



21st Century Skills and Their Implications in Teaching English as a Foreign Language: Review Article

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Abstract

Twenty-first century (21st-century) skills are a set of competencies considered essential for success in the modern world. When it comes to Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), integrating these skills into the language learning process can enhance students' language proficiency, critical thinking abilities, and readiness for the globalized world. This paper reviewed some implications of 21st-century skills in TEFL. For instance, TEFL instructors can emphasize interactive and communicative activities to promote effective verbal and written communication. They can also incorporate activities that encourage students to think critically, analyze information, and solve problems using English language skills. In addition, creativity and innovation can be applied by providing opportunities for students to express their creativity and think innovatively in English. Global and intercultural awareness are also implied by exposing students to diverse cultures and perspectives. By exposing students to a variety of language contexts and helping them adapt to different communicative situations, they can develop adaptability and flexibility. Finally, integrating real-world tasks, such as job interviews, presentations, and negotiations, can help students develop language proficiency in professional and practical contexts.

Key words: 21st century, skills, implications, teaching, English



I. Introduction

Predicting specific skills that will be in high demand in the 21st century can be challenging, as the future is inherently uncertain. By incorporating 21st-century skills into TEFL, instructors can prepare students not only to become proficient English speakers but also to thrive in the globalized and interconnected world, equipping them with the skills necessary for success in their personal, academic, and professional lives (Yeni & Can, 2022).

A study by Holm (2024) (2017) indicated that digital literacy skills positively influenced learning outcomes. Students who possessed higher digital literacy skills demonstrated improved language proficiency, enhanced critical thinking abilities, and increased motivation for learning English. This paper reviews 21st century skills and their implications for Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Here are some skills that could be relevant in the 21st century and their potential implications for learning English.

1.1 Digital Literacy and Technology Skills in Teaching English

As technology continues to advance, digital literacy and proficiency in using various tools and technologies will become increasingly important (Van Laar *et al.*, 2017). Students will need to develop skills such as coding, data analysis, cyber security, and proficiency in using digital collaboration platforms. Education will need to prioritize teaching these skills to prepare students for the digital age. Proficiency in digital technologies, data analysis, and cyber security will continue to be crucial as technology becomes more integrated into various industries (Kessler & Plakans, 2008).

Digital literacy and technology skills have significant implications for teaching English as a global language. There are some ways in which they impact English language instruction. For instance, technology provides access to a vast array of authentic language resources from different English-speaking countries. Students can access online newspapers, blogs, podcasts, videos, and social media platforms to engage with real-world English language use. This



exposure helps them develop a broader understanding of English, as it is used in different contexts and cultures (Sosas, 2021). In addition to this, digital tools and language learning apps (applications) offer interactive exercises, virtual language practice, and instant feedback. Students can engage in targeted language practice activities, such as vocabulary drills, grammar exercises, and pronunciation practice, at their own pace. This individualized practice supports their language development and fosters independent learning.

Ali *et al.* (2024) conducted a study on the use of digital learning in the EFL classroom and its effect on self-perceived knowledge, learning, and English use at the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia and found that there is a positive relationship between the use of digital tools in the classroom and students' development in language learning. Therefore, digital learning strengthens students' learning experiences and engagement (Akyuz & Yavuz, 2015).

Technology also enables English learners to connect and collaborate with peers from

around the world. Online platforms, video conferencing tools, and social media networks facilitate cross-cultural exchanges, allowing students to communicate with native and non-native English speakers. This enhances their language skills and promotes intercultural understanding (Selfa-Sastre *et al.*, 2022). Digital platforms provide opportunities for students to produce authentic language output. They can create blogs, podcasts, videos, or social media posts in English, sharing their ideas and experiences with a global audience. This authentic language production enhances their language fluency, creativity, and digital communication skills (Pifarré, 2019). The other implication of digital technology in language teaching is that digital resources allow English learners to explore different cultures, traditions, and perspectives. Through online videos, articles, and virtual tours, students can gain insights into diverse cultural practices, global issues, and intercultural communication. This fosters cultural understanding and empathy and prepares students to be global citizens (Kumi-Yeboah *et al.*, 2020).

Teaching digital literacy skills equips students with the ability to critically evaluate



online information. In an era of fake news and misinformation, learners need to develop the skills to discern reliable sources and validate information. This is particularly important for English learners who rely on online resources for language learning and research (Zimdars & McLeod, 2020). Additionally, technology enables blended and online learning models in English language instruction. Online platforms, learning management systems, and virtual classrooms provide flexibility in terms of time and location, expanding access to English education. Blended learning approaches combine face-to-face instruction with online resources, allowing for personalized learning experiences (Chaeruman *et al.*, 2018).

Finally, digital literacy and technology skills empower English learners to engage with English as a global language in meaningful ways. They provide access to diverse language resources, foster global communication, promote cultural understanding, and support lifelong learning in an increasingly interconnected world.

1.2 Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Implications in TEFL

Critical thinking skills refer to the ability to analyze and evaluate information, arguments, and ideas in a logical and systematic manner. It involves actively and objectively questioning, examining, and reflecting upon the information or situation at hand. Critical thinking skills enable individuals to make reasoned judgments, solve problems, and make informed decisions (Southworth, 2022). Some key components of critical thinking skills are analyzing, evaluating, inferring, interpreting, problem-solving, reflecting, and effectively communicating (Basri, 2019). Therefore, developing critical thinking skills is essential in various aspects of life, including education, professional work, problem-solving, decision-making, and engaging in informed citizenship. It helps individuals become active learners, independent thinkers, and effective problem-solvers (Southworth, 2022).

Critical thinking and complex problem-solving—the capacity to analyze complex situations, think critically, and solve problems using holistic approaches—will be essential in addressing challenges in an interconnected world. TEFL can incorporate activities that encourage students to think critically, analyze information, and solve



problems using English language skills. This can involve tasks such as analyzing texts, discussing complex issues, and engaging in critical reflection (Shirkhani & Fahim, 2011).

Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are highly relevant and valuable in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). By integrating these skills into TEFL, educators can help students develop their language proficiency in a meaningful and practical way (Kök & Duman, 2023). By using authentic teaching materials, questioning and inquiring, analyzing and evaluating, problem-based learning, creative and critical writing, debate and discussion, problem-solving strategies, and reflection and metacognition, TEFL can apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills in language teaching (Birgili, 2015). Therefore, by integrating critical thinking and problem-solving into TEFL, educators can facilitate a deeper understanding of the English language and equip students with valuable cognitive skills. These skills not only enhance language proficiency but also prepare students to navigate real-world language challenges and become independent, analytical, and adaptable language learners.

1.3 Artificial Intelligence and Automation Skills in Teaching English

Automation and artificial intelligence are expected to replace routine and repetitive tasks. In contrast, skills that require human judgment, lifelong thinking, and complex problem-solving will be highly valued. Education should focus on fostering analytical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and the ability to approach problems from multiple perspectives (Birgili, 2015). Artificial intelligence (AI) and automation have the potential to significantly impact the field of TEFL (Sumakul et al., 2022).

Some implications and applications of AI and automation in language teaching can be: intelligent tutoring systems, which can provide personalized language instruction tailored to individual learners' needs, language assessment and feedback, Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms can analyze learners' language production, identify errors, and provide automated feedback, enabling learners to receive immediate guidance on their language performance, Chat-bots and virtual assistants, which can engage in interactive conversations with learners, providing language practice opportunities, language learning apps, which can offer personalized



learning experiences by analyzing learners' progress, adapting content to their proficiency level, and providing targeted vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation exercises, automated language translation, which can assist language learners in understanding and translating texts in real-time.

Such tools can support learners in developing reading and comprehension skills, as well as facilitate communication with speakers of different languages, speech recognition and pronunciation practice, which can assess learners' pronunciation accuracy and provide feedback on specific pronunciation errors, language content Generation, which can generate language learning materials, such as exercises, quizzes, and dialogues, based on specific learning objectives and learner needs. Finally, AI and automation can assist in analyzing vast amounts of language data and corpora, enabling researchers and educators to gain insights into language patterns, usage, and variation (Woo & Choi, 2021; Zhai et al., 2021).

1.4 Emotional Intelligence and Interpersonal Skills in Teaching English

As technology becomes more pervasive, the demand for social and emotional skills will increase. These skills include empathy, effective communication, collaboration, and leadership. Education should emphasize the development of interpersonal skills to enable students to work effectively in diverse teams and navigate complex social dynamics (Haddock, 2022). TEFL should consider the emotional well-being of students. Creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment, promoting empathy and respect, and integrating activities that develop emotional intelligence can enhance students' overall language learning experience (Rahman *et al.*, 2023). Emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills are indeed considered as an essential skills of the 21st-century. Emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills are useful in leadership, collaboration and teamwork, communication, resilience and adaptability. It also use in interpersonal skills, collaboration and teamwork, cultural competence, networking and relationship building, customer service and conflict resolution (Kumra *et al.*, 2020; Carmel, 2003). Therefore, developing emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills equips individuals with the abilities to navigate



social and professional interactions, collaborate effectively, and build harmonious relationships. These skills foster a positive and inclusive work and social environment, enhance personal well-being, and contribute to overall success in the 21st century.

Emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills are highly relevant in the context of English language learning in the 21st century (Rahman *et al.*, 2024). For instance, English language learning involves developing strong communication skills. Emotional intelligence enhances effective communication by promoting self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to understand and respond to others' emotions. Learners with high emotional intelligence can better understand cultural nuances, adapt their communication style, and build rapport with English speakers (Bora, 2012). In addition to this, English language learning often involves collaborative activities and group work. Interpersonal skills are essential in these contexts as learners need to effectively collaborate, share ideas, listen actively, and provide constructive feedback (Zhang, 2022). Developing interpersonal skills allows learners to work harmoniously

in diverse teams and benefit from collective knowledge and perspectives.

We can see the significance of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills in terms of cultural competence development. English is a global language, and English language learners often interact with speakers from different cultural backgrounds. Emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills facilitate cultural competence by promoting respect, open-mindedness, and understanding of cultural differences. Learners can develop cultural sensitivity, communicate effectively across cultures, and navigate intercultural interactions successfully (Rahman & Manaf, 2017). Emotional intelligence also fosters empathy and perspective-taking, which are crucial in language learning. Understanding others' perspectives and emotions helps learners interpret and use English in context, leading to more accurate comprehension and effective communication. Empathy also promotes a positive and inclusive learning environment where learners support and learn from each other (Rahman & Manaf, 2017).

Language learning can be challenging, and emotional intelligence supports learners in



managing frustration, setbacks, and anxiety. By developing self-regulation skills, learners can effectively cope with difficulties, maintain motivation, and persist in their language learning journey. Emotional intelligence also helps learners build resilience and adaptability, which are essential for continuous improvement (Zhang, 2024). Finally, the implication of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills can be seen in terms of conflicts and negotiating differences of opinion in English language learning settings. Learners can develop skills to express their views respectfully, listen to others, find common ground, and reach mutually beneficial resolutions, which promote a positive learning environment and effective collaboration, and interpersonal skills are valuable for building relationships with English speakers and practicing the language. Learners who can establish rapport, engage in small talk, and actively participate in conversations develop linguistic and social confidence. They create opportunities for authentic language practice and cultural exchange (Zhang, 2024). Hence, by integrating emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills into English language learning, learners do not only

improve their linguistic abilities but also become effective communicators, culturally competent individuals, and successful global citizens. These skills enhance language learning experiences, promote meaningful interactions, and facilitate personal and professional growth in the 21st century.

1.5 Cultural Competence and Global Awareness in Teaching English

In an interconnected world, cultural competence and global awareness are crucial skills. Students will need to understand and appreciate diverse cultures, perspectives, and global issues. Education should incorporate global perspectives, promote cultural exchange, and develop students' ability to collaborate across borders (Reimers, 2020).

TEFL can expose students to diverse cultures and perspectives. Incorporating multicultural literature, discussing global issues, and promoting intercultural exchanges through video conferences or pen-pal programs can help students develop a broader understanding of the world while improving their language skills. Additionally, entrepreneurship often involves operating in global and multicultural contexts. TEFL can expose



students to diverse cultural perspectives and promote intercultural competence. Students can engage in discussions on global issues, analyze multicultural case studies, or collaborate with peers from different cultural backgrounds, thereby enhancing their language skills and cross-cultural understanding (Mandarani & Munir, 2021).

The capability to engage respectfully and effectively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, demonstrating empathy, cultural awareness, and a global perspective one aspect of global and intercultural awareness increase learners' engagement in language learning. The capability to work effectively in diverse and global environments, understanding different cultural contexts, and collaborating with individuals from various backgrounds will be valuable as globalization continues (Kaihlanen *et al.*, 2019).

1.6 Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Teaching English

The future job market is likely to value entrepreneurial and innovative mindsets. Education should foster creativity, risk-taking, and an entrepreneurial spirit. Students should be encouraged to think critically, identify opportunities, and

develop innovative solutions to real-world problems (Li *et al.*, 2023).

Entrepreneurship and innovation can have significant implications in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). Integrating entrepreneurial and innovative approaches into TEFL can enhance students' language learning experience, foster creativity and critical thinking, and prepare them for real-world language use (Paragae, 2023). There are some key implications of entrepreneurship and innovation in the field TEFL. Adaptive curriculum and instruction is one. Entrepreneurial TEFL educators are more likely to develop dynamic and learner-centered curricula that can adapt to change student needs and market demands. They may experiment with innovative instructional methods, such as flipped classrooms, project-based learning, or game-based approaches, to enhance student engagement and outcomes (Hung, 2017; Robinson *et al.*, 2016).

TEFL entrepreneurs often embrace educational technologies to improve teaching efficiency, personalize learning, and expand access to language instruction. This could involve developing online/mobile language learning platforms, AI-powered



adaptive learning tools, or virtual/augmented reality experiences (Herawati, 2023). Additionally, entrepreneurial TEFL providers may offer highly specialized language programs, such as English for specific purposes (e.g., business, medical, legal) or tailored tutoring services. This allows them to cater to niche market segments and differentiate their offerings from traditional language schools (Ferguson, 2013).

1.7 Information Literacy Skills in Teaching English

Information literacy refers to the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use information from various sources. In the digital age, where information is abundant and easily accessible, information literacy has become increasingly important. It involves a set of skills and competencies that enable individuals to navigate the vast amount of information available and make informed decisions (Munise, 2023). Identifying information needs is one of the key aspects of information literacy. Information literacy begins with recognizing the need for information. It involves understanding what information is required to address a specific question, problem, or task (Landøy et al., 2020). Furthermore,

information literacy also involves knowing how and where to access relevant information. This includes understanding different sources of information, such as libraries, databases, websites, and online platforms. It also involves being aware of search strategies and techniques to effectively retrieve information (Dorvlo, 2016).

Evaluating information is another aspect of information literacy. Information literacy requires the ability to critically evaluate the quality, accuracy, reliability, and relevance of information. This involves assessing the credibility of sources, considering biases or vested interests, and evaluating the currency and authority of the information (Andretta, 2005). Moreover, organizing and managing information is one of the 21st century skills. Information literacy includes skills related to organizing and managing information effectively. This involves techniques for note-taking, summarizing, categorizing, and storing information in a systematic manner (Dorvlo, 2016). Information literacy also involves the ability to synthesize and analyze information from multiple sources. It includes comparing and contrasting different perspectives, identifying patterns or trends, and drawing meaningful



conclusions (Carlock, 2020; Alewine & Mark, 2017).

Information literacy includes understanding and adhering to ethical standards when using information. This involves respecting intellectual property rights, properly citing sources, and avoiding plagiarism. Moreover, information literacy involves applying acquired information effectively to solve problems, make decisions, or complete tasks. This includes integrating the information into one's knowledge base and using it to support arguments or narratives (Andretta, 2005; Carlock, 2020).

Information literacy is not limited to any specific field or discipline. It is a transferable skill that is valuable across various domains, including education, research, professional work, and everyday life. By developing information literacy skills, individuals can become critical thinkers, independent learners, and responsible users of information in the digital age. TEFL can guide students in navigating and evaluating sources of information in English. Teaching them how to conduct effective online research, critically evaluate information, and cite sources correctly can develop their

information literacy skills while enhancing their language abilities.

1.8 Ways of Integrating 21st Century Skills in Current Education System

Incorporating 21st century skills into the current education system requires a deliberate and comprehensive approach (Kim et al., 2019). Some of the strategies teachers can employ to integrate these skills are mentioned hereunder. For example, reviewing and updating the curriculum to include explicit learning objectives and activities related to the identified skills, is one strategy. Integrate cross-disciplinary projects and assignments that promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration (Allison & Pan, 2011). Allison and Pan (2011) state that implementing project-based learning approaches encourage students to work on real-world challenges and develop problem-solving skills. In a similar way, encouraging inquiry-based learning approaches that stimulate curiosity and independent thinking is another strategy. Providing an opportunity for students to ask questions, and explore topics of interest is important (Almulla, 2020; Chu et al., 2021). Experiential learning is an educational approach that emphasizes learning through direct



experience and reflection (Pandita & Kiran, 2023). It is creating opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world contexts, and organize field trips, guest speaker sessions, or internships that allow students to gain practical experience and develop a deeper understanding of the skills being taught. Another strategy that is useful to integrate 21st century skills is collaborative learning. It is fostering collaborative learning environments where students can work together in teams, engage in discussions, and learn from one another. It also promotes group projects, debates, and presentations to develop interpersonal and communication skills (Darko & Wang, 2021).

Leveraging technology tools and platforms to enhance learning experiences and develop digital literacy skills. It also introducing coding, data analysis, and digital collaboration tools into the curriculum (Ardi & Elvira, 2022). By cultivating a positive learning environment, we can integrate the 21st century skills in to current education system (Dianne, 2011). Hence, it is important to note that integrating these skills into the education system requires a systemic approach involving curriculum

reform, teacher training, and support from policymakers. Collaboration among educational stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, parents, and policymakers, is crucial for successful implementation.

There are several technologies that educators can consider focusing on to teach 21st-century skills. To begin with, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are some of the 21st century technologies. VR and AR technologies can create immersive and interactive learning experiences. They can be used to simulate real-world scenarios, enhance cultural understanding, and facilitate experiential learning in various subjects (Zhao et al., 2023). Multimedia creation tools are another 21st century technologies. Multimedia creation tools like video editing software (e.g., iMovie, Adobe Premiere), graphic design tools (e.g., Canva, Adobe Creative Cloud), or podcasting tools (e.g., Audacity, Anchor) allow students to express their creativity, develop digital storytelling skills, and present their ideas in engaging ways (Liu & Beamer, 1997; Greene & Cody, 1995). There are also online collaboration tools, such as Google Workspace, Microsoft Teams, or project



management platforms such as Trello or Asana that can facilitate collaboration and communication among students. These tools promote teamwork, effective communication, and project-based learning (Kirk, 2010). Therefore, it is important for educators to consider their pedagogical goals, learning objectives, and the specific needs of their students when selecting technologies. Additionally, professional development and ongoing training can help educators effectively integrate these technologies into their teaching practices and leverage them to develop the 21st-century skills.

2. Conclusion

The significance of the 21st century skills are paramount in this global and competitive age. Additionally, the specific skills emphasized within each industry may vary based on the nature of the work and the evolving demands of that particular field. For instance, the education sector emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, creativity and innovation, information and media literacy, flexibility and adaptability, social and cross-cultural skills and communication skills for educators, administrators, and instructional

designers to facilitate effective teaching and learning in diverse settings. 21st century skills are critical for preparing students for the demands of the modern workforce and society. These skills allow students to be adaptable, innovative, and able to tackle complex real-world problems. Teaching 21st century competencies like critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy must be integrated across curriculum. Education needs to move beyond just content knowledge and focus on developing transferable skills; therefore, hands-on, project-based learning opportunities are keys for cultivating 21st century abilities.

Employers in the 21st century and beyond will increasingly value applicants with strong 21st century proficiency skills, such as problem-solving, communication, and creativity will be in high demand as jobs become more complex in this competitive age. Automation and AI will handle more routine tasks, making uniquely human abilities more crucial. Additionally, interdisciplinary and team-based work will require advanced interpersonal and collaboration capabilities. Finally, various stakeholders should play their role in integrating 21st century skills into the education system. These stakeholders can be



policymakers and education leaders, school administrators, teachers, students, and families and communities. Therefore, by aligning efforts across these key stakeholder groups, education systems can more effectively cultivate the skills students need to thrive in the 21st century. Coordinated action is essential for transforming teaching and learning.

3. Recommendation

Critical thinking and problem solving (take courses on logic, decision-making, and creative problem solving, practice analyzing complex issues from multiple angles, and engage in activities that require strategic thinking, such as chess or strategic game design), and Creativity and innovation (explore design thinking methodologies, participate in innovation challenges, and take classes in arts, creative writing, or entrepreneurship), communication and collaboration (improve public speaking and presentation skills, practice active listening and facilitating group discussions, and take courses in interpersonal communication or conflict resolution), emotional intelligence (learn about personality types and strategies for empathy and self-awareness, participate in leadership development or team building

workshops, and consider a coaching or mentorship program) and digital literacy (gain proficiency in common productivity software and cloud-based tools, take courses in data analysis, programming, or digital media creation, stay up-to-date on emerging technologies and trends, and let me know if you need any other specific recommendations for developing these critical future skills.

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