Is Indonesia's ELT Implementation Already Aligned with the Concept of 21st Century Language Teaching?

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Abstract

The 21st century demands that students acquire the 4C's skills so that they can face future challenges. In that case, English teachers have to select particular teaching methods or techniques to assist the students in sharpening their 4C skills. Therefore, to make the teaching relevant and effective, teachers should understand the notion of 21st-century language teaching and implement particular teaching methods and strategies that suit their needs. This research is aimed at examining if English language teaching in Indonesia has turned to the ideas of 21st-century education based on the student's point of view. To seek the answer, this research employed a descriptive-qualitative approach. There were 58 secondary student participants from public and private schools. A survey, documents, and FGD were used as the instruments to collect the data. The data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that many of our English language teaching practices in Indonesia were still conducted with a teacher-centered approach, focused on language components rather than sharpening their holistic knowledge, and rarely integrated with technology. In conclusion, based on the students' perspectives, ELT in their schools has not tuned to the notion of 21st-century education. It was indicated by three reasons discussed in the study.

Keywords: ELT; Language; Learning; Perspectives; Students; Teaching.

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1. Introduction

Globalization and the 21st century are here and now, and they have an impact not only on economics and technology but also on education. In education, the effect of globalization is attached to how teaching and learning are conducted (McCallum, 2022). According to Minister of Education and Culture No. 21 of 2016, Indonesian school graduates must meet competency standards in attitude, skills, and knowledge. In 2045, it is anticipated that students will satisfy the demands of the golden generation and fulfill future requirements. Henceforth, teachers have to adapt to the current situation by selecting particular teaching methods that can accommodate and assist students in gaining competency because the students need to face future challenges that are different from those of the 20th century.

It is undeniable that English has been a pivotal competency for students to survive in any era since it is a language of science, economics, and technology. It also serves as a bridge for students in a larger community, as it is an international language. In recent times, English language teaching should ideally focus on developing students' life skills rather than teaching language components such as grammar and vocabulary, similar to traditional teaching (Padmadewi et al., 2020; Üner et al., 2023). Fundamentally, it is understandable that they are indeed needed to form a language, but to subdue the challenges of globalization, students must be adept not only with the language components but also with the valuable skills or competencies needed in the 21st century.

English language teaching in the 21st century is a dynamic and evolving field that requires teachers to be aware of the changing needs and expectations of their students (Wang, 2021). Therefore, Renandya & Jacobs (2023) opined that being able to use different techniques is one of the characteristics of effective teachers since implementing various teaching techniques can accommodate students' different learning styles. Teachers have to find activities tailored to students' needs and the current situation and condition. Further, they mentioned that some of the characteristics of effective English language teachers in the 21st century are: (a) teachers focus on developing students' skills in collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and communication (4C skills) through interdisciplinary themes; and (b) teachers can integrate technology into their teaching and learning activities using various digital tools such as the Internet, podcasts, LMS, etc., to promote learners' engagement, interaction, and autonomy (Karacan & Kesen Mutlu 2023; Rahmati et al., 2021; Yu & Kaur 2024). In addition, (c) they are aware of the diversity of their learners in terms of linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds, and they tailor their instruction to meet their individual needs and preferences. Overall, English teachers should promote a student-centered approach in their teaching practice to accommodate students acquiring their life skills.

The main objective of the implementation of a student-centered approach is to assist students in gaining 4C skills and enhancing their life skills (Tyson, 2023). Unfortunately, many teachers still conduct their teaching practices using a teacher-centered approach (Efendi & Arijanto 2023). In a teacher-centered approach, students receive information from teachers and become passive receivers. Teachers have become the sole source of this process. For these reasons, the teacher-centered approach could be an issue in developing students' productive skills because it gives students less opportunity to practice and explore themselves and tends to focus on language components such as vocabulary and grammar. In particular, English is not a habit; students do not practice using the target language. The students also do not have a role model to use the language because the teachers use English minimally (Achmad, 2023). Of course, this condition has an impact on the student's English proficiency.

Teachers, as those who apply the curriculum, should be able to help students establish habits by performing appropriate teaching techniques to suit the conditions of the 21st century (Richards et

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al., 2001). Therefore, this research aimed to determine whether English language teaching in Indonesia has turned to the notion of 21st-century education based on the student's point of view as the subjects of education. It is important to evaluate the teaching and learning process to make sure that our English language teaching is relevant to the needs so that students have the skills needed for future challenges. Additionally, this study hopefully helps English teachers to catalyze guidance and enable them in their subsequent lesson plans that are tuned to the mandated curriculum and 21st-century education to attain effective English language teaching.

Many studies have evaluated English language teaching in Indonesia. The first was entitled 'English Language Education in Indonesia: A Review of Research (2011–2019)' conducted by Zein et al., (2020). They conducted a literature review based on the research conducted from 2011 to 2019. The paper concludes that Indonesian teachers face language, pedagogy, and content-related needs, including areas such as classroom discourse, pronunciation, and integration of language skills. A second study was conducted by Rachman (2023). He analyzed English language teaching based on the Merdeka Curriculum in a public senior high school in Bandung. He found that conventional teaching using the Grammar Translation Method was still implemented in that school. As a result, a monotonous learning process occurred because the students merely developed their reading abilities. A third study was conducted by Pratolo & Susanti (2018). They examined students' perceptions of English teachers' teaching techniques in a private Indonesian junior high school. The study revealed that the teachers used all three techniques, namely, controlled, semi-controlled, and free techniques.

1.1. Purpose of study

Despite numerous studies evaluating English teaching and learning, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies regarding the relevance of English language teaching with the notion of 21st-century language teaching from students' points of view. Therefore, this research is worth investigating the actual implementation of ELT in Indonesia from students' perspectives as the students are the subject of the teaching and learning process, they are the ones who experience the process.

2. Methods and materials

To see whether English language teaching in secondary school has been tuned to 21st-century language teaching based on the student's perspective.

2.1. Participants

This research employed a qualitative approach. There were 58 secondary students from both private and public schools who participated in this research: grades twelve, eleven grade eleven, ten grade ten, nine grade nine, and eight grade eight.

2.2. Data collection instrument

The instruments used in this research were questionnaires, documents such as notebooks and worksheets, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The questionnaire was used to obtain data regarding their opinions on English language teaching in the participants' schools. The questionnaire was divided into two main categories: English teaching activities and technological integration. In total, there were 11 statements in the questionnaire. The statements were made based on these two themes to see whether the teaching activities in their schools were conducted using a teacher-centered approach or a student-centered approach. The participants stated their opinions by selecting five frequency Likert scales: always, often, sometimes, rarely, and never. The results of the questionnaire were then described and interpreted.

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The second instrument used in this study was a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This FGD was meant to obtain further opinions more clearly by eliciting more information from the questionnaire. Not all the participants joined the FGD, but the researcher chose only a representative of them randomly due to their availability and willingness. There were twenty participants in the discussion. The FGD focused on six topics: their English teachers' routine in teaching, what lessons or activities the English teachers give, project-based learning, problem-based learning, and the use of technology in the teaching process. The results of FGD were transcribed, coded, and summarized.

The third instrument was documents in the form of students' worksheets, or LKS, and notebooks. It was used as support and to do cross-checking with the results of the questionnaire and FGD.

2.3. Data analysis

The data obtained were then interpreted and put into the thematic analysis. Any relevant theories were used to interpret the data and examine whether the English language teaching at the participants' schools has tuned to the notion of 21st-century language teaching.

2.4. Ethical consideration

To reduce any possible risk of injury or discomfort to volunteers, the researchers implemented all necessary safety measures. The study's design and execution placed a high priority on ethical issues, with special emphasis on minimizing any negative consequences on the welfare of the participants.

3. Result

After the data was collected, the researcher analyzed the data through data interpretation, coded, and summarized. The findings are presented as follows:

3.1. Survey

To figure out the answer, the researcher conducted a survey and interviewed secondary students. 58 students participated in this study: 25 boys and 33 girls. They were from public and private schools. Almost half of them were tenth graders (48.3%), followed by ninth graders (34.5%), eleventh graders (12.1%), and the rest were seventh graders (3.4%) and twelfth graders (1.7%). The following is a display of the participants' demographics (figure 1):

Figure 1
The participants

Kelas
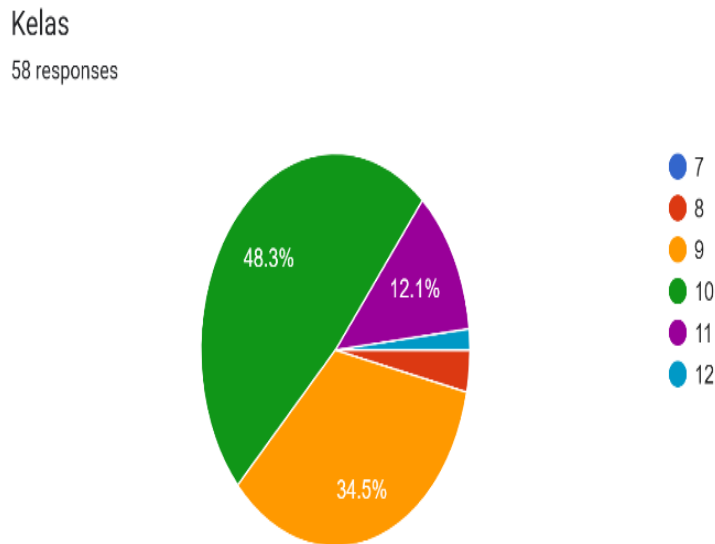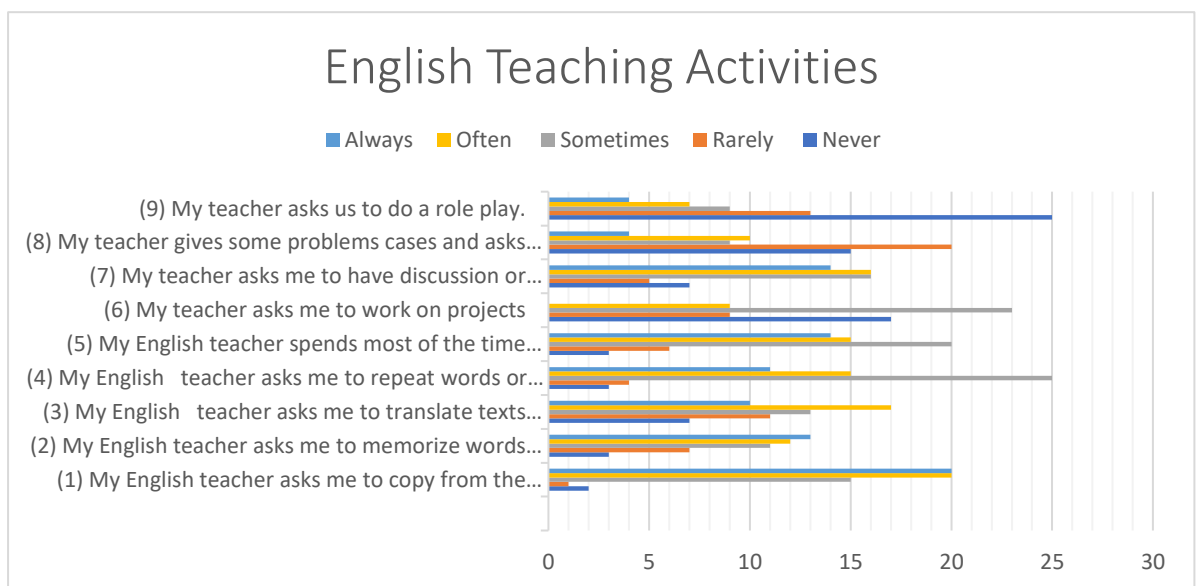
58 responses

Figure 2

English teaching activities

English Teaching Activities

The results of the survey regarding the use of technology in the teaching and learning process can be seen in Figure 2 below. It was revealed that most participants thought that their teachers did not use technology quite often in their teaching. Also, they were seldom assigned to work on educational platforms. Figure 3 below displays the technology integration

Figure 3

Technology integration

Technology Integration

Never — Rarely — Sometimes — Often — Always
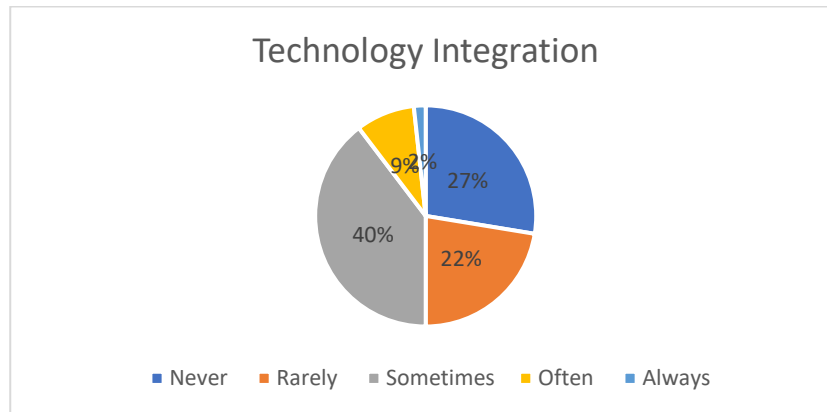
4. Discussion

Based on the findings above, three points can be inferred: (a) the absence of a-centered approach; (b) the irrelevant teaching practice; and (b) disintegration with technology.

4.1. The absence of a student-centered approach

The highest frequency of activities such as copying from the board, textbook, and PPT, memorizing words, and the teacher dominating the classroom indicated that the teachers still applied the teacher-centered approach. The characteristics of this approach are that teachers act as a single source of knowledge, and as a result of this learning scheme, students passively absorb the information since the teachers dominate the classroom and the teachers become a single information giver (Ghafar, 2023).

The activity, such as copying from the board, should be minimized, especially if it is just merely about the definition, generic structure of the text, and other conceptual things that students can be assigned to look for on the internet. The activities should be more practical and sharpen the student's skills. Such an activity also takes time, and the students will only spend their time doing it. It also indicates that our teaching is still based on memorization; the students learn from the book in the exam. Another characteristic revealed in the finding is less interaction.

Based on the findings above, the interaction activity (students-students or students-teacher) is minimal. They rarely do activities that engage them in meaningful interaction. Moreover, interaction plays a critical role in determining the success of language learning. Interactions between teacher-student and student-students could be a means of practicing their target language to exchange ideas, feelings, opinions, views, perceptions, etc. (Eisenring & Margana 2019). Students must actively participate in the process of learning, and the essence of learner engagement is action (Mercer, 2019). Engagement itself describes how much (quantity) and what kind (quality) of learners actively participate in a language learning assignment or activity (Hiver et al., 2021). Less interaction means that the teacher tends to dominate the classroom.

The teachers who dominate the classroom talk continue sharing or transferring information only; as a result, the objective of learning language as a means of communication is not achieved; the students learn language merely as knowledge. The teachers who are persistent in using this approach mostly depend on the textbook (Ahmed et al., 2022). It can be understood that textbooks play a significant role for teachers as guides and sources. Most teachers use textbooks as a means of teaching aid to expose their students to the targeted materials (Achmad, 2023). However, teachers are often trapped in monotonous activities: presenting, assigning students to do the textbook or worksheet, and

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discussing the answers. As a result, being textbook-oriented does not widen the teachers' competency, and the teachers will not grow as professionals.

Another issue with textbooks is that teachers often see it as a mandatory task to finish all the chapters in the book. As a result, the teachers will take a little care of students who still don't achieve the target learning because they are in a rush to finish the chapters. It could be said that the absence of a student-centered approach seems irrelevant to the notion of 21st-century teaching practice, which focuses on making students active and independent. Therefore, the implementation of a teacher-centered approach will only make it hard to achieve the targeted goals to assist students in becoming active since they are bound to make students less active. It is different from the student-centered approach in that teachers' role is as facilitators or guides in students' processes. This kind of approach theoretically and practically promotes active and engaging students as the teachers act as guides and facilitators. They provide scaffolding when needed.

4.2. Vocabulary and grammar teaching

English is supposed to be taught differently nowadays since the situation and conditions are now and then different in terms of the rapid changes in the internet and technology. Back then, teaching English was focused on language areas such as grammar and vocabulary (Ali Alghamdi et al., 2019). However, looking at the needs of this century, it seems not enough to teach students in only those language areas since the industry demands high-quality human resources that can adapt and survive with their needs, and those two are considered insufficient to help students survive; considering that, the language classroom should tailor to the future needs to cope with the challenge, as it is a fact that foreign language proficiency is believed to be a crucial competence in this century and ahead. In addition, English teaching and learning in the 21st century is supposed to be engaging and activating students' 4C skills.

The notion of learning a language is to use it as a medium of communication; therefore, the coverage of its teaching and learning should be based on wider topics such as economics, literacy, business, health, environmental issues, etc. to prepare students' readiness to use English to cope with global issues. However, those content knowledge skills are challenging to implement in the English classroom since the teaching and learning process in our English classroom still focuses on language components such as grammar and vocabulary (Wahyuningsih, 2022). It could be inferred from the FGD and the students' notebooks. Teaching vocabulary as well as grammar is not wrong, but the way teachers convey them indeed needs to be evaluated. Today's English teaching encourages English teachers to conduct their teaching holistically, meaning that they should be integrated. Some studies in line with these current research findings show that there are still teachers who practice vocabulary teaching by translating, playing games, and memorizing (Garwan & Priyanti 2021).

Translation in foreign language learning could slow down students in the process of acquiring the language since the words in English have more than one meaning. If the students are not taught how to translate the words, they will generalize them in any other context, which makes them less accurate. Therefore, one of the alternative ways of teaching vocabulary is through context. Contextualization could be in the form of giving storylines, familiar situations and characters, and daily real-life conversations (Abdul Razak, 2021). Meanwhile, speaking of grammar, teachers should be careful since it could demotivate students to produce a language, either orally or in writing. Fundamentally, grammar is a pivotal aspect of English language learning. Grammar makes the sentence or utterance clear and meaningful. Based on the findings, most teachers overexpose them with formulas or patterns and do not use them as functional grammar. The teachers used a deductive approach to teaching grammar. In this case, the students become passive recipients; they merely receive the patterns or formulas from the teachers. It can be seen from the students' notebooks that

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they wrote the formula, and examples given by the teachers, followed by the exercise. The use of this approach confirms that the teaching and learning in our classrooms are dominated by teacher-centered teaching, and English teaching and learning are not taught holistically. As a result, students are afraid of using the target language; they keep thinking about the grammar pattern. To add to that, the grammar teaching that students in this research experience receive merely ends up as English knowledge. It can be seen from how they acquire the grammar.

Referring to the findings above, it seems the practice of the grammar-translation method is still widely used by teachers. The characteristics of this method appeared, such as teacher-centered activity, translation, and mother tongue in the classroom. This method, with its techniques such as memorization and translation, could slow down the students' progress toward achieving the 4C skills. At least there are three reasons why this method is ineffective in language teaching: (a) this method only spoon-feeds the students with information; (b) the teachers merely transform knowledge, which the students could find on the internet; and (c) the teaching and learning focus on vocabulary and grammar teaching. English is supposed to be taught differently nowadays since the situation and conditions are now and then different in terms of the rapid changes in the internet and technology. Back then, teaching English was focused on language areas such as grammar and vocabulary. However, looking at the needs of this century, it seems not enough to teach students in only those language areas since the industry demands high-quality human resources that can adapt and survive with their needs, and those two are considered insufficient to help students survive; therefore, the language classroom should tailor to the future needs to cope with the challenge, as it is a fact that foreign language proficiency is believed to be a crucial competence in this century and ahead. In addition, English teaching and learning in the 21st century is supposed to be engaging and activating students' 4C skills.

4.3. Disintegration of technology

Another significant characteristic of 21st-century education is the involvement of technology in the teaching and learning process. Based on the student's perspective in this research, the teachers rarely incorporate their teaching with technology. It is in line with the findings that reveal the conventional teaching practices that the students experienced. In the 21st century, the use of technology here cannot be detached from teachers' pedagogy skills since teachers nowadays are facing generations Z (born 1995–2010) and Alpha (2011–present). These generations become learners who are tech savvy; they have been exposed to technology since they were born, which benefits them in searching for and obtaining information faster through the internet. Thus, teaching nowadays should involve technology. According to (Limbong, 2017), technology has become a teacher's assistant without impediment in terms of time, place, or cost. They can access the Internet anytime and anywhere; even now, many schools have the Internet to support the teaching and learning process.

Seven characteristics entail this generation: (1) physical, (2) hyper-customization, (3) realistic, (4) fear of missing out (FOMO), (5) economist, (6) do-it-yourself (DIY), and (7) encouragement (Stillman, 2018). Furthermore, (Hendrastomo & Januarti, 2023) emphasized that there are five things to be done in teaching this generation: (1) changing mindsets; (2) being creative to develop learning models and strategies; (3) being varied in using learning media; and (4) utilizing technology to support the learning process and enhance communication between teachers and students.

The government has also attempted to suit the curriculum and its needs by implementing the Merdeka curriculum. One of the mandates in this curriculum is the involvement of technology in the teaching and learning process to keep up with the 21st century. Integrating technology into the teaching and learning process is now inevitable. The use of technology in the teaching and learning process has become mandatory. Undoubtedly, technology can ease teachers' work and assist teachers

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in teaching effectively, as numerous studies have found that integrating technology into teaching and learning promotes student motivation and engagement, and using information technology has accelerated the transition from learner-centered to teacher-centered approaches in language teaching and learning (Riasati et al., 2012). In addition, it promotes autonomy to enhance students' performance in the EFL classroom (Azmi, 2017). The curriculum shifts from a traditional curriculum that is based on textbooks to a competency- and performance-based curriculum (Wang & Chia, 2022).

5. Conclusion

It can be inferred that English teaching and learning based on the student's perspective, unfortunately, has not tuned with the notion of 21st-century language teaching due to three factors: irrelevant teaching practice, irrelevant teaching focus, and disintegration with technology. To emphasize, since the beginning, the problem with our English language teaching has been the mismatch between the curriculum and its implementation.

To add to that, English language teaching in this century should be holistic, meaning that vocabulary and grammar should not stand alone as a lesson. It should be imparted in a certain context and as a means of supporting students' communication. It seems the root lies in the teachers' readiness and understanding in implementing the curriculum and their willingness to move from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach to attain effective language teaching in preparing students' 4C skills.

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