

ASEAN COMMUNITY

Thai students 'must learn languages'

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Thai students have been urged to improve their English and also learn a third language so they can compete with people from other Southeast Asian nations when the region becomes a single economic community of more than 600 million people in 2015.

Sakkarin Niyomsilpa, a demographic expert at Mahidol University's Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR), said Thailand's weakness was its language limitations, especially in English. He said Filipino labourers could speak better English than Thais, giving them a much better chance of getting hired in other countries.

It was now time for Thai students to improve their English and learn a third language such as Vietnamese, Bahasa, Japanese or Korean, he added.

Mr Sakkarin said if the education system and students paid no attention to

language improvement, Thailand might lose its competitive edge to Vietnam as many Vietnamese could now speak English or even Thai.

He recently addressed an IPSR seminar entitled "A Turning Point For The Thai Population; A Turning Point For Thai Society" that discussed the kingdom's situation as it prepares for the launch of the Asean Community.

The community's vision of achieving the "three pillars" of security, sociocultural and economic integration was brought forward from 2020 to 2015 to quicken integration in view of growing competition around the globe.

Apart from language improvement, Mr Sakkarin called on the government to develop more skilled workers for the automotive, electronics, mechanical and petrochemical industries, while more students should be trained in tourism and medical services.

He said there would soon be plenty of competition among these industries and businesses in the region.

Mr Sakkarin added that migration in Asia would double in the next decade and this could pose a problem for Thailand if it was not prepared to cope with the situation.

He said the number of transnational labourers may dramatically increase after Asean becomes a single community. Thailand should tighten its immigration system to prevent any problems, he said.