

# **Perceptions and Practices of EFL School Teachers on Implementing Active Learning in Thai English Language Classrooms**

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Received: 07/03/2020

Revised: 21/05/2020

Accepted: 22/05/2020

## **Abstract**

Thai students study English as a compulsory subject for twelve years in primary and secondary school, yet their English language competency is generally lower than other ASEAN countries. This might have been attributed to the teacher-centred approach in EFL classrooms. Active learning has been suggested as a better approach for English learning in Thai school, but more research is needed to confirm the previous findings in the Thai context. This study investigated the practices and perceptions of 41 school teachers after 40 hours of training on the active learning approach. Observation, questionnaires, and interviews were administered. The findings revealed the positive effects of active learning on teachers' perceptions, and classroom observations showed that the approach implemented in the classroom were moderately practical. However, the findings from classroom observation disclosed that classroom facilities did not fully support active learning. The findings of interviews unveiled some negative impacts of active learning that could hinder the effective implementation of active learning in the classroom such as limited resources, space, and time, as well as challenges in classroom management. Overall, teachers' perceptions of the active learning approach was positive.

**Keywords:** active learning, EFL classrooms, teacher perceptions, EFL teaching practices

## **Introduction**

In Thailand, students spend twelve years in schools studying English as it is a compulsory subject in accordance with education reforms by Ministry of Education (1996). However, English proficiency of Thai students were considerably lower than other countries in ASEAN (Education First, 2018). Moreover, they are mostly unable to communicate in English (Kaewmorakot, 2005). Simpson (2011) also stated that after studying at primary and secondary schools, the majority of Thai students can only perform English at a very basic level for communication. This problem can be the result a teacher-centered approach which is the dominant strategy used in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms in Thailand (Fernquest, 2016). Stone (2017) also pointed that the teacher-centered teaching approach is the favorite teaching style for teachers in Thailand. Thus, it can be said that this teaching approach can be the cause which affects students to have a feeling of boredom and demotivation from studying English, and then, they may then learn passively without passion or meaning (Jeno, 2015). As Mulatu and Bezabih (2018, p.89) stated that the teaching methodology can be “the cause of success or failure in language learning; for it is ultimately the method that determines the ‘what?’ and the ‘how?’ of language instructions”.

Active learning approach, as widely recognized and recommended by both researchers and teachers as a teaching strategy that can influence the success of second/foreign language learning, can be a solution to the problem mentioned above as it has widely known benefits in terms of enhancing students' achievement and motivation.

Thai government is now promoting the approach in order for teachers to implement it in the classroom and also to replace the teacher-centered teaching approach. Therefore, in the past decade, the approach has been implemented and more research studies have been conducted on the active learning approach. Furthermore, the majority of research conducted was focused on students' perceptions and other factors. Although some research studies have been conducted with teachers in order to assess their perceptions and to investigate if active learning in their classrooms was practical or not, those studies were conducted with teachers who had never received training in the active learning approach (Gerlese & Akerlind, 2004; Kember, 1997; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001). According to the results of those studies, teachers did not understand and practice the approach in the classrooms effectively due to the lack of opportunity to receive active learning training and this led to the impracticality of the teaching method. Moreover, similar studies by Girma (2013) and Ayele (2014) showed that active learning failed to be practiced in schools due to teachers not have training in this particular teaching method. This led to ineffective teaching and the impracticality of the method in classrooms.

However, only a few Thai researchers extended their work more directly with teachers who had already received the active learning training in order to assess their perceptions and practices in the classrooms and to follow up the results after the training to identify some points of concern that can occur in the classrooms and hinder the efficacy of implementing the approach.

Thus, this research study focused on investigating the EFL school teachers' perceptions of active learning after they received 40 hours of training in active learning and implemented the approach in Thai English language classrooms. More importantly, the study aimed to examine the teachers' practice of active learning in English lessons/classes in schools in order to see whether it would be practical or not and to identify the factors that can inhibit the effectiveness of implementing the approach in EFL classrooms.

### **Objectives and research questions**

The objectives of the study were to investigate EFL school teachers' perceptions and to explore teachers' practices on the implementation of active learning in EFL classrooms in order to see whether or not active learning is appropriately implemented in teaching English. To achieve the objectives, the specific objectives are as follows:

1. To examine EFL school teachers' perceptions in implementing active learning in English classes.
2. To investigate EFL school teachers' practices in implementing active learning in English classes.
3. To explore the factors that may affect the implementation of active learning in teaching/learning English in EFL school teachers.

On the whole, the study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What is the EFL school teachers' perception towards active learning in the classrooms?
2. What are the EFL school teachers' classroom practices?
3. What factors may affect the implementation of active learning in teaching English?

## **Significance of the study**

The aim of the research was to investigate EFL school teachers' perceptions and practices on implementing active learning in Thai English language classrooms. The findings of this study may help to promote and raise teachers' awareness of implementing active learning and also the fundamentals for the better and more effective application. Furthermore, the findings of this study may be useful for curriculum developers, teachers, and other stakeholders such as schools, educational institutes and those who are interested in applying active learning, and acknowledge what the current practices and needs are in order to include them in the newly developed ones. Moreover, the findings will highlight areas of training that teachers need to focus on in future teaching plans. They will also identify factors that may hinder the implementation of active learning in teaching English which they should be aware of when implementing active learning in the future. Finally, this will contribute to the body of research and literature to the topic of active learning in the Thai context.

## **Literature review**

In this literature review section, the notion of active learning in EFL contexts is defined. Then the framework of active learning in this study is presented. Finally, related studies which highlight studies on practices and perceptions of active learning in implementing active learning is discussed.

## **Definitions of active learning**

Active learning is broadly described as an instructional approach or method that engages students in the learning process. Bonwell and Eison (1991) defined active learning approach as anything that gets students involved in doing things and thinking about what they are doing. Similarly, Silberman (1996) referred to active learning as is anything that gets students to perform most of the activities or work, use their brains, analyze ideas, solve problems and apply what they have learned in their daily life. Moreover, Lumpkin et al., (2015) stated that active learning is "any activity encouraging students to participate in learning approaches, engaging them with course material and enhancing critical thinking as they make applications beyond the classroom" (p.123). Additionally, in the active learning approach, there are many learning strategies and teaching methods such as cooperative language learning, project-based learning, group discussion, role play, problem-based learning, task-based learning, inquiry-based learning, case studies, simulation, debates (Agbatogun, 2014; Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Hung, 2015). Active learning is often different from the traditional lecture because in the lecture students receive information from the instructor passively (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Bonwell and Eison (1991) claimed that active learning is better than passive learning in terms of supporting the development of students' skills in thinking and writing. Several studies support the idea that active learning is comparable to lectures in promoting the mastery of content but superior to lectures in promoting the development of students' skills in thinking and writing (Harasim et al., 1997). Furthermore, many research studies have consistently found that higher learners' performance and engagement are associated with instructional methods involving active learning techniques (Freeman et al., 2014). In addition, a wide range of activities that allow students to be involved during learning in the class can enhance students' performance and attention when they are engaged in the activities (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Malik, 2011; Soltanzadeh, et al., 2013). Watanapokakul (2013) stated that engagement or interaction with their friends through authentic material in various kinds of situations can promote a positive classroom atmosphere and increase students' motivation and enjoyment in the class. It can be said that because active learning provides a wide variety of learning styles, promotes learner's attention, changes

learner's attitudes, enhances learner's performance, and basically causes learners to learn more (Astin, 1993; Fayombo, 2012).

### **The characteristics of active learning**

These characteristics of active learning were adapted from Bonwell and Eison (1991); Chickering and Gamson (1987); McKeachie and Svinicki (2006) and summarized as the following:

1. Learners are not only involved in listening but they have to get engaged through thinking, and interacting with their classmates.
2. The transmitting of information is less focused on, but the teaching is more on the development of learners' skills.
3. The higher-order thinking skills such as application, analysis, evaluation, and creation are the skills that learners have to be engaged in.
4. The content or concepts, namely reading, discussing, writing, brainstorming, summarizing, critiquing, and presenting, are focused on in order to get learners actively engaged.
5. The exploration of own ideas, and values of learners are emphasized.

### **The advantages and disadvantages of active learning**

Several research studies demonstrate the positive impact active learning can have upon students' learning outcomes. More specifically, active learning in the classroom has distinct advantages as suggested by Bonwell and Eison (1991); Malik (2011); Soltanzadeh et al. (2013) as the following:

1. Active learning enhances content knowledge, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.
2. Active learning promotes motivation and attention for learning in both students and instructors.
3. Active learning enhances the development of capabilities such as critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, adaptability, communication and interpersonal skills.
4. Active learning promotes student positive attitudes towards learning.
5. Active learning promotes learning through collaboration and interaction with other students, engaging more deeply with the course content and building invaluable social skills.
6. Active learning promotes learning with real life situations as activities in the class allow students to use language in authentic settings.
7. Through involvement in activities, students develop their self-esteem. In other words, the activities increase the concept of self as they perceive that they have the ability to perform well in class and contribute to the group.
8. Active learning enhances the development of knowledge retention, understanding, and transfer have been found to be the result of learners' effortful work for those who are engaged in active learning with sense-making activities.

However, active learning also has negative impacts in English language classrooms in several ways as suggested by Drew (2019) as follows:

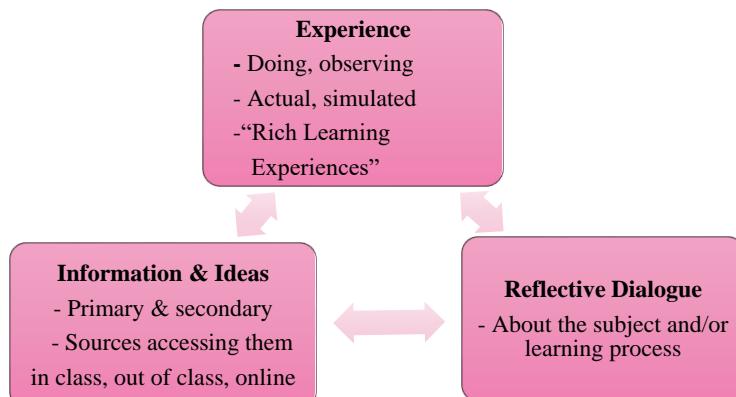
1. Classroom management appears to be the issue when implementing active learning as the active learning activity is fun, but it needs to be carefully manipulated.

2. Students need to be used to the active learning activities. When activities are first introduced to the class, the instruction/explanation of activities should be clear, otherwise, lesson may not work if learners are not used to how to process the activities.
3. Some active learning activities can get loud when implemented. This can be a distraction for the class next door as they are trying to concentrate.
4. Active learning requires more spontaneous and flexible lesson plans. So, this can increase the workload of teachers.
5. Some active learning activities require equipment and materials when they are to be implemented in the class such as projector, screen, and computer.

### **The framework of active learning in this study**

In general, active learning activities are considered as participatory techniques. As Bonwell and Eison (1991, p.2) stated “instructional activities involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing”. The active learning approach focuses more on developing students’ skills than on transmitting information and makes students do something through reading, discussing, or writing that requires higher-order thinking through activities. They also tended to place some emphasis on students’ explorations of their own attitudes and values. Moreover, they explicitly recognized that a range of activities can fall within it. They suggested some techniques/activities which should be applied or implemented in classrooms by teachers in order to foster active learning, and to make the learners become actively engaged in what they are learning thus enhancing students’ participation in the learning process. The major ones are presented as the following: brain storming, group work, concept mapping, cooperative learning, inquiry learning, discovery learning, problem solving, role play, graphic organizer, inductive approach, discussion, project work, task-based learning, peer teaching, critical thinking, debate, and games.

In addition, Fink (2013) suggested a more specific view on the active learning approach as when learners are engaged in learning such as listening to a teacher or reading a textbook, they are gathering “Information and Ideas” which is the important part of the learning process but also one that is relatively passive. Moreover, it was advised that teachers should provide students with some kind of experiential learning and chances in order to get students involved actively and also for reflective dialogue. Then, the “holistic view of active learning” was proposed. The conceptualization of active learning includes “getting information and ideas” as well as “experience” and “reflection” as shown in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: A Holistic View of Active Learning**

Fink (2013, p.6) also provided some ideas for the three components of active learning: Information and Ideas, Rich Learning Experience, and Reflective Dialogue.

### **Information and Ideas**

In this stage, he advised that teachers should give alternative ways of introducing students to the key information and ideas of the course, such as reading before coming to class or some other activities related to the course that help students can get more ideas and information during teaching.

### **Rich Learning Experience**

In this stage, he mentioned that “certain learning experiences are “rich” because they allow students to acquire several kinds of significant learning simultaneously”. Thus, he suggested that techniques such as pair work, group work, games, problem solving, role playing, and graphic organizers, etc. be applied in the class with a wide variety of teaching strategies.

### **Reflective Dialogue**

In this stage, teachers should give students time and encouragement in order for them to reflect on their learning experience. There are many forms of reflecting such as reflecting with oneself, others, teacher and writing. In reflective writing, students ask themselves with different questions such as: What am I learning? What is the value of what I am learning? How am I learning? What else do I need to learn?

## **Related previous studies**

There were some studies conducted on a similar topic. For example, Mulatu and Bezabih (2018) examined the perceptions and practices of EFL teachers in implementing active learning in English lessons with three selected secondary schools in Genna Bossa Woreda of Dawro Zone. The findings showed that most of the teachers involved in the study had perceived active learning positively. However, their practices of active learning were low/poor. Moreover, it revealed that the major factors affecting the implementation of active learning were large class sizes with fixed sitting arrangements, inadequate teacher training, the tendency of focusing on the teacher-centered method, and time scarcity. Similarly, in Thailand, Nonkukhetkhong et al. (2006) conducted the study and found that teachers failed to practice in the classrooms due to the insufficiency of facilities, resources and learning environments. In the same way, Moge (2007); Binyam (2014); and Arikew (2015) conducted their studies on practices and perceptions of active learning in implementing active learning in upper primary schools in Gondar town. Their findings revealed large class sizes, shortage of time, awareness problems, and readiness to implement active learning methodology, were challenges affecting the implementation of active learning in English classes.

## **Methods**

### **Research design**

This study is a mixed methods research approach of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis in order to fully understand the participants’ perceptions towards the topic, and to validate the data by analyzing the results from the different methods. To elaborate, by using mixed methods, data obtained through questionnaires and observation checklists providing quantitative data, and semi-structured interview providing qualitative data. The data sets were complementary, affirming the outcomes were related to the active learning approach and not from other variables.

### Research setting, participants and sampling techniques

This study took place in schools located in Nakhon Pathom Province, which is about 75 kilometers from Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. The training was arranged by Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University under an academic service project, in collaboration with schools in the service area. To select the participants, the purposive sampling was used to select participants for the training as the researcher set the criteria as follows:

1. Participants should never have active learning training before, and
2. Participants should teach at primary level.

The announcement was sent to the schools and participants were recruited by their schools to participate in the training. Forty-one teachers participated and received forty hours of training in active learning at the end of the 2018 academic year. Thus, this sample size was representative enough to make generalizations at the end of the study. Moreover, it is impractical to include the whole population due to limited resources and time. Active learning lesson plans used in the training were based on the model from Saiphet (2018, pp.40-41), which was adapted from Bonwell and Eison (1991) and Fink (2013) in order to apply with the participating teachers and the more details of the training was described in the Appendix B.

Moreover, in terms of school settings, participating schools had both primary level (grades 1-6) and lower-secondary level (grades 7-9) with various kinds of programs to foster their expertise. Annually, there are 400-1,000 new enrolling students at each school. All teachers participating in this study were teaching primary level. The teacher participants' demographics are shown in table 1 below. All English classes were taught for 55 minutes in one period. Teachers in this study had to teach 16-24 periods a week. The course book had six chapters was used to teach during the semester. There were 35 to 45 students in each class.

**Table 1: Participants' Information**

Participants	Sex	Ages	Level of Teaching	Teaching Experience
6 teachers	5 females 1 male	45-49	Primary	More than 20 years
16 teachers	12 females 4 males	33-43	Primary	10-19 years
19 teachers	13 females 6 males	25-31	Primary	Fewer than 10 years

### Research instruments

This research study was a mixed methods research approach. The data were collected through different instruments which were observations, interviews and questionnaires.

The classroom observations were used in this study. The purpose of the classroom observations was to determine if the teachers were practicing active learning based on the prescribed principles during the teaching process. Classroom observations were adapted from Birdwell, et al. (2016). The observations were conducted with eleven teachers as selected through a simple random technique. One observer was a non-participant who collected data with the observation checklist, without taking part in the teaching process, while the other main observer walked into the classroom with the observation checklist to collect data by

watching and taking part in the activities. The reason why the classroom observations had two observers was to minimize the subjectivity due to individual bias.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data in this study. The purpose of the interviews was to get a more in-depth information which could validate the response revealed through the questionnaire and classroom observation. The interview questions were created based on the questions in the questionnaire (Appendix A) and then were validated by three experts through the Item Objective Congruence (IOC). A tape recorder and a camera were employed during the interviews. Five teachers participated in the individual semi-structured interview sessions on a voluntary basis. Teachers who participated, had teaching experience from six years to twenty-eight years. Furthermore, two teachers selected from observations that were conducted earlier by the researchers. The interviews were conducted in their schools by the researchers. The interviews were carried out in Thai language in order to help the interviewees to fully understand and answer the research questions.

Furthermore, the questionnaire used in the study had three parts. The purposes of the three parts were intended to gather general and personal information about the teachers, to obtain the data on teachers' attitude towards active learning, and to find out factors that may affect the implementation of active learning in teaching English. The set of obtained data from questionnaire was used to support the date collected through classroom observation and interviews in order to make the study more insightful. The questionnaire was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 to 1 (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree) was adapted from Taye (2008) and designed based on the objectives of the study. In addition, the average scores were interpreted using the interpretation key suggested by Srisa-ard (2002). Moreover, the questionnaire was translated into Thai to avoid misunderstanding and to encourage appropriate responses because English is not the participants' native language.

The data collection instruments were also validated by three experts through the Item Objective Congruence (IOC). Then, they were piloted with a group of teachers who shared the same characteristic with the participants in the study. By doing this, Cronbach's Alpha (Statistics How To, 2017) was adopted to measure the reliability of the questions presented in the questionnaire. The main goal of conducting a pilot study was to ensure that the research instruments were reliable and consistent, and did not cause any confusion among the participants. Thus, the research instrument was required to have the reliability of 0.7 or higher. The reliability value of the questionnaire questions was 0.78, which was an acceptable level.

### **Active learning lesson plans**

After the training, active learning lesson plans were based on the model from Saiphet (2018, pp.40-41), which was adapted from Bonwell and Eison (1991) and Fink (2013) (presented in Figure 2) by participating teachers in order to apply them in their English language classes. The content of lesson plans was taken from the course material used in their classes. Generally, teaching periods for English were 55 minutes. After lesson plans were finished, they were submitted to three advisors in order to ensure that the incorporation of the model and content from the book were congruent. Then lesson plans were adjusted according to advisors' comments. Lesson plans were then piloted with a group of students with the same characteristics as the participating students from participants' classes. Finally, the lesson plans were adjusted to improve their practicality for normal classes.

The conceptual framework of active learning for English language teaching used in this study comprises three stages including;

**Stage 1: Gathering details and ideas.** In this stage, reading and listening activities were used to gather or obtain information and ideas. Reading tasks such as reading passages or other printed materials were used along with the reading activities namely, jigsaw reading tasks, gap filling, group discussion, and stories rearrangement in the classrooms. Moreover, listening strategies (bottom up/top down) and listening tasks such as video clips and other listening files were applied along with listening activities namely gap filling, games and competitions in the classrooms.

**Stage 2: Experiencing.** In this stage, speaking and writing tasks were used to expose students to English. Pair work, group work, games, problem solving, role playing, and graphic organizers, etc. were applied in the class. A wide variety of teaching strategies namely, problem-based learning, task-based learning, cooperative learning, project-based learning, and technology-based learning, etc. were employed.

**Stage 3: Reflecting.** In this stage, students reflect on their learning, identify problems in the learning process, review their own work, and suggest what they may need to do to improve their learning successes. Students were allowed to use Thai language in order for them to express their reflections freely and clearly.

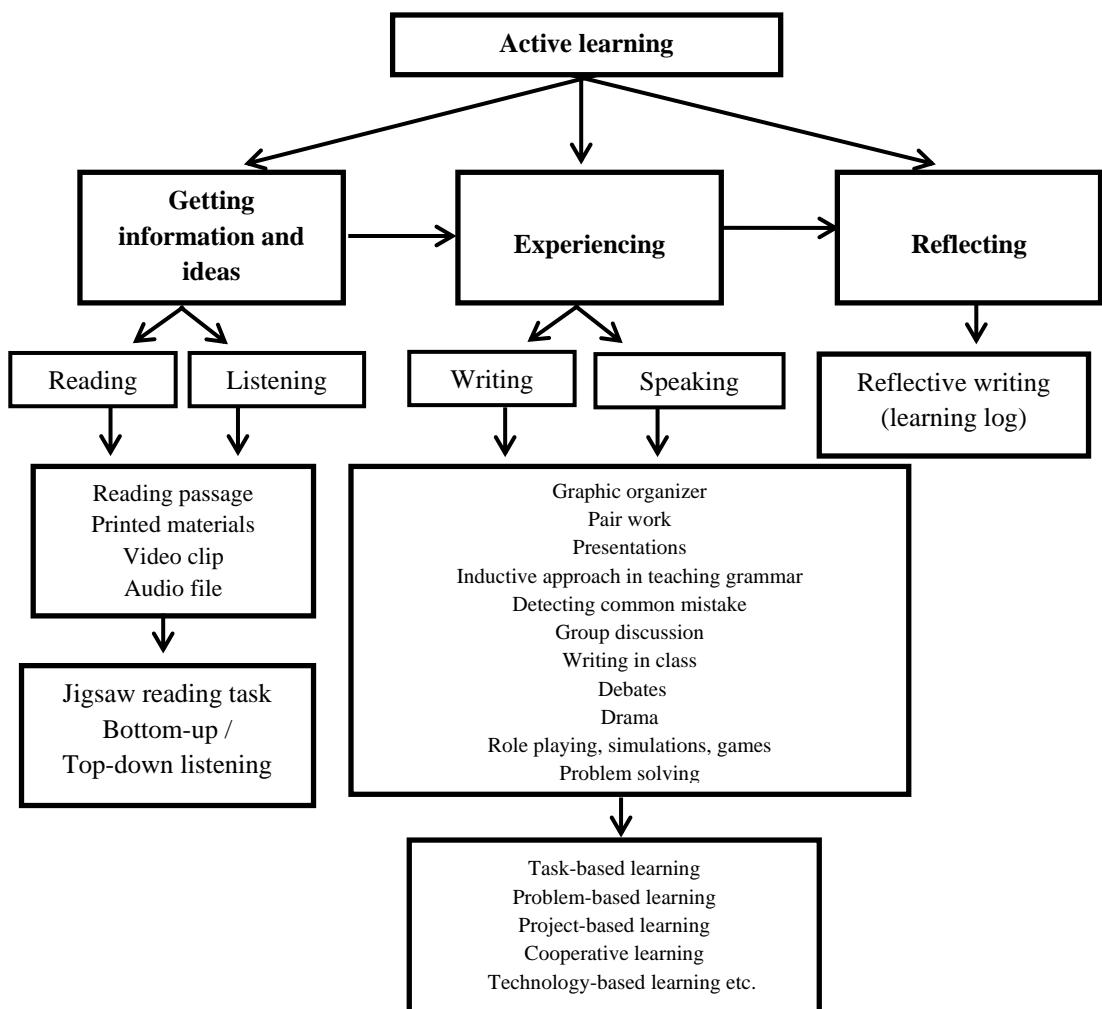


Figure 2: Active Learning Conceptual Framework

### **Data collection procedures**

Initially, researchers informed the participants about the purpose of the study, ethical issues, and were given consent forms. They were also given the option to withdraw at any time without negative consequence. Participants then received forty hours of training on the active learning approach from the researchers. The training was arranged three days a week, two and a half hours each day in the second semester of the 2018 academic year (details of training presented in Appendix B). After the training, active learning lesson plans were designed based on the content of the course book for participating teachers. Lesson plans were then validated by three experts to ensure that the activities in each lesson plan were congruent with the model of active learning. Each lesson was piloted with a group of students who share the same characteristics with participants' students.

Before the semester began, the questionnaire was trialed with a group of teachers from other schools, who shared the same characteristics with the participating teachers. It was subsequently edited according to comments.

During the semester, classroom observations were conducted randomly in weeks 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10 on two participants each week. After six weeks of classroom observations, eleven participants had been observed by the two observers, one teacher taking part and the other not.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> week, interview sessions with five volunteer EFL school participants were conducted in order to assess or examine their perceptions of active learning and their practices of active learning in the classrooms. The interviews were conducted in schools, between five and eight minutes for each teacher, and were done in Thai in order for participants to understand the questions clearly and be able to convey their answers from their understanding.

Finally, in the 14<sup>th</sup> week, questionnaires were distributed to all participants, and the data were collected. Data collection tools were put in the order mentioned above because if questionnaires had been responded to earlier than the classroom observations and interviews, teachers might arrange make up classes which they might not be held at the usual time. For this reason, it helped the researchers get valid and reliable information regarding practices of active learning in the classes. The reliability and validity of data in the study would be ensured by these data gathering procedures. Furthermore, the questionnaire was translated into Thai to help participants understand the questions clearly and to be able to answer from their understanding.

### **Data analysis**

The data gathered through the classroom observation checklist were analyzed by SPSS in order to present frequencies and percentages. Moreover, the data obtained from the questionnaire were transformed into descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations (S.D.). The findings were analyzed based on the five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 to 1 (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree) was adapted from Taye (2008). In addition, the average scores were interpreted using the interpretation key suggested by Srisa-ard (2002) as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Scales for Interpreting Quantitative Data from Questionnaires**

Score Range	Interpretation
4.51 – 5.00	highest
3.51 – 4.50	high
2.51 – 3.50	moderate
1.51 – 2.50	low
1.00 – 1.50	lowest

Moreover, the data obtained from the semi-structured interview questions and observations were transcribed and then analyzed by using content analysis. The data were then categorized into themes by grouping similar ideas together.

## Findings

### The results of questionnaire

The results of questionnaire which was used to assess the perceptions of EFL school teachers towards the implementation of active learning are presented in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

**Table 3: The summary of perceptions of EFL teachers towards active learning**

The teaching techniques and methods	strongly agree 5	agree 4	undecided 3	disagree 2	strongly disagree 1	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Attitude Level
	%	%	%	%	%			
1. The quality of education can be improved if teachers shift their instruction from the lecture methods to AL.	61.54	34.62	1.92	0.00	1.92	4.54	0.73	highest
2. Active learning enhances students' level of understanding and involves them in problem solving.	63.46	32.69	1.92	0.00	1.92	4.56	0.73	highest
3. Active learning creates the opportunities to share experiences and encourages friendship among students.	61.54	34.62	1.92	0.00	1.92	4.54	0.73	highest
4. Active learning enhances active involvement of students in learning instead of passive listening.	71.15	26.92	0.00	1.92	0.00	4.67	0.58	highest
5. Active learning enhances self-confidence and independent learning of students.	46.15	42.31	11.54	0.00	0.00	4.35	0.86	high
6. Teachers must encourage students to communicate effectively.	55.77	38.46	3.85	0.00	1.92	4.46	0.75	high
7. Active learning offers opportunities for progress of students in language use.	53.85	42.31	3.85	0.00	0.00	4.50	0.58	high
8. Active learning prepares students for active participation in the lesson.	59.62	34.62	3.85	1.92	0.00	4.52	0.67	highest
9. Active learning makes students responsible for their own learning.	48.08	40.38	9.62	1.92	0.00	4.35	0.86	high
10. I am sure student-centered approach has a great contribution to scale up the quality of education.	48.08	42.31	9.62	0.00	0.00	4.38	0.82	high
<b>Total</b>						4.48	0.73	high

As can be seen from Table 3, the items related to assumptions about active learning, advantages of active learning and their views about active learning were presented to determine participants' perceptions. The significant findings from table 3 revealed that overall perceptions were rated at the high level ( $\bar{x} = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ). The mean scores of perceptions were 4.67 ( $SD = 0.58$ ); item number 4: "active learning enhances active involvement of students in learning instead of passive listening" to 4.35 ( $SD = 0.86$ ; item numbers 5 and 9: "active learning enhances self-confidence and independent learning of students", and "active learning makes students responsible for their own learning", revealing from highest level of approval to high level of approval. Moreover, item number 4 was reported at the highest level, and it can also be seen that this item was reported as in the scale of strongly agree at 71.15%, agree at 26.92%, undecided by at 0.0%, disagree at 1.92%, and strongly disagree at 0.0%.

**Table 4: The summary of teachers' perceptions on the side effects of active learning**

The teaching techniques and methods	strongly agree 5	agree 4	undecided 3	disagree 2	strongly disagree 1	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Attitude Level
	%	%	%	%	%			
11. Teaching is the sole responsibility of teachers.	19.23	23.08	21.15	28.85	7.69	3.17	1.26	moderate
12. Active learning minimizes students and teachers' workloads and save time.	34.61	32.69	9.62	23.08	0.00	3.79	1.16	high
13. It is a tiresome activity for teachers to implement active learning in language classroom.	32.69	42.31	15.38	9.62	0.00	3.98	0.94	high
14. There are not enough materials in my school.	32.69	40.38	25.00	1.92	0.00	4.04	0.92	high
15. I know that active learning adds work load on teachers.	5.77	7.69	40.38	23.08	23.08	3.49	1.21	moderate
16. If there is no lecture method, it is impossible to control the students/the class become noisy while they perform active learning.	26.92	34.62	15.38	19.23	3.85	3.62	1.19	high
<b>Total</b>						3.66	1.10	high

The data in Table 4 were used to assess the side effects of active learning implemented in English classrooms and were used to identify the teachers' perceptions. The findings revealed that the participants' perceptions were rated at the high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.66$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). The mean score of the participants' perceptions was 4.04 ( $SD = 0.92$ ); item number 14: there are not enough materials in my school to 3.17 ( $SD = 1.82$ ); item numbers 11: "teaching is the sole responsibility of teachers", unveiling a moderate level of approval. More importantly, it can also be seen that the majority of participants rated item number 13: "It is a tiresome activity for teachers to implement active learning in language classroom." as reported in the scale of agree at 42.31%, and the rests were strongly agree at 32.69%, undecided at 15.38%, disagree at 9.62%, and strongly disagree at or 0.0%, and it was rated at the high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ).

### **The results of classroom observation (checklist)**

The results of classroom observation which was designed to investigate the practices of active learning implemented in the classrooms are presented in tables 5 as follows.

**Table 5: The summary of teachers' uses of active learning in EFL Classrooms**

How often do they use these active learning strategies in the classrooms	Always 5	Frequently 4	Sometimes 3	Rarely 2	not at all 1
	%	%	%	%	%
Lecture/ explanation	9.09	36.36	45.45	9.09	0.00
Problem solving method	0.00	9.09	45.45	27.27	18.18
Role-playing	0.00	27.27	54.55	0.00	18.18
Group Discussion	53.55	18.18	19.18	9.09	0.00
Brainstorming	54.55	18.18	9.09	18.18	0.00
Peer Teaching	0.00	0.00	9.09	18.18	72.73
Cooperative learning	72.73	18.18	9.09	0.00	0.00
Group work	81.82	18.18	0.00	0.00	0.00
Demonstration	0.00	0.00	18.18	18.18	63.64
Giving homework	72.73	18.18	9.09	0.00	0.00
Inquiry method	0.00	0.00	9.09	18.18	72.73
Case study	0.00	0.00	9.09	18.18	72.73
Discovery method	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Educational field trip	0.00	0.00	0.00	9.09	90.91

The data from Table 5 were used to assess the extent to which active learning has been employed in teaching English and to investigate the practices of active learning implemented in the classrooms. As can be seen from the table, the majority of the teachers used group work in their classrooms (81.82%), which means that teachers most often used this strategy with students. Moreover, cooperative learning and giving homework were the strategies most frequently implemented in the class after the group work as applied by 72.73% which implies that these were among to the top strategies used in the classrooms. Furthermore, discussion and brainstorming were the third most frequently used strategies in the classrooms. On the other hand, lectures/explanations, problem solving method and role playing were strategies chosen as “sometimes” level of frequency by (45.45%), (45.45%) and (54.55%) of teachers’ implementation respectively. In addition, peer teaching, inquiry method, case study, discovery method, and educational field trips were among the strategies that were rarely or never used with the students as rated by the majority of teachers in the rarely/not at all level of frequency.

### **The results of open-ended questions from questionnaire and classroom observation**

The results of classroom observations which were designed to assess the factors that can prevent the implementation of active learning in the classrooms, are presented below.

1. Active learning activities were difficult to implement due to the hot weather (no air con in classrooms)
2. Active learning activities caused the class to be noisy.
3. There was a lack of materials and equipment needed to support active learning techniques.
4. Large class sizes prevent teachers from implementing active learning.
5. Group work or discussion among students invites the dependency of majority of students to minority.

In general, these are the factors that seem to cause the ineffectiveness of implementing active learning approach in the classroom.

### **The results of interview**

The results of the interview designed to assess the teachers' perceptions on the implementation of active learning in the classrooms are presented below.

In general, teachers from the interviews agreed that the implementation of active learning provided positive effects towards their students after the approach was implemented with them in the class.

1. Students were willing to be more attentive and involved in activities in the classrooms.
2. The classroom atmosphere was more relaxing.
3. Students had more enjoyment and fun.
4. Students had more confidence in terms of sharing ideas and answering questions.

However, the results from the interview also revealed the obstacles and concerning points, which were similar to the results found in the observations above.

### **Discussion**

The data obtained from questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews were analyzed and discussed in order to answer the research questions as follows:

**Question 1.** What is the EFL school teachers' perception towards active learning in the classrooms?

Based on the analysis of the results obtained from the questionnaires and interviews, in general, teachers had the positive perception towards the active learning approach. Most teachers agreed that the teaching approach seemed to be beneficial for teachers and learners as many items in the questionnaires were rated at high and highest levels. For instance, teachers believed that the approach can enhance active involvement of students in learning instead of passive listening, and the approach can prepare students for active participation in lessons. Similarly, the results from interviews showed that teachers also agreed that active learning could help enhance students' willingness to be more attentive and involved in activities in the classrooms.

Teachers' responses:

*"Most male students loved to join my activities."*

*"My students loved playing games because they said they felt more relaxed than when they studied from the book."*

*"My student told me that she would like to come to my class because she could practice English via activities."*

From the findings, it was discovered that through a variety of activities which were students allowed to get engaged in learning in the class enhanced students' motivation and attention which is consistent with the findings of (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Malik, 2011; Soltanzadeh et al., 2013). Moreover, the active learning approach offers students' chances to get involved in a wide variety of activities and these make students feel more attentive in class than focusing only on the text (Wilke, 2003). The findings are congruent with Mulatu and Bezabih (2018, p.95) stating that "active participation of learners is more perceivable in classrooms where teachers use active learning methods". Likewise, teachers participating in this study shared the same views on other aspects which had positive effects from implementing the active learning approach. For example, it could encourage students to have more confidence, help create a good working atmosphere and opportunities for students to share experiences, and encourage friendship among students in the classroom.

Teachers' responses:

*"I could notice that my students had more confidence in terms of sharing ideas and answering questions."*

*"Some students told me that they felt more relaxed than when working alone."*

From the findings, it is obvious that teachers understood that students' self-confidence increased according to the active learning activities provided in class. The results were congruent with the study conducted by Ndebele and Maphosa (2013) that students develop their self-esteem through the involvement in activities in class. To put it simply, the concept of self has increased via the activities as they acknowledge that they are capable of performing well in class and contributing to the group such as answering questions, discussing or expressing opinions, and winning the group competitions.

## **Question 2.** What are the EFL school teachers' classroom practices?

The results obtained from the classroom observation checklists and interviews in order to assess the practicality and extent to which active learning was employed in teaching English were analyzed. The researcher and the researcher assistant observed and filled out the classroom observation checklists. The interviews with teachers (participants) were conducted by the researcher. These two types of data collection were used to substantiate each other. The findings revealed that in general, the degree of practicing major active learning techniques in teaching English was practical. Observations showed that the majority of the active learning techniques, such as group work, cooperative learning, and giving homework, were among the most frequently implemented active learning techniques in the classrooms, which implies that the teachers involved in the study had a clear understanding on the importance of the approach and perceived active learning positively. The interviews also showed that group work, and cooperative learning were techniques that were most frequently applied in the classroom. During the interviews, some teachers reported that they loved to have students working together in pairs or groups as they could learn from their classmates. Moreover, games were also popular activities for students who were able to compete with other groups. To elaborate, by using games, students had to help each other in their group in order to beat the other groups. As it was also stated, the competitive nature of the games, tasks and authentic setting activities provided a good learning environment and encouraged learners to join, and also enhanced their enthusiasm and passion for learning in the class (Hakulinen et al., 2015). However, giving homework and lectures/explanations were among the frequently used techniques. This could be because both the teachers and students were familiar with these techniques which are traditional. Additionally, in interviews, teachers disclosed that giving homework was still needed for students because sometimes they would like to get students to revise what they had studied in class. Moreover, they revealed that lectures/explanations were

still necessary for teachers and students because sometimes the weather was too hot for teacher to implement active learning activities in the class. So that they decided to switch to the traditional teaching techniques.

The findings demonstrated that the frequently used techniques mentioned above were the major techniques in the model proposed by Bonwell and Eison (1991) and Fink (2013) as it was adapted to be the conceptual framework model in this study. Moreover, other techniques such as role-plays, brainstorming, and problem-solving activities were also among the widely used techniques. Therefore, it is possible to say that the active learning approach implemented in the classrooms was practical.

**Question 3.** What factors may affect the implementation of active learning in teaching English?

Based on the analysis of the results obtained from three types of data collected in the questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews, the majority of teachers agreed that there were some factors that could hinder the effectiveness of implementing active learning in the classrooms.

The results of questionnaires and interviews pointed out that active learning activities were tiresome when implementing them in the classroom. As Soltanzadeh et al. (2013) stated, the active learning approach moves the focus from the teachers to the students and their active engagement with the teaching materials. Furthermore, Hakulinen et al. (2015) mentioned that the active learning approach involves games, tasks and authentic setting activities which are mainly competitions for helping teachers to create a good learning environment and encourage learners to participate, as well as enhancing the passion for learning in the class. Therefore, teachers (participants) in this study, had to walk around and pay a lot of attention to facilitate and control the classrooms, especially considering that their students were young learners studying at an elementary level. This could make the teachers more tired than teachers teaching adult learners. As Cooperstein and Kocevar-Weidinger (2004) stated, one of the main roles of teachers when implementing active learning in the class is to facilitate and control the class in order to promote deeper levels of understanding. Additionally, teachers make it more possible to extend and to achieve the learning objectives by providing positive learning environments, opportunities, interactions, tasks and instructions.

The data also revealed that teachers agreed that there was a deficiency of materials, a lack of air conditioning in hot weather, space limitations, and limited classroom facilities, were factors that hindered the effectiveness of implementing active learning approach in the classroom. For example, the class had no projector or visualizer which was very important for some active learning activities, space was limited in some classes because students had to sit very close to each other and the temperature in the classroom was very hot when active learning activities were being conducted because the classroom had no air-conditioning. Teachers pointed out that the climate was the main obstacle in classrooms that have no air-con because they were teaching in the classrooms that was facing the afternoon sun. It made both students and teacher exhausted. Moreover, due to hot weather, some teachers were concerned that it would be too noisy during activities for teachers teaching in adjacent areas because the doors were left opened. The results conformed to the findings of studies by Noom-Ura, (2013) and Noopong, (2002) who mentioned that the inadequate budget for teaching materials, classroom facilities and space were the main problems which can hinder the success in English language teaching. Eyob (2014) also stated that the classroom arrangements were important barriers to teachers who applied the active learning approach.

More importantly, the majority of teachers admitted that pair and group work can be a factor that would hinder the effectiveness of active learning because some activities required

students to work in groups. This kind of activity should be facilitated by a teacher because some student may take over the task or some may not do anything. To support these findings, Yusuk (2018) stated that students felt bored when the teacher assigned them to work in pairs or groups because some of their group-mates did not do their duty. It can also be argued that active learning puts an emphasis on group work. It is culturally relevant in Asia; however, group work can contribute to a community in which some students do not do their share of the work (Cacioppo & Freberg, 2013).

Finally, the results found that teachers had too much administrative work to do which could prevent the effectiveness of lesson preparation. This was referred to in a study by Noom-Ura (2013). She stated that teachers themselves were overloaded with administrative responsibilities, apart from being overloaded with teaching duties. Furthermore, there was one other point of concern for teachers, examinations. These could be one of the major barriers because they were worried that they could not cover all the content in preparations for the exam, especially the national exams such as ONET and GAT. This result was in line with the study from Girma (2013) and Ayele (2014, p.89) as it was claimed that “active learning failed to be practiced in schools due to the scarcity of time to cover the curriculum, student’s attention focused on exam oriented topics, and the lack of adequate materials”.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to investigate EFL school teachers’ perceptions and practices on the implementation of active learning in schools in Nakhon Pathom Province. In general, the results from questionnaires revealed that most of the teachers had the positive perception on active learning after they had applied the approach in the classrooms. Furthermore, the results from observation checklist discovered that the approach implemented in the classroom were moderately practical. Moreover, the results from observation (open-ended part) unveiled that classroom facilities did not fully support the implementation of active learning. In addition, the results from the interviews showed that the majority of teachers perceived active learning positively. However, the results from the interviews also suggested that there were factors that could hinder the effectiveness of the implementation of active learning in the classroom. Overall, the results indicated that most of the teachers involved in the study perceived active learning positively, and they believed that active learning can make a great contribution towards improving students’ active participation in classroom and development of their self-confidence with English.

## **Pedagogical implication and limitation**

The implication for institutes and teachers is significantly beneficial based on the findings of this study in terms of pedagogical implementation. For example, implementing active learning in the English courses can be considered as important strategies when developing English language courses. Besides, the results of implementing active learning can be considered as a guideline for teachers to develop teaching methods, classroom activities, and teaching materials in order to promote practice and enhance both teachers’ and students’ positive perceptions in English classrooms.

More importantly, according to the participants in this study from primary level, teachers from different levels such as secondary or university levels should be asked to participate to see if the results are comparable to those identified in this study.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all participating teachers in Nakhon Pathom, Associate Professor Wilairat Kirin, Ph.D., and all teachers and staff from Language Institute of Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University, for their valuable advice and continuous assistance and support throughout the period of this research paper preparation.

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## APPENDIX A

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Teachers

1. How long have you used the active learning?
2. What were the active learning techniques that you used to implement active learning?
3. Do you think it is important to use active learning in teaching English Effectively? (Is it important/ helpful in teaching/learning English effectively?) (Tell me your opinion about active learning)
4. What factors do you think might hinder the effectiveness of the implementation of active learning in teaching English?

## APPENDIX B

### Details of the Training

Active learning lesson plans used in the training were based on the model from Saiphet (2018, pp.40-41), which was adapted from Bonwell and Eison (1991) and Fink (2013) (presented in Figure 1) in order to apply with the participating teachers. There were 3 stages in this conceptual framework of active learning for English language teaching as followings;

#### Stage 1: Gathering details and ideas.

In this stage, reading and listening activities are used to gather or obtain information and ideas. Reading tasks such as reading passages or other printed materials are used along with the reading activities namely, jigsaw reading tasks, gap filling, group discussion, and stories rearrangement in the classrooms. Moreover, listening strategies (bottom up/top down) and listening tasks such as video clip and other listening files are applied along with listening activities namely gap filling, games and competition are to be used in the classrooms.

#### Stage 2: Experiencing.

In this stage, speaking and writing are to get students exposed in English. Pair work, group work, games, problem solving, role playing, graphic organizer, etc. are applied in the class with a wide variety of teaching strategies namely, problem-based learning, task-based learning, cooperative learning, project-based learning, technology-based learning, etc.

#### Stage 3: Reflecting.

After each activity conducted, participating teachers reflect on their learning from activity, the process of learning problems, reviewing their own work, and telling what they may need to do. In this stage, participating teachers are allowed to do it in Thai in order for them to be able to express the reflecting freely and clearly.

In general, there were 41 participants from different schools in Nakhon Pathom in the training. In the training, the participants received the 40 hour- training on active learning approach from the researcher. The training was arranged three days a week, 2.30 hours each day which was in the 2nd semester of academic year 2018. The content in the training was taken from the course materials that were used in their classes. Moreover, other supplementary

materials seen as suitable and beneficial for students in participating teachers' classrooms were also added. The training was divided into 2 parts as follows:

1. Theoretical knowledge of adapted active learning model for 6 hours,
2. The rest of the training time was about strategies and activities based on the conceptual framework in Figure 1.

Moreover, all the activities conducted in the training were based on the stages according to the adapted model which the participants could have an opportunity to be engaged in the activities as they would gain a better understanding of how to apply activities with their students and how they could follow the stages during preparing the lessons and teaching in the classroom.

### **About the Author**

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