

21st Century Skills 4 C's in Higher Education English Language Classroom: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

English Language teachers recognize that English language Teaching and learning have evolved significantly in the 21st century, driven by the need to equip students with skills that are relevant in a rapidly changing global landscape. This research explores the incorporation of 21st-century skills, represented by the 4C's (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity), into the curricula of Higher Education institutions in Pakistan at the undergraduate level, as perceived by educators. Employing a quantitative approach, the research analyzes data obtained through a survey questionnaire to examine the extent to which existing syllabi align with the pedagogical requirements of 21st-century skills, as perceived by English language teachers. The findings revealed that the comprehensive adoption and implementation of the 4 C's are not fully realized within the syllabi of Higher Education Universities and Colleges in Pakistan. The research provides valuable perspectives on the present condition of curriculum development within the framework of 21st-century skills. The outcomes of this study contribute valuable insights to modify syllabi for English language education in Pakistan's Higher Education context.

Keywords: 21st Century Skills, Higher Education, English Language Classroom, Teachers' Perspectives

Introduction

Syllabi are souls of academic systems and growth. They must be focused. In the contemporary educational landscape, the rapid evolution of the 21st century has ushered in unprecedented challenges and opportunities, necessitating a reevaluation of pedagogical approaches to align with the demands of an increasingly interconnected and dynamic world. In the midst of this paradigm shift, the significance of higher education institutions, especially in the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT), becomes crucial in equipping students with competencies that surpass conventional linguistic abilities. This research paper investigates the development of 21st-century skills, with a particular focus on the 4 C's: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, within the Higher Education English Language classrooms in Pakistan. With a focus on teachers' perspectives, this study aims to assess the current integration status, identify needs, examine the perceptions of importance and relevance, and suggest improvements in ELT syllabi. As we steer the complexities of preparing

students for an ever-evolving global landscape, understanding how these essential skills are perceived and integrated by educators becomes paramount in shaping the future of English language education in higher education institutions in Pakistan. Hutchinson and Waters (1987), Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), and Tomlinson (2008) argue that education syllabi play a crucial role in imparting knowledge to learners and are essential in the teaching and learning process. They emphasize the importance of incorporating approaches that can help educators instill 21st-century skills in students. The syllabi are designed with the idea that teachers should implement modern language instruction focusing on the 21st century 4 Cs: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. This involves carefully planned objectives, various pedagogical methods, technological materials, interactive activities, professional training courses, and consideration of students' educational and cultural aspects. Levin-Goldberg (2012) suggests that there are multiple pedagogical approaches to integrate the 4 Cs into the curriculum. Plucker, Kaufman, and Beghetto (2016) point out that these skills were initially outlined in 2002 by the non-profit organization now known as the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. Febiana (2019) highlights the challenges in teaching, such as pedagogy, class size, multilingualism, and available resources, when implementing these skills. Toffler (2006) asserts that in the 21st century, illiteracy extends beyond the inability to read and write; it includes the incapacity to learn, unlearn, and re-learn. This underscores the need for transformative teaching, communication approaches, and lifelong learning to empower individuals and English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners in their teaching context. The study suggests that teachers should incorporate subject-based assessment, skills-centered lessons, competency-based pedagogy, extracurricular activities, and workplace mastery development plans.

4 C's of 21st Century Skills

The 4 C's of 21st-century skills in education are Collaboration, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Creativity. These skills play a significant role in teaching and learning in universities by preparing students for the demands of the modern workforce and society.

1. Collaboration: Collaboration involves working effectively with others to achieve common goals. In university settings, collaborative learning promotes teamwork, communication, and the exchange of ideas. Through collaborative activities, students learn to respect diverse perspectives, enhance their interpersonal skills, and develop problem-solving abilities. Collaboration is crucial in preparing students for the collaborative nature of professional environments and fosters skills needed for successful teamwork. According to Silva (2009), while collaboration has always been a skill, the contemporary world requires individuals to actively employ their collaborative skills. Mere knowledge without effective application is deemed insufficient in today's context.

2. Communication: Effective communication holds significant importance in both academic and professional settings. Communication is essential in academic and professional contexts. It involves the ability to convey ideas clearly, actively listen, and engage in meaningful dialogue. Universities focus on developing students' oral and written communication skills, as well as their digital literacy, to effectively express themselves and understand others. Strong communication skills enable students to present their ideas, collaborate with others, and engage in critical discussions. According to Afana et al. (2019), effective communication abilities contribute significantly to an individual's overall happiness, sense of self-value, self-confidence, self-realization, and academic achievements.

3. Critical Thinking: Critical thinking entails the examination, assessment, and integration of information to arrive at well-informed decisions and address intricate challenges. Educational institutions place a premium on fostering critical thinking skills in students, aiming to enhance their capacity for scrutinizing evidence, engaging in thoughtful analysis, and forming reasoned conclusions. By applying critical thinking skills, students can approach challenges from multiple perspectives, identify biases, and develop creative and innovative solutions. Critical thinking skills are vital for academic success and preparing students to navigate the complexities of the professional world. Ventura et al. (2017) introduced a contemporary and thorough framework, asserting that critical thinking is a collection of skills with broad applicability across various disciplines. They highlight that proficiency in these abilities depends on the specialized knowledge, conventions, and tools specific to a given field and discipline to convey information effectively.

4. Creativity: Creativity refers to the ability to generate original and innovative ideas and solutions. Universities recognize the importance of nurturing students' creative thinking skills to encourage innovation and problem-solving. Creativity is fostered through diverse learning experiences, encouraging students to think outside the box, explore new possibilities, and express their unique perspectives. It empowers students to approach challenges with a fresh outlook, adapt to changing situations, and contribute to societal development. According to Lai, Yarbrow, DiCerbo, & de Geest (2018), throughout human history, creativity has maintained its significant role, enduring from ancient Greek philosophers to the contemporary era.

Background and Rationale

The present study is grounded in researches on syllabus designing and the impact of syllabi on pedagogical approaches and student learning outcomes in the higher education setting. The extensive literature review revealed that education system rely on syllabi for academic growth, consequently, all the syllabi must be updated and upgraded in light of the needs and demands of the 21st century academics scenario. Old and outdated syllabi should not be followed and immediately replaced with 21st century landscape.

Objective of the Study

1. To explore to what extent 21st century skills are part of Higher Education syllabi
2. To identify the need of 21st century skills in ELT classrooms
3. To examine Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance and Relevance of 4 C's

4. To improve ELT Syllabus by adding 21st century skills 4 C's in Higher Education Syllabi

Research Questions

1. Are the 21st century skills (4 C's) the part of the current syllabi of Higher Education?
2. Why to add 21st century skills (4 C's) in Higher Education Syllabi?
3. How do English language teachers in Higher Education perceive the need and importance of 21st century skills (4 C's) in the current educational landscape?
4. What improvements will result by adding 21st century skills (4 C's) in Higher Education English Language Teaching syllabi?

Significance of Study

This research holds paramount significance on multiple fronts. Firstly, it sheds light on the critical role of 21st-century skills within the context of language teaching classrooms in Pakistani universities, emphasizing their relevance and integration. Secondly, the study seeks to identify any substantial gaps existing in the current Higher Education English Language Teaching (ELT) syllabi, aiming to pinpoint areas where these essential skills may be lacking. Additionally, the research is situated within a less-explored domain, highlighting a research gap that underscores the novelty and importance of the investigation. By outlining the weaknesses of the present syllabus, the study aims to bridge the existing gap between the current educational framework and the demands of 21st-century skills. Ultimately, this endeavor aspires to contribute to the enhancement of the education system, fostering academic growth in English language teaching and learning in higher education settings.

Limitations

The study acknowledges the limitations of the study. Some of the possible limitations are the focus on higher education Universities and Colleges syllabi and the limitations of the teachers' perspectives with generalization issues.

Future Research

Future research should explore the implementation of 21st-century skills specifically 4 C's across different educational levels in Pakistan and assess the impact of these skills on student outcomes and contribution to the growth of education system.

Literature Review

Recently studies have discovered that integrating 21st-century skills is an activator of individual and social evolution in the learning phase. Paschal and Mkulu (2020) presented that the improvement of modern society is foremost influenced by the substantial planning of quality teaching which has the possibility to create and develop skilful tenants to bring to the nationwide growth and expansion. Casner and Barrington (2006) asserted that 21st-century skills constitute a structured collection of abilities crucial for a sustainable lifestyle and learning environment in the modern era. Given this perspective, aligning with the current trajectory of higher education in Pakistan and the swiftly evolving global priorities, it is imperative to equip our emerging generation for the challenges beyond their college and university education. Yacek (2019) argued, transformative education requires psychological restructuring for effective learning to take place because it requires an in-depth critical reflection about previously held beliefs to determine whether those previously held ideas should be upheld or discarded. Gul (2016) asserts that learning constitutes an integral part of life itself and is intricately tied to the experiences of apprentices, rather than being an abstract concept detached from their personal journey. The author delves into the experiences of English teachers, emphasizing the importance of 21st-century skills as a catalyst for pedagogical transformation in the classroom. The global landscape presents various challenges for educators, such as teaching approaches, class sizes, technology integration, multilingualism, teaching aids, and training prospects, all of which can negatively impact the teaching process. The incorporation of 21st-century skills, however, faces contextual challenges. Adapting pedagogy necessitates a communicative approach and lifelong learning to provide opportunities for contemporary teaching and learning systems, ultimately facilitating effective language skill acquisition for all learners and stakeholders in the education system. Brown, Lauder & Ashton (2008) state that our world and lives are creatively globalized and digitalize. Learning content consider as the fountainhead that convey knowledge to pupils and play a key role in teaching and learning practices. Hutchinson & Waters (1987), Dudley-Evans & St. John

(1998), and Tomlinson (2008) propose that the incorporation of 21st-century skills in education serves as a catalyst for personal and collective development. Paschal and Mkulu (2020) emphasize the significant impact of modern society's evolution on the quality of education, asserting that it plays a crucial role in generating skilled individuals for national growth. Ledward & Hirata (2011) contend that 21st-century skills go beyond the traditional 4 C's (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity) and are essential for success in life, particularly in a globalized society. They argue that students must develop creative approaches to prepare for future success in a world that demands proficiency, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. To meet these demands, integrating 21st-century skills and competencies into traditional educational domains is deemed necessary. However, the challenge lies in shifting learners from mere recognition of facts and figures to becoming critical consumers of knowledge and ideas. The conclusion drawn is the need for concerted efforts to integrate new skills and competencies into the education system. Rafianti, Anriani, and Iskandar (2018) stated that to achieve learning objectives in the 21st century, educators must design learning activity that supports 21st century skills. According to Dupuy (2011), multiliteracy extends the formal language-based concept of literacy – the capability to read and compose– to include not just the proficiency to deliver and interpret texts, but also an essential awareness of the associations between readers, discourse patterns, and sociable and cultural contexts. Parkes et al. (2002) posit, a syllabus serves as a contract between the instructor and the students given that it contains vital information regarding course description, course readings, assignments and their deadlines, attendance policy, roles and duties of students as well as the responsibilities of instructors. In the emerging global landscape, English has become the predominant language for internationalization, education, and communication, as noted by Derakhshan and Shirmohammadli (2015). Many nations integrate the English language into their educational curricula to equip their citizens with the skills needed to thrive in the evolving and competitive global environment. Educational planners are exploring various methods to incorporate English into their education systems. According to Jha (2019), there is a blend of English Language Teaching (ELT) methods and techniques in the 21st century. Furthermore, the ongoing digital revolution plays a crucial role in providing easy access to high-quality educational resources and structured learning through multimedia and constructionist learning approaches. This underscores the importance for educators to continually learn and implement best practices in their classrooms. According to Rosebrough et al. (2011) syllabi should be designed in such a way that educational goals will be formed around addressing the fundamental question of educating more for transformation and minimally for information. Derya Orhan and Kurt (2017) emphasize the significance of 21st-century skills in the academic realm, asserting that the evolving technological landscape and rapid global advancements necessitate continuous adaptation in learning and teaching methodologies. Similarly, Pellegrino and Hilton (2012) argue that educational systems should focus on cultivating 21st-century learners to enable them to realize their full potential in adulthood. In alignment with this perspective, Fandiño Parra (2013) underscores the critical role of integrating 21st-century skills into English language teaching. He contends that English learners must develop global connections, self-directed learning capabilities, creativity, critical thinking, and effective communication and collaboration skills. It is the responsibility of language educators, spanning from primary school to university, to instill these essential skills in students.

Research Design and Methodology

Theoretical Framework

In this quantitative study, the theoretical framework draws upon the conceptual foundations of 21st-century skills, specifically the 4 C's (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity), within the context of Higher Education English Language classrooms. Grounded in relevant literature, this research utilizes SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to analyze survey data obtained from English language teachers. The application of SPSS enables statistical examination of teachers' perspectives on the addition of 21st century skills. Mean and Standard Deviations will be obtained by data analysis. By employing a quantitative approach, the study aims to provide empirical insights into the current status and prospective enhancements of Higher Education English Language syllabi in

Pakistan, contributing to 21st century skills in education with better claims and opportunities. Qualitative analysis provided ESL teachers perceptions about the deficiencies and improvements needed in the present higher education syllabi at the Universities and Colleges levels.

Population and Sample

Population

All the Public and Private Colleges and Universities Teachers both male and female in Higher Education.

Sample

Data was collected through simple random sampling from male and female English teachers teaching BS English Programs.

Data Collection

Quantitative analysis was conducted using survey questionnaires to collect data, while qualitative analysis involved the collection of information from ESL Teachers through semi-structured interviews.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed by utilizing SPSS and teachers' perspective analysis regarding the lack and the additions in the present higher education syllabi.

Quantitative Data Analysis Result & Discussion

Item No. 1 As an ESL Teacher, Are you aware of 4 C's: (i) Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (ii) Communication (iii) Collaboration (iv) Creativity of 21st Century Skills for ELT Classrooms?

Response	Code	Frequency	Mean Score	S.D.
Strongly Agree	5	14	4.03	0.9172
Agree	4	41		
Undecided	3	01		
Disagree	2	01		
Strongly Disagree	1	03		
Total		60		

Table # 1

The above table shows that this response supports the statement with smaller variation as standard deviation is low. In response to the statement, "As an ESL Teacher, Are you aware of 4 C's: (i) Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (ii) Communication (iii) Collaboration (iv) Creativity of 21st Century Skills for ELT Classrooms". The result of the data confirms that a large number of ESL teachers are aware of the concept of 4 C's of 21st century skills in ESL Classroom.

Q. No. 2 As an ESL Teacher do you Teach 21st Century Skills (4 C's) in your Classroom?

Response	Code	Frequency	Mean Score	S.D.
Strongly Agree	5	12	3.91	0.8799
Agree	4	39		
Undecided	3	02		
Disagree	2	06		
Strongly Disagree	1	01		

Table # 2

The above table shows that this response supports the statement with smaller variation as standard deviation is low. In response to the statement, "As an ESL Teacher do you Teach 21st Century Skills (4 C's) in your Classroom". The result of the data confirms that majority of the ESL teachers teach personally 4 C's of 21st century skills in ESL Classroom.

Item No. 3 Are Higher Education BS 4-Years Programs syllabuses according to the needs and demands of 21st Century skills?

Response	Code	Frequency	Mean Score	S.D.
Strongly Agree	5	08	3.24	1.543
Agree	4	21		
Undecided	3	03		
Disagree	2	20		
Strongly Disagree	1	08		
Total		60		

Table # 3

The above table shows that this response disagrees with the statement with variation as standard deviation is low. In response to the statement, “Are Higher Education BS 4- Years Programs syllabuses according to the needs and demands of 21st Century skills”. The result of the data confirms that the teachers disagree that Higher Education BS 4-Years Programs syllabuses are not according to the needs and demands of 21st Century skills.

Q. No. 4 Do you think that Syllabuses should be made modern and updated?

Response	Code	Frequency	Mean Score	S.D.
Strongly Agree	5	34	3.41	1.170
Agree	4	21		
Undecided	3	0		
Disagree	2	02		
Strongly Disagree	1	03		

Table # 4

The above table shows that this response agrees with the statement with variation as standard deviation is low. In response to the statement, “Do you think that Syllabuses should be made modern and updated”. The result of the data confirms that the teachers agree that syllabuses should be made modern and updated.

Q. No. 5 I am satisfied with Present Higher Education Syllabus

Response	Code	Frequency	Mean Score	S.D.
Strongly Agree	5	06	2.8	1.653
Agree	4	21		
Undecided	3	05		
Disagree	2	21		
Strongly Disagree	1	07		

Table # 5

The above table shows that this response disagrees with the statement with variation as standard deviation is low. In response to the statement, “I am satisfied with Present Higher Education Syllabus”. The result of the data confirms that ESL teachers are not satisfied with Present Higher Education Syllabus.

Q. No. 6 21st Century Skills (4 C's) should be included in Higher Education Syllabus

Response	Code	Frequency	Mean Score	S.D.
Strongly Agree	5	34	4.24	0.994

Agree	4	23		
Undecided	3	01		
Disagree	2	0		
Strongly Disagree	1	02		

Table # 6

The above table shows that this response agrees with the statement with variation as standard deviation is low. In response to the statement, “21st Century Skills (4 C's) should be included in Higher Education Syllabus”. The result of the data confirms that the teachers support that the 21st Century Skills (4 C's) should be included in Higher Education Syllabus.

Q. No. 7 The Present University Syllabuses do not have 4 C's 21st Century Skills?

Response	Code	Frequency	Mean Score	S.D.
Strongly Agree	5	12	3.32	1.269
Agree	4	25		
Undecided	3	06		
Disagree	2	14		
Strongly Disagree	1	03		

Table # 7

The above table shows that this response disagrees with the statement with variation as standard deviation is low. In response to the statement, “21st Century Skills (4 C's) should be included in Higher Education Syllabus”. The result of the data confirms that the teachers agree that the 21st Century Skills (4 C's) should be included in Higher Education Syllabus.

Q. No. 8 As ESL Teacher I personally add 4 C's 21st Century Skills to my Syllabus?

Response	Code	Frequency	Mean Score	S.D.
Strongly Agree	5	10	3.5	1.129
Agree	4	41		
Undecided	3	05		
Disagree	2	03		
Strongly Disagree	1	01		

Table # 8

The above table shows that this response disagrees with the statement with variation as standard deviation is low. In response to the statement, “As ESL Teacher I personally add 4 C's 21st Century Skills to my Syllabus”. The result of the data confirms that the teachers responded that as ESL Teacher they personally add 4 C's 21st Century Skills to their Syllabus.

Q. No. 9 As ESL Teacher I personally recommend 4 C's 21st Century Skills to be added in higher Education Syllabus?

Response	Code	Frequency	Mean Score	S.D.
Strongly Agree	5	24	3.28	0.862
Agree	4	34		
Undecided	3	0		
Disagree	2	02		
Strongly Disagree	1	0		

Table # 9

The above table shows that this response agrees with the statement with a smaller variation as standard deviation is low. In response to the statement, “As ESL Teacher I personally recommend 4 C's 21st Century Skills to be added in higher Education Syllabus”. The result of the data confirms that ESL teachers personally recommend 4 C's 21st Century Skills to be added in higher Education Syllabus.

Q. No. 10 As ESL Teacher I think that 21st Century Skills (4 C's) are the Need of ESL Learners?

Response	Code	Frequency	Mean Score	S.D.
Strongly Agree	5	27	3.64	0.713
Agree	4	29		
Undecided	3	0		
Disagree	2	02		
Strongly Disagree	1	02		

Table # 10

The above table shows that this response agrees with the statement with variation as standard deviation is low. In response to the statement, “As ESL Teacher I think that 21st Century Skills (4 C's) are the Need of ESL Learners”. The result of the data confirms that ESL teachers think that 21st Century Skills (4 C's) are the need of ESL Learners.

Qualitative Data Analysis Results & Discussion

Semi structured Interviews of 10 ESL Teachers were conducted.

Item No. 1 Elaborate your views about adding 21st century skills 4 C's in higher education syllabus.

Item No. 2 How satisfied are you with present higher education syllabus?

Item No. 3 What improvements do you suggest in present higher education syllabus?

Item No. 4 Do you agree or disagree that 21st century skills 4 C's are included present higher education syllabi.

Item # 5 Do present higher education syllabi fulfill the 21st century skills needs of ESL Learners?

Response Analysis

Response # 1 Majority of ESL Teachers recommended addition of 21st century skill 4 C's in higher education syllabi.

Response # 1 A large number of ESL Teacher felt dissatisfied with the present syllabi of higher education.

Response # 3 Maximum number of ESL Teachers suggested that the present higher education syllabi lack update contents like 21st century skills 4 C's that needs to be improved at the earliest.

Response # 4 Most of the ESL Teachers agreed that at present 21st century skills 4 C's are not systematically included in higher education syllabi. They personally add some topics.

Response # 5 No. Majority of teachers opined that present higher education syllabi do not fulfill the needs of ESL learners.

Discussion

The analysis of the above qualitative data suggests that ESL Teacher felt dissatisfied with the present syllabi of higher education because it lacked update contents like 21st century skills 4 C's. ESL Teachers recommended addition of 21st century skill 4 C's in higher education syllabi to fulfill the needs of ESL learners and improve the quality of education.

Conclusion

This research provides insights into the current state of 21st-century skills 4 C's teaching and learning in English language classrooms in Pakistani Higher Education Universities and Colleges classroom and concludes by emphasizing the urgency of equipping English language learners in Pakistani universities with the necessary 21st-century skills to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and competitive world.

Findings

The findings of the study are based on the ESL teachers' perspectives. The present study obtained the following findings:

1. The present higher education syllabi do not systematically include 21st century skills 4 C's.
2. The present higher education syllabi are not updated and modern in light of 21st century skills 4 C's needs and demands.
3. The present higher education syllabi do not fulfill the needs and demands of ESL learners at Universities and Colleges levels in view of 21st century skills 4 C's.
4. ESL teachers realized addition of 21st century skills 4 C's in higher education syllabi.

Recommendations

According to the results and the subsequent discussion, this research highlights the level of importance attributed to the 21st-century skills known as the 4 C's: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. The study suggests the incorporation of these 21st-century skills, specifically the 4 C's, into the instructional approach of English language education within Pakistani Higher Education institutions, including universities and colleges. It emphasizes the need of the adoption of innovative pedagogical approaches and importance of syllabus in academic growth of learners in an educational system.

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