Introduction

Since its inception, one main goal of ASEAN has been to bring nations together. As a collective group the nations that make up ASEAN, originally Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, later joined by Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma) and Vietnam represent a stronger force within the world community. The concept of bringing together many countries within the region is similar to other collective groups of countries in the world such as the European Union. These groups of nations have each recognized that there is strength in numbers; that as individual nations they are already strong, but in a collective group they can more easily work together to increase the presence of their region on the world stage. When countries work together, they can achieve more not only as a group, but this achievement will positively influence each of the nations individually as well. ASEAN has been a success so far because it is an association which helps bring countries together, giving them a sense of unity. It has also been successful in helping represent these countries and the region of Southeast Asia to the rest of the world, simply through its existence and the power and influence that comes from representing the member countries as a group that is an organization, rather than many individual countries that just happen to neighbor each other. However, until a plan was proposed to create the ASEAN Economic Community, the member countries had primarily existed as separate economies which individually traded with other nations.
The ASEAN Economic Community, or AEC as it is often abbreviated, is relatively new and was developed to “create a regional Economic agenda in ASEAN.” (asean.org) It “offers opportunities in the form of a huge market of $2.6 trillion and over 622 million people”, making ASEAN collectively the third largest economy in Southeast Asia. (asean.org) A blueprint has been developed to ensure that the steps towards integrating the economies of the ten member states are met. The goals of ASEAN related to AEC are set to occur rather quickly, as the blueprint was established in 2015, and hopes to have created an economic community by 2025 which is “highly integrated and cohesive; competitive, innovative and dynamic, with enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation.” (asean.org) Since the goals set or the AEC are quite extensive and have been set to occur in a rather short amount of time, ASEAN member nations must be able to work together efficiently in order to achieve the goals in a timely manner.

As the motto of the AEC is “One Vision, One Identity, One Community” the emphasis is undoubtedly on the creation of one from many. Many countries coming together to create one economic group. The rise of India and China as forces in global economics has created a need for other countries in the region to band together to compete. The population size of both China and India, both having populations well over one billion people has helped them to grow their economies. By combining their economic power, the 10 ASEAN member nations can be more competitive within their region, creating a balance with China and India, the two countries with the largest populations in the world. Steve Forbes of Forbes magazine wrote in summer 2015 “there’s no reason why India shouldn’t achieve double digit annual growth rates and join China as a global economic superpower.” (Vanham, weforum.org) Having already referenced China as an economic superpower, Forbes implied that India was right behind China in achieving that status. This does not mean, however that other economies are not able to compete. The collective
economies of the ASEAN nations will likely become the third super powerful economic force in Asia and they have taken the first necessary step towards this by deciding to create a collective economic system, however there are still questions surrounding the AEC; Questions such as:

1. Is it possible to achieve the goal of creating one collective but competitive economic system between member nations by the deadline of the blueprint in 2025?

2. How will the member nations maintain a competitive environment but make sure that each member state is following the rules outlined in the collective agreement that makes up the AEC?

3. After achieving the goals intended by the creation of the AEC, how will the ASEAN nations then present their new economy to the rest of the world?

The most important aspect to the answer for each of these questions is communication.

**Analysis**

In order to achieve the many goals outlined in the the blueprint no later than 2025, effective communication will be the most necessary tool. If the countries do not have a common way to communicate between them, every goal will be achieved slowly, making it nearly impossible to reach their AEC goals by 2025. In answer to the second question, ASEAN member nations cannot maintain the goal of a competitive environment while also making sure that each individual nation follows the rules outlines in the collective agreement related to the AEC if they are not able to quickly and effectively communicate with each other. It would simply not be possible to keep everyone accountable to any rules if there was no common communication tool. Lastly in relation to the third question, presenting the newly united economy to the rest of the world will require a collective communication tool as well. If member nations are able to communicate and the workers and companies within the member nations are able to
communicate the goals of the AEC will be easy to achieve. Then the AEC can use its collective communication tool to interact with the global community.

Language is the most important communication tool, so one language must be used to communicate between people within each of the ASEAN member states and must then be used to communicate with the rest of the world community. According to some estimates there are about 7000 languages in the world. More than 12% of the world speaks Mandarin as a first language, making it the most widely spoken native language. However, according to the article “10 Most Spoken Languages in the World” on listverse.com, “Mandarin can be really tough, because each word can be pronounced in four ways (or tones) and a beginner will invariably have trouble distinguishing one tone from another.” Learning Chinese characters is equally if not more difficult than speaking Mandarin. According to the BBC website section on languages,

“Altogether there are over 50,000 characters, though a comprehensive modern dictionary will rarely list over 20,000 in use. An educated Chinese person will know about 8,000 characters, but you will only need about 2-3,000 to be able to read a newspaper.” Although 2-3,000 is considerably smaller than 50,000, 20,000 or 8,000, it is still an extremely difficult task to learn that many characters, especially for people who do not use characters in their native language, and that’s just to read a newspaper. For these, among other reasons, although Mandarin boasts the most native speakers it is not the most widely spoken language by non-native speakers. According to the article “50 Things You Probably Didn’t Know About Languages” by Katie Lepi posted on edudemic.com, “25% of the world’s population speaks at least some English.” English has the most non-native speakers, with most estimates claiming that English has between 250 million to 350 million non-native speakers, and some claiming even more. Thus the data shows that especially for a group of countries with no common first
language between them, English is the language of communication that is best suited for their goals. An article on the Harvard Business Review website states:

“English is now the global language of business. More and more multinational companies are mandating English as the common corporate language—Airbus, Daimler-Chrysler, Fast Retailing, Nokia, Renault, Samsung, SAP, Technicolor, and Microsoft in Beijing, to name a few—in an attempt to facilitate communication and performance across geographically diverse functions and business endeavors. Adopting a common mode of speech isn’t just a good idea; it’s a must, even for an American company with operations overseas, for instance, or a French company focused on domestic partners… concerns drove Hiroshi Mikitani, the CEO of Rakuten-Japan’s largest online marketplace—to mandate in March 2010 that English would be the company’s official language of business.” (Neeley, http://hbr.org)

English has now become essential to global business and economics, so in order to compete and reach the greatest level of success in an increasingly globalized world, individuals, companies, countries, and associations made up of more than one country must consider fluency in English to be of the utmost importance. In the age of the internet, which has helped to connect the world, language is extremely important. The Harvard Business Review article continues with the claim that “an estimated 565 million people use it (English) on the internet.” English must take a central role in preparation for and implementation of every aspect of the ASEAN Economic Community.

There are preparations that must be made to face the ASEAN Economic Community. Each individual country must increase their efficiency, which starts at the individual worker level, which then increases efficiency within one company, which can then increase efficiency between the different companies in the country. This will allow each country to maximize its positive contribution to the overall economic standing of the ASEAN Economic Community by first strengthening its own economy. How can efficiency be increased? By finding common ground through the mastery of a common language. In today’s globalized world, each of the
countries that will contribute economically to the ASEAN Economic community have both local and international companies as many of the largest corporations have offices all over the world. These large corporations comprise of employees who come from many countries. If the company is multilingual, too much translation will be necessary, decreasing productivity, so strong knowledge of the shared language of English is necessary. Not only does efficiency within one location of a corporation require the use of a shared language, but often within one international corporation, an office in one country will need to contact their companies office in another country, meaning that although they are in different countries and in a way separate entities, a common language is necessary for communication. As an example, perhaps the Microsoft office in Jakarta needs to contact the office in Singapore. However, even the local companies within each ASEAN country could benefit from using English as a shared language because as the language of business in the world, using English would allow them to attract the best talent to their company.

Trade and purchase are also greatly increased when communication is made easier by the use of a shared language, increasing profits. This then strengthens the Economy. If this process spreads and English continues to be introduced as the official language of business in many companies, productivity will continue to increase, presumably increasing profits and strengthening the Economy even more. In an article posted on Inc.com about this subject the author states that

“communication, without a doubt, is a crucial aspect of business operations. Without an effective system of communication in place, you will have difficulty in achieving goals or even in functioning properly.”

Language is one of the most common forms of communication but it only works as a communication tool if the language used is understood by everyone involved.
Conclusion

For Indonesia to benefit its own economy as well as the AEC, an emphasis on English education is crucial. If more people who are part of the workforce at all levels are fluent in English, Indonesia will be better prepared to face the AEC. As the most populated ASEAN country, Indonesia has the potential to become a leader within the AEC, but in order for this to happen, fluency in the “global language of business” must be increased in the workforce in general. As English is adopted as the language used by the ASEAN Economic Community, member countries which do not adapt by emphasizing the importance of learning English will lose their competitive edge within the community, primarily due to the disadvantage caused by their inability to communicate well with the other AEC members and by not being able to capitalize on the potential for increased productivity due to better communication between workers. If the importance of learning English is not emphasized by one or more AEC member countries, communication between these ASEAN countries could become difficult, possibly preventing the productivity necessary to achieve the goals outlined in the AEC blueprint by 2025, thus negatively impacting the ASEAN Economic Community’s standing within the global economic community. The best way for Indonesia to face the AEC, ensure its positive contribution to the AEC and increase the ASEAN Economic Community’s as well as its own influence within the global economy is to place even greater importance on mastering the English language.
Bibliography


