

Teaching 21st Century Skills in a New Norm among Malaysian English Language Teachers

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Abstract

Teaching and learning process today becomes more challenging to teachers and students all over the world due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A lot of schools are shut down to contain the virus from spreading widely. In Malaysia too, all schools are closed, hence the teachers and students are required to have online distance learning, where all teaching and learning sessions are conducted virtually. In the 21st century, teachers are not only required to teach subject matters virtually to the students, but they also need to teach and train 21st century skills (skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, and values and ethics) to them. This paper presented a pilot study which was conducted to investigate the techniques of teaching 21st century skills among secondary school English language teachers in Malaysia. A quantitative approach was employed in this study, specifically using the survey research design. Questionnaires were distributed to 150 respondents through Google Form which was an online survey platform. Descriptive statistics analyses were performed to identify the techniques commonly used by the respondents to teach and train the 21st century skills. One of the outstanding results revealed through the analyses was that most respondents agreed they trained values and ethics the most, compared to the other 21st century skills.

Keywords: 21st Century Skills, English Language Teachers, English Language, Teaching and Learning, 21st Century Teaching

Introduction

In December 2019, the first Covid-19 virus cases were reported in Wuhan, China (World Health Organization, 2020). At that time, the public was not aware of the danger that this virus could pose to the human population all over the world. Later, the Covid-19 virus spread to the other countries which then caused a huge panic to arise as thousands of people were infected with this easily spread virus. Malaysia is also one of the countries that is affected with this Covid-19 pandemic. On 25th January 2020, the first 3 cases of Covid-19 were reported in Johor Bahru (New Straits Times, 2020). At first, the Covid-19 cases were

manageable but in March 2020, the numbers of cases started to rise rapidly which caused the government of Malaysia to impose the Movement Control Order (MCO) for all states in order to curb the spread of the virus. Due to the MCO, all education institutions and schools were asked to close down starting from 18th March 2020 (New Straits Times, 2020). Since then, the teaching and learning sessions in all education institutions in Malaysia were conducted online.

The instruction from the Ministry of Education (MoE) Malaysia for all teaching and learning sessions to be conducted online was not a surprise to teachers and students, however it did not mean that they were fully ready to have full online distance learning (ODL). Despite the low readiness to have full ODL sessions from their homes, they still have to undergo it as the Covid-19 cases in Malaysia do not seem to decline. After some time having the ODL sessions, a lot of issues and problems started to arise such as lack of gadgets to use for ODL, internet connection issues, stress, exhaustion, and burnout among both teachers and students (Tan, 2021). As these problem arise, it has become more difficult for the teachers to teach their subject matters to the students which makes them become demotivated and frustrated.

Teachers do not only have to teach the subject matters, but they are also required to teach and train students with 21st century skills, as the current education system is integrating 21st century skills in the teaching and learning process (Education Performance and Delivery Unit, 2018). The integration of 21st century skills is important as Malaysia is embracing and adapting to Education 4.0 as a response to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). According to Anaelka (2018), in Education 4.0, new opportunities are enabled and empowered by humans with the help of technology. With the help of technology, humans are able to move forward with a variety of inventions and innovations that will improve their daily lives. However, in the future as well, there will be technology that could replace humans in the workplace such as the artificial intelligence (AI). In fact, nowadays there are some critical jobs that are replaced by robotics and technology such as remote surgery. Therefore, in order to ensure that humans are still relevant in the workplace, they need to possess the 21st century skills. In this case, it is the responsibility of the teachers and educators to teach and train these skills to the students.

The concern regarding Malaysian graduates' lack of 21st century skills and low performance at the workplace has been going on for quite some time among the industry employers (Subramanian, 2013). This is supported by Ilhaamie, Rosmawani, and Yusmii (2018) who stated employability skills are lacking among the graduates. Some examples of these lacking employability skills are critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, and decision-making skills. These skills are highly sought in the workplace industry these days, and to ensure that Malaysian graduates have these skills, they need to be taught and trained from a young age, specifically from the primary and secondary education. This is the reason the Ministry of Education in Malaysia is making the shift to 21st century education, where the 21st century skills are given more emphasis and focus. This is where the teachers play a major role, as they have to teach and train these skills to the students in order to mould them into students who are well-balanced and holistic in nature.

However, even though the shift towards 21st century education is happening in Malaysia, the execution of 21st century skills teaching in schools are not quite successful yet. This was mentioned in a study by Tee et. Al. (2018) who concluded that among pre-service and in-service teachers, they rarely used activities that train 21st century skills in the classroom. This could stem from insufficient training received by the teachers on how to teach and train 21st century skills. This is supported by Nair (2014) who reported that there were

some agreements among teachers and school leaders regarding the lack of focus on 21st century skills in their training. In addition, Tee et. al. (2018) reported that teachers are unable to change their teaching practices whenever there is a policy change in the education system. This issue can cause frustration and confusion among the teachers, as they are asked to teach and train the 21st century skills when they themselves are not equipped enough to do this in school.

Literature Review

In an effort to adapt to the ever-evolving Industrial Revolution, education systems all over the world have to be improved, updated, and reformed in order to fulfil the demands by the various industries. This is important to ensure that a country has a high-quality manpower to lead the country. To achieve this goal, it is very crucial to train and equip the young generation with the 21st century skills. Trilling and Fadel (2009) introduced 21st century learning and they emphasized that in teaching the 21st century skills to the students, teachers themselves need to be an expert in the skills they want to impart to the students.

In order to ensure that the integration of 21st century education is successful, it is very important to identify whether the stakeholders and the key players are ready for this to happen. Therefore, some researchers studied the perspectives of the stakeholders and the key players regarding the 21st century education. For example, Campbell Jr and Kresyman (2015) interviewed stakeholders such as industry employers regarding important skills demanded at the workplace and from the interview, they found that in order for students to fulfil the demands of the industry, there are moderate to severe improvements needed in the education system to include 21st century education. Employers are not the only ones who express their concern. Maida (2017) also conducted a study on students' perspectives regarding the 21st century skills education. In the study, it was reported that in order to learn 21st century skills, the students had an expectation for their teachers to possess those skills before teaching them. They also expected their teachers to use technology and consider students' characteristics when teaching

Some studies do integrate technology to teach 21st century skills while some do not. While it is possible to teach 21st century skills without the use of technology, the study by Motallebzadeh et al. (2018) shows that technology also takes part in developing students' 21st century skills. In Malaysia, even though teaching and learning of 21st century skills could be done without technology and have been proven by teachers who won the 21st century learning teacher campaign or PAK21 Campaign (Husni, 2019), the use of technology in schools is becoming more vigorous. Especially now that teaching and learning sessions are conducted online, teachers have no choice but to integrate technology into their teaching process.

As technology enriches and enhances English learning, the integration of 21st century skills too is proven to be beneficial to students' learning in English. Previous researchers included various 21st century learning models into English language learning to discover the benefits they contribute. Aside from using 21st century learning models, other researchers used projects that could enhance students' English language learning. For example, Thang et al. (2014), conducted Digital Story Telling (DST) project in the course of English for Academic Purpose (EAP). Through this project, the researchers found that students were able to work both independently and collaboratively, and the teamwork value was very evident in this project. Aside from that, the DST project also led students to improve other 21st century skills such as creative thinking, digital skills, and communication skills. Meanwhile, Carrió-pastor and Skorczyńska (2015) found that when collaborative learning is combined with

communication technologies such as Google Doc, students became more motivated. The researchers found that the combination of collaborative learning and communication technologies enabled students to collaborate meaningfully to complete activities and tasks while interact actively through the Google Doc application.

Similar results were achieved by Yang, Chuang, Li, and Tseng (2013), as they used a virtual learning environment named Moodle teaching English listening and speaking skills. Based on the results of the study, the Moodle platform managed to improve the students' listening and speaking skills. Not only that, students' critical thinking skills were also elevated, as the students' significantly open-mindedness improved. These studies have established that, when English language learning is combined with 21st century skills and technology, they would yield more benefits to students' development and achievement. Not only students improve their English language significantly, but their 21st century skills are also improved as well. This will create students who are rounded and well-balanced, not only in terms of academic, but in other areas as well. With this kind of learning, the education institutions will be able to produce graduates who have the skills to face the 21st century challenges.

Methods

This pilot study employed a quantitative approach, specifically employing the survey research design. This research approach and design were chosen because the Covid-19 pandemic caused the schools in Malaysia to be closed, hence the researchers were not able to go to school to collect data personally. By utilising the survey research design, this study were able to collect data from the target population without having to administer the data collection physically, as the data collection was conducted online through Google Form survey.

The setting of the study involved public secondary schools under one district education office in Selangor, which was Petaling Perdana district. Petaling Perdana district education office was chosen as the number of public secondary schools under this district was the highest compared to other districts. The target population of this study was English language teachers who are teaching in public secondary schools under the Petaling Perdana district. The number of English language teachers under this district surpassed the number of teachers from other districts, therefore increasing the chance for this study to collect more data.

This study chose to conduct the sampling procedure by probability sampling, specifically the two-stage cluster sampling technique. This technique was chosen as this study could not obtain the list of teachers from all schools due to the restriction of access. This technique allowed this study to gather data easier as it was impossible to select individual sample randomly and it was less time consuming (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2016). This sampling technique was conducted by first examining the number of schools under the Petaling Perdana district (48 schools in total). The first stage of cluster sampling was done by selecting 30 from 48 schools under this district. From these 30 schools, 5 respondents from each school were selected to be the sample of this study.

The data collection was done through online survey, specifically using the Google Form survey. The instrument of this study was a questionnaire, which was created using the Google Form application. There were two sections in the questionnaire, in which the first section was the demographic profiles, and the second section was the 21st century skills teaching strategies for the respondents to respond to. Likert scales were utilised for the second section as the respondents were required to choose their responses from the scales of 1 to 7 (1 =

Never, 2 = Almost never, 3 = 1 to 3 times per year, 4 = 1 to 3 times per month, 5 = 1 to 3 times per week, 6 = Almost daily, and 7 = Daily). The questionnaire was developed based on the 21st century framework by the Education Performance and Delivery Unit (PADU) from the Ministry of Education, which was the 4C1V framework (the skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, and values and ethics). Aside from that, the Bloom's Digital Taxonomy by Churches (2008) was also referred to when developing the items for the questionnaire.

The link of the questionnaire was generated and then distributed the link of the online survey to the teachers in charge, which then shared the link to their colleagues who teach English language subject. The expected sample size for this study was 150 respondents, however only 130 responses were received from the respondents. Hence, the response rate achieved in this pilot study was 86.7%. After going through the data cleaning process, 127 responses were able to be analysed for this study.

Results/ Findings

This study used SPSS Version 26 for the purpose of data analysis. The purpose of this study was to investigate the techniques or strategies used by the English language teachers to teach 21st century skills to the students in the new norm. Hence, this section will answer and discuss the research question of "What are the techniques or strategies used by the Malaysian English language teachers to teach 21st century skills in the new norm?" The results of the analysis will be presented in the form of the mean scores and standard deviation values for all items in each category of the 21st century skills.

Demographic Profiles

The first section of the questionnaire identified the demographic profiles of all the respondents involved in this study. The demographic profiles section involved were gender, years of teaching experience, and highest education qualification. The frequency descriptive statistics analyses were employed to analyse these three categories of demographic profiles. The results of the analyses are shown in the table below:

Table 1

Respondents' Demographic Profiles

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	35	27.6
Female	92	72.4
Total	127	100
Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 5 years	68	53.5
6 to 10 years	22	17.3
11 to 15 years	6	4.7
16 to 20 years	8	6.3
21 to 25 years	7	5.5
26 to 30 years	12	9.4
More than 30 years	4	3.1
Total	127	100
Highest Education Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Diploma	1	0.8
Bachelor's Degree	67	52.8
Master's Degree	59	46.5
Total	127	100

Table 1 reports the demographic profiles of the respondents in terms of gender, years of teaching experience, and their highest education qualification. For the category of gender, it is reported that there were 35 male respondents (27.6%) and 92 female respondents (72.4%). In term of the teaching experience, this study finds that majority of the respondents has less than 5 years of teaching experience, as the frequency is the highest which is 68 (53.5%). This is followed by those with 6 to 10 years of experience (n = 22, 17.3%) and those who have 26 to 30 years of teaching experience (n = 12, 9.4%). The lowest frequency is 4 (3.1%) which represents the respondents who have more than 30 years of teaching experience. Meanwhile, for the highest education qualification category, most of the respondents have a bachelor's degree (n = 67, 52.8%). This is followed by those with a master's degree (n = 59, 46.6%) and the least is the diploma, with a frequency of 1 (0.8%).

Teaching Strategies of 21st Century Skills

The second section of the questionnaire was regarding the 21st century skills teaching among the respondents. The respondents were required to choose their responses from 1 = Never, 2 = Almost never, 3 = 1 to 3 times per year, 4 = 1 to 3 times per month, 5 = 1 to 3 times per week, 6 = Almost daily, and 7 = Daily. For this section, the descriptive statistics analyses involving the mean scores and the standard deviation values for all items were determined. The results of the analyses are shown in the following tables.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of teaching critical thinking skills

Items	Mean	SD
1) I ask students to outline their work/project before completing it.	4.827	1.453
2) I ask students to search for legitimate and authentic information from various sources.	4.717	1.425
3) I ask students to validate their information/sources before including them into their work.	4.677	1.480
4) I ask students to critique certain materials (e.g.: literature texts, movies, etc) and give their opinions.	4.543	1.320
5) I ask students to experiment with new lessons they gain in real-life situations.	4.685	1.233
6) I ask students to judge each other's work/products/presentation.	4.803	1.375
7) I ask students to review certain materials (eg: literature texts, movies, etc).	4.504	1.327
8) I ask students to debate certain issues/problems in English language.	4.323	1.380

Table 2 above shows the mean scores and standard deviation values for the teaching strategies of critical thinking skills among the respondents. From the table above, a majority of respondents chose the strategy of asking the students to outline their work or project before completing it to teach critical thinking skills the most ($M = 4.827$, $SD = 1.453$). This is followed by the strategy of asking the students to judge each other's work/products/presentation as the mean score for this strategy is the second highest ($M = 4.803$, $SD = 1.375$). Other than that, the strategy of asking students to search for legitimate and authentic information from various sources becomes the third popular choice to teach critical thinking skills with a mean score of 4.717 ($SD = 1.425$). On the other hand, the lowest mean score is 4.323 ($SD = 1.380$), which represents the item "I ask students to debate certain issues/problems in English language". This indicates that the respondents use the strategy of debate the least when teaching critical thinking skills to the students.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of teaching creative thinking skills

	Mean	SD
9) I ask students to design their products on their own in English language (eg: short story, poem, poster, etc).	4.535	.974
10) I ask students to construct their own questions based on newly gained English language lessons/information.	3.811	.861
11) I ask students to plan an event/project on their own.	2.835	.949
12) I ask students to produce their own products (eg: poem, poster, short story, etc) based on newly gained lessons.	4.551	.974
13) I ask students to invent various solutions to given situations/scenarios.	4.095	.859
14) I ask students to film short videos/video blog in English language.	2.976	.904

Table 3 above displays the mean scores and standard deviation values for the strategies of teaching creative thinking skills among the respondents. From the table, it was

found that most respondents used the strategy of asking their students to produce own products based on newly gained lessons to teach creative thinking skills the most as the mean score is the highest ($M = 4.551$, $SD = .974$). Aside from asking to produce own products, the respondents also mostly asked the students to design their own products in English language ($M = 4.535$, $SD = .974$). Other than that, it was also found that the respondents decided to use the strategy of asking the students to invent various solutions to given situations/scenarios ($M = 4.095$, $SD = .859$) quite often. On the other hand, the strategy of asking students to plan an event/project on their own was the least used strategy ($M = 2.835$, $SD = .949$). This is followed by the strategy of asking students to film short videos/video blogs in English as the mean score is also among the lowest ($M = 2.976$, $SD = .904$). Meanwhile, the respondents agreed that they used the strategy of asking the students to construct their own questions based on newly gained English language lessons/information for 1 to 3 times per year, as the mean score is 3.811 ($SD = .861$).

Table 4

Descriptive statistics of teaching communication skills

Items	Mean	SD
15) I ask students to post their status online in English language.	4.047	1.522
16) I ask students to message/text me/other people in English language.	4.764	1.556
17) I ask students to make calls in English language.	4.087	1.633
18) I ask students to use English language while making video calls.	3.803	1.709
19) I ask students to talk to me/each other in the classroom/online in English language.	5.654	1.439

Table 4 above reports the descriptive statistics of teaching communication skills among the respondents. Based on the table, the respondents mostly used the strategy of asking their students to talk to them/each other in English language during the teaching and learning session ($M = 5.654$, $SD = 1.439$). This is followed by the strategy of asking the students to message or text them in English language ($M = 4.764$, $SD = 1.556$). There are two strategies in which the mean scores are quite close to each other, and they are the strategies of asking students to make calls in English language ($M = 4.087$, $SD = 1.633$) and asking students to post their status online in English language ($M = 4.047$, $SD = 1.522$). This indicates that the respondents used these two strategies to teach communication skills at almost the same number of times. In contrast, the respondents used the strategy of asking students to use English language while making video calls the least ($M = 3.803$, $SD = 1.709$), as the mean score for this strategy is the lowest compared to other strategies.

Table 5

Descriptive statistics of teaching collaboration skills

Items	Mean	SD
20) I ask students to negotiate with each other in English language.	5.095	1.371
21) I ask students to video call each other in English language.	3.543	1.736
22) I ask students to chat with each other on online platforms in English language for education purposes.	4.260	1.600
23) I ask students to do group work in classroom to complete a task.	5.433	1.257
24) I ask students to do pair work activities in the classroom.	5.551	1.180
25) I ask students to edit each other's work through online platforms (e.g: Google drive, One drive, blog, etc).	3.622	1.736
26) I ask students to organize small events/competitions/projects regarding English language on their own.	3.394	1.672

Table 5 above describes the results of descriptive statistics analysis of teaching collaboration skills among the respondents in this study. There were 7 strategies included in this category. The table above shows that the strategy to teach collaboration skills mostly used by the respondents was the strategy of asking students to do pair work activities during the teaching and learning session ($M = 5.551$, $SD = 1.180$). Apart from the pair work activities, the respondents also chose to ask the students to do group work to complete a task ($M = 5.433$, $SD = 1.257$) to teach collaboration skills. Asking the students to negotiate with each other in English language is another strategy frequently used by the respondents ($M = 5.095$, $SD = 1.371$). On the other hand, the strategy least used by the respondents in this study is asking the students to organize small events/competitions/projects regarding English language on their own ($M = 3.394$, $SD = 1.672$). This is followed by the strategy of asking the students video call each other in English language ($M = 3.543$, $SD = 1.736$) and asking the students to edit each other's work through online platforms ($M = 3.622$, $SD = 1.736$).

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Teaching Values and Ethics

Items	Mean	SD
27) I show students examples of good values and ethics using pictures/videos in the classroom.	4.890	1.305
28) I organise various activities/competitions for students to practice values and ethics.	4.370	1.647
29) I impose rules and regulations that involve values and ethics for students to obey.	5.205	1.323
30) I give role play activities for students to practice values and ethics.	4.709	1.497

In Table 6 above, the mean scores and standard deviation values of the strategies to teach values and ethics are presented. In this category, there were 4 strategies involved for the students to rate from the scales of 1 to 7. In this table, it is reported that the strategy of imposing rules and regulations that involve values and ethics for students to obey was chosen the most by the respondents ($M = 5.205$, $SD = 1.323$). This indicates that the respondents used this strategy the most when teaching. The second strategy that mostly used by the respondents is by showing students examples of good values and ethics using pictures/videos ($M = 4.890$, $SD = 1.305$) followed by the strategy of giving role-play activities for students to

practice values and ethics ($M = 4.709$, $SD = 1.497$). The strategy with the least mean score is the strategy of organising various activities/competitions for students to practice values and ethics ($M = 4.370$, $SD = 1.647$) which means that the respondents used this strategy the least.

Discussion and Conclusion

In a new norm where teaching and learning sessions are conducted online, this study identified several strategies mostly used by English language teachers to teach and train 21st century skills to the students in the new norm of online teaching and learning. For instance, this study found that in order to teach critical thinking skills, the teachers mostly asked the students to outline their work or project before completing it and also asked their students to judge each other's work. Based on Churches' (2008) Bloom's Digital Taxonomy, the strategy of outlining falls under category of analysing while judging falls under the category of evaluating. These two strategies are higher order thinking skills that lead to critical thinking. A lot of teachers teach critical thinking skills to students by asking them to do debates, critique or review papers, or evaluate and discuss cases or situations (Alsaleh, 2020; Hansen & Salemi, 2011). These findings are different from the results of this study, and this could be due to the new norm of teaching and learning. In online learning situation, it might be more relevant and practical to conduct activities that do not need much supervision such as outlining and judging compared to debating or criticising, as these kinds of activities require close and constant guidance from the teachers which would be easier in physical classroom.

Meanwhile, for the category of teaching creative thinking skills, this study found that the teachers used the strategies of producing and designing own products in English language based on the newly gained lessons. In the Bloom's Digital Taxonomy, the strategies of producing and designing fall under the category of creating, which is the highest category of the higher order thinking skills (Churches, 2008). When creating a product, a person uses his or her capacity to imagine, discover, and generate ideas and solutions (Birgili, 2015). The fact that teachers in this study chose to use the strategy of producing and designing products for their students to do could be because the students are able to access more resources at home when having online learning. As compared to having a physical class, the activities of producing and designing could be limited as resources in the class are limited. In online learning, students have more freedom to access resources that could help them in producing and designing their own products. The strategies chosen in this study are different from other studies which discovered that problem-based learning (PBL) could improve students' creative thinking skills (Ulger & Imer, 2013; Birgili, 2015).

In term of teaching communication skills, the results of this study revealed that teachers chose to use the strategies of asking students to talk, message, or text them in English language while having the online class. These results are once again different from other studies that investigated teaching practices of communication skills among educators. For examples, some studies found that public speaking can improve communication skills (Metusalem, Belenky & DiCerbo, 2017), using recorded videos to practice speaking (Murphy & Barry, 2016; Ritchie, 2016), or role-playing activities to improve interpersonal communication (Berkhof et al., 2011; Hulsman & van der Vloodt, 2015). In this study, since the teaching and learning sessions are conducted online, it could be seen that the teachers stick to the basic activities to teach communication skills to the students. There could be various reasons for this result, one of which the teachers would like to encourage students to speak more during online classes, without them being overwhelmed with more difficult activities such as public speaking and role-playing.

In order to teach collaboration skills in the new norm, the teachers in this study used pair work and group work activities the most. These strategies are commonly used by teachers in other studies as well compared to other strategies such as negotiating, editing each other's work, or organising projects together. Lai et al (2017) in their report stated that when students were asked to be in groups to complete task together, they became more cooperative and their collaborative skills improved. On the other hand, to teach values and ethics, the teachers in this study imposed rules and regulations for the students to obey the most compared to other strategies. According to Mohammad (2016), teachers can model the values and ethics they want to teach to the students for the students to follow or imitate. However in this study, the teachers used the strategy of imposing rules and regulations the most, and the reason could be that it is easier to observe the behaviour of the students when specific rules and regulations are specified. Modelling the values and ethics during online learning might be limited, since the students might not be able to fully capture or recognise the values modelled by the teachers online.

In conclusion, teaching and training 21st century skills in the new norm through online learning might not be easy for the teachers. This is because teaching those skills require close monitoring and supervising from the the teachers, which could be done easier through face to face teaching and learning sessions. Teachers find it challenging to teach their subject matters online, and they might also be overwhelmed to teach and train the 21st century skills online too. There are also other factors that could hinder this, such as internet connection problem, students are not participative enough, lack of gadgets among the students and many more. In general, teachers will need a longer time to familiarise themselves with online learning, and also to find their momentum to teach 21st century skills effectively to the students in this new norm.

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