rEFLections
Vol 32, No 1, January - April 2025

How active is 'active'? Overcoming Misconceptions and Optimizing Pedagogical Practices of Active Learning in EFL Classrooms

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Article information
Article history:
Received: 19 Feb 2025
Accepted: 20 Apr 2025
Available online: 28 Apr 2025

Keywords:
Active learning
Passive learning
English as a Foreign language (EFL)
English language teaching
Education

Abstract
Active Learning (AL) has emerged as a promising pedagogical alternative to traditional passive learning across various educational fields, including English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Despite its increasing adoption, discrepancies and misconceptions persist in its implementation within EFL contexts. This review article first delineates the core principles of AL as recognised in contemporary educational literature. It then addresses prevalent misunderstandings that hinder effective practice. In response, the paper proposes an updated, comprehensive framework tailored to EFL classrooms, with practical recommendations for instructional design, activity integration, and the strategic use of educational technologies, including generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). Finally, it outlines key criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of AL, focusing on student achievement, attitudes, and engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies in education have documented a significant transition from passive learning (PL) to active learning (AL) (Nguyen et al., 2021). This transition is particularly evident when AL is formally adopted in various English as a Foreign language (EFL) contexts: such as in Indonesia (Devira, 2020), Japan (Caine, 2020; Waniek & Nae, 2017), and Thailand (Waluyo, 2020). To develop a more comprehensive understanding of AL, it is first necessary to examine the typical characteristics of PL.

Passive learning

Passive learning (PL) is a pedagogical approach in which students primarily receive one-way information from sources such as lectures or textbooks, with limited engagement in cognitive processes or interactive activities (Mizokami, 2018). In this teacher-centred environment, students are often perceived as sponges (Alzahrani, 2018), expected to absorb knowledge passively through listening and note-taking during lectures (Prince, 2004; Waniek & Nae, 2017). While these activities are integral to the learning process, Fink (2013) contends that knowledge

cannot be effectively transmitted through such passive methods. Research indicates that students engaged in PL often struggle to retain information, with significant difficulty recalling material even shortly after learning (Fink, 2013; Waniek & Nae, 2017). As a result, these learners may face challenges in acquiring meaningful knowledge or skills due to their limited engagement in the learning process (Caine, 2020; Waniek & Nae, 2017).

Active learning

In response to the limitations of PL, recent research has advocated for AL as a promising pedagogical alternative. Bonwell and Eison (1991) introduced the concept of AL as students' active participation in "doing things and thinking about what they are doing" (p. 5), emphasizing higher-order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Since then, subsequent research has expanded this foundational concept, shifting the focus from isolated classroom activities to a more comprehensive approach that frames AL as systematic instruction. Cavanagh (2011) and Prince (2004) argue that AL represents a student-centred approach that integrates lectures with diverse strategies, such as group-based and problem-based learning, to promote interaction and foster student engagement. Fink (2013) further asserts that implementing AL as systematic instruction enables students to move beyond mere memorization of course content, encouraging them to reflect on how they think and what they aim to achieve in their learning journey.

Fink (2013) proposes a holistic framework for AL as pedagogical instruction, comprising three interrelated components (see Figure 1): (1) *Getting information and ideas,* (2) *Experiencing by doing and observing,* and (3) *Reflecting on what and how an individual learns*. The first component involves accessing new information and ideas through various means: directly via primary sources (e.g., reading materials or analyzing original data), indirectly via secondary resources (e.g., attending lectures, listening to audio content), and through online platforms (e.g., educational websites or digital content). Contrary to the view that positions lecturing exclusively within PL, Fink (2013) argues that lectures remain a valid, indirect method for introducing new content, and thus are not inherently antithetical to AL. The second component expands Bonwell and Eison's (1991) concept of "doing things" by incorporating both experiential and observational learning. According to Fink (2013), students enhance their understanding not only by engaging in hands-on activities ("learning by doing") but also by observing peer performances and instructor demonstrations. These experiences may be gained directly (e.g., participating in or observing authentic tasks), indirectly (e.g., through simulations, case studies, roleplays, films, and oral histories), or online learning. The third component, reflection, refines the idea of "thinking about what one has done" into a structured process of evaluating both the content and the method of learning. Reflection, whether conducted individually or collaboratively with peers or teachers, and whether in class or through online tools, enables students to integrate new information with prior knowledge and to develop more effective learning strategies.

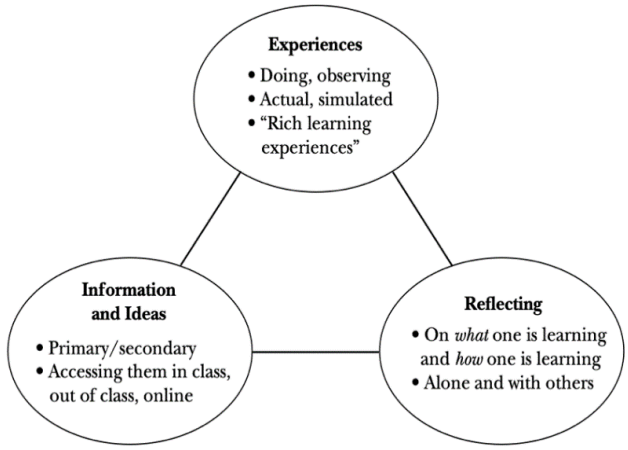

Figure 1 A holistic view of active learning (Fink, 2013, p. 119)

According to Fink (2013), AL instruction is achieved through the integration of the three aforementioned components, providing students with meaningful and multifaceted learning experiences. These components can be implemented individually or collaboratively, either in person or online. Fink (2013) also highlights the role of technology in AL, advocating the use of digital tools and platforms to support instructional delivery and enhance accessibility. Due to the adaptability and comprehensiveness of this framework, it has been widely adopted across disciplines, as demonstrated in the work of Caine (2020), Fallahi et al. (2009), Jenkins (2011), Kopp et al. (2025), Saiphet (2018), Seemanath and Watanapokakul (2024), Watanapokakul (2024), and Yusuk (2021).

In summary, building upon the foundational perspective of Bonwell and Eison (1991) and the subsequent contributions of Cavanagh (2011), Fink (2013), and Prince (2004), AL should be understood as student-centred instruction that systematically integrates diverse pedagogical activities—ranging from lectures to higher-order thinking tasks—across a sequence of stages: *Getting information and ideas, Experiencing by doing and observing,* and *Reflecting.* These stages can be supported by the appropriate use of technology to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

CURRENT IMPROPER USE OF AL IN EFL SETTINGS

Although AL has been widely applied across educational contexts, its implementation in EFL settings often diverges from its original pedagogical intent. Devira (2020) observes that teachers frequently reinterpret AL principles based on personal beliefs and understandings, leading to unsystematic and inconsistent practices. In the EFL literature, two prevalent misconceptions are evident: one equates AL with a collection of diverse classroom activities, while the other associates it with the creation of an engaging learning environment. While both perspectives share certain characteristics of AL, they fail to capture the full scope of AL's conceptual and instructional framework, thereby hindering its effective and systematic implementation.

AL as a collection of classroom strategies

In publications across the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, AL is often regarded as a collection of discrete classroom strategies rather than as a systematic form of instruction (Nguyen et al., 2021). This perspective tends to overlook the importance of strategically sequencing activities or offering clear justifications for the order in which strategies are implemented. A similar trend is evident in recent AL studies within EFL contexts.

Ho et al. (2023) investigated the perceptions of 56 teachers from two English language centres in Vietnam regarding the use of three AL techniques—think-pair-share, group work, and questioning—in their speaking classrooms. Findings from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews revealed that teachers held positive views of these techniques, though they also reported challenges related to mixed-ability classes and students' shyness and anxiety. In Japan, Yamauchi (2020) conducted a study exploring students' attitudes towards AL strategies at a tertiary institution. Twenty-six students enrolled in a basic English course completed a pre-survey prior to engaging in a variety of AL strategies, including pair work (e.g., dialogue practice, interviews), whole-class activities (e.g., listening to songs, chorus reading, sharing writing and videos), and mobile-assisted tasks (e.g., *Kahoot, Duolingo*). A post-survey was administered following the course. The data indicated high levels of student satisfaction with the majority of AL strategies. Students also reported reduced nervousness and anxiety when communicating with native English speakers and expressed increased interest in intercultural and international communication. While participants in both studies expressed positive attitudes towards the AL strategies employed, neither study addressed how students acquired new information and ideas prior to these activities. Furthermore, no provision was made for a reflection stage during the implementation process. Additionally, the instructional sequence was not specified, leading to uncertainty about the structure and coherence of the students' doing and observing experiences.

In Indonesian settings, Sajidin and Ashadi (2021) and Solikhah and Sofi (2023) oversaw the implementation of AL in EFL classrooms. Sajidin and Ashadi (2021) observed 12 classrooms across eight junior high schools and reported that most teachers followed an AL model beginning with brainstorming or ice-breaking activities, followed by group work and group presentations. Only one teacher, however, concluded the session with students' reflection activities. Interview data from 81 students revealed their excitement with AL strategies, which were perceived to enhance both academic learning and social skills. While the researchers acknowledged that incorporating reflection would render the AL model more holistic, they also noted that, despite increased student engagement during the initial minutes of the lesson through brainstorming and ice-breaking, classroom observations did not clarify how students accessed new information and ideas before participating in group work activities.

Similarly, Solikhah and Sofi (2023) focused on the AL strategies employed by a single teacher in a junior high school EFL classroom. Data were collected through classroom observations and structured interviews with three students from different classes taught by the teacher. The findings identified ten effective AL strategies, each accompanied by clear descriptions of how input was delivered. However, the sequencing of these strategies and the pedagogical

rationale behind their selection and integration were not addressed. Moreover, the study did not explicitly report a reflection component. While it is possible that students engaged in incidental self-reflection during activities such as problem-solving, peer teaching, and jigsaw learning, these reflective practices appeared to be optional and thus, potentially less impactful.

Fink (2013) cautions against viewing AL as a mere collection of classroom strategies, instead emphasising its design as systematic instruction that begins with opportunities for students to acquire information and ideas, proceeds through AL experiences, and concludes with reflection. Similarly, Devira (2020) observes that although many EFL teachers implement a variety of engaging strategies, these are often executed in rigid, teacher-dictated, and repetitive ways, limiting the development of students' higher-order thinking skills. Such practices, therefore, do not align with the core principles of AL. The emphasis should not rest solely on the diversity or appeal of the strategies employed, but on their systematic and pedagogically sound integration into the instructional process. Consequently, the mere inclusion of multiple strategies does not suffice to categorise an approach as AL unless it aligns with the comprehensive instructional framework discussed above.

AL as an engaging learning environment

In several EFL studies, AL is not conceptualised as systematic instruction but is instead interpreted as the creation of an engaging classroom environment. As a result, teachers in these contexts often focus on fostering supportive and stimulating atmospheres, which they then regard as indicative of AL classrooms (Devira, 2020).

In 2023, Chau and Pham conducted a study utilising *ClassPoint*, a classroom response system, to enhance student satisfaction and promote AL in Vietnamese EFL classrooms. A total of 208 students, drawn from a listening class, a speaking class, and two academic writing classes, engaged with the *ClassPoint* platform to participate in discussions, complete exercises, and take quizzes during class time. Data gathered from an online survey and semi-structured interviews indicated that the integration of this technology improved students' attention, reduced stress associated with assessment, mitigated peer pressure, and facilitated more equitable communication with teachers, thereby contributing to an engaging AL environment. However, it appears that the revitalised classroom atmosphere was primarily attributable to the affordances of technological innovation. Furthermore, although the platform offered a variety of interactive features (e.g., whiteboard, word cloud, quizzes), the study provided limited insight into how the stages of AL could be systematically implemented through these technological tools.

Another study investigating the use of digital portfolios to facilitate AL was conducted by Dayag and Abdalla (2023) with 293 EFL students enrolled in an English foundation programme at a university in Oman. As part of the course, students were instructed to develop portfolios comprising academic planners, vocabulary logs, and reflection tasks. At the end of the course, students responded to an online survey, and were randomly selected for 6 focus-group discussions. The findings indicated that portfolio development fostered students' active role and enhanced their vocabulary repertoire. Additionally, the inclusion of reflection tasks

appeared to support the development of critical thinking and self-assessment skills. Nevertheless, it may be contended that portfolios function more as assessment tools than as instruments of AL instruction. While they may incorporate elements aligned with AL, such as reflection and self-assessment, these features alone do not substantiate their classification as AL. Moreover, since the portfolios in this study were developed outside the classroom, the instructional process was not clearly delineated. Specifically, the study did not explain how students acquired new information, how they participated in classroom activities, or how reflection was integrated with their experiential learning within the instructional sequence.

Edwards (2015) observes that while the implementation of AL can enhance students' engagement, an engaging classroom environment is not always necessarily indicative of AL. From the perspective of AL as systematic instruction, the use of technology in AL classrooms must be aligned with the structured teaching sequence outlined by Fink (2013), as illustrated in Figure 1. In this light, it becomes evident that the application of *ClassPoint* and digital portfolios in the aforementioned studies did not adhere systematically to the stages of AL instruction. Consequently, the observed engagement in these contexts may be more plausibly attributed to the novelty or pedagogical affordances of the instructional innovations themselves, rather than to the principles of AL per se. It is therefore methodologically unsound to conflate students' engagement in these studies with the implementation of AL.

HOW ACTIVE IS ACTIVE LEARNING?

AL continues to be frequently misapplied in many EFL contexts, largely due to misconceptions regarding what it means for learners to be "active" in the classroom (Devira, 2020). AL should not be reduced to a discrete set of activities or an engaging classroom atmosphere, as such interpretations fail to encapsulate its comprehensive pedagogical intent. Rather, AL ought to be conceptualised as a form of systematic instruction in which various classroom strategies are purposefully and coherently integrated to promote both students' achievement and engagement (Cavanagh, 2011; Fink, 2013; Prince, 2004). To underscore the integrative nature of AL, it is essential to revisit its foundational principles and consider recent findings from AL-related scholarship. On this basis, the present section proposes a more detailed instructional framework for AL, accompanied by recommendations for its effective implementation as a pedagogical approach in EFL classrooms.

A framework for optimising AL

Apart from Fink's (2013) three components of AL, as illustrated in Figure 1, additional concerns regarding AL have been raised by scholars. Devira (2020), for instance, observes that many educators continue to implement AL strategies in ways that mirror traditional, teacher-centred instruction. This highlights the necessity of reinforcing the student-centred nature of AL. More importantly, classroom instruction should aim to develop students' higher-order thinking skills—namely analysis, synthesis, and evaluation—as these cognitive processes promote students to engage with conceptual understanding rather than simply remember new information (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

With regard to the modes through which activities are conducted, Bonwell and Eison (1991) assert that AL strategies incorporate a range of modalities, including visual learning, debates, games, simulations, and other interactive approaches. Additionally, AL strategies may be delivered through printed materials, online platforms, and visual aids, thereby accommodating both online and face-to-face learning environments (Fink, 2013). In this respect, the strategies employed in an AL-oriented classroom should exhibit multimodality in order to address diverse learner preferences, thereby enhancing student engagement and deepening the overall learning experience.

Regarding interaction in AL classrooms, group work activities are often prioritised to foster peer interactions (Prince, 2004). However, Matsushita (2018) raises concerns about collaboration in small groups, observing that some students prefer working individually and may be reluctant to engage in group work. In practice, AL can be implemented both individually and collaboratively, employing pairs or small groups, to promote interactions not only among students but also between students and instructors (Fink, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2021). Beyond interpersonal exchanges, contemporary technologies facilitate interactions between individuals and learning systems (e.g., *Moodle*) or tools such as generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). Thus, the concept of interaction within AL can be expanded to encompass interactivity, involving student–student, student–teacher, and individual–technology dynamics, all of which contribute to the development of students' knowledge.

Additionally, Kessler (2022) highlights the role of technology in promoting multimodality and interactivity in today's classrooms. Its integration can offer significant benefits for students, whether in on-site or online AL classrooms (Fink, 2013). Interactive platforms, videos, and animations, for instance, can further engage students in online AL classrooms (Seemanath & Watanapokakul, 2024). Learning management systems also offer advantages by providing spaces for online discussions, collaboration, and immediate feedback (Caine, 2020). Recently, considerable research has been devoted to examining the application of GenAI in AL classrooms, which has significantly accelerated the transformation of education towards a more technology-driven approach (Holtham, 2023; Maldonado-Trapp & Bruna, 2024; Rouzegar & Makrehchi, 2024). The findings of these studies offer practical recommendations for using GenAI to enhance the effectiveness of AL instruction. As such, this aspect should be emphasised in an AL framework.

Despite clear recommendations for implementing AL as systematic instruction, concerns still persist regarding strategy selections. Experts note that many educators tend to equate "active" in AL with physical activities (Watkins et al., 2007). Consequently, these teachers often favour strategies that involve significant physical movement (e.g., allowing students to move or run around the classroom) in an attempt to maintain an "active learning" environment. Furthermore, some teachers who interpret AL as primarily "learning by doing" focus only on hands-on activities in their classrooms. However, Yannier et al. (2020) argue that the mere inclusion of hands-on activities does not substantially enhance student learning. To assist teachers in selecting more effective strategies for their AL classrooms, Edwards (2015) categorises AL strategies into three distinct types: *Intellectually AL, Socially AL,* and *Physically AL*. *Intellectually AL* encompasses classroom activities designed to stimulate cognitive development, encouraging

students to think critically and share new intellectual ideas with their peers, rather than relying predominantly on teachers (Yuh & Thamrongsotthisakul, 2020). As such, intellectual activities should not only address lower-order cognitive skills (e.g., memorising and understanding) but should primarily focus on higher-order, more cognitively demanding tasks, as emphasised by Bonwell and Eison (1991). In this context, students are given opportunities to connect new ideas to existing knowledge and experiences, facilitating a deeper understanding of the content and promoting long-term retention. *Socially AL* involves organising students into small groups or engaging the whole class in collaborative work, fostering peer learning through observation and reflection, as outlined by Fink (2013). *Physically AL*, meanwhile, is not confined to physical movement; it also includes lab experiments, games, model-building, and hands-on projects. Also, Yuh and Thamrongsotthisakul (2020) argue that when learners experience positive emotions about the tasks they are engaging in, it significantly enhances task achievement. Therefore, the emotional dimension of AL should be emphasised. Stark et al. (2018) assert that classroom activities should be structured in ways that foster both high levels of control and positive task value. However, this does not imply that students have complete autonomy over their learning; rather, it suggests that teacher facilitation is crucial in guiding students' choices (Jones, 2007). Based on this, a fourth category, *Emotionally AL*, is characterised by activities that engage students' interests, highlight the value of the lesson, and provide students with some control over the pace, selection, and sequence of learning (Stark et al., 2018; Yuh & Thamrongsotthisakul, 2020).

Together, Figure 2 proposes a comprehensive framework for optimising AL. The framework includes AL components (Fink, 2013) depicted in the inner circle. The middle circle highlights five characteristics of effective AL implementation: student-centredness, higher-order thinking skills, multimodality, interactivity, and technology. The outer circle illustrates four subcategories of AL: *Intellectually AL, Socially AL, Physically AL*, and *Emotionally AL*. In this framework, classroom activities can be thoughtfully selected and sequenced to foster systematic AL instruction.

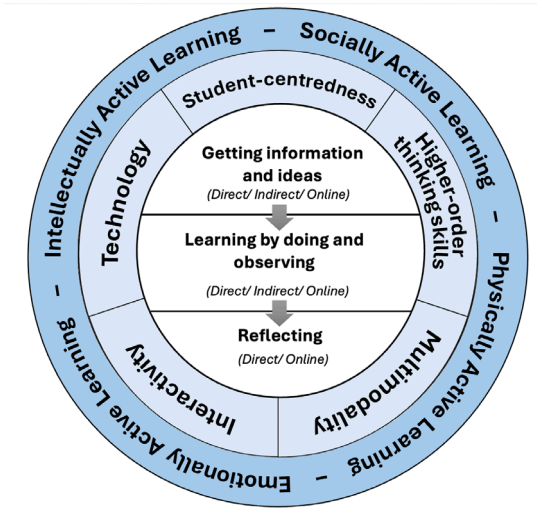

Figure 2 A proposed active learning framework

Recommendations for AL instruction in an EFL classroom

With reference to the AL framework presented in Figure 2, AL instruction in the EFL classroom can be structured into three key stages. In the initial stage—*Getting information and ideas*—Seemanath and Watanapokakul (2024) recommend beginning with engaging warm-up activities using multimedia (e.g., songs, films) or online game-based learning platforms (e.g., *Kahoot*) to familiarise students with the lesson content. This may be followed by exposure activities such as reading or listening tasks that introduce core concepts. In the subsequent stage—*Learning by doing and observing*—EFL students participate in tasks individually, in pairs, or in groups. These activities should promote engagement with challenging and authentic experiences. Seemanath and Watanapokakul (2024) also suggest a range of interactive tasks, including dialogue creation, role-playing, and case studies. Finally, the lesson concludes with the *Reflection* stage, wherein students are encouraged to reflect collaboratively on what they have learned, how they felt during the process, and the progress they have made.

The effectiveness of AL implementation in EFL classrooms is shaped by five key features: student-centredness, higher-order thinking skills, multimodality, interactivity, and technology (see Figure 2). AL instruction should be conducted within a student-centred environment, with the teacher assuming the role of facilitator. In such a context, students actively engage in the various AL stages alongside their peers and take ownership of their learning. For example, in a writing class, students may be given the freedom to select topics of personal interest (Jacobs & Toh-Heng, 2013). Crucially, AL instruction prioritises the development of higher-order thinking skills by providing learners with opportunities to analyse, evaluate, and create.

Multimodality and interactivity are closely interconnected in the EFL context. Kessler (2022) advocates for the idea of fostering interaction among classroom participants through diverse semiotic modes, including linguistic, visual, aural, and gestural modes. In an English language classroom, students may interact with one another and with the teacher through discussion (linguistic mode), collaboratively creating slides with images and videos (visual, aural, and linguistic modes), and delivering presentations (gestural mode).

Technology plays a significant role across various stages of AL instruction. Gordy et al. (2018) observe that numerous educational institutions have invested in technology-enhanced AL classrooms, which are equipped with state-of-the-art devices such as flat screens, projectors, and portable smart devices, alongside movable furniture. These purposefully-designed spaces have demonstrated their effectiveness in facilitating AL for both teachers and students (Gordy et al., 2018; Hao et al., 2021). However, such infrastructure often entails substantial financial investment and can only accommodate a limited number of students, raising questions about its feasibility for institutions with constrained resources (Hao et al., 2021). Beyond physical infrastructure, online platforms and mobile applications have also been integrated into AL practices. Caine (2020) and Kazmi and Riaz (2019) recommend employing learning management systems (LMSs), such as *Moodle, Blackboard*, and *Google Classroom*, to extend learning beyond the physical classroom. This approach provides students with additional opportunities to engage in learning after class hours. To further enhance engagement, Kazmi and Riaz (2019) advocate the use of structured online quizzes through platforms such as

Kahoot, Quizizz, Baamboozle, and *Blooket,* which are readily accessible via students' smart devices.

An example of technology integration to promote AL in synchronous online instruction, particularly in teaching grammar to EFL students, is provided by Watanapokakul (2024), who recommends the use of various online applications: *Google Slides* for lecturing, *Google Forms* for practice activities, *Padlet* for sentence construction tasks, and *AnswerGarden* for reflective exercises. These platforms not only support teachers in monitoring students' progress but also encourage learners to engage in self-reflection throughout the learning process. Moreover, in the 21st century, GenAI has become an increasingly indispensable component of AL classrooms as its interactive capabilities contribute directly to enhancing both practice opportunities and student engagement. For instance, in a listening and speaking EFL class, GenAI-powered chatbots or voice assistants (e.g., *ChatGPT* or *Gemini* with speech integration) can simulate real-life dialogues, allowing students to practise conversational English in a dynamic and responsive manner. Similarly, in reading and writing instruction, students can use GenAI tools to generate sample texts, receive real-time feedback on grammar and coherence, or co-construct essays and summaries, thereby enhancing their writing fluency and critical reading skills.

Classroom activities in EFL instruction can be thoughtfully selected with reference to the four subcategories of AL: *Intellectually AL, Socially AL, Physically AL,* and *Emotionally AL*. *Intellectually AL* primarily targets higher-order thinking tasks; accordingly, activities such as inquiry-based learning, problem-solving, and document synthesis are highly applicable in the EFL context (Edwards, 2015). EFL teachers might also incorporate familiar strategies—such as multimedia presentations, critical writing tasks, self-assessment, and peer feedback—provided that these tasks intellectually challenge students and engage their cognitive skills. For *Socially AL*, Solikhah and Sofi (2023) recommend collaborative activities such as Think-Pair-Share, Jigsaw, peer teaching, and role-playing, all of which foster interaction and cooperation among students. Hockly (2024) further suggests the use of GenAI chatbots as conversational partners in simulated scenarios or as virtual tutors offering language correction and explanations, thus enhancing social engagement through technology-mediated interaction. Beyond conventional games and kinaesthetic activities, *Physically AL* can be supported through project-based learning and hands-on activities (Edwards, 2015). Teachers may guide students to employ GenAI for brainstorming ideas, developing project plans, or generating visual content to support their presentations and outputs (Hockly, 2024). In the case of *Emotionally AL,* it is important for teachers to be attuned to students' individual characteristics and preferences in order to select activities that stimulate interest and grant learners a high degree of autonomy in the learning process. For instance, in a writing class, students might engage in creative writing tasks and use GenAI tools to generate illustrations or storyboards based on their written work. In summary, the four subcategories of AL presented in the outer circle of Figure 2 should be systematically integrated into the stages and principles outlined in the inner circles to ensure effective EFL instruction. As Edwards (2015) observes, it is often possible to address more than one subcategory simultaneously; however, in instances where only one can be feasibly applied, *Intellectually AL* should be prioritised, as the core objective of AL is to facilitate meaningful learning rather than merely promote enjoyment.

An example of transforming PL into AL instruction in an EFL classroom

Table 1, adapted from Edwards (2015), illustrates how PL instruction can be transformed into AL instruction through a sample lesson plan focused on teaching gerunds and infinitives.

Table 1

A comparison of PL and AL instruction in an EFL class (Adapted from Edwards, 2015)

Passive Learning Instruction	Active Learning Instruction
	1. Getting information and ideas
- The teacher introduces new lesson: gerunds and infinities.	1.1 Lecturing - The teacher introduces new lessons using multimedia to stimulate students' interest (*Emotionally AL*).
	2. Experiencing by doing and observing
- The teacher provides sentences and asks students to identify gerunds and infinities. - The teacher asks students to complete a worksheet of identifying verbs in 20-25 sentences.	2.1 Individual & Whole-class practice - The teacher gives sentences and asks students to raise one finger, if the teacher is pointing at a gerund, or two fingers for an infinitive (*Intellectually AL, Physically AL, Emotionally AL*).
	2.2 Pair work - The teacher converts worksheet content into an online quiz game (e.g., *Blooket*). - Students play the game synchronously with their peers. (*Intellectually AL, Physically AL, Emotionally AL, Socially AL*).
- The teacher presents answers to the class.	2.3 Whole-class practice - The teacher facilitates whole-class discussion of the answers (*Socially AL*). - The teacher calls some students to answer one question of the worksheet (*Physically AL*). - Students can choose the sentence they prefer to perform (*Emotionally AL*). - Other students and the teacher listen and give feedback (*Socially AL*).
- The teacher assigns students to write sentences with gerunds and infinities on a piece of paper.	2.4 Pair work - In pairs, students write sentences using gerunds and infinitives (*Intellectually AL, Socially AL*). - Students use GenAI to correct the sentences and generate images representing their sentences (*Physically AL, Emotionally AL*). - Students upload their products to *Padlet* for class viewing and feedback (*Socially AL, Physically AL, Emotionally AL*).
- The teacher asks students to submit their work for grading.	2.5 Whole-class practice - The teacher facilitates a class discussion based on students' shared work (*Socially AL*). - Each pair presents their AI-generated image (*Physically AL*). - Students can choose the image they prefer to perform (*Emotionally AL*). - Other students create a sentence based on the image (*Intellectually AL, Socially AL, Emotionally AL, Physically AL*), and presenters give feedback (*Socially AL*). - The teacher may assist in facilitating the interaction.
Homework: - The teacher asks students to do one page of exercises in the grammar book.	2.6 Group work Homework: - Students work in groups to create a video based on the sentences from the workbook exercise (*Intellectually AL, Socially AL, Physically AL*). - Students can use GenAI for script generation, video editing, and enhancement with music and effects (*Socially AL, Physically AL, Emotionally AL*). - With students' consent, the teacher may share their videos on a social media platform (e.g., Facebook).

Passive Learning Instruction	Active Learning Instruction
	3. Reflecting on what and how a student learns
	3.1 Group work - In groups of four, each student writes (in their first language) what they learned and lists three things they are not confident in the class, on a piece of paper (*Physically AL*). - The papers are rotated among group members to suggest solutions where possible. The process continues until all students have read and responded to each other's reflections (*Intellectually AL, Socially AL, Emotionally AL, Physically AL*). - The teacher invites students to share the knowledge gained, along with their concerns and solution, and provides feedback. (*Intellectually AL, Socially AL, Emotionally AL, Physically AL*).

In the first stage, rather than delivering content through a traditional lecture format, the teacher may utilise multimedia (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, videos) to introduce and explain new concepts more effectively, thereby enhancing student engagement.

In the second stage, activities in the PL model tend to be discrete and individually focused, offering limited opportunities for interaction, collaboration, or student agency. In contrast, the AL approach incorporates a variety of strategies and modalities, supported by technological tools, that encourage students to actively engage in the learning process through doing tasks both individually and collaboratively with peers, and observing their peers and their teacher. Homework can be given as an option or reserved for use in a revision session. In the PL classroom, the idea also be reconceptualised to foster deeper engagement and promote a more student-centred learning experience. For instance, students collaborate in groups to produce a video based on assigned content, where they would be required to make key decisions about content, format, and presentation. On a more crucial point, they would be encouraged to utilise technology and GenAI throughout the group work process—for idea generation, language refinement, and multimedia integration—thus reinforcing both the technological and collaborative dimensions of AL. Many of the tasks in the second stage—such as collaborative sentence construction, image interpretation, and peer feedback—are designed to promote higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

While the PL model typically omits opportunities for reflection, the AL instruction incorporates a structured reflection stage, which further strengthens student-centredness and higher-order thinking through peer-supported metacognitive engagement. By allowing students to express their reflections in their first language, the activity creates a psychologically safe space for students to share insights and uncertainties freely. The teacher, acting as a facilitator, then guides a final class discussion and offers formative feedback as needed.

It is evident that the teacher should employ various mediums, such as multimedia (e.g., PowerPoint slides, videos, pictures), online platforms (e.g., *Padlet*), and GenAI, to engage students and stimulate their interest through multimodal communication channels (e.g., viewing illustrations, listening to lectures, and reading sentence examples) in an AL classroom. Furthermore, *Intellectually AL* strategies should be present in the majority of activities, as Edwards (2015) highlights their significance in helping students acquire new knowledge and develop higher-order thinking skills. On this foundation, *Physically, Socially,* and *Emotionally AL*

strategies could complement those that promote intellectual development. Moreover, *Physically AL* in a language classroom extends beyond mere physical movements; it can also involve creative tasks and hands-on projects, such as video creation, as illustrated in Activity 2.6. In the AL activities, interactivity is multifaceted, involving interactions among students, between students and the teacher, and between students and technology.

EVALUATING AL IN EFL CLASSROOM

A growing body of research has demonstrated that the systematic implementation of AL can significantly enhance students' academic achievement and promote greater classroom engagement (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Cavanagh, 2011; Fink, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2021; Prince, 2004). These positive outcomes have also been documented in studies situated within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Gasmi & Nadabi, 2023; Seemanath & Watanapokakul, 2024; Thongthee, 2020; Waluyo, 2020; Watanapokakul, 2024; Yusuk, 2021). Importantly, students' attitudes towards learning are recognised as influential factors in shaping their motivation (Gardner, 2007). Accordingly, evaluating the effectiveness of AL in EFL classrooms should involve the examination of three interrelated dimensions: students' academic achievement, their attitudes towards learning, and the extent of their classroom engagement.

In evaluating students' achievement, Bacon (2016) distinguishes between *actual learning* and *perceived learning. Actual learning* refers to demonstrable improvements in knowledge or skills as measured by objective, rigorous assessments (e.g., tests), whereas *perceived learning* reflects learners' self-reported progress based on their personal experiences and perceptions. In current research on AL implementation in EFL contexts, these two dimensions are often investigated separately. For actual learning, Seemanath and Watanapokakul (2024), Thongthee (2020), and Watanapokakul (2024) employed pre-tests and post-tests to assess student progress, while Yusuk (2021) adopted a pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test design. The statistical analyses across these studies indicated significant improvements in students' performance. Conversely, other scholars have focused on perceived learning. For instance, Caine (2020) evaluated the effectiveness of AL by administering a questionnaire comprising both quantitative and qualitative items to gather students' perspectives on their academic progress. Similarly, Gasmi and Nadabi (2023) utilised a combination of questionnaires and students' self-reflective writing to assess perceived learning outcomes. The findings of both studies revealed high levels of student satisfaction with AL and notable perceived gains in learning. Notably, Bacon (2016) and Deslauriers et al. (2019) have emphasised the importance of incorporating both actual and perceived learning measures in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of student development over any training courses. Therefore, it is recommended that evaluations of AL effectiveness in EFL contexts integrate both forms of evidence to provide a more nuanced and holistic depiction of student achievement.

In addition to evaluating learning outcomes, it is essential to examine students' attitudes toward the implementation of AL in EFL classrooms. Attitudes, in this context, refer to a psychological construct encompassing an individual's beliefs, emotions, and predispositions toward specific situations (Crano & Prislin, 2008). According to Gardner (2007), students'

attitudes can significantly influence their motivation, which, in turn, affects their academic achievement. Positive attitudes toward learning environments are often associated with more successful language acquisition, whereas negative attitudes may result in disengagement and diminished learning outcomes (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). In light of this, researchers have increasingly incorporated attitude assessments into their evaluations of AL in EFL settings. For instance, Seemanath and Watanapokakul (2024) employed questionnaires and interviews to investigate Thai students' attitudes toward AL practices. Their findings indicated a generally positive reception, which was also linked to improvements in students' language proficiency.

Most importantly, engagement should not be overlooked in the evaluation of AL classrooms. As Trowler (2010) argued, engagement is not merely synonymous with participation in classroom activities. Scholars generally agree that student engagement should be assessed across three interrelated dimensions: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive (Fredricks et al., 2004; Schmidt et al., 2018). According to Fredricks et al. (2004), behavioural engagement encompasses attendance and active involvement; emotional engagement pertains to students' expressions of interest, enjoyment, or enthusiasm; and cognitive engagement involves the mental investment in learning, including a willingness to exceed basic requirements and embrace challenging tasks. Highlighting the interconnected nature of these dimensions, Schmidt et al. (2018) noted that high levels of behavioural engagement are unlikely to occur in the absence of corresponding emotional and cognitive engagement. Within EFL contexts, engagement has often been examined indirectly—through constructs such as perceived learning (Caine, 2020; Gasmi & Nadabi, 2023), student attitudes (Seemanath & Watanapokakul, 2024), learner satisfaction (Thongthee, 2020), or motivation (Yusuk, 2021). However, given its critical role in fostering effective learning, engagement should be evaluated directly and independently as a distinct outcome of AL implementation.

CONCLUSION

Despite its growing popularity, AL in EFL contexts is often narrowly interpreted as a set of techniques or an engaging classroom environment, diverging from its foundational pedagogical roots. This paper repositions AL as a form of systematic instruction, comprising three stages and grounded in five interrelated principles: student-centredness, higher-order thinking, multimodality, interactivity, and technological integration. The proposed framework extends existing models by incorporating human–technology interaction, refining the role of emotional engagement, and exploring the pedagogical affordances of GenAI. Through a comparison with PL, this study provides practical guidance on integrating AL strategies—*Intellectually, Socially, Physically,* and *Emotionally*—into EFL instruction. It further underscores the importance of multidimensional evaluation, advocating for the joint assessment of students' achievement, attitudes, and engagement to capture AL's full pedagogical impact. While AL is not a universal remedy, its thoughtful implementation—supported by appropriate technologies and informed pedagogical judgment—can transform EFL classrooms into spaces of deeper learning, learner agency, and intellectual growth. Ultimately, the future of AL in EFL lies not in its novelty, but in educators' sustained commitment to purposeful design and principled practice.

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