



Unbalanced Priorities: The Representation of 21st Century Learning Skills in English Language Textbooks

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Abstract

As 21st-century learning skills become increasingly essential in preparing students for global challenges, it is crucial to assess how these competencies are manifested in English language teaching materials. However, existing research on the representation of these skills in widely used textbooks remains limited, highlighting the need for a systematic evaluation. This study investigates the representation of 21st-century learning skills in English language teaching materials through a content analysis of Cutting Edge – Pre-Intermediate by Pearson. Findings reveal an uneven emphasis on these skills—Communication emerges as the most prominent, underscoring its role in fostering interaction and expression. Collaboration follows, highlighting its significance in teamwork and problem-solving. However, Critical Thinking and Creativity receive moderate representation, while Citizenship and Character Education are significantly underrepresented. The disparities suggest the need for a more balanced integration of 21st-century skills to foster holistic student development.

Keywords: English language teaching, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, character education

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Introduction

The 21st century has ushered in a paradigm shift in education, necessitating a move beyond traditional knowledge transmission toward the development of holistic student competence. While the term 21st-century learning skills—encompassing critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, citizenship, and character education (Halverson, 2018; Prastyaningrum et al., 2023; Prihandoko et al., 2024; Rutkowski et al., 2011; Toar et al., 2024; Wulandari, 2021)—is widely invoked, its operationalization in educational materials tend to remain vague. To address and provide a coherent analytical framework, this study is grounded in the Partnership for 21st-Century Learning (P21) Framework (Battelle for Kids, 2019). This framework explicitly models the integration of essential competencies by positioning the 4Cs (Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity) as the central skills, which have become a cornerstone of modern education (Prastyaningrum et al., 2023; Wulandari, 2021). Together, they bridge core academic knowledge to the competencies required for success in the modern work and civic life (Battelle for Kids, 2019). Additionally, character education and citizenship are vital for nurturing well-rounded individuals capable of contributing positively to society (Saleh et al., 2022). As such, the integration of 21st-century learning skills into education is crucial for preparing students to thrive in a dynamic and interconnected world.

Books have historically played a significant role in student development and learning, imparting knowledge, fostering critical thinking, and shaping character. Well-written historical novels and educational books have been utilized to connect students with various events, enhancing their understanding of different subjects and historical contexts (Gunawan et al., 2018). They offer a unique platform for developing empathy, imagination, critical thinking, and language skills. Books, as repositories of knowledge and frameworks for thought, continue to influence the way students acquire and apply the competencies necessary for the modern workforce and society. Research studies related to enhancing 21st-century learning skills through content analysis of educational materials have aimed to investigate the role of books, particularly e-books, in developing critical skills essential for modern learning (Cahyono et al., 2024; Rosmawati, 2023; Sari et al., 2022). Through a thorough content analysis, the study aims to pinpoint specific elements within educational materials that significantly enhance skills like critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication (Adeoye, 2023). However, the question arises as to what extent contemporary books equip readers with the specific skills required for success in the 21st century.

The presentation of 21st-century learning skills in educational content is crucial for fostering the competencies that students need to succeed in a rapidly changing world. Innovative book formats such as pop-up books and big books have been shown to boost student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes. These interactive and visually appealing resources not only capture students' attention but also aid in comprehension and knowledge retention (Nurani & Mahendra, 2019; Rahayu et al., 2021; Risna et al., 2023). By incorporating elements of local culture and thematic content, books can enrich students' learning experiences and broaden

their perspectives (Cibro, 2023; Damayanti & Putra, 2021). Despite the recognized importance of these skills, there remains a gap in understanding how effectively current educational texts address and promote them.

The widely accepted importance of 21st-century skills is echoed across diverse educational systems worldwide. In Finland, a country renowned for its top-ranking education system, emphasis is placed on critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, equipping students to adapt to a rapidly changing world (Sahlberg, 2011). Similarly, together, core values and competencies such as collaboration, communication, and critical thinking will help students realize the expected educational outcomes so that they have the character, skills, and knowledge to face future opportunities and challenges (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2024). In South Korea, the focus is on fostering creativity and innovation, recognizing their crucial role in driving economic growth and social progress (Kim & Yoon, 2015; Kwon et al., 2015; Shin, 2015). The United Kingdom's education reforms emphasize the importance of character education, citizenship, and global awareness, aiming to produce well-rounded individuals who are active and responsible citizens (Peterson & Civil, 2022). These examples demonstrate the global consensus on the need to cultivate 21st-century skills, highlighting their relevance across diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts. In addition, there seems to be only one study conducted in the same book as the present study, but it took the upper level and investigated language development skills. Despite this recognized importance, a significant gap remains in understanding how effective contemporary educational texts are structured to promote this integrated competence. While some studies have analyzed textbooks for language development or general skill promotion (e.g., Nazim, 2021), there is a lack of research that systematically evaluates their content through the comprehensive lens of the P21 Framework (Battelle for Kids, 2019). This study addresses this gap by conducting a content analysis of an English language textbook. It investigates the representation and integration of the P21's core competencies and 2 additional skills, citizenship, and character education. The findings aim to provide a nuanced understanding of whether and how these materials are designed to build the holistic, applied competence that students need to thrive in a dynamic and interconnected world.

Literature Review

In the 21st century, UNESCO has emphasized the need for individuals to develop essential skills to thrive in a rapidly changing world, advocating a holistic educational approach based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together (Zorlu & Zorlu, 2021). These competencies, collectively referred to as 21st-century skills, extend beyond academic knowledge to include personal development, social interaction, and adaptability (Saputra & Abdulkarim, 2022). Organizations like the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) and the OECD have collaborated with educators, businesses, and governments to integrate these skills into curricula at all levels, targeting youth and instructors. The P21 framework (Battelle for Kids, 2019) highlights three key categories of 21st-century skills: life and career skills; learning and innovation skills

(critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity); and information, media, and technology skills, emphasizing their role in assessments, teaching practices, and professional development as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

The Partnership for 21st Century Learning Framework (Battelle for Kids, 2019)



Life and career skills focus on intrapersonal abilities such as flexibility, initiative, productivity, leadership, and responsibility, while the 4Cs—critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, and communication—prepare students to meet the demands of the evolving 4.0 technology-driven society (Pardede, 2020). Information and communication technology (ICT) skills emphasize locating, evaluating, and utilizing data effectively across various media formats (Voogt et al., 2013; Valtonen et al., 2021), with informational, media, and technology literacy forming their foundation. Frameworks like those from the OECD categorize 21st-century skills into cognitive (critical thinking, systems thinking), intrapersonal (self-regulation, adaptation), interpersonal (teamwork, cultural sensitivity), and technical (financial literacy, entrepreneurship) abilities (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). Similarly, the National Research Council (NRC) (2012) clusters these skills into intrapersonal (work ethic, self-evaluation), interpersonal (leadership, collaboration), and cognitive (creativity, strategies), highlighting challenges in standardizing definitions and ensuring transferable application (NRC, 2012). Similarly, Zhao (2012) highlights the significance of cognitive abilities, autonomy, cooperation, flexibility, innovation, and the "4Cs"—communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity—as key skills for thriving in the 21st century.

In "Promoting 21st Century Skills," Norris (2019) identifies six key elements of 21st-century pedagogy for improving English language teaching (ELT): collaboration and communication, creativity and imagination, critical thinking and problem-solving, digital literacy, citizenship, and student leadership and personal development. Collaborative work involves proactive group participation, while

language serves as a tool for creative expression and problem-solving through critical thinking. Digital literacy encompasses cognitive and technical skills like creating a professional online identity and using diverse tools. Citizenship emphasizes values like respect, tolerance, and democracy, fostering informed local and global participation. Norris highlights the need for teachers and learners to develop qualities for sound decision-making. The "4Cs"—communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity—are integral to ELT, supported by models of English competence (Erdogan, 2019; Halverson, 2018; Priyana, 2019) and endorsed by studies such as the Mountains (2017) and the American Management Association (AMA) (2019) which stress the growing importance of these skills for workforce readiness. Language instructors can integrate the 4Cs effectively by setting clear goals and planning activities (Mountains, 2017), as evidenced by successful applications in informal education settings (Tohani & Aulia, 2022).

Creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking are widely recognized as essential 21st-century skills, often referred to as meta-knowledge (Fitria et al., 2023; Malaban et al., 2022; Mishra & Mehta, 2017; Natuna et al., 2021; Prastyaningrum et al., 2023). Additional "Cs" such as citizenship and character education (Fullan & Scott, 2014) have also been proposed, highlighting the broader scope of 21st-century competencies. Together, these "6Cs"—communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, citizenship, and character education—prepare students to address the challenges of the modern world and foster collaboration for societal improvement, particularly in English language learning (Anugerahwati, 2019).

Communication

In non-formal education, learning English supports life skills by enhancing students' ability to communicate, aligning with Halliday and Mathiesen's (2014) view that speech and writing produce texts for listeners and readers to interpret. The P21 framework emphasizes communication through effective articulation in diverse contexts, active listening, purposeful use of media, and collaboration with respect for team dynamics (Battelle for Kids, 2019). In the digital age, Zhao (2012) highlights the growing importance of communication skills due to readily available information, evolving technologies, and unprecedented collaboration opportunities. Research underscores the need for quality communication in both traditional and digital environments (Davis et al., 2013; Lei & Zhao, 2008; Roman et al., 2018), especially for today's digitally immersed students, described as Millennials, Neo-Millennials, and Digital Natives (Nakrani, 2013). These learners, adept with technology, use digital media to inform, instruct, motivate, and persuade (Fullan & Scott, 2014), applying diverse intelligences and learning styles within an ethical framework to create, evaluate, and manage their education effectively.

Collaboration

Teaching English enhances collaboration and communication, building higher-order skills and improving learning outcomes (Chu et al., 2017; Heller, 2022; Norris, 2019). Effective collaboration requires respectful interaction, active

listening, and sharing skills, which instructional activities should promote through interactive, language-focused exercises (Watkins, 2016). According to Battelle for Kids (2019), the P21 framework emphasizes working effectively in diverse teams by respecting cultural differences, leveraging diversity for innovation, and communicating professionally. Zhao (2012) supports collaborative learning reforms like project-based and cooperative learning, technology integration, and global partnerships, where students work together toward shared goals and build intercultural competencies. Modern technology facilitates virtual collaboration across boundaries, requiring ICT literacy, adaptability, and the ability to use appropriate media and expressions in multicultural settings, highlighting collaboration as a vital 21st-century skill.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking and problem-solving are closely linked and emphasized by the P21 as essential 21st-century skills, involving effective reasoning, systems thinking, evidence evaluation, and the ability to synthesize information and draw sound conclusions. Critical thinking enables students to analyze opposing viewpoints, reflect on learning processes, and address challenges using both traditional and creative approaches (Battelle for Kids, 2019). Grounded in Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001), critical thinking spans high-order skills such as creating, analyzing, and evaluating, as well as low-order skills like recalling and applying (Pohl, 2000). Analysis involves breaking down complex information, identifying patterns, and interpreting data systematically, while evaluation focuses on assessing credibility and making decisions based on evidence. Problem-solving complements these abilities by fostering open-mindedness, logical inference, and creative solutions, enabling learners to identify issues, weigh options, and choose effective courses of action (Lai, 2011).

Creativity

Creativity, as defined by Boden (2001), involves generating novel, valuable, and comprehensible ideas, while Csikszentmihalyi (1997) describes it as an act or creation that transforms or establishes a new domain. Creativity entails originality, learning from failure, and embracing diverse perspectives, recognizing it as a cyclical process of progress and setbacks (Torrance, 1993). The P21 highlights creativity as the ability to generate, develop, and implement innovative ideas, using methods like brainstorming and iterative evaluation to optimize results (Battelle for Kids, 2019). Ma (2009) notes that creativity is influenced by personal traits such as cognitive ability, motivation, and experiences. Educational systems must adapt to celebrate cultural diversity and recognize creativity as a driver of social and economic progress, fostering individual talents rather than enforcing uniform standards of creativity.

Citizenship

Citizenship, as outlined by the Partnership for 21st-Century Learning (Battelle for Kids, 2019), is a key component of the 21st-century skills framework, emphasizing the ability to be an informed and engaged participant in society

(Dhakal, 2023). It includes understanding democracy, human rights, and global issues, as well as respecting cultural diversity and fostering intercultural understanding (Fullan & Scott, 2014). Global Citizenship Education (GCE) aims to equip students with the skills needed to succeed in an interconnected world, promoting values such as human rights, gender equality, and global awareness (UNESCO, 2015; Reimers, 2020). GCE emphasizes empathy, critical thinking, communication, and respect for diversity, aiming to develop a sense of global responsibility (Reimers, 2020). In the context of English language education, integrating citizenship skills fosters digital citizenship and media literacy, preparing students to actively contribute to society and navigate a rapidly changing global landscape (Saleh et al., 2022; Stehle & Peters-Burton, 2019). This approach helps students not only excel academically but also become responsible, engaged global citizens.

Character Education

Character education focuses on developing students' emotional intelligence, empathy, and moral values, which are essential for personal effectiveness and building healthy relationships. Emotional intelligence, ranked as one of the top skills sought by employers (Jose, 2021), supports mental well-being and leadership. Fullan's "Six Cs" approach emphasizes character education as a core competency for success in a changing society, encouraging qualities like bravery, persistence, and resilience (Fullan et al., 2018). This education nurtures social responsibility and integrity, helping students become responsible citizens and empathetic individuals (Idawati et al., 2022; Agustini, 2021). It is vital for students' overall development, enhancing social and emotional skills while fostering positive behaviors such as honesty, respect, and resilience (Herman et al., 2022; Fauziah et al., 2019). Even in the digital age, character education remains crucial, promoting ethical values and interpersonal skills through various learning models, including online platforms (Wua et al., 2021). Educators play a key role in encouraging students to develop into responsible, compassionate adults, fostering both academic and personal growth (Anugerahwati, 2019; Sigalingging & Budiningsih, 2022).

Method

We utilized checklists to conduct document analysis, gathering data on the representation of 21st-century learning skills in a textbook, which is a focused, in-depth case study of a critical and representative case. In this study, our ontological perspective guided the identification and interpretation of relevant content in the textbooks and shaped the understanding of 21st-century learning skills. This study employs a purposive sampling technique, selecting the pre-intermediate textbook as a critical case. This level was chosen because it represents a pivotal transition where learners move from concrete language use to more abstract thinking, making it an information-rich context for observing how higher-order skills are scaffolded. Critically, pre-intermediate learners are often on the cusp of entering the job market (Zainuddin & Rijal, 2022), where employers increasingly demand work-ready graduates (Nurjanah et al., 2022). Additionally, this study is designed as a first step to a bigger study. The primary textbook analyzed was *Cutting Edge – Pre-*

Intermediate by Pearson, designated by the institution as the core learning resource. This textbook, aligned with the CEFR and supported by the Global Scale of English (GSE), underwent rigorous scientific and statistical validation by the Council of Europe. Comprising 14 units, it serves as the exclusive learning source for Pre-Intermediate General English for Adults classes.

The study followed three primary processes that were taken from Cohen et al. (2011): preliminary analysis, material evaluation, and result processing. Reading the textbooks to have a broad overview of them was the first step in the preliminary analysis. We have developed a consensus, or a shared understanding, among the academics about how to use a particular framework for assessing the textbooks. An organized collection of standards or principles used to evaluate and examine textbook content is called a codebook. It might contain predetermined topics, classifications, or standards that researchers would apply while classifying and assessing data. To prevent prejudice and guarantee uniformity in the assessment of the textbooks, a consensus on the application of the framework was also formed during this phase. The researchers had to undertake discussions to reach an agreement in order to ensure that all participants in the study shared a common understanding of how to apply the framework and to address any ambiguities. Reaching a consensus is particularly important when multiple scholars are involved in the review process. Early agreement made by different raters ensures that different researchers use the codebook consistently, which increases inter-rater reliability. The nuts and bolts of the analysis are presented in a code book, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Code Book

No	Skills	Operational Definition	Coding Indicators	Textbook Example
1.	Communication	Tasks that require learners to articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written, and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts. The focus is on the <i>production</i> and <i>exchange</i> of meaning, not just correctness	Prompts for presenting information to an audience (e.g., "give a short presentation on..."), tasks involving structured discussion or debate (e.g., "discuss in a group and reach a consensus"), activities requiring the creation of a sustained written or spoken text (e.g., "write an email," "create a podcast script"), exercises that explicitly target fluency, pragmatic competence, or audience awareness (e.g., "role-play a complaint in a restaurant").	"Write an email to a friend"

2.	Collaboration	Tasks that explicitly require pair or group work to produce a joint outcome.	Instructions such as "work with a partner," "in your group, discuss," "role-play with a classmate."	"Work in pair"
3.	Critical Thinking	Tasks that require analysis, evaluation, inference, or synthesis of information beyond simple factual recall. Must involve justification or reasoning.	Prompts containing "why," "how," "justify your opinion," "compare and contrast," "what if."	"Which programme and TV channels do you prefer? Why?"
4.	Creativity	Tasks that require learners to generate, elaborate on, and evaluate original and innovative ideas; to be open and responsive to new perspectives; and to create tangible or conceptual solutions that are of personal or social value.	Prompts using words like "create," "design," "invent," "imagine," "what if...", tasks with open-ended outcomes where there is no single correct answer, activities that combine ideas or concepts in new ways (e.g., "write a new ending to the story"), exercises that encourage divergent thinking or brainstorming.	"Think about five more questions to add to the survey."
5.	Citizenship	Tasks that develop an understanding of civic rights and responsibilities, encourage engagement with community and governmental structures, or promote an awareness of global issues and intercultural understanding.	Content or questions related to community roles, laws, voting, or social responsibility, discussions of global challenges (e.g., climate change, poverty, digital citizenship), texts or tasks that explore different cultures, traditions, or perspectives, prompts that ask students to consider their role in a local or global community.	Texts about "Teachers' Day", "World Book Day", and "Respect for the Aged Day"
6.	Character Education	Tasks that encourage the development of ethical reasoning, resilience, personal responsibility, integrity, empathy, and respect for others.	Scenarios or questions about ethical dilemmas and making difficult choices, texts or tasks focusing on perseverance, learning from failure, or setting personal goals, activities that require students to reflect on their own feelings, motivations, or behavior, content that explicitly teaches or asks students to demonstrate respect, empathy, or fairness.	"Practice telling your story until you are confident."

The second phase was material reviews, where the authors read each book thoroughly to find 21st-century skills representation in the textbooks. This phase employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. To provide measurable evidence (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2018), the study employed quantitative analysis focused on numerical counts and frequencies of the prominence of specific skills, thereby enhancing validity. On the other hand, qualitative analysis delved into uncovering themes, patterns, and meanings within the text. This approach involved segmenting the text into analyzable units and presenting statistical evaluations concisely. Lastly, in the resulting process, the number of occurrences of each skill was calculated for the purpose of reporting. A modified version of Yuen's (2011) analytical model was used to organize findings in a table format, categorizing data by grade, unit, pages, component/domain, and examples. Additionally, Nunan's (2004) framework on task components provided a lens for identifying 21st-century learning skills in the materials. Nunan's model highlights six task elements: context, learner role, instructor role, aim, input, and procedure. While task goals, input, process, and context are explicitly outlined, learner and instructor roles are often inferred. This comprehensive approach revealed various ways 21st-century skills are embedded in the learning materials.

Results and Discussions

This research analyzed the representation of 21st-century learning skills in the *Cutting Edge – Pre-Intermediate – Students' Book* by Pearson using frameworks from The P21's (Battelle for Kids, 2019) four skills (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity), Fullan & Scott's (2014) citizenship, and Fullan et al.'s (2018) character education. The quantitative findings, summarized in Table 2, evaluated context, learners' role, instructors' role, aim, input, and procedure across textbook units. Communication emerged as the most represented skill, accounting for over half of the total instances, while character education was minimally featured. Collaboration ranked second, appearing in just over a quarter of the total, with critical thinking at less than 10%. Creativity and citizenship had equal frequencies (39 instances each). Unit 13 demonstrated the highest frequency of 21st-century skills (77 instances), whereas Unit 1 showed the lowest (50 instances).

Table 2

Results of Book Analysis

21 st Cent. Learning Skills		U	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	U	TOTAL	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		14
Communication	F	21	29	17	28	30	31	34	31	39	40	45	36	44	43	468
	P	4.49	6.20	3.63	4.27	6.41	6.62	7.26	6.62	8.33	8.55	9.61	7.69	9.40	9.19	
Collaboration	F	13	10	18	14	15	15	20	12	22	21	19	12	19	14	224
	P	5.80	4.46	8.04	6.25	6.70	6.70	8.93	5.36	9.82	9.38	8.48	5.36	8.48	6.25	

Critical Thinking	F	3	9	11	9	7	5	7	5	9	6	7	1	11	5	95
	P	3.12	1.05	11.6	9.47	7.37	5.26	7.37	5.26	9.47	6.32	7.37	1.05	11.6	5.32	
Creativity	F	5	4	2	2	5	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	39
	P	12.8	10.3	5.13	5.13	12.82	5.13	7.69	5.13	5.13	5.13	7.69	5.13	5.13	7.69	
Citizenship	F	6	3	6	4	3	1	2	4	1	0	0	7	1	1	39
	P	15.4	7.69	15.4	10.3	7.69	2.56	5.13	10.3	2.56	0	0	17.9	2.56	2.56	
Character Education	F	2	0	0	1	3	0	3	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	12
	P	16.7	0	0	8.33	25	0	25	8.33	0	8.33	8.33	0	0	0	
TOTAL	F	50	55	54	58	63	54	69	55	73	70	75	58	77	66	877
	P	5.70	6.27	6.16	6.61	7.18	6.16	7.87	6.27	8.32	7.98	8.55	6.61	8.78	7.53	

Note:

U: Unit

F: Frequency (the number of occurrences in each unit)

P: Percentage (the calculation based on the frequency)

P = F per unit: F in total x 100%

Communication

Communication emerged as the most emphasized skill, with a total frequency of 468, significantly higher than any other category. The frequency of this skill showed a steady increase over the intervals, starting at 21 and reaching a peak of 77 in interval 13. Similarly, the percentage ranged from 4.49% to 9.61%, reflecting its growing importance. This consistent upward trend indicates a strong and increasing focus on developing effective communication skills. This emphasis aligns with the P21 framework (Battelle for Kids, 2019), which underscores the critical role of communication in diverse contexts. Halliday and Mathiesen's (2014) perspective on the functional roles of speech and writing in producing interpretable texts reinforces communication as a foundation for interaction in education and beyond.

It is true that in EFL instruction, communication skills are increasingly essential for language acquisition and broader success. Elshahawy (2020) highlights the role of out-of-class activities in enhancing proficiency, while Kawa and Nidham (2023) emphasizes the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in simulating real-world tasks, aligning with the P21 framework's (Battelle for Kids, 2019) focus on purposeful articulation and active listening. Tools like TED Talks reinforce listening and comprehension (Tilwani et al., 2022), and academic language skills are critical for navigating complex texts (Uccelli et al., 2014). Additionally, communication skills are key to employability (Ting et al., 2017), reflecting their relevance beyond the classroom.

The integration of technology has transformed communication skills training for digitally immersed learners, described as Millennials, Neo-Millennials, or Digital Natives (Nakrani, 2013). Zhao (2012) highlights the importance of

communication in an era of abundant information and collaboration opportunities, while Fullan & Scott (2014) notes the use of digital media to inform, instruct, and persuade. These developments blend traditional and digital communication, emphasizing ethical information management and diverse learning styles.

Innovative methods and tools further enhance communication development. Ghafar and Raheem (2023) identify technological tools as improving speaking proficiency, aligning with Dixon et al.'s (2012) findings on communication's central role in second language acquisition. Research by Roman et al. (2018) and Davis et al. (2013) underscores the importance of quality communication in digital spaces. As education evolves, the dual focus on traditional and digital communication prepares learners to navigate complex interactions, fostering active listening, effective articulation, and digital fluency. Leveraging technology and innovative pedagogy is essential for equipping students to communicate effectively in local and global contexts.

Collaboration

Collaboration plays a crucial role in English language teaching, ranking second in importance with 224 occurrences, reflecting its moderate emphasis in fostering teamwork and communication among learners. While the data shows variations in its application, ranging from 4.46% to 9.82% across intervals, these fluctuations highlight contextual factors like instructional strategies and student engagement. Studies, such as those by Gougou et al. (2023), underline the importance of social interaction in enhancing higher-order thinking and language fluency. Technology has further expanded collaborative opportunities, connecting students with peers and native speakers, as demonstrated by Sasi et al. (2017). Collaborative learning has been linked to improvements in vocabulary acquisition and overall competence (Drumhiller & Schwanenflugel, 2013), reinforcing its role as a complementary skill to communication.

The integration of technology has significantly amplified collaboration in English education, enabling dynamic interactions and global partnerships. Digital tools, such as social media platforms, foster collaborative communities where learners can enhance their writing and communication skills (Klímová & Pikhart, 2020). This aligns with Zhao's (2012) advocacy for cooperative models emphasizing shared goals and intercultural competence. Collaborative models also boost motivation and critical thinking, as noted by Jie (2023), engaging learners in tasks that promote teamwork and problem-solving. Furthermore, the P21 framework (Battelle for Kids, 2019) highlights collaboration's role in fostering adaptability, cultural respect, and innovative thinking. By leveraging technology, educators can enhance collaboration, enabling students to work effectively in diverse teams and adapt to multicultural environments, preparing them for personal and professional success.

Critical Thinking

The data on critical thinking in English language education, with a total frequency of 95 occurrences, reveals irregular integration into teaching practices,

with peaks in intervals 3 and 13 and percentage variations ranging from 1.05% to 11.58%. These inconsistencies suggest challenges such as limited teacher training, insufficient resources, and varying curricular priorities. Critical thinking, essential for addressing complex social and intellectual challenges, involves higher-order cognitive skills like analyzing, evaluating, and creating, as outlined by the P21 framework (Battelle for Kids, 2019) and Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001; Pohl, 2000). It fosters curiosity, open-mindedness, and creative problem-solving, empowering students to navigate diverse perspectives and challenges (Lai, 2011). However, gaps in teacher preparation, highlighted by Laabidi (2021) and Yuan and Stapleton (2019), hinder its consistent implementation, raising concerns about its integration into educational contexts.

Innovative strategies are vital to strengthen critical thinking instruction. The integration of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), as noted by Hasbullah et al. (2022), and collaborative tasks, emphasized by Tram and Quyen (2019), align with the P21 framework's (Battelle for Kids, 2019) focus on reflective learning and creative problem-solving. Digital tools like mind mapping and online platforms further enhance critical thinking, as demonstrated by Moustaghfir and Brigui (2023) and Yunqing (2023). Problem-solving complements critical thinking by encouraging logical inference, evidence-based decision-making, and creativity, which are particularly relevant in language education for enhancing linguistic proficiency and cultural navigation. To maximize critical thinking's potential, systematic reforms are needed, including aligning strategies with Bloom's taxonomy and investing in professional development. This approach can bridge the gap between its theoretical importance and practical application, equipping students with cognitive tools for academic and real-world success.

Creativity

The findings on creativity in English language education, with only 39 occurrences, reveal their limited emphasis compared to other skills. Creativity showed consistent but low representation, with occurrences ranging from 2 to 5. The skill rarely exceeded 15% in frequency, indicating that this is not a central focus in English curricula despite its recognized importance. Creativity, as defined by Boden (2001) and Csikszentmihalyi (1997), fosters engagement, critical thinking, and originality, encouraging students to embrace diverse perspectives and learn from failure (Torrance, 1993). Studies by Aldujayn and Alsubhi (2020) and Chow et al. (2017) affirm creativity's role in enhancing student outcomes, aligning with the P21 framework's (Battelle for Kids, 2019) emphasis on innovative thinking. However, the data highlights a gap between its value and prioritization, as educational systems often favor uniform standards over celebrating individual talents and cultural diversity (Ma, 2009).

Creativity plays a crucial role in language acquisition, fostering engagement, problem-solving, and self-expression. Language learning requires students to think divergently, experiment with linguistic structures, and adapt language to different contexts. Creative language use enhances motivation and deepens understanding, as students engage in storytelling, role-playing, and creative

writing activities. Studies by Aldujayn and Alsubhi (2020) and Chow et al. (2017) affirm that creative literacy activities contribute to improved learning outcomes by encouraging imagination and fostering deeper connections with language content. Moreover, creativity promotes autonomy, allowing learners to take ownership of their learning process (Núñez-Regueiro et al., 2025) and explore language in ways that align with their interests and experiences.

Citizenship

The findings show minimal representation of citizenship (39 occurrences). Citizenship education emphasizes intercultural understanding, societal participation, and global awareness, aligning with the P21 framework (Battelle for Kids, 2019) and fostering empathy and communication (Dhakal, 2023; Fullan & Scott, 2014). Scholars like Fang and Baker (2017) and Yücel (2019) underline their potential to bridge cultural gaps and inspire societal engagement. Despite its importance, Citizenship showed sporadic representation in the data, reflecting inconsistent integration into curricula. Addressing these gaps requires innovative and interactive teaching approaches. Huh and Lee (2019) advocate for creative pedagogies that encourage dynamic learning, while Global Citizenship Education (GCE) equips learners to tackle global issues like human rights and sustainability (Reimers, 2020; UNESCO, 2015). Focusing on these skills can better prepare students for the challenges of a rapidly evolving world.

Integrating creativity and citizenship into English language instruction aligns with broader educational goals of fostering critical thinking, communication, and global responsibility. For creativity, this involves designing lessons that encourage originality, collaboration, and iterative learning, as highlighted by the P21 framework (Battelle for Kids, 2019). Citizenship, requires embedding democratic principles, intercultural understanding, and digital literacy into curricula, preparing students to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the global landscape (Saleh et al., 2022; Stehle & Peters-Burton, 2019). As Ma (2009) and Reimers (2020) suggest, educational systems must adapt to celebrate diverse talents and perspectives, recognizing that both creativity and citizenship drive social and economic progress. Language education offers a unique platform for fostering these skills, given its emphasis on communication and cultural exchange. By prioritizing creativity and citizenship, educators can help students excel academically while developing the skills needed to thrive as responsible, engaged global citizens. This dual focus not only enhances language learning outcomes but also ensures students are equipped for the demands of an interconnected and diverse world. By leveraging creative and civic-oriented pedagogies, educators can nurture learners who are both innovative thinkers and active participants in society.

Character Education

The data revealing that Character Education has the lowest total frequency, with only 12 occurrences, underscores a concerning neglect of this essential skill in English language teaching. Although its importance is recognized—evidenced by a peak of 25% in interval 5—the overall lack of consistent integration highlights missed opportunities for fostering emotional intelligence, empathy, and moral

development alongside language skills. This discrepancy contrasts sharply with the more significant emphasis on Communication and Collaboration, reflecting a broader trend of prioritizing interpersonal and cognitive skills over values-based education. Pohan and Malik (2018) emphasize that embedding character values into language teaching is critical for promoting students' personal growth and social responsibility. The low frequency of Character Education in the data suggests a gap in achieving this balance, leaving a vital aspect of student development underserved.

Character education, as defined by Fullan et al.'s (2018) "Six Cs" framework, is a core competency for navigating the complexities of a rapidly changing world. It nurtures qualities like bravery, persistence, and resilience, fostering integrity and social responsibility (Agustini, 2021; Idawati et al., 2022). It also enhances students' abilities to form healthy relationships and build empathetic, responsible communities. Despite these benefits, the lack of emphasis in current curricula reflects a need for systemic changes to position Character Education as an integral part of language learning. Integrating Character Education into English teaching requires deliberate strategies that balance academic and personal development. Literature offers a powerful medium for fostering moral and ethical understanding, as noted by Eko et al. (2019). Stories, poetry, and dramatic texts can prompt discussions on empathy, honesty, and resilience, helping students reflect on values in relatable contexts. However, as Nguyen et al., (2023) highlight, modern approaches such as communicative and task-based teaching often overshadow character-building efforts. To address this gap, educators could incorporate project-based learning, ethical discussions, and collaborative professional development, as suggested by Anto and Coenders (2019) and Adriyanti (2021). These methods create opportunities to blend character development seamlessly into language instruction. The emphasis on Character Education is particularly relevant in fostering the holistic development of students. By nurturing emotional intelligence and positive behaviors such as respect and resilience, educators prepare students to excel not only in academics but also in interpersonal and societal roles (Fauziah et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2022). Furthermore, in the digital age, character education plays a critical role in addressing challenges like cyberbullying and misinformation and fostering ethical values and interpersonal skills through online and hybrid learning models (Wua et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the critical need to recalibrate pedagogical and curricular approaches in English language teaching. While communication and collaboration have received significant emphasis as represented in the textbook, the underrepresentation of critical thinking, creativity, citizenship, and character education suggests an imbalance that limits holistic student development. Addressing these disparities requires a comprehensive strategy that incorporates innovative teaching practices, enhanced resource development, and a commitment to curricular reform. By fostering an integrated approach, educators can prepare learners not only for academic success but also for navigating the complexities of a globalized and rapidly evolving world.

Future research needs to focus on the longitudinal impact of balanced skill integration, examining how equitably represented 21st-century skills contribute to students' personal growth, career readiness, and societal engagement. By embedding these competencies holistically, English language teaching can transform into a more inclusive and impactful platform, equipping learners with the diverse skills they need to thrive in the modern era.

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