The World is My World: An Exploration of the 21st Century Language Learner

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Abstract

This study reveals student perceptions of what a "language" is, who a "language learner" is, and how vital it is to learn English in the 21st century, in a technology institute where the medium of instruction is English. The study also explores students' expectations regarding the curriculum and role of instructors throughout the language learning process. Students' short-term and long-term educational goals were explored as well. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Various instruments including questionnaires and post-interviews have been used. The interviews have been carried out with the students who have reflected a more critical viewpoint in their responses on the open-ended questions in the questionnaires. The data analysis unveiled striking results on the 21st century language learner and language learning.

Key words: 21st century skills, education, language learning, student perceptions, student expectations

Introduction

The 21st century skills

21st century skills emerge as a set of cognitive and non-cognitive skills, and are considered to be essential for success, not only in academic contexts and but also in employment (Greiff, Niepel and Wüstenberg, 2015). These skills can be named higher-order thinking skills and complex cognitive processes. In the past, it was the industrial production that was deemed vital; however today, the production of information is on stage. Therefore, "the intellectual capital of citizens" is the triggering force for the 21st century (Şahin, 2009: 1464). In order to be able to competently solve the problems of the new -postmodern- world, it is a must for people to have the high level thinking skills, through which they can utilize the knowledge and skills they have. These learning skills can be summarized as "information and communication skills, thinking and problem-solving skills, interpersonal and self-directional skills" (Şahin, 2009: 1464). Today, not only researchers but also policy makers have the concepts of creativity, problem solving, and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy on their agenda.

These skills have become vital recently due to the increase in factual knowledge and highly specialized content expertise. As a result of this situation, policy makers have developed some assessment programmes, including The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) since the high-level thinking skills are also at the core of education. In addition to the domains of science, mathematics, and reading, PISA now focuses on the 21st century skills, among which creative problem solving in collaborative and team settings can be listed, because these skills are relevant across all domains mentioned. Besides being relevant to large-scale assessments and educational policy issues, the 21st century skills are also central for today's workforce. (Autor, Levy, & Murnane, 2003; cited in Greiff, Niepel & Wüstenberg, 2015). Although there have been a number of rigorous empirical research studies, there are many issues to be unveiled as a result of high diversity and constant changes having a domino effect on all domains. The world of the 21st century requires the capacity to cope with uncertainties, opportunities, and qualities for effective lifelong learning as a

vital life skill (Deakin & Wilson, 2005). More research should be done to further investigate the 21st century skills including problem solving, science inquiry skills, creativity, learning-to-learn, and ICT literacy and their relevance and benefits answering the question of how these skills can be fostered. Only in this way can the millennium learners be equipped to face the challenges of the future.

The 21st century skills and education

According to Prather (1996), the 21st century would pave the way for the rebirth of sociology, as it always does in times of social upheaval. As a result of the social crises caused by these radical changes in every aspect of life, social theorists have attempted to reveal the sources of these social problems. However, most importantly, this also has led to a crisis in especially higher education, which is the last step to equip students with the required skills to face the challenges of this new century. In this sense, an answer should be sought for the question of "what action are we willing to take now to improve the preparation of future students?" (Prather, 1996: 437). Prather poses a more important question: "Are we prepared to teach in the 21st century?" In this regard, Prather (1996) states that sociologists have to investigative tools to search for solutions to overcome this educational crisis. Prather suggests using Smelser's (1963) value-added theory of collective behaviour as the framework. Smelser's framework-value-added theory of collective behaviour- suggests five stages and provides descriptions of events that have to be examined as evidence (Prather, 1996: 438) The stages in the framework are as follows: *Stage 1.* Structural conduciveness: general unrest related to fundamental structural factors such as economic conditions. *Stage 2.* Structural strain: strain occurring because of conflicting values of diverse groups, especially new vs. old groups. *Stage 3.* Generalized beliefs or rumours: beliefs that incite flames. *Stage 4.* Precipitating factors: incidents that trigger social action. *Stage 5.* Mobilization for action: people begin to take social action which may be constructive or turn destructive. For stage 1, economic recessions, job layoffs, downsizing of economic organizations, shortage of educational funds, increase in poverty can be given as evidence. New immigrant groups vs. established is advantaged groups struggling for control in schools; affluent suburban schools vs. impoverished ghetto schools; voucher vs. public; English only vs. bilingual are indicators of stage 2. For stage 3, unsafe schools, schools that are not maintaining academic excellence and schools that lack moral standards, and incompetent teachers are on the evidence list. Lastly, the potential evidence for stage 4 involves frustration over the low scores on achievement tests, anger concerning affirmative action, and possible impact upon admissions. Based on evidence, sociologists describe the social situations and shed light on social changes being observed, potential future problems, and potential crises in education. Without taking these into consideration, the fact that education is being devalued cannot be faced and measures cannot be taken to overcome this problem.

Teaching in the 21st century

"After decades of drift, decisive action is required to raise teaching to the front rank of professions. Only by modernisation can we equip our nation for the new century. I hope you will join us in meeting this challenge" (Tony Blair, DfEE, 1998a, Foreword; cited in Furlong, 2008:727). It has been explicitly stated in Blair's quote that educational reforms can be accomplished only if the profession of teaching can be modernised. That is, it has to become a '21st century profession' (Furlong, 2008: 727). Education has a central role in the modern world since there is constant competition between nations, and teachers are at the heart of education (Lauder et al. 2007, cited in Furlong, 2008). Education is the key concept to guaranteeing national prosperity, social justice and cohesion. Thus, "teaching has to become a '21st century profession' on the creation of a highly skilled workforce with the knowledge, enterprise and insights required to attract the global supply of high-skilled, high-waged employment" (Furlong, 2008: 728).

Two studies from literature show how crucial teachers' role is in this century. The study by Day and others (Gu & Day, 2007) was conducted in England with 300 teachers across 100 schools (cited in Furlong, 2008: 735). The researchers document that at the beginning of 2000s, a majority of teachers had to face professional challenges, such as "the intensification of performativity and a challenge to some of their traditional educational values". To cope with this problem, most teachers could adapt to the new environment with "their sense of vocationalism, their personalised commitment to their students, even if they disagreed with the broad thrust of the education policy they were required to implement" (cited in Furlong, 2008: 735). In the second study-the Teacher Identities Project- which was conducted in nine schools in London, 70 teachers' and eight school principals' experiences have been analysed (Moore et al., 2002; cited in Furlong, 2008: 736). The study revealed that most teachers perceived and described themselves as both pragmatic and eclectic. Teachers also

mentioned that they had modified their previous practice to adapt it to the expected teaching practice in the current policy. The teacher education program at the University of Maryland-Baltimore County has also been investigating new ways to increase students' opportunities for intellectual and social development. The program mission highlights "(a) that teaching is a profession for which disciplinary knowledge is as critical as knowledge of pedagogy, human development, learning theory, and methods of inquiry; and (b) that social responsibility is at the core of teaching" (Hrabowski, Lee & Martello, 1999: 295). The following six areas are emphasised in the curricula: "(1) developing teaching expertise; (2) providing prospective teachers with school-based preparation; (3) nurturing their decision-making, reasoning, problem-posing, problem-solving, and inquiry skills; (4) preparing them to work effectively both on behalf of and among diverse student populations (5) fostering an ethic of social responsibility; and (6) cultivating both habits and attitudes of reflective thought." In this regard, it can be stated that teaching expertise is multifaceted. In addition to the knowledge of subject areas, the knowledge of how children grow, learn, and develop is also required. To develop the teaching skills of prospective teachers, the curriculum should focus on the development of some basic skills, which include reasoning, decision making, problem posing, and problem solving. As Dewey (1900) stated "reflective thought" is inevitable in teaching and emphasised "openmindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility" (cited in Hrabowski, Lee & Martello, 1999: 298). Indeed, these make the profession of teaching unique.

In brief, only through education can the lives of students and teachers be transformed. Therefore, in order to meet the challenges of the future and the "brave the new world", the profession of teaching and the role of the 21st century should be redefined.

New millennium learners

The changes accompanying the new century has put the spotlight on students. As important stakeholders in education, their perceptions, ideas, opinions, needs and expectations should be taken into account. With the question "Are students prepared for higher education?" in mind, the characteristics of the 21st century students should be considered in planning and implementing higher education. Listed in Table 1 are descriptions about 21st century students compiled from the literature with comments from educators. (Editorial Projects in Education, 1994; cited in Prather, 1996).

Table 1. *Characteristics of the 21st century college student*

• Used to entertainment in classroom.	• Less respect shown to fellow students.
• Media-oriented = their culture.	• Have work experience.
• Short attention span.	• Have credit cards and debt.
• Not comfortable with writing or reading.	• Many are not physically fit.
• Decreased quantitative skills and critical thinking.	• Increase in students from dysfunctional/ violent homes.
• Competent with computer and video equipment.	• Increase in students experiencing poor economic conditions.
• Consumer-oriented.	• Highly motivated and dedicated: see school as only chance for success.
• Few behave as if school is high priority.	
• Fewer are politically active or interested.	
• Less deference shown towards authority.	

In addition to these characteristics, the 21st century students are likely to be skilful in using different computer applications and telecommunications and are more interested in the visual and audio media than print media. Prensky (2001) calls college students *Digital Natives* as these students have spent only 5,000 hours of their lives reading. For playing video games and watching TV, on the other hand, they have spent more than 30,000 hours (cited in Şahin, 2009). Plus, they are more aware of social issues and may represent the first member in their families to attend college. Based on the given information, it is apparent that these students are highly motivated to acquire higher education; however; they should be guided in terms of the means to accomplish their goals. That is why

educators have a central role in not only teaching but also mentoring and guiding students. Higher education institutions should take action to improve education and meet the needs of these students.

Needs of new millennium learners

In *Do You Want Your Students to Be Job-Ready With 21st Century Skills?* Kivunja (2014a) mentions the "Partnership for Teaching 21st Century Skills" (P21) reported by Trilling and Fadel (2009) in which the skills young people need in the 21st century as individuals, citizens and workers have been listed (cited in Kivunja, 2015). These skills are elaborated in four domains. The researchers report that the four domains are the Traditional Core subjects and Skills domain, the Learning and Innovations Skills domain (LIS), the Career and Life Skills domain (CLS), as well as the Digital Literacies Skills domain (DLS). Apart from the traditional core skills of literacy and numeracy, new pedagogical approaches put the emphasis on these skills. The pedagogical shift inevitably involves teaching skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, effective communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation (Kivunja, 2014a, Kivunja 2014b; cited in Kivunja, 2015). The 21st century -Information Age- requires effective participants to be equipped with the skills of critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, flexibility and adaptability to be better-educated individuals and successful and prosperous citizens. Therefore, it is crucial that education providers, particularly those in the higher education, give the new millennium learners the opportunity needed to learn these skills.

> This is not a new idea since it was highlighted early in the 20th century when American sociologist and philosopher Eric Hoffer (1902 – 1983) admonished, "In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists" (Goodreads, 2014, n.p. para. 1). However, it is even more significant today than it was then because of the greater speed and magnitude of flexibility and changes occurring in the Information Age fuelled by technology (Kivanju, 2015: 3).

Learning revisited

The desired form of 21st century learning can be defined as lifelong learning, since it is the form of learning regarded 'transformative' through which all types and classes of learning can be realised (Deakin & Wilson, 2005). Transformative learning is the essential ingredient for sustainability. It is intentional and continuous- that is it is the form of learning that takes place throughout the life span. Lifelong learning includes becoming the lead actor in the learning process by taking the responsibility for learning, being self-aware, learning to learn and being reflective as well. However, lifelong learning is a personal but not a private activity. Also, for lifelong learning, the process of learning itself is the reward; therefore, an extrinsic reward is worthless for the learner who pursues learning for the sake of learning itself (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Taşpınar, 2004). It is the form of learning in which significant others are also valued as in the theories of Dewey and Vygotsky. Therefore, it can be stated that relationships of learning are of utmost importance (Deakin & Wilson, 2005).

Due to new information systems and the rapid innovative changes, global and local distinction has become obsolete, which requires the 21st century learners to have the critical capacities such as knowledge processing, manipulation and transmission rather than the accumulation of data and the rote transmission of facts within the context of narrow specialism. Thus, the future is promising for those who have ideas, knowledge and creativity. That is why the goal of education 'should be the development of understanding which can be applied and extended by taking it into spheres of thought and action which, in the real world, demand intelligent behaviour' (Bently, 1998: 19; cited in Deakin & Wilson, 2005). Hence, the application of knowledge in the real world raises the issue of how valuable knowledge is. In the light of these, contemporary education should redefine the capacities and competencies required since with the development of capacity to learn and to pursue learning is the essence of living in this century. Only in this way all students can become productive citizens in a democratic society (Stallings, 2015).

Research questions

1. How do English preparatory school students define "language", "ideal language classroom", "ideal curriculum", "the roles of the teacher" and "the roles of the students" in the 21st century?

2. How do English preparatory school students best learn as 21st century language learners?

3. Which language skills/areas are deemed the most important?

4. Which factors are deemed more important in the language learning process?

5. Which groupings/pairings are preferred more in the language learning process?

6. What are English preparatory school students' short-term and long-term goals?

7. What are English preparatory school students' sources of motivation for/while learning English?

8. How do English preparatory school students define the characteristics of the 21st century teacher and learner?

9. What are the English preparatory school students' strengths and weaknesses in terms of language skills/areas?

Method

This study focuses on students' perceptions of 21st century learning, learner-teaching roles, and language at a state technology institute -the most advanced model of technical universities in today's world and the only one in the country- where the medium of instruction is English. 17 A1 level preparatory class students volunteered to participate in the study. Table 2 shows detailed information regarding the participants.

Table 2. *Participants of the study*

Age	18	19	20	22						
Number of Students	10	4	2	1						

Gender	Male		Female							
Number of Students	9		8							

Educational Background	State High School	Anatolian High School	Private High School	Science High School	Anatolian Teacher High School					
Number of Students	2	9	2	1	3					

Department	ME	MBG	FE	CE	CoE	EEC	A	CRP	M	P
Number of Students	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2

Time Spent on Learning English	> 8yrs.	8 yrs.	7yrs.	1 yr.	2,5 mo.s					
Number of Students	3	7	1	2	4					

ME: Mechanical Engineering, **MBG:** Molecular Biology and Genetics, **FE:** Food Engineering, **CE:** Civil Engineering, **CoE:** Computer Engineering, **EEC:** Electrical-Electronics Engineering, **A:** Architecture, **CRP:** City and Regional Planning, **M:** Mathematics, **P:** Physics

12 of the respondents (N=17) reported that they like learning English. However, 3 students reported they do not like learning English. Only two students stated that they do not like learning languages in general but want to learn English.

Instruments

Questionnaires were administered in Turkish. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. 6 items in the first part were aimed to solicit personal information about the students. 22 items in the second part of the questionnaire, which were open-ended items and ranking items, aimed to reveal students' opinions on the (language) learning process.

Data collection

The questionnaires were administered on November 16, 2015. 17 students out of 24 students volunteered to take part in the study. Two students whose answers reflected a more critical viewpoint in the questionnaires were interviewed on January 11, 2016.

Data analysis

The results of the study were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Through a qualitative method of content analysis, students' responses to open-ended answers were translated into English and thematically categorized by the researcher. Frequencies were computed to identify the tendency for the ranked items. Each item was analysed separately. 360 responses which produced important observations were analysed across the data set. No responses were produced for 14 items. Male students' responses represent 52.9% of all responses, female students' responses produce 47.05% of the responses. The results of the questionnaires will be analysed under 15 sections below.

Results

The definition of language in the 21st century (Q1): In Table 3 students' definitions are listed.

Table 3

The definition of language in the 21st century
• One of the most important criteria that enables us to communicate with other people
• A communication tool that enables us to have a different perspective and learn more about the society whose language we learn-it is very difficult to learn
• A communication tool that changes with the economic, political, social, cultural and technical structure of a specific time period
• A group of vocabulary items and grammatical structures that is required for communication
• A tool through which we can express our feelings, thoughts and behaviours, the same feelings and thoughts can be expressed through different languages
• A language means to be able to learn about the different culture and lifestyle of the society in which it is being spoken
• Something that is needed for self-expression.
• A tool that has been created by societies in order to communicate with each other
• A language is not something that should be learnt by a person to improve herself, it is a must for better job opportunities.

While communication and interaction were emphasised in the majority of definitions, in some responses, culture, different lifestyles, economy, politics, self-expression, and job opportunities have been highlighted. As global citizens of the dynamic and constantly changing world, students are aware of the fact that language is like the glue of this new world.

The role of teacher/learner/course materials in the language learning process (Q2/3/5)

In questions 2-3-5, students were asked to define the role of the teacher, learner and course materials in the language learning process. Students' definitions regarding these can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4

The role of the teacher in the language learning process
• As students do not try to improve themselves, we can only learn what the teachers teach. **T > S**
• Teachers have an extremely important role as language learning and speaking requires confidence, so teachers should provide a good classroom atmosphere and be friendly and supportive. **T > S**
• Teachers have the most important role: s/he is the one that will make us enjoy learning a language with her energy and pronunciation. **T > S**
• Different from children, we need a schedule to learn a language and the teacher provides us with this schedule. **T > S**
• With effective teaching strategies, teachers should generate students' interest and enhance their motivation by making them love the language. **T> S**
• Teachers are 'the building blocks' in the language learning process. **T > S**

- Teachers should make us love the language and get rid of our anxiety. **T > S**

- Teachers share their knowledge and experience with us, that's it! If we like the language we are learning, we can improve ourselves more! **S>T**

- Teachers should only teach us the rules and vocabulary items, s/he cannot teach us everything, but it is the students who should learn! **S > T**

- Teachers should share their experiences with us and guide us. **S > T**

- Teachers should teach just the grammar rules and vocabulary items, we cannot learn the language as long as we use it in our daily lives. **S > T**

- Teachers should provide the basic knowledge and skills. It is the students' responsibility to improve themselves. Teachers just help to accelerate this process and help it to be a structured one.   **S > T**

- Teacher is the most important factor in the process, but the students are more important. **S > T**

- Teachers are as important as students. Teachers should share their experience with the students. **T=S**

- Teachers should provide us with a good atmosphere to learn a language and make us have language learning as part of our daily lives.

- Teachers should teach us not only academic but also daily language.

The role of the learner in the language learning process

- Students have a very important role: they should listen to the teacher very carefully and improve themselves by taking the teachers' experiences into consideration.

- Students should be motivated and alert to learn the language during class. They should practice the language by watching TV series and reading English books.

- Students should recycle what they have learnt and use them in their daily lives for better learning.

- Without effort outside class, students cannot learn no matter how good the teachers are.

- Students should not have prejudice. They should be as active as possible for permanent learning.

- Students should use appropriate materials for more effective learning.

- Students should be confident and come up with some strategies to learn new words. They should not be passive and shy.

- Learning English should be a way of life.

- 60%-70% of the responsibility belongs to the student. The student who knows what s/he wants can learn the language in a very short time.

The role of the course materials in the language learning process

- I think materials are the most important factor in language learning. I do not think one can learn a language without any materials.

- Materials should provide students with effective learning opportunities. When students believe that they are learning the language, they can have higher levels of motivation.

- There is no need to follow the materials strictly.

- Audio-visuals and appealing materials should be used to supplement the course books as they help us easily remember.

- Materials with a lot of activities, books that require us to speak and games such as Scrabble and Taboo should be used.

- I do not think that course materials are that important.

- Materials that reflect the daily language use such as the Internet, websites, films and newspapers should be used more.

In 7 responses, it was stated that teachers have a more important role in the language learning process. However, in 6 responses, students reported that it is the student who should take the responsibility for the learning process, as 21st century learning requires. A majority of the students implicitly report that learner autonomy and active learning should be at the core of language learning in the 21st century. Only in this way canthey be a part of this global world through exchange programs and career mobility and be able to apply their knowledge. This also explains why they need more authentic materials rather than course books that are strictly being followed by teachers.

Effective classroom atmosphere and ideal classroom in the language learning process (Q4/8): In questions 4 and 8, students were asked to define the effective classroom atmosphere. Table 5 presents student responses.

Table 5

Effective classroom atmosphere

- The classroom atmosphere should trigger student participation.

- The teacher should have a good rapport with students.

- Students should respect other students and be tolerant.

- Students who have the same proficiency level should be in the same class. There should not be any students who are more proficient in the lower level classes.

- Ambitious and motivated students make language learning easier.

- Classes should be technologically well-equipped. There should not be too many students in the same class.

- The atmosphere should be relaxing and encourage students to be active. They should have fun while learning.

- Students should be able to learn from each other.

- The target language should be used as much as possible.

- All students in the class should actively participate in the class so that the teacher can help correct the mistakes. Some students who are shy like me should try to get over this problem and participate more.

- Group works and speaking activities should be frequently used.

- Students' mistakes should be regarded as a part of learning.

- All students should take learning seriously. Learning a language requires concentration.

Ideal language classroom

- Daily language use should be taught through a variety of listening activities.

- In an ideal class, students' language proficiency levels should be similar.

- In an ideal class, first grammar and new vocabulary items should be taught. Also, students should be provided with a lot of listening and speaking activities

- It should be fun. There should be a lot of group works, presentations, and debates in class.

- Writing should not be the most important skill. All aspects of the language should be emphasised. More time should be spent on speaking activities, watching movies, and listening to songs. Phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions should also be taught.

- There should not be too many students in the class. All the students should actively participate.

- The teacher should have a positive rapport with students.

- The physical environment of the classroom is important.

- Classmates should be respectful, supportive, and eager to learn.

- Only the target language should be used to communicate.

- The activities should be fun. A lot of visual materials such as pictures and videos should be used.

Nearly all students stated that the classroom atmosphere is of great importance in the language learning process. They reported that they are more likely to actively participate in the lesson when there is a positive learning environment and the teacher has a good rapport with students. Students also mentioned respect, support and fun as key concepts. In this sense, the language teacher should make sure that there is a relaxing and encouraging classroom atmosphere where there is group cohesion and a lot of collaboration and as a result more learning.

Effective learning strategies (Q6): Table 6 presents student responses regarding their learning strategies.

Table 6

Effective learning strategies
• Audio/visual materials help with mental representations which promotes permanent learning.
• I can remember the words/expressions more when I hear them while communicating in English that's why I like speaking more.
• When daily language use is presented.
• When I'm active in class. In this way, I can use trial and error as a learning strategy.
• By writing and by analyzing the formal and informal language use.
• By listening and experiencing, when I see or use the new words in different contexts.
• When words are structurally analyzed and examples from real-life are presented.

Students learn better when they see the relevance in what is being taught. When real-life language use is presented, they are more likely to have higher levels of motivation. They participate more and as a result, they learn more. Nearly all students report that being active in class is the best strategy in learning a foreign language. That's why they report they should speak more and analyze more. In the 21st century, the language learning process is not considered a spoon-feeding process any more.

The uniqueness of the language class (Q7): Table 7 shows student responses on the uniqueness of the language class.

Table 7

The uniqueness of the language class
• As language learning is multifaceted, respect and participation are especially important.
• It is definitely unique. Language learning is not as easy as studying another subject.
• It is different. Students should be informed about the curriculum and syllabus. Otherwise, they may not be able to follow the order of topics/structures/subjects that are being taught.
• A language can be learnt by experiencing it. Although we have been learning Turkish for 18 years, there is a lot more to learn.
• While learning a language, we try to learn the culture as well. We, in a way, change our lifestyles.
• In mathematics, by learning the formulas by heart, you can answer the questions. But learning a language requires a lot of knowledge. I think you should live abroad in order to be able to fully learn it and fluently speak it.
• In an ideal language class, language should be used as if a group of people are having a chat with each other outside the class using the target structures and vocabulary items naturally.
• Students should be responsible for their learning in an ideal language class. If we try hard, we can learn a language more.

- Although there are rules to be learned while learning a language, language learning is not theoretical. It requires practice.

- I do not think it is different. In high school, we used similar course books. The only difference is that we have more speaking practice here.

Student responses show that most of the students think leaning a language is more unique and challenging than learning any other subject. They think that language learning requires students to participate in class activities and practice, that is, to experience it.

Important factors in the language learning process (Q9): Table 8 shows students' perceptions of the most important factors in the language learning process.

Table 8

Ranking / f (N=17)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Teacher	4	*8	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
Student	*10	3	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Classroom atmosphere	3	1	*7	4	0	2	0	0	0	0
Curriculum	0	1	2	1	1	3	2	3	1	3
Technological facilities	0	1	1	1	2	3	*5	1	2	1
In-class activities/tasks	0	1	0	3	3	3	3	1	1	1
Extracurricular activities	0	1	1	0	3	2	2	2	*4	2
Online activities	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	5	*7
Self-study outside school hours	0	0	2	*7	1	1	1	2	1	2

Note: 1= the most important, 10= the least important

Student responses show that the most important factors in the language learning process are teacher, students, classroom atmosphere and self-study outside class hours. 58.8 % of the students reported that students have vital role while learning a language. 47% of the students reported the teacher to be the second most important factor while learning a foreign language.

Preferred pairings/groupings in the language class (Q10): In Table 9, information on students' preferred pairings and groupings is presented.

Table 9

Ranking / f (N=17)	1	2	3
Individual work	*7	2	8
Pair work	3	*10	4
Group work	*7	5	5

Nearly half the students prefer working individually or in groups, which shows that students value teamwork, cooperation, and collaboration. 58.8 % of students consider pair work an alternative to individual work and group work.

Important language skills/areas and relevant skills for the students' department (Q 11/19): Table 10 presents the language skills/areas that are deemed important by students.

Table 10. *Important language skills/areas (Q11)*

Ranking f (N=17)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Vocabulary knowledge	*10	1	3	0	3	0	0
Pronunciation	1	1	2	4	1	1	*7
Grammar	2	4	0	2	2	4	3
Reading comprehension	1	4	3	3	1	4	1
Listening comprehension	2	4	3	1	*5	2	0
Writing	0	0	1	5	3	3	5
Speaking	1	3	*5	2	2	3	1

Note: 1= the most important

10 out of 17 students consider vocabulary knowledge the most important language area. 7 , on the other hand, report pronunciation as the least important language area. Grammar, reading comprehension and listening comprehension were also regarded as important. When the productive skills were compared, speaking was reported to be more important that writing. Writing was ranked in the top three only in one response.

Table 11. *Relevant language skills/areas for the students' departments (Q19)*

Skill	f (N=17)
Reading comprehension	4
Listening comprehension	3
Writing	4
Speaking	4
Listening & Speaking	1
All skills	1

Considering their departments, students reported reading comprehension, writing and speaking as the most relevant language skills/areas. Only 1 student considered all skills to be equally relevant. The department-related requirements may have influenced students' perceptions as they are expected to write reports such as lab-reports and feasibility reports in their departments.

Students' strongest and weakest language skills/areas (Q12/14): In Table 12, information regarding students' weakest and strongest language skills/areas is presented.

Table 12 (Q13)

Skill	f (N=17)	Reason
RC	7	• By seeing the words, I can guess their meanings. • I can make associations. • I like reading, it is good way of personal development. It is fun. • I have hearing loss, I have a good vocabulary knowledge. • I can make inferences by reading the whole text although I do not understand the all the words.
LC	2	• I watch a lot of TV series in English.
W	3	• I like using the structures/expressions/ phrases that I have just learnt while writing. • I have time to think, plan, and check.

S	1	• I have been playing and trying to understand the stories in computer games since I was a kid.
G & V	4	• It is like mathematics, similar to learning formulas. It is easier to learn since I have mathematical intelligence. • They are the first steps in learning a language, especially when practiced while reading and writing.

RC: Reading comprehension, LC: listening comprehension, W: writing, S: speaking, G: grammar, V: vocabulary

Nearly 50% of the students have reported reading as their strongest language skill. Grammar and vocabulary and writing were also reported as skills which students thought they were good at. Speaking, however, was reported by only one student as the skill that s/he thinks s/he is good at. As Table 13 shows, students need to improve their speaking skills.

Table 13 *(Q14)*

Skill	*f (N=17)*	Method
LC	5	• By listening to music and watching videos.
W	3	• By studying individually. • I have time to think, plan, and check.
S	12	• By speaking with foreigners/ native speakers. • By having practice in class. • By watching TV series, movies, keeping vocabulary journals. • I have been playing and trying to understand the stories in computer games since I was a kid.
V	1	• By using effective strategies (e.g. vocabulary journal).
P	1	NA
G	1	• By studying individually.
All skills	1	NA

P: pronunciation

Reason for learning English (Q13)

Table 14

Reason for learning English
• To be able to read international magazines, keep up to date with my future career and current issues. • To improve myself in any subject. • To be able to speak an international language both at school and work. • To be a part of the academic world. • To go abroad in the future. • To learn how people express the same things in a different way, how speakers of a different language think. • To see how people with similar thoughts and ways of thinking communicate in a different language. • To be able to communicate with native speakers/people effectively. • To realize myself. • To be a part of the global world. • To have a better career. • To realize my goals (i.e. international). • To be more equipped after graduation. • To learn about different cultures and meet new people. • To be able to go abroad on exchange programs such as Erasmus. • To have an academic career. • To be able to access more resources.

- Learning English is a must. It is the lingua franca.

- I will need it throughout my life, especially for my career. English is spoken in the countries that I am planning to go to.

- For personal development.

Student responses reveal how important it is to learn a foreign language in the 21st century. Although some of the students have personal reasons to learn English, most of the responses show a desire for different forms of integration into the new world. 12 out of 17 students reported that they would learn English even if they were not enrolled at an institute where the medium of instruction is English. Only 1 student stated that he would not learn English if this were the case.

Students' short-term and long-term goals (Q15/16): Students' short-term and long-term goals are listed in Table 15.

Table 15

Students' short-term goals (Q15)	
• To pass the preparatory class.	• To learn technical English.
• To have a good command of English at the end of the preparatory year.	• To graduate from college in 5 years' time.
• To improve my English in order to be able to express myself very easily.	• To go abroad on Erasmus.
	• To have an MS (e.g. at METU).
• To improve myself in my career.	• To have a high graduation grade.

Students' long-term goals (Q16)	
• To accomplish great things.	• To realize my dream of working abroad.
• To have a native-like fluency in English.	• To have a PhD abroad.
• To learn other foreign languages such as German and French.	• To have a good career.
• To be a successful mathematician.	• To be able to graduate from college before the expected time.

In the short term, learning English and being able to speak it fluently, passing the preparatory class and graduating from college are among students' priorities. In the long-term, they are planning to achieve more, which indicates that most of them are goal-oriented students. Their long-term goals are mostly career-related.

Sources of motivation (Q17): In Table 16, students' sources of motivation are listed.

Table 16

Students' sources of motivation	
• Language learning process itself.	• Getting good exam results.
• I motivate myself.	• Having the feeling that I am learning.
• My department & Instructors in our school.	• Being persistent-never giving up.
• Understanding the English TV series and songs.	• Thinking that most of my friends will be attending language courses after graduation.
• Activities & computer games.	
• Motivation? I have no.	• Being able to learn more.
• My dreams/future goals e.g. career-related.	• Career-related goals.
	• The fact that learning English is a must.

The sources listed in Table 17 indicate that some students are intrinsically motivated while others are extrinsically motivated. The responses show the value of the "individual" who is the decision-maker in the language learning process and actively makes choices. They take the responsibility of their own learning.

The effect of learning English on students' lives (Q18: Table 17 shows reported positive and negative effects of learning English on students' lives.

Table 17

Positive effects of learning English
• To meet new people from different countries and learn about different cultures.   • To be able to use the English resources effectively.   • To be able to understand the songs, videos, and movies.   • To translate the sentences into English while speaking outside class.   • To be able to obtain first-hand information about foreign countries.   • To be able to communicate more easily.   • To be able to obtain more job opportunities.   • To be able to understand the movies without subtitles.   • To learn a new thing= English.
Negative effects of learning English
• Negative effects on the use of L1   To have less time to spend on scientific issues as it is an intensive program and learning English requires a lot of practice.

Students mostly reported positive effects of learning English on their lives. They stated that learning English is a tool that helps them to be a part of the world around them and understand it better, which is an inevitable need in the 21st century.

Curriculum and extracurricular activities (Q20): In Table 18, information on students' perceptions of the curriculum and extracurricular activities is given.

Table 18

Curriculum/ Extracurricular Activities Meet Students' Needs	Definitely no.	No.	Partly yes.	Yes.
F	1	3	1	5
Suggestions	• More games & activities to practice daily language use. • More worksheets. • More hours for the Listening & Speaking course. • Impromptu speeches.			

Students' responses reveal that the majority of the students think that their needs are being met. However, they state that more importance should be given to listening and speaking skills and more production.

The characteristics of the 21st century teacher/learner (Q21/22): In Tables 19 and 20, the characteristics of the 21st century teacher and learner based on student responses are listed.

Table 19

The characteristics of the 21st century teacher (Q21)

- Uses technology effectively.

- Is able to teach daily language use.

- Is well-educated and knowledgeable.

- Gives importance to personal development, keeps up-to-date.

- Uses a variety of course materials.

- Has good communication skills.

- Communicates with students not only in class but also outside the school hours.

- Is a more effective teacher.

- Benefits from all the facilities provided.

- Has positive rapport with students.

- Is friendly.

- Fosters learner autonomy so that students can improve themselves more.

- Arouses students' curiosity.

- Make use of online newspapers, magazines, songs, and movies more.

- Empathizes with students.

Table 20

The characteristics of the 21st century learner (Q22)	
• Is talkative. +	• Is easily bored. _
• Is good at using technology. +	• Is lazy. _
• Is eager in doing everything. +	• Has a shorter attention span leading to less concentration. _
• Has high self-confidence. +	• Has less interest and seriousness. _
• Can easily access English materials. +	• Has less imagination. _
• Is impatient. _	• Cannot learn words permanently as technology makes learning new vocabulary items very easy. _
• Is less motivated. _	
• Is mostly passive during classes. _	• Is direct-gives quick responses. 0
• Is addicted to technology and easily distracted by technology. _	

The responses show that they expect the language teacher in the 21st century to be technology-literate, knowledgeable not only in the language but also in world issues. Students also highlight the importance of teachers' having good communication skills and good rapport with students. In terms of the learner characteristics, they report more negative characteristics. Although they believe students have high self-confidence and motivated to do new things, students mention the negative effects of technology on them as 21st century learners.

Discussion

The study reveals significant findings on the perceptions of the 21st century language learners in a state technology institute where the medium of instruction is English. Despite being A1 level students, their responses show that most are goal-oriented and autonomous. Different from the traditional language learning settings, they believe that a more student-centred language teaching pedagogy will be more fruitful. Rather than memorizing rules, they value active learning which requires students' participating in class by using, applying, and experiencing knowledge. Also, they are aware of the fact that language learning also takes place outside the classroom and a lot of meaningful practice is needed for better learning.

Conclusion

As Kivunja states (2015: 9) Information Age requires well-educated employees who can demonstrate mastery of a variety of skills, such as information and communication skills, thinking and problem-solving skills, interpersonal and self-directional skills. Equipping the actors of the future with these skills will make them better educated individuals and better citizens who will be able to contribute more to commerce and civil life in the Digital Economy of the 21st century. Higher education, as the last step, should provide the learners with the opportunity of being competitive and flexible in the 21st century Digital Economy, by including these skills

in their curricula. Besides these skills, being language-skilled is also crucial in the more flexible world of the future which will introduce the concept of career mobility. As stated in Itani, Jarlstrom & Piekkari (2015: 376), "a boundaryless career is becoming a privileged opportunity for the linguistically competent and highly educated male elite in Western multinationals", which suggests that language-skilled respondents are more likely to be more mobile compared to those who are less proficient in a language. In a nutshell, the profession of teaching, especially language teaching, should be reshaped in the light of these so as to meet the new needs of the new millennium learners who will shape the future of the "brave" new world.

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