

การใช้กลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้เชิงรุกเพื่อส่งเสริมการมีส่วนร่วม  
ของนักศึกษาในห้องเรียนภาษาอังกฤษขนาดใหญ่:  
กรณีศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีราชมงคลธัญบุรี

IMPLEMENTING ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES  
TO PROMOTE STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN  
LARGE ENGLISH CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY  
OF RMUTT

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## บทคัดย่อ

ในประเทศไทยปัญหาหลักที่มักเกิดขึ้นในห้องเรียนภาษาอังกฤษคือจำนวนนักเรียนที่มีมากกว่า 50 คนต่อห้องเรียน และการเรียนรู้แบบเน้นฟังบรรยายของผู้เรียน ดังนั้นการเรียนรู้เชิงรุก ซึ่งเป็นทักษะที่จำเป็นในศตวรรษที่ 21 จึงได้รับความนิยมและเป็นกลยุทธ์ที่จำเป็นในห้องเรียน จุดมุ่งหมายของงานวิจัยในครั้งนี้คือ 1) เพื่อตรวจสอบประสิทธิภาพของการประยุกต์ใช้วิธีการเรียนรู้แบบเชิงรุกในห้องเรียนภาษาอังกฤษด้วยการทดสอบก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียนและ 2) เพื่อสำรวจระดับความพึงพอใจของ กลุ่มตัวอย่าง เป็นนักเรียน 267 คนที่ลงทะเบียนเรียนรายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐานของมหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีราชมงคลธัญบุรี มีบทเรียนกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้แบบเชิงรุก 8 สัปดาห์ มีกิจกรรมหลายหลายรูปแบบ รวมถึงการใช้เครื่องมือทางเทคโนโลยีการศึกษา เครื่องมือที่ใช้คือแบบทดสอบวัดผลสัมฤทธิ์ทางการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษแบบปรนัยจำนวน 75 ข้อ ที่ใช้เป็นแบบทดสอบก่อนเรียนและแบบทดสอบหลังเรียนและแบบสอบถามจำนวน 20 ข้อ ประกอบด้วยแบบประเมินตนเองของนักเรียน 6 ข้อและแบบประเมินโดยครู 14 ข้อ สถิติที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลประกอบด้วย ค่าเฉลี่ย ส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน และการทดสอบที่ผลการวิจัยพบว่าคะแนนทดสอบหลังเรียนสูงกว่าคะแนนทดสอบก่อนเรียนที่ระดับค่าสถิติ .05 คะแนนการประเมินตนเองของนักศึกษาต่อการใช้กิจกรรมการเรียนรู้เชิงรุกและการจัดการเรียนการสอนพบว่ามีคามพึงพอใจในระดับสูงโดยมีคะแนนเฉลี่ยอยู่ที่  $4.16 \bar{X} = 4.16$ , S.D. = 0.75) คะแนนเฉลี่ยความพึงพอใจของนักเรียนที่มีต่อครูผู้สอนอยู่ในระดับมากเท่ากับ 4.20 ( $\bar{X} = 4.20$ , S.D. = 0.73) ผลการทดสอบก่อนการเรียนชี้ให้เห็นว่า นักศึกษาอาจไม่คุ้นเคยกับการใช้กลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้เชิงรุกในห้องเรียนภาษาอังกฤษขนาดใหญ่ แต่อย่างไรก็ตาม เมื่อนักศึกษาได้มีส่วนร่วมในการเรียนรู้เชิงรุก สามารถส่งเสริมการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ ดังที่เห็นได้จากผลการทดสอบหลังการเรียน

**คำสำคัญ:** กิจกรรมการเรียนรู้เชิงรุก การประเมิน รายวิชาภาษาอังกฤษพื้นฐาน ห้องเรียนภาษาอังกฤษขนาดใหญ่

## Abstract

In Thailand, the main problems normally occurring in English classroom are the large size of more than 50 students per class and passive learning of students. Thus, active learning, the essential skill in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is rising in popularity and presence as an essential strategy in classrooms. The aims presented in this study are 1) to investigate the effectiveness of applying active learning methods in the English classrooms through pretest and posttest, and 2) to explore the degree of their satisfaction. The samples were 267 students who enrolled in the English basic course at Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi (RMUTT). The active learning activities for an 8-week lesson plan applied in the course were various, including educational technology tools. The instruments were the 75-item, four multiple choice English learning achievement test used as pretest and posttest and the questionnaire of 20 items comprising six items of student self-assessment and 14 items for teacher assessment by students. Mean, standard deviation, and t-test were used for data analysis. The results of the study revealed that the posttest score was higher than the pretest score at .05 statistical level. The students' self-assessment rating to the use of active learning activities and instructional arrangement showed high level of satisfaction ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.16, S.D. = 0.75). The mean score for the students' satisfaction to the teacher was at the high level ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.20, S.D. = 0.73). The students' performance on the pretest could stem from their unfamiliarity with active learning. However, after participating in active learning activities in large English classrooms, their English proficiency was improved, as shown by their better performance on the posttest.

**Keywords:** Active Learning Activities, Assessments, Foundation English Course, Large English Classes

## Introduction

The traditional way of learning, that is, lecturing is a popular teaching technique used by many teachers in many countries like Thailand. Students are expected to sit for hours, listening and absorbing what the teacher is presenting in front of the class. Students only receive messages from their teachers. The class interaction happens when teachers give the students a chance only. This creates tension and boring atmosphere in the class; the students lack interest and are not responsible for their self-learning process. The reason is that the lecture is a method that the students have little interaction in the class and can lead to disregard the class. If a teacher is not a good speaker and cannot attract his/her students, the students will not pay attention to the class. Also, if the teacher cannot properly organize his/her lessons, the students may not understand the lessons and they also cannot ask questions if the teacher provides no chance for questioning. Therefore, active learning was applied in classrooms through various activities. Active learning allows students to activate more areas of their brain via activities, so they retain more of what they learn; it gives students more autonomy over their learning; and it helps students learn how to learn. As for the teacher's role, active learning shifts the focus of instruction since his/her role is changed from being a lecturer to facilitator by helping to develop learning and thinking skills of the students. Rotellar and Cain (2016) support the use of active learning activities with students since they increase student engagement and deeper learning, and gain information better than learning from lecturing traditionally.

In teaching and learning English language, one primary goal for students who study English as a foreign language (EFL) like Thai students is to develop their four skills in English communication. In order to gain students' engagement in learning English, students need to participate actively in class. Moreover, active group or pair work plays an important role in acquiring English since English needs practical skills. Especially, English classrooms in Thai universities since classes are normally big in size and the class size will not be reduced in the near future. Therefore, active learning can help in this situation since students can communicate with each other to share "suggestions, insights, feedback and failures" and then they can learn from one another. Any size class can benefit from active learning with some modifications of activities. Group/Pair activities develop higher levels of thinking than the traditional lecture approach and help to retain knowledge, including stimulating students' experience of various types of interaction and generating more relaxed and cooperative classroom atmosphere. However, students need to be trained to work in group/pair settings for the importance

of communication in class. In a mixed ability class where the target language (English) is the main language of the group, the use of mother tongue (Thai) is not a problem. What teachers can do is to help students stick to the target language as much as they can since they can help and learn from each other. The teacher's roles are to act as a facilitator and to help students learn from each other and then they can be successful in their learning. When the teacher gives an opportunity for students to actively participate in the learning environment, they take more responsibility for their performance in the course. When students have more opportunity to make decisions about what they learn and how they use the knowledge, they see the course more valuable and more directly related to their goals. The teacher just helps them in the development of classroom activities so that they can practice in generating ideas how a concept could be applied for what they are interested. This makes students take part in their classroom; it automatically increases engagement levels. It is obvious that active learning forms students' intrinsic motivation through joining in the activities conducted individually or in group/pair work. If students take the initiative in learning, they learn more thing and learn better than those who just passively wait for the knowledge from the teacher to be taught only.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study were as follows:

- 1) To investigate the effectiveness of active learning strategies used in the English classes.
- 2) To examine the degree of the students' satisfaction on using active learning in the large English classes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

At RMUTT, students in English classrooms are quite passive. The approach used in the classrooms is teacher-centered and the focus is related to course contents and time management before taking the final exam at the end of semester. Many students are often absent and chat with their classmate. They feel bored and sleepy while studying English since the teachers teach from a textbook. The researcher, as an English instructor, teaching the English foundation course has also witnessed these students and are interested in conducting the study by applying active learning activities into the general and required English course enrolled by the first-year students to get them interested, engaged and motivated. The process of learning was fulfilled through various activities related to using

English language inside or outside the classroom, individual or group work, and with or without the help of technology. Since teachers are the ones who can provide knowledge and facilitate their students to learn by themselves, their role is changed from being teacher-centered to student-centered as a facilitator in arranging learning and teaching by adjusting activities to serve students' needs, interests and abilities so that they can be beneficial to students in developing their learning and thinking skills. In this paper, the researcher used active learning activities to promote the engineering students' engagement when studying English in large classes and examine their English achievement, including their satisfaction of using active learning strategies.

### **Literature review**

In passive classroom, teachers are considered as the source of knowledge and understanding. They give direct instruction and lecturing by giving information without providing for feedback. On the contrary, in an active learning classroom, teachers guide students to construct their own knowledge and understanding. Students are considered as the main element and play an important role in teaching and learning. The focus is centered on students or based on student-centered approach since students take an active and engaged role in learning. When learning is active, students learn more (Gholami, Attaran & Moghaddam, 2014). Various active learning activities such as active learning group, games-based learning, jigsaw classroom and so on can be created both inside and outside of the classroom. They can be used with learners of all levels, or with individualized, small or big group learning. McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson, and Robinson (2008) support that these activities help learners achieve active learning since lively learning activities help students learn lively as well. Moreover, Mark, Cathi and Dan (2009) add that good teaching starts from where the students are at, and provides experiences to extend and deepen their understanding. Therefore, student engagement should be involved and recognized by teachers and group work or learning groups does work. Group learning is better than the lecture format because it encourages the pooling of resources, builds a sense of group believing, allows participants to express their views, helps them to clarify their thinking and so on. Therefore, we, as a teacher, try to develop teaching techniques to contribute the group process. The teacher role is to monitor groups whether they can work and balance between teacher and students. However, the teacher should pay attention to how a group forms, how groups develop and build over time and how the dynamics of the group work to influence its members towards the goals the teacher has in mind.

The strategies used in active learning can be divided into various types. Some may work in small or large classes and ones may be appropriate for individual work. However, for large classes, using active learning activities allows social construction of knowledge supporting communication, interaction, and collaboration. When students do work together in the activities to figure out a complex text or a problem, deep learning can occur; they learn skills in the classroom and apply in the long run (Herrington & Oliver, 1999). More example of active learning is the discussion activity. Speaking is a very important part of active learning as it gives opportunities for students to discuss with their partner, a group or the whole class. Also, reflections or brainstorming is one of activities used to explore ideas. This pulls the students to think and engage before they discuss allowing them to see their thought processes. Thus, active learning is now widely accepted since it is an important approach to make students involve in learning and develop their critical thinking skills. According to Bonwell and Eison (1991), during the use of active learning, student move from being passive recipients of knowledge to being participants in activities that encompass analysis, synthesis and evaluation. They conducted a study and its results support that the active activities offered were effective to encourage student engagement and help students for enhancing their learning. As mentioned by Davis (1993), groups are able to promote more effective learning through shared support and common feedback. They encourage interaction, self-determination and trust. As mentioned by Ellis (1993), interaction within the classroom leads to many advantages for language learning such as comprehension checks, language practice and so on. Long and Porter (1985) found that when second language learners worked in groups, they were more motivated, took more initiative, and were less anxious concerning their learning. With active learning, students can be creative and this fosters critical thinking. Moreover, the Thai education system is heavily testcentric, which can be viewed as underlying much of the poor performance of the Thai educational system (Todd and Shih, 2013). Thus, Thai students give the importance of test results and this leads them to concentrate only on passing exams rather than learning for self-development. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, Thai classes are big in size and teachers have faced discipline problems dealing with them because students could be diminished in learning. Teachers find it difficult to develop rapport with students. At the same time, students have fewer chances to speak and get less attention from their teachers, including feedback on student work is decreased (Todd, 2018). This supports by Noom-Ura (2013) that Thailand's English proficiency is reported to be very low and

even lower than most of the countries in Asia. And, one of the important factors causes the problem is the lack of motivation because English language is rarely used in daily communication in Thai. Haque (2009) concluded in his study that students learn better if they have personal connection with the teacher. That means that lack of teacher attention and push from teacher can render students demotivate. Also, inadequate facilities, learning content and material, teachers' competency, teaching style, and teachers' behavior are students' key demotivation factors. Therefore, in teaching and learning English, there is a need for students to interact with learning content rather than overly emphasizing on grammar. Moreover, the role of teacher is important and is suggested to help increase students' learning since the teacher can act as a coach or facilitator and provide feedback for students.

In the assessment section, it is essential in education process. Assessments are divided into two main types: summative and formative. Summative assessments are used to measure students what they have learnt at the end of a unit to promote students and to be certain that they have met required standards before graduation whereas formative assessments refer to interactive assessments of student progress and to adjust teaching appropriately before finishing the course (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). A summative assessment is mostly used to grade students, especially in the traditional classes. In Thai universities, the A-F grade system is normally used and many courses allocate more than 50 out of 100% for tests and exams. They just learn via memorizing and repeating before taking exams and then forget after passing them. The exam focus learning should be avoid since it taints students by making them over-emphasizing the importance of the score as a measure of their ability (Kitjaroonchai & Tantip, 2012). Actually, as a teacher, he or she should pay attention to common learning goals, materials and learning assessments which are the main components of constructive alignment in developing course/curriculum. As Race (2010) insisted, teachers still assess too much and give time only to those things that will count towards their degrees; therefore, if teachers need to achieve, they have to enhance student learning instead. Hence, the assessment tools should be selected appropriately and based on the alignment with the learning outcomes and classroom activities.

In many active learning classes, the formative assessment is recommended to be used to monitor students learning style and ability and to provide ongoing feedback for improving student learning. A number of formative assessments are added in classes e.g., self-reflection, peer feedback, presentation and discussion and

so on. For example, peer assessment is introduced to the students to reflect their own active teamwork whereas jigsaw technique is used to create cooperation by structuring student interdependence through the learning task, rather than through the grading system. This means that formative assessment helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need additional work. It also helps the teacher recognize where students struggle and address problems immediately (Segers & Dochy, 2010). In addition, if the teacher provides guidelines formatively throughout the learning process, students will aware of how to achieve the goal in coping with their work. The methods that teachers use can guide students toward development of their own learning which is necessary for them since knowledge can be outdated and this is a means to meeting the goals of lifelong learning (Black & William, 1998).

### **Methodology**

The population of this study was first-year students of Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi. They registered in the academic year of 3/2019 in the course of English for Communication, with the total number of 852 students. The samples of this study were 267 students. There were 190 males (71.2%) and 77 females (28.8%) and their ages ranged from 17 to 22 years old. The sample size of 267 students was set using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sample size determination. The instruments used in this study were questionnaire, lesson plan, test and tool. The questionnaire was used to investigate the student learning behavior at the end of the study as feedback proposed through a 20-item questionnaire consisting of 6 items for students' self- assessment and 14 items for students to assess the teacher if they felt satisfied with the methods the teacher used in their class. As for the lesson plan, there was an eight-week lesson plan, four hours per week and the test containing 75 items, four choices multiple choice. The item of objective congruence (IOC) was 0.67-1.00, the difficulty was 0.32-0.76, the item discrimination was 0.21-0.75 and reliability was 0.87. The tools, Kahoot, Padlet, YouTube, Google Forms and Flinga. These interaction tools applied in the class can be used through any mobile device, or laptop with an internet connection and then students can actively participate with teachers. Kahoot is a free game-based learning platform making a series of multiple choice questions in both individual and group learning settings that are appropriate for content and students' environments whereas the other two tools allow teachers to check the students' answers what they are thinking.

In this way, it is possible to have a more focused discussion. The programs require no downloads. All users need is their website and participants with a smartphone, laptop or tablet. These five programs used in the class are called active learning programs. They can help students integrate and synthesize knowledge on their own. The students can apply their earned knowledge towards other lessons that they are interested in. The data in this study were computed and analyzed in terms of means and standard deviation and t-test.

**Table 1** Eight Week Lesson Plan and Activities

Week	Topic	Activity Type
9	Food	Flinga
10	Food (Continued)	In-class demonstration, Padlet
11	Interests	Mind mapping, Crossword puzzle
12	Interests (Continued)	Role playing, Kahoot
13	Vacation	Flinga, flashcard
14	Vacation (Continued)	Storytelling
15	Consequences	igsaw technique
16	Consequences (Continued)	JGroup work discussion

### Results and Discussion

Regarding the pretest and posttest of the English achievement test, the results were shown as follows:

**Table 2** Average Score in Percentage of Pretest and Posttest

Test	Score	Sample	$\bar{\chi}$	S.D.	t	Sig
Pretest	75	267	35.69	13.53	-17.43	.000*
Posttest	75	267	39.62	14.36		

\*p < 0.05

Table 2 shows that among the participants (267), they had an average score of 35.69 percent before taking the pretest and 39.62 percent for the posttest of the English achievement test.

**Table 3** Average Score in Percentage of Pretest and Posttest

Number	Testing		Results	Effectiveness Index	Percentage of Increase
	Pretest	Posttest			
$\bar{X}$	35.69	39.62			
S.D.	13.53	14.36	3.57	0.09	9.08

As shown in Table 3, it was found that the posttest was higher than pretest (39.62 and 35.69). Moreover, there was a score difference at 3.57. The students applying active learning activities scored significantly higher on the posttest than the pretest at the level of 0.05.

With regard to the objective of this study, “.....to investigate the effectiveness of active learning strategies used in the English classes”, the posttest score which was higher than that of the pretest score showed that the students’ English proficiency was improved after using active learning methods. The active learning methods could help them develop themselves and the teacher could put theory into practice so that this could lead them toward better understanding of the concept. Moreover, using technology tools as active learning can help and encourage the students to have more interaction in the class. As Kay (2010); Coon and Mitterer (2013) mentioned, applying educational technology in teaching refers to the use of advanced science, technology, tools, equipment, and other techniques to arrange teaching and learning activities. The purpose is to create effective learning. Then, the students can apply their knowledge in their current and future daily life. It also strengthens the relationship between the teacher and students as well. When the learning environment is positive, it helps the students learn and gain more knowledge and then become responsible for their own learning process. Thus, the students will have better learning quality and have affection for life-long learning.

According to the other objective of this study, “.....to examine the degree of the students’ satisfaction on using active learning in the large English classes”, the results showed the students’ self-assessment rating to the use of active learning activities and instructional arrangement with the mean score of 4.16 (S.D. = 0.75). The mean score for the students’ satisfaction to the teacher was 4.20 (S.D. = 0.73). This meant that the students perceived that active learning activities applied in their courses were advantageous to them as the student feedback conducted at the end of the semester showed their positive responses and also showed high level of

satisfaction. When considering each item, it was found that most of respondents mostly agreed on “The instructor encourages students to perform by themselves” and “The instructor performs diverse teaching methods which make the students understand easily.” with mean score as of 4.37 (S.D. = 0.70), followed by “The instructor assigns tasks for individual and group including provides suggestion for additional resources.” ( $\bar{X}$  = 4.27, S.D. = 0.76) and “The instructor uses S.D. = 0.74), respectively.

Regarding opinions of the students suggested in the study, they added that active learning definitely made them want to study more since it made lessons fun and engaging. It created a variety of learning methods which helped them learn in the class. It reduced stress while studying as it made learning interesting and easier. The activities like jigsaw technique, think-Pair-Share, mind-mapping, and so on helped them learn effectively. Moreover, learning via group work helped them stay alert; they were not bored. They could learn from peers; they discussed and shared ideas. This made the class atmosphere positive, active and relaxed. Furthermore, with the help of technology, the traditional way of teaching style changes as students' engagement is increased as well as their interest and motivation are promoted through technological tools. This kind of learning helped them remember and understand the lessons. It also helped them practice answering questions and learn the lessons by themselves. As for the feedback, the students gain more new knowledge and receive explanations from the teacher if they answer wrongly. They mentioned that the teacher gave positive feedback when they made a mistake. The teacher did not blame but supported and encouraged them. As discussed by Rotellar and Cain (2016), active learning strategies create engaging learning experiences for students and change their perception of learning as well.

From the statistics and the students' attitude towards the use of active learning strategies to promote students' engagement in large English classes, the results indicated that the students were satisfied with the methods that the teacher applied in the class. They pointed out that the teacher encouraged them to perform by themselves. As mentioned by Kitjaroonchai and Tantip (2012), the students are the center of learning and able to search information/knowledge by themselves and the teachers change their role from lecturers to facilitators to guide, coach and support their students by arranging learning and teaching activities to be appropriate for the students. In this situation, the students agreed that they could apply the obtained knowledge or what they learnt in their everyday life since they were given

more chances to learn and work according to their needs, interests, and abilities. Sivan, Leung, Woon, and Kember (2000) also stated that the students' feedback through using active learning activities is positive since they can encourage and engage students for their own learnings. This was also supported by Gholami, Attaran and Moghaddam (2014) that active learning strategies are encouraged and reinforced in all EFL classes by teachers and also at every level of education.

The instructor

## **Conclusion**

This paper has presented implementing active learning strategies into course design which can transform classrooms into exciting and dynamic learning environment. It was obviously seen that no matter what course the teacher teaches, active learning activities can be beneficially applied for as active learning provides students the opportunity to become engaged learners and dynamic thinkers. When they were given chances by the teachers, they participated more. Also, they had more responsibilities and could create their own work. Comparing with the traditional style of teaching, students felt more satisfied with the active learning style as it can motivate and engage them in learning, that is, their learning skills like collaboration, critical thinking, organizing and planning, communication and so forth can be developed through active learning activities. And, as shown in the statistics of satisfaction rates, it can be concluded that the use of educational technology is an interesting way to develop the learning quality since they can be used as alternative tools for teachers to encourage students and at the same time improve their teaching. Thus, teachers should be encouraged to apply technology in their classes to develop the students' learning quality. Besides the active learning strategies, a comparison between pre- and post-evaluation was applied in this study as a summative assessment to investigate the learning effectiveness of the students. As for formative assessments, a variety of them were applied for enhancing the student skills as well as teamwork or active skills. The success of this implementation will lead to more active learning classroom at RMUTT. To assist students learn actively, the active learning is on instructional approach that can engage students in the course. And, in order to practice the critical thinking on each lesson, students can learn and engage from various group activities applied in the class. As described above, the active learning requires that students do something to develop their own

skills; therefore, at the beginning, the teacher should help them promote self-study through the activities which is essential for improving students' skills. In term of active learning, the instruction with collaboration and interaction among students is important to promote their working in group as well as classroom participation. Hopefully, if students can apply what they experience in and outside the class to their real-life situations, this will finally make them become lifelong learners.

### **Recommendations for Further Studies**

In light of the research results, the researcher recommends the following:

- 1) This type of research could be conducted as a longitudinal study, which would allow the researcher to determine whether using active learning strategies implemented across a long term resulted in a significant improvement of English learning.
- 2) The study may be implemented on a larger sample with other campuses or different English proficiency levels and the students' attitudes on the use of active learning methods may be examined.
- 3) Investigation of the relationship between active learning strategies and age, gender, learning styles, motivation or other factors could be further explored.

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