



21ST Century Learning Skills in the Classroom & Beyond

Dr. Anindita Dutta

Department of English

The Neotia University

Abstract: The overall aim of this article is to discuss the importance of 21st Century skills for learners in every field of study and how best to prepare them to cope with the challenges of a fast-evolving future. In the 21st century, the world is fast changing with technology. Every discipline of knowledge and skills are being automated, digitised and outsourced. Educational Institutions, governments and businesses across the world are working together to introduce the skills that students will need to succeed in the 21st century. This article highlights how learning skills that are specific to the 21st century could be effectively taught in the English Language classroom to bring about an effective transition of learners from students to professionals. Modern workplaces are now in high demand for employees who can solve complex problems, perform extraordinary communications, and have the required social and professional skills. The skills of the 21st century include knowledge skills, digital skills, life skills and career skills, that are critically important for present-day learners to thrive and succeed in today's world.

Keywords - 21st century skills, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, ICT skills, life skills

I. INTRODUCTION

It is becoming increasingly important for learners to acquire the 21st-century learning skills to be ready for an ever-changing global economy. Learning in the 21st-century is a fundamental shift from the traditional modes of education that learners have experienced so far to a more challenging one. The challenge comes through the new and blended modes of teaching that will help learners acquire the skills of the 21st century and prepare for an ever evolving future. In 21st-century learning, learners need to be actively engaged in the learning process and explore opportunities to apply their learning to real-world situations.

II. 21ST CENTURY LEARNING SKILL

The skills of the 21st century refer to knowledge, life skills, digital skills, career skills, that are vital for our students to succeed in today's world, particularly as they move from school to college to employment and adult life.

2.1 Why is 21st-century learning so important?

It helps learners build up skills they need for the real world.

Employers in the 21st century, look for employees who are knowledgeable, adaptable, can think critically and work collaboratively. 21st-century learning helps learners to grow these necessary skills.

It prepares learners to face the globalized world.

As the world is turning into a global village, learners need to have the skills to communicate and work with people across different cultures. The skills of the 21st-century help students develop a global perspective to be successful in an inter-connected world.

It helps learners learn how to learn.

In today's fast-paced global scenario where information is constantly transforming, students need to be quick learners, learn new knowledge and implement them effectively. 21st-century learning helps learners to grow the metacognitive skills they would require to be lifelong learners.

It helps learners develop an interest for learning.

The 21st-century learning skills provide hands-on, exposure to learning that is interactive, and engaging. This helps learners develop a passion for learning that they will carry with them all through their lives.

It is more relevant to the lives of learners.

The 21st-century learning skills are relevant to students' lives and the world they live in. It takes a learner much beyond rote learning and helps him develop the skills required to be successful in his personal and professional life.

III. Challenges of 21st century learning skills

A fast-learning pace

A complex world that is constantly evolving

Students need to apply learning to real-world situations

Greater emphasis on collaborative work

Technological changes and advancement every day

Learning more than acquisition of knowledge – it is about developing skills, values and attitudes

This century, will require students to develop a new set of skills to make them adapt to a future that would be constantly evolving. These new set of skills are referred to as 21st century skills. As we know, that in the past, only a handful of people needed to possess skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, but in the 21st century, every individual needs to possess these skills in order to survive. The reason for the difference between the skills of the past century and those of the 21st century is the vast progress in the field of information and communication technologies. The technological changes that have come in are brisk, swift and remarkable and uniquely transforming life.

IV. Categories

These 21st century skills are also known as survival skills. They are listed as: critical thinking and problem-solving skills; collaboration, communication and leadership skills; digital skills and creativity and imagination skills. Categorising them makes it easier to understand these skills. Based on the feedback of many researchers, the skills are categorised into four broad areas: ways of thinking (that includes creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making); ways of working (that includes communication and collaboration); Digital Literacy or Information and Communications technology [ICT]; and skills for surviving in this world (citizenship, life, career, and personal and social responsibility). Irrespective of how these skills are categorised, all these skills are indispensable for surviving in the complex world we live in.

Each 21st Century Learning skill can be divided into three categories:

Learning skills***Literacy skills******Life skills*****4.1 Learning skills (the four C's) -What are the 4 C's?**

The 4C's of 21st Century are important learning skills that include Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Collaboration Skills. These skills set are vital and considered important for the future workplace. In fact, the 4 Cs are not only a part of an educational framework, they are actually real-life skills that are measurable, definable, and teachable.

Creativity

Creativity is a skill that empowers students to find choices, conceptualize thoughts, produce solutions, reconsider existing standards, and create new information. However, creativity is more than “thinking outside the box.” Creativity in the 21st century is mostly a group process that requires being open to new and varied ideas, being able to give useful feedback, understanding the limits of new ideas and the value of old ideas, and being able to use failure as an opportunity. Creativity lies at the centre of personalised learning.

Critical thinking

Mastering critical thinking skills enable students to understand problems, ask questions, sort through information, consider multiple viewpoints, analyse arguments and approach unknown problems. Although many of these skills have been taught in traditional classrooms over the years, the goal is to use them across the curriculum. In a classroom, learners could be encouraged to read articles from newspapers that come up with a wide range of people’s opinions. Learners could be motivated to ask question on what they read. What are the opinions they possess? Do they support a particular opinion? If so, why? Activities as these could grow their critical thinking skills.

Communication

Communication Skill is the ability that permits learners to read, listen, understand, talk, write, convince, negotiate, contend, and ace a huge assortment of media. Asking open-ended questions, encouraging opportunities for effective listening and speaking, critical thinking and reflective learning, modelling situations for effective conversational skills are a few ways to teach students communication skills.

Collaboration

In this fast-changing world, the importance of collaboration can never be understated. Collaboration refers to group work and team work that brings success. By collaboration, we mean skills that enable individuals to collectively establish objectives, assign resources, satisfy group roles, manage time, make collective decisions, negotiate, and resolve conflicts and in the process build strong and efficient teams that work unitedly towards a common goal. A couple of ways to implement collaborative learning in the English language classroom is to integrate games into studies, create opportunities for classroom conversation and narrate stories, encourage brainstorming and intensify students’ voices. A jigsaw style activity in the classroom could be a way of sharing information with learners, so that they can collaborate to piece together that information. Working on group projects could be equally helpful. Learning to work in unison with other people is an important life skill that will take learners a long way. All professions require their employees to collaborate and work in teams. Therefore, the more opportunities our students get to collaborate with one another, the better for them.

4.2 Literacy skills (IMT) or ICT Skills

In addition to the 4C’s that are significant, there are other skill categories that are integral to the 21st century. This important skill is called ICT Skills or Information & Communication Technology Skills also known as IMT skills. IMT includes information literacy, media literacy and technology literacy. IMT is related to students reading and understanding information, that are available online. Information Literacy refers to acquiring the skills of understanding the information students read on the web, comprehending online materials, whether it is an academic paper, a newspaper article or a blog. Information Literacy is a skill that could help learners understand facts, data and information available on the web. Media literacy refers to identifying the sources of information and the authenticity and trustworthiness of the sources. Media literacy Skill is the ability to identify relevant information received from credible sources. Technology literacy is a skill that would help students understand the equipment that distributes data on the web and the technological innovations and tests performed. Students themselves are digital natives i.e., they are proficient in using these technologies without training. Nevertheless, when it comes to deeply engaging with technology, they are digital immigrants. This is because we cannot take it for granted that the new generation is a always a proficient and conscious user of technology. The new tools and platforms offered by new technologies pose many challenges to them. It would be futile if students have access to digital platform but are not able to understand the information available. They not only need to understand the available data but analyse it fruitfully. Technology not only enhances learners’ confidence level but keeps them engaged, and helps them to achieve higher levels of excellence. As teachers, our aim is to provide resources and guide them and students will learn how to make the best use of those resources.

4.3 Life skills (FLIPS)

The next category of 21st century skills is 'Life Skills'. Life skills are skills that students would require in their personal and professional lives. Flexibility, leadership, productivity and social skills are important life skills that need to be learned.

.V. METHODOLOGY TO SUPPORT 21ST CENTURY LEARNING SKILLS

There are several methods teachers can adapt for teaching 21st-century Skills to students. Teachers can create learning experiences that are relevant to the real world. This means incorporating problems and situations in teaching, that students are likely to encounter in their future personal and professional lives.

Teachers can make use of technology to create engaging and interactive learning experiences for learners, and provide them access to varied information and resources. Project-based learning can boost up the learning process.

Teachers can create a 21st-century learning model for students. This would include flexible teaching modes and use of technology and application to real-world scenarios to justify their points. This model can show students that learning the 21st century skills can be relevant, engaging, and fun.

5.1 Classroom implementation

Students need to combine all the skills discussed above for a well-rounded future development of their personal lives and their professional lives. The challenge lies in implementing the 21st century skills in the teaching and learning process within the classroom and beyond it. The tasks and activities in the classroom must have relevance to the future needs of the learners. The ultimate goal is to prepare students to meet the requirements of a fast-changing workplace. We ought to give our learners work that is challenging and requires a thought process, the kind of work, that will soak their attention and turn on their innovative minds. Allowing students to take control of their learning is one effective strategy for incorporating the 4 C's. Teachers in this setting are facilitators, so their responsibilities are limited to guiding students and encouraging them to explore on their own. Since they need to understand explain their learning in some way, students get practice in critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills. Students become empowered and, develop a kind of autonomy that can assist them in becoming independent learners now and in the future.

5.2 Create an inquiry-based classroom environment

In an inquiry-based classroom, the teacher can create a learning environment where students are encouraged to ask questions and carry out research on challenging issues. They could be given ample opportunities to explore the content and solve problems on their own. One of the main goals of skills for the 21st century is to help students develop their ability to think critically.

5.3 Encourage creativity

The creativity of students could boost up if they are given opportunities to apply what they have learned in new and unfamiliar settings. Fortunately, teachers can encourage their students' creativity in a variety of ways, from recording podcasts to writing blogs to encouraging them to use new technologies. Creative students can manifest their creativity in unique and innovative ways, a skill that can be utilized throughout their lives.

VI.CONCLUSION

In this article, I have tried to outline the key 21st Century skills that learners need to acquire to cope with the demands of an unpredictable future life and work. This would be possible if teachers to bring about positive changes in classroom teaching, use authentic content to keep learners engaged with real life challenges, and as facilitators, encourage inter-disciplinary skills of the 21st century such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration and digital literacy in learners.

REFERENCES

Care, E., Scoular, C., & Griffin, P. (2016). Assessment of collaborative problem solving in education environments. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 29, 250-264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08957347.2016.1209204>.

Flavell, J. H. (1987). Speculations about the nature and development of metacognition. In F. Weinert & U. R. Kluwe (Eds.), *Metacognition, motivation, and understanding* (pp. 21–29). Hillsdale: Erlbaum.

Krippendorff, K. H. (2012). Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc..

Partnership for 21st Century Learning. (2016). Framework for 21st century learning. Retrieved from www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework.

