INTEGRATING 4C SKILLS (CRITICAL THINKING, COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION, CREATIVITY) IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract - In the 21st century, teaching traditional EFL lessons that focus more on grammar rules and vocabulary memorization is insufficient to prepare learners for modern demands. This research explores the integration of 4C skills (critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity) into EFL classroom settings. Based on recent studies (2018–2025), the article discusses theoretical foundations, classroom implementation and major challenges. According to the findings, project-based learning, task-based activities and digital tools are effective in developing both language proficiency and the 4Cs. Obstacles including exam-focused curricula, overcrowded classrooms and lack of training continue to affect implementation, even though teachers have favorable attitudes.The integration of the 4Cs systematically is essential for enhancing student motivation and preparing students for real-life challenges.

Keywords - 4C skills, 21st century skills, EFL teaching, integrated skills, project-based learning

In today's modern world, education cannot prepare students for real-life situations by teaching traditional EFL lessons that focus more on grammar rules and vocabulary memorization. For this reason, educators try to focus on not only basic rules, but also 4C skills – critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity – to develop language proficiency. Educators and learners should use these 4C skills to think more critically, to adapt to different situations, work in groups, analyze problems more accurately in various circumstances and create new innovative ideas. As language learning involves problem-solving, self-expression and interaction, the integration of 4C skills into classroom is very valuable. Recent studies show that when teachers deliberately combine these skills with the four language abilities (listening, speaking, reading and writing), students become more motivated, confident and better equipped for academic and professional success. [9; p. 71] In modern education, the 4C skills concept is based on educational theories and practical needs in the classroom. In recent years, communication has not been limited by written or oral format, but also it includes digital and intercultural forms such as online discussions, video presentations and others. Collaboration is associated with sociocultural concepts and it consider learning as a social process and involve teamwork and shared responsibility. Critical thinking includes analyzing texts, judging information, solving problems and making appropriate decisions, in addition, creativity allows students to develop original content and think in new ways. Collaboration works well when communication is clear and ideas are generated critically, while creativity is often developed through analyzing real-life issues and that can be evidence that these four elements are strongly interconnected. Pardede (2020) argues that EFL classrooms provide an ideal setting for this integration because language use in daily life rarely happens in isolated skills [9; p. 72]. He stresses the value of task-based and content-based approaches that weave the 4Cs into meaningful activities [9; pp. 73-75].

Several pieces of research provide useful strategies to implement this integration into the classroom. Erdoğan (2019) explains practical ways to combine the four language skills (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) with the 4C skills using cross-curricular lessons and different classroom activities. For instance, first students may read articles or books about climate change, then discuss its negative effects on local people and the nature of the country, and think critically about solutions to that problem, and finally prepare their own presentations or short videos for performance. Such tasks naturally develop all four skills simultaneously. Similarly, Marwa et al. (2023) examined teaching documents in EFL settings and found that while syllabi often mention 4C competencies at a basic level, actual assessments still lag behind, frequently remaining at the "approaching competency" stage [7; pp. 8-10]. This gap indicates the importance of applying the approach more consistently during the planning and evaluation stages. Scientific evidence from several contexts encourages the effectiveness of these techniques. In a 2024 study, Marwa and colleagues explored video creation projects and Google Classroom activities, showing how students improved their creativity through content design, collaboration through team roles, communication through scripting and presenting and critical thinking through research and editing [8; pp. 12-15].Aeni (2024) reported positive outcomes in post-pandemic Extensive Reading classes, where lecturers encouraged idea generation, group discussions, and creative responses to texts [1]. Halvorsen (2018) noted that even lower-proficiency learners can participate meaningfully in research,

debates, and presentations when tasks are well scaffolded [4; pp. 8-12]. Hapsari (2025) examined lesson plans and identified both successes and persistent difficulties in explicit 4C integration [5], while Kapkır's (2024) thesis revealed that although teachers hold positive attitudes toward the 4Cs, students often lack awareness, and institutional constraints limit full implementation [6; p. 86].

Challenges	FrequencyinLiterature	ProposedSolutions
Exam-orientedcurriculum	High	Align 4C tasks with exam formats; use formative assessment
Largeclasssizes	High	Use digital collaborative tools (Padlet, Google Workspace); structured group roles
Limitedteachertraining	High	Professional development workshops; peer observation
Studentlowmotivation / reluctance	Medium	Student-centered topics; gamification; clear rubrics
Assessmentdifficulties	High	Develop 4C rubrics that combine language + skills scoring
Resource&technologygaps	Medium	Low-tech alternatives + school–university partnerships

There are still some challenges that occur even though there are major positive discoveries. It is always claimed that the main obstacles are class size, lack of training and resources for use by teachers. Most instructors consider the 4Cs concept as complicated to apply in everyday seminars and lessons and to assess students fairly, although they understand the notion. It is stated that student-related factors, including assessing language proficiency levels, low encouragement and inactivity during classes, also create some problems. According to Barseghyan (2022) and Rasyid (2025), stress and similar concerns given above were highlighted, and the necessity for development of materials/methods that can be used for teaching contexts [2].Most of these challenges can be reduced with the help of technology through collaborative digital tools in large and blended classrooms by supporting interaction.Nevertheless, limited access to technology and low digital literacy remain key problems. In general, the reviewed studies' findings demonstrate that project-based learning, task-based activities, debates, media analysis, and digital content creation are effective ways to integrate the 4Cs into EFL classrooms.These approaches enhance student engagement and lead to deeper learning when they are applied carefully with appropriate scaffolding and clear assessment rubrics covering both language and 21st-century skills.However, the effectiveness always depends greatly on teacher preparation, curriculum alignment, and sustained support from educational institutions. In conclusion, integrating critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity into EFL classrooms is no longer optional but essential for preparing learners for the demands of the modern world.While challenges exist, the combination of theoretical frameworks and practical examples from recent research offers clear pathways forward.Teachers should receive targeted training, adopt flexible assessment tools and design meaningful tasks that connect language learning with real-life competencies.Future studies could usefully explore long-term impacts in diverse cultural contexts and develop more effective ways to measure the 4Cs in language classrooms.By embracing this integrated approach, EFL education can move beyond linguistic competence toward nurturing adaptable, thoughtful and innovative global citizens.

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