

4Cs & LSRW: 21st CENTURY SKILLS IN A LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**Dr. Manjeet Yadav**

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ABSTRACT

The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn. (Toffler, 2006)

Accelerating technological change, rapidly accumulating knowledge, increasing global competition and rising workforce capabilities around the world make 21st century skills essential. Basic literacy skills of reading, writing and mathematics are no longer sufficient. In addition to these skills our students shall be able to read critically, write persuasively, think and reason logically, and solve complex problems. Therefore, our educational system must understand and embrace the 21st century skills within the context of rigorous academic standards. These skills incorporate the 4Cs: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication; IMT: information, media and technology; FLIPS: flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity and social skills. NEP 2020 envisions the holistic development of an individual being equipped with the 21st century skills.

Language education promotes the development of these skills where people develop the ability to connect with each other and this is one of the most rewarding and fulfilling human experience. This in-turn develops better understanding, increased social acceptance and empathy among people. Mastery over language skills open up various professional horizons for an individual. Various job opportunities and entrepreneurial ventures depend lot on the language proficiencies of an individual for its success. The 4Cs are an integral part of a language class as a language teacher blends them in their classroom activities while exercising the four language skills of their students. The focus of a language class is on equipping the students with ability to think critically and creatively; perform tasks independently as well as in groups; collaborate with their peers and experts, and interact proficiently with people. All the language learning activities incorporate the above dimensions. This expedites the development of listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) skills of students in a language class.

Keywords: - 21st Century Skills, 4Cs, Language Skills, LSRW, Language Education.

INTRODUCTION

The periphery of literacy keeps evolving with time and is in sync with various social developments. It is a dynamic concept. It is an individual's capacity to comprehend something. The concept of multi-literacy has evolved in the recent times. In order to succeed in the present scenario of volatile changes, one need to possess multi-skills like analytical skills like critical and logical thinking; creativity and innovation; systematic thinking; collaboration and cooperation. These would prepare individuals to tackle the global challenges practically. Multi-skills in addition to the knowledge are the constituents of the 21st century skills. Global Task Force (2008) stated in its report, "In order to educate the generation of students who will face the challenges of the 21st century, universities need to provide students with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to work effectively in our increasingly interdependent world". 3Rs i.e. reading, writing and

arithmetic are not enough. Rapid technological evolution has impacted each and every domain of development, raising the need for learning technology and digital skills. It has redefined the concept of 21st century skills which is much beyond the 3Rs.

Current educational reforms are focusing on skill development, research and innovation. National Education Policy 2020 has emphasized great deal on this aspect and has suggested various steps which would help in achieving it. Such reforms would provide impetus to achieving the vision of self-reliant India. To build atmanirbhar bharat we need to equip our students with self-confidence. This confidence originates from the knowledge and skills of an individual, and one more important component, the language. Overcoming linguistic barrier opens-up unlimited horizons for individuals. This global arena has also provided impetus to the need of communication skills resulting in the need of learning and mastering the language skills. An

individual with competence in communication would achieve much more than those who are not competent. Specifically, the English language for it being the global language of business and connection. It provides a common platform for different cultures to come on a single plain and connect. Ability to express, articulate and communicate are the key to achieve success. The learning and innovation skills- the 4Cs i.e. critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, communication, collaboration are prominent among various 21st century skills. We need to promote these skills among our learners, teachers and mentors.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the present paper is to explore the dimensions of the 21st century learning skills i.e. 4Cs in English language classrooms focusing on the development of LSRW: listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

The present paper would discuss and review the 21st century learning skills 4Cs with reference to language skills LSRW.

21st Century Learning Skills (4Cs) in Language Classroom

These learning skills include:

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Creativity and innovation
- Communication
- Collaboration

“Critical thinking skill is an individual’s ability to use a number of his or her general cognitive processing skills which fall into high-order thinking levels of analyzing, evaluating and constructing new ideas or creating and which enables students to think deeply to solve non-familiar problems in different ways” (Kivunja, 2015). Thinking critically implies looking at a situation or problem from its multiple perspectives and analyzing it. This analysis is evidence and fact based. Critical thinking and problem solving requires exercises involving students in problem-based tasks. It persuades an individual to use reasoning, rational and reflective thinking while interpreting and evaluating the given information. Every individual has different learning styles including their major and minor learning styles. Some learn by seeing (visual), some by listening/speaking (auditory), some through reading/writing work and some by doing (kinesthetic). Being aware of these helps in acknowledging and incorporating these into

classroom activities. It helps in critical thinking and problem-solving activities being conducted by the students as per their own learning style.

In a language class tasks such as comprehension exercises, creative writing-based tasks involves analytical skills like critical thinking and finding solution to the present questions. While conducting such tasks, display questions should be avoided. Rather, exploratory questions should be used. It stimulates the critical discourse among the students. Using such kind of tasks is an integral component of a language class. All the four language skills are activated when students are allotted the tasks like discussions or debate. While discussing or during debate the students will read texts, make notes, listen to the other side and speak-out their thoughts on the given topic as per their research or study. Listening and speaking; reading and writing shall be used in continuum in such tasks. Providing more and more of such kind of exercised to the students would assist in learning and developing the critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Creativity and innovation are an individual’s capacity to produce an original and distinct product, or finding a distinct way or solution to a problem. Creativity and innovation follow once critical thinking and problem-solving tasks are completed. While finding the solutions for the given problem an individual is required to think in different and new ways.it exercises their creative thinking skill and the final product would be an innovation or creation of a new knowledge. “Creative activities in a classroom teaching-learning process are the tools which gives opportunities to the students to express their learnings in a new way” (ELT, Oxford University Press, 2013). There are three type of creative thinking- Combinational thinking: producing new ideas by associations of old ideas; Exploratory thinking: exploring the possibilities in current conceptual space using the existing rules; and Transformational thinking: altering the current concept.

Creative writing tasks, completion tasks, open-ended questions, cloze test items and tasks requiring students to suggest different plausible plot or series of events are used in language classes. In addition, the activities involving brainstorming, group projects, essay writing, poem writing and visual representation of the idea through its drawing, promote creativity in a language class. Such tasks are aimed at promoting the creativity and innovation skills among the students. These

tasks provide students the opportunity to innovate. Integrating creative thinking in language lessons develops cognitive skills like observation, inquiry and hypothesizing; metacognitive skills like evaluation and reflection (Read, 2015).

Communication being the most crucial skill for learning, is the ability of an individual to interact with their fellow people and share their thoughts and state of mind with them. It is also one of the basic needs of an individual, as in the absence of it the person feels isolated from its surrounding. This makes them feel wandering uselessly. It enables individuals to connect and articulate their thoughts and ideas orally, in writing and using non-verbal cues. An individual should be able to express themselves clearly and appropriately using the correct structures of language and appropriate words. In various life spheres and in career these skills are crucial and the determining factors of success.

All the language class tasks are aimed at developing the communication skills of the students so that they can interact with their surroundings meaningfully and to their most satisfactory extent. Though it involves the above two skills as well. As, an individual while communicating is required to think critically and creatively to proceed with the process.

“Collaboration is defined as working together to achieve common goals” (Applied Educational Systems, 2019). It is the ability of the person to work in cohesion with their peers or team, taking the responsibility of the allotted tasks. This helps in understanding the fact that each individual think differently and have different ideas. Various critical thinking and problem-solving tasks in a language class requires the students to work in collaboration with their peers. Various collaborative tasks require students to coordinate, communicate, take decisions, resolving conflicts and doing negotiations while solving the problem.

Communication exercises in a language class involve a small group of students to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing tasks in collaboration with their peers. Writing short stories in groups, completing the story, drawing conclusions or endings are the activities which can be used in a language class to promote collaboration among students. Students should also be motivated to discuss their course of path while performing the given tasks and analyze; compare the strategies used by the other groups or students;

suggest the ways to improve these collaborations. Communication and collaboration are the two Cs about which the language teachers are well aware. As these are the basis of all the language classes, in the absence of which the language classes are meaningless as it would not be able to develop the desired language skills.

DEVELOPING LANGUAGE SKILLS

Language is a means of communicating thoughts. Language has two forms; spoken and written. Mainly a language proceeds from spoken to written form. To acquire a language and to learn a language one need to possess the language skills. There are four language skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW). These language skills are classified into two categories- receptive skills also known as passive skills and productive skills also known as active skills. Listening and reading are the receptive (passive) skills, while speaking and writing are productive (active) skills.

Listening being the passive skill is very important for developing its counterpart speaking a productive skill, as it provides the input for processing. Listening influences the multicultural sensitivity and helps in developing empathy a crucial component of social and emotional development. Practicing listening in a language class involves various activities based on active listening. Classroom discussions contribute a great deal in exercising the listening skill of the students. This pose a challenge also, the challenge of the conversation veering off the course. So, in order to provide successful listening experience to the students, the teacher needs to engage students into purposeful listening by telling them which part needs their attention, how they can do so, what to respond to, how to respond and when to respond. Audios and supporting visuals compose the listening exercises. Such tasks should integrate both audio and video providing multisensory inputs to grasp the attention of the students as well as using more than one sense to generate the meaning out of the given situation. Technology proves to be a useful tool for such exercises. The 21st century listening lessons are tech-enabled which can be accessed as and when required, replayed with ease and fully controlled by the students to adapt as per their level.

Speaking comes in quick succession to the listening skill. We learn a language more naturally in speaking form first as it serves our primary

communication purposes very well. Also, it provides the immediate practical implementation of the language learnings. This language skill is more about fluency, pronunciation and verbal oral drill. Our classroom interactions are more reliant on this skill in comparison to the other language skills. Also, it helps us to use our class time more economically. Various function-based tasks and activities help in developing speaking skills. Rhymes repetition, oral composition, pronunciation drills, look and say, read aloud, open-ended stories, narrations, description, dialogue, role play, interviews, debates and discussions, rhymes, talks and picture comprehension are speaking skill activities which can be used in classrooms (Jyothsna & Rao, 2009).

Reading skill is an important receptive (passive) skill as it provides the input and basis for the other skills. An important 21st century skill, as we are facing a bombardment of information- true and fake. To identify we need to possess the reading skill and should be a well-informed reader. Understanding the context of a text is crucial to make a meaning and to draw out the wholeness of the content. Reading exercises and tasks in a language class involves to read the story, novel, essay, poem, newspaper, letters etc. and to understand it from various perspectives by analyzing the text structure, vocabulary, text forms, reference, direct and indirect contexts, feeling and emotion represented through that piece of text. Reading comprehension exercises are also crucial tasks being used in a language class.

“Writing is a powerful tool to open up communication and allow change to be initiated” (Anae, 2014). Writing is a productive (active) skill of a language. It is creative task where students gather their thoughts and ideas; analyze; process and generate new thoughts and ideas. Stories,

rhymes, quotes, letters, songs, etc. are the some of the writing tasks used in a language class to develop the writing skill among students. Creative writing is the most used tool among these. Creative writing lessons creates motivation, imagination and inspiration among the students. It develops the competence and skill to create knowledge and process it individually, in pairs and in groups. It requires students to brainstorm, identify and organize their ideas into a written piece. In addition to developing the language skill and its fluency, this also provides the opportunity to think critically, create, communicate and collaborate among themselves while producing a new piece of work. Also, drama, dialogues, autobiography, memoirs, travelogues, music, storytelling, projects and creative writing tasks together gives a lot of opportunities for students to exercise the 21st century learning skills the 4Cs. Creative writings facilitate the social and literacy skills it also provides the device to explore the social and personal issues.

CONCLUSION

The 21st century learning skills are the pillars of the vision: Self-reliant India (Atmanirbhar Bharat). The 4Cs of these learning skills are the crucial components of a language class. In integration these 4Cs helps an individual conquer various tasks both at workplace and at home; social and personal sphere. These are the indicators of success and helps in further developments. All the knowledge acquisition processes are dependent on these and in turn the development of these skills is dependent on the knowledge acquisition tasks. All these aspects make it very important to focus on these 4Cs and language skills not only in language class but also beyond that i.e. in each and every task performed at school or college level.

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