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21ˢᵗ Century Skills and Learning Environments: ELT Students' Perceptions

Feyza Nur Ekizer* and Seyda Sarı Yıldırım

English Language Teaching Department, Necmettin Erbakan University, Turkey.

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of English Language Teaching (ELT) students regarding 21st century skills and learning environments. A qualitative content analysis method was used, which involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 62 ELT students. The findings of the study revealed that ELT students perceive critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and effective communication as essential 21st century skills. They also believe that these skills can be developed through engaging and dynamic learning environments that incorporate technology, project-based learning, and real-world applications. The results of this study have important implications for ELT educators and curriculum developers, as they suggest the need to create learning environments that are engaging, dynamic, and incorporate technology, project-based learning, and real-world applications. The findings also highlight the importance of preparing ELT students for success in the 21st century by developing 21st century skills. This study provides valuable insights into ELT students' perceptions of 21st century skills and learning environments, which can inform the design of ELT curricula and the development of teaching practices.

Keywords: 21ˢᵗ century skills, learning environments, 4c skills, English language teaching, English Language Learning, English as a Foreign Language

INTRODUCTION

A globally connected and globalized world exists in the 21st century. In this increasingly interconnected world, the power of online technology has altered how individuals live their lives in terms of social contact, employment, commerce, religion, and other spheres. The COVID-19 epidemic, which has compelled people to live virtually online while under lockdown, makes clear the potential of such technology. It affects almost every nation on earth. Education, in particular, is one sector that emphasizes the necessity of comprehending 21st century abilities. Several scholars have focused on education to better understand the needs, developments, and roles of both students and instructors in the 21st century (Rahmadani et al., 2019). The internet and computer technology have come to the fore to represent the 21st century. Every element of human life, including business, health, education, recreation, and social contact, has been impacted by the rapid progress in these fields. Seng

*Corresponding author. E-mail: fyznur@hotmail.com.

et al. (2020) state that each of us must reevaluate the way we work, conduct business, teach, learn, and communicate with one another in order to meet the requirements of the 21st century. According to Kaufman (2013), the competencies that make up 21st century skills include critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, communicative skills, information and media literacy skills, contextual learning skills, and an ever-vital cooperation skill set. Instructors should also integrate these qualities into their core content areas to inspire students to appreciate learning. According to Fandino (2013), education of important courses like English, Science, and Mathematics must explicitly incorporate learning methodologies, digital competencies, and career abilities. Moreover, students in EFL classes should be exposed to a variety of activities and procedures with an emphasis on developing their creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, self-direction, and cross-cultural competence.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (Guo and Woulfin, 2016; Voogt and Roblin, 2010; Irgatoğlu et al., 2022) is a non-profit organization that places a strong emphasis on the explicit integration of learning and innovation skills, information, media, and digital literacy skills, and life and job skills. It is assumed that students who graduate from systems of education that incorporate these 21st Century Learning Skills (CLS) would be well-rounded people who have the necessary knowledge and attributes to succeed in any environment. Numerous examples of 21st century abilities have been identified (Geisinger, 2016). Skills such as cooperation, communication, and critical thinking are essential for the 21st century (Gkemisi et al., 2016). Communication, and especially effective communication, is an age-old requirement for humanity, as is the ability to think critically and solve problems (Berger, 2016). Such skills form the basis for cooperativity and other 21st century abilities, as they are built on social interaction (Gkemisi et al., 2016; Bulus et al., 2017; Irgatoğlu, 2021). One of the essential abilities for today's corporate and educational environments is cooperation. Due to increasing workloads, people are expected to work in groups or teams (Lewin and McNicol, 2015; Marbach-Ad et al., 2019). Cooperation is essential for working towards shared goals and adhering to the rules of cooperation such as respect, encouragement, and assistance (Trilling and Fadel, 2009). Moreover, it is required for the disclosure of other abilities (Neubert et al., 2015). Algorithmic thinking is another crucial skill for today's corporate and educational settings. It involves planning the actions or course of action needed to achieve the desired objectives (Doleck et al., 2017; Irgatoglu and Pakkan, 2020). Digital literacy is also important in today's digital world (Kocak et al., 2021). It consists of technological and mental competencies (Lewin and McNicol, 2015). It is a fundamental ability for resolving technological, cognitive, social, and communicational issues, especially in the digital age (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004).

Kocak et al. (2021) remind us that the 21st century has brought about major changes in people's lives in numerous areas, including communication, learning, and the economy and production. The technological platforms and tools recently developed have focused on the lives of individuals, and this, together with changes in all aspects of society, has created social, economic, and academic lives that are far more demanding and complex than before. As such, the demands of the 21st century require individuals to develop new abilities, some of which are referred to as 21st century skills, while others are timeless. Therefore, rather than continuing with a content-based approach, schools need to concentrate on developing these skills in their students, so that they are adequately prepared to meet the obligations placed upon them after graduation. This is particularly pertinent in developing nations such as Turkey, where there is still much debate about the extent to which education can address 21st century skills.

The 21st century talents, according to Munteanu (2016), are a collection of competencies that students must master to survive in the information society. Three categories of skills are suggested by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) (2015), including life and career skills, learning and innovation skills, and information, media, and technology skills. While information, media, and technology skills include information literacy, media literacy, and ICT literacy, life and career skills encompass flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility. Learning and innovation skills cover the 4Cs, or Creativity and innovation, Critical thinking and problem solving, Communication, and Collaboration, according to Partnership for the 21st Century (2015). Furthermore, according to P21 (2015), the first C (creativity and innovation) includes abilities to think creatively, collaborate creatively with others, and put inventions into practise. The second skill is critical thinking and problem solving, which involves being able to apply systems of thought, reason, form judgments and decisions, and resolve issues. The final two Cs, communication and collaboration, allude to the ability to cooperate with others and communicate clearly. Learning and innovation abilities are increasingly being recognized as those that distinguish students who are prepared for a larger and more complicated life and work situations in the 21st century from those who are not, as advocated by the Partnership for the 21st Century (2009). To prepare pupils for the future, a focus on creativity, critical thinking, communication, and teamwork is essential. To develop citizens and employees that are appropriately equipped for the 21st century, these skills need to be integrated into classrooms, schools, and districts across the nation.

To get back to the issue at hand, English foreign language (EFL) students tend to have varied backgrounds, a multiplicity of achievement levels, and

diverse learning styles, which impact their ability to learn and use the foreign language (Ananiadou and Claro, 2009). At the same time, these learners are not only 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 at university. Therefore, the EFL classroom needs to move away from traditional methods focused on language mastery and start incorporating new approaches aimed at integrating content, culture, technology, and lifelong skills (Taylor, 2009). It is clear that the EFL classroom of today differs from one from the mid-to late 20th century. The evolving and adaptable nature of literacy that covers topics as diverse as technology, multimedia, relationships, and culture must be accepted by English teachers and everyone related to teaching English. The English classroom must, therefore, be a setting that can address the plurality and integration of a growing number of diverse modes of meaning-making, where the textual is related to the visual, the aural, 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 21st century skills.

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. These skills go beyond mere technological literacy and include proficiency in critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and teamwork. Through the mastery of these skills, people gain the ability to access, synthesize, and communicate information; work collaboratively across differences to solve complex problems; and create new knowledge through the innovative use of multiple technologies, thus allowing them to thrive in the new environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Skills and 4 foreign language skills

Recent studies have emphasized how crucial it is to train English speakers to become fully competent language users, critical thinkers, and effective social change agents (Sun, 2016). As a result, instead of simply emphasizing language acquisition and imitating native English speakers, ELT now seeks to instill in pupils a sense of social responsibility. Similarly, Eaton (2010) argues that grammar, memory, and rote learning should no longer be the primary focus in EFL classrooms today. Instead, they should be seen as places where people can discover how to communicate with others from all over the world by using their language and cultural background. There is a case for a field that is more learner-centered, collaborative, and technologically driven, according to Eaton (2010). Teachers can take advantage of new and innovative frameworks and methods as part of this

reconceptualization of the EFL classroom. Now, according to Fandio (2013), EFL classrooms should be full of purposeful and intellectually stimulating activities, practices, and processes that enable students to not only articulate thoughts and ideas using oral, written, and nonverbal communication effectively, but also to understand complex perspectives, reach judgments and decisions, and collaborate creatively with others. Teachers must therefore critically evaluate what the 21st century movement has to offer in order to improve their pedagogical procedures and instructional methods. According to Davila (2016), by incorporating the 4Cs into EFL classes, a routine grammar lesson can be transformed into a magical experience in which teachers play a more active role as facilitators and students develop into motivated, self-directed learners while still adhering to the curriculum's guidelines. Erdogan (2019) asserts that utilizing 21st century abilities in the classroom has nothing to do with teaching at all. These abilities, which are the ones that will ensure our student's success in the future, will reflect how capable and inquisitive they are as individuals. A sequence of activities may be arranged, lessons/lectures may be scheduled, and materials may be prepared to focus on certain abilities in order to attain goals. Halverson (2018) suggests that when students are encouraged to investigate a topic, discuss or debate that topic with peers, and then write about what they find, all four language skills can be easily activated, and these activities don't require high levels of English ability. Lessons in EFL classes can be developed cross-curricular and may have multiple aspects to focus on 4C skill development. In this regard, it is important to consider how these skills might be taught in an EFL classroom. According to the National Education Association (2015), language teachers can more successfully incorporate the 4Cs into their lessons if they set some guiding questions for themselves as they create objectives and plan their activities. Each ability should be thoroughly covered in the sections that follow.

Communication skill

EFL programs are the ideal setting for improving students' communication skills, as one of the primary objectives of learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate in that language effectively. According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), students should be able to communicate successfully in a range of settings, using oral, written, and nonverbal methods, as well as being able to listen attentively and use communication for various purposes. It is important to note that effective communication entails more than just grammatical and lexical abilities; it includes the capacity to communicate appropriately based on the context, speakers, subject, audience, and time and location. Al-Mahrooqi (2012) states that, for many employers, communication skills are

more critical than the subjects covered in degree programs, as effectively conveying and managing complex information is a key skill in many professional fields. With the use of ICT technology, individuals are able to interact with people from all around the world, as well as those in their immediate environment. Ananiadou and Claro (2009) explain that ICT applications encourage the growth of coordination and peer collaboration skills, as well as reinforcing and widening communication opportunities. To engage in and contribute positively to the digital culture, young people must be able to communicate, exchange, critique, and present information and ideas. This includes using ICT applications. To foster our students' communication skills, we can give them authentic/real-life opportunities to interact with their peers and require them to use cutting-edge technological tools like social media, blogs, web 2.0, e-mail groups, Google classes, etc. As a result, they will be able to converse with students from different societies, which is essential for studying in the 21st century. We can also take advantage of opportunities such as e-Twinning, sister schools, and student exchange programs to let kids connect and communicate with friends all around the world. In the current digital age, there are many activities that can be developed to improve communication abilities, but it is clear that all viable options simultaneously build the 4 primary language skills.

Collaboration skill

Collaboration is the act of working together with others to achieve a common goal, according to Applied Educational Systems (2019). Students will likely have to collaborate in some capacity for the rest of their lives, thus collaboration is an essential skill to master. Collaboration exercises help students learn how to analyze an issue, present solutions, and determine the best course of action. They learn the value of understanding that not everyone has the same views as them. According to Lai (2011), collaboration requires participants to work together on the same task rather than each working on different parts of the assignment, and it can have positive impacts on student learning, particularly for those who have difficulty performing academically. However, Lai states that it is essential to structure collaborative tasks in a way that explicitly encourages the development of skills such as coordination, communication, dispute resolution, decision-making, problem solving, and negotiation. Collaborative exercises can also improve students' speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills when used in a comprehensive approach. According to Palmer (2015), cooperation should extend beyond simply sending documents via email or making PowerPoint presentations; working together to create digital resources, presentations, and projects will make classroom activities more like real-world experiences. Moreover, producing short videos on

a particular subject, creating short stories, finishing half-stories, and deriving conclusions from reading material can all be effective strategies to foster cooperation skills in a language class. Nonetheless, Roberts (2016) underlines that it is crucial to request that students evaluate how successfully they have collaborated or offer suggestions for how to do so. This 21st Century skill can be made more apparent by asking one group member to watch and record information, such as how many contributions each group member made or who assumed a leadership role, and then have a group discussion about the notes.

Creativity skill

Creative activities are instruments that enable students to convey what they have learned in fresh ways, according to the Oxford University Press ELT (2013). This information synthesis and personalization strengthens learning and provides an experience that students remember long after the lesson has ended. Everyone can be creative under the right circumstances, according to Maley and Bolitho (2015), especially when it comes to language because it allows us to construct new associations, outrageous concoctions, and original interpretations. Moreover, even at the primary level, these alternatives can be explored and enjoyed in the English classroom. Teaching creativity and topic comprehension go hand in hand, according to the Center for Curriculum Redesign (2015). Instead of paper and pencil exercises with a single correct response, open-ended, problem-based learning is more likely to inspire students to think creatively. However, teachers should set up helpful boundaries for students to be innovative within, in line with the learning outcome they hope to achieve. According to Read (2015), when we integrate creative thinking in English lessons, students develop relevant cognitive skills that are necessary for all subject areas of the curriculum, as well as metacognitive skills such as the ability to assess and critically think about their own performance and learning outcomes.

Critical thinking and problem solving skills

According to Kivunja (2015), the ability to employ one's general cognitive processing skills for higher-order thinking tasks such as analyzing, assessing, and inventing new ideas or products allows people to engage in deep thought and find novel solutions to unfamiliar situations. Another definition of critical thinking is a process that requires someone to utilize introspective, logical, and rational thinking in order to gather, analyze, and evaluate data, and use that information to reach an informed conclusion (University of Sydney, 2014). Problem-solving is another key element of critical thinking, requiring students to use the knowledge, facts, and data they have

acquired to reach a solution (Herrmann, 2015). This requires them to make appropriate decisions and judgments, use inductive and deductive reasoning as necessary, and analyze complex systems to determine how different components interact with one another.

METHOD

A qualitative data collection procedure was adopted to carry out the present study. Initially, at the beginning of the second academic term of the 2021-2022 education year, the necessary ethical approval was obtained from the institution aforementioned and consent forms were distributed to the students relevant. The study was totally on a voluntary basis. This study aimed to explore ELT students' perceptions of 21st century skills and learning environments. To achieve this aim, a qualitative content analysis method was used. Qualitative content analysis is a research method that involves the systematic analysis of textual data to identify patterns, themes, and meanings (Krippendorff, 2013). This method was chosen because it allowed for the in-depth exploration of ELT students' perceptions and experiences, providing a rich and nuanced understanding of the topic. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with 62 ELT first-class students studying at Necmettin Erbakan University. The study was implemented in the second semester of the 2021/2022 academic year. All participants gave their consent to participate and the study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical guidelines.

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Describe your ideal study environment or culture.
2. What characteristics did the best teacher you've ever had – or wished you'd had - exhibit?
3. Describe your preferred teaching style.
4. Describe the most effective roles that you believe a good teacher can play in his or her relationship with students.
5. What is the single most important factor that must exist in your study environment for you to succeed?
6. What is your preferred method of studying? Do you prefer studying by yourself or in a group? Given the option, how much time would you devote to each?
7. What are your top three to five teacher expectations?
8. Describe your most likely role on a team.
9. How do you process information in theage of technology?
10. What steps do you take when searching for information on the internet?

Population and sampling

This study was conducted with 62 first-year students from the English Language Teaching Department of Necmettin Erbakan University in Konya, Turkey. As this was a qualitative study, a semi-structured interview was used to gather data. Convenience sampling was used for the selection of participants, which entails selecting participants based on their relative ease of access (Wiederman, 1999). All participants were informed about the research, the interview questions, and the research process in detail.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ELT students. The interview questions were designed to elicit students'

perceptions of 21st century skills and learning environments. The interviews were conducted in person and lasted approximately 30 minutes each. A total of 62 ELT students participated in the study. The data collected from the interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The data were read and reread several times to gain a sense of the overall content and identify emergent themes. The data were then divided into segments and coded, with similar codes being grouped together and patterns and connections between the codes being explored. The coded data was organized into themes and relationships between themes were explored. Finally, the themes were reviewed and refined. The final themes were used to construct a narrative that captured the key findings of the study. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several steps were taken. First, the study was reviewed and approved by an ethics committee to ensure that the rights of the participants were protected. Second, the study was conducted by the lead author, who has extensive experience in qualitative research. Third, the study was reviewed by an independent expert in the field of ELT education, who provided feedback on the methodology and findings. Finally, the data was analyzed by two independent coders to ensure reliability and consistency in the coding process, and to verify the accuracy of the findings. In conclusion, the qualitative content analysis method used in this study provided a rich and nuanced understanding of ELT students' perceptions of 21st century skills and learning environments. Through an in-depth exploration of students' experiences and perspectives, and with steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the results give valuable insights into the topic.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 presents the findings on life skills that are among the 21st century skills. These findings, based on the factors required by students in their study environments, provide evidence of competencies related to the flexibility, productivity, and social skills sub-dimensions of students' life skills. As a consequence of analysing the students' statements, it was concluded that silence (f:14) was the most important aspect of their study environment. The students asserted that they could not conduct an efficient process if there was insufficient stillness in their study environment, citing silence as a prerequisite. The second most important factor that students required in their study environment was motivation (f:10). Noting that they could not conduct an effective study process without sufficient motivation, the students highlighted motivation as one of the most crucial components. Some students responded that their setting should provide sufficient resources (f:5) for efficient study. The scope of these resources ranges from online sources to printed documents, depending on the activity performed. Students also identified the presence of others working in the surroundings (f:3) as a factor. In contrast to the silent factor, the students claimed that in order to be motivated, they needed to be surrounded by individuals who had a positive impact on their work. Some students claimed that a good study environment required the presence of soothing music (f:3). The loneliness (f:2) factor, which is one of the necessary study environment components, plays a similar function

Figure 1. Factors that should be presented in a study environment.
Source: Author

as the quiet factor and symbolises a more rigid setting than the relevant factor. The students who voiced their ideas on this code indicated that they were required to operate alone in their study environments and that this circumstance was essential for them. The clear mind (f:2) aspect, which was one of the reasons identified by the students, referred to the students' circumstances rather than the location's conditions. Students who indicated that they must have a clear mind (f:2) in order to fully concentrate on their works stated that they would not be able to achieve sufficient efficiency if this were not the case. In addition, the students stated that their environment should be clean and neat (f:2), free of distractions (f:2) and pressure (f:2) and that factors such as adequate lighting in the environment (f:1), no phones in the environment (f:1), coffee in the environment (f:1), a large environment (f:1), and the presence of things they enjoy in the environment (f:1) are essential for them to work efficiently. When the factors that should be present in the study environment of the students are examined, it is determined that the students cannot carry out efficient work without certain conditions in general. This situation can be seen as a negative result in terms of life skills, which are among the 21st century skills. Especially in the sub-dimensions such as flexibility, productivity and social skills among these skills, individuals are expected to have developed social skills that can adapt to different environments, carry out efficient work even if there are

external factors and be productive. However, the fact that students need environments away from silence, loneliness, distractions, and pressure in order to carry out productive work is not in accordance with the definition of an individual characterized in 21st century skills. Although this situation is seen in students in general, it can be said that there are students who fit the definition of an individual in 21st century skills. Especially students who indicate that there may be different individuals in their environment can be evaluated in accordance with this definition in terms of being productive despite distractions and socializing. The following are some student remarks about the factors shown in Figure 1:

"I prefer quiet, relaxing space where I can focus and get work done." (PF18)

" I don't think environmental factors make much of a difference for me. The single most important factor is that I have to study with love." (PM21)

"I prefer to work quietly in my own room because I don't like to work in other places such as the library. My desk should be tidy so that I don't get distracted." (PF40)

"I would like to be in an environment that is as moral as possible and where everyone respects everyone. I want people like me, who are happy with the smallest things,
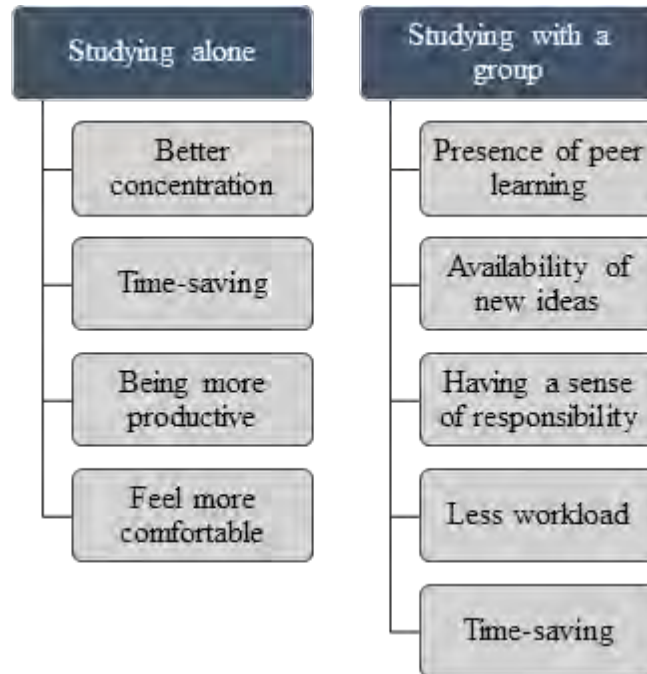
Figure 2. Study preferences of the students.
Source: Author

who will lead me to explore the world." (PF53)

"I have to be able to access everything in my working environment. So working at home is better for me. Also, the presence of music in the environment I work affects my productivity." (PF58)

"My most productive and happy studying environment consists of a big cup of coffee and my headphones. If I have coffee and headphones on a tidy table, that place becomes my most productive and happy place. If the environment is messy first, I clean it up and then I start working on the subject that I have to do." (PF37)

"The moment that I have a relaxed mind and pay full attention to my work is when I am alone in a room, I am familiar with, along with my personal tools. In an environment like this, I would be in my most productive and content form." (PF47)

"Another factor I pay attention to is that I cannot focus on whatever subject I am studying if there is someone else in the room who is busy with irrelevant work. I also get distracted easily if it is noon. In other words, the time of the day at which I am studying matters as well. Lastly, the place where I am studying should be large enough, so that I feel comfortable studying there." (PF48)
"The environment in which I am happy to work becomes one in which people do not enter into unnecessary competitions, where everyone helps each other and

ignores their flaws. In such conditions, you will not be nervous, and I can handle your job easily. And the happier I am, the more comfortable I work. And because I work comfortably, I become more productive and successful." (PF27)

"First and foremost, my work environment should be clean and neat. A messy and untidy environment makes me feel very uncomfortable and reduces my motivation, determination, and concentration to study." (PF54)
"I am happy when my study environment is silent. Also, it is so significant that my place I study has to be enough in terms of light. There is another significant thing that I need technology to be productive. If these all conditions are supplied me, then I can do my best." (PM59)

Figure 2 presents study preferences of the students. Out of the 62 students who participated in the study, 4 stated that they could study both alone and in a group as a working style and that it made no difference to them; 5 students preferred to study in a group; and 53 students generally preferred to study alone. When the statements of students who preferred to study alone were analysed, it revealed that the most often repeated reason was better concentration (f:27). The students responded that one of the most essential features of studying alone was the ability to concentrate better on the subject at hand, which was not possible when studying in groups.

Furthermore, the students noted that group work was hampered by group members' distracting talks and their

inability to comprehend the material. Another reason frequently cited by students who preferred to study alone was the time-saving feature of this style (f:13). They stated that this situation was not possible when working in a group, as they often lost a lot of time due to situations such as sharing work among group members, reaching common ideas, and bringing information together.

On the other hand, those who preferred to work alone reported that this allowed them to focus more easily and complete their work quickly without being exposed to any external factors. Some students mentioned the exchange of ideas, but emphasised that studying alone was more productive (f:9). These students reported feeling pressured when working with a group, and claimed that this negatively impacted their productivity and that they were insufficiently productive. Furthermore, they claimed that they did not encounter such a circumstance when studying alone and continued to work according to their own learning styles. Regarding group work, five codes were found to categorise the reasons why students who preferred group work did so, albeit less than those who preferred to study alone. Those who preferred to work with the group stated that they learned something from their friends in the group thanks to group dynamics and that this led to peer learning (f: 3). They also reported that while studying with a group, new ideas are generated (f: 2) and they are able to be more creative due to the exchange of ideas among group members. According to the students, studying with a group provides advantages such as having sense of responsibility (f:2), having less workload (f:1) thanks to task sharing and thus saving time (f:1)by carrying out a rapid process. The following are some student remarks about the roles shown in Figure 2:

"I normally like to study alone since it allows me to evaluate the subjects in which I believe I am failing. Besides, it is easier to focus on my studies when I am on my own. There is only me and my problems to solve and I only spend time for myself. On the other hand, when I am being a part of a team, there are so many things to be handled with and it takes much more time. For example, there is a subject I do not understand, and I want to solve it, it takes an hour; however, the more people, the more problems so the more problems the more time you need." (PF52)

"Obviously studying alone. Whenever I find myself studying with others, I cannot wait to show them something or talk about another thing which ends the studying process in about 20 minutes at most." (PM2)

"I prefer studying alone because I think I get the best when I work in that way. Working as a part of a team distracts me a lot, I can't concentrate, and I think it's a bit of a waste of time. In addition, when working as a part of a team, each individual has a unique idea, and this

causes great confusion." (PF9)

"I would prefer to work alone. I like to work individually because I can organize everything in my own way, and I am responsible for everything I do." (PF13)

"Although I am very good at teamwork, I still choose to study alone. I am much more comfortable, and I can choose my working style." (PF37)

"Studying alone is always freer and more comfortable. I can devote most of my day to studying alone." (PM21)

"In some scenarios, teamwork could be more effective owing to the different, unique ideas of others. On account of time and effort, the percentage of the time and effort that give while studying alone is so much more than the group work. I could easily say that if the time in the personal working is 24 hours, it is 12 hours in group work. So, we can conclude that the group work decreases the time frequently. And of course, the effort too." (PF48)

"I prefer studying as a part of team. For example, Tuesday I failed in my presentation alone, but on Thursday we did it as a group for Galiphoca and we succeeded. I trusted them and they trusted me. The thing is I'll give my all day for group studying." (PF30)

"I love them both and both of them are beneficial in different ways but recently I have realized that working with a group of friends can be better than studying alone because we can see different perspectives about the subject and while talking about it over and over again and we can make them permanent." (PF17)

"I used to work alone but nowadays I study with my friends, and I just found out that study as a team is more effective." (PF33)

Figure 3 depicts the distribution of the students' roles in a team. The content analysis results showed that the most repeated role by the students was the leader role (f:23). These students, who see themselves as having a sense of leadership and group management ability, claimed that they would take on this role even when not assigned to do so. The second most repeated role by the students was the participant role (f:15). These students, who see themselves as part of a team, stated that they are good at fulfilling the given tasks, but their character is not suitable for process management. Some students, on the other hand, claimed that, despite their unwillingness to lead, they excel at team planning and are at the forefront when it comes to planning (f:5). The fourth role that emerged in this regard was the technical support. The students, who volunteered to meet the technical needs (f:3) of the group, stated that this activity was essential to achieving the objective. In addition to these, some
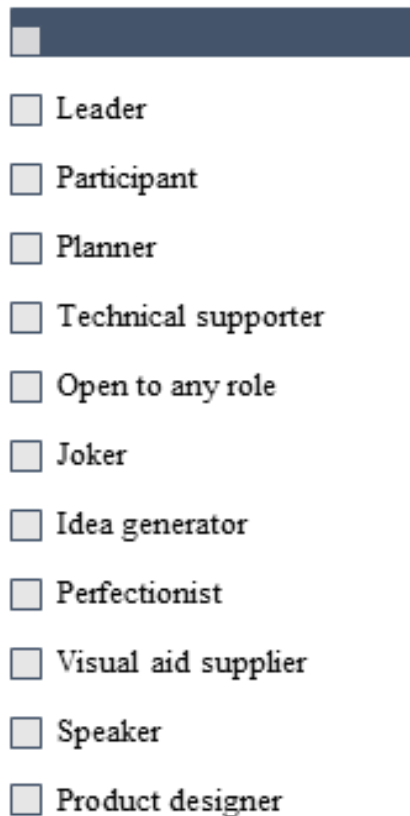
Figure 3. Students' roles in the team.
Source: Author

students indicated that they might fulfil roles such as joker (f:1), idea generator (f:1), perfectionist (f:1), visual aid supplier (f:1), speaker (f:1) and product designer (f:1) within the group. The following are some student remarks about the factors shown in Figure 3:

"I think I do not like to be a pawn. I generally prefer to be the queen or the king like in chess." (PM1)

"Because of my personality, I generally become the leader. I give the main ideas, methods etc. After each person got their jobs, I try to finish mine effectively and immediately and then I'll help and guide each teammate personally. Also, I would never enforce my thoughts on them; I take everyone's opinion and respect them even if I don't agree." (PF8)

"I used to be the leader of my team because I like talking and communicating with everyone in my team and ı can organize the stuff. I never give up and help and courage others to do more to do the process in the best way." (PF14)

"I want to be a leader but If I am not a leader, I do not mind. When I work with a team, I try to do my best and do

my responsibilities and duties in the best way. But, when I am a leader, I know all the steps done and will be done. All steps are controlled by me, so my mind is clear. I know what steps will be carried into practice or will not. Hence, I prefer being a leader." (PF32)

"My role would not be big or leadership focused but I would work hard as a regular member and the supporter of the team. I would try to understand the others' doings and their plans because I also want to keep up with them. After obtaining some information, I would probably take some of the tasks and finish them in time to make myself more comfortable." (PF57)

"When I work with a team, I and my team friends share all works equally and everyone does his or her assignments properly." (PF60)

"I am the one who reminds the others to send their voice recordings in time. So this shows that I am most likely the one that tries to keep everybody in check when I am doing a team assignment." (PF24)

"I'm probably not the one who's interested in the technological part of the assignment. I would rather be the one who makes a good planning by coming up with new ideas when drafting an assignment. And then I'll be the one guiding you through the process of preparing the assignment." (PF27)

"I am very flexible when it comes to roles so I do not have a specific role." (PM43)

"I can play on all roles in a team. I mean I could be joker for a team." (PM15)

"I prefer to make topic distribution and research. Because sometimes I find the resources that my friends found insufficient." (PF51)

"Main role. I'm a perfectionist and if my name is in that group, it must be perfect, no exceptions. Most of the time I make the entire project by myself. Even if it's a group one." (PM28)

"I like researching and preparing visual aids for presentation." (PF20)

"When I work with a team, I will most likely be an effective speaker or a teacher." (PF6)

"I generally play a part at the end. And as I am good at handmade, I play a big part in that area." (PF26)

In Figure 4, effective teacher roles are presented from the perspective of the students. Students were asked to indicate five characteristics that effective teachers should have. On the other hand, 28 effective teacher roles

Figure 4. Effective teachers' roles in the lens of students.
Source: Author

expressed by the students were identified. Regarding the effective teacher roles, the most repeated role by the students was the role of motivator (f:18). The students believed that one of the essential roles of an effective teacher is to motivate students to learn. Furthermore, they noted that teachers who support and motivate them cognitively and emotionally both during and outside of the teaching process represent an important opportunity for them. Caring (f:17) was the second most frequently repeated teaching role by students. Students who voiced their ideas under this code emphasised that teachers who care about them play a distinct role in the education process. They also mentioned that effective teachers should be good at teaching (f: 14). Referring to the importance of instructors' professional backgrounds as well as their personal traits, the students stressed that the way to be an effective teacher is to be good at teaching. In this role, the students highlighted the significance of the approaches and strategies utilized in the educational process.

In tandem with this position, the role of being knowledgeable in the field also evolved (f: 11). Fifthly, the concept of an effective teacher has been associated with fairness (f: 10). Referring to the significance of a sense of fairness, the students responded that this condition should occur in a variety of contexts, including the course process, exams, student characteristics, and learning differences. In addition to the five roles identified most frequently by students, 23 additional successful teacher roles were listed. They were as follows: respectful (f:9), having sense of humour (f:7), understanding (f:7), helpful (f:6), kind (f:6), providing a variety of input (f:6), patient (f:5), well-prepared (f:4), friendly (f:4), having good communication skills (f:4), sincere (f:4), authoritative (f:3), good at classroom management (f:3), loving his/her job (f:3), self-confident (f:3), aware of learner differences (f:2), open-minded (f:2), problem-solving (f:2), showing empathy (f:2), tolerant (f:2), multifaceted (f:1), punctual

(f:1) and social (f:1). The students, who indicated what kind of characteristics effective teachers should have in many dimensions such as relational, content knowledge, teaching knowledge, and personal characteristics through these roles, produced a descriptive map of the effective teacher. The following are some student remarks about the roles shown in Figure 4:

"The first thing I expect from my teacher is that he is respectful and does not see students in a lesser situation because of his position. The second feature is that my teacher should have a good command of the subject he is going to tell us. The more he has knowledge of the subject and the more he has developed himself, the more he contributes to me. The third feature that I expect from my teacher is that people are aware of learning differences and participate in the lesson with various materials suitable for this." (PF39)

"Being beneficial to their students in many sense, treating students equally, being helpful and good humoured" (PF13)

"My expectations from a teacher: Firstly, the teacher should be prepared for the lesson, secondly the teacher should suggest alternatives for students to express themselves instead of forcing them to certain methods, thirdly the teacher should create a respectful classroom environment where students can exchange ideas." (PF40)

"I expect my teacher to be friends with me, to really listen to me and really talk to me, to really help me if I have problems." (PM42)

"Firstly, I expect my teacher well-prepared and have great knowledge. Secondly, I expect the teacher to have respect for all of his/her students and to take care of

his/her students. Finally, the teacher encourages the students and accepts the student's mistakes." (PF10)

"The first expectation that I have of my teacher is for them to teach me new things. I want to learn new vocabulary every day. My second expectation is that I want them to be more attentive to their student's questions. For example, some teachers just give vague descriptions about how they want their assignments to be done and they do not give proper answers to their student's questions about the assignment. And if the student makes any mistake, they cut points from the student. My third expectation is that I want to have fun while I am in a classroom, so I would want my teacher to be lively, happy and cheerful during the lessons." (PF24)
"My teacher should be positive and motivate me for studying and doing something.
My teacher should make the lesson as fun as possible.
My teacher should have high field information.
My teacher should be warm in the classroom and treat every student equally.
My teacher should use lesson time well and efficiently." (PF20)
"He/she should be equipped. She should be kind and sincere. She also should know we are all equal and human being." (PF16)

"They should not be late to class, they should not miss the lesson, should contribute to us. They should be sincere. They should have creative ideas rather than boring lectures." (PF5)

The views of the students on the third and final sub-dimension of 21st century skills, namely competence, were examined by considering the themes of information, media, and technology literacy. As a result of the examination, the ways of obtaining information in today's technology age of the students were collected under six headings, and the ways of accessing information were collected under five headings. When examining the methods of gathering information, it was revealed that the browsing code (f: 47) was the most frequently used by students. The students, who believe that it is important to take advantage of this opportunity afforded by developing and changing technological conditions, stated that they can access new information as quickly as possible via the Internet, and that they only visit libraries and bookstores when absolutely necessary. In terms of information-gathering methods, the code for reviewing printed sources (f:15) was the second most frequently used by students. Under this code, the students claimed that they were unable to locate print sources online, particularly those that were out of date. Under the effect of their old practises, some students stated that they still relied on printed sources to gain new knowledge. The students also identified the code of asking individuals around (f: 11) as a means of collecting information. Students

reported that they received information through this code by asking their peers, instructors, parents, and acquaintances questions. The 4th code repeated by the students was acquiring information through social media platforms (f: 7), which is closely related to the research code on the internet. It was noticed that this code has a major impact on the acquisition of information, considering the time and data flow of the students, who noted that they acquire a great deal of information here, as a result of frequently visiting social media sites. Playing games (f: 5) and watching videos (f: 4) were also mentioned by students as information-gathering methods. The students underlined that using these codes, playing online games and watching videos on internet video sharing platforms are among the means of acquiring information.

The following are some student remarks about the ways of gathering information and steps followed when gathering information in Figure 5:

"I just Google it." (PF18)

"I generally use internet for gathering information in the age of technology but of course there are some websites that I trust when I need real information like www.dergipark.com and www.googlescholar.com. But right now, in some projects I use books about the topic for gathering information." (PF44)

"When I am researching a subject, I usually use the internet, but if there is a resource or a book on the subject, I also use them." (PF54)

"I get most of the information from the internet. For example, I usually come across information that I would be surprised while surfing on Instagram." (PF9)

"In the age of technology, it is very easy to gather information. Now, thanks to Uncle Google, I can learn any information I want by searching. And I can understand it if I want, by listening, by reading, or by a teacher. At the same time, it is more catchy and fun to acquire knowledge by playing games all the time." (PF7)

"I can grasp the subject by watching various videos on a subject from a platform such as YouTube. In addition, I use applications that include various games and visual cards in order to better teach a subject that I learned through face-to-face training. For example, after watching foreign language videos on YouTube, I reinforce my knowledge from applications such as Duolingo and membrise." (PF39)

"I go to a search engine. A search engine is a website that collects and organizes information on the internet and makes it available for searching.
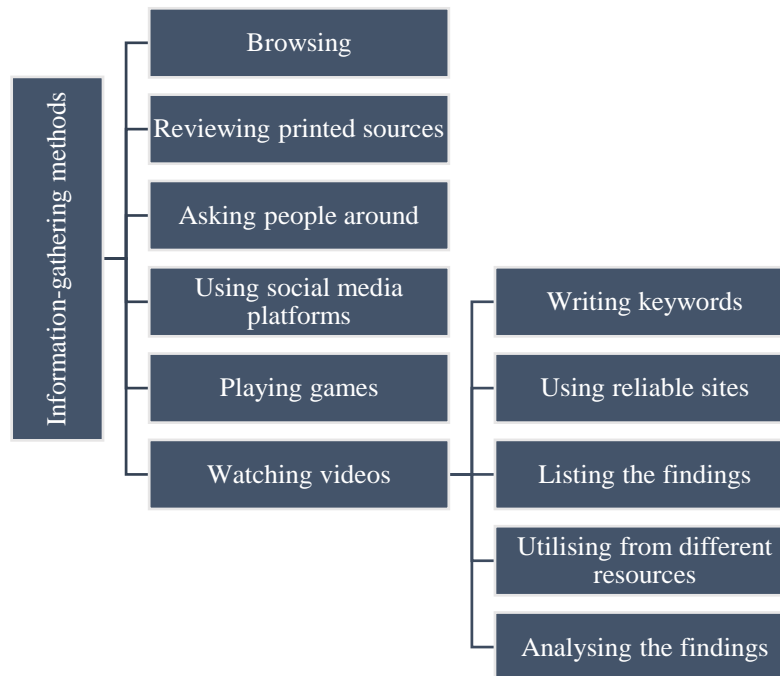*I type what I'm looking for into the search bar and press*

Figure 5. Information gathering and ways to access information
Source: Author

the Enter key to run my search. I can enter a single word, a sentence, a phrase, some numbers, or anything else I wish. This displays my search results in a list.
I click or tap a result to view it. If I find a website that looks like what I want, I click or tap it to open in my browser.
I can rephrase my query for better results. If I'm not finding the right information, I might need to use different words in my search.
I can filter my results by date. The majority of search engines have some handy (but easy to miss) tools near the top of the results pages, including the ability to only show results from a certain time period.
I can filter my results by type. In general, doing a regular internet search displays a list of web links that match what I've typed. But if I just want to see photos, videos, or news articles, I can click Images, Videos, News, and sometimes other categories at the top of every search engine's results page to filter my results." (PF23)

"Firstly, I search with the keywords. Finding multiple trusted resources and emerging them together. That's how I do." (PF19)

"First I find the subject I want to research, then I do my first research about it, I group the information I find and then I try to reach the right information. Because there is a lot of misleading information on the internet" (PF9)

"As I just mentioned, I get help from reliable sites to get

rid of any information pollution on the internet. Sites recommended by my teacher are priority for me. The books we use in the lesson are the same. If I'm doing homework, I start with these two first. Then I use approved articles on the internet for more detailed information. I complete my homework by taking notes of my thoughts with the information I read." (PF3)

"As I said, I will use a safe browser such as Google Scholar, and then I will narrow the time and many other categories by selecting. Now, the only thing remains is to further analyse the articles and reach a conclusion." (PM2)

"I try to find most reliable sources. I check couple of sources and see if they're similar or so. Therefore, it shows that it is reliable." (PM28)

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need for 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, in addition to traditional academic knowledge. In response, many education systems have shifted their focus towards incorporating these skills into their learning environments. This qualitative study aimed to explore the perceptions of ELT (ELT) students on 21st century skills and the learning environments that support their development. The findings of the study suggest that ELT students view 21st century skills as important for their future success and are aware of the need for them to be developed in the

classroom. However, the students also expressed that traditional teaching methods do not always support the development of these skills, and that there is a need for a shift towards more interactive and student-centered learning environments. This highlights the importance of promoting a culture of lifelong learning, where students are encouraged to take an active role in their own development and are provided with the necessary tools and resources to do so. Additionally, the study found that technology plays a crucial role in the development of 21st century skills. The use of technology in the classroom was seen as an effective way to support student engagement, creativity, and collaboration, as well as providing access to a wealth of information and resources. This underlines the need for schools to invest in technology and to provide training for teachers to effectively integrate it into their teaching practices. The results of this study emphasize the importance of creating learning environments that support the development of 21st century skills. By incorporating student-centered approaches, technology, and a culture of lifelong learning, education systems can ensure that students are equipped with the skills necessary for success in a rapidly changing world. It is hoped that this research will inform policymakers and educators about the needs and perspectives of ELT students and serve as a call to action for creating more effective learning environments.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The contemporary era has seen numerous technological, communicative, and global developments and transformations that have had a significant impact on the pedagogy and acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Consequently, there is an increasing necessity to cultivate and execute skills pertinent to the 21st century within the realm of EFL instruction. The acquisition of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for success in the contemporary era, can be facilitated by EFL instructors through the integration of activities that prompt learners to engage in critical analysis of real-life issues. One possible approach to engage students in critical thinking and discussion is to assign them to work collaboratively in groups, with the task of analysing a recent news article or debating a current event. The utilisation of English language in discussing and analysing a topic not only fosters the development of critical thinking skills among students, but also enhances their language proficiency. The ability to collaborate is deemed a crucial skill in the 21st century. The cultivation of collaborative skills among students in the EFL context can be facilitated by the active encouragement of teachers to engage them in group-based projects and activities. As an illustration, pupils have the option to collaborate in compact teams to generate a presentation or accomplish an assignment.

Collaborative learning not only fosters the development of students' teamwork abilities but also augments their linguistic aptitude as they utilise English to interact and cooperate with one another. Conversely, creativity constitutes a crucial facet of contemporary competencies and is increasingly valued in the global labour market. To foster creativity among EFL learners, educators can integrate instructional strategies that promote the opportunity for students to articulate their thoughts and ideas in novel and imaginative manners. For instance, students can be encouraged to write a piece of poetry, craft a short narrative, or create a visual representation. Engaging in creative activities not only facilitates the development of students' creativity, but also their language proficiency as they utilize the English language to articulate their thoughts and concepts. To summarise, fostering the acquisition of 21st century skills within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction is essential for students to succeed in the international job market. The cultivation of critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and effective communication skills can be facilitated by EFL instructors through the integration of activities that promote these competencies. Through this approach, learners will not only cultivate these essential skills but also augment their linguistic proficiency by employing English in authentic contexts.

CONCLUSION

Herewith, the analysis of 21st century skills and learning environments highlights the importance of preparing ELT (English Language Teaching) students for success in the 21st century. The findings of this study indicate that ELT students perceive critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and effective communication as essential 21st century skills. They also believe that these skills can be developed through engaging and dynamic learning environments that incorporate technology, project-based learning, and real-world applications. The results of this study suggest that ELT students value learning environments that provide opportunities for hands-on and collaborative experiences. They believe that technology can enhance learning by providing access to resources, facilitating communication, and allowing for real-world applications of language skills. Furthermore, students see project-based learning as a valuable method for developing 21st century skills as it allows hands-on experiences, collaboration, and the application of language skills to real-world problems. It can be deduced from this study that 21st century skills have important implications for ELT educators and curriculum developers. Educators should strive to create learning environments that are engaging and dynamic, incorporating technology and project-based learning to provide opportunities for students to develop 21st-century

skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and effective communication. By doing so, ELT students will be better equipped to succeed in the 21st century, both in their academic and professional pursuits. Additionally, curriculum developers should consider the findings of this study when designing ELT curricula. They should strive to incorporate 21st century skills and engaging, dynamic learning environments into the curriculum, so that ELT students are well-prepared for success in the 21st century. Furthermore, they should also consider the importance of technology and project-based learning in developing 21st century skills. Consequently, the analysis of 21st century skills and learning environments highlights the importance of preparing ELT students for success in the 21st century. ELT students perceive critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and effective communication as essential 21st century skills that can be developed through engaging and dynamic learning environments that incorporate technology and project-based learning. Therefore, incorporating these findings into ELT education can better equip students to succeed in the 21st century.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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