



The Integration of 21st Century Skills into English Language Learning

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the 21st century skills and how these skills can be integrated or incorporated into English language learning. With a focus on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, the researcher explores the 21st century skills reported in the relevant literature and overviewed the role and location of 21st century skills in EFL classroom. In order to achieve the research goals, the researcher used the descriptive approach with its qualitative dimension. Furthermore, the research findings are deductively made based on a study of the relevant literature and the relevant data collection resources. The findings of the study showed that 21st century skills are highly essential in the educational systems of the developed countries and in the educational system, especially in the English language learning domain. It was revealed that the researchers have varied in their introduction of the 21st century skills and that the basic 21st century skills comprised the communication, cooperation, problem-solving, ICT skills, critical thinking, decision making, creativity, innovation, personal and social responsibility, citizenship, etc. On the other hand, it is shown that 21st century skills play a major role for EFL students in their EFL classes due to the universality of English language and due to the needs of the knowledge-based economy. The research presented a set of steps or strategies that for the integration of 21st century skills into English language learning. Finally, the need for major change in English language curriculum and teachers' awareness were the major recommendations of this research.

Keywords: Incorporation, 21st Century Skills, English Language, Literacy, EFL, Classroom

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the age in which we live now is the age of knowledge-based economy and that economic competition between countries depends on the skills that match with the requirements of the current age. This has led to the need for the individuals to have the skills that enable them to live and work in knowledge society where cooperation replaces competition, effective communication with others depends on technology, and the need to possess non-traditional problem solving skills (Varis, 2007).

As a result, it was argued that education should provide learners with the skills necessary to succeed in their societies and work in the 21st century. In this context, many educational institutions have sought to develop frameworks for defining 21st century

skills and suggesting how to integrate them into the educational system in general and English language learning in particular (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2008).

Not only is there an increasing awareness of the need for enhancing the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in different fields of the working life, but there is also rising concern over the effective use of educational approaches on how to become literate in today's knowledge society. For Varis (2007), governments and schools should focus on removing barriers to access and connectivity, supporting professional development, accelerating E-learning innovation, promoting digital literacy, and implementing lifelong learning. In a similar vein, Lotherington and Jenson (2011) state that globalization and digitization have reshaped the communication landscape, affecting how and with whom we communicate, and deeply altering the terrain of language and literacy education.

English Foreign Language (EFL) students have different backgrounds and achievement levels, and diverse learning styles, which impact their ability to learn and use the foreign language (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). At the same time, these learners are not simply interested in achieving a high command of the different language skills needed in social situations, they are also concerned with the acquisition of the formal academic skills demanded in university³. Similarly, the Languages and Literatures Department of St. John's University (2013) states that in an increasingly interdependent world success depends greatly on the ability of individuals to function as successful members of a global village whose members speak a variety of languages. Therefore, the EFL classroom needs to move away from traditional methods focused on language mastery in order to start incorporating new approaches aimed at integrating content, culture, technology, and lifelong skills (Taylor, 2009).

It can be said that today's English language learning classroom must be different from the classroom of twenty or thirty years ago. Shoffner, De Oliveira and Angus (2010) inform that today's English classroom requires an extended understanding and enactment of literacy. Rather than an all-inclusive single literacy, English teachers must accept the changing and flexible nature of literacies that address areas as diverse as technology, multimedia, relationships and culture. These areas, in turn, require the English classroom to be a space capable of addressing the increasing multiplicity and integration of different modes of meaning-making, where the textual relates to the visual, the audio, the spatial, and the behavioral. One possible way to answer to the new interests and demands of our learners and our society is the explicit, but critical work with what experts have called the 21st century skills (Alemi & Daftarifard, 2010).

Based on the continuous efforts to incorporate the 21th century skills into the language learning domains, especially the EFL context, the current study aims to investigate the literature of 21th century skills, their location in EFL classroom, and how such skills can be integrated into the English language learning domain.

Statement of the Problem

To participate effectively in the increasingly complex societies and globalized economy that characterize today's world, students need to think critically, communicate

effectively, collaborate with diverse peers, solve complex problems, adopt a global mindset, and engage with information and communications technologies, to name but just a few requirements.

There is, however, agreement that there is a deep gap between the skills that students learn in school and those they need in life and work in the knowledge-based society, and that the current English language curriculum is no longer sufficient to prepare students for life and work in today's changing world of technology (Alemi & Daftarifard, 2010). Richards (2006) states that, as a result of the studies that analyzed the work required by the labor market in the 21st century to determine the skills required for EFL students, the present English language programs in EFL contexts lack the necessary 21st century skills and that the EFL students are provided with traditional skills that do not address their higher thinking skills.

This research attempts to fill an academic gap by looking into the 21st century skills and how these skills can be integrated into English language learning, especially in EFL settings. To the researcher's knowledge, this process of integration is understudied and the need for more insights is essential for effective English language learning practices.

Research Questions

This paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the 21st Century Skills?
2. What are the characteristics of The EFL classroom in the 21st century?
3. How to incorporate 21st century skills into the EFL classroom?

METHOD

In order to collect data for the current research, the researcher used the descriptive approach. The descriptive approach is mainly used to give an account of 21st century skills and to determine the skills that should be integrated with English language learning. The research is mainly qualitative in nature. Also, the researcher used the deductive approach in order to reach conclusion based on the data collected from the literature of 21st century skills and English language learning. In order to collect data for this paper, the researcher used the accredited academic data bases such as ERIC, the relevant journal articles, the theses and dissertations, and the published books.

LITERATURE REVIEW

21th Century Skills

The 21th century skills are the skills that address the individuals' non-traditional capacities and raise their positivism and contribution to their surrounding environment. According to Ledward and Hirata (2011), 21st century skills are a blend of content knowledge, specific skills, expertise, and literacies necessary to succeed in work and life. Ledward and Hirata point out that these skills are more than technological literacy and include proficiency in critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and team work. Ultimately, these skills allow people to thrive in the new economy since they help people a) access, synthesize, and communicate information; b) work collaboratively across

differences to solve complex problems; and c) create new knowledge through the innovative use of multiple technologies.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2007b) reports that while the present schools show the influence of industrial and information age models, the modern 21st century school must bring together rigorous content and real world relevance, by focusing on cognitive skills as well as those in affective and aesthetic domains. To help schools achieve such challenging goals, the Partnership (2007a) have created a framework for 21st century learning, which consists of core subjects (English, Reading, Language Arts, World Languages, Arts, Mathematics, Economics, Science, Geography, History, and Government and Civics) as well as interdisciplinary themes (global awareness, financial, economic, business, civil literacy, health literacy, and environmental literacy). These subjects and themes center on three core skills: life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, and information, media, and technology skills.

According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), each of the three core skills addresses particular areas people need to acquire and develop. Life and career, for instance, describe the ability to be flexible, adaptable, self-directed, socially aware, accountable and responsible. For their part, learning and innovation include the ability to be creative and innovative, critical, problem-solving, communicative and collaborative. Finally, information, media and technology consist in the ability to access and use information, to create and analyze media products, and to apply technology effectively. Once studied and incorporated into curriculum, instruction, and assessment, these skills can help schools and teachers set up learning environments capable of developing the essential abilities needed in the 21st century (Lai & Viering, 2012).

In order to structure the analysis of 21st century skills, several conceptual models have been created. One of those models is the one proposed by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory and the Metiri Group (Lemke, 2002). Lemke (2003) explains that this model provides a framework to define what students need to thrive in today's digital age. The framework identifies four general skills through four dimensions: digital-age literacy, inventive thinking, effective communication and high productivity. The first dimension involves being able to use digital technology and communication tools to create, manage, and evaluate information in order to function in a knowledge society. Inventive thinking has to do with people's cognitive abilities to apply information technologies in complex and sustained situations and to understand the consequence of doing so. The third dimension includes the ability to clearly communicate with others either orally or in writing using a wide range of media and technology. Finally, high productivity covers abilities to prioritize, plan and manage for relevant and high-quality products and results.

Table 1. The Dimensions of 21st Century Learning

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Digital Age Literacy ▪ Basic, Scientific and Technological Literacy, Visual and Information Literacy Cultural Literacy and Global Awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inventive Thinking ▪ Adaptability ▪ Managing Complexity and Self-Direction ▪ Curiosity, Creativity and Risk-Taking ▪ Higher-Order Thinking and Sound Reasoning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective Communication ▪ Teaming, Collaboration and Interpersonal Skills ▪ Person, Social and Civic Responsibility ▪ Interactive Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High Productivity ▪ Prioritizing, Planning and Managing for Results ▪ Effective Use of Real-World Tools ▪ Ability to Produce Relevant and High-Quality Products

In 2010, companies such as Cisco Systems, Intel Corporation, and Microsoft Corporation sponsored an initiative called “Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21S).” This initiative created a model that defined ten universally accepted 21st century skills into four broad categories of competencies. These skills can help schools and school systems to prepare students for success in the workplace and as global citizens.

Table 2. 21st Century Skills According To ATC21S

Broad Competencies	Ways of Thinking	Ways of Working	Tools for Working	Living in the World
Universal Skills	Creativity and Innovation, Critical thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making, Learning to learn, Metacognition	Communication, Collaboration and Teamwork	Information Literacy, Research of sources, ICT literacy	Local and Global Citizenship, Life and Career, Personal and Social Responsibility, Cultural Awareness And Competence

Generally, the frameworks for 21st century skills tend to be largely consistent with each other. They all agree on the fact that the abilities individuals should have for life, career, citizenship, and self-actualization in the 21st century are different from those needed in the 20th century. These differences have basically emerged from the changes in the ways we communicate, use technology, produce knowledge, and interact with others. These changes demand students, workers, citizens, and individuals equipped with a new set of competences that allows them to act, think, and network successfully. Despite its significance, schools and teachers need to be cautious when redefining and transforming their practices and processes based on the 21st century skills movement. There are certain aspects of this movement that institutions and educators need to consider carefully.

The English Language Classroom in the 21st Century

Rogers (2000) stated that the 20th century saw an immense amount of activity in language teaching methods and approaches. One of the most well-known methods was and still is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). With its emphasis on communicative competence, learner-centeredness and interaction, not only has CLT influenced syllabus design and methodology; it has also paved the way for new

methodologies such as content-based instruction (CBI), task-based instruction (TBI) and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) (Richards, 2006). However, some authors believe that methods are expert-constructed prescriptions for practice which have both pedagogic limitations as well as insidious sociocultural and political agendas (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Stern, 1992). Kumaravadivelu (1994) reports that teachers must be capable of adapting their own approach in accordance with local and contextual factors. These factors are guidelines that teachers use to generate their own classroom techniques.

On the other hand, English cannot be treated as a simple linguistic skill. Instead, English should be regarded as a global language that people can use to express their local identities and to communicate intelligibly with the world (Crystal, 2006). As a consequence of this new perspective, Eaton (2010) states that today's EFL classroom should no longer be focused on grammar, memorization and learning from rote. Rather, it should be conceived of as a space to learn to use language and cultural knowledge as a means to connect to others around the world.

21st Century Skills and the English Language Classroom

Armstrong and Warlick (2004) inform that an increasingly digital and networked world requires students to be able to demonstrate knowledge, employ information and express ideas compellingly. Students need to become not only literate, but also able to use that literacy within their personal information environment in order to succeed now and in the future. The use of that literacy, maintain Armstrong and Warlick, involves, among other things, being able to read deeply for meaning in multimedia content, handle appropriate software tools to process information, use practical and technical skills to communicate knowledge with multimedia, and know the ethical use of the information highway.

English language educators need to develop activities that engage learners in the kind of authentic tasks and problem-solving activities that they will actually need in the future. Warschauer (2001) suggested that such engagement can be achieved by having students carry out complex project work involving negotiation, collaboration, goal-setting, meaningful communication, and the development of challenging products.

Therefore, students need to learn to develop a whole new range of English language literacies, which involve emerging forms of communication, reading, and writing using online technologies. Concretely, Warschauer (2001) affirmed that English teachers need to use learner-centered collaborative projects, in which students work together with their classmates and with other around the world, using a variety of technological means.

For their part, Chang and Tung (2009) contend that EFL students should not be asked to work alone on assignments emphasizing short-term content memorization, nor should they do assignments which focus on translation or allow sloppily put-together pieces of model phrases and sentences from the textbook. Instead, they suggest using project-based learning (PBL) to help students analyze problems, investigate possible solutions, make decisions, create designs, and solve problems. On the one hand, PBL encourages students to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time to come up with

realistic products or presentations in the end. On the other hand, instructors act as facilitators, who do not directly provide students with correct answers but rather guide them in the learning process and offer feedback. PBL seems, then, to be a valid alternative for incorporating 21st century skills into the teaching of English.

Additionally, Black (2009) states that English language learners need activities based on new technological tools and semiotic forms that can offer them opportunities for the development of both standard language proficiency and digital literacy and 21st skills. She believes that multimodal practices such as instant messaging, social networks, digital storytelling and media redesigning should be used to teach and learn English so that students can engage in creative manipulation of popular cultural and textual artifacts. By doing so, she argues, students cannot only represent themselves, but also communicate in online spaces by mixing text, image and sound.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

Having overviewed the 21st century skills into the English language learning, it can be reported that the incorporation of 21st century skills into the English language learning is a multi-dimensional process that entails inputs from each of the learners, the teacher, the curriculum, the community, and the school administration.

Based on the literature of the role of 21st century skills in English language learning, the researchers (e.g. Taylor, 2009; Ledward & Hirata, 2011; Canses, T. & Sabahattin, 2019) have provided the following steps or strategies for the incorporation of 21st century skills into English language learning:

A- Letting Students Lead the Learning

Learning takes place best in environments where students feel empowered to learn. Effective teachers are more like moderators, offering inspiration and guiding students to discover for themselves. The teachers should students the opportunity to be self-learners, which guarantees lifelong learning.

B- Creating an Inquiry-Based Classroom Environment

For the students to lead their learning, they need to be able to ask questions – and then find the means to answer them. Students (and teachers) need to “wonder out loud” as they encounter new information. A KWL chart (What do you Know? What do you Want to know? What have you Learned?) can guide students toward true self-motivated learning.

C- Encouraging Collaboration

The active and sound classroom is a sharing classroom. Students are social beings, and even more so in a language class. The teachers should every opportunity to allow students to form pairs and small groups. Not only does this encourage the development of speaking and listening skills, but it also teaches students how to effectively achieve goals together.

D- Developing Critical Thinking Skills

Learning is more than memorizing and remembering. Critical thinking skills take students well beyond simple comprehension of information. Students use these skills to solve problems in new situations, make inferences and generalizations, combine information in new patterns, and make judgments based on evidence and criteria. The teachers should introduce activities in their lessons that build critical thinking skills along with language skills.

E- Encouraging Creativity

The teachers should encourage their students to be creative throughout each lesson. Creative activities allow students to express what they've learned in a new way. This synthesizing and personalizing of knowledge consolidate learning, and creates an experience that remains with students long after the class is over.

By keeping the above-mentioned strategies in mind as the teacher plans each lesson, he will be encouraging the development of 21st Century skills. The student may also need time to adjust to this new way of learning. However, they will soon begin to feel empowered to think more critically, to ask questions and seek answers, and to express themselves creatively. Most importantly, their communication skills will become much stronger as a result, which always remains the main goal of English language learning (Canses & Sabahattin, 2019).

In order to integrate English language learning with 21st century skills, teachers and students can work with both or either Multiliteracy and Multimodal Communicative Competence. According to Dupuy (2011), multiliteracy expands the traditional language-based notion of literacy – the ability to read and write – to include not only the ability to produce and interpret texts, but also a critical awareness of the relationships between texts, discourse conventions, and social and cultural contexts. Such ability, asserted Dupuy, prepares learners to participate in diverse discourse communities and fosters the critical engagement they need to design their social futures. In this regard, Elsner (2011) maintains that language learners today need to be able to cope with different kinds of texts, including interactive, linear and nonlinear texts, texts with several possible meanings, texts being delivered on paper, screens, or live, and texts that comprise one or more semiotic systems. However, Haut (2010) points out that EFL teachers should not only incorporate different types of texts, modes of language and discourses, they should also give explicit instruction detailing the inherent conventions so that students can learn to move between discourses and become both aware and critical of the intrinsic features that are portrayed.

On the other hand, Royce (2007) reports that EFL classrooms need to be increasingly concerned with developing students' multimodal communicative competence. Teachers should begin to focus on and develop students' abilities in visual literacy, and to develop a pedagogical metalanguage to facilitate these abilities when images co-occur with spoken and written modes. In this line of thought, Heberle (2010) defines multimodal communicative competence as the knowledge and use of language concerning the visual, gestural, audio and spatial dimensions of communication, including computer-mediated-

communication. The familiarization of EFL learners with different types of texts and meanings can help them be better prepared for different literacy practices in their professional and sociocultural experiences with native and non-native speakers of English.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above-mentioned results and analysis, the research presents the following recommendations:

1. Restructuring beliefs about English language learning and continuing to view schools as responsible agents for preparing students to be successful in the 21st century by building a 21st century-based curriculum.
2. The integration of 21st century skills into English curriculum in public education after a deep analysis of the skills needed for the 21 century and with a consideration for the global and local needs.
3. Those who are committed to a holistic view of English language education in the 21st century have much work to do in terms of research, sharing of experience, capacity building, and advocacy around the potential and need for all countries, regardless of context, to move in this direction.
4. Considering using of 21 century skills in EFL classes will improve learning mechanism by shaping appealing and fascinating environments, it is clear that, teachers should create better circumstances for increasing the broad application of it in any stage of language acquisition process. So, the first step should be increasing awareness of teachers of the 21 century skills, their importance, and their various exercises. Knowledgeable teachers will best transmit these skills to the students.

CONCLUSION

The 21st century requires that clear integration of learning and innovation skills, information, media and digital literacy skills, as well as life and career skills. So, schools in general and English Language classrooms in particular should provide students with practices and processes focused on acquiring and developing, among other things, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, media literacy, initiative and self-direction, and social and cross-cultural skills. Also, English Language classrooms need to be filled with meaningful and intellectually stimulating activities, practices, and processes that allow students to not just articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written and nonverbal communication, but to also understand complex perspectives, use multiple media and technologies, make judgments and decisions, and work creatively with others. As a result, teachers should be aware of the important of 21st century skills and the curriculum should be tailored to meet the needs of the 21st century.

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