

How to Succeed in Learning English in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Nowadays, the changes in the world result socially and globally in people's lifestyle development, communication, learning, and other. This kind of development leads to learning in the 21st century, which includes the main principles and concepts to help create, promote and support better learning. However, the most important link of interpersonal communication is still the use of English as an international language. The author believes that all learners wish, intend, hope and try to find effective learning strategies that can lead themselves to succeed in learning English. Therefore, the author recommends the 15 effective English learning as follows: 1) Finding strengths and weaknesses as well as corrections, 2) Setting goals, 3) Changing attitudes, 4) Creating opportunities, 5) Finding fellow friends, 6) Practicing, 7) Being self-confident, 8) Doing favorite activities, 9) Imitating a role model, 10) Doing imagination practice, 11) Learning from teachers, 12) Having fun with learning, 13) Using online media and technology, 14) Making friends with English-speaking people, and 15) Traveling abroad.

Keywords: Successful Learning, Effective English Learning Strategies, the 21st Century, English Learning,

Introduction

Thailand has adopted the principles of learning in the 21st century as part of the policy movement in the Thai educational field. In the learners' context, they are required to possess the 3Rs x 8Cs features, as identified by the Education Council (2016), which states that the Thai children's features in the 21st century consist of 3Rs, i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic abilities, and 8Cs, i.e. critical thinking and solving-problem skill, creativity and innovation skill, collaboration teamwork and leadership skill, cross-cultural understanding skill, communication, information and media literacy skill, computing and media literacy skill, career and learning self-reliance skill, and compassion skill. The author believes that the features aforementioned enable learners to be well-qualified in all aspects of life. They will certainly become quality citizens and help develop the country in the future. Thus, the author would like to propose the effective English learning strategies for Thai students in the 21st century as follows:

1. Finding strengths and weaknesses as well as corrections

The strengths and weaknesses in this paper do not belong to any specific person. That is, strengths refer to learners' existing good points, whereas weaknesses mean any of the existing points that need improving. Corrections are any process used by learners for improving their weaknesses, or for enhancing their strengths. This vital method enables learners to know and find appropriate means to improve themselves. What we can do is as follows. First, take notes on paper, computers, or any other equipment by dividing them into two parts: strengths and weaknesses as well as corrections. Second, write mind maps of self-improvement by listing strengths, weaknesses and corrections under sub-topics. This will help learners see details more clearly. Third, spend time with yourself considering and revising your strengths and weaknesses. The length of time spent on this activity

depends on whether you can understand yourself very clearly within the duration or not. It is recommended that you stay alone in a quiet place. Fourth, ask your teachers who truly understand your ability about your strengths, weaknesses. Also, ask them to correct your mistakes in using English. Last, ask your family members, such as your father, mother, brothers, sisters or anyone who is close to you and knows your characters, advantages and aspects that need improving in learning English. Atipat (2011) who did research on a self-directed learning model for communicative English using for eco-tourism in Thaka, Samutsongkarm and found that the pattern that is appropriate for using communicative English for eco-tourism in Thaka, Amphawa, Samutsongkarm should be instructional media in which service person or interested person can learn by themselves in note book.

2) Setting goals

A goal is something that helps learners identify details, stages, methods, media, instruments or people who get involved or provide assistance. You should firmly fix the duration of time because it can also direct you to your goal with order, discipline and ease of measurement. For example, your goals are to finish reading an English textbook within four weeks, or obtain a TOEIC score of 700 within one year, etc. In the author's view, the goals, based on the length of time, can be divided into five categories. First, a present goal is the one that needs immediate action, such as thinking, fixing and doing. Second, a short-term goal is the one that needs a short time for action, such as one week, two weeks or a specified time. Third, a moderate-term goal is the one that needs a longer time for action than a short-time one, such as one month, two months or a specific time. Fourth, a long-term goal is the one that needs a longer time for action, such as one year, two years or a specific time. Last, a future goal is the one that needs a longer time for action than a long-term one, such as ten years, twenty years or a specific time. Setting Goals have two types of goals; performance and process goals. Performance goals mean focusing on results than process. On the other hand, process goals mean focusing on process than results. The two goals are working

and supporting together when setting performance goals, knowing process goals, following process goals to succeed, and adjusting performance goals. Therefore, for long term learning, learners should add their own motivation to work with the two goals. (Chanjavanakul, 2017)

3) Changing attitudes

The author believes that some learners have negative attitudes towards learning English. For this reason, they have no desires to learn, and consequently lack knowledge of English. The reasons for this may be due to teachers, teaching methods, instructional media, and other. Benhawan (2012) conducted research with 322 first-year students and 11 English teachers at Prince of Songkhla University, Pattani Campus about the attitude of learning English, and found that integrating positive attitudes towards English, liked English, the citizens in the globalization era who can communicate in English with foreigners, and feeling proud of their English communication were understandable. They also had beneficially positive attitudes, especially the benefits that are helpful for their careers and education. Regarding this, learners may change their attitudes for the following reasons: First, although English is not their first language, it plays a vital role because English helps increase job opportunities. Second, English helps increase wage, salary, bonus, and position income. Third, English helps increase the opportunities of working overseas. Finally, English helps increase communicative opportunities.

4) Creating opportunities

In the author's perspective, creating opportunities refers to creating opportunities that allow the use of the English language to happen, i.e. situations, environments, surrounding people, media and instruments. For example, you may stick English words on instruments or equipment in your room or the names of the rooms because this will enable you to see or memorize them every day. This technique helps increase the number of your vocabulary. In addition, you may talk in English with your relatives, family members, friends, teachers or anyone you

are close to so that you will get familiar with English and have no fears of using it. Moreover, you should watch TV or films in English or listen to English radio programs. At first, you may find it difficult to understand the content, accent and emotions of the characters or songs. However, after frequent practices, you will learn more. Next, you should read books, magazines, or printed media published in English so that you can learn both formal and informal vocabulary, grammar and usage. Finally, you should try to produce English words, sentences or speech without translating English into Thai because when learners want to speak English, they usually translate their ideas from Thai into English. Therefore, if you think in English more often, you will have more chances to learn and use English, which is consistent with the research on The Needs of English Using for Staff in Hotel Business Enterprises, conducted by Parndamrongsatit (2013) and found that most staff needed the opportunity to practice more English by studying with Thai teachers more than with foreign teachers. Moreover, staff needed training from private tutors approximately 2 hours per times.

5) Finding fellow friends

Finding fellow friends can lead to succeed in learning English in classes, situations or other places where English is required. The benefits of having fellow friends are as follows: First, they will help you learn and understand more about details and contents of the lessons. They can give you explanation and share their ideas with you. Second, they can help reduce your stress. When asked a question in the classroom, you may feel less worried if you are among your friends. Third, they can advise you to do or not to do something. If you say or do something wrong in English, they can help correct you. Fourth, they can motivate and encourage you to learn English better. When you are too exhausted, discouraged or lazy to learn, they will push you and motivate you. Last but not least, they will remind you of what you have to do, such as the activities or assignments that you may forget to complete. According to Tanthanis's (2016) research, learning together technique in cooperative language learning activities has various advantages such as being

aware of role and duty of each other, supporting group work skill, and having fun in learning. In addition, the learners always work together that let them exchange understanding about working style, thinking, attitudes, problem solving, etc. These help to support effective learning.

6) Practicing

Practicing is an important learning strategy that can lead to succeed. It refers to repeating actions. When you repeat something, you will learn more or less from it. Then, you will understand it and gain knowledge. If you do it regularly, you will feel more confident in your knowledge. Panyaroj (2011) proposed the rules of self-practice that “the rules of self-practice are important. Anyone who wants to succeed must improve him/herself, learn more from books or other sources of knowledge, and practice doing under strict control and supervision. Those who fail often blame everything around them, but those who succeed start with self-improvement. Therefore, they become successful in their lives.” The author proposes the principles of practicing as follows: First, make a systematic practice plan including specific details and steps. Later, prepare materials, equipment and media readily for practicing in order not to waste time finding any missing items. Next, follow the plan and do the activities as specified in the plan. Fourth, be well-disciplined and determined. Since English is not used in everyday life, learners should have strong determination, intention and persistence in regular practice. Although it is a difficult task, you can follow your plan if you do it regularly. Finally, be ready to solve upcoming problems during your practice. You should find possible solutions to the problems beforehand so that your plan will not be delayed.

7) Being self-confident

Whenever using English, you must rely on a thinking process, confidence and courage in order to express what you know, understand, describe, suggest, explain, and other. Learners often consider it unsafe to be self-confident when they have to do activities. The author would like to introduce the approach to building

your self-confidence as follows: First, always be aware that nobody will laugh at what you are going to express because English is not our mother tongue. Second, although you do not use English correctly, you can learn from your mistakes or misunderstanding and become more confident in your newly-learned knowledge. Third, study the details of the topic carefully and understand them clearly before you express them. Fourth, to increase your self-confidence, you can do role plays of specific situations with your close friends or family members. Finally, if you often express yourself with confidence, you will feel comfortable to do it. Similarly, Pratumnrat (2014) claimed that the students had confidence in speaking English, enthusiasm and positive attitude towards learning English, intention to learn and always attended their class, and confidence in expression for each situation.

8) Doing favorite activities

Doing your favorite activities can also lead you to success. You should do whatever makes you interested in or happy with. You can make use of your favorite activities in some aspects of English and learn from them. Your new knowledge can inspire you to learn more and more. Therefore, you should do whatever you like in English, and you will find it interesting to do so. The topics of your interest can be classified as follows: your favorite kinds of entertainment, such as movies, songs, drama; your favorite food to eat or to cook and its recipe; your favorite sports or hobbies; your favorite books; and your adorable or favorite people. To support the concept, Tayati (2013) reported that her students' writing scores from the English writing test were found to be higher than the average score at the 59.38% after they studied through service-learning activities. Moreover, the entrepreneurs' satisfaction reached the highest level after they received students' works which affected students' motivation in learning English through service learning activities at the high level of satisfaction.

9) Imitating a role model

If you consider someone who can use English well as your role model, he/she can motivate or push you to be like him/her. Your role model may be a superstar, a singer, an academician, a teacher, etc. For the author's role model is the late King of Thailand, Bhumibol Adulyadej because the king had various English proficiency skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For instance, he had many quotes, such as "A good person can make another person good; it means that goodness will elicit goodness in the society; other persons will also be good." (AZ QUOTES, 2017)

10) Doing imagination practice

"Imagination is more than knowledge" is Albert Einstein's famous quote. Even Einstein, who was a globally celebrated scientist, wished people to learn new knowledge. Although knowledge makes us smarter, it remains stable if we do not add imagination to it. Simply say that knowledge is like the present, whereas imagination is like the future. Therefore, if you practice how to use imagination, like imagining that you can use four skills of English perfectly in all situations and a lot of subsequent benefits will follow, you will be more encouraged and visualized. (Sanook GURU, 2013) The followings are some tips for practicing how to use imagination. First, write or type out your goals that require your imagination. Next, find a quiet and peaceful place. Later, imagine a picture similar to a real one through your senses and obtain the real results. Then, repeat or revise your imaginative pictures frequently by taking notes so that you will feel as if you were in a real situation. Last, find the most appropriate way for yourself because each learner has his/her own way of practicing how to use imagination. Therefore, you should use your imagination in learning English.

11) Learning from teachers

Since English consists of a lot of grammatical rules and details, you may not understand some content. For this reason, you should ask your teachers to teach you new knowledge, clarify the details, or recommend some learning techniques so that you can learn more. You may follow these tips if you need your teachers' assistance. The techniques include firstly, making a plan of time, cost, transport and endurance and consider if it is worthwhile. Secondly, checking and take notes of what part of you lack. Thirdly, finding the best way of yours to learn, such as a one-to-one tutorial class, a small group or a large group. Finally, finding the list of experienced teachers, tutorial fees, hours of course and certificates that you will receive at the end of the course. According to Arunsuksawang and Sungrugsa (2015), they found that one of the factors which affected the ability of using English for Grade 12 students in schools in Bangkok to support the entrance into the ASEAN Economic Community in a high level is the teacher. The teachers should, therefore, improve themselves in current issues, teaching techniques, and technology for learners.

12) Having fun with learning

Ngamnet (2017) studied the motivation and attitudes of the students by using English Camp to Enhance English Speaking Skills and found that English activities were used in the English camp; all activities were highly effective and developed skills in the English and knowledge of students, and the attitudes toward learning English camp were surveyed with the students after classes were 3.83 to 3.97 which was at the high level. These are from games and various activities they can enjoy, relax and make students extremely speaking English, enthusiastic to learn, and use intuitively language. Therefore, you will learn English successfully if you love English, think positively, and have a strong determination and perseverance. The techniques of increasing your fun and love in learning English are as follows: First, take notes of what you have learned, such as new vocabulary or sentence structures, in your notebook. Second, revise your lessons regularly. Third, always

have questions about English usage in your mind in order to encourage yourself to find the answers. Fourth, share your knowledge with your classmates in order to update your knowledge. Last, share your knowledge with other English experts and discuss the interesting topics with them.

13) Using online media and technology

Nowadays, online media and technologies are gradually influencing and affecting learners' lifestyles. If they have no access to existing online media, they will become technologically handicapped. Saeheng (2013) studied the development of English teaching and learning process via computer-assisted instruction, and concluded that computer-assisted instruction can help learners improve their English skills efficiently and achieve the required goals. Moreover, they can learn English freely, happily and purposely anywhere or anytime. Therefore, computer-assisted instruction should be promoted at all levels of education. Besides, kinds of online media, such as Facebook, Google, Instagram, Twitter, Skype, etc. can help learners succeed in their learning.

14) Making friends with English-speaking people

Making friends with English-speaking people can help learners succeed in learning English. The author used to host the American and Australian exchange students while studying in the secondary school. At the workplace, the author also worked with colleagues from the UK, the USA, Myanmar and Vietnam. These direct experiences are of great benefits as follows: Firstly, if you mispronounce any English word or use wrong vocabulary or sentence structures, they will correct you. Secondly, you can learn more about their art and culture, such as eating and dressing. Thirdly, you can learn how to behave in another cultural context or situation. Moreover, you can learn not to offend them about the economic and social constraints of their countries. Finally, you can spend less time thinking, processing and choosing the correct vocabulary and sentence structures when communicating in English because, instead of thinking in Thai and translating into English, you

will think and speak out in English. As Globish (2017) suggested, if you want to contact foreigner friends by using English language, you should dare to greet with them and introduce yourself and take turn, ask information about education and work, talk about country's information such as traveling places, norm, culture, festival, etc., talk more about general topics for example, film, music, pets, etc., find useful time or vacation for eating at restaurants, travelling, and learn about the do-and-don't things, behaviors, and manners of country that you stay.

15) Traveling abroad

Traveling abroad is a dream for almost all students or those wishing to further their studies, pursue their careers, or broaden their horizons of knowledge. The advantages of traveling abroad are that you can do various things and prepare yourself for learning new knowledge. Also, you can use English in real situations and solve problems in using English while living or studying abroad. Moreover, you will learn and imitate the accents of the native speakers and can expand your communication networks. Bishop (2017) stated that traveling makes us more creative as well. It opens our minds, helps us become more emotionally stable and makes us better people. Once we stop interpreting our fear of the unknown, that inevitable wicked step-sister of travel, as a negative thing, we can grab hold of it and leverage its unique ability to help us learn and grow.

Conclusion

To sum up, the author has proposed the 15 effective English learning strategies for Thai students in the 21st century which help promote, support, and complete better learning. Learners themselves can improve their English skills based on the 15 learning strategies that are finding strengths and weaknesses as well as corrections, setting goals, changing attitudes, creating opportunities, finding fellow friends, practicing, being self-confident, and doing favorite activities. Also, they should imitate a role model, do imagination practice, and learn from teachers. Besides, they should have fun with learning, and use online media and

technology in learning for modernity. Additionally, they should make friends with English-speaking people and travel abroad. If they follow the 15 learning strategies, they will certainly succeed in learning English and become quality citizens in the 21st century.

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