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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Moroccan EFL Teachers' Perception of 21st-Century Skills in Moroccan Public Schools

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to investigate Moroccan EFL teachers' perceptions of the use of 21st-century skills in public school classes. Fifty-one Moroccan teachers from both middle school and high school participated in a survey to collect data. The results showed that Moroccan EFL teachers agreed that 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills are a positive plus in students' competencies. The data analysis was done statistically using an online survey that was sent to them through emails and WhatsApp groups. Teachers' responses showed the importance of 21st-century skills on students' performance and autonomy, as well as learning and acquiring knowledge in a manner distinct from the conventional approach.

**KEYWORDS**

21<sup>st</sup> century skills, EFL teachers, Teachers' perceptions.

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### 1. Introduction

In the context of the prevailing teacher-centered education system, which is still widely employed in classrooms, recitation was the central component of this outdated instructional approach. While using this method, students would sit quietly while successive individuals took turns reciting the lesson until everyone had participated. Teaching methods have undergone significant transformations over time. The traditional use of recitation and memory techniques for education involved students reciting lessons, with teachers evaluating each student's recitation and assessing their ability to recall assignments.

For English Language Teachers, it became a challenge to stick to the traditional way of teaching since its outcomes are always decreased. English as a foreign language for non-speakers makes them need to be a part of the learning process to digest the language; otherwise, they will be just passive receivers of the language. Students are looking for a different type of connection with their teachers, peers, and instructional materials. They learn in various ways, belong in their own environment, and should be educated using methods appropriate to their age and needs. They are "no longer to be viewed as a passive recipient for knowledge, but rather as an active participant in knowledge construction" (Nissim et al., 2016, p. 29). Students today "will graduate into a world where the demands of our professional, personal, and civic lives get increasingly complicated every year" (para. 2 of "Partnership for 21st Century Learning").

### 2. Literature review

21<sup>st</sup>-century skills are one of the most important keys teachers are concerned about when teaching youth (Pearson, 2013). The Partnership for 21st Century Skills ([www.21stcenturyskills.com](http://www.21stcenturyskills.com)) has also developed a framework for 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning, introducing the skills that students need to thrive in today's global economy. Students must acquire the necessary skills for success in the modern world, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and cooperation, which are the important components of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills within the context of education in fundamental knowledge.

Andrade (2016) stated that the emphasis on accountability, which has forced institutions to prove the worth of school coursework, is another element affecting higher education. To make it happen, it is necessary to look at curricular, pedagogical, and learning theories that offer insight into learner achievement, particularly how learning experiences can be created to produce desired results. Institutions must first identify the goals they are working for, both within and between disciplines, as a first step. This leads to the fact that 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills have, as an outcome, the ability of students to increase their responsibility to learn and achieve.

The requirements of a future prescriptive that is dictated by constant novelty and development must be met by education today (Pearson, 2015). "Teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century are filled with challenge and opportunity, especially when teaching students for whom English is a new language" (ibid, p. 5). In addition to that, Nissim et al. (2016) assert that the 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning setting might be "a process-supporting system" that establishes a context in which learners learn more effectively.

### 2.1 Research Questions

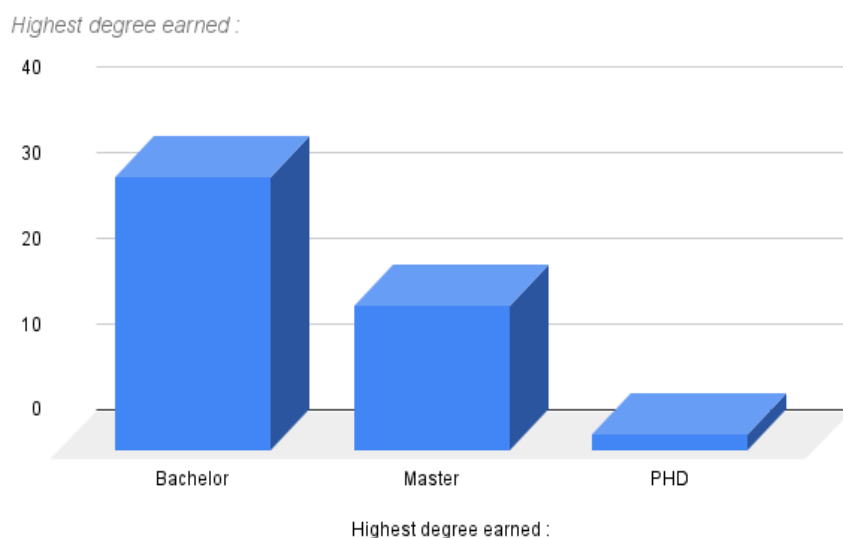
1. To what extent Moroccan teachers are aware of the importance of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in the learning process?
2. How can Moroccan EFL teachers implement 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in their classrooms?

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Participants:

This study focused on 51 Moroccan teachers belonging to Moroccan public schools; 51% of them were Middle school teachers, and 49% were high school teachers. The majority of them were bachelor's holders with at least five years of experience in teaching English as a foreign language. Many of these educators were familiar with the concept of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, as they actively incorporated these skills into their classrooms.

**Figure 1**  
*Participants' highest degree earned*



### 3.2 Instrument and procedure:

The study was conducted using a survey based on a questionnaire done by Ayu Fatmawati (2018) in her article that investigated the students of the English Education Department of one of the private Universities in East Java in Indonesia, was employed to know their perception of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills development through the implementation of PBL. It was sent to English teachers via emails and WhatsApp groups to see the whole topic from teachers' perspectives.

The questionnaire included open-ended questions and selected questions that helped to collect teachers' perceptions of the use of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in the learning process. It consisted of 7 items on a Likert scale that measured the teachers' perception while selecting from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", and they were also able to add their own comments freely.

## 4. Results and discussion

The questionnaire given to the teachers contained a question that says if the teacher thinks that 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills are important in the learning process, he should explain why.

(88,2%) of them stated that they were highly aware of the importance of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills as they require a good knowledge of soft skills like life skills, leadership, and learner-centered models. They help students to be autonomous. Students should be able to express themselves clearly and be self-confident with high awareness, thanks to 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills.

One of the participants assured that 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in teaching are a must since students' mentalities and ways of growing differ from the past. It is important to make learners ready for life challenges so that they get great careers in the future because students of today are tomorrow's citizens. Indeed, it is so important to provide them with the necessary tools to make them critical thinkers, problem solvers, and creative people. Some participants agreed that 21st-century skills help build students' characters, attitudes, and, most importantly, knowledge to understand and participate in a globally connected world, bearing in mind that they are a part of the competency-based approach that Morocco is currently adopting in the teaching sector.

**Figure 2**  
*Teachers' familiarity with the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills*

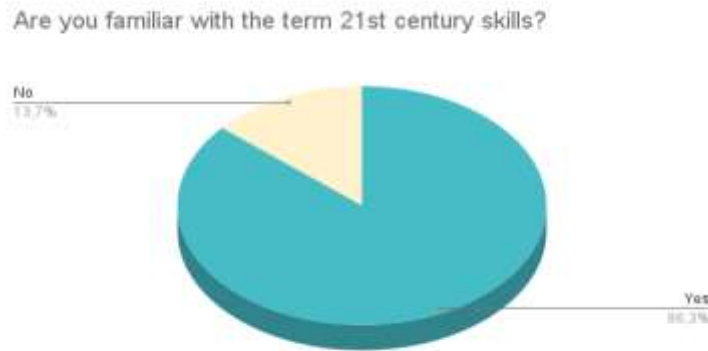


Figure 2 shows that (86.3%) of the participants are familiar with the term 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. This will lead to them answering the following questions of the questionnaire based on their prior knowledge.

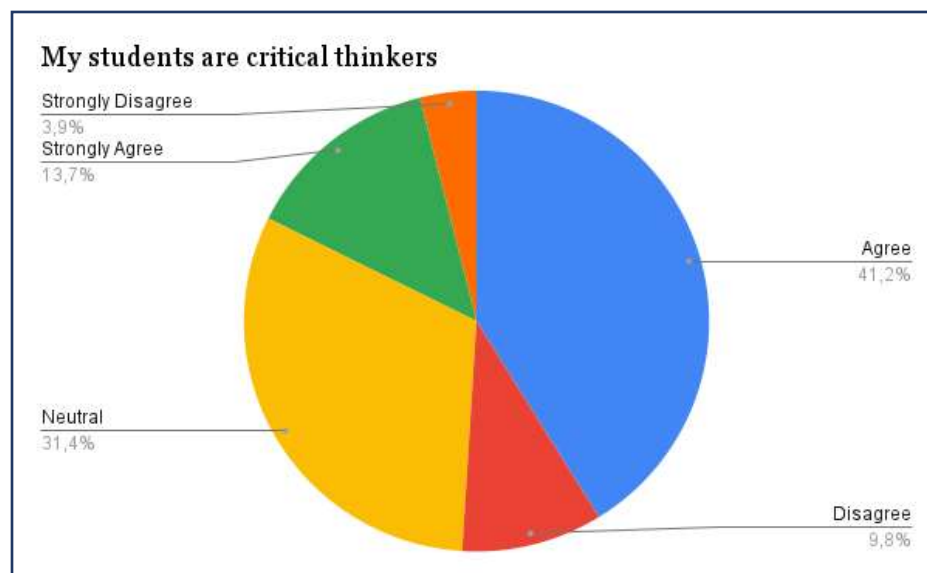
**Table 1**  
*Analysis of teachers' responses to the survey*

Statements	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
School community recognize the difference between higher and lower order thinking	11.8	21.6	31.4	21.6	13.7
My students are critical thinkers	13.7	41.2	31.4	9,8	3.9
My students are decisions makers	13.7	39.2	23.5	19.6	3.9
My students are problem solvers	7.8	52.9	17.6	15.7	5.9
My 21st century skills as a teacher have improved compared to my starting career	43.1	39.2	11.8	5.9	0
Students get higher marks when they memorize lessons	7.8	25.5	25.5	29.4	11.8

Data revealed that (41.2%) of teachers agree on the fact that their students are critical thinkers, (39.2%) claimed that their students are decision makers and (52.9%) stated that their students are problem solvers, which explains that the implementation of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in the learning process was beneficial for the learners.

These skills align with the principles advocated by cognitive psychology and philosophical perspectives on critical thinking Wegerif (2002). By engaging in such exercises, students not only enhance their comprehension abilities but also develop the capacity to think inductively, understand complex information, and effectively summarize content Sternberg and Baron (1985).

**Figure 3:**  
*Teachers' Perspectives on Student Critical Thinking*



When it came to 21<sup>st</sup>-century-skills impact on teachers, we noticed that (43.1%) of teachers strongly agreed that their skills improved thanks to the implementation of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in their teaching process, and just 5% of them expressed disagreement.

When referring to the traditional way of teaching that consists of memorizing and homework, (29.4%) of the teachers were against the idea that students get higher marks when they memorize lessons, while (29.5%) of them stayed neutral.

Finally, we arrive at the fact that the majority of Moroccan EFL teachers are aware of the rule and importance of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, not only in the learning process but also in their own improvement as instructors, because thanks to these skills, they build creative, independent and confident learners. "Teachers of English need to guide their students to conduct project work activities to enhance inquisitiveness and social skills." Jebbour (2019).

It becomes evident that a substantial majority of Moroccan EFL teachers are aware of the principles and significance attributed to 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. This awareness extends well beyond the confines of the learning process, permeating into their individual journeys of professional development as instructors. They recognize that these 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills have a remarkable role in the learning process; thus, they count on these skills as essential tools in their pedagogical toolkit.

## 5. Conclusion

This whole study covered the importance of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills from teachers' perspective; the results showed that most of the instructors are aware of the huge role of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in building learners' personalities. The use of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in the learning process helps to plant the seeds of being open to society from different backgrounds so that they can clearly express themselves and be positively involved in the modern world. The study highlighted educators being cognizant of the transformative impact that integrating 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills into the learning process can have on students' overall development.

The study found that the majority of teachers strongly acknowledged the significance of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in the learning process. Teachers emphasized the importance of soft skills such as life skills, leadership, and learner-centered models, as these skills promote autonomy and enable students to express themselves confidently. Instructors highlighted the necessity of adapting teaching methods to cater to the evolving mentalities and growth patterns of today's learners. They emphasized that 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills are crucial in preparing students for life challenges and future careers, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving abilities,

and creativity. Moreover, teachers noted that these skills contribute to the development of students' characters, attitudes, and knowledge, aligning with Morocco's current adoption of a competency-based approach in the education sector.

The study underscored the positive influence of these skills in fostering openness to diverse social backgrounds. By incorporating 21st-century skills, educators contribute to creating an environment where learners can confidently express themselves and actively participate in the contemporary world, as well as educators who become cognizant of the transformative impact that integrating 21st-century skills into the learning process can have on students' overall development.

However, it is essential to acknowledge certain limitations inherent in the study. Firstly, the research was conducted within a specific educational context, and the findings might not be universally applicable. Variations in educational systems, cultural nuances, and resource availability could impact the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data from educators, which may introduce a subjective bias.

Furthermore, the scope of the study itself may not have captured all nuances of the implementation of 21st-century skills. The depth of understanding and application of these skills could vary among educators.

To enhance the comprehensiveness of future research in this domain, it is necessary to conduct cross-cultural studies that could provide a more nuanced understanding of how 21st-century skills are perceived and integrated into teaching practices across different educational settings.

Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the long-term impact of 21st-century skills on learners' personal and professional development would contribute valuable insights. Exploring the variations in educators' perspectives on implementing these skills and assessing the effectiveness of different strategies could be another fruitful area for future research.

Overall, continued research in this field is crucial for refining pedagogical practices and ensuring that educators are equipped to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the modern world.

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