

Evolving 21st Century Skills as Competencies for More Effective Learning and Teaching of English

Sankalp Goswami (sankalp.goswami@gmail.com), Research Scholar

Dr. Mohammed Tausif ur Rahman (tausif.rahman@igntu.ac.in), Assistant Professor

Department of English and Foreign Languages, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, India



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Abstract: *Technology is constantly changing the world around us. Automatisation, digitization and outsourcing of knowledge and skills are taking place frequently. Various universities, colleges, institutions, and schools have been working to identify the skills students must have to succeed in today's fast-moving world. Name any sector like education, research, business, banking, etc.; employers look for specific skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking while hiring a candidate. These sets of skills are termed as 21st-century skills. At this point, some questions pop up, like, how can 21st-century skills be imparted to students? Are the students ready to face the world with one of the most desired competencies, i.e. excellent communication skills? To understand the notion of competency, Docking (1994) defines competencies as "...competencies cannot be a static body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Competencies are dynamic, evolving continuously with different times and contexts."*

Hence, the integration of 21st century skills with English language teaching is necessary as it will serve two purposes. Firstly, this fusion will make the students effective communicators. Secondly, they will be proficient enough in marshalling world affairs. In the same context, this research paper draws attention towards the students of Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh. Despite being immensely talented, students hesitate to express their ideas and fumble while speaking in English. Therefore, this research paper suggests that teaching English at IGNTU needs the fusion of 21st Century Skills like collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking. Moreover, how can these skills be practically demonstrated while teaching English? Finally, this research paper highlights the utility of the ESA (Engage, Study, Activate) Teaching Model by Jeremy Harmer to make students go-getters.

Keywords: 21st Century Skills, Critical Thinking, ELT, ESA (Engage, Study, Activate), Learning Environment

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Introduction

What qualities must one possess to succeed as a student or graduate in a cutthroat environment? The 21st Century demands an entirely distinct mindset from the 20th century when mastery of key academic subjects and a penchant for writing served as the performance benchmark. Students must be able to think creatively, speak persuasively, interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, solve complex problems, adopt a global perspective, work collaboratively with ICTs, and engage efficiently in the ever-more complex societies and the globalised economy that characterise today's world. As it has been apparent that conventional educational systems have mainly failed to prepare students to address these difficulties, the international education community is getting increasingly vocal and influential in support of the changes that are required. Giving pupils the best chance to get ready for the future is the responsibility of educators. A prosperous future can no longer be assured by knowledge and qualifications alone. Instead, young people require and merit the opportunity to grow into well-rounded, imaginative, and important members of society who may influence their futures and that of future generations. By making contributions to the conversation about education, developing educational systems, and offering

support services, teachers in educational institutions directly address these concerns. To invest in the common future, they must infuse global thinking and hone their core competencies.

What are 21st-Century Skills

According to the National Research Council (2012), 21st Century Skills include "**problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and self-management**"(p. 1). This definition emphasises the value of applying knowledge to novel situations rather than having the memory of facts, concepts, or procedures. In light of the changing nature of the world, the paper draws the inference that fostering interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities promotes flexibility and adaptation. A report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) supports the use of "curiosity, imagination, resilience and self-regulation" by 21st Century learners are essentials to prepare them "**for jobs that have not yet been created, for technologies that have not yet been invented, and to solve problems that have not yet been anticipated**" (OECD, 2018, p. 2). This research article suggests that the essential elements required to be employed are interpersonal communication, higher-order thinking, and IT skills in the 21st Century.

Treating English Language Skills as a Competency

In the 21st Century, students need to master English for several reasons. The first justification is that English, an official international language, is the language that unites the entire world. In this instance, regardless of nationality, race, religion, or gender, English is utilised as a language of communication worldwide. Learning English will make it simpler to speak with people in other regions of the world without being perplexed by language barriers in their native tongues. Moreover, academic institutions, organisations, and the corporate sector across the globe assert that success in an increasingly interdependent world depends heavily on a person's capacity to function effectively in a global village where people speak English. Therefore, the traditional ways of teaching English need to give way to innovative strategies aimed at combining content, culture, technology, and lifelong skills. In the views of Armstrong and Warlick (2004), "*an increasingly digital and networked world requires students to be able to demonstrate knowledge, employ information and express ideas compellingly.*" Therefore, English language educators must develop authentic projects and problem-solving exercises that students will truly require in the future.

Additionally, English teachers must recognise the adaptive and changing nature of literacies that cover a wide range of subjects, including technological advances, multimedia content, relationships, and culture. The English classroom has to be a place where a variety of instructional modalities can be addressed and integrated, where textual information is linked to the visual, aural, spatial, and behavioural. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to look into the value of 21st Century skills, where they are taught in ESL classes, and how they might be included in the field of English language learning and teaching.

Evolving 21st Century Skills with ELT

The integration of 21st century skills into the study of English language is a complex process that involves contributions from each learner, the instructor, the curriculum, the community and the school administration. The following steps or strategies for incorporating 21st Century skills into English language learning have been suggested by researchers (Taylor, 2009; Ledward & Hirata, 2011; Canses, T. & Sabahattin, 2019).

Providing Student-centric Learning Experience

The best learning environments are ones that give students the confidence to learn. Effective teachers more closely resemble facilitators, encouraging and guiding students while they arrive at their conclusions. To ensure lifelong learning, teachers should provide their students with the chance to be

independent learners. This can be put into practice when teachers plan their lesson well beforehand keeping students in focus with varied interaction patterns and resulting in less Teacher Talking Time and increasing Student Talking Time for encouraging peer learning and peer teaching.

Creating a Learning Environment through 21st Century Skills

The ability to ask questions and then find the resources to respond to them is necessary for students to take charge of their learning. As they come across new material, both students and teachers need to "wonder out loud." The materials designed in the form tasks and activities enable students to activate both concepts of language and develop language skills and 21st Century Skills.

Enhancing Critical Thinking Capabilities

Learning involves more than just memorization. Cognitive abilities allow students to do much more than just take in knowledge. Students apply these skills to solve problems in novel ways, establish generalisations and conclusions, organise information in novel ways, and form judgements based on facts and norms. In addition to linguistic skills, teachers should incorporate activities that foster critical thinking into their courses. The activities designed with "How & Why" type of questions will automatically involve students for thinking, analysing and solving problems. Such activities will help students to brainstorm their ideas, discuss, analyse and develop understanding of the subject.

Guiding for Creativity

Through creative activities, students can illustrate what they've learned in unique ways. The synthesis and personalization of knowledge result in an experience that pupils retain even after the class is over, which reinforces learning.

The English language teacher can promote the development of 21st Century abilities by planning each class with the aforementioned ideas in mind. The pupil could also get some time to become used to this new method of instruction. However, they will soon start to experience a sense of empowerment that will allow them to express themselves creatively and more critically. Most importantly, as a result, their communication skills will significantly improve, which is always the primary objective of learning the English language (Canses & Sabahattin, 2019).

Therefore, it is obvious that teachers need to provide better conditions for improving the broad use of 21st Century Skills at any stage of the language learning process. Using 21st Century skills in EFL lessons will improve learning mechanisms by creating engaging and exciting surroundings. Educating teachers about 21st Century Skills, their value, and the numerous exercises they may do should be the first step. The greatest way for kids to learn these abilities is through knowledgeable teachers.

Rationale

All in all, when a lesson be it language focussed or Skills focussed or both follow the 3 easy steps of Engagement, Study and Activate through various tasks and activities in the form of puzzles, predicting exercise, personalisation will help students engage themselves with the tasks and activities. Then, exercises like True-false, Yes-no type questions and checking answers through peer discussion will lead the session into study and finally with post-reading task or post-listening task, students can be given a chance to activate their concepts through writing and speaking tasks by bringing them to include all what, when, where, how and why type of questions.

Conclusion

The 21st Century requires an apparent fusion of information literacy, creativity and knowledge, as well as life and career skills. To help students develop and acquire imagination, analytical thinking, collaboration, knowledge of media, responsibility and independence, as well as social and intercultural skills,

educational institutions in general and English language classrooms specifically must provide them with activities and processes.

Additionally, significant and conceptually stimulating tasks, practises, and procedures that help students understand complicated points of view, employ an array of media and technologies, form beliefs and decisions, and work together creatively with others must be incorporated into English language classrooms. Therefore, teachers need to comprehend the relevance of 21st Century Skills, and the educational programme should be adjusted to meet those needs.

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