



## VOICES FROM THE CLASSROOM: INTEGRATING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS IN TURKISH PRIVATE SCHOOL EFL EDUCATION – A QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Seçil TÜMEN AKYILDIZ<sup>1</sup> Fatmanur ŞAHİN<sup>2</sup>

Article Info	Abstract
<p><b>Keywords</b> 21st century skills 4C EFL teaching Teacher perspectives Private schools</p>	<p>This qualitative study explores the integration of 21st-century skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education within Turkish private schools. Focusing on the 4Cs—communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity—the research examines how nine EFL teachers in Malatya incorporate these competencies into their teaching practices. The study employs semi-structured interviews to gain insights into teachers' methods, challenges, and perceptions regarding the use of technology, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills, enhancing communication and collaboration, and encouraging creativity and innovation. Findings reveal that teachers effectively use tools such as interactive whiteboards, digital platforms, and project-based learning to create dynamic and engaging lessons. They also employ techniques like Socratic questioning, debates, and role-playing to develop students' cognitive and linguistic abilities. Despite the benefits, challenges such as technological proficiency and equitable access to resources persist. The study underscores the importance of continuous professional development and support for teachers to optimize the integration of 21st-century skills in EFL education. Future research should explore long-term impacts and additional methods to support innovative teaching practices. This study contributes to the advancement of EFL education in Turkey and offers valuable insights for educators globally, highlighting the need for holistic development to prepare students for modern life and work environments.</p>
<p><b>Received:</b> 27.07.2024 <b>Accepted:</b> 27.12.2024 <b>Published:</b> 30.12.2024</p>	

**Cited as APA:** Tümen Akyıldız, S., & Şahin, F. (2024). Voices from the classroom: Integrating 21st century skills in Turkish private school EFL education – A qualitative perspective. *International Journal of Current Approaches in Language, Education and Social Sciences (CALESS)*, 6 (2), 178-210.

### Introduction

The 21st century continues to be a transformative era, profoundly influencing change and driving progress across numerous fields. Education, in particular, stands as one of the most significantly affected areas by these dynamic trends. It is a continuous process, characterized by perpetual renewal and the capacity to integrate new knowledge and developments. The technological advancements of this century are unfolding with remarkable speed and intensity, prompting a wave of transformations and new demands across various disciplines. This has necessitated the evolution of the human profile to align with contemporary understandings. As Beers (2011) highlights, the current century marks the advent of the digital age, distinguished by an unprecedented surge in information density due to rapid

<sup>1</sup> Firat University, Türkiye, [stakyildiz@firat.edu.tr](mailto:stakyildiz@firat.edu.tr)

<sup>2</sup> Firat University, Türkiye, [fatmanursahinm@gmail.com](mailto:fatmanursahinm@gmail.com)

technological progress (Saykılı, 2019). Indeed, technology has revolutionized operational methodologies, exerting its influence globally across all domains (Pattnayak et al., 2024). In light of technological advancements, it is essential for individuals to augment their skills to remain relevant in modern times. Consequently, staying informed about the evolving capabilities required in the 21st century is of paramount importance (Chu et al., 2021).

The global transformations and students' efforts to adapt to these changes significantly drive the demand for 21st-century skills, as noted by Marzano and Heflebower (2012). In this era, often called the age of information and technology, individuals must adeptly navigate rapid advancements to become proficient citizens, adeptly utilizing media and technological resources (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2015). Possessing essential 21st-century skills is imperative for individuals today. These skills encompass the specific talents necessary for effective learning and adaptation in the modern world (Hamarat, 2019). They represent a comprehensive strategy applicable to lifelong learning, extending beyond traditional educational settings. Individuals equipped with these skills demonstrate critical and creative thinking, effective communication, analytical and synthesizing abilities, productivity, leadership, responsibility, entrepreneurship, and social awareness (Ra et al., 2019; Kurudayıoğlu & Soysal, 2019). In the 21st century, characterized by universal communication, streamlined transportation, and cultural diversity, these skills are crucial for success in both educational and business contexts (Buasuwan et al., 2022; Suto, 2013). The framework provided by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) continues to serve as a foundational guide for global educational strategies, ensuring learners are prepared to meet contemporary challenges (Larson & Miller, 2011).

In the rapidly evolving educational landscape of this century, it is imperative to equip students with a broad set of competencies that extend beyond traditional academic knowledge. The integration of 21st-century skills, such as technological proficiency, critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication, collaboration, creativity, and innovation, is essential for fostering holistic development and preparing learners for the complexities of modern life and work environments. The National Education Association (2015) also supports the integration of 21st century abilities in English as foreign language (EFL hereafter) classes and emphasizes the crucial role of EFL teachers in incorporating these skillsets into their lessons. Therefore, this study aims to explore the application and significance of these skills in the context of EFL teaching in Turkey. Within this

framework, 21st century skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity will be explained regarding EFL.

### **EFL and 21st Century skills**

In the rapidly evolving educational landscape, mastering 21st-century learning skills has become indispensable for teachers and students alike. These skills, encompassing critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, are crucial for success in today's global society. Specifically, in EFL teaching, integrating these competencies can significantly enhance learning experiences and outcomes. Taylor (2009) asserted that traditional teaching and learning techniques, which predominantly emphasize mastery of core subjects, must be replaced. He argued for an innovative approach integrating the essential skills of the new era: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (the 4Cs), along with career and life skills, and digital literacy. To better grasp these essential skills, numerous seminars, conferences, professional development activities, and training programs have been organized, attracting educators, teacher trainers, and researchers (Nurhidayat et al., 2024). Furthermore, various frameworks have been developed to facilitate the implementation of 21st-century skills. One study highlights that these frameworks provide a scaffolded approach guiding both learners and teachers in understanding fundamental concepts and instructing them on the appropriate application of these skills (Ambrose et al., 2010). It is required of innovative teachers in the 21st century to provide learning opportunities and acknowledge the significance of combining 21st-century innovation with learning skills (Pardede, 2020). Educators must create learning environments and curricula that seamlessly integrate these abilities into core courses. Globalization has simplified communication, especially while learning English, making it essential for students to acquire 21st-century learning and innovation skills (Shadiev & Wang, 2022). Moreover, professional development activities ensure the quality of students' learning processes, acting as a vital guide for teachers (Marcelo, 2009). By engaging in ongoing professional development, teachers can deepen their understanding of 21st-century skills and effectively integrate these competencies into their educational methods. The primary goals of educators should be to educate and enhance 21st-century abilities so students can participate in the global community. These broad concepts guided the current study's exploration of how EFL teachers perceive 21st-century talents and how they recognize and apply these skill sets in their educational contexts.

Understanding the 4Cs—critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication—is crucial within this research context due to their profound impact on educational outcomes and global readiness. These skills serve as the foundation of a comprehensive educational framework that equips students to navigate the complexities of modern life and work environments (Feliks et al., 2023). As globalization and technological advancements continue to reshape industries, the ability to think critically and creatively is invaluable for adapting to new challenges

and innovating solutions (Chu et al., 2017). In the realm of EFL teaching, integrating the 4Cs fosters a dynamic and interactive learning atmosphere, enhancing both linguistic proficiency and global competencies (Pardede, 2020). Moreover, these skills promote lifelong learning by encouraging curiosity, open-mindedness, and proactive engagement, which are essential in an era of rapid change (Rusdin & Ali, 2019). Aligning with educational standards that prioritize holistic student development, the 4Cs enable educators to design curricula that not only meet academic requirements but also prepare students socially and emotionally for future success (Voogt & Roblin, 2010). Thus, this research underscores the necessity of the 4Cs in crafting an educational experience that is both effective and transformative, particularly within EFL contexts.

### **The 4Cs**

As per the guidelines of the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (2011a), the 4Cs encompass vital learning and innovation proficiencies essential for students. These 4Cs, namely communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, serve as versatile competencies that individuals can seamlessly apply across various assignments and professional roles. Highlighting the significance of these skills, the National Education Association (2015) underscored the imperative of fully embedding the 4Cs into educational practices to cultivate well-prepared citizens and workforce members equipped to thrive in the dynamic landscape of the 21st century.

Recent studies further substantiate the necessity of integrating the 4Cs into educational frameworks. Kembara and Rozak (2019) demonstrate that research-based learning significantly enhances students' 4C skills by promoting active engagement with learning materials, thus fostering communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. Similarly, Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023) propose a dynamic interactionist model, termed "Crea-Critical-Collab-ication," which effectively addresses the pedagogical challenges associated with teaching these skills, advocating for a balanced and structured approach. Furthermore, Landon (2019) evaluates students' perceptions of 21st-century learning, noting a significant gap in the practical application of the 4Cs despite their recognized importance beyond high school. This study emphasizes the need for effective training and integration of these skills into educational practices to ensure their full realization.

Collectively, these studies reinforce the critical role of the 4Cs in shaping educational practices that prepare students to meet the demands of an evolving global landscape, thus aligning with the foundational principles set forth by the Partnership for 21st Century Learning and the National Education Association. To fully understand the importance of the 4Cs in English language education, it is essential to delve into each component individually. By examining communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity within the context of English teaching, we can better appreciate how each skill contributes uniquely to a student's language acquisition



and overall linguistic competence. This detailed exploration underscores why these competencies are indispensable in preparing learners to navigate and excel in the complexities of English as a global language. Each of these skills plays a distinct role in shaping well-rounded communicators who are equipped to address the challenges and opportunities of engaging with diverse cultures and perspectives in the 21st century.

### *Communication*

As language serves primarily as a vehicle for communication, the primary aim of language instruction is to empower learners to effectively engage in communication. English as a Foreign Language classrooms have long been recognized as highly conducive environments for bolstering students' communication proficiencies. The emergence of Communicative Language Teaching in the 1970s, which has since become a dominant approach in language education, was a direct response to this imperative (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Consequently, EFL educators are expected to seamlessly integrate communication skills into their language instruction, given the intrinsic link between language acquisition and effective communication. However, communication in the realm of 21st-century skills encompasses a more intricate dimension compared to its counterpart in the 20th century. As asserted by Miller (1996), communication remains the cornerstone of societal cohesion, bridging nations, corporations, scientific fields, and families, with certain facets remaining unchanged. Nevertheless, the widespread adoption of innovative technologies such as video conferencing, multimedia, and internet platforms has profoundly reshaped communication dynamics in the 21st century. While the essence of communication still revolves around sharing thoughts and ideas through oral, written, and interpersonal channels, the pervasive use of technology has rendered contemporary communication inseparable from information and communication technology. Emphasizing this evolution, the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (2011b) underscores that communication proficiency in the modern era entails adeptness in digital, interpersonal, written, and oral communication to interpret meaning, encompassing knowledge, values, attitudes, and intentions for various purposes such as informing, instructing, motivating, and persuading, across diverse contexts and environments, including multilingual and multicultural settings, utilizing a plethora of media and technologies. Therefore, alongside nurturing conventional oral and written communication skills in English, EFL instructors must also foster their students' competence in ICT-mediated communication, necessitating the integration of ICT tools within the learning process. Beckett (2023) also discusses the development of 21st-century skills in language education, emphasizing the importance of equipping learners with language and interpersonal skills that are crucial for effective communication in today's globalized world.

## *Collaboration*

In broad terms, collaboration denotes the collective effort towards achieving a shared objective, a skillset increasingly valued in education due to the prevalent shift towards team-oriented work environments in organizations and businesses (Dede, 2009). Unlike the solitary nature of many tasks in the 20th century, the demands of the 21st century necessitate collaborative endeavors for success. Effective teamwork hinges on collaboration skills, which amalgamate participants' skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001).

Collaborative learning has gained widespread acceptance as an instructional approach, involving students working in groups to tackle tasks, solve problems, or undertake projects (Harmer, 2007). Group work fosters regular interaction among learners, offering opportunities for mutual learning, aligning with the sociocultural perspective that views learning as a social process occurring through interaction within contextualized settings (Ortega, 2009). Nonetheless, several studies have noted that while students acknowledge the benefits of group work such as idea enrichment, enhanced achievements, improved precision, and increased social engagement, some exhibit reluctance to actively engage, while others tend to remain passive, allowing their peers to shoulder the workload (Storch, 2005; Othman & Murad, 2015). Recognizing the growing significance of collaboration in both educational settings and the professional sphere, its essence extends beyond mere cooperation among students to encompass purposeful engagement. In every collaborative endeavor, students should be guided to actively participate by committing to adhere to group work guidelines and striving towards the attainment of the collective objective. Effective collaboration entails each member taking ownership of their role to prevent the group from descending into inefficiency. In the context of a globally interconnected 21st-century world, collaboration entails students engaging in authentic and purpose-driven cooperative learning experiences, collectively generating new knowledge (Sharratt & Planche, 2016). Evans (2020) also reviews the conceptualization and assessment of 21st-century skills, including collaboration, highlighting its significance in developing deeper learning competencies.

## *Critical Thinking*

The concept of critical thinking traces its roots back to approximately 2,500 years ago when Socrates introduced the practice of questioning, later known as the Socratic Method, as a means to enhance the quality of human reasoning skills. This notion experienced a resurgence in the 17th century through the works of Descartes and was further refined and popularized by Dewey, emerging as a prominent element in Western educational curricula since the mid-20th century (Pardede, 2019b). Critical thinking is indispensable for every student as it fosters active and proficient lifelong learning, facilitates comprehension, enables the evaluation of diverse perspectives, enhances problem-solving skills, leading to empowerment, empowers individuals to

take ownership of their thought processes. It cultivates the ability to establish appropriate criteria and standards for analyzing their thinking (Elder & Paul, 1994; Lai, 2009). According to Pardede (2019, p. 169), EFL students particularly benefit from developing critical thinking skills as it enables them "to passionately and responsibly take, apply and control their thinking skills (question, analyze, criticize, reflect, and synthesize). They develop proper principles and standards to evaluate their thinking, and willingly judge, accept, or reject new ideas, concepts, and viewpoints". In the EFL context, Gandimathi and Zarei (2018) discovered that integrating critical thinking enhances students' proficiency in the English language.

The realm of literature offers a multitude of methodologies and tactics aimed at incorporating critical thinking into the realm of English as a Foreign Language education. Klynhout (2018) advocates for the utilization of stimulating inquiries, such as "Why do you believe...?", "How can you validate...?", and "What evidence supports...?" to foster critical thinking throughout the educational journey. Consequently, queries necessitating a singular correct response or a binary Yes or No answer should be sidestepped. These thought-provoking interrogations enable students to demonstrate their comprehension while nurturing analytical and interpretative faculties. Equipping students with the skill to pose pertinent questions is pivotal for refining their capacity to assess narratives, construct arguments, compose critical essays, and actively engage in classroom discourse. Additionally, facilitating group collaboration to deliberate or debate various topics, tackle real-world challenges, critique written works or visual aids, or undertake project-based learning initiatives serves as a catalyst for enhancing students' critical thinking prowess. In the pursuit of these endeavors, students concurrently refine their holistic language competencies, encompassing research, textual analysis, information synthesis, note-taking, idea exchange, attentive listening, and persuasive communication, thereby fostering a dynamic learning environment. Rezaei et al. (2011) propose the incorporation of media analysis, debate platforms, problem-solving endeavors, and self-evaluation mechanisms as further strategies to fortify critical thinking skills within the EFL domain. Akatsuka (2020) examines the promotion of critical thinking skills in an online EFL environment, suggesting approaches to enhance students' critical thinking in writing and tackling higher-order thinking questions.

### *Creativity*

Creativity encompasses the outcomes, procedures, or exchanges that yield fresh ideas, concepts, and artifacts, whereas creative thinking pertains to the cognitive abilities that empower an individual to conceive original or innovative ideas, thoughts, and creations. Therefore, creative thinking constitutes a foundational component of creativity, as creativity is forged through a combination of creative thinking skills, motivation, and expertise (Amabile, 1998). In the 21st-century landscape characterized by global competition and increasing automation of tasks,

possessing a creative mindset and innovative prowess are vital for both personal and professional success. The fundamental elements of creativity—novelty, effectiveness, and ethics—align seamlessly with learning, particularly within the constructivist framework. According to this theory, which views learning as a process of constructing understanding and knowledge through experiential learning and reflection, creative thinking and learning are inherently intertwined. Both processes involve active engagement and production of knowledge. Just as a creative thinker generates novel ideas, a student adopting a constructivist approach acts as an active creator of knowledge, engaging in inquiry, exploration, and evaluation throughout the learning journey. In essence, creative thinking and learning complement each other, mutually reinforcing the process of knowledge acquisition and generation. Cropley (2001) identified three barriers hindering teachers from integrating creativity into their teaching practices. Firstly, many teachers perceive creativity as an enigmatic concept beyond their grasp, mistakenly equating it solely with artistic endeavors such as creating masterpieces akin to those of Shakespeare, Mozart, or Edison. This misconception undermines educators' efforts to foster creativity, as it fails to recognize that creativity permeates various aspects of language use, including speaking and writing, which involve rearranging and recombining existing language elements in novel ways. For instance, foreign language learners exhibit creativity when they manipulate sounds to form meaningful words, construct sentence patterns, or experiment with spelling and pronunciation rules (Oxford University Press ELT, 2013). Secondly, the notion that creativity is an innate trait exclusive to a select few individuals perpetuates the belief in elitism, inhibiting efforts to foster creativity among all learners, including language learners. Contrary to this belief, creativity thrives in conducive environments, enabling individuals to create new associations, playful combinations, and fresh meanings through language use (Maley & Bolitho, 2015). Finally; there exists a fear that nurturing creativity may impose undue pressure on children, leading them to become casualties of adults' zeal for creativity. However, creativity is an innate quality inherent in every individual, albeit to varying degrees, and can be nurtured and developed rather than enforced (Maley & Bolitho, 2015). Tümen Akyıldız and Çelik (2020) explore how Turkish EFL teachers perceive creativity and their creative teaching practices. They highlight the need for teachers to embrace creative processes to enhance students' creative thinking abilities in the field of EFL. Çelik and Tümen Akyıldız (2021) also examine EFL teachers' attitudes towards creativity in EFL classes. They identify constraints to creativity and suggest the need for targeted training to improve creative practices.

While a substantial body of research has explored 21st-century skills and their integration in education, particularly in relation to EFL contexts, there remain critical gaps in understanding how these skills are specifically enacted within Turkish EFL



classrooms. Existing studies often generalize the 4Cs across educational fields without focusing on the unique challenges and opportunities that arise within EFL instruction in Turkey's diverse educational settings, including the differences between public and private institutions. Furthermore, there is limited exploration of how EFL teachers' perceptions and practices around creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration are shaped by local educational policies, resource availability, and professional development opportunities. This study addresses these gaps by investigating how Turkish EFL teachers perceive and implement 21st-century skills within their teaching practices, aiming to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors that enhance or hinder the integration of these competencies in the language classroom.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

This study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of how Turkish EFL teachers in private schools integrate critical 21st-century skills—namely technology, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and innovation—within their teaching practices and the subsequent impact on language learning outcomes. By examining these competencies in the context of EFL education, the research seeks to provide valuable insights for educators both in Turkey and globally, addressing the evolving demands of language education in the modern era.

In this context, the main research question of the study has been formulated as follows: **"How do Turkish EFL teachers incorporate 21st-century skills into their teaching practices, and what are their perceptions of the impact of these skills on language learning?"** To address this main research question, four interview questions were developed, each pairing related 21st-century skills to reflect their complementary roles in language education effectively:

1. **In what ways do Turkish EFL teachers integrate technology and digital competence into their teaching practices, and what impact does this integration have on student achievement?**

This question aims to understand the essential role of technology in modern education by examining teachers' use of technology to enhance language acquisition and create interactive learning environments. It seeks to reveal the effects of technology on students' digital competence and overall learning success.

2. **What methods and strategies do Turkish EFL teachers use to foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and how do they perceive the role of these skills in supporting language learning?**

Critical thinking and problem-solving are foundational skills for developing analytical and evaluative capacities in students. Critical thinking enables learners to question, analyze, and interpret language and meaning, while problem-solving allows them to apply these insights to real-life scenarios. In

EFL contexts, fostering both skills together enhances students' ability to understand and respond thoughtfully to language challenges, promoting deeper cognitive engagement and practical language use.

**3. What activities and projects do Turkish EFL teachers implement to develop effective communication and collaboration skills among students?**

Communication and collaboration are essential for interactive and cooperative learning, particularly in language education. While communication focuses on expressing ideas clearly and effectively, collaboration emphasizes the importance of teamwork and shared learning. When paired, these skills encourage students to engage in meaningful language practice, negotiate meaning, and build intercultural understanding within group settings, reflecting real-world applications of language.

**4. How do Turkish EFL teachers encourage creativity and innovation in language learning, and what impact do these practices have on students' ability to generate original ideas?**

Creativity and innovation are vital in motivating students to engage with language dynamically, fostering imaginative and flexible thinking. Creativity encourages original thinking and expressive use of language, while innovation emphasizes the development of novel solutions and ideas. Together, these skills enable students to adapt language use to diverse contexts, fostering flexible and imaginative approaches to communication.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the integration of 21st-century skills in EFL teaching among teachers in private schools in Malatya province. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for this investigation because it allows for an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences, perspectives, and practices, which are essential for comprehensively addressing the research questions.

Qualitative research is characterized by its focus on exploring phenomena in their natural settings, providing rich, detailed insights into participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). This approach is ideal for investigating complex, context-dependent issues such as the implementation of 21st-century skills in language teaching. This study seeks to comprehensively understand teachers' behaviors, beliefs, and challenges by utilizing qualitative approaches, as these aspects may not be adequately captured through quantitative measures alone. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The primary data collection method for this study is semi-structured interviews. This technique was chosen because it offers flexibility, allowing researchers to probe

deeper into specific areas of interest while maintaining a consistent structure across interviews (Kvale, 2007).

## **Participants**

The study involved nine English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers currently working at private schools in Malatya province, Turkey. These teachers were purposefully selected to provide diverse perspectives on the integration and significance of 21st-century skills in language teaching within a private educational context. Purposeful sampling, rather than randomization, was used to ensure that participants represented a range of demographics and experiences relevant to the study's focus. Private schools were specifically chosen due to their greater emphasis on foreign language instruction compared to public schools, their advanced technological resources, and the need for teachers to remain up-to-date to meet high student expectations. This setting provides a unique environment where the integration of 21st-century skills in language teaching can be more thoroughly explored.

The participants included six female and three male English language teachers, with ages ranging from 25 to 60 for females and 27 to 30 for males, representing a balanced mix of gender, age, and professional experience. This demographic composition was chosen to provide a balanced representation across different age groups and genders, offering a comprehensive understanding of the current practices and attitudes toward 21st-century skills in EFL teaching within private schools in Malatya. In particular, the variation in age among female participants adds depth, as it represents a range of teaching experiences and perspectives on the evolution of language teaching methodologies over time.

## **Trustworthiness of the Study**

Ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research is essential for establishing the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study employs several strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of the research process and outcomes.

### ***1. Credibility***

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and the interpretations made. To enhance credibility, the researcher engaged with participants over an extended period to build rapport and gain a deep understanding of their teaching practices and experiences, which allowed for the collection of detailed and contextually rich data. Data triangulation was also achieved by gathering information from multiple sources, including interviews with nine teachers, to corroborate findings and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research questions (Patton, 2015). After transcribing the interviews, participants were invited to review the transcripts to verify the accuracy of their statements and provide any additional insights or clarifications, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected

their perspectives. Additionally, both authors independently reviewed and cross-checked the coding to enhance the rigor and reliability of the interpretations.

## ***2. Transferability***

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts. To support transferability, the study provided detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and findings, enabling readers to evaluate the applicability of the results to their own settings (Geertz, 1973). While the study offers a rich, contextualized account of teachers' experiences, its transferability is somewhat limited, as it reflects the perspectives of private school teachers. The rationale for selecting this specific group has been explained, and thus the findings may be most applicable to similar educational contexts, particularly those where private institutions or enhanced technological resources play a significant role in language instruction.

## ***3. Dependability***

Dependability involves ensuring that the research process is consistent and repeatable. To enhance dependability, the research design, data collection methods, and analysis procedures were reviewed by colleagues with expertise in qualitative research and language education. This peer review process provided constructive feedback, allowing the researchers to refine and strengthen the methodological rigor of the study (Morse et al., 2002). Additionally, a comprehensive audit trail was maintained, documenting all stages of the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This detailed documentation enhances transparency and provides a basis for the potential replication of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## ***4. Confirmability***

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are shaped by the participants rather than by researcher bias or interests. To enhance confirmability, a transparent account of the research process and decision-making was provided, documenting each stage of the study in detail. This thorough documentation enables an independent assessment of the study's objectivity and minimizes the influence of personal bias. Through these strategies, the study strives to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, offering a credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable account of the integration of 21st-century skills in EFL teaching among Turkish teachers in private schools.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data for this study were collected through one-on-one interviews with each of the nine participating EFL teachers. Each interview lasted a minimum of 40 minutes, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the teachers' perspectives on integrating 21st-century skills into their teaching practices. During the interviews, audio recordings were made to ensure accuracy in capturing the participants' responses. To enable the



teachers to express themselves more fully and comfortably, the interviews were conducted in Turkish. The recorded data were subsequently translated into English for analysis, ensuring that the content accurately reflected the participants' original meanings while making it accessible for broader research purposes. The data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. This approach enabled a structured examination of teachers' experiences and perspectives, allowing themes to emerge that reflect the integration and impact of 21st-century skills in EFL teaching. The analysis began with a familiarization phase, in which the researcher immersed themselves in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. This initial phase helped in identifying early ideas and recurrent concepts relevant to the research questions. The next step involved coding meaningful data segments with descriptive labels, capturing key insights across the dataset. Codes such as "technology integration," "critical thinking activities," and "collaborative challenges" were applied systematically. To maintain participant privacy, identifiers like 1MT27 and 3FT29 were used, where, for example, "1MT27" represents the first male teacher who is 27 years old. This coding system preserved anonymity while allowing distinct references to participants' responses.

Following the coding process, the researcher grouped related codes into preliminary themes. For instance, codes related to "technology tools," "digital resources," and "online platforms" were combined to form the theme of **Technology Integration**, while codes such as "critical thinking exercises" and "problem-solving tasks" clustered under **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving**. This step of identifying themes allowed broader patterns to emerge within the data, capturing the study's focus on 21st-century skills in language teaching.

To ensure clarity and coherence, the themes were reviewed and refined in an iterative process. This involved re-examining the coded data extracts to verify that each theme accurately represented the data, sometimes merging or modifying themes to improve consistency. Each theme was then carefully defined and assigned a descriptive name that conveyed its central idea concisely. Names like **Technology Integration in Language Teaching, Promoting Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Encouraging Collaboration and Communication, and Fostering Creativity and Innovation** were chosen to reflect the study's focus and communicate the essence of each theme.

Finally, the themes were organized into a cohesive narrative illustrating how Turkish EFL teachers incorporate 21st-century skills into their teaching practices and their perceptions of the impact of these skills on language learning. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendation, representative quotes were included to exemplify each theme, providing rich, contextualized insights into teachers' experiences and perspectives. This thematic analysis framework ensured a robust and transparent

approach to data analysis, enhancing the credibility and depth of the study's findings.

## Findings and Results

*Question 1: How do Turkish EFL teachers integrate technology into classroom and extracurricular activities, and what are their perceptions of the impact of technology on student achievement?*

The analysis of the interview data revealed three main categories: integration of technology in classroom activities, integration of technology in extracurricular activities, and perceptions of technology's impact on student success, as detailed in Table 1.

*Table1: Categories and Codes for Technology Integration in EFL Teaching*

General Category	Code	Frequency
Classroom Activities	Interactive whiteboard	9
	Digital learning platforms	6
	Online assesment	4
Extracurricular Activities	Online research and projects	7
	Digital submission and feedback	4
	Collaborative tools	3
Achievement	Positive impact	7
	Challenges	3
Total		43

Within the first category Participant 1FT25 shared her experiences with using interactive whiteboards in her classroom: *"Integrating the interactive whiteboard into my teaching has revolutionized how I conduct my lessons. I use it daily to display lesson content, play educational videos, and conduct interactive exercises. For instance, during a lesson on vocabulary, I can instantly pull up images, videos, and even quizzes that the students can participate in right from their seats. This has made my lessons more dynamic and engaging, and I've noticed that students are much more attentive and involved. They love coming up to the board to participate in activities, and I feel this hands-on approach significantly enhances their learning experience. The interactive whiteboard also allows me to save and revisit previous lessons, which is incredibly useful for reviewing material and ensuring continuity in learning. It's not just a tool for displaying information; it's a platform for interactive and immersive learning experiences."* Participant 2MT29 provided an in-depth reflection on the use of digital learning platforms in his teaching: *"Using digital learning platforms like Google Classroom has transformed my approach to teaching. These platforms allow me to organize lessons, share resources, and communicate with students more effectively. I've also noticed that students who might be shy in a traditional classroom setting feel more*

*comfortable participating in online discussions. Overall, digital learning platforms have made my teaching more organized, interactive, and responsive to students' needs.*" Participant 4FT33 elaborated on her use of online assessments in her teaching practice: *"Implementing online assessments through tools like Kahoot and Quizizz has greatly enhanced my ability to gauge student understanding in a fun and interactive way. These platforms allow me to create quizzes that students can take in real-time, providing immediate feedback not only to them but also to me. For example, during a grammar lesson, I can set up a quiz to check their grasp of the material right away. The instant results help me identify which areas need more attention and which students might be struggling. The competitive element of these quizzes keeps students engaged and motivated to do their best. Moreover, online assessments are very convenient for tracking progress over time. I can easily compare results from different quizzes to monitor improvement and adjust my teaching strategies accordingly. The students also appreciate the variety and break from traditional paper-based tests. Overall, online assessments have made the evaluation process more dynamic, informative, and enjoyable for everyone involved."*

In the first category, the integration of digital tools such as interactive whiteboards, digital learning platforms, and online assessment tools emerged as transformative elements in the participants' teaching practices. The use of interactive whiteboards has enhanced lesson delivery by making content more accessible and engaging, allowing students to interact directly with the material and increasing attentiveness in class. Digital platforms have also played a pivotal role, not only streamlining lesson organization and resource sharing but also fostering a more inclusive environment where all students, including those who might feel shy in traditional settings, can actively participate. Additionally, online assessment tools like Kahoot and Quizizz have enriched the evaluation process by providing immediate feedback and making assessments interactive and enjoyable. These digital tools collectively contribute to a more dynamic, responsive, and motivating learning environment, supporting both instructional effectiveness and student engagement.

Regarding the second category, Participant 3MT30 reflected on his use of online research and projects: *"Given that many of my students have lower-than-average English proficiency, I've found that online research and projects can be a highly effective way to boost their language skills while making learning more engaging. I usually start with simple, guided research tasks to build their confidence. For example, I assign topics related to their interests, such as popular culture or technology, and provide a list of reliable websites and resources in simpler English."* Participant 5FT35 shared her experiences with using digital submissions and feedback: *"With many of my students struggling with English proficiency, digital submissions and feedback have become invaluable tools in my teaching. By allowing students to submit their assignments online, I can provide more timely and detailed feedback than traditional methods permit. For instance, I use platforms like Google Classroom, where students can upload their work and I can annotate directly on their documents. This makes it easier for them to understand my comments and corrections. To accommodate their language levels, I often provide feedback in both English and Turkish. This*

*bilingual approach helps them grasp what they need to improve without feeling lost. I also include multimedia feedback, such as audio comments, to explain complex points more clearly. This method has been particularly effective because students can hear the correct pronunciation and intonation, which is something written feedback alone cannot provide."* Participant 3FT29 shared her insights on using collaborative tools: *"Given the challenges my students face with English proficiency, using collaborative tools has been incredibly beneficial in creating a supportive and interactive learning environment. Tools like Google Docs and Padlet allow students to work together on assignments and projects in real-time, even outside the classroom. This collaboration helps them learn from each other and feel less isolated in their struggles with the language. For example, I often assign group projects where students must write short essays or create presentations. Using Google Docs, they can contribute to the document simultaneously, see each other's edits, and discuss changes. This not only improves their writing skills but also encourages peer learning. More proficient students often help their peers understand difficult concepts, which reinforces their own knowledge and boosts the confidence of those who are struggling. I also use Padlet for brainstorming sessions and group discussions. Students post their ideas and respond to each other's posts in a less formal, more engaging way."*

In the second category, participants highlighted the use of online research, digital submissions, and collaborative tools as effective strategies for supporting students with varying levels of English proficiency. Assigning guided online research tasks tailored to students' interests, such as popular culture or technology, has been shown to build confidence and enhance language skills in an engaging way. Digital submission platforms have also facilitated timely, bilingual feedback, enabling students to understand corrections more clearly through direct annotations and multimedia feedback like audio comments. Collaborative tools, such as Google Docs and Padlet, have fostered a supportive learning environment, where students can work on group projects in real-time and engage in peer learning. These tools allow students to learn from each other, improve writing skills, and feel more connected, thereby enhancing both language proficiency and confidence.

Regarding the last category participant 1FT25 shared her observations on the positive impact of technology on student achievement: *"Despite my students' initial struggles with English, I've noticed a significant positive impact on their achievement due to the integration of technology in our lessons. For instance, using interactive tools like language learning apps and online quizzes has made the learning process more engaging and accessible for them. These tools provide immediate feedback, which helps students quickly understand their mistakes and learn the correct usage. One of the most notable improvements has been in their vocabulary and reading comprehension. Apps like Quizlet allow students to practice vocabulary in a fun and interactive way, which keeps them motivated and encourages regular practice. I've seen students who were initially hesitant to participate become more confident and proactive in their learning."* Participant 6FT60 discussed the challenges and concerns related to integrating technology in her teaching: *"As a teacher who has been*



*in the field for many years, integrating technology into my classes has been quite challenging. I often find it difficult to keep up with the rapid changes in technology and the new tools that are constantly being introduced. While I see the benefits, the learning curve can be steep, especially for someone my age. One of my main concerns is the technical issues that frequently arise. For instance, there have been several instances where the interactive whiteboard malfunctioned or the internet connection was unstable, disrupting the flow of the lesson. This not only frustrates me but also affects the students' learning experience. Additionally, I worry about my students getting distracted by non-educational content when they use devices like tablets or laptops in class. Ensuring that they stay focused on the lesson can be quite challenging. Moreover, not all my students have equal access to technology at home, which creates a disparity in their learning opportunities. Despite these challenges, I am committed to incorporating technology because I understand its potential to enhance learning. However, I believe more support and training for teachers, especially those of us who are less tech-savvy, is essential to effectively integrate these tools into our teaching practices."*

In the final category, participants discussed both the positive impacts and challenges of integrating technology into EFL teaching. Teachers observed significant improvements in students' vocabulary and reading comprehension, noting that tools like language apps and online quizzes provided immediate feedback and motivated students to engage actively with learning material. However, some teachers expressed challenges, particularly in keeping pace with technological advancements and managing technical issues during lessons. Concerns were also raised about student focus and equitable access to technology, as not all students have equal resources at home. Despite these challenges, teachers remain committed to using technology, emphasizing the need for additional support and training to optimize its integration.

*Question 2: What methods and strategies do Turkish EFL teachers use to develop their students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and how do they perceive the importance of these skills in foreign language learning?*

The analysis of the interview data revealed two main categories: methods for developing critical thinking skills, and methods for developing problem-solving skills as detailed in Table 2.

*Table 2: Categories and Codes for Developing Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Skills in EFL Teaching*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Methods for Critical Thinking Skills	Socratic questioning	6
	Debate and argumentation	3
	Project-based learning	2
Problem Solving Skills	Collaborative learning	5
	Case studies	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>20</b>

The first category, Methods for Developing Critical Thinking Skills, encompasses various strategies that Turkish EFL teachers employ to enhance their students' ability to think critically. These methods aim to foster deeper understanding and analytical skills, which are crucial for language learning and overall cognitive development. Participant 2FT28 shared her approach to using Socratic questioning with her students: *"Using Socratic questioning has effectively developed my students' critical thinking skills, even with limited English proficiency. I start with simple questions, like 'Why do you think the character is sad?' to encourage them to think beyond the text. Though their answers are basic, this method gradually builds their confidence and willingness to participate in discussions."* Participant 1FT25 described her use of debate and argumentation techniques with her students: *"Introducing debate to my A2 students has been a rewarding challenge. Starting with simple topics like 'Which is better: summer or winter?' allows them to form basic arguments. I support them with sentence starters and vocabulary lists, building their confidence and teaching them to respect different viewpoints. Over time, this approach has improved their speaking skills and ability to construct coherent arguments, making them more active participants in class."*

Participant 3MT30 explained his approach to using project-based learning with his students: *"Implementing project-based learning with my A2 students has been effective for developing critical thinking skills. Starting with manageable projects like creating a poster about their favorite animal, I used templates and bilingual resources to guide them. Working in small groups, they discussed and presented their findings, which not only improved their language skills but also taught them collaboration and decision-making. This hands-on approach keeps them engaged, boosts their confidence, and fosters a positive attitude toward learning English."*

The first category includes various strategies that Turkish EFL teachers use to foster students' analytical abilities, crucial for both language learning and broader cognitive growth. Techniques like Socratic questioning, debate, and project-based learning are adapted to meet students' language proficiency levels. For example, teachers start with simple, guided questions and topics to encourage students to think beyond the text and form basic arguments. Project-based learning allows students to engage in manageable projects, such as creating posters on familiar topics, which fosters collaboration and decision-making in small groups. These approaches not only boost students' confidence in expressing ideas in English but also create a dynamic, interactive classroom environment where critical thinking and language skills develop in tandem.

The Methods for Developing Problem-Solving Skills category includes various techniques that Turkish EFL teachers employ to enhance their students' ability to identify, analyze, and solve problems. These methods are designed to cultivate practical problem-solving abilities, which are essential for effective language use and everyday communication. Participant 5FT35 shared her experiences with using collaborative learning to develop problem-solving skills her students: *"Collaborative*

*learning has greatly helped my students develop problem-solving skills. I organize group activities, like planning a trip to an English-speaking country, where they negotiate solutions and use class vocabulary. This improves their language skills, teaches them to listen and share responsibilities, and boosts their confidence in teamwork. Despite starting with basic language, their collaboration skills in English grow significantly."*

Participant 2MT29 described his use of case studies to develop problem-solving skills with his students: *"Using case studies with my A2 students has effectively enhanced their problem-solving skills. I select simple, relatable scenarios, like a lost pet story, and guide them through vocabulary and concepts. In small groups, they discuss solutions to the problem, supported by guiding questions such as 'What happened?' and 'What can the characters do to solve the problem?' This approach helps them think critically, articulate ideas, and work collaboratively in realistic contexts, building their confidence and natural use of English."*

The second category encompasses various strategies that Turkish EFL teachers use to enhance students' practical problem-solving abilities in realistic contexts. Techniques like collaborative learning and case studies encourage students to work together, discuss ideas, and find solutions using English. Through group activities, such as planning trips or analyzing simple case studies, students practice essential language skills while learning to negotiate, share responsibilities, and listen to different perspectives. These methods help students build confidence in expressing their thoughts and solving problems, fostering both language proficiency and teamwork skills.

*Question 3: What activities and projects do Turkish EFL teachers implement to develop their students' effective communication and collaboration skills, and how do they evaluate the contributions of these skills to the language learning process?*

The analysis of the interview data revealed three main categories: activities for developing communication skills, activities for developing collaboration skills, and evaluation of communication and collaboration skills, as detailed in Table 3.

*Table 3: Categories and Codes for Developing Communication and Collaboration Skills in EFL Teaching*

Category	Code	Frequency
Communication Skills	Role playing	7
	Presentations	4
Collaboration Skills	Group projects	5
	Cooperative learning activities	4
Evaluation of Both	Student Engagement	5
	Language proficiency improvement	3
Total		28

The first category, Activities for Developing Communication Skills, includes various strategies that Turkish EFL teachers use to enhance their students' speaking and listening abilities through interactive and engaging activities. Participant 1FT25 shared her approach to using role-playing to develop communication skills: *"Role-playing has been incredibly effective in helping my A2 level students improve their communication skills. I often create simple, everyday scenarios, such as ordering food in a restaurant or asking for directions, and assign roles to each student. This method encourages them to practice speaking in a context that feels real and relevant. For example, one activity involved students taking turns being a customer and a waiter in a café. They used basic phrases and vocabulary we had practiced, and I provided them with key sentences to help guide their interactions. The students were initially nervous, but they quickly became more confident and started to have fun with it. By acting out these situations, they not only practiced their English but also learned to think on their feet and respond to their partners. It's amazing to see how much more comfortable they become with speaking English through these role-playing exercises."*

Participant 3MT30 described his use of presentations to develop communication skills: *"Using presentations to develop my students' communication skills has been successful. I assign simple topics like 'My Favorite Hobby,' allowing students to prepare short presentations with basic vocabulary. One shy student presented about her pet cat, using pictures and simple sentences, and the class responded with support and questions. Presentations improve students' speaking skills and help them organize thoughts and express themselves clearly in English."*

This category highlights strategies that Turkish EFL teachers use to improve students' speaking and listening abilities through interactive activities. Techniques like role-playing and presentations provide real-life contexts where students can practice basic English phrases and vocabulary. In role-playing exercises, students act out everyday scenarios, such as ordering food, which builds their confidence and ability to respond spontaneously. Similarly, presentations on accessible topics allow students to express their interests and practice clear, organized communication. These methods create a supportive environment, encouraging students to engage actively and become more comfortable with spoken English.

The second category, Activities for Developing Collaboration Skills, includes two strategies that Turkish EFL teachers use to enhance their students' ability to work together effectively through cooperative and interactive activities. Participant 1MT27 shared his experiences with using group projects to develop collaboration skills: *"Group projects have greatly benefited my students' collaboration skills. Tasks like creating posters or short skits require them to work together, such as when researching festivals to present to the class. In groups, they support each other, divide tasks, and assist with vocabulary, which improves their English and teaches them effective cooperation and communication."*



Participant 2FT28 explained her use of cooperative learning activities to develop collaboration skills: *"Cooperative learning activities have been effective in fostering collaboration among my students. I frequently use the jigsaw technique, where each student researches an aspect of a topic, like 'Countries and Cultures,' and then teaches their findings to peers, ensuring everyone contributes. Another activity, Think-Pair-Share, allows students to reflect individually, discuss with a partner, and then share with the class, creating a supportive environment for all, including quieter students."*

The second category includes strategies that Turkish EFL teachers use to promote teamwork and cooperative learning among students. Group projects, such as creating posters or researching festivals, allow students to divide tasks, support each other with language, and practice effective communication as they work towards a shared goal. Additionally, cooperative learning techniques like the jigsaw activity and Think-Pair-Share foster collaboration by giving each student a role in teaching or discussing content with peers. These activities not only enhance English proficiency but also build students' ability to work collaboratively in a supportive, interactive setting.

Regarding the third category, Participant 4FT33 shared her observations on the impact of communication and collaboration activities on student engagement: *"I have noticed a remarkable increase in student engagement and participation when incorporating communication and collaboration activities into my lessons. For example, when we use role-playing and group projects, even my A2 level students, who are typically shy and hesitant to speak in English, become more animated and involved."* Participant 5FT35 discussed the positive impact of communication and collaboration activities on students' language proficiency: *"Integrating communication and collaboration activities has significantly improved my students' language proficiency. Group discussions, debates, and collaborative projects provide meaningful practice for speaking and listening. For example, in a project on 'Local Traditions,' students gathered information, organized findings, and presented together, helping them expand vocabulary, improve pronunciation, and build stronger sentence structures."*

The third category, Impact of Communication and Collaboration Activities, highlights the positive effects of these strategies on student engagement and language proficiency. Teachers observed that incorporating role-playing, group projects, and discussions increased student participation, even among shy learners. Activities like group presentations also provided students with opportunities to practice speaking and listening in meaningful contexts, enhancing their vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure through collaborative effort and peer learning.

*Question 4: What teaching techniques do Turkish EFL teachers use to encourage creativity and innovation, and how do they support students in generating original and innovative ideas?*

The analysis of the interview data revealed three main categories: teaching techniques for encouraging creativity, strategies for supporting innovative thinking, and evaluation of creativity and innovation, as detailed in Table 4.

Table 4: Categories and Codes for Encouraging Creativity and Innovation in EFL Teaching

Category	Code	Frequency
Encouraging Creativity	Creative writing activities	4
	Multimedia projects	3
	Drama and role-play	2
Supporting Innovative Thinking	Problem-based learning	3
	Encouraging curiosity	2
Evaluation of Creativity and Innovation	Assessing creativity and innovation	3
Total		17

The first category, Teaching Techniques for Encouraging Creativity, encompasses various strategies that Turkish EFL teachers use to foster creative expression and original thinking in their students. These techniques aim to inspire students to explore their creativity through different mediums and activities. Participant 6FT60 shared her approach to using creative writing to encourage creativity: *"Creative writing activities have been an effective way to inspire my A2 students to think outside the box and express themselves in English. I use simple, open-ended prompts like 'Imagine you find a mysterious object in your backyard.' One memorable assignment was writing a story about their favorite superhero, which excited them and led to impressive, varied stories. This process improved their writing skills and boosted their confidence in using English creatively."*

Participant 2MT29 (described his use of multimedia projects to encourage creativity: *"Multimedia projects have been an effective way to stimulate creativity among my students. One memorable project involved creating a short video about their daily routines, where they used smartphones to record clips, add narration, and include background music and subtitles. This allowed them to be creative with both language and visuals. Despite their basic English level, they conveyed their messages effectively, and their engagement was much higher than with traditional assignments."*

Participant 3FM shared her experiences with using drama and role-play to encourage creativity: *"Drama and role-play activities have been highly effective in sparking creativity among my students. I often assign short skits, like a restaurant scene with roles such as waiter, customer, and manager. This helps them practice speaking and listening while using their imagination to create characters and scenarios. Despite limited language skills, they produce creative dialogues and add humor and expressions, making performances memorable."*

*These exercises have boosted their confidence in speaking English and encouraged them to use the language in imaginative ways."*

The first category outlines methods Turkish EFL teachers use to inspire creative expression and original thinking in their students. Strategies such as creative writing, multimedia projects, and drama activities enable students to use English in imaginative ways. Through prompts for storytelling, video projects on daily routines, and role-playing skits, students practice language skills while expressing their creativity. These activities not only improve writing, speaking, and listening abilities but also boost confidence, allowing students to engage actively and enjoy using English in diverse, creative formats.

The second category, Strategies for Supporting Innovative Thinking, includes various approaches that Turkish EFL teachers use to nurture students' ability to generate original ideas and think critically, encouraging exploration and problem-solving in the language learning process.

Participant 3FT29 described her approach to using problem-based learning to support innovative thinking: *"Problem-based learning has effectively encouraged innovative thinking among my students. I present real-world problems, like planning an environmentally friendly school event, that are simple enough for their language level but complex enough to stimulate critical thinking. Working in groups, students research, brainstorm, and justify their ideas using visual aids and basic phrases. This activity enhances their problem-solving skills, fosters creative thinking, and promotes collaboration."*

Participant 3FT29 shared her experiences with encouraging curiosity and exploration to support innovative thinking: *"Encouraging curiosity and exploration has been fundamental in helping my students develop innovative thinking skills. I often use open-ended questions and exploratory assignments to stimulate their interest and imagination. For instance, I might ask questions like 'What would you do if you could travel to any place in the world?' or 'How would you design a perfect school?' These questions prompt students to think deeply and explore ideas beyond their usual scope. They were free to use various resources, including videos, articles, and interviews, which made the research process exciting and engaging."*

This category highlights approaches used by Turkish EFL teachers to foster students' ability to generate original ideas and engage in problem-solving. Techniques like problem-based learning and encouraging curiosity through exploratory questions help students think critically and creatively. Through real-world scenarios, such as planning eco-friendly events or envisioning ideal schools, students practice language skills while developing innovative solutions. These activities enhance problem-solving abilities, encourage exploration, and create an engaging learning environment where students can express their ideas with confidence.

The third category, Evaluation of Creativity and Innovation, focuses on the methods and criteria Turkish EFL teachers use to assess and measure students' creative and innovative efforts, as well as the impact of these activities on their overall learning and development. Participant 3MT30 shared his approach to assessing creativity: "*Assessing creativity in my A2 level students involves using specific rubrics and encouraging peer review. For example, when students create stories or multimedia projects, I evaluate their work based on originality, effort, and how effectively they use English. I look for unique ideas, creative problem-solving, and the ability to express themselves clearly, even if their language is still developing. To make the assessment process more engaging, I also involve the students in peer review sessions. They share their work with classmates and give each other feedback using simple, guided criteria. This not only helps them learn to evaluate creative work but also gives them a chance to see different perspectives and ideas.*"

The Evaluation of Creativity and Innovation category explores the methods and criteria Turkish EFL teachers use to assess students' creative and innovative efforts. Teachers employ specific rubrics focused on originality, effort, and clarity of expression, even at basic language proficiency levels. Additionally, peer review sessions allow students to give and receive feedback based on guided criteria, fostering a collaborative environment where students learn to appreciate diverse ideas and perspectives. This approach not only evaluates creativity but also encourages students to reflect on their own and others' work, enhancing their overall learning experience.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The 21st century continues to have a substantial influence on the ongoing development and change in a variety of fields, with education being one of the most affected areas. Education is a continuous process that necessitates the capacity to adapt to new information and developments and is constantly renewed. The rapidity and intensity of technological advancements in this century have resulted in the emergence of new requirements and modifications in a variety of fields. This requires the modification of the intended human profile to be consistent with current perspectives. The digital era and a substantial increase in information density as a result of accelerated technological advancements are the defining characteristics of this century (Beers, 2011). Technology has revolutionized working methods, affecting all domains and disciplines on a global scale. This is evident. As a result, it is essential for individuals to improve their skills in order to reflect the contemporary era. It is essential to remain informed about the changes and advancements in the skills necessary for the 21st century (Lemke, 2003). The findings from the interviews provide valuable insights into how Turkish EFL teachers integrate technology, foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, develop communication and collaboration skills, and encourage creativity and innovation in their classrooms. This discussion will examine the implications of these findings in the context of EFL teaching, highlight challenges, and suggest potential areas for future research.

To begin with, the positive results observed in this study can be attributed to several factors unique to the participants' working environments. Notably, the participants are employed at foreign language-intensive private schools in the province where the study was conducted, where there is a strong institutional emphasis on English language acquisition and the implementation of contemporary educational trends. This study's focus on private school teachers in this specific context provides a unique insight, as these schools differ significantly from public institutions in terms of resources, technological access, and the overall language-learning environment. These schools are often better equipped with technological resources and provide more professional development opportunities compared to public schools. As a result, teachers in these institutions are more adept at integrating technology into their teaching practices and utilizing innovative methods to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. The local context of the province, with growing educational investments in private institutions, shapes these findings, suggesting that private EFL environments here may be more receptive to integrating 21st-century skills compared to areas with fewer educational resources. The findings of this study regarding the enhanced integration of technology and adoption of innovative teaching methods in resource-rich private school environments align with existing literature. Private schools, with their superior access to technological resources, are demonstrated to more effectively implement digital tools to facilitate innovative educational practices, thereby enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes (Granić, 2022). Additionally, these institutions offer more extensive professional development opportunities, enabling educators to adopt new pedagogical strategies that contribute to improved educational results, a contrast to the often restricted opportunities found in public schools (Chamorro & Rey, 2013). Moreover, the role of local contexts and cultural factors is significant in shaping educational practices. In particular regions, a strong emphasis on community support and collaboration enhances the effectiveness of group-based learning strategies in EFL instruction, aligning with the observed cultural tendencies toward collaborative learning in Turkish educational settings (Tuzlukova & Prabhukanth, 2018).

Additionally, these teachers are highly dedicated to improving their students' English language proficiency. This dedication is reflected in their willingness to adopt and experiment with new teaching strategies, such as interactive whiteboards, digital learning platforms, and project-based learning, which are aligned with the latest trends in education. The supportive and resource-rich environment of these private schools, coupled with the teachers' commitment to professional growth and student success, significantly contributes to the positive impacts on student achievement, engagement, and overall language development. This context-specific finding contrasts with other research, where resource limitations in public schools often restrict teachers' ability to adopt such innovative approaches. Thus, this study



uniquely highlights how local factors in private schools facilitate the adoption of advanced EFL strategies.

The integration of technology in both classroom and extracurricular activities has been a significant factor in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. Teachers frequently use tools such as interactive whiteboards, digital learning platforms, and online assessments to create more dynamic and interactive lessons. These tools help organize lessons, share resources, facilitate student participation, and provide immediate feedback, making the learning process more engaging and effective. This is supported by several studies that highlight how digital tools and immediate feedback significantly enhance student engagement (Fischer & Yang, 2022; Ingrid, 2019). However, challenges remain, particularly for older teachers who face difficulties in keeping up with technological advancements and managing technical issues. In the province where this study took place, as in other parts of Turkey, the digital divide is evident, with some students lacking equal access to technology at home. Beckett (2023) also discusses the development of 21st-century skills in language education, emphasizing the importance of equipping learners with language and interpersonal skills that are crucial for effective communication in today's globalized world. The current study reveals the particular impact of this divide on private school EFL teachers, who often adapt their methods to ensure that all students, regardless of access, can benefit from technology-driven lessons. Despite these obstacles, the positive impact of technology on student achievement underscores the need for ongoing support and training for teachers to effectively integrate these tools into their teaching practices. However, it is crucial to note that the benefits of technology integration are not guaranteed without proper training and support for teachers, as some studies argue that inadequate professional development can lead to superficial integration and limited educational outcomes (Chamorro & Rey, 2013). Aloyayid (2023) identifies a gap in the practice of critical 21st-century skills notably in areas of information and media technology, suggesting the need for enhanced training and educational strategies to bridge this gap. Alzahrani and Nor (2022) also underscore the critical role of professional development programs in equipping EFL teachers with the necessary tools to effectively foster 21st-century skills among learners, highlighting a positive correlation between teacher development and student skill acquisition.

The use of methods such as Socratic questioning, debate and argumentation, and project-based learning has proven effective in developing students' critical thinking skills. These methods encourage students to think beyond the text, form and defend arguments, and engage in in-depth research projects. These activities not only improve language skills but also foster essential cognitive abilities, preparing students for real-world challenges and promoting lifelong learning. This is supported by research that highlights the effectiveness of these approaches in enhancing critical thinking and cognitive skills (Rezaei & Derakhshan, 2011; Cosgun & Atay, 2021).

Akatsuka (2020) further examines the promotion of critical thinking skills in an online EFL environment, suggesting approaches to enhance students' critical thinking in writing and addressing higher-order thinking questions. In this study, the unique combination of private school support and local factors, such as access to training, enables teachers to implement these strategies more effectively, setting this study apart from similar research conducted in less resource-rich environments.

For problem-solving skills, collaborative learning and case studies are highlighted as effective strategies. Group activities teach students to listen, share responsibilities, and reach a consensus, while case studies provide practical, relatable scenarios for students to analyze and solve. These methods cultivate practical problem-solving abilities, essential for effective language use and everyday communication. The emphasis on collaborative learning in this local context reflects a cultural tendency toward community and group support, which may make Turkish students particularly receptive to such strategies.

Activities such as role-playing, presentations, group projects, and cooperative learning activities are key to enhancing communication and collaboration skills. Role-playing helps students practice speaking in realistic contexts, boosting their confidence and comfort with the language. Presentations improve students' ability to organize their thoughts and express themselves clearly. Group projects and cooperative learning activities foster teamwork and peer learning. These activities encourage students to support each other, share knowledge, and develop a sense of community, which is crucial for effective language learning. This is supported by research indicating that such interactive and collaborative methods significantly enhance communication skills and language proficiency (Fischer & Yang, 2022). The positive impact of these activities on student engagement and language proficiency highlights their importance in the EFL classroom. However, it is important to acknowledge that the effectiveness of these activities can be limited by factors such as large class sizes and insufficient teacher training, which may hinder the ability to effectively implement these strategies (Raba, 2017).

Teaching techniques such as creative writing, multimedia projects, and drama and role-play are effective in fostering creativity and innovation. Creative writing prompts inspire students to use their imagination and express their ideas in English. Multimedia projects stimulate creativity, allowing students to use visual and storytelling techniques. Drama and role-play engage students in imaginative scenarios, enhancing their ability to think creatively and use the language in dynamic ways. These findings are supported by research indicating that creative pedagogical approaches significantly enhance students' creative thinking and language skills (Ferrari, Cachia, & Punie, 2009; Haim & Aschauer, 2024). This study's findings on creative techniques are particularly significant in the context of Turkish education, where traditional methods often dominate. In parallel, Tümen Akyıldız and Çelik (2020) underscore the importance of creativity in EFL teaching, suggesting that

teachers who actively engage in creative processes can greatly enhance students' ability to think creatively. Their further research (Çelik & Tümen Akyıldız, 2021) identifies specific constraints to creativity in EFL contexts, recommending specialized training to help teachers develop effective creative practices despite these limitations. Private school environments in the study's province are enabling teachers to explore and apply creative strategies that may be less feasible in public school settings, thus contributing to the originality of this study.

Supporting innovative thinking through problem-based learning and encouraging curiosity further enhances students' ability to generate original ideas and think critically. Assessing creativity and innovation involves evaluating the originality and practicality of students' ideas, fostering an environment where creativity is valued and nurtured. This is supported by research indicating that problem-based learning environments significantly contribute to the development of creative thinking and critical analysis skills (Sawyer, 2015). This study stands out by demonstrating how private school teachers in the province where the study was conducted adapt assessment techniques to foster creativity in ways that align with both educational goals and local expectations, bridging the gap between innovative thinking and traditional academic success.

The integration of technology, development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, enhancement of communication and collaboration abilities, and encouragement of creativity and innovation are crucial components of effective EFL teaching. The findings from this study highlight the diverse methods and strategies used by Turkish EFL teachers to achieve these goals, despite the challenges they face. Additionally, the balance between fostering creativity and adhering to traditional curricula can pose difficulties, as rigid educational structures may hinder innovative approaches (Sawyer, 2015).

The positive impact of these approaches on student engagement, language proficiency, and overall learning outcomes underscores their importance. However, ongoing support and training for teachers, addressing the digital divide, and providing resources for innovative teaching methods are essential for maximizing their effectiveness. This study contributes a unique perspective by showing how these strategies can be successfully implemented in private schools in the specific province, suggesting that similar environments could replicate these successes by addressing local challenges and leveraging available resources.

This study's limitations primarily stem from its focus on private schools in Malatya province, Turkey, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings, particularly public schools or those in regions with fewer resources. Additionally, the sample size is limited to nine EFL teachers, which, while sufficient for qualitative analysis, might not capture the full diversity of perspectives among Turkish EFL educators. Furthermore, challenges such as the digital divide and varying levels of technological proficiency among teachers also emerged,

impacting the consistency of technology integration across different classrooms. These factors suggest that the findings should be applied with caution to broader EFL contexts where resources and institutional support may differ substantially. Future research should aim to address these limitations by exploring a wider range of educational settings and teacher backgrounds, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of 21st-century skill integration in EFL classrooms.

Future research should consider expanding the scope to include public school teachers, allowing for a comparative analysis of the integration of 21st-century skills across different educational contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of these teaching strategies on student achievement and language proficiency. Another area for future exploration involves examining specific support mechanisms for teachers, such as targeted professional development programs, that would aid them in effectively incorporating technology and fostering critical and creative thinking within the EFL classroom. By addressing these areas, future studies could further validate and build upon the findings of this research, offering more comprehensive guidance on preparing students for the demands of the 21st century.

## References

- Akatsuka, Y. (2020). Promoting critical thinking skills in an online EFL environment. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics* 24(2), 95-113.
- Alowayyid, N. (2023). The reality of middle school (intermediate) female students in Saudi Arabia and the practice of 21st-century skills: teachers' perspective. *Education Research International*, 2023, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/7869980>
- Alzahrani, M. and Nor, F. (2022). Professional development and EFL teachers' practices in activating learners' acquisition of 21st century skills. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 80(5), 652-678. <https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/22.80.652>
- Ambrose, S., Bridges, M., Lovett, M., DiPietro, M., & Norman, M. (2010). *How Learning Works: 7 Research – Based Principles for Smart Teaching*. Jossey-Bass.
- Anagün, Ş. (2018). Teachers' perceptions about the relationship between 21st century skills and managing constructivist learning environments. *International Journal of Instruction*, 11(4), 825-840. <https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2018.11452a>
- Buasuwat P, Suebnusorn W, Butkatunyoo O, Manowalulou N, Kaewchinda M, Lalitpasan U, Srilapo N, Sarnswang S, Suksiri W, Wiboonuppatham R and Sripongpankul S (2022) Re-envisioning a "skills framework" to meet 21st century demands: What do young people need? *Front. Educ.* 7, 1004748. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2023.1282892>
- Bedir, H. (2019). Pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs and perceptions on 21st century learning and innovation skills (4Cs). *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 15(1), 231-246. <https://doi.org/10.17263/jlls.547718>
- Beers, S.Z. (2011). 21st Century skills: Preparing students for their future. Erişim adresi: [https://www.mheonline.com/mhmymath/pdf/21st\\_century\\_skills.pdf](https://www.mheonline.com/mhmymath/pdf/21st_century_skills.pdf)

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Chamorro, G. & Rey, L. (2013). Teachers' beliefs and the integration of technology in the EFL class. *HOW*, 20(1), 51-72.
- Chu, S. K. W., Reynolds, R. B., Tavares, N. J., & Notari, M. (2021). *21st century skills development through inquiry-based learning: From theory to practice*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2481-8>
- Cosgun, G., & Atay, D. (2021). Fostering critical thinking, creativity, and language skills in the EFL classroom through problem-based learning. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 13 (3), 2360- 2385. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1312851.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Çelik, V., & Akyildiz, T. (2021). Creativity in EFL classes: Examining Turkish secondary school teachers' attitudes and thoughts. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 8(3), 2007-2027. <https://iojet.org/index.php/IOJET/article/view/1337>
- Evans, C. M. (2020). *Measuring student success skills: A review of the literature on collaboration. 21st Century Success Skills*. National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED607774.pdf>
- Feliks, T., Nalley, H. M., & Bhae, J. (2023). On the importance of four Cs in schools and beyond. *Asian Journal of Educational Sciences*, 4(1), 45-57. <https://doi.org/10.35508/ajes.v7i1.11724>
- Ferrari, A., Cachia, R., & Punie, Y. (2009). *Innovation and Creativity in Education and Training in the EU Member States: Fostering Creative Learning and Supporting Innovative Teaching*. JRC Technical Notes. Publication of the European Community.
- Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: The opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 209-230. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1177/146879410200200205>
- Fischer, I.D., Yang, J.C. (2022). Flipping the flipped class: using online collaboration to enhance EFL students' oral learning skills. *Int J Educ Technol High Educ* 19(15). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-022-00320-2>
- Gandimathi, A., & Zarei, N. (2018). The impact of critical thinking on learning English language. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 1(2).
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Basic Books.
- González-Pérez, L. I., & Ramírez-Montoya, M. S. (2022). Components of Education 4.0 in 21st century skills frameworks: Systematic review. *Sustainability*, 14(3), 1493. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031493>
- Haim, K., & Aschauer, W. (2024). Innovative FOCUS: A Program to Foster Creativity and Innovation in the Context of Education for Sustainability. *Sustainability*, 16(6), 2257. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16062257>



- Hamarat, E. (2019). 21. yüzyıl becerileri odağında Türkiye'nin eğitim politikaları. *Seta Analiz*, 272, 1-24. <https://www.setav.org/assets/uploads/2019/04/272A.pdf>
- Huh, K. and Lee, J. (2019). Fostering creativity and language skills of foreign language learners through smart learning environments: evidence from fifth-grade korean efl learners. *Tesol Journal*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.489>
- Ingrid, I. (2019). The effect of peer collaboration-based learning on enhancing English oral communication proficiency in MICE. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 24(1), 38-49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2018.10.006>
- Kembara, M. D., & Rozak, R. W. A. (2019). Based lectures to improve students' 4C (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity) skills. *Atlantis Press*.
- Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing Interviews*. SAGE Publications.
- Kurudayıoğlu, M., & Soysal, T. (2019). 2018 Türkçe dersi öğretim programı kazanımlarının 21. yüzyıl becerileri açısından incelenmesi. *Ahi Evran Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 5(2), 483-496.
- Larson, L. C., & Miller, T. N. (2011). 21st century skills: Prepare students for the future. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 47(3), 121-123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2011.10516575>
- Lemke, C. (2003). EnGauge 21st century skills: digital literacies for a digital age. North Central Regional Educational Lab, Naperville, IL; North Central Regional Educational Lab, Metiri Group, CA, 1-32. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED463753>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Marcelo, C. (2009). Professional Development of Teachers: past and future. *Educational Sciences Journal*, 8, OECD (2009a). 21st – century skills and competences for new millennium learners in OECD countries.
- Marzano, R.J., & Heflebower, T. (2011). *Teaching and Assessing 21st Century Skills*. Solution Tree Press.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), 13-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690200100202>
- Nurhidayat, E., Mujiyanto, J., & Yuliasri, I. (2024). Technology integration and teachers' competency in the development of 21st-century learning in EFL classroom. *EduLearn: Journal of Education and Learning*, 18 (2), 342-349. <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v18i2.21069>
- Othman, H. G., & Murad, I. H. (2015). A study on Kurdish students' attitudes to group work in the EFL classroom. *European Scientific Journal*, 11(11), 290-303. <https://ejournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/5454>
- Pardede, P. (2020). Integrating the 4cs into efl integrated skills learning. *Jet (Journal of English Teaching)*, 6(1), 71-85. <https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v6i1.190>

- Partnership for 21st Century Learning. (2015). P21 framework definitions. <https://www.imls.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/Bishop%20Pre-Con%202.pdf>.
- Pattnayak, J., Jayakrishnan, B., & Tyagi, A. K. (2024). *Introduction to architecture and technological advancements of Education 4.0 in the 21st century*. IGI Global. Retrieved from <https://ak-tyagi.com/static/pdf/157.pdf>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. Partnership for 21st Century Learning. (2015). P21 framework definitions. <https://www.imls.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/Bishop%20Pre-Con%202.pdf>.
- Ra, S., Shrestha, U., Khatiwada, S., & Yoon, S. W. (2019). The rise of technology and impact on skills. *International Journal of Training Research*, 17(3), 188-202. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1227560>
- Raba, A. (2017) The Influence of Think-Pair-Share (TPS) on Improving Students' Oral Communication Skills in EFL Classrooms. *Creative Education*, 8, 12-23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ce.2017.81002>
- Rezaei, S., & Derakhshan, A. (2011). Critical thinking in language education. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(4), 769-777. <http://www.academypublication.com/issues/past/jltr/vol02/04/06.pdf>
- Sawyer, R. K. (2015). How to transform schools to foster creativity. *Teachers College Record*, 117(10), 1-36. <https://keithsawyer.com/PDFs/TCR.pdf>
- Saykılı, A. (2019). Higher education in the digital age: The impact of digital connective technologies. *Journal of Educational Technology and Online Learning*, 2(3), 124–135. <https://doi.org/10.31681/jetol.516971>
- Shadiev R & Wang X (2022) A Review of Research on Technology-Supported Language Learning and 21st Century Skills. *Front. Psychol.* 13, 897689. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.897689>
- Sharratt, L., & Planche, B. (2016). *Leading collaborative learning: Empowering excellence*. Corwin.
- Storch, N. (2005). Collaborative writing: Product, process, and students' reflections. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 14(3), 153–173. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2005.05.002>
- Taylor, F. (2009). Authentic internet in the EFL class. *Modern English Teacher*, 18(1), 5-9.
- Thornhill-Miller, B., Camarda, A., & Mercier, M. (2023). Critical thinking, communication, and collaboration: Assessment, certification, and promotion of 21st century skills for the future of work and education. *MDPI*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence11030054>
- Tuzlukova, V., & Prabhukanth, K. U. (2018). Critical thinking and problem-solving skills: English for science foundation program students' perspectives. *Zbornik Radova Filozofskog Fakulteta u Prištini*, 48(4), 101-116.
- Tümen Akyıldız, S. T., & Çelik, V. (2020). Thinking outside the box: Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions of creativity. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 36, Article 100649. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2020.100649>
- Voogt, J., & Roblin, N. P. (2010). *21st century skills*. Zoetermeer: The Discussienota.

- 
- Wang, W. (2016). Chinese English in as Lingua Franca in Global Business Setting. [Conference presentation] Web of Conferences:25.
- World Bank. (2011). Learning for all. Investing in people's knowledge and skills to promote development. World Bank Group Education Strategy 2020. Washington DC: World Bank.