21st Century Skills

(Part 3/5: New Paradigm in Language Teaching and 21st Century Skills)

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Picture 1. P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning

Twenty-first century learning has been started from around two decades ago when education experts and decision makers started the initiatives to respond to the urgent call on the importance of necessary skills in the era of changes and automation. During these days, society has undergone an acceleration of change from economy to technology and it also results to affect the workplace. Many realized that memorization, didactic and rote learning which have been recognized prime skills the early learning days would not be able to equip young individuals for a fast-changing, disruptive, global world. They need to acquire skills which are needed more in the society today.

The term 21st century skills refers to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed to be critically important to success in today's world, especially in future careers and workplaces (Mishra & Mehta, 2017). The skills are varied but share some common themes which are based on providing effective learning in the educational contexts. The pedagogies involve higher order thinking skills and learning dispositions. To note, the higher order thinking skills must be scaffolded from the lower ones, but the emphasis

of today's learning must be providing opportunities for pupils to be ready in the global workforce with skills of the future, like critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, collaboration, and communication (Santosa, 2019). The skills comprise abilities and learning dispositions that can be applied in diverse areas and have been identified as success indicators in the 21st century society and global workplaces by those of educators, leaders, academics, businessmen, and governmental agencies. Therefore, there is a growing demand for educational systems and agencies to prepare their students for their future works.

There are some initiatives conducted and terms used for these important skills. In 2002, Partnership for the 21st Century Skills (now, the Partnership for the 21st Century Learning or P21) were started in 2002. The organization identified six important elements for the future, they are:

1. core subjects,
2. 21st century content,
3. learning and thinking skills,
4. information and communication technologies (ICT) literacy,
5. life skills, and
6. 21st century assessments.

They further develop most critical skills, known as 7Cs, which involve:

1. critical thinking and problem solving,
2. creativity and innovation,
3. cross-cultural understanding,
4. communications,
5. information, and media literacy,
6. computing and ICT literacy, and
7. career and learning self-reliance.

The P21 forum further deepen their research on the learning skills and competencies that are called as the Four Cs of 21st Century Learning. The 4Cs are:

1. collaboration,
2. communication,
3. critical thinking, and
4. creativity.

Lately, in 2015, the World Economic Forum published a report about New Vision for Education focusing on the issue of the 21st century skills gap and ways to address it through technology. The forum identified sixteen crucial proficiencies for education in the 21st century.

The skills include six foundational literacies, four competencies, and six character qualities.

The foundation literacies consist of:

1. literacy and numeracy,
2. scientific literacy,
3. ICT literacy,
4. financial literacy,
5. cultural literacy, and
6. civic literacy.

The competencies, moreover, comprise:

1. critical thinking/problem solving,
2. communication, and
3. collaboration.

Finally, the character qualities involve:

1. creativity,
2. initiative,
3. persistence/grit,
4. adaptability,
5. curiosity,
6. leadership, and
7. social and cultural awareness.

The video below sums up the 21st century skills.

Picture 2. 21st Century Skills: The 4Cs: https://youtu.be/BXT2STtm_54

As mentioned earlier, educators, leaders, businessmen from both individuals and organizations have been aware of the urgent need to figure out and equip all with more skills demanded by today's rapid changing era. In this globally and digitally interconnected world, all learners, do need new skills and knowledge to succeed. The needed skills all share the same meaning and purpose, that is that the traditional skills may not be adequate to assist young generations in their future endeavors. They must be provided and equipped with soft and core skills which are internalized within each individual so that they can apply them in various contexts and situations.

Today's young people, called as generation Z or Alpha, are growing up in a fast-paced world. Some people also call them as millennials, post millennials, Gen Tech, Gen Wii or Digital Natives. These generations are those which are born with technologies and the Internet are always on their hands. As new technologies, labour markets and digital channels open up new opportunities, they also pose new challenges for the world's future citizens and workforce. In the educational perspective, preparing a child for the world that does not exist is not an easy task for any teacher. Identification on critical skills every student need to survive and succeed in our world is urgently needed.

If the children want to be successful in school, work and life, opportunities to learn 21st century skills are essential. These 21st century skills are more important to students now than ever before. They do not only provide a framework for successful learning in the classroom, but ensure students can thrive in a world where change is constant and learning never stops. They are also tremendously important for our nation's wellbeing. Today's business community demands a workforce with these skills to ensure our competitiveness in a global economy. It is also important for our children to be a good citizen, the one who can be civically engaged, critically thinking, digitally literate, globally aware, and an effective communicator. Figuring out how educational sectors and schools should respond to this emerging situation, however, remains an open question for many communities. To be fully prepared for life and work in a global economy, it is essential that young people have the opportunity to develop the right skills.

It can be summarized that a number of related terms have been coined to introduce these 21st century skills. Some of them include generic skills, soft skills, graduate attributes, transversal skills, applied skills, cross-curricular skills, cross-disciplinary skills, interdisciplinary skills, transferable skills, non-cognitive skills, common cores, and core skills. These skills communicate a similar urgent need, that is, the yesterday's skills were not adequate anymore in today's era and students must be equipped with competencies which are applicable

in various areas and contexts. Therefore, it is urgent for young students to acquire the skills important for their growth in the 21st century context.

Additional Material

To enrich your understanding on the topic, please read the following materials.

1. 21st Century Learning and Life Skills: Framework: https://youtu.be/ixRBjEW_sFs.
2. Santosa, M. H. (2019). Introduction to Core Skills and Its Best Practices in the Indonesian Classrooms. In M. H. Santosa (Ed.), *Penerapan Core Skills di kelas-kelas di Indonesia* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 07–23). Azizah Publishing.

References

- Mishra, P., & Mehta, R. (2017). What we educators get wrong about 21st-century learning: Results of a survey. *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*, 33(1), 6–19. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21532974.2016.1242392>.
- Santosa, M. H. (2019). Introduction to Core Skills and its best practices in the Indonesian classrooms. In M. H. Santosa (Ed.), *Penerapan Core Skills di kelas-kelas di Indonesia* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 07–23). Azizah Publishing.

Note: This section is Part 3 of 5 of New Paradigm in Language Teaching and 21st Century Skills writing series.

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