

21st Century Skills: A Proposal for ELT Teachers Successful Performance Today

Habilidades del siglo XXI: una propuesta para el buen desempeño de los profesores de ELT hoy

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Abstract

This article addresses a reflective study on 21st century ELT teachers' necessary skills at school level in Colombia. The study aimed to analyze a set of abilities that enable teachers to perform successfully in a contemporary classroom setting by understanding the pivotal role of ICTs, adaptability, and communicative-social skills to guarantee the accomplishment of students' expected learning outcomes. Data were collected through documentary analysis of academic research articles. Findings revealed that mastering 21st century teaching skills equips ELT educators with the required knowledge to provide students with a rewarding learning experience. As a conclusion, the integrative employment of a particular array of skills aligned with present-day educational standards cultivates highly proficient teachers who are capable of effectively navigating both their teaching context and that of their students.

Key words: ELT teachers, ICTs, adaptability, communicative-social skills.

Resumen

Este artículo aborda un estudio reflexivo sobre las habilidades necesarias de profesores de ELT a nivel escolar en Colombia en el siglo XXI. Este estudio busca analizar un conjunto de habilidades que permiten a los docentes desempeñarse con éxito en un aula de clase en la actualidad entendiendo el papel fundamental de las TIC, la adaptabilidad y habilidades comunicativas y sociales para garantizar que los estudiantes alcancen los resultados de aprendizaje esperados. Los datos fueron recopilados mediante un análisis documental de artículos de investigación académica. Los hallazgos revelaron que el dominio de las habilidades docentes del siglo XXI equipa a los educadores de ELT con el conocimiento necesario para proporcionar una experiencia de aprendizaje enriquecedora a los estudiantes. En conclusión, el empleo integrado de una serie particular de habilidades alineadas con los estándares educativos actuales cultiva profesores altamente competentes, capaces de navegar eficazmente tanto en su contexto de enseñanza como en el de sus estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Profesores de ELT, TICs, adaptabilidad, habilidades comunicativas y sociales.

Introduction

In order to ensure both a high-quality teaching performance as well as students' learning process, a set of necessary abilities comprising the so-called 21st century skills come into play. (Kim et al., 2019). In light of this, it is vital to analyze specific skills required to guide ELT educators to perform successfully in a contemporary classroom setting since teachers have a central role in shaping students' learning journey throughout the implementation of up-to-date teaching skills towards meeting the students' expected outcomes.

As ELT teachers, it is essential to be able to cope with new technologies that constitute a complementary component of language instruction today considering they grant students the opportunity to access innovative material that enhances their commitment to learning due to the accelerated growth of new technologies and its influence on instructional settings. Hence, managing digital appliances may be lightened by teachers who act as "facilitators and motivators" (Hidayat, 2019). Teachers' ability to adeptly handle the intrinsic novelty represents a pivotal skill for educators related to a flexible performance and the inner demonstration of interest conveyed in meeting the evolving needs of their students while not neglecting their context (Collie & Martin, 2016, p. 31).

It is remarkable how effective teacher-student communication fosters active learning. On the one hand, it facilitates both knowledge conveyance and understanding. On the other hand, students' engagement increases to the point that they take control of their own learning process. Thus, being an effective communicator can guarantee the active engagement of students in the educational process, therefore, the overall educational quality is enhanced as students' level of achievement rises (Yavuz, & Güzel, 2020, p. 135).

Methodology

The intrinsic complexity of qualitative inquiry remains in the way it can be developed. Flick (2016) presents three different levels of critical qualitative inquiry and highlights the reflective position investigators assume in spotting issues, the individuals affected by them, and endeavoring to propose feasible solutions. Accordingly, being analytical in the revision of academic documents is fundamental in the context of the present work since it could lead to meaningful insights resulting from translating earlier findings into Colombian language instructional scenarios.

The rigorous nature of any investigative work implies a comprehensive examination of the existing literature to have a clearer picture and a deeper understanding of the addressed matter to eventually stimulate the critical evaluation of the scope of study. Henceforth, regarding a proper development of this reflective article a documentary research settlement involving the collection, contrast and reasoning of specific phenomenon oriented studies in specialized scientific areas within EFL contexts is a determining factor (Carrillo, 2020).

Additionally, to expand on social issues problem-solving, qualitative examination in Education may be useful (Carrillo, 2020). In order to extract meaning, enhance comprehension, and build empirical knowledge, this research method has been historically implemented in the field of education concerning the systematic process of document analysis to interpret the collected data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, & Rapley, 2007, as cited in Bowen, 2009), which represents the first step towards the exploration of contextually relevant approaches to effectively deal with particular challenges researchers encounter in the current educational outlook. As a result, these inquiry methods offer an opportunity to delve into students' and teachers' viewpoints and contribute to the construction of knowledge around successful ELT.

Therefore, several experimental academic research articles in the field of education constitute the baseline for the evaluation of the subject matter. Sources were initially considered based on the main aspects this article aims to address. First, understanding the importance of counting on 21st century teaching skills in current instructional settings from both teachers' and students' perspective. A second moment was delimited by the selection and revision of references supporting the chosen array of skills, which have been assessed through empirical research that focuses on the challenges educators must tackle when coping with students' needs according to given conditions in today's world.

Discussion

A spectrum of competencies is widely acknowledged to be part of the 21st century skillset. Particular settings, namely those of developing countries, present a considerable absence of advancements in learning outcomes. This indicates an urgent need to enhance the quality of instruction in which the paramount significance of nurturing this skillset is particularly evident (Kim et al., 2019). Undoubtedly, copious scholars all around the globe have inquired into how the current demands have influenced the educational scope, more precisely regarding teaching practices. Subsequently, some requirements for EFL educators are extensively considered to be imperative to support students' learning process, among which three of the addressed skills stand out.

Communicative-social skills

One aspect EFL instructors must always deem concerns teacher-student interaction in the classroom. Ibrahim et al. (2019) assert that at the core of being a competent teacher, effective communication skills are worthy of heed. When it comes to communicating with students, a set of recommended skills linked to how teachers interact with their students emerges, taking over the roles of guiding, assisting, persuading, motivating, and stimulating; all aimed at fostering a learning environment conducive to effective educational processes. That is, teachers must possess good interpersonal communication skills with their students to guarantee the fluid operation of the teaching process (Ibrahim et al., 2019). Therefore, English teachers should not only convey the content of the lesson in a straightforward manner understandable for students to achieve the pedagogical goals but also be a figure that

accompanies and motivates learners to take control of their own knowledge building journey. Ultimately, students must take part of the responsibility on the long but fruitful route to successful language learning.

Hand-in-hand with effective communication skills, teachers must continually adapt and evolve in accordance with the ever-changing conditions of today's world (Yavuz & Güzel, 2020, p. 135). It is crucial to ensure that language instruction is consistent with the conditions in which education takes place. ELT is a complex phenomenon influenced by sociocultural issues rather than a simply isolated pedagogical activity (Le Gal, 2018). Thus, to establish a suitable route to devise pertinent courses and materials, a qualified teacher must bear in mind the importance of students' contexts to be aware of the difficulties and challenges that must be endured as well as the potential circumstances students may encounter in the future to achieve profitable learning outcomes.

Adaptability

Another ability embedded in successful teaching performance is skillful adaptability given that instructional work requires educators to effectively handle continuous changes (Collie & Martin, 2015, as cited in Collie & Martin, 2016). In order to address the diverse needs of students, encompassing varying developmental levels, language and cultural backgrounds, as well as social-emotional faculties and socio-economic situations; the relevance of flexible teaching practices is highlighted by Corno (2008). In view of this, EFL teachers must acknowledge students' diverging inner conditioning factors involving different learning styles and personal interests since they significantly influence the language learning process.

These insights would enable teachers to contribute with the creation of accurate curricula in which a set of meaningful tasks students feel engaged with can be implemented. Consequently, adjusting instructional content and the pacing of the lesson is necessary to respond to learners' differential learning needs so that the teacher is able to effectively guide students through a fruitful learning process. Likewise, this adaptation extends to changing the levels of support offered as students progress in content mastery and modifying classroom management strategies to accommodate the dynamic classroom environment (Collie & Martin, 2016). It is the teacher's responsibility to deliver information by using the most appropriate techniques and innovative materials to ensure that successful instruction is accomplished while keeping students actively motivated with class development. Moreover, students' needs cannot be thought of as a static element but an evolving condition given by learners' progress in their understanding, affirming once more the necessity for flexible teaching practices that cope with the actual circumstances surrounding the classroom setting. Overall, this aligns with a student-centered approach, highlighting the teacher's pivotal role in facilitating an inclusive and effective learning environment through continuous adaptation.

ICTs

In this digital age, a need for innovation is gaining strength in the contemporary educational field due to the arising circumstances shaping the way the world operates. The utilization and management of ICT is essential for teachers as it markedly assists students' learning journey, thereby improving the overall effectiveness and quality of education (Santosa et al., 2022). For some time now, considering that students have become more interested in making use of the different digital platforms, and technological appliances within their reach, the potential for ICTs to enhance learners' experience lies in the availability of resources that facilitate access to useful information, interactive language learning tools, and authentic material allowing students to reinforce their individual learning process. Furthermore, according to Santosa et al. (2022) contributing to ICT literacy for both teachers and students through the incorporation of diverse technological means serves as a crucial provision for life. Thence, educational efforts aimed at fostering ICT proficient management fulfills a purposeful duty with broader implications that transcend formal instruction considering it constitutes an essential life skill for individuals to better respond to the demands of the contemporary society, where technology is deeply embedded in various aspects of life and work. It is worth mentioning that at the moment of incorporating ICTs into the educational process well-defined instructional plans must be established to boost students' effective learning (Santosa et al., 2022). Thus, the successful integration of ICT goes beyond mere access to technology. It involves teachers' effort to carefully plan and accomplish the goals of each lesson while bearing in mind students' necessities.

Looking at students' perspective about the utilization of technology for academic purposes, Gamlo (2019) noted that EFL students show positive attitudes towards ICT usage in English teaching and learning as it constitutes a valuable means for accessing authentic material. There was a strong consensus that ICT holds the potential to enrich students' experience in learning the target language and foster the growth of their learning autonomy (Gamlo, 2019). Indeed, most students take advantage of these tools to explore various educational resources for acquiring the English language. Therefore, technology's widespread acceptance signals a promising shift toward embracing the correct adoption of digital appliances while guiding students so that they access quality resources that are deeply engaging and empower them to take charge of their own learning journey, hence, resulting in meaningful educational outcomes that account for ICTs positive impact on students' overall language learning process.

Conclusions

An essential element for becoming a successful teacher, particularly an effective language instructor, lies in the teacher's performance (Zohoorian & Faravini, 2021), which has a notable influence in promoting students' learning outcomes (Montoneri, 2011, as cited in Zohoorian & Faravini, 2021). Accordingly, Werang et al. (2022) consider that the most significant institutional driver of student academic success is the teaching performance of the teacher that refers to a series of skills, attitudes, and efforts involved in educators' teaching labor both in and outside classroom settings (Nzewi et al., 2018, as cited in Werang et al., 2022). Undeniably, ELT teachers play a decisive role in propelling a more dynamic and

student-centric language education environment. How a teacher performs directly relates to learners' achievements in their academic endeavors. For that reason, effective teaching practices, encompassing a range of necessary competences, should be implemented to guarantee successful teaching performance and therefore a positive trajectory towards instructional efficacy.

In this paper, it was intended to analyze a set of skills for 21st century ELT teachers to perform successfully in a contemporary classroom setting. Upon literature review three main skills were identified as enablers for teachers to overcome current challenges in the educational field and provide learners with a fulfilling experience. This analysis resulted in the acknowledgement of teachers' need for cultivating communicative-social skills, enhancing their ability to easily adapt, and proficiently managing ICTs in Colombian English learning contexts. Individually, each of the mentioned factors have proved to be highly reliable and useful at fostering EFL students' learning outcomes. Nevertheless, although the isolated incorporation of these skills can certainly shape the instructional environment for the better, if they are all integrated in the teaching practice, improvement may be even more noticeable.

This work also aimed at describing the positive impact ELT teachers' communicative-social skills, adaptability, and ICT management have in students' language learning journey. Being able to communicate effectively with students without losing sight of their needs is pivotal to ensure the relevance of the content that is being taught and the means by which quality education is achieved. On this matter, the teacher, who performs as a guide and motivator, provides an inclusive and interactive learning atmosphere that helps students develop autonomy and build interest on the subject, hence, shifting any unfavorable attitude towards English learning into a positive one while preparing for real-world language use situations. Similarly, teachers' ability to adapt to the ever-evolving conditions surrounding education, involving different teaching methods, technological advancements, and the unique needs of each student, must be a priority skill to guarantee that the learning experience remains dynamic and well suited to what students require. This customized approach makes sure that every student receives ideal support, which maximizes their understanding and promotes language acquisition. Additionally, the strategic incorporation of ICT constitutes a valuable support for ELT to increase students' motivation. Facilitating innovative language learning resources including online educational platforms, and authentic materials such as videos, articles, blogs, and podcasts can be highly engaging for students. These tools help students work on both their linguistic competence and cultural sensitivity ultimately creating a positive and productive learning environment.

It is widely acknowledged that language learning depends on several factors. On the one hand, it is possible to identify those integral to the student: sociocultural background, cognitive capacities, previous experiences with the target language influencing the affective filter, etc. On the other hand, factors conditioning language learning can be external: exposure to the language and incoming input, learning environment conditions, and teacher quality. This time, the latter concerning teaching work was addressed considering its

unquestionable impact on students' learning process. After studying adaptability, communicative-social abilities, and ICT management in more detail, it is feasible to propose the integrative incorporation of these skills as a route for ELT teachers to perform successfully in Colombian instructional contexts. This suggests a holistic-collaborative perspective that advocates for a flexible educator who communicates effectively and intelligently incorporates technology to prompt a student-centered approach that adjusts to the diverse needs and preferences of learners.

It is evident that 21st century skills have been thoroughly explored and showed promising results in many countries. On the grounds of this, it is advisable to encourage ELT teachers to work on the development of the addressed skillset, and most importantly start implementing it in the Colombian context. Thence, for future studies, empirical research is recommended for the purpose of testing these pedagogical practices in various educational environments as well as with diverse student groups. Further documentary analysis is also suggested to encounter other complementary teaching skills that may be useful for English language instruction to ultimately assess the viability of their application while keeping a holistic-collaborative approach in which knowledge, competences, and skills intertwine with each other to improve students' learning experience.

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Appendix 1 AI Proofreading:  Appendix 1_AI proofreading