

Fostering 21st Century Learning Skills in English as a Second Language Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

21st century skills have received increasing attention in the past decade. This mixed-method (quantitative and qualitative) study explores ESL learners' preferred skill among 21st century skills and to what extent ESL teachers integrate these skills into their practice. Data were collected using two methods. A survey was distributed, which revealed that ESL learners rated communication as the most important skill for present and future career requirements. Six semi-structured interviews showed that communication skills were predicted by teachers to be highly favourable by ESL learners. The interviews also outlined some practical applications teachers use to incorporate 21st century skills into their classes and help learners take responsibility for their learning for future objectives. The findings suggest that more communicative tasks could be blended into ESL classrooms, which will help learners improve their communication skills for professional purposes.

Résumé

Les compétences du 21^e siècle ont reçu une attention croissante au cours de la dernière décennie. Cette étude à méthode mixte (quantitative et qualitative) explore les compétences préférées des apprenants d'anglais langue seconde parmi les compétences du 21^e siècle et dans quelle mesure les enseignants d'anglais langue seconde intègrent ces compétences dans leur pratique. Les données ont été recueillies à l'aide de deux méthodes. Un sondage a été distribué, qui a révélé que les apprenants d'anglais langue seconde considéraient la communication comme la compétence la plus importante pour les exigences de carrière actuelles et futures. Six entretiens semi-structurés ont montré que les compétences en communication étaient prédites par les enseignants comme étant très favorables par les apprenants d'anglais langue seconde. Les entretiens ont également décrit certaines applications pratiques que les enseignants utilisent pour intégrer les compétences du 21^e siècle dans leurs classes et aider les apprenants à assumer la responsabilité de leur apprentissage pour les objectifs futurs. Les résultats suggèrent que des tâches plus communicatives pourraient être intégrées dans les salles de classe d'anglais langue seconde, ce qui aidera les apprenants à améliorer leurs compétences en communication à des fins professionnelles.

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) is a dynamic field (Larsen-Freeman, 2004). Earlier approaches in ELT have focused on language mastery and producing correct grammatical structures. Today's English as a second language (ESL) classrooms should reflect the 21st century we live in. These classes are expected to extend the meaning of literacy to accommodate the advances in technology, multimedia, world issues and culture (Fandiño Parra, 2013). The highly competitive 21st century economy has put more demand on graduates of any field to be able to effectively communicate in English in a multicultural environment (Ganapathy & Kaur, 2014). The workforce in the current times, on the other hand, needs not only academically successful, but also skilled, graduates with an additional set of abilities (Ganapathy & Kaur, 2014). These skills are referred to as 21st Century skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Wagner, 2014) or employability skills (Suarta, Suwintana, Sudhana, & Hariyanti 2017). 21st Century skills call for higher-order thinking skills, which are claimed to help learners be knowledgeably critical, creative, innovative, communicative and collaborative (Ganapathy & Kaur, 2014).

'21st century learning skills' has different meanings in different frameworks or to different experts. According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), 21st century skills include critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, communication, creativity and innovation, and leadership skills. The significance of 21st century skills is increasingly emphasized by scholars, educators and business leaders (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Silva, 2009). Studies show that graduates from technical colleges and universities lack a number of essential applied skills (Ganapathy & Kaur, 2014; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Therefore, it has been suggested that infusing 21st century learning skills in different subject areas, including English and world languages, would help learners

acquire other literacies, e.g. digital literacy, cognitive abilities to reflect and produce new knowledge, etc. (Silva, 2009; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Wagner, 2014).

21st century skills stretch traditional approaches to fit our current time and business requirements (Silva, 2009). They are described as a set of skills, needed for our time, that are taught through combining traditional subjects with current themes. These themes include financial literacy, health literacy, global awareness, environmental and digital literacy (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). According to The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), an organization that encourages the infusion of 21st century skills, there are three sets of skills: Learning and innovation; information, media and technology skills; and finally, life and career skills. It is believed that these skills not only prepare students for the workforce demands but also contribute in helping learners manage their own learning (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

A number of studies have emerged since the call for 21st century learning skills was made to explore the application of these skills in different domains, such as science (Turiman, Omar, Daud, & Osman, 2012), technology (Tucker, 2014) and school-level contexts (Bell, 2010; Kay & Greenhill, 2010; O'Sullivan & Dallas, 2017). Very few studies have investigated the students' perceptions of 21st century skills and teachers' practices to foster these skills.

Learners' English level and mastery have been traditionally assessed by their ability to produce correct grammatical forms. 21st century skills direct English as a second language into deeper learning outcomes. They are believed to prepare graduates with employability skills, leadership skills and autonomy.

1.1 Purpose of the study and research questions

This study aims to identify learning skills that students rank as highly important for their learning in ESL classrooms and for a future career. It also seeks teachers' perspectives regarding the implementation of different practices they use to promote 21st century learning skills that can also meet with students' needs. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What skills do students prefer among the variety of 21st century learning skills that could be taught in English language classrooms?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of 21st century learning and skills in English language classrooms in higher education institutions?
3. Are teachers adapting their curriculum to teach along with the current learning standards considering students' needs and interests? If so, how?

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

In the last two decades, the term ‘21st century learning skills’ has gained popularity among educators and researchers. Both business leaders and educators have come to believe that there is a gap between the knowledge and the skills required for professional success in the current times (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2002; Wagner, 2014). This particular challenge highlights the distance between what is taught in schools and what students need to be successful learners, workers and citizens in the 21st century (Wagner, 2014, chapter 1). These skills are suggested to be woven into different subjects, including English and world languages, to suit the time we live in today.

The present working environment requires employees to be critical thinkers, problem solvers and good communicators. Such skills prepare students to be not only lifelong learners but also citizens of a wider community with a sense of responsibility (Ananiadou & Carlo, 2009). Through the beginning of the 21st century, the significance of language learning and teaching has been highlighted in promoting global awareness and intercultural communication (Haley, Steeley, & Salahshoor, 2013). In the earlier times, language teaching and learning were focused on teaching language as a subject where language is taught through grammar-translation methods and memorizing chunks of language phrases to be tested later at the end of the course.

The Partnership for 21st Century skills (P21) framework extends these teaching and learning approaches. P21 is an organization founded in 2002 by business leaders and educators, who came up with a framework to include a number of skills needed for learners to excel not only academically but also professionally. These skills are classified into three main groups: 1) *Learning and innovation skills*: critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation. 2) *Information, media and technology skills*, which

include competencies such as information literacy, media literacy, ICT literacy (information , communication and technology); and 3) *Life and career skills*, which include flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility.

Saavedra and Opfer (2012) criticized the educational systems where students might have a lot of information learnt at school, but are unable to apply their knowledge in contexts that require a higher level of thinking and communication. Therefore, learners, especially graduates, should be taught and guided within 21st century skills to be able to work in a competitive economy (Keogh, Maguire, & O'Donoghue, 2015). These skills are believed to help learners participate in a constantly developing economy (Ananiadou & Carlo, 2009). However, the application of these skills and their fusion in ESL classrooms, for example, can be determined according to different views from both teachers and students.

Teachers and learners bring different beliefs to ESL classrooms. The views of students and teachers can shape a teaching program, from planning to the assessment of a course, which affects teaching practices (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Learners, like teachers, bring to class their views and goals, which affect how they approach learning. Students' beliefs about language are shaped by the nature of the social environment they come from, which also may influence their attitudes toward language itself and language learning (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Yuan & Stapleton, 2020). Teachers, on the other hand, bring different views on language teaching and learning. These views can reflect teachers' experiences as language learners, their experiences of what works best, research-based recommendations, and methods of teaching (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Teachers usually are the decision-makers, the ones who decide the selection of activities that the students

might enjoy. Barkhuizen (1998) argues that learners should take part in the decision-making process.

In order to make the language learning and teaching experience better, teachers need to be trained first to relearn, adapt to different modes of literacies and modalities and know how to work collaboratively with students in order to be qualified to teach and foster new competencies needed for the current-era classrooms (Tan, Choo, Kang, & Liem, 2017). This means that teachers have to be problem-solvers, critical thinkers, communicators, collaborative and creative, before they teach 21st century skills. This can also mean that 21st century skills have different meanings and interpretations, which, as a result, determine the application of these skills. Teachers not only need to be content masters of their subjects, but also be capable of facilitating the learning process for more meaningful and lifelong learning purposes (Tan et al., 2017).

Since education standards and the purposes of education are changing, curriculum frameworks, instructional methods, and assessment strategies must also change. Those changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment have many important human capital implications, including those related to teacher training, professional development, career mobility, and general cultural standing of the teaching profession (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012, p. 12).

Like many classrooms, English as a second language (ESL) classrooms have shifted from being teacher-centric to learner-centric. In order for ESL learning to be learner-centric, many factors need to be considered (Spratt, 1999). Students' most preferred skills (Willing, 1988) and beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1988) are all essential elements in the design process. The new educational paradigms are calling for much more deeper learning skills. In English

language classrooms, the four language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) are globally known and emphasized upon. However, within the new educational paradigm, as in the 21st century learning skills, language skills are woven with much more deeper and necessary skills (e.g. critical thinking, communication and innovation skills) to have more productive outcomes. Some educators criticize that incorporating these skills into ESL classrooms might require changes in the curriculum and, specifically, assessment.

Designing new educational pedagogies that foster 21st century skills will mean creating new ways of assessment, which should not be a justification for continuing to assess students traditionally and in the same way we did decades ago and continue to apply. Research has found that there is no specific developmental level that enables learners to be ready to acquire thinking skills and analytical skills (Silva, 2009). Meaning, students do not need to learn facts and core subject materials in order to learn problem-solving and critical-thinking skills (Silva, 2009).

We need to reflect on our roles, think systematically about our own practices, draw on research to deepen our understanding, and adapt our teaching in ways that most effectively support student learning. (Tan, Liu, & Low, 2017, p. 2)

Not only should the curriculum be relevant, teachers need to address topics that resonate with learners (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). Students need to see that connection and how the topics they are introduced to align with their learning in general. Students also have to be equipped with the skills that do not teach them to be the complete recipients of knowledge, but, producers (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).

For the millennium we are living in today, changes that dwarf the traditional ones are continuously taking place (Gardner, 2006). Therefore, educational reforms are necessary in which

learners' minds should be broadened using the five methods Gardner believes in. He emphasizes the importance of Synthesizing, in which learners select, organize, and make meaning of information, which cultivates one's knowledge. That prepares students to go beyond the existing knowledge and synthesizing to come up with brand new and creative ideas, solutions and questions (Gardner, 2006). Similarly to communication and collaboration set in the 21st century learning skills, Gardner (2006) highlights the vital role of nurturing respectful minds that normalize differences in persons and teams. This means that learners should also learn how to work individually and in groups smoothly. Gardner adds another mind to be cultivated, which he refers to as the Ethical Mind. By this, he suggests that learners need to realize their role as a citizen, a student, and a future professional and be able to reflect on those roles (Gardner, 2006). It also means "recognizing one's responsibilities as a citizen of one's community, region, nation, and world, and acting on those responsibilities" (Gardner, 2006, p. 158). These five methods seem to define 21st century skills and learners.

Trilling and Fadel (2009) detail each set of the 21st century skills. For the purpose of this research, I will only shed light on the first set of 21st century skills that focuses on critical thinking and problem solving (expert thinking), communication and collaboration (complex communication), and finally creativity and innovation (applied imagination and invention) (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). These skills are believed to be highly essential not only for lifetime learning but also for workforce demands. Since these skills are to be woven with the core subject, this paper aims to explore how they are taught and presented in ESL classrooms.

2.1 Critical thinking and problem solving

Wagner (2014) believes that asking good questions is the core principle in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving. He explained why these skills came to be considered as the first survival skill set of 21st century skills through briefing business development over the past twenty years. ESL classrooms would be one subject among many to foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, in addition to seeing how these skills are presented and used in language classrooms. Learning and teaching a second language (L2) changed over the years from teaching about the language to deeper skills that involve meaning as a communicative tool to be used professionally. In ESL classrooms, critical thinking and problem-solving skills do not necessarily mean to negatively think about something, but rather, incorporating language learning in learners' experiences, their community and world problems (Wallerstein, 1983). Critical thinking can be taught in classrooms by asking questions and giving some information about an issue that later leads to a discussion where students can relate the topic to their personal experiences (Wallerstein, 1983). All these examples of proposing critical thinking in the classroom carry with them a shared goal that leads students to take an action and eventually fosters students' leadership skills (Baron & Sternberg, 1987; Cook-Sather, 2006; Wallerstein, 1983).

According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), education has always honored the belief that mastering content comes first and then comes putting it in action. They added that, for the current standards, research has now been focusing on integrating critical thinking, problem solving and creativity with content knowledge, which increases students' willingness to learn and leads to better learning outcomes (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

It is interesting to see now how teachers are incorporating these skills into their classrooms along with content knowledge. These skills require learners to analyze, evaluate, and interpret

information and apply their findings to solve a problem (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Although critical thinking is a valuable skill, it is still ‘a buzzphrase’ where teachers seem blared about how to foster it, teach it and test it (Voogt, Erstad, Dede, & Mishra, 2013; Wagner, 2014; Young, 1982). It is vital for us as educators and for learners to see how problems evolve and try to use a systemic overview to be curious about things and to be able to elicit what is important and what is not necessary (Wagner, 2014). Classrooms in the 21st century need to teach how to make students curious about what is around them and “learn the inquiry process” instead of passing an exam (Neal, as cited in Wagner, 2014). Another challenge teachers face while teaching critical thinking is the availability and practicality of teaching pedagogies and how critical thinking can be assessed (Young, 1982). In order to develop critical thinking in ESL classrooms, Wallerstein (1983) suggests starting what she called a “descriptive level” (p. 18), where students are simply given opportunities to describe events, places or people in which they learn vocabulary and grammar and which also leads to dialogues and classroom discussions.

According to P21, critical thinking and problem-solving skills enable students to practice different kinds of reasoning, use systematic thinking and be able to make decisions through analyzing, evaluating, interpreting information and synthesizing based on their analysis. P21 also added that students should be able to solve problems and have the confidence to ask questions and recognize the most significant points of view, which will result in offering the best solutions to the problems given. These skills offered in classrooms are believed to have long-lasting objectives where students will be gradually able to make decisions on their own based on their own analysis, search, interpretation of different types of information (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). Therefore, ESL classrooms can offer an opportunity to practice L2 using the analytic skills

mentioned above where language skills are also practiced through a new perspective and much deeper skills.

2.2 Communication and collaboration skills

Teaching English in the current time of ESL classrooms is changing according to a variety of multiliteracies available to both teachers and students (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Isisag, 2012). The accessibility to many digital and virtual platforms promotes collaborative, communicative activities in class and learning at a distance (Herrington & Herrington, 2006). It can also change students' learning styles (Dede, 2005; Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Learners are now aware of the variety of information existing on the internet, which also helps them realize that learning is not exclusive to one source of knowledge (Dede, 2005).

Increasingly, people want education products and services tailored to their individual needs rather than one-size-fits-all courses of fixed length, content, and pedagogy. Whether this individualization of education products is effective depends on both the insight with which learners assess their needs and desires and on the degree to which institutions provide customized services rather than Frankenstein-like mixtures of learning models. (Dede, 2005, p. 8)

Communication and collaboration in the 21st century would be strongly associated with the use of technology. However, teachers also have the responsibility of navigating those multiliteracies for lifelong learning outcomes of the students with and without the presence of technology (Larson & Miller, 2011). According to Johnson and Morrow (1992), effective communicative activities have three main characteristics: information gap, choice and feedback.

Based on that, such activities should add another perspective to learners, provide multiple directions to choose from, and finally give a space to reflect upon and elaborate on new ideas.

In ESL classrooms, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a widely common approach that aims at aiding students to master communicative competence in L2 (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). However, CLT depends on teachers' perceptions of what makes learners competent in the second language and their assumptions and beliefs about L2, which can affect their language learning and acquisition (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). True communication carries with it more than just lexical and grammatical structures of the language. In a communicative ESL classroom, the teacher is a facilitator or co-communicator who prompts and eases discussions, whereas students do most of the communication and learn from each other (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In this case, when teachers implement communicative activities, they are not advised to know the answers of the questions, but rather, try to elicit learners' perspectives, which also generates new ideas and questions for both teachers and students (Wallerstein, 1983). That means, communicative and collaborative skills can foster critical thinking and problem solving through oral and writing activities where students share their opinions, comment on others, and collaboratively create new ideas.

Collaborative learning, on the other hand, is also highly valued to ease learning for many reasons. It helps students develop a sense of belonging and connection that fosters learning in general (National Research Council, 2012). It is also believed that collaboration helps students to be responsible of their own learning through their observations of each other, which can result in some sense of coaching (Taylor et al., 2007, as cited in National Research Council, 2012). Collaborative learning can also help students develop a sense of responsibility towards their own

and their peers' learning process (Ibrahim et al., 2015). According to P21, good integration of communication and collaboration skills in classrooms means that students should be able to not only create and think of ideas, but also focus on how they will communicate efficiently, understand the materials and how they can deliver what they have to discuss, convince and motivate. Such activities also allow students to listen to different points of view, how to make an argument, how to convince others and build on each other's ideas (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).

In real life, students need to work in teams and know how to work collaboratively with others in different contexts. With communication skills, learners need to practice working in teams in an effective way and with flexibility to help each other achieve their goal as a team. These skills can be fostered through many methods in the classroom. Communicating and collaborating with others might be achieved through direct physical face to face contact or virtually, through different forms of technology (Herrington & Herrington, 2006)

2.3 Creativity and Innovation

Literacy now extends its meaning from being able to read and write to include the ability to communicate, interpret meanings, analyse, create and develop new ideas in both the first and the second language (Kaur & Ganapathy, 2006). Creativity too is widely considered as an essential outcome for the 21st century in our global world. Not only do the educational standards have to change to adopt much higher standards, so that learners have a good command on knowledge and survival skills, but it is also vital that our teaching goes hand in hand with the contemporary world we live in now (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The need for teachers providing knowledge and useful resources is surely important; however, the need to expose and practice a high order of thinking,

analyzing and reflecting is becoming highly demanded for the 21st century education (Wagner, 2014).

As mentioned above, the ESL field is dynamic. Educators need to always be updated and creative in what and how to teach, so learners meet the needs of the current social, economic and environmental demands (Schoff, 2016). This means that learners are required to create and innovate new ideas, comprehend complex ones, use different means of technologies, and work collaboratively with others (Fandino Parra, 2013). Trilling and Fadel (2009) believe that creativity is not exclusive to few people, nor it is something people are born with; instead, creativity is something that can be learned and nurtured in our classrooms. Creativity and innovation can be fostered through multiple methods: encouraging students to question more and more and giving students the openness of failing and standing to try again (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Schleicher (2015) adds that learning in the 21st century is more likely to be effective when it helps students make a connection between what they study in classrooms and the outside world. Therefore, educational innovation is not directly linked to how much technology is there in our classroom, but rather, a great deal of emphasis should be made to promote leadership, creativity, and new pedagogical approaches (Schleicher, 2015). Creativity and innovation are not terms exclusive to science, but instead, they emphasize on the role of accepting new ideas, reflecting on the learning process and learning from error and trial (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Creativity can be viewed through the use of authentic learning as a feature of an innovative educational environment, which is strongly reflected on the development of the 21st Century skills (Lombardi, 2007). However, authentic learning might be difficult to implement; but technology has made access to

authentic materials much easier. Lombardi (2007) believes that authentic learning can help learners have:

1. A sense of judgment to distinguish reliable from unreliable information
2. Patience to follow longer arguments
3. Synthetic ability to recognize relevant patterns in unfamiliar contexts
4. And the flexibility to work across disciplinary and cultural boundaries to generate innovative solutions

The availability and exposure of authentic learning can help learners develop higher-order thinking skills and complex communication skills (Lombardi, 2007) and give students multiple opportunities to verbalize their thoughts (Iucu & Marin, 2014). It seems that 21st century skills are interconnected and cannot be taught separately from each other. It can be said that twining ESL acquisition and 21st century skills can help students learn a second language and develop higher-order thinking skills for the future.

2.4 Second language classroom

The current language approaches to learning and teaching have become more learner-centric that support autonomous learning skills (Spratt, 1999) and more directed to integrate social, political, cultural, psychological, cognitive and interactional insights (Hinkel, 2005; Schleicher, 2016). In order for students to be able to take responsibility of their own learning, exposing students to learning skills and a variety of authentic language material is not enough if autonomy is not woven into the teaching context (Loewen & Reinders, 2011).

Although the call for fostering 21st century skills has been agreed upon, they are still not well implanted in practice (Voogt et al., 2013). The main cause is strongly related to the fact that

implanting 21st century skills means major changes in the curriculum, assessment and teaching practice. Most of the studies in second language learning within the 21st century concept are viewed through the presence of technology in classrooms and activities built through technology to facilitate learning (Son, 2018). 21st century skills, like critical thinking, have been globally acknowledged to be essential for competitiveness and employability; however, teaching English as a second language through the concept of higher-order thinking is still a buzzword among educators (Luk & Lin, 2014). As students might have the ability to critically argue and reason easily in the first language (L1), Luk and Lin (2014) argue in their study that second language students might have difficulty critically expressing their thoughts. This hints that some cultural backgrounds may resist learning that requires reflection and expressing opinions. It is important to note that educational institutions are not exclusively places to equip graduates with subject knowledge only; they also are venues to nurture students with skills and abilities in order to be looked-for as workers and contributors to their society (Burrus, Mattern, Naemi, & Roberts, 2017).

Second language (L2) learning and teaching has received a great deal of attention and research. “The ever-increasing pace of globalization has also led to the emergence of new types of learners and learning needs” (Hinkel, 2005, p. xvii), which this research aims to explore. The communicative approach or theory is the most common and favoured method to teach L2 today (Hinkel, 2005; Littlewood, 1983). As the name of the method suggests, it aims to improve learners’ communication competence. Learning a language does not necessarily mean knowing how to use it. That explains why some students who have learned the language for many years still have difficulty communicating it (Widdowson, 1972, as cited in Littlewood, 1983). According to Hinkel (2005), the essential values of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) enable learners to enhance their communication fluency by engaging them in meaningful communication that leads

them to create meaningful and authentic forms of language. Students now prefer a learning environment that offers experiential and participatory learning experiences instead of didactic ones (Koh, Chai, Wong & Hong, 2015).

As technology has changed people's lives, it has also changed English teaching and learning. Language learning is no longer exclusive to classrooms where teachers have to be the providers of knowledge. The availability of technology and media nowadays makes language teaching and learning easily accessible to teachers and students. Media, for instance, provides 1) unlimited resources for authentic language materials (Eslami & Kung, 2016); and 2) affordable platforms for learners to practice and connect with native speakers of English (Chan, 2011).

Most of the current literature of 21st century skills and learning within second language teaching and learning studies the position of technology in 21st century classrooms (Black, 2009; Smith & Dobson, 2011; Son, 2018), project-based learning (Lai & Guo, 2018) and calls for the need of technology as part of teacher education in language teaching classrooms (Son, 2018). The relationship between students' and teachers' perspectives toward what makes English language classrooms a 21st century classroom has not yet been clarified. The practical application of the new educational standards by teachers in ESL classrooms is also limited. There is a need to shed light on students' anticipation of the skills they need for the future from their standpoint and what skills they value in ESL classrooms. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore students' needs of 21st century skills and elaborate them with teachers' perspectives of 21st century skills in ESL classrooms. The research will also explore insights about the students' role in the ESL curriculum and how teachers address students' interests and the needs to create a meaningful ESL 21st century classroom.

2.5 Student voice and leadership

Within the field of ESL learning and teaching, language mastery depends on many factors, from teaching materials, learning strategies, learning environment to learners' needs (Alfian, 2019). Considering learner' needs or voice is essential in designing teaching materials to optimize the language acquisition process. A lot of students find it hard to participate actively and find their voice in classroom, which can influence their achievement later (Núñez, Rios-Aguilar, Kanno, & Flores, 2016). Learners' voice has varying meanings to educators. Cook-Sather (2006) traces the definitions of students' voice from early 1990s to finally cultivate from various studies and academics that these definitions "challenge dominant images of students as silent, passive recipients of what others define as education" (p. 3). That somehow empowers students to be considered as partners in educational reforms and development or maybe beyond the school environment for further lifelong benefits. Teachers here need to listen closely to what students think and suggest about their learning. Cook-Sather (2006) also adds that students' voice makes students feel heard, respected and involved rather than being customers or recipients of knowledge. That indicates building a healthier teacher-student relationship where both parties exchange and communicate better, which is, in fact, what 21st century learning and teaching is grounded upon.

Taking students' voice into practice and a higher level of decisions enable students to develop their leadership skills (Mitra, 2006). Mitra refers to students' voice in all kinds of levels, from giving students a chance to share their ideas, discussing problems and solutions, co-working with adults or teachers, to also letting students take control to make decisions in order to 'building capacity for leadership'. According to Mitra (2006), being heard is the most common type of student voice, in which students are not just empty heads but thinkers who have special knowledge worth sharing (Cook-Sather, 2006; Mitra, 2006). The second level of student voice is collaborating

with adults. In this level, students work with adults together to improve learning, curriculum or teaching and also level up the communication between students and teachers (Mitra, 2006). The third level Mitra refers to is the smallest in the pyramid of student voice, building capacity for youth leadership. This level helps students make important decisions to create a better learning environment. It is vital to create a place of leadership for students and see them taking responsibilities and actions that will contribute to their future and lifelong learning (Mitra, 2006).

Kouzes, Posner, High, and Morgan (2013) refer to student leadership as the ability to influence others in order make their voice heard for the benefits of their school, community and for their future. It takes effort to break that misconception some students have where leadership means being told what to do, and not questioning what they do because of the hierarchy of those above who know better. These students come to believe in others rather themselves as individuals with abilities who can change “values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risks into rewards” (Kouzes et al., 2013, p. 2). The challenge educators might face is how they would nurture those leadership qualities in their students. Giving students an environment where they can practice their abilities within the 21st-century skills framework might influence their abilities to lead. Kouzes et al. (2013) outline what they call Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership around fundamental foundations of the 21st century skills mentioned above.

1. The ability to clarify values and negotiate them by finding shared values.
2. Inspire a shared vision where they envision future by considering possibilities.
3. Challenge the process and their willingness to take risks by looking at innovative ways to improve.
4. Enable others to act by encouraging collaboration and building trust.

5. Encourage the heart by valuing collaboration and a sense of belonging to a community.

Such activities give learners more autonomy over their learning in general and their language learning as well. Learners become more self-directed in the learning process and more aware of their strengths and areas to be developed. Holec (1981), as cited in Wenden (1998), identified that planning, monitoring and evaluating are what define self-directed language learning. This means that learners should be able to set their needs and goals, be able to see their progress in language acquisition, and evaluate their work. Students therefore will be able to identify areas that need more effort. It is difficult to assume that all students come with a set of needs and objectives and are able to monitor their learning (Nunan, 1995). For learners to acquire that autonomy in learning, teachers need to scaffold activities that foster these skills.

By recognizing these practices, teachers, therefore, are aware of the skills needed for today's learners and can create a learning environment that fosters student leadership and autonomy. This could be achieved by involving students in the design of learning and putting their visions and needs as priority (Kouzes et al., 2013), creating changes in curriculum materials and assessment (Wagner, 2008), and getting equal access to educational resources for students and teacher professional development programs (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

“Command and control leadership style” is not applicable in business now to be able to work globally (Wagner, 2014). According to Wagner (2014), youth seem to have also misunderstood leadership as a command-and-control type of leadership where they work to be told what to do and how to do it. They are not aware of how valuable their opinions and ideas are, how leadership is changing where leaders and employees are working together, instead of working hierarchically.

2.6 Gaps in the literature

English as a second language classrooms need to be flexible to the changes in technology, multimedia, world issues and culture. Today's classrooms, as a result, need to accommodate to the everyday changes through new literacies. To do so, it is recommended to integrate what the educators and experts called the 21st century skills (Fandiño Parra, 2013).

According to Cruz and Orange (2016), the importance of second language learning derives from the fact that learners need to express themselves, discuss issues, develop understanding and respect towards different points of view. That means, by fusing 21st century skills in ESL classrooms, learners are expected to be able to 1) communicate in a multicultural/diverse environment; 2) use different kinds of reasoning to reflect thoughts; and 3) manage their own learning autonomously (Cruz & Orange, 2016).

Embedding 21st century skills within content subjects has received many educators' attention. In the past decade, studies have explored the integration of these skills into science (Turiman et al., 2012; Windschitl, 2009), game-based learning or game design (Bermingham, Charlier, & Dagnino, 2013; Thomas, Ge, & Greene, 2011) and project-based approaches (Bell, 2010; Lai & Guo, 2018; Moylan, 2008). Although some studies on 21st century skills within ESL learning and teaching have been conducted, they were conducted within elementary and K-12 contexts. Very little research has been conducted to explore the integration of 21st century skills in ESL classrooms within college level or post-school level. Therefore, there is a need to look at how much 21st century skills are incorporated into these classrooms and what kind of practices are used to develop 21st century skills for career readiness. However, it is important to note here that this research does not call for the ESL classrooms to be skills-driven, which ignores English language content as knowledge. Instead, language education should go hand in hand with new skills to help

learners both, acquire a good command on the language and develop higher thinking skills for future careers.

Fandiño Parra (2013) investigated this topic in studies published in three Colombian foreign language journals; however, the examination has not been thorough. Accordingly, this study aims to further explore students' perspective regarding 21st century skills and what they consider most important for their learning and future careers. It also aims to identify some practices and activities teachers use to promote the acquisition of 21st century skills.

In sum, this chapter reviewed the literature of 21st century skills within ESL learning and teaching, as well as student voice and its significance in putting learners' needs a priority to promote students' leadership skills and autonomy. This chapter also has shed light on the importance of exploring 21st century in ESL classrooms and the gaps missing in the literature.

CHAPTER 3: Theoretical framework

21st century skills are agreed upon to be the recent educational reforms we need to ensure better learners, critical thinkers and more desired employers (Wagner, 2014). This section reviews some learning theories that might underpin the reasons why they are considered to be favorable skills in the current time.

3.1 Reflective learning and thinking

Today's learning and teaching has matured from teaching about the content to emphasize higher thinking practices (Taba, 1963). Part of this call seems related to Dewey's concepts of reflective thinking by pinpointing learning as an active process of finding relationships between what is considered as new information and previous knowledge to finally constructing new information (Mezirow, 1999; Taba, 1963). The process of reflective thinking takes shape in how gradually ideas are built one over the other critically where "each term leaves a deposit which is utilized in the next term" (Dewey, 1910, p. 3). He suggests that one of the vital goals of education is to help individuals acquire habits of reflective thinking, which distances them from routine thinking. It also has the advantage of allowing individuals to manage future matters and be more in control of their ideas rather than taken by routine thought (Dewey, 1933).

Dewey (1933) defines reflective thinking as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends." (p. 9). In other words, reflective thinking is a process for discovery learning (Dewey, 1910) which what 21st century skills are aiming to, to make students think, make connections and create something new. It is also "a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships

with and connections to other experiences and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society” (Rodgers, 2002, p. 845). This definition indicates that reflective learning is also social which requires interacting with oneself experiences and others too. According to Phan (2009), reflective thinking practices can affect learners’ actions, which may also determine and be utilized in solving personal and professional issues in the future.

According to Dewey, reflective thinking is not a random process where thoughts come and go, but rather a process that begins with one idea leading to another in a sequence. This sequence of ideas will eventually lead to a conclusion. Dewey detailed reflective thinking to have two stages: 1) “ a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity...in which thinking originates; and (2) an act of searching, hunting, inquiring to find material that will resolve the doubt” (p. 12).

Reflective thinking (RT) can be a very useful objective in education to be nurtured and taught. Dewey emphasizes the importance of RT, which gives a sense of power and control over thoughts rather than making no effort to give meaning to an event. Without an awareness of how RT works, we may tend to “fall in with prejudices of others and may weaken his independence of judgment” (p. 29). Meaning, acquiring information does not mean having the ability to think reflectively, nor are there specific tasks that help us think correctly. What makes a difference is what Dewey refers to as attitude. It is a key factor that can make a difference and could be nurtured in the classroom environment. Educational institutions have the potential to channel positive attitudes to make use of knowledge (Dewey, 1933).

There are three main attitudes Dewey outlines in his book:

1) *Open-mindednes*, which he defines as the willingness to listen and welcome other opinions and possibilities. It also means to take into consideration other sides of beliefs even to

our own ones that we have not questioned before. Dewey thinks that having an open-mindedness attitude can break out fears that prevent us from looking at new ideas or making new observations.

2) *Whole-heartedness*: Teachers and the teaching materials used in the classroom play an important role in capturing students' attention to ask more and search other readings on their own or by the help of the teacher. What happens in everyday classrooms generally is that the teacher lectures the lesson, and students listen carefully to be able to pass an examination later.

3) *Responsibility*: Similar to whole-heartedness, responsibility is a key attitude that allows individuals to not only accept other sides and opinions of an event, but also consider the effects of their decisions. Teaching materials that do not encourage students to think and reflect upon their experiences may minimize curiosity, and, therefore, they tend to be intellectually irresponsible (Dewey, 1933). This suggests that motivation is an essential responsibility of an educator in the classroom to keep curiosity on board.

Dewey listed five main steps of reflective thought that are not in a particular order. Each step can stand alone and have sub steps:

1. *Suggestion*: a situation where it can be considered as doubtful that requires initial idea or suggestion
2. *Intellectualization*: understanding an event or a problem by recognizing its conditions and causes to be solved later.
3. *Guiding Idea*: a more detailed examination of the situation where other possible solutions and suggestions are expanded or considered. A more controlled thinking of the solutions due to the analysis of the problem.
4. *Reasoning*: stretching ideas by considering past and present ideas or experiences.

5. *Hypothesis Testing*: a final decision or conclusion has been made through an action or in thought.

This could be fostered by infusing curiosity (Dewey, 1910) in the learners so they autonomously perform these skills for future purposes. Curiosity plays a vital role in the learning process, which is also fostered socially and turned to an interest in problems to find solutions and answers collaboratively (Dewey, 1910).

3.2 Social Constructive theory

Unlike positivism, which is grounded on the belief that knowledge is acquired through imitation and observation, constructivism or social constructivism emphasizes on knowledge being constructed socially (Kim, 2001). In its epistemological roots, constructivism is a more student-centered oriented theory where each student's reality is constructed differently than the other based on each individual's previous experiences s/he is referring to. It is based on the educational views by Vygostky and later stretched by Burner (1973).

The social constructivism theory views learning to happen in a socio-cultural environment (Kim, 2001). This theory is based on three main assumptions: reality, knowledge and learning. To social constructivists, reality is created through social interaction, and, therefore, knowledge is the result of those social and cultural frames (Kim, 2001). This also means that learning is a social process constructed within an individual and interaction with others. Gredler (2009) argues that the formation of knowledge is affected by the intersubjectivity constructed by cultural and historical factors of a society.

Social constructivism suggests the demand for collaboration skills between learners themselves and with their educators (Kim, 2001). Activities in the classroom are used, therefore, according to need, since knowledge and learning can be constructed through interaction with oneself or collectively with peers and teachers (Kim, 2001).

The constructive learning theory by Burner seems to mirror Dewey's reflective thinking and learning concept. Students are not passive learners, but rather constructors of new meanings and ideas (Good & Brophy, 1994, as cited in Cooperstein & Kncevar-Weidinger, 2003). Good and Brophy (1994) also added that constructive learning happens best socially and authentically where students share and compare ideas, which is also an opportunity to learn from others through utilizing authentic tasks and materials. Cooperstein and Kncevar-Weidinger (2003) clarify that constructive learning is structured on the principle where students discover, ask questions, reflect and solve problems, in which teachers' main purpose is to facilitate a learning environment and let learners thrive on their own for future goals.

“Students must think about and process the activity, not simply replicate an action, in order for learning to take place. Therefore, through carefully developed questions, our problems and exercises force students to employ a wide range of higher-order cognitive skills... Throughout out lessons, students are asked to analyze and synthesize information, to brainstorm possible responses to questions, to solve problems, and to think critically.” (Cooperstein & Kncevar-Weidinger, 2003, p. 144).

The quality of reflective learning is also based on communication, collaboration and social interaction (Cooperstein & Kncevar-Weidinger, 2003; Soller, 2001), which means that learners are able to not only question, but to also elaborate on their ideas, justify their opinions and

encourage their peers to do the same (Soller, 2001). Teachers, therefore, have an important role in carefully selecting the activities that serve this goal.

Likewise, critical thinking is also considered a constructive activity (McPeck, 1987, as cited in Garrison, 1991) where it helps learners expand their knowledge horizon of the different assumptions and beliefs as well as have enough curiosity to challenge those assumptions to create something better (Garrison, 1991). This supports Dewey's reflective thinking concept and suggests a relatable connection between critical and reflective thinking (Garrison, 1991).

Schunk (2000), as cited in Molka-Danielsen (2009), listed a number of activities that are based on social constructivism, which include reciprocal teaching, cognitive apprenticeships, problem-based instruction, and collaborative approaches. Like reflective learning activities, social constructivism is not exclusive to socially interacting with others, but also fosters relating one to his experiences and knowledge to construct something new. Teachers here are facilitators, rather than instructors, of knowledge (Lave & Wagner, 1990). Meaning, teachers should help learners find their own meanings and knowledge instead of dictating facts. That explains the core basis of social constructivism as a learner-centred approach where the learner is the emphasis, instead of the content or the teacher (Glaserfeld, 1989; Prawat & Folden, 1994).

According to the social constructivist point of view, learning in the classroom can be considered a micro-society where learners are guided and taught through authentic materials and dynamic interaction (Fosnot, 1993). Teachers are required to consider a variety of learning styles and motivation strategies to help students learn work collaboratively, reflectively and socially.

The social constructivist theory has been stretched to include a variety of teaching models and activities that consist of self-directed learning, problem-based learning, experiential learning

and reflective practices (Jiang, 2013). Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, and Hagg (1995) listed four main factors that make up a constructivist learning environment:

1. *Context*: refers to the real-world setting that includes social, cultural, political and power issues
2. *Construction* of knowledge where learners articulate and reflect within a context. It also means allowing students and learners to make their own meanings based on their experiences and personal interpretations rather than the teacher's interpretations of an experience.
3. *Collaboration* is a key factor as it has been mentioned above. Collaboration not only allows learners to acquire communication and teamwork skills, but also give students a space to share and modify knowledge structures. It also helps learners evaluate and develop existing beliefs.
4. *Conversation* is "an essential part of the meaning-making process because knowledge, for most of us, is language mediated" (p. 14).

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

4.1 Objectives and research questions

This study aims to explore students' perspectives on which skill among the 21st century skills is highly important for their learning and for the future. It also aims to seek teachers' understandings of how 21st century skills can be incorporated into ESL classrooms. Accordingly, the research questions are as follows:

1. What skills do students prefer among the variety of 21st century learning skills that could be taught in English language classrooms?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of 21st century learning and skills in English language classrooms in higher education institutions?
3. Are teachers adapting their curriculum to teach along with the current learning standards considering students' needs and interests? If so, how?

The previous literature in chapter 2 have focused on integration of 21st century skills into many subjects and educational levels. There had been little attention given to the extent 21st century skills are incorporated into English language classrooms. The literature above directed me to consider student's point of view regarding 21st century skills as a less studied issue, and to explore teachers' perceptions about the practical applications of these skills in ESL classrooms. The results of this study might suggest some helpful practices of the skills to ESL teachers.

4.2 Methodology

This study is a mixed-method research, that is, it is both a quantitative and qualitative case study. Instead of classifying this case study as one that belongs to one type of case studies, this research has some features from several case study types pointed out by case study pioneers: Yin,

Stake and Merriam. The need for using a case study derives from the belief Yin (1981) indicates where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Based on this belief, this case study has indicated above the ambiguity of what 21st century skills mean to different educators, perceived, practiced and assessed differently. Yin (1981) believes that case studies are not merely qualitative research as Stake (1995) indicates, but can be both quantitative and qualitative. Although it seems that Yin's epistemological beliefs of case studies are positivist (Yazan, 2015), he did not favor one over the other. Instead, he signifies that both qualitative and quantitative methods are important. "The use of case studies allows one to examine the knowledge utilization process, and ultimately to recommend and design appropriate policy interventions" (Yin, 1981, p. 100). "Therefore, I chose case study research to help me know how both students and teachers perceive what is known as 21st century skills and what they prioritize in the learning and teaching process at the current time for future purposes."

Stake (1995), on the other hand, seems to have a different epistemological viewpoint, which looks to take a constructivist side (Yazan, 2015). Stake (1995), as cited in Yazan (2015), believes that "contemporary qualitative researchers hold that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered" (p. 99). This can also mean that there are different realities and multiple views of knowledge to be explored. This case study seeks to look at those different views of students and teachers with regard to contemporary learning skills.

This research is a mixed-methods (i.e. quantitative and qualitative) case study. Stake (1995) differentiates three types of case studies, the intrinsic, the instrumental and the collective. This mixed-method case study includes features from two types of case studies stated by Stake: intrinsic and instrumental. As the notions suggest, an intrinsic case study is where the researcher

investigates a case because of an interest in a particular phenomenon to better understand the case (Stake, 1995).

This case is intrinsic to me simply because of my passion and interest in literacies and new learning skills to better teach English as a second language. I have always believed as a student of English that I am not only learning a language, but also getting to discover cultures and world issues I was not aware of. Learning English as a foreign language opened doors to many other things that have influenced my identity and how I now know that learning is not merely about the language itself but something much deeper. This interest has grown since I started teaching in the technical college I am currently working at. The curriculum I have taught, in addition to the supervisors' feedbacks of teaching the language through traditional methodologies, made me question my teaching strategies, in which I wanted to utilize and improve students' skills in my classes. I wanted to know what students want and need and design my lessons accordingly, as much as possible, so that they have the chance to discover and shape their own identities and beliefs.

This study is also an instrumental case study because of its research questions that require not only an understanding of a phenomenon, but also helps other learners and educators to identify their perspectives of 21st century skills and learning and how they translate those perspectives into their classrooms. I do also think that this study will hopefully help me gain insights to work with educational experts in order to develop new policies and suggest new teaching methodologies in English language education as a second and foreign language.

Merriam is more likely to have similar epistemological to Stake (Yazan, 2015). Like Stake, Merriam believes that reality is constructed through people's social interaction; therefore, it means also that knowledge consists of a variety of interpretations. According to Merriam (1998), as cited

in Yazan (2015), case studies do not have certain data collection methods, but rather, they “focus on holistic description and explanation” (p. 29).

Case study is a powerful methodology due to its ability to focus closely on a phenomenon in depth through immersion by using different sources of evidence (Zainal, 2007). This study’s core goal is to explore the applications of new literacies in ESL settings to give an understanding of the contemporary trends in education that promote students’ autonomy for future use.

a. Methods

This research was carried out through as follows: 1) a total of 26 students from the School of Continuing Studies participated in an online survey. The majority of the participants had completed their bachelor’s degree and were studying in the program to improve their language and pursue higher degrees. The students come from different backgrounds including Iran, Iraq, China, Japan Syria and Korea. After an email was circulated to teachers to allow me talk to students and a permission to elicit students’ participation from 3 classes was obtained, participants were chosen for this study from two different levels: Mid Intermediate level and High Intermediate level. The reasons for selecting these two levels are: A) the interim director suggested these levels as well as the advanced since students at these levels have already developed a good command of the language and are able to have a vision for their plans after finishing the courses. B) Among Mid, High intermediate and advanced levels in the school, I got three invitations to only two levels mentioned.

The research also used 2) semi-structured in-depth interviews with 6 teachers teaching ESL students at the same institution. Three out of 6 teachers are part time staff, who also teach at connected institutions in Montreal. The educators’ experiences vary from 5 to 26 years in teaching

ESL learners. 3 of the educators are in administrative positions in the school with 20-26 years of experience.

Table 1 Participant Summary

| Participants pseudonyms | Experience in teaching ESL |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Emma | 14 |
| Olivia | 5 |
| Sophia | 20 |
| Amelia | 26 |
| Amy | 16 |
| Patricia | 25 |

To answer my research questions, I chose McGill School of Continuing Studies where English language is taught due to its prestigious reputation in Montreal. The school offers different degrees and courses, including undergraduate certificates, graduate-level certificates and professional development courses. I approached the school through exchanged emails with the interim Director of the Language and Intercultural Communication department. Learners in the institutions come from various countries around the world to improve their language proficiency, pursue higher degrees in education, and get better job opportunities.

In order to answer the research questions of this study, I chose these two methods in particular to be able to identify which 21st century skills students favour and how that might affect teachers' practices. To look into the teachers' experiences and perspectives towards 21st century skills and how these new literacies are integrated in ESL classrooms, I used semi-structured interviews. This can result in identifying common themes by pointing out essential differences that might emerge from the interviews. The qualitative part of this study is used to enhance the survey

results by adding a deeper understanding of the topic (Jones-Harris, 2010). It is important to note that a summary of the statistical data derived from the survey is shared with the teachers for discussion.

b. Survey

ESL learners at McGill School of Continuing Studies were asked to complete a survey using an online survey programme, Google forms. The aim of this survey is to explore participants' perceptions of 21st century skills and what are the skills they consider important today. The data collected from the survey were analyzed and presented to the teachers during the interviews for their opinion about students' standpoint regarding what skills they consider most important and how these skills would be adapted in their ESL classroom. The survey consisted of three questions. In order to elicit learners' data, I chose a Likert question for the first question. Participants rated learning skills from least important to the most important, as presented in (picture 1) according to their preferences. The survey included all the skills' definitions in the prompt, so learners have an idea what each skill means according to (P21).

Question 2 is an open -ended question. Learners were asked which skill they would like to improve and master for a future career. Question 3 is a (yes or no) question to know whether the English course they are studying is helping them manage their own learning.

Picture 1 Question 1.

21st Century skills *

| | Not at all impor... | Slightly unimpo... | Neutral | Slightly import... | extremely impo... |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Critical thinking | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Problem solving | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Communication | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Collaboration | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Creativity | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Innovation | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| English langua... | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| leadership | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Picture 2 Question 2 and 3

2. What skill(s) would you like to improve and master in your English language course for future career? Why? *

Long answer text

3. Dose your English Language course help you to be responsible for your own learning? How? *

Long answer text

c. Semi-structured in depth interviews

Stake (1995) believes that interviews are “the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64). This statement indicates that interviews as a method can reveal various opinions if they are conducted

by providing the right questions (Satke, 1995). Before conducting interviews, the researcher needs to set a plan of the nature of the questions to help him/her elicit the explanations sought for (Stake, 1995). Therefore, the interview questions were guided by the research objectives, which aim to explore the practices and activities they use to promote 21st century skills in ESL classrooms. I chose to add interviews as another method in this study because it is believed that qualitative data can help the quantitative part of the research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). It is important here to clarify that the data collected from the students was shared with the teachers in order to know how teachers would change their teaching pedagogies accordingly. Johnson et al. (2007) believe that quantitative data can contribute in establishing base line information. Based on this belief, the data obtained from the survey were essential in shaping the interview questions.

Semi-structured, one-on one interviews were used to conduct this study to have a variety of views and opinions from different teachers who have a varying background of knowledge and experience. I specifically chose interviews because I believe that this method will enable participants to express their thoughts and ideas, and also because they are flexible in a way that allows participants to add any thoughts whenever they feel they need to justify certain ideas (Longhurst, 2009). The interviews were in-depth with six educators. Semi-structured interviews allow exploration of educators' experiences more openly. I used open-ended questions in which each educator is asked the same questions, which are based on the interview guide. This method helped me categorise possible themes from the interviewees.

Before commencing the interviews, teachers are sent a detailed outline of the interviews, which includes: a research topic and questions they will be asked to give them some amount of time to think and prepare their answers. I also informed the participants of the duration of the

interviews. Interviews are voice-recorded then transcribed for coding. The interviews took place according to the participants' preferences.

d. Ethical considerations

After receiving permission from the English language school and teachers, I made an oral in-class announcement regarding the research to students. I provided students with fliers that included the research topic, objectives and my contact information, so students who are willing to participate can easily contact me. After receiving approvals from the students who are willing to participate, online consent forms were sent to them to be signed. The consent form appeared as a separate link when participants received the study information and survey via email. A prompt is provided in the link for saving/printing a copy of the consent form before clicking agree to continue with the survey.

For the interviews, with the school administration's and principal's approval, an email was sent to the school administrators, so it could be circulated to the teachers for volunteers to be interviewed. Those who were interested in participating signed the consent form electronically. Therefore, both teachers and students will already have a copy of the signed consent forms. Since all consent forms are soft copies, they are kept in the principal investigator's personal computer and locked with a password.

To ensure confidentiality, all participants' personal information was anonymized and given random pseudonyms when reporting. They were also informed that their privacy and confidentiality will be maintained. In the survey, students' personal information (e.g. email addresses age, level of English course, etc.) appeared anonymized in reporting. The audio-

recorded interviews were transcribed, analyzed, coded, and safely protected on the principal investigator's personal computer and protected by a password. The identifiable data and the audio-recordings will remain stored safely for 7 years after the study was conducted, and then will be destroyed.

e. Data analysis

In this mixed-method study, two kinds of data were collected: quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (interviews), and they were analyzed separately.

The analysis of interviews in this study was guided by thematic analysis, which is defined as “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). First, I transcribed the interview recordings, gave pseudonyms to participants, and coded them. After that, I read the transcripts multiple times to search for themes. Four themes emerged from the data according to the research questions: 1) changes in ESL classrooms; 2) the impact of the survey results on the teachers' practice; 3) activities that promote 21st century skills acquisition; and 4) activities that promote student autonomy.

CHAPTER 5: Results

This chapter presents results from both the online survey responses of the students (26 participants) and the interviews (six teachers). The statistical results of the survey are explained briefly, and then followed by the qualitative results of the interviews. Thematic analysis was employed to organize the interview data.

5.1 Survey results

The survey aimed to identify what skills the students think are most important from their point of view. A summary of the survey results of the 26 students is presented below. The survey consisted of three questions. The first question is a Likert scale question where they rate how important or unimportant learning skills are (i.e. critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, innovation, leadership and main English language skills). The second question is an open question about what skill would they like to improve more for a future career. And the last question is a yes or no question in whether the course they are studying is helping them to be responsible for their own learning.

The range of years learners studied English varied between 2 and 4 years. The first question and the most important one answers which skills from the 21st century learning skills listed in the survey is highly valued. Before answering the question, brief definitions were provided to students to give them an idea what these skills mean according to the P21 definitions.

The 26 students thought that all the 21st century skills are important to some extent. None of students chose ‘not important at all’ for any of the skills. Most of them (n=18), however, found that communication is an extremely important skill. The second skill that is rated as extremely important was ESL skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). Leadership and collaboration

was least chosen by the students as extremely important.

21st Century Learning Skills

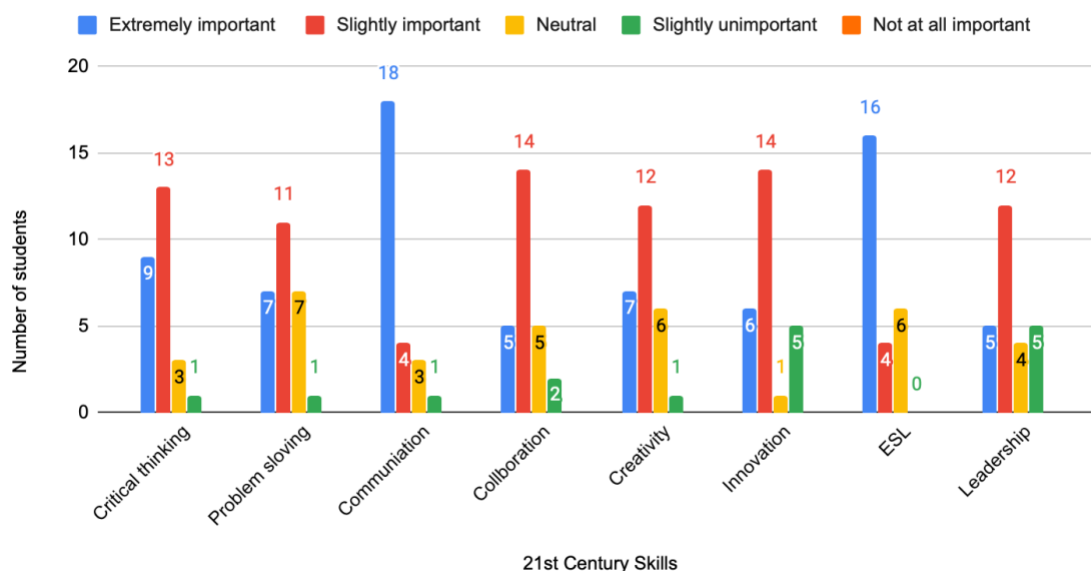


Figure 1 student answers about the usefulness of the 21st centuries skills

Students reported in the second question of the survey that they would like to improve communication skills (which includes speaking, writing and conversation). They also reported that the English course they are in helped them to learn the language outside the classroom on their own and be responsible for their own learning.

5.2 Interview results

Based on the interviews with teachers of ESL classrooms, four themes emerged, these were: (1) how teaching in ESL classrooms changed over the years; (2) how the survey results would influence the teachers' practice; (3) practices that help promote 21st century learning skills; and (4) activities and practices that help students manage their own learning during and after the English language courses.

1. How teaching ESL has changed over the years/ over their experiences?

All six teachers agreed that teaching in ESL classrooms changed in a way that teaching methodologies and practices switched from being teacher-centric to more learner-centric. In the current time, teachers are no longer the information providers or the main sources of knowledge, but rather facilitators. Students are now the main players in the classroom. Teachers agreed on the fact that current teaching strategies are designed to give students more autonomy and independence. They also agreed on the role of technology and Internet in the way students learn and how it influenced teachers' ways of practice.

Emma: "I'm noticing quite a marked distinction between younger students who are very tech savvy and how they learn and like to learn and more mature students[...]they're not so focused on technology as a means to learning a language".

Olivia: "I think social media has changed a lot of the ways we learn, and the way we teach. It has also created a wider community of teachers and learners to share ideas, recourses and practices [...] language was only taught and practiced in the classroom [...] everything now is one click away [...] ESL classrooms are more becoming technology based"

Sophia: "I would say in terms of using technologies and affordances... of course we integrated a lot more use of online tools for learning... it's just not that what we do has changed so much, but that we've adopted to being able to do it using different tools."

Amelia: "The change was very slow, but eventually it had to happen because the internet developed. Through technology, teachers are able to exchange and praise ideas, practices and methodologies and how it is important to switch from traditional thinking and teaching to all the new methods because the world demanded more autonomy and independence to students".

Amy: "my training[...]was really focusing on communication and collaboration [...]teaching English it's been pretty much stayed the same, the big difference is technology"

Therefore, the big changer in ESL classrooms is technology and how it has influenced teaching practices. Because of technology, teaching and learning materials are just one click away. It has become much easier for teachers to exchange materials, communicate with each other and with students and get access to use a variety of activities.

Some teachers pointed out that teaching in ESL classrooms has not changed much, especially in English, for academic purposes classes. However, the way they teach the language has changed, as well as the learners.

Emma: “In a language course, grammar, writing, reading and vocabulary objectives have not changed, but the way how I teach the language has changed. For example, a text doesn't need to be for reading comprehension, you know a text can be for analyzing style, sentence varieties, sentence structure, idiomatic expressions.”

Patricia: “I don't think I've changed in terms of teaching [...] but what has changed is the use of technology and what our students have available to them perhaps also what teachers have available to them”

Some teachers indicated that ESL classrooms changed from their point of view and according to their practice. A writing course teacher pointed out that ESL classroom tasks, as well as teaching ESL learners, has changed over the years. Another teacher mentioned how the internet and teaching methodologies changed ESL classrooms. She indicated that recent methodologies encourage student autonomy and independence.

Sophia: “Yes writing courses has changed over the years. Students are required to write different genres, they are also aware of the different audiences. Teaching has changed in the way where students are no longer consumers of information, but also producers in different platforms, like social media. So, as a field, we've become more aware of engaging students with wider possible audiences and thinking about who those audiences are, what the purposes are, and how the medium affects the way you craft a message.”

Amelia: “The change was very slow but eventually it had to change because the internet developed. Through technology teachers are able to exchange and praise ideas, practices and methodologies and how it is important to switch from traditional thinking and teaching to all the new methods because the world demanded more autonomy and independence to students”.

These teachers noted that although technology has contributed vastly to ESL classrooms, teaching in its core, as being based on a communicative approach, has not changed. Language activities and practices have changed because of technology, but the main objective of teaching, which is communicative in this case, has not changed much. Even with academic language courses

and traditional teaching approaches, like grammar-centred courses, it has only changed to be more communicative as possible.

Sophia added that not only ESL classrooms changed to be more learner-centred or technologically based, but the learners also changed in a way that they are tech-savvy and autonomous.

Sophia: “they already come with a certain amount of awareness of presenting themselves in different venues in some ways that they've gotten much more savvy about understanding that and the need to do it persuasively”

Patricia, on the other hand, finds some students are more dependent on the teachers as sources of information and are used to be given everything, which makes it a little hard for them to adapt to new learning skills that feature autonomy and leadership. She noted that it usually depends on the students' educational backgrounds and experiences.

Patricia: “I find that students feel more entitled and they're featured to give them everything [...] like they deserve certain things but maybe some people want to be spoon-fed, I feel like the idea of autonomy has changed, maybe some students are more autonomous and can go out and find answers but others are not”

2. Based on the survey results, how can that influence teachers' practice

Four teachers out of six think that the results of the survey were not surprising since communication is woven into their teaching from the beginning. However, fostering communication in ESL classrooms might be challenging sometimes; however, it is not something new in the field.

Emma: “I noticed that this kind of teaching is very challenging with more mature students or among professional clientele who are focused on their own individual target and goals.. for some of them it is elbow mentality rather than holding hands mentality [...] I think that some students underestimate the importance of collaborative and communicative learning[...] it's a huge challenge to truly meet the needs of every learner, especially, when they're from different cultural backgrounds or linguistically own cultural backgrounds”

Sophia: “as you know, the role of communication and teaching languages is not something that has been newly discovered. It is...long long ago that was the idea of communicative competence and how that should form the basis of our curricular and our purposes in our classrooms, so I would say it hasn't changed at all [...] it is more about the tools available to us and the different expectations for how people communicate now, those things have changed”

Amelia: “there is less emphasis on being perfect, and a lot of emphasis on being optimal, and to me the difference between perfect and optimal that optimal is not perfect but it's exactly what you need [...] using proper channel for your communication [...] In which it indirectly building higher level thinking skills, all of that goes into consideration without overtly discussing it ”

Amy: “my training [...] was really focusing on communication and collaboration...teaching English pretty much stayed the same, the big difference is technology in the classroom and the power of that”

Patricia noted that communication, collaboration or corporation, has always been her teaching objective too because that is what she believes an essential skill for the future as well.

3. Activities and practices that promote the acquisition of 21st century skills

Emma believes that intercultural communication is a very effective way to teach critical thinking and integrate 21st century skills in English second language classrooms. She adds that in order for students to effectively learn communication skills, it is essential to raise awareness of the differences in cultures, especially, in multicultural and multilingual environments like Montreal. And therefore, to make her classes more focused on communication, she thinks more efforts will be required from both teachers and students.

Emma: “that are professionals who are potentially mid-career and they're not so focused on technology as a means to learning a language I would say. I think from what you said about communication always been [...]their primary goal, but I think because we live in information age expressing critical thinking, which is required by a lot of assignments oral or writing, it is not as easy to achieve I think for some.”

She added that integrating 21st century skills does not mean abandoning the traditional methods in language teaching, especially for academic purposes, but to make teaching as interactive and collaborative as possible where the teacher is no longer lecturing language in front

of the class. She emphasized on the fact that teaching in ESL classrooms is not literally teaching a language, but it goes more than that.

Emma: “I think for employers and for students, it is necessary to teach beyond the language. It's about how to structure a letter, what tone is appropriate, how to write a persuasive closing paragraph so that somebody responds[...]and these are I believe they fit in the notion of the 21st-century skills as an effective communication in a global work place to be very clear and very simple, very well structured for healthier and positive communication”

Amelia agreed with Emma that traditional language methods should not be abandoned. She added that although her teaching is grounded on the communicative language teaching method, when students can express themselves verbally very well but have bad writing skills, she emphasized that traditional methods are useful in such cases.

“[...]and because these kind of classes are academic it was hard to tie them to anything in real life because there were for academia and university”

Olivia agrees with Emma that teaching English through the new skills requires effort and needs modification on how we teach the language, taking into consideration the different learning styles and needs of the students. She added that integrating social media, for example, is one way she thinks important in ESL classrooms and how they changed to become more technology-based. Patricia believes that collaborative activities and being able to work with others is an essential skill to be fostered in ESL classrooms. She added that activities like individual, pair or group work, where students share ideas and opinions with each other, is the kind of practice she prefers and helps students to work with others later in the future in the career life.

4. Activities and practices that promote autonomy.

Teachers use similar practices to help students manage their own learning. These activities help students to be more aware of what they are studying, the purpose behind them and they can be

responsible of their learning progress. 3 out of 6 teachers referred to feedbacks as part of their curriculum and as a method that is more student-centered to help students get into the habit of reflecting on their work. Teachers referred to peer-feedback, self-feedback and teacher-feedback. As an example, a teacher finds peer-reviews helpful in her classes, as they give students a sharper eye before looking to their own work. One teacher emphasized that individual feedbacks are important because each student has his/her own needs and goals, and therefore, personalized materials are helpful to students to nurture their needs. Another example of feedback activities as reported by a teacher is to video-record her students' presentations and let them write feedbacks to their own works following the grid provided. Students not only evaluate their own presentations, but also comment on the teacher's feedbacks where they see clearly their teacher's comments and why he/she gave them that particular mark.

Emma: “we have a syllabus but then you have a student who has particular needs, [...] they need to be nurtured in a way that feeds where they are with the language. So, individual feedback, very personalized resources are all important tools, online resources, a lot of additional material that can speak to different learning, different ways of learning, because some people are auditive, some are more visual or something more advanced like challenging thing when you go back to getting the basics.”

Two teachers used homework journals as another activity so students keep track of their own language learning progress. They reported that this activity is part of self-directed learning. They indicated that by using this method, students see clearly where they are in their learning journey and what areas need more effort. They also added that these journals are great for finding, adding, and sharing new materials with the teacher and their peers.

All the teachers agreed that online materials are another way to help students manage their own learning. Students have the opportunity to decide first what they think is a useful resource from a bad recourse and respond to these materials during class discussions. One teacher added that using online materials or authentic ones (e.g. ads, articles, videos, and documentaries) can be a good

opportunity to create chances for students to express their opinions, evaluate sources, and criticize materials. She added that by doing so, students expressed that these activities helped them gain confidence in expressing themselves and in selecting the appropriate skills in a particular situation.

Amy: “ what we could do is having the students develop the literacy to know what might be a good source to a less good one”

Two teachers added that they make sure that their students see how what they have in class is tied with their surroundings. One teacher is keen to encourage her students to always reflect on their life-experiences, work experiences, their training, their backgrounds and their culture. Therefore, activities take shape in the form where students react to different situations by bringing their points of view for class discussion.

Amelia: “I use a lot of my students life experiences, work-experiences, their training, their backgrounds, to bring it to classrooms as regular everyday people who can apply these strategies in learning a language.”

She added that using this kind of reflective learning, some students found this way a bit challenging. She commented that getting learners to get used to these kinds of activities takes time. She also added that she got criticized for doing “less teaching” by her students and some teachers because of her teaching approaches. She reported that some teachers are still lecturing language or using traditional teaching methods. Despite the fact that there was a lot of evidence for how good and successful traditional language methods are for language learning (e.g. test-based method), Amelia commented that:

“ I don’t think the teachers switched quickly to that (high order thinking skills/ or activities). It was uncomfortable to teach because it required so much autonomy given to students and less autonomy given to teachers.”

One teacher considered composing summaries is another activity she used in her class to help students use critical thinking skills

Amy: “A skill that I find important is summarizing, where students decide which information is important, and why it is important. It is a remarkably important skill in academia and work [...] building up summaries, orally and in written form in a reading class is forcing students to employ some critical thinking skills.”

CHAPTER 6: Discussion

In the first part of the findings, the survey, it answered the research question of what skill students consider as the most important one for future career among all 21st century skills. The majority of the students voted communication skills as a highly important skill in their English language classrooms that they would like to improve for future career purposes. In the second part of the findings, teachers have reported that choosing communication was not surprising and their English language classrooms are rooted in a communicative method. They also listed various practices that promote the acquisition of 21st century learning skills and other activities that help students manage their own learning.

Teachers indicated that 21st century skills are not new skills. This parallels with Silva's (2009) indication that 21st century skills can be historically linked to Socrates and Sophists, and Dewey's concept of *grounded in experience* (Johnson & Reed, 2008, as cited in Larson & Miller, 2011). According to Dewey (as cited in Larson & Miller, 2011, p. 122), an educated individual is defined as "one who thinks and reflects before acting, responds intelligently to a problematic situation and finally assesses the consequences of a chosen plan of action". This definition aligns perfectly with 21st century learning skills. The definition also parallels with the concept of learner autonomy and a learner-centered approach.

Teachers emphasized that generally ESL classrooms have shifted from being teacher-centered to become more learner-centred. Students have become also producers of knowledge rather than just receivers. It is important to note that a learner-centered approach does not mean that "the teacher hands over power, responsibility and control to the students from Day 1" (Nunan, 1995, p. 134). Instead, a learner-centred approach, according to Nunan (1995), means that the teacher is the coach who provides students with materials that promote autonomy.

Data collected from the student survey and teacher interviews agreed on the importance of communication skills as the most needed competence for the workplace environment. Levy and Murnane (2007) stated in their study two kinds of essential skills for future workers: expert thinking and complex communication. This belief support the findings of this study, where communication skills are top voted by learners and highly used by teachers.

6.1 Communicative method in ESL classrooms

With all the vast changes in the world, new competencies have emerged to arm the new generations to live in an economically and socially developed world. Educational systems need to provide young people with these new skills that are embedded within social values and attitudes to positively contribute in the 21st century world (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). In order for English language programs to achieve their academic purposes and meet employment requirements for learners, Butler (2005), as cited in Kung (2015), suggests that teachers should promote learners' communicative skills. This belief aligns perfectly with the teachers' statements, where the CLT method is what their classes are based on. Teachers have reported that in purely academic English courses, traditional language methods are more suitable to use than any other. They also stated that traditional language methods should not be abandoned. Morrell (2012) agrees with this belief, where he states that "as teachers of English language arts, part of our responsibility is helping our students acquire these 21st-century literacies without abandoning our commitment to the traditional literacies that have defined the education of the previous 20 centuries." (p. 302)

Teachers believe that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been and is still the foundation of second language teaching and learning. Using CLT in English as a second language classrooms seems to align perfectly with the 21st century expectations that aim to help students acquire effective communication skills, which go beyond second language (L2) competencies (e.g.

reading, writing, speaking and listening). The findings revealed some applications teachers use in class to promote communicative competence where 21st century skills are incorporated. Being able to communicate in L2 means also being able to negotiate, solve problems, convince and use high-order thinking skills. In order to fulfil that goal, teachers try to create a more naturalistic learning environment by exposing learners to authentic materials. Teachers emphasize the importance of clearly outlining the goals and using what they learn in class outside the classroom in daily communication as well as in their careers in later life. They indicated that using authentic materials and being in an English-speaking country, learners have great opportunities to get access to authentic materials and practice L2. Authentic materials are defined as texts that are not intended for language-teaching purposes (Jordan, 1997), which are also believed to give learners a more communicatively naturalistic environment (Kung, 2015).

Glimore (2007) sees that “the concept of authenticity can be situated in either the text itself, in the participants, in the social or cultural situation and purposes of the communicative act, or some combination of these” (p. 4). This belief fits perfectly with the examples teachers provide in using CLT and authentic materials in English as a second language (ESL) classrooms. Some teachers said that using real professional emails in class for discussion is one way of using authentic material. This activity gives learners a real picture of how professional emails are written and what language structure to use. Another teacher who teaches immigrants took her students to markets to practice some basic life skills in L2, for example, using the Canadian currency, asking for prices and learning vocabulary items. With the known importance of using authentic materials, according to teachers, they are sometimes unsuitable to include in purely academic classes. These classes are designed to teach academic English to students to complete a degree and be able to write a research for instance. Authenticity is highly valued in teaching L2, and it is important for

students to know that authenticity does not always mean something good (Gilmore, 2007). Providing students with multiple authentic materials for class discussion is another example. Teachers gave fake news as an example in which good sources and fake ones are brought into discussion to enable students to reflect and evaluate materials. However, a study by Peacock (1997) showed that there is no significant difference in the motivational level when using authentic and artificial materials. On the other hand, he emphasises on the importance and functionality of using authentic materials to beginners to motivate learners.

Besides using authentic materials that reflect real communication, communicative skills carry with them other aspects. Canale and Swain (1980) state that there are no specific skills that are included in basic communicative skills. While some studies refer to grammatical skills (Savignon, 1972, as cited in Canale & Swain, 1980), others refer to the ability of expressing oneself in L2 and the knowledge of the paralinguistic aspects of L2. Teachers state that communication skills consist other skills, like critical thinking skills, problem solving, collaboration, creativity skills and other 21st century literacies. They also indicated that communication should reflect real-life interaction needed for both daily use and professional purposes. They are fully aware of the 21st century skills and their importance in second language classrooms. They also realize that students are no longer passive learners, but active participants of the learning process. Teachers encourage students to share their experiences in class and to participate in meaning making. CLT seems an umbrella term to mean different things to teachers and scholars. For some teachers, communication means also collaboration. Others refer to it as an interpretation of expressions and being able to reflect on experiences verbally or in a written form. Prasad (2013) stated that CLT today can be referred to so many principles that can be practiced in different ways by teachers that

depend on the teaching context, learners' age and level, and the learners' objectives. He outlined 10 assumptions on what CLT means in the 21st century.

1. Learners are motivated when they are engaged in interactive meaningful communication
2. Efficient class activities that allow learners to negotiate meaning and stretch their language.
3. Content that is relevant to learners, purposeful, interesting and engaging.
4. Using different learning modalities and language skills.
5. Various activities that include discovery learning, language analysis, and reflection
6. Language learning is gradual, which involves creative use of language, trial and error.
7. Learners develop their learning progress and have different needs and motivations for language learning.
8. Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies.
9. The role of the teacher in language learning is that of a facilitator
10. The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing.

As mentioned above, communication skills are unsurprisingly the most important skill according to learners. The integration of CLT with high-order thinking skills is not something new either. Teachers stated that especially in writing and speaking classes, high-order thinking skills are embedded in class activities without being explicitly outlined. Today's technology gives learners more opportunities to be involved in authentic activities that go beyond the classroom setting.

6.2 Technology

Wagner (2014) highlights that teaching and learning in the 21st century needs to go beyond technology. Although this is true, with the students being technology savvy, teaching and learning in the 21st century cannot be separated from the existence of technology to meet the full optimum of communication, collaboration and other 21st century skills' objectives.

Technology has the potential of acquiring a second language better (Ybarra & Green, 2003, Yang & Walker, 2015). Technology now makes the accessibility of authentic materials easier for both teachers and students. Not only that, instructors stated that the role of technology has a more significant influence on ESL classrooms than any other factor. As technology and social media changes our lives constantly, they have also changed how students learn, how teachers teach, and even how assessment is done and practiced. The integration of technology and language teaching and learning aims to not only prepare learners for the future, but also to help them make meaning and construct their own knowledge (Andrei, 2016).

Teachers reported that social media and technology are very essential parts of their classrooms. Digital literacies are embedded in today's classrooms. It seems that teachers do not explicitly teach digital literacies; instead, they use social media and different modalities to teach L2. Tour (2019) indicates that digital literacies do not mean technical computer skills. He adds that "to be digitally literate means to have a rich repertoire of skills, knowledge, understanding, and ways of thinking needed to interpret, manage, share, and create meanings in a wide range of digital channels, for different purposes, in various contexts, and with different audiences" (Tour, 2020, p. 3). Some teachers said that they use videos and documentaries for students to reflect, interpret and summarize. Summarizing media is one activity that teachers use to help learners learn and use new vocabulary items to use them later in their communication. One teacher commented

that summarizing video documentaries and texts is an important exercise for L2 learners to make meaning of media. Such activities are in line with the concept of media literacy, which includes the capability of evaluating, analyzing, decoding and producing other forms of media (Westbrock, 2011). Learners, therefore, will be able to construct meanings from images and videos (Morrell, 2012), reflect on their own experiences, learn how forms of media can be structured and finally be able to produce forms of media and language at the same time. The vast amount of media offers a large amount of learning opportunities. With media, teachers have multiple authentic sources to select from to improve learners' language (Kung, 2016).

Teachers are aware of the essential value of collaborative and communicative work that enhances productivity and boosts learners' confidence. Technologies give professionals and academics new methods for course design and delivery (Roberts, 2005). These technologies give value as well to the concept of social interaction, which has been emphasized by many scholars, from Vygotsky (1978), to Lave and Wagner's (1991) concept of situated learning (as cited in Roberts, 2005). Social media, for instance, give opportunities for using technology in a social constructive learning setting (Yeh & Swinehart, 2018). Such platforms also give learners a collaborative learning context where they share sources and communicate with each other. Teachers believe that collaborative activities can promote 21st century skills. This belief is in line with Roberts' (2005) academic benefits of collaborative learning, which are as follow:

1. Promotes critical thinking
2. Models appropriate students problem-solving techniques
3. Develops a social support system for students
4. Builds diversity understanding among students and staff
5. Establish a positive atmosphere for modeling and practicing cooperation

6. Can increase students' self esteem

Teachers reported that they encourage students to use their digital skills to share useful resources for language learning. Teachers use emails and social media platforms to communicate and share materials and useful links to learn the language. This way, students learn how to write a proper email that consists a specific linguistic register than that in a text message (Dudeney et al., 2013, as cited in Tour, 2020). Therefore, using digital literacies gives ESL teachers more opportunities to show how L2 is used in different contexts.

6.3 Practices and activities

Holec (1981) defines autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (p. 3). Guiding students on how to practice autonomy is essential for effective language learning and for future purposes. “It is a mistake to assume that learners come into the language classroom with a natural ability to make choices about what and how to learn” (Nunan, 1995, p. 134). This belief is in line with the teachers’ justification of the fact that practicing autonomy takes a long time since students come from different educational backgrounds. Those backgrounds are referred to as the ones where teachers are the only knowledge providers in classrooms. Some students, therefore, face difficulty adapting to a learner-centered environment. Therefore, teachers indicated that they scaffold activities to help learners familiarize themselves to a new environment.

Teachers used a variety of practices that can help learners develop autonomy besides 21st century skills and basic English language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking). Teachers mentioned that students exercise giving feedbacks on course materials and evaluate their teachers’ and their own progress language learning. This activity helps students to have a critical eye and plan their learning in general for the future. Teachers indicated that such activities should

be scaffolded through a long period of time. Some students reported to teachers that these activities improved their self-confidence in using L2.

Teachers used different kinds of feedbacks to help students manage their own learning, for example, teacher to student feedbacks (and vice versa), student to student feedbacks, and students' reflection on their own works. They also use homework journals as another activity where students reflect on their language learning journey. This activity is believed to help learners see their strengths and weaknesses and the areas they need to work more on. Studies show that feedback activities are increasingly popular among ESL teachers (Rollinson, 2005; Sheen, 2010). Such activities, like peer-feedback, give students a sense of comfort when corrected by their classmates and make learning more collaborative (Sultana, 2009).

Educators also make sure that they explicitly state the objectives of the activities used in the classroom so learners see the relevance of what they study and the use of these activities outside the classroom. Amelia's philosophy of teaching English stems from the belief that whatever students are exposed to should be authentic and relatable to the outside world. Since her students come from different backgrounds and cultures, she likes to encourage her students to reflect on their experiences. This aligns perfectly with Dewey's (1933) concept of reflective thinking and allowing learners to see how what is presented in class mirrors reality. Studies suggest that such activities structured around reflective thinking can enhance language acquisition (Tarvin & Al-Arishi, 1991).

6.4 Students beliefs and needs

Richards and Lockhart (1994) expresses that learners bring to class their needs, interests, goals and beliefs, which affect how they learn the language. For example, learners have beliefs

about the nature of English language, about native speakers, about the four language skills, about teaching and language learning, and about their abilities as learners and their goals. These beliefs can affect the language acquisition and attitudes towards language learning (Dede, 2005; Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Teachers explained that learners with different age groups have different perceptions in ESL classrooms. Teachers noticed that while younger students seem to be more flexible when introducing activities that promote 21st century skills, older ones show resistance. Teachers agreed that older and middle-aged ESL learners prefer traditional methods like a grammar-based teaching methodology.

Teachers are aware that the topics of their English language classes have to align with the students' needs and interests. Saavedra and Opfer (2012) stated that not only changes in the curriculum should be relevant to the learners, but they should also resonate with students' interests. A study investigating students' needs in academic English speaking courses revealed that learners necessitated speaking tasks, communication, and collaboration skills with 64,49% and 39,10%, respectively (Menggo, Suastra, Budiarsa, & Padmadewi, 2019). This finding matches with the results of this study, where communication skills are highly rated and favoured for now and future purposes. As communication skills are one of the selection criteria components for employment, the design of academic English courses should also adapt to the 21st century framework (Menggo et al., 2019). Along with the students' needs, the P21 framework listed new subject themes to be introduced and discussed in the classrooms. These themes include global awareness, financial, health, environmental literacy and civic literacy (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

6.5 Summary

The study provides insights into what ESL classrooms are like in the current time. It also provides information on how CLT is used in ESL classrooms and how technology has influenced English language teaching and learning. The findings showed that students and teachers agreed on the fact that communication skills are top priority in English language acquisition. The findings also offered different practices and activities teachers use to help students develop the 21st century skills for language learning and to later manage their own learning.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusion and recommendations

The aim of this study is to explore what learners prioritize in 21st century ESL classrooms and how that will change teachers' practice. It also aims to explore the activities and practices teachers use in ESL classrooms to foster 21st century skills and how they encourage learners to manage their own learning inside and outside the classroom. In this paper, learners and teachers came to agree on communication skills as highly important as a language skill and as an essential measure for employability. It seems that 21st century skills are interconnected with each other and can be taught more effectively through ESL classrooms. As it has been mentioned in the previous chapter, communicative competence goes further than just acquiring lexical items and grammatical structures. It also goes beyond drills of spoken language phrases. Communication skills do not function in themselves, but are best taught through other 21st century skills e.g. critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and collaboration. CLT provides practitioners with multiple, creative and new activities in ESL classrooms for better language acquisition and communication skills.

In this research, and to fulfill the aims of this study, I used two data collection methods. A survey for ESL learners to explore the top skill students would like to improve for now and for professional life. The results from the survey were shared with six ESL teachers in face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The results showed that learners prioritized communication skills, which also seemed predictable by the teachers. Teachers are aware of the importance of the communication skills and CLT approach, which their classrooms are based on since the beginning. Therefore, the survey results would not change teachers' practice greatly. However, they expressed that they would focus more on communication since it's the learners' top-rated skill. The findings pose the question "how communicative are ESL courses now and to what degree English language

activities are helping students manage their own learning.” The results also question how English academic courses can be more communicative to suit career requirements in the future.

The findings made more sense to teachers who teach writing and speaking courses since these skills are more communicative in their nature than reading and grammar. Communication skills call for unrehearsed responses from learners, which could be achieved through thinking skills found in 21st century skills. Students can also practice these skills by giving them more opportunities to reflect on their experiences in speaking and writing classes. It is important to help learners generate new ideas, reflect on their own experiences and avail from others as well (Thanasoulas, 2000). This could be achieved when learners work collaboratively, which might also boost learners’ confidence, especially those who are not used to such a learning environment.

The findings of this research suggest some practical recommendations for teachers. 1) Teachers should try to have a broader understanding of the learners’ needs and beliefs. This means that teachers should consider language learning through allowing students to reflect on their beliefs and experiences. 2) Teachers should also try to adapt language activities in grammar and reading skills in a more reflective and communicative way. While some teachers tend to focus on linguistic language acquisition, there should be a place where learners reflect on the reading texts, relate to what they read and express their opinions. Besides linguistic knowledge, learners need to be familiar with activities that stretch their knowledge about learning itself, which goes beyond language learning.

The study has a number of limitations. First of all, the sample size of the survey was small, hence, the results of the study cannot be generalized to all ESL contexts. Second, since this study was conducted in a bilingual country (English and French) and multicultural place, the survey results, the teachers perspectives and the practices used in class may not be applicable in non-

English speaking countries. Therefore, conducting this study in a different context and non-English speaking country could give different insights into the application and functionality of 21st century skills in ESL classrooms. Future studies are needed to explore 21st century skills in EFL contexts and how teachers can integrate these skills in ESL and EFL classrooms. Third, class observation in this study could have given an actual perspective into how teachers' statements are reflected in class. This can cultivate multiple class activities and help teachers in 1) creating new language activities and share their ideas on how to incorporate 21st century skills in English language settings. 2) It will also contribute in helping students to participate effectively in a global world in the future.

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