

4Cs in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the concepts of the 4Cs (critical thinking, collaboration, communication & creativity) which are introduced as main skills of the 21st century. It provides detailed explanations of the principles of these skills and describes the strategies , techniques and challenges of their integration into English foreign language (EFL) teaching and learning in foreign contexts through reviewing the recent research. Recently the development of these skills has been the aim of most English language programs in EFL contexts including the Libyan

context and therefore there is a need for examining the suitability and readiness of these contexts for realizing this aim. No one can deny the importance of developing the 4Cs among EFL learners in order to prepare them for the demands of living in the 21st century. However, the insights derived from this study suggest the need for taking some necessary steps to ensure the effective integration of these skills. Among some others, training EFL teachers for this process and development of English language materials that foster these skills are fundamental steps.

Key Words: Critical Thinking-Collaboration-Communication-Creativity

1. Introduction

There is a consensus among researchers, scholars, educationists, psychologists and teachers about the necessity of integrating the 21st century skills into education (P21 Partnership, 2007; Partnership for 21st century skills & AACTE, 2010; Savu ; Chirimbu, & Dejica-Cartis, 2014; Cox, 2014 & Junpho, 2015;). The concept of 21st century skills was developed in 2007 in USA as an attempt to improve education outcomes in order to prepare USA citizens for the demands of 21st century workplace. The introduction of these skills has made a fundamental change in the aims of education. Accordingly, many curricula development plans and programs have been designed and conducted for the purpose of integrating these skills (The Partnership for 21st century skills, 2009; Bawazeer ; Elyas & Mahboob. 2013; Zaman. & Sabry, 2014; Pešikan & Lalović, 2017). Recently, a new English language

curriculum has been developed for Libyan primary, preparatory and secondary schools aiming at the promotion of these skills (see <https://www.englishforlibya.com/>). The integration of these skills in the curriculum necessitates a change in the materials being taught, the methods of teaching being used and the assessment strategies being employed. This issue has been emphasized in the framework for 21st century learning: "21st century standards, assessments, curriculum, instruction, professional development and learning environments must be aligned to produce 21st century outcomes for today's students" (P21, 2007: 1). This entails encouraging learners to become autonomous and creative to secure opportunities in the demanding competitive global market. The concept of 21st century skills has been broadly used to include socio-emotional and key competencies which 21st century students need in order to be well-prepared for their future professional life and labor market demands. Pešikan and Lalović (2017:7) divided these skills and competencies into: a) socio-emotional skills; b) problem-solving; c) critical thinking; d) creativity and innovation; e) information literacy; f) ICT literacy; g) learning to learn and metacognition) working skills, entrepreneurship & productivity; life skills). Some of these competencies were further divided into subcategories such as social awareness, self-awareness, self-regulation, research skills and citizenship and social responsibility.

In this paper, the concept of 4Cs refers to 'critical thinking', 'collaboration', communication' and 'creativity' as 21st century skills. The focus is on discussing EFL university instructors' integration of these four skills in their curriculum. This research was inspired by the findings

of Al-Issa and & Al-Bulushi (2012) and by the researcher's recent study about critical thinking (Saleh, 2019). The aim is to shed light on incorporation of the 4Cs in language teaching and learning in FL contexts and to highlight the importance of considering the particularities of these contexts regarding the implementation of these skills.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is one of the main 21st century skills and recently has been the focus of many research articles and education conferences themes (Báez, 2004; Khatib; Marefat & Ahmadi, 2012; Hughes, 2014; Živkovića, 2016. Kamgar, & Jadidi 2016. Florea, & Hurjui, 2016; Al-Kindi & AL-Mekhlafi, 2017 & Saleh, 2019). The concept of critical thinking was originally developed as a western concept but it is now seen as an essential skill of 21st century education worldwide (Atkinson, 1997; Gbènakpon, 2017; Rear, 2017). The literature provides many definitions for critical thinking as it has been interpreted differently in research articles (Halvorsen, 2005). However, there is an obvious consensus about labeling critical thinking as a meta-cognitive process through linking it with human cognitive activities (Gbènakpon, 2017; Harizaj, & Hajrulla, V. 2017 ; Araidne, 2017). The six classes of the cognitive domain (about knowing) of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al. 1956:19) namely 'knowledge', 'comprehension', 'application', 'analysis', 'synthesis', and 'evaluation' represent the main elements of critical thinking. Other cognitive activities such as interpretation, inference, explanation and self-regulation emphasized by Báez (2004:49) are also considered as fundamental principles of critical thinking. However, none of these

cognitive activities can be properly performed by those whose critical thinking abilities are limited or not sufficiently developed. This explains the necessity of integrating critical thinking into education, in general, and as an “integral part of English language pedagogy” in particular (Khatib, et al, 2012:33).

Critical thinking has been offered as a pedagogical alternative to improve language learning (Atkinson, 1997; Báez, 2004; Halvorsen, 2005; Khatib, et al, 2012; Zhao, et al, 2012; Gbènakpon, 2017; Harizaj, & Hajrulla, V. 2017; & Araidne, 2017). The 21st century learners should be encouraged to be self-regulated and motivated language analyzers to solve any communication problems. But this shift is not an easy process and can be faced with many challenges. In this regard, Rear(2017) pointed out the fact that most Asian students lack the required critical thinking skills. Similarly, a recent study conducted by Al-Kindi and AL-Mekhlafi (2017) in Oman revealed the absence of any teachers’ behaviors that foster critical thinking in Omani Post-Basic EFL classrooms. Challenges related to the course book, extra curricula activities, size and lack of training were reported to be encountered by these teachers. In the Libyan context, Saleh (2019) investigated the conceptions and implementation of critical thinking of 24 university teachers and identified the challenges they faced in their implementation of critical thinking. The findings revealed the participants’ implementation of critical thinking in many aspects of their teaching; despite the different conceptions they had about it. The participants reported some social, cultural and administrative barriers which limited their implementation.

Halvorsen (2005) and Araidne (2017) emphasized the role of the instructors in creating an inquiry-based environment and in providing the necessary tools for developing critical thinking. The well-informed instructors can significantly help their students in developing this kind of thinking through providing them with challenging situations and encouraging them to investigate these situations from various perspectives to find out and challenge their underlying assumptions and to explore their possible alternatives. Atkinson (1997) called for using critical approach to promote critical thinking in ESL settings whereas Tanaka (2014) emphasize a dialectical approach for the same purpose. Halvorsen (2005) suggested three classroom techniques EFL/ESL teachers can use for developing critical thinking including debate, media analysis and problem solving. Moreover, Zhao, et al. (2016) explained some instructional strategies for promoting critical thinking among EFL learners including ‘explicit instructions, questioning, and active and cooperative learning strategies such as group discussion, debate, reciprocal peer questioning. They also summarized the effective features of critical thinking instruction as “ frequent practice, intense student interaction, and a supportive CT classroom climate” (ibid:18).

Although all 21st century ESL/EFL instructors are called to adopt critical thinking pedagogies , they have to carefully consider the caution raised by Atkinson (1997) and Rear (2017) regarding the complexity of this process in their contexts due to social, cultural and contextual considerations. This applies to Libyan EFL teachers in all stages of education. They are urged to adopt the appropriate strategies that help in

promoting this necessary skill among Libyan students with a careful consideration for the particularities of their context.

Collaboration

Collaboration is the second 21st century skill which receives much attention in recent pedagogical theories and educational reforms (Johnson et al., 2013; Espina, et al. 2017; Ghaith, 2018). It implies the sense of cooperation and sharing responsibility and accountability. In the context of teaching and learning, it refers to students working together to achieve a shared goal when every member has a role to play in accomplishing tasks towards that goal. Johnson, et al. (2013:3) defined cooperative learning as “the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning”. Cooperative learning has become a feature of progressive education and an essential component of effective teaching and learning. It has been offered as a way for improving instructions at university (Johnson et al., 2013) and for better teaching of English language learners and for EFL teacher education (Beltran & Peercy, 2014). Moreover, it represents a solid foundation for other forms of active learning such as problem-based learning, team-based learning and peer-assisted learning. Collaborative action research has been also found useful for fostering speaking skill in Chilean EFL classrooms (Espina, et al. 2017). Johnson et al (2013) explained the necessary internal dynamics which EFL instructors need to consider in preparing their students for successful cooperative learning. Developing the perception of ‘positive interdependence’ through promoting the feeling of belongingness towards the group with a clear

understanding of the need for others in completing the tasks and achieving the goals. ‘Individual accountability’ is another important factor for successful collaboration. Every member should be personally responsible for performing his share and for helping others in completing their tasks. Promoting positive interaction among the members of the group through estimating each member’s effort and praising achievements. This interaction can develop social skills of participating in discussions, challenging others’ reasoning and conclusions and supporting and motivating others. To ensure better results from formal cooperative learning, EFL instructors can follow the strategies suggested by Johnson, et al (2013:11):

- Make a number of preinstructional decisions.
- Explain the task and the positive interdependence.
- Monitor students' learning and intervene within the groups to provide task assistance
or to increase students' interpersonal and group skills.
- Assess students' learning and helping students process how well their groups functioned

For informal cooperative learning, Penilla (2010) suggested using collaborative web-based tasks and processes and performances. The completion of these tasks in a collaborative mode which requires engaging learners in negotiating and redefining tasks can help in developing learners’ social and cognitive skills. Social media today offers

sufficient opportunities for students' collaboration, interaction, and exchanging of information.

However, the implementation of cooperative learning in EFL (e.g. Arab) contexts is often faced with many challenges. A review of related research indicates that these challenges can be attributed to teachers, students, textbooks, examinations, education policy, classroom size, lack of facilities and gender and other social factors (Al-Kindi, & AL-Mekhlafi, 2017). The findings of a recent study conducted by Ghaith (2018) in Lebanon revealed that teacher knowledge, curriculum alignment, and school policy impacted the implementation of cooperative learning in the six districts of the Republic of Lebanon.

As most of the recent language theories emphasized the usefulness of implementing cooperative learning in language teaching and despite the above mentioned challenges, Libyan EFL teachers need to develop their teaching strategies in order to overcome these challenges and to create appropriate environments for more students' collaboration and mutual cooperation. The interactive activities included in the new textbooks which have been introduced recently can help these teachers in their implementation of cooperative learning. **Communication**

A simple definition of language is a means of communication and therefore developing learners' ability to communicate in the target language represents the main aim of language teaching and learning. The emergence of CLT in late 1960s (Xi-chun & Meng-jie, 2015) was a response to the need for achieving this aim; and since then it becomes very popular for language teaching and learning (Richards & Rodgers,

2001). This approach was mainly introduced to develop and promote communication and interaction in FL classrooms (Rivera, 2010). Communication is the third skill of the 21st century and recently its integration in EFL classrooms becomes a must not an option. It refers to any interactive mutual attempt of two interlocutors to negotiate a meaning in different communication situations. Promoting effective interaction and communication inside EFL classrooms requires instructors' use of different communication strategies such as 'achievement' and 'reduction' strategies (Cervantes & Rodrigue, 2012). The positive impact of teaching communicative strategies was emphasized by the results of the study conducted in the Iranian context by Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh (2014) whose participants benefited from their understanding of the communicative strategies in employing their 'strategic competence' in developing their overall 'communicative competence' (MacIntyre et al., 1998). This was also confirmed by the findings of (Rabab'ah, 2005). Developing this competence requires implementing CLT main principles regarding centering oral English teaching activities on communication, establishing good relationships with students and tolerating students' mistakes in class (Xi-chun & Meng-jie, 2015). Moreover it requires shifting the role of the teacher from a sole knowledge provider into a facilitator of learning and co-communicator in oral activities. This implies encouraging students to be in charge of their own learning (Richards & Richards, 2001). Relevant research findings in FL contexts revealed a positive link between developing students' critical thinking and promoting their communicative competence (Xiao, L. 2004).

Communication activities should be a noticeable feature of those EFL teachers who are really concerned with developing their students' communication skills. Different communication activities can be implemented for this purpose such as role-play, oral presentations, group work, pair work, discussion, games, class circles, countdown, and word association, (Patterson, D. 2013). These activities should be around interesting topics for students in order to enhance their motivation to participate actively. However, these activities should not introduce much new material and should provide opportunities for students to activate the language items they already know (Patterson, 2013). By the same token, Rivera (2010) emphasized the importance of using a variety of interaction patterns including student-student interaction, teacher-student interaction, and student-teacher interaction.

The implementation of communication activities in FL classrooms has been a serious challenge for the teachers due to different reasons. (Rabab'ah, G. 2005; Al-Issa& Al-Bulushi, 2012; Kara et al, 2017; Al-Sobhi1, & Preece, 2017). This includes difficulties in teaching listening, speaking , reading and writing which are resulted from some linguistic, personal, social and educational factors. The findings of Al-Sobhi1, & Preece (2017) attributed these difficulties among Saudi university students to anxiety, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, limited knowledge of English, and ineffective teaching methodology. Al-Issa and & Al-Bulushi (2012) reported similar difficulties among 141 Sultan Qaboos University students. As a result of their failure to develop their communication skills, these students reported negative attitudes towards the existing ELT system and the curriculum of the university and

attributed these problems to implementation shortcomings. Similar challenges have reported in the Libyan context which resulted in weak communication skills for most Libyan EFL students at all levels (Orafi & Borg, 2009 ; Shihiba, 2011 & Saleh,2016). Nevertheless, developing EFL learners' communicative competence cannot be achieved if teachers do not implement more communicative and interactive teaching. On the other hand, the results of a study conducted by Saleh (2018) in the Libyan context revealed the ability of six EFL university teachers for adopting and implementing communicative activities such as group work, role play and oral presentations in their teaching. These teachers reported the positive impact of implementing these strategies on enhancing students' interest and active participation.

There is a need for more research for more effective ways that encourage EFL teachers and students to be engaged in more interactive teaching and learning. In Libya, for example, the textbooks are designed to develop students' communicative competence through including a variety of interactive activities and tasks and the teachers are instructed through the teacher's book guidelines to adopt communicative and interactive teaching in order to achieve this goal. Although the research conducted in the Libyan context revealed EFL teachers' over reliance on tradition and teacher-centred methods (Orafi& Borg, 2009; Shahibah, 2011, Salih, 2016), some promising steps have been recently taken for training these teachers to shift into more interactive teaching.

Creativity:

Creativity is a cognitive concept often linked with creative thinking, imagination and innovation in education.. Educational psychology research provides sufficient evidence about its relevance to education and teaching and learning (Dornyei, 2005). It is seen as an important variable that affects teachers' performance and students' learning (Ghonsooly & Raeesi, 2012) This was emphasized by Dornyei (2005: 204) who reported "some evidence that creativity is a positive correlate of academic performance". Despite this attention in the literature, scholars and researchers do not agree on creativity definition or description. Hana and Hacène (2017) referred to the complexity of defining this concept in the literature and Howard (2008) described it as a complex cognitive process. However, there is an agreement about considering originality and value as its fundamental features (Dornyei, 2005; Hana & Hacène, 2017). Runco (2003) attributed scholars' different definitions of creativity to whether they receive it as a personality character (creative personality), or as a process (creative process), or as a product (creative product), or as environments that foster creativity.

In the most cited definition offered by Torrance (1970:27), creativity has been defined as "the process of sensing a problem, searching for possible solutions, drawing hypotheses, testing, evaluating and communicating results to others" and described as "including original ideas, different points of view, breaking out of the mould, recombining ideas, and seeing new relationships among ideas" . Generally, creativity is often associated with imagination, divergence, intellectuality, lack of conventionality, originality and flexibility (Hana & Hacène, 2017). .

Teachers' promotion of creativity in EFL classrooms can be significantly influenced by their good knowledge and understanding of the concept and their awareness about effective strategies for its integration. Therefore, Investigating EFL teachers' beliefs about integrating creativity in the classroom and developing their knowledge and understanding about its proper implementation represents an important step for their inclusion of creative practices and activities. Fitriah (2017) investigated the views of Indonesian EFL teachers about creativity in EFL classrooms through interviewing 20 teachers and distributing a questionnaire among 175 teachers. The results showed that the participant teachers hold positive beliefs incorporating creativity in EFL classrooms and they defined it in terms of four categories: 'product', 'process', 'everyday practice' and 'cognition' and considered it as a personal achievement. The results of this study suggest that teachers' creativity is not only essential for engaging learners in classroom activities but also for creating the condition which allow the learners' own creativity to flourish. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of teachers' creativity not only for engaging learners in classroom activities but also for creating opportunities for learners' own creativity to flourish. Hana and Hacène (2017) administered a questionnaire among twenty seven Algerian university teachers to find out about their knowledge of the concept of creative thinking and its related skills and their incorporation in their classrooms. The findings revealed that the teachers hold positive perceptions about promoting creative thinking among their students; despite their lack of understanding of this concept and its characteristics. The results of this

study emphasized that EFL teachers' holding of positive beliefs about creativity does not necessarily indicate their good knowledge and understanding of its principles and effective practices.

The findings of Avila's study (2015) indicated the positive impact of implementing creative activities such as chain games, creative writing and screenwriting on enhancing EFL learners' oral and written fluency and improving their understanding of English grammar and structure. In his experimental teaching, he used Elliot's (1991) action model, in which the

teacher plans, acts, observes, and reflects upon the pedagogical experience. The activities implemented in this experiment included: 'remembering English grammar and structures', 'creating a fictional story', 'promoting creative writing', 'sharing a speech', 'circles of life', 'boosting vocabulary through screenwriting', 'asking and answering questions', 'drawing and speaking' and 'students' autonomy in creating their own activities'. He offered his eleven participant who were at the intermediate level the opportunity to apply their creative potential and to implement knowledge and skills by creating and participating in the teaching process. These students ended up with high motivation for giving their own speeches and creating their own activities. Cho and Kim (2018) implemented five types of language play with example activities and their results showed that applying language play activities can foster students' communicative competence and offer them the space they need for practicing creativity which can make them creative and explorative. They offered useful guidelines for EFL teachers on how to integrate language play in classrooms. Dianawati and Mulyono (2016) reported

how their sixteen EFL students' creativity was promoted through engaging them in writing tasks about their meaningful communicative situations in their real social environment. They added that other activities such as drama, poetry, short stories, fiction and storytelling can also be effectively employed for promoting creativity. Reflecting on the findings of these studies, EFL teachers are recommended to enlarge their horizon in order to make classes much more original and creative. It is possible to use the activities discussed in this study as a model for promoting creativity in EFL classrooms. This also applies to Libyan EFL teachers at all levels if they aim at developing their students creative thinking. However, it is important for researchers and educationists to start by addressing the issue of creativity in Libyan EFL classrooms from different perspectives including teachers and students beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and readiness for integrating creativity in classrooms.

Conclusion:

The concepts of the 4Cs (critical thinking, collaboration, communication & creativity) has been thoroughly discussed in this paper. They have been introduced as main skills of the 21st century. The development of these skills among EFL learners has been the aim of most recent English language programs in EFL contexts including the Libyan context. However, achieving this important aim in these contexts requires implementing some necessary actions in order create the appropriate environment for integrating these skills in language teaching and learning. Training EFL teachers for this process and developing English

language materials that foster these skills are fundamental steps for this purpose. Research in EFL contexts should address exploration of teachers' and learners' attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and practices of these skills. It should also focus on reviewing and developing the current English curriculum to include tasks and activities that promote these skills. In conclusion, 21st century graduates should develop 21st century skills.

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