

Integrating 4C Skills of 21st Century into 4 Language Skills in EFL Classes

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Abstract

Most of the foreign language teachers, who have over ten or fifteen years of experience in their teaching profession, were educated with an emphasis on the importance of integrating four language skills in the EFL classes. However, we now educate a generation to the 21st century, which requires individuals equipped with some skills necessary to catch up with the increasingly developing technology in the global workforce. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills presents the 4Cs of communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking skills as the main skills of learning and innovation in the 21st Century. In this paper, the author explains these 4C skills in a relationship with education and puts forth connections with language teaching and their integration into the 4 language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), and propounds activities for teachers to improve these skills in EFL classes.

Keywords: Activities, 4C skills, 21st century skills, EFL class, language, teaching

1. Introduction

Today, as never before, meeting our society's challenges demands educational excellence and our school systems need to respond better to a changing world. As teachers, we can help our students connect learning with real life and provide them with the necessary skills to prepare them for success in life. According to the *OECD Learning Framework 2030*, education plays a vital role in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable people to contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and sustainable future. It will be essential to learn how to form purposeful goals, work with others with different perspectives, find opportunities and identify multiple solutions to big problems in the coming years. So education needs to equip students with the skills they need to become active, responsible and engaged citizens (OECD, 2018).

The National Education Association (2015) reports that what was considered a good education many years ago is no longer enough for success in college, career and citizenship in the 21st century. In the past, it was enough to master the "Three Rs" (reading, writing, and arithmetic). In the modern world however, "Three Rs" simply aren't enough. If today's students want to compete in this global society, they must also be proficient communicators, creators, critical thinkers, and collaborators (4Cs). Educators must complement all of those subjects with the 4Cs to prepare young people for citizenship and the global workforce.

In Europe 2020 strategic plan, the European Union Commission (2010) mentions some flagships, one of which is associated with skills in order to achieve the prior goals for a smart growth and sustainability. It is; "An agenda for new skills and jobs" to modernize labor markets and empower people by developing their skills throughout the lifecycle. Achieving longer working lives will require the possibility to acquire and develop new skills throughout the lifetime. Thus, it is essential to empower people through the acquisition of new skills to enable our current and future workforce to adapt to new conditions and potential career shifts, reduce unemployment and raise labor productivity. Research supports the importance of teaching the 4Cs: The National Education Association (2015) indicates that "80 percent of executives believe fusing the 4Cs would ensure that students are better prepared to enter the workforce. According to these managers, proficiency in reading, writing, and arithmetic is not sufficient if employees are unable to think critically, solve problems, collaborate, or communicate effectively." To another study carried out by the American Management Association, the AMA 2010 Critical Skills Survey, the "4Cs" will become even more important to organizations in the future. Three out of four (75.7 percent) executives who responded to the AMA survey said they believe these skills and competencies will become more important to their organizations in the next three to five years, particularly as the economy improves and organizations look to grow in a global marketplace (2019).

According to *Educational Leadership* (as cited in Oliver, 2016), "A growing number of business leaders, politicians, and educators are united around the idea that students need '21st century skills' to be successful today." The demand being placed on teachers is to find ways to incorporate these identified skills in their lessons so that students have an adequate amount of time to practice and master these skills in the course of their daily routines.

As what the Partnership for 21st Century (2009) advocates, learning and innovation skills are increasingly being recognized as those that separate students who are prepared for a more and more complex life and work environments in the 21st century, and those who are not. A focus on creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration is needed to prepare students for the future. In our lessons, we can plan a variety of activities to integrate them into teaching-learning process and foster these skills of students with the expectation of growth in each skill in the following way:

-Communication and collaboration skills enables students to interact competently and respectfully with others especially across cultural, in diverse and multinational workplaces and communities in our global and digital era.

-Creative thinking skill enables students to think unconventionally, question the herd, imagine new scenarios and produce astonishing work since many of the fastest-growing jobs and emerging industries rely on workers' creative capacity.

-Critical thinking and problem solving skills enables students to judge the information that comes their way every day - on the Web, in the media, in homes, workplaces, etc. It empowers our students to assess the accuracy and value of information, analyze and evaluate information, make reasoned decisions and take purposeful action. Businesses expect employees at all levels to identify problems, think through solutions and alternatives, and explore new options if their approaches don't pan out.

In order to equip our students with 4C skills for the future, these skills need to be integrated into classrooms, schools, and districts around the country to produce citizens and employees adequately prepared for the 21st century.

2. 4C Skills and 4 Foreign Language Skills

It has been focused in recent research that it is very important to develop English speakers as fully competent language users, critical thinkers, and constructive social change agents have been focused on in recent research Sun (2016). Thus, the goals of ELT have changed from focusing solely on developing language skills and mimicking native English speakers to fostering a sense of social responsibility in students. Similarly, 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 globe. As a result, argues Eaton, there is a case for a reconceptualized field that is more learner centered, collaborative and technologically driven. As part of that reconceptualization of the EFL classroom, teachers can resort to new and innovating frameworks and approaches.

At this point, Fandiño (2013) suggests that EFL 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 also to understand complex perspectives, make judgments and decisions, and work creatively with others. As a result, teachers need to analyze critically what the 21st century movement offers in order to enrich their pedagogical processes and instructional practices. Davila (2016) asserts that by applying the 4Cs into EFL classes, we can turn a typical grammar lesson into something magical where teachers have an active role as facilitator and students become inspired, self-guided learners-who still manage to work inside of the

confines of the curriculum. 21st century skills and using them in the classroom, Davila adds, is not really about teaching at all. These skills, and truly the skills that will spell success for our learners in the future, are going to be how capable they are as independent and curious individuals.

In order to achieve our goals, we can plan a series of activities, organize lessons and develop materials to focus on these skills. Halvorsen (2018) states that all four language skills can easily be activated when students are asked to research a topic discuss or debate that topic with peers, and write about what they find and these activities don't require high levels of English proficiency. Students even at lower-intermediate levels can conduct basic research and have meaningful discussions with peers about real issues. They can make short films, interviews, compare statistical data, act in plays, prepare presentations, join debates, and try to find solutions to certain problems which will promote their communicative, creative, critical thinking and collaboration skills by working in groups. In the EFL classes, lessons can be built up on cross-curricular basis and may have a multiple dimension as to aim at developing 4C skills. In this respect, as language teachers, we need to explicitly teach our students how to:

- communicate effectively in real-life situations, both verbally and in writing to understand the role of effective communication as global citizens;
- cooperate with others and appreciate teamwork;
- be creative and innovative to find out different ways to tackle problems, and not be afraid of taking risk;
- be critical thinkers and problem solvers to sort out the overload of information available at their fingertips.

In this respect, the question how can these skills be incorporated into the EFL classroom needs to be addressed. The National Education Association (2015) suggests that if the language teachers put forward some guiding questions for themselves while putting objectives and planning their activities, they can integrate 4Cs into their lessons in a more effective way. The following parts will focus on each skill and put some suggestions for EFL teachers.

2.1 Communication Skill

As one of the main goals in learning a foreign language is being able to communicate in that language, EFL classes are perfect environments for boosting communication skills of students. Trilling & Fadel (as cited in Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010) argue that today's student should be able to articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts; listen effectively; use communication for a variety of purposes in diverse environments. Hereby, we can simply assert that communication skill does not involve solely knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. It also involves the ability to express oneself clearly and appropriately depending on situation, interlocutors, topic, time and place. Wickramasinghe and Perera (as cited in Al-Mahrooqi, 2012) state that communication skills are more important than subjects studied during degree programs for many employers. In many of professional fields, handling complex information and communicating it effectively is a major requirement. To link up with the 21st century skills, teachers can arrange settings to foster the communication skills in an EFL class by answering to the questions of:

-How to emphasize communication skills in general; to enhance oral and written communication skills in particular in our classroom; to encourage students to give oral presentations to varied community audiences and how can students be encouraged to use technology and new media to communicate innovatively and effectively?

In our era, communication occurs not only by speaking in a group of people around you, but also interacting with people from all around the world via ICT technology. Ananiadou and Claro (2009) indicate that ICT applications strengthen and increase the possibilities of communication and reinforce the development of skills of coordination and collaboration between peers. For this reason, young people need to have the ability to communicate, exchange, criticise, and present information and ideas, including the use of ICT applications to participate in and make positive contributions to the digital culture. Then, in addition to assigning them to search for current issues and prepare an oral presentation using posters, slides and discuss it with their friends in the classroom, we can promote our students' communication skills by providing them with authentic/real-life situations to talk with their peers and also make them use of contemporary technological tools such as social media, blogs, web 2.0, e-mail groups, Google classes, etc. Thus, they will be able to communicate with students from other societies, which is a demand for the 21st century learning. Teachers also can make use of the opportunities such as e-Twinning, sister school, student exchange programs which enable students get in touch and interact with their peers world widely. Numerous activities can be created for

developing communication skills in this digital age but it can be obviously revealed that all possible alternatives at the same time foster the four main language skills.

2.2 Collaboration Skill

Applied Educational Systems (2019) defines collaboration as the practice of working together to achieve a common goal. Collaboration is important because students will probably work with other people for the rest of their lives. Practicing collaboration helps students understand how to address a problem, pitch solutions, and decide the best course of action. It is also helpful for them to learn that other people don't always have the same ideas that they do. Language teachers can shape their teaching plan by addressing the following question in order to boost collaboration skills of their students:

-How can we create a learning environment that emphasizes collaboration skills and provide students opportunities to work in diverse teams?

In the foreign language classes, we often ask our students to work together in groups on a task. Lai (2011) points out that collaboration involves participants working together on the same task, rather than in parallel on separate portions of the task and it can have powerful effects on student learning, particularly for low-achieving students. However, maintains Lai, it is of crucial importance how we structure the collaborative work among our students provide explicit instruction that encourages development of skills such as coordination, communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, problemsolving, and negotiation. When structured in a compounded way, collaborative activities improve students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills at several levels. Palmer (2015) states that collaboration should go beyond sharing documents via email or creating PowerPoint presentations; creating digital resources, presentations, and projects together with other students will make classroom activities resemble the real world. Furthermore, writing a short story, completing a half story, making short films on a given topic, drawing conclusions from a reading material can be good ways to promote collaboration skills in a language class. However, Roberts (2016) emphasizes that it is very important to ask them to analyze how well they have worked together or what they could do to improve their collaboration. Asking one member of the group to observe and take notes on, for example, how many contributions each group

member made or who took a leadership role, and then discussing the notes as a group, can help to make this 21st Century skill more visible.

2.3 Creativity Skill

The Oxford University Press ELT (2013) defines creative activities as tools which allow students to express what they have learned in a new way. This synthesizing and personalizing of knowledge consolidates learning, and creates an experience that remains with students long after the class is over. Maley and Bolitho (2015) states that when the right conditions are given, everyone is capable of being creative, especially in language as language enables us to create new associations, playful combinations, and new meanings. Furthermore, these options can be explored and enjoyed in the English classroom, even at elementary level. In this context, the question is:

-How can we incorporate more creativity and innovation into our lesson plans and encourage students to be more creative and innovative?

Boden (as cited in Tin, 2013) proposes three types of creative thinking to produce new ideas. They are, combinational thinking to produce new ideas by associating old ideas in unfamiliar yet intelligible and valuable ways; exploratory thinking: to explore all possibilities inherent in a current conceptual space using existing rules; and transformational thinking which alters one or more rules of the current conceptual space. Applying this view of creativity to language, states Tin (2013), language creativity can be defined as the playful use of language to construct new and surprising meaning.

On the other hand, Center for Curriulum Redesign (2015) states that teaching for creativity is complementary with teaching for content knowledge. Open-ended, problem-based learning is more likely to encourage students to think creatively than paper and pencil exercises in which there is only one right answer but teachers should set helpful boundaries within which to innovate, according to the learning outcome they hope to accomplish.

Read (2015) remarks that when we integrate creative thinking in English lessons, students develop relevant cognitive skills such as observing, questioning, comparing, contrasting, imagining and hypothesising, that they need in all areas of

the curriculum as well as metacognitive skills such as ability to evaluate and reflect critically on their own performance and learning outcomes.

Our activities to foster creativity may vary from variation to original creation in accordance with the level of the students. Activities like brainstorming, group projects, rewriting, writing an essay, poem, ending a film/story in another way, drawing after listening by using imagination, using web 2.0 tools for creating new products and game-like activities can be suggested and enriched for promoting creativity skills of the students keeping in mind that language learning tasks should promote a creative desire and the need to say something new is as important as the need to communicate known and given meaning (Tin, 2013).

2.3 Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills

Kivunja (2015) defines critical thinking skill as an individual's ability to use a number of his or her general cognitive processing skills which fall into high-order thinking levels of analyzing, evaluating and constructing new ideas or creating and which enables students to think deeply to solve unfamiliar problems in different ways. In another term, critical thinking is a process that challenges an individual to use reflective, reasonable, rational thinking to gather, interpret and evaluate information in order to derive a judgment (University of Sydney, 2014). In this context, in a foreign language teaching setting, a teacher can plan activities through the following question to improve students' critical thinking and problem solving skills:

-How can we model critical thinking/ problem solving for our students and what kind of learning environment is needed to be set for emphasizing problem solving skills and encouraging students to be better critical thinkers in a more intentional and purposeful way in our classroom?

According to Herrmann (2015) the skills of critical thinking and problem solving include using knowledge, facts and data to solve problems. When applying critical thinking and problem solving, students must be able to make appropriate decisions and judgments using what they have learned or read, use inductive and deductive reasoning as appropriate to the situation, and analyze complex systems and determine how parts of a whole interact with each other.

Klynhout (2018) suggests that to promote critical thinking in our lesson, we can avoid display questions with only one right answer or that can be answered with a simple *Yes* or *No*. Instead, we can ask *How do you know...*, *What tells you...*, *Why...?* These questions allow students to demonstrate their understanding, rather than simply supply a one-word answer that can be found in a dialogue or text. Asking such questions can promote higher order thinking skills of analysis and interpretation as opposed to simple recall and reporting. Similarly, reading and writing skills can perfectly match for creating an atmosphere for enhancing the critical thinking and problem solving skills when they are supported with speaking activities before and after. Enriching our teaching with activities such as debates, group projects and book, poster, add criticism in addition to giving real-life problems to think about for solutions in groups can be suggested to promote critical thinking and problem solving skills. These activities also contribute the four language skills in an integrated way while improving their critical thinking skills: students who prepare for a debate, for example, will make research, read text, elicit true information, take notes, listen to other side carefully and defend their ideas to convince the audience.

3. Conclusion

If students leave school being unaware of their skills and unaware of the competences that our century looks for, they will be underprepared for the challenges of society and the workforce. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills presents the 4Cs of communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking skills as the main skills of learning and innovation in the 21st century. As they are foundational essentials for success in college, university, career, and life outside educational institutions, these skills are supposed to be focused essentially to prepare students for the future.

Teaching critical thinking and problem solving effectively in the classroom is vital for students because today's citizens must be active critical thinkers if they are to compare evidence, evaluate competing claims, and make sensible decisions. Communication skills are closely related to collaboration skills, such as working effectively with diverse teams, making necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal, and assuming shared responsibility for collaborative work. Collaboration is necessary for students and employees, due to globalization and the rise of technology. As a result of students working collaboratively, the group can generate more knowledge, making collaboration a key ingredient to student success in today's global society. Besides, innovation springs not from individuals thinking and working alone, but through cooperation and collaboration with others to draw on existing knowledge to create new knowledge.

If we need to improve these 4Cs of our students in accordance with the changes in demands for the global life, EFL classes are perfect places to improve the 4C skills integratedly with four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. All four learning and innovation skills can be fitted into language teaching-learning process with an emphasis to enhance and promote these life skills of our students. As teachers, we can foster these skills of the students by creating opportunities and facilities and finding creative ways to discover themselves deeper and closer to make correct choices for a more successful future life in terms of education and workforce to catch up with the 21st century.

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