



Practice of Knowledge and Competence of English Language Teachers for Outfitting with 21st Century Skills

Research Paper

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Abstract

This study explored how teachers' existing knowledge about twenty-first century skills does not reflect on their pedagogical competence and practice in the tertiary level language classrooms, and discovers a sheer imbalance between teacher's knowledge about 21st century skills and pedagogical practice. A qualitative approach and a multiple case study method were followed to find out the answers of the research questions. Data were collected from purposively selected four language classrooms of English department of a private university in Dhaka. The analysis of data suggested that teachers have lack of knowledge about 21st century skills. Additionally, it is seen that teachers failed to address their competence to incorporate 21st century skills in classroom planning and practice. The distinct causes were lack of proper training, regular follow-ups and sometimes anxiety to deal with multilevel classrooms. The findings of the article recommended that teacher education programs should include the aspects of regular training for the teachers to practice 21st century skills in their pedagogy.

Keywords: Knowledge, competence, 21st century skills, pedagogy, practice

1. Introduction

In present world, education refers to the need to develop students with certain core skills and competencies, often known as 21st century skills, which can be characterized as; critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration. Generally stating, the 21st century skills' concept is motivated by the belief that teaching students is the most creatively careful, useful in-demand, and universally applicable skills. Students need to be taught different life skills which is the demand of the 20th century to face real life challenges, and that the skills they learn, should reflect the specific demands that will be placed upon them in a complex, competitive, knowledge-based, technology-driven applicable learning and as well as real life situations. Competence must take into consideration where real-life skills can be demonstrated outside classroom. In fact, today's students are active learners rather than spectators. They believe in sharing. They view themselves as participants in creating information and new ideas. Collectively, these visions can be successful if the teachers possess the sound knowledge and achieve competence for outfitting with the skills and practice it in the classrooms. The emerging scenario of shifting to outcome-based curriculum and pedagogical practice of the universities of Bangladesh is quite rapid which requires relevant knowledge, necessary training, integrated

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multilevel skills and competence for the language teachers to transform students to a critical thinker and creator. This is the time of integrated learning where, a learner must have extra skills to be a problem solver, critical thinker, creative, communicative, etc. This is the present demand where this 21st century skills are mandatory to be practiced initially in tertiary level classrooms as well as in curriculum. Before that, it is to see that whether the teachers are aware or not; knowledgeable or not, and have the competence for outfitting themselves with the skills before practicing in classrooms or not. As Bangladesh has had a long history of tertiary level teaching, pedagogy has hardly reached to its goal due to the lack of knowledge and competence of the teachers regarding practicing of 21st century skills, where teachers must acknowledge that the learners are already engaging with technology.

Besides, the majority of faculties are unknown to their lack of knowledge and pedagogical methods for adjusting their teaching framework to accommodate the diversity of students' worldviews to nurture knowledge progression in the classroom settings. These lacking causes a barrier to the purpose of outfitting themselves with the demanding skill to stimulate new ideas and knowledge towards real world connections to make learning relevant, personalized, collaborative, communicating, engaging and teach to encourage critical thinking and creativity. There are few teacher trainings programs that target the teaching or development of 21st century skills, although there are several teacher training initiatives that focus on developing teachers' ICT skills only and most of them are optional; few are in vein. The study aimed to work on this gap.

2. Objectives

The study was an attempt to examine what existing knowledge about 21st century skills the English language teachers have and to explore how much competent are they to reflect the skills in their pedagogical practice.

3. Methodology

Two research questions of this study dealt with exploring teachers' existing knowledge about 21st century skills and its reflection on their pedagogical practice. To explore these two phenomena, a qualitative research was needed as Creswell (2012) asserted that qualitative research is the most suitable for exploring and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon. It was approached to conduct a case study as case studies are good for describing and expanding the depth of understanding of a fact and are often used to study people and programs particularly in education (Stake, 1995). Within the qualitative framework, a multiple case study had been chosen for this research. According to Gay, Miles and Airasian (2011), multiple case studies allow the researcher to make claims that the events described at one site are not necessarily idiosyncratic to that site and thus contribute to the researcher's understanding about the contextual variations.

4. Case Selection

For this study, undergrad students of English department, who were running their 9th semester, were considered as a case or unit of analysis (Yin, 1994) that include both students and teachers of language classes and pedagogical practices inside the classrooms. Following Creswell's (2012) suggestion, it was chosen four cases or unit of analysis intentionally for this study using purposive sampling strategy as it was expected to know the central phenomena by getting an available information for the needs. Five students from each class were selected for interview; two teachers were purposively selected, who had been teaching language courses for more than eight years, for interview. Pre-observation interview was taken to both the students and teachers to obtain varied perspective and classroom observation was done of each class

eight times to bring the authentic information as well as to see the similarities and differences between teachers' knowledge and actual practice within two different cases. At first, minor themes had been identified for single case analysis. Then all the minor themes of four cases were merged into major themes in cross case analysis as well as triangulation of data which addressed the answers of two research questions. According to Creswell (2012), it is useful to see that researcher has one major theme and several minor themes subsumed under the major theme.

5. Findings

Each case analysis provided the opportunity to have an in-depth understanding of teachers' knowledge about 21st century skills and their pedagogical competence to implement in classroom activities which was related to the research questions. Four classroom settings of individual cases were observed eight times during four weeks followed by the major findings under two themes, teacher knowledge and pedagogical competence, across the cases. Here the names of the teachers are imaginary. The emerged themes across four classes are discussed briefly below:

Table 1: Classroom settings of each case center alignment

Teacher's name	Number of classes	Language Course	Class duration	Teaching experience
Mr. Mirza	Twice a week	Second language acquisition	1 hour and 15 minutes	More than eight years
Mr. Nahid	Twice a week	Composition	1 hour and 15 minutes	More than seven years

5.1. Teachers' Knowledge about 21st Century Skills

5.1.1. From Teacher's Interview

Two teachers from two cases acknowledged that they have limited knowledge about 21st century skills. Mr. Mirza only mentioned that 21st century skills are critical thinking and effective communication. On the other hand, Mr. Nahid explained in his words:

'I guess I have no such clear knowledge about 21st century skills but these skills refer to communication, critical thinking and integration of technology which are necessary to be practiced in classroom because of the present demand of the time where students need to act outside the classroom.'

Teachers mostly gave the importance to communication and communicative classroom. Both of them also considered that they tried incorporate few skills in their pedagogy and lesson plan though most of the students are not capable to cope-up with the practice of these skills in a multilevel classroom. Sometimes they used digital content like, you-tube beside textbooks for students' better understanding. The respondents said that still the teachers of tertiary level need proper training, as they have the competence to practice these skills, to make them much competent to practice it regularly in their pedagogy. In fact, Mr. Mirza and Mr. Nahid focused on teacher's communicative skill to communicate with the students and most importantly, to make the classroom much communicative. They paid attention to teacher's training that should focus mostly on enhancing their communicative skill and to include in curriculum to foster them to outfit with these skills.

5.1.2. From Students' Interview

After students' interview it is seen that students feel that their teacher's teaching style, way of delivery is very helpful, funny and friendly and also very interesting when they find that teacher uses several real-life examples to connect them with the lesson. Students also find that they get space to share their opinion in classroom openly with the teacher. According to them

the classroom is completely lecture centered where there was sheer scope to think and create anything critically and no such use of digital content except multimedia. Students are not familiar with the outsource materials in internet in the classroom except text book. They hardly get involve in pair or group work in the class and opportunity to work with collaboration, and even they get no scope to communicate among themselves unlike teacher's talking time. They believe that there must be a synergy between classroom learning to improve their skill which can they use in real life situation.

5.1.3. From Classroom Observation

The actual fact is found after pre and post observation. In both the cases, the teacher was confident enough to start the class with anecdote and planning, seems first, but with the progression of the class there was no such planning is seen; teacher was asking random open questions where some of the back benches students sit idle and follow the lectures doing nothing else. Teacher did not use any digital content or instructional materials to involve students to think critically and to engage them in any activity and conducted the class with full-on lecture method though he used lots of real-life examples beside elicitation. No use any other source of learning or students' involvement to create something beside the contextualized lesson of textbook. Overall, the pedagogy lacked proper collaboration among the students, zero scope for creativity and also practice critical thinking part which altogether could make the class effective for the students to connect the outsource materials with their lesson topic. It is vivid teachers had knowledge, but they are not competent enough to incorporate the knowledge in pedagogy.

5.2. Teacher's Competence and Pedagogy

There was sheer imbalance between teachers' knowledge, which is explored during their pre-observation interview, and practice after the observations of both the cases. The differences were also found from what teachers said and what the students experienced in the classroom and these different scenes were seen after each case observation of classrooms repeatedly.

5.2.1. From Teacher's Interview

During the interview, both the teachers claimed that their classes were always participatory and students got themselves involved in different collaborative activities. To find the answer of the third research question, it is seen as teachers' lack of competence results from multilevel large classroom anxiety, lack of proper training, collegial anxiety, time schedule, students' multilevel of understanding and mostly self-motivation. Firstly, teachers must have a very clear idea of 4Cs and its effectiveness to make a synergy between classroom and real-life situation. Thus, teachers need training before practicing the mentioned skills at the tertiary level. They must need follow-ups after training to overview that to what extent their practice addresses the students' capability to face real life challenges.

5.2.2. From Students' Interview

All five students of each of the cases answered not that much positively here as they said that they get few chances to work in groups or pair or discussions among themselves where they get to create something by mutual collaboration. The classes are mostly lecture based, sometimes sharing opinion openly in the class. One of the students opined:

'Teacher asks questions but never involve us in any group work to discuss or any assignment which can we do by mutual collaboration; and we only follow his lectures. Very often he uses multimedia slides.'

In Mr. Mirza's case, students said that sometimes teacher gave them open space to think over a topic or fact and asked to share their opinion.

5.2.3. From Classroom Observation

There is no variation in teaching techniques, no activity in the class to practice 4Cs, no attempt to involve students in different thought provoking and collaborative activities, no use of teaching materials to let students work or create on; and, eventually, no feedback what they have learnt, achieved or created in the class. Cooperation and collaboration in different activities among the students to dig out the topic is seen as completely ignored in classroom observation. Students are listening to the teachers only and share their opinion randomly, sometimes not, in the class. Even, the teacher does not address all the students to participate in open sharing as well. A large part of the class is being alienated from the main discussion of the class delivered by the teacher. Secondly, teachers need to use proper planning to prepare instructional materials to make the lesson much feasible, understandable and also use the digital and outsource content beside textbook to diversify students' learning. It can help them to relate with the outside scenario lastly, teacher must follow a specific plan to specify the practice of different activities and tasks in the class as well as need to play the role as facilitator to foster the creative field for the students to invent new things or ideas.

Though teacher's eliciting technique is good to drag the students towards the lesson but no systematic involvement to let students think and work on the issues together, and also, absence of the use of different global or local digital content which prove the sheer lacking of teacher's competence to practice 4Cs in classroom as well as daily lesson plan. In two cases, the main finding came out from three angles; from teachers' interview, students' interview and classroom observation were almost same. The major result of both the cases which can be shortly synthesized as below:

Table 2: Synopsis of the result of case-1

Teacher's name	Number of classes	Language Course	Pedagogical strategy	Classroom activity	Use of digital content	Lesson planning	Practice of 21 st century skills
Mr. Mirza	Twice a week	Second language acquisition	Lecture	No activity and involvement of students	Not seen	No certain planning	Elicitation for a time being to let them think critically

Table 3: Synopsis of the result of case-2

Teacher's name	Number of classes	Language Course	Pedagogical strategy	Classroom activity	Use of digital content	Lesson planning	Practice of 21 st century skills
Mr. Nahid	Twice a week	Composition	Lecture	No activity and involvement of students	Not seen	No certain planning	Not seen

In the above cases, table-2 and table-3, it was found that teacher lacks pedagogical competence to practice any of the 21st century skills in any of his classrooms. There was little attempt to involve students to foster to think critically on a topic but was not so focused. Teacher was not following any plan; no activity to foster communication and collaboration skills among the students, no use of digital content was seen in any of his classes. Significantly, there was no strategy seen to let the students involve to create something after a series of lessons.

6. Discussion

6.1. Teachers' Knowledge

In both the cases, the teachers, who have been teaching more than ten years in the tertiary level, has prior knowledge about 21st century skills but not much vivid and sufficient. It is seen that the participant mentions few common practiced skills like, critical thinking, communicative skills and integration of technology which are included under the broad concept of 21st century skills but in informal interview the respondent also considers, unlike the researcher, he lacks sound knowledge on 21st century skills. Their perceptions towards the skills are clear enough but not analytically structured. It is the most common image of the other language teachers of the department as well. Though they have knowledge, they cannot make it contextualize. Teachers' opinion also addresses some other reviews of literature where it is seen the shift of change in the canvas of education demands ability-based education where quality must be accomplished. Prior research also finds that teachers' knowledge must be enhanced, enriched and overviewed by contextualizing the skills into tertiary level curriculum. This lacking is mostly seen in the context of Bangladeshi tertiary level curriculum. A report by National Institute of Education, Singapore, 1959-1978 was the period of 'Survival-driven education', where Teachers' Training College (TTC) established and launched certificate in education for non-graduates. Gradually, it increases its' path as part time teacher training and full-time teacher training. Later diploma in teacher training and part-time cadetship in teach scheme for the teachers and TTC becomes Institute of Education (IE). The report says, 1079-1996 is the time of 'Efficiency-driven education', where full time teacher training replaces the part time scheme, Diploma in Educational Administration (DEA) and Further Professional Diploma in Education (FPDE) and Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) also launched which was considered as the milestone in the field of teachers' training and professional development. With the progression of these inclusions, Teaching of Computing and Teaching of Computer added. PhD degrees started with all its necessity to imply the academic knowledge in practical field during this period. From that time, it is seen that to address quality education and to link it with the needs of changing global scenario in education, teachers' knowledge and training is much mandatory. As well as this need is a felt, educational institution started to give emphasis on teachers' training to enhance their knowledge and later competence to practice it. The 'Ability-driven education' from 1997-to present, it is focused on the outcome based education gradually where, degrees and programs are revised according to the need analysis, students' outcome based result and this scenario has made a significant change in the tertiary level at present, though very newly started, but the shifting focus demands much on grooming to deal with real life skills and facing challenges of modern era.

6.2. Teachers' Competence

In the findings of the study, it is discovered that there was no synergy between teacher's prior knowledge and practice; no variation in teaching techniques, no activity in the class to practice 4Cs, no attempt to involve students in different thought provoking and collaborative activities, no use of teaching materials to let students work or create on; and, eventually, no feedback is seen what students have learnt, achieved or created after completing a lesson in the class. Most significantly, though the teacher has prior idea about the 4Cs but the whole class is driven by lecture method and no systematic planning is seen to practice the skills. Besides, cooperation and collaboration in different activities among the students to dig out the topic is seen as completely ignored, which are the most demanding skills to be practiced in pedagogy, in classroom observation. Students are listening to the teachers only and share their opinion randomly, sometimes not, in the class. A large part of the class is being alienated from the main discussion. Literature on this fact offers compelling arguments for transforming pedagogy to

better support acquisition of twenty-first century skills. Scott (2013) considered that the 'transmission' or 'lecture model' are highly ineffective for teaching twenty-first century competencies and skills, yet widespread use of this model continues. In spite of global demand that learners need skills such as critical thinking and the ability to communicate effectively, innovate, and solve problems through negotiation and collaboration, pedagogy has seldom adapted to address these challenges. Among the other studies, Datnow (2002) suggested that most reforms are externally driven; therefore, leaders must be aware of the distinction between mandating change and supporting change. Embedding 21st century skills into a teacher's curriculum is based on concrete strategies such as, vocabulary terms, readings, and quizzes, as well as acknowledging the individual teacher's pedagogical style and specific content. As teacher lacks proper skill to plan a class with the inclusion of all 4Cs, absence of using outsource materials and digital content are also missing to connect students actually to the real-life challenges beside textbook.

7. Conclusion

It is the fact; students should prepare themselves for a more complex life and work environment. A twenty-first century classroom must promote creativity, critical thinking, flexible communication, and collaboration by preparing the teachers' knowledge to foster them to ready for implementation in classroom where students and teachers must learn and share content within the context of 21st century skills. Teachers need to be upgraded with sound knowledge, necessary variation and changes of teaching style and, of course, pedagogically competent enough. This study penned to focus that teachers with little prior knowledge about 21st century skills can hardly reach the pedagogical excellence to incorporate the skills in classroom practice.

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