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Learning and Innovation Skills in the General English Textbook for Advanced Level in Sri Lanka: A Qualitative Content Analysis

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Abstract

The dawn of the 21st century and the associated technological, demographic, and socio-economic changes necessitated reforms in language education to equip learners with a diverse variety of skills, commonly referred to as 21st century learning and innovation skills, in addition to content and knowledge. Language teaching material, an integral and important element in teaching/learning, must evolve correspondingly to meet the demand for these skills. Centrally developed textbooks are the primary materials used in English as a second language teaching/learning in the Sri Lankan public education system. This paper investigates the representation of learning and innovation skills (Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Collaboration) in the current General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (G.C.E. (A/L)) English textbook of Sri Lanka. Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) was employed as the research methodology, and a coding frame was developed and utilized as the primary analytical tool. Two additional independent co-coders with diverse expertise also engaged in coding to boost the study's trustworthiness. The findings reveal that the textbook contains a variety of activities that promote Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication and Collaboration skills. However, the results indicate that certain subskills are not adequately emphasized to enhance the holistic development of the 21st century skills. The study offers insightful recommendations for curriculum and material developers.

Keywords: ESL, General English, Learning and innovation, Qualitative Content Analysis; Textbook evaluation, 21st century skills

Introduction

The role of English language textbooks in developing 21st century skills among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners has gained increasing attention in language education. As the 21st century skills emphasize critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2019), textbooks play a crucial role in shaping these competencies. The Framework for 21st Century Learning highlights the need for language learners to develop cognitive flexibility, digital literacy, and interpersonal communication abilities (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). English Language textbooks also influence the pedagogical approaches, and the learning experiences students encounter (Richards, 2001). The centrally prescribed ESL textbooks are the fundamental resources in the Sri Lankan secondary education. On the other hand, the universality of the English language, together with a knowledge-based economy that relies on the English language as the global medium of communication, highlights the key role the 21st century skills play in English language teaching/learning (Albahlal, 2019).

English language was initially introduced to Sri Lanka by the British for administrative and evangelical purposes. They also introduced English as a medium of education, only available in a limited fee-levying schools, creating a community of English-educated locals located mainly in urban areas (Aloysius, 2015). Although the “Free Education Policy” paved the way for English education to be extended to the rural areas, (Aloysius, 2015; Sanmuganathan, 2017), the subsequent creation of the 1956 Sinhala Only Act, and

education policies establishing the vernacular languages as the media of instruction, resulted in a decline in English language competency among the population (Liyanage, 2021). The shift towards an open economy in the country, the importance of English proficiency in the 21st century, and its role in the reconciliation process as a link language after the civil war and in tertiary education led policymakers to prioritize English language education since the early 1990s (Sanmuganathan, 2017; Wijsekera, 2018).

It is a general perception that efforts to teach and learn the English language in Sri Lankan schools have achieved only limited success. This perception is supported by students’ performance in public examinations. Specifically, the pass rates for English in the G.C.E. (O/L) and General English (GE) in the G.C.E. (A/L) are consistently among the lowest compared to other subjects (Department of Examinations, 2016–2021). Furthermore, the youth in Sri Lanka, although possessing the necessary technical and academic qualifications, have been found to lack both English language skills and the soft skills required to transform their knowledge into a profession, resulting in substantial mismatches between the demand for and supply of workers. (Asian Development Bank & the International Labour Organization, 2017; Dundar et al., 2014). Brunfaut and Green (2019) found significant deficiencies in the productive language skills of employees. One of the primary causes for the failure of school education in Sri Lanka to produce competent students and workers is believed to be the highly examination-oriented education

system which encourages rote learning and superficial learning (Ginige, 2020; Liyanage, 2021; National Education Commission, 2020). Therefore, there is a need to move beyond traditional language teaching and incorporate teaching-learning of these required skills in the everyday language classroom.

Furthermore, the pedagogy, which focused on grammar, memorization, and rote learning, has now shifted to using language and cultural knowledge as a means to communicate with people around the globe (Eaton, 2010). Shoffner et al. (2010) further state that the concept of a single all-encompassing literacy focusing on reading comprehension and writing ability has given way to multiliteracies and students should be able to use these literacies. (Armstrong & Warlick, 2004). Moreover, knowledge regarding how we learn, teach, and acquire knowledge has also evolved, resulting in a student-centered approach and collaborative learning (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001 cited in Eaton, 2010). Moreover, the 21st century education goals and sustainable development goals generally push the educational authorities and curriculum developers to pay special attention to promoting the 21st century skills among students. In the light of these developments, it is necessary to include 21st century skills and literacies in addition to content in the English Language classrooms.

21st century skills

“21st century skills” can be described as a set of skills, competencies, knowledge, and attributes that are necessary to be successful in work, academic and social life in the current century. Several education and employment related institutions have formulated and

proposed frameworks that outline skills or competences, knowledge and attributes required for the 21st century. Two of the most widely adopted 21st-century skills frameworks in education are the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) and the Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21S) frameworks. The P21 categorizes the skills as follows:

- Learning and innovation skills (The 4Cs): creativity, critical thinking & problem solving, communication, collaboration.
- Information, Media, and Technology Skills: information, media, communication, and technology literacy
- Life and Career skills: flexibility, adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, leadership, and responsibility (Partnership for 21st century Learning, 2019).

The ATC21S classifies the 21st-century skills into the following four categories.

- Ways of thinking: creativity and innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, metacognition.
- Tools for working on information literacy - ICT literacy.
- Ways of working: communication, collaboration.
- Ways of living in the world: local and global citizenship, life, and career (Flexibility and Adaptability, Initiative and Self-direction, Productivity

and Accountability, Leadership and Responsibility), personal and social responsibility, cultural awareness (Griffin & Care, 2015).

It is observed that both frameworks encompass remarkably similar skills. The primary differences between these frameworks occur in the categorization of these skills. Although these frameworks originated in Western countries, it is important to note that Asian countries have also adapted these frameworks to align with their own contexts and goals, incorporating Asian values (Cheng, 2017). In the Sri Lankan context, the National Education Policy report (National Education Commission: NEC, 2022) describes 12 National Learning Competency Domains formulated based on the Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework (SLQF) which was constructed in line with the 21st century skill frameworks (with special reference to the P21 framework) and the National Educational Goals (NEGs) of Sri Lanka (NEC, 2022)

Empirical studies have demonstrated the benefits of 21st century skills integration in English language teaching and learning. For example, Ashraf et al. (2017) examined the effects of integrating 21st century skills teaching on listening and reading comprehension in the English language classroom. The results showed that practising speaking and listening through 21st century skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, interpersonal skills, leadership, and technology literacy had a positive impact on learners. Motallebzadeh et al. (2018) investigated the relationship between five sub-constructs of 21st century skills and EFL learners' speaking and writing

skills and found a significant relationship between these skills and learners' writing and speaking scores. Communication and collaboration had the highest correlation with language speaking scores, while technology literacy had the highest correlation with language writing scores. Paschal & Gougou (2022) studied English teachers' experiences in incorporating 21st-century skills in English Language Teaching in Ivory Coast. Their findings revealed that incorporating 21st-century skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity and imagination, critical thinking and problem solving, and leadership aided language acquisition, developed communicative competencies, and improved participation, student engagement, and motivation. Therefore, it is evident that the development of English language skills should occur concurrently with the acquisition of 21st-century skills to fulfil the objectives of the General English course which aims to equip students with the linguistic competencies necessary for success in the academic, professional, and social domains (National Institute of Education: NIE, 2017).

Objective and importance of the study

The General English Textbook (Education Publication Department, 2017) is the primary resource/material at the upper secondary level ESL education in the education system of Sri Lanka, i.e., Advanced Level: Grades 12 and 13. A review of the literature associated with textbook analysis in relation to 21st-century skills indicates a clear research gap within the Sri Lankan context. Therefore, the present study aimed to ascertain the extent to which the current Advanced Level General English textbook includes 21st century

skills enhancement activities, particularly, the learning and innovation skills such as creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. The following sub-research questions facilitated the process.

- What are the 21st-century skills included in the A/L General English textbook?
- To what extent are learning and innovation skills addressed in the A/L General English textbook?
- To what extent does the A/L General English textbook include the subskills or subcategories of these skills?

In addition to contributing to the existing body of literature on this subject, it is expected that this study would provide useful information to policymakers, curriculum and material developers regarding the content of the textbook concerning learning and innovation skills. It is also anticipated that the findings would provide valuable insights into the importance of integrating learning and innovation skills in the English language classroom to ELT practitioners and provide a basis for further research on the subject.

Methods and Materials

Methodology

The study utilized Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques (Creswell, 2015; Kansteiner & König, 2020; Krippendorff, 2013). The qualitative analysis aims to identify the learning and innovation skills, and the sub-skills included in the textbook through descriptive analysis. The quantitative analysis, which primarily consists of frequency

counts and percentages of the whole, aims to identify the number of activities that promote the required skills. The combined analysis and interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data help determine whether the activities address all skills/ subskills and the level of representation of each skill/subskill.

Materials

The material analysed was the Advanced Level General English textbook published by the Educational Publications Department (2017), Sri Lanka. It is the only textbook prescribed for the Advanced Level General English course (<https://govdoc.lk/view?id=5656&fid=632aaa12e8006>). The textbook comprises eight units integrating the four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar. G.C.E. (Advanced Level) General English textbook is taught in Grades 12 and 13 to prepare students for the second most important public examination in Sri Lanka – General Certificate in Education (Advanced Level), aiming at highly competitive state university admission.

Coding framework

A coding frame comprising main categories (concept-driven) and subcategories (concept driven and data-driven) was developed as the main tool based on the P21 and the ATC21S frameworks, the most widely adopted 21st century skills frameworks in education that provide detailed definitions and descriptions of what each skill entails (Griffin & Care, 2015; Partnership for 21st century Learning, 2019). Additionally, a codebook was developed to ensure the consistent and reliable application of codes. The codebook comprised the names of categories and

subcategories, comprehensive descriptions of the subcategories, and illustrative examples of activities. The Twenty-first century Skills Map for English Subject by P21, and the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework were also considered when constructing the codebook, as these frameworks specifically provide explanations and examples of how 21st century skills relate to English language learning.

The textbook was segmented into thematic units for analysis, with each segment (unit of coding) representing a portion of the text corresponding to a specific subcategory. Following the segmentation, a pilot study was conducted simultaneously by the first author and two co-coders on randomly selected sections of the textbook, and areas of disagreement were deliberated, resulting in the merging of certain subcategories or the refinement of descriptions. A subsequent round of trial coding validated the modifications made, and the revised coding frame was used for the final analysis with a few revisions. Two other individuals supervised the entire process, including the second author.

Reliability

Double coding is the most common reliability test in QCA, and including co-coders with diverse experiences enhances data understanding and interpretation, making it advisable for coding teams to comprise individuals with varied disciplinary training (Keene, 2020). Accordingly, along with the first author, two co-coders with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise participated in the coding process while the second author oversaw the process.

Validity

Validity concerns the quality of research in both narrow and broad senses (Schreier, 2012). Validity in a narrow sense in QCA is primarily concerned with the validity of the coding frame (Schreier, 2012). Since the coding frame used for the analysis was constructed in accordance with the widely cited and adopted 21st-century frameworks in education (P21 and ATC21S), it can be considered a reasonable and objective representation of 21st-century skills. Validity is further enhanced by adhering to the prescribed construction steps, conducting pilot tests, evaluating and modifying the frame, and creating subcategories in both data-driven and concept-driven manners. Another significant type of validity within QCA is Semantic Validity (Mayring, 2014, citing Krippendorff, 1980). This refers to the accurate reconstruction of the material's meaning within categories. Semantic validity can be and was determined by comparing the passages under a subcategory and assessing the homogeneity of these passages.

Results and Discussion

This ESL textbook analysis attempted to explore what 21st century skills are included in the A/L General English textbook; the extent to which learning and innovation skills are addressed; and the extent to which subskills or subcategories of learning and innovation skills are included.

The results reveal that all learning and innovation skills are included in the A/L General English textbook. In the succeeding discussion, we explain them under each main skill - Communication, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, and Creativity, respectively,

along with their sub-categories, while referring to language skills. To this purpose, we use the percentages of representation of the main skills. The depicted values in the pie charts are rounded to the nearest whole number, and therefore, they do not depict decimal points or fractions.

The findings are based on the judgments of the first author and co-coders, which rely on their perceptions and interpretations and are susceptible to human error. Consequently, these findings cannot be regarded as a completely accurate quantitative representation of the extent of 4C skills in the material, but rather as an indication of the presence and extent of these

skills in the textbook, which was the purpose of this study. However, these judgments were further scrutinized by the second author and another experienced supervisor, which may have increased the reliability.

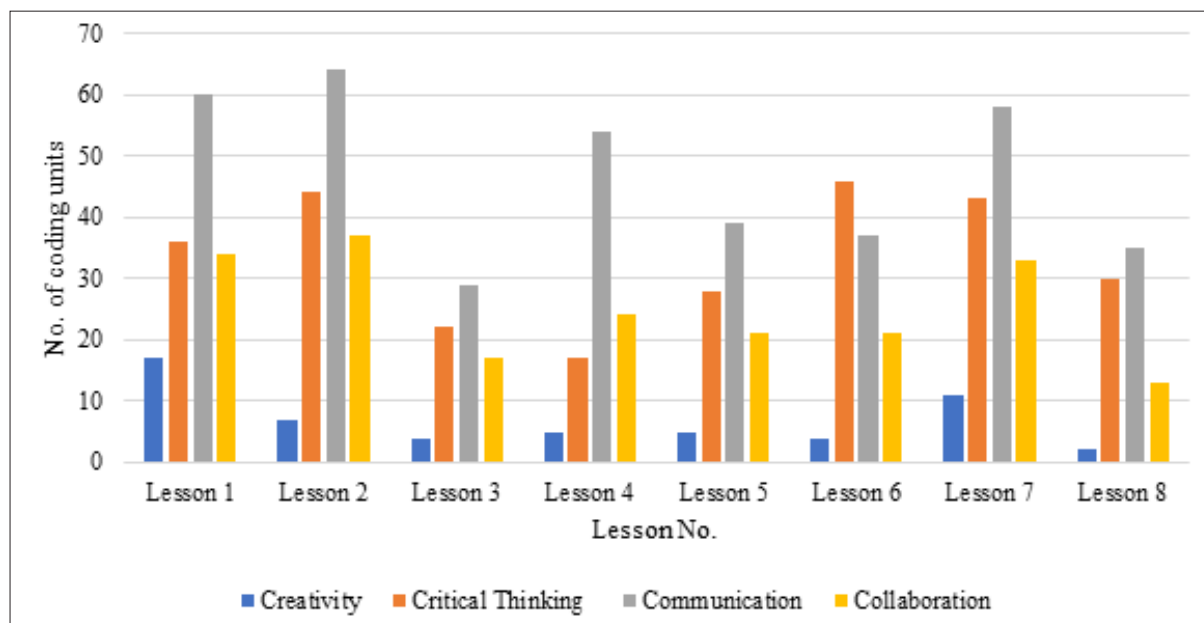
Distribution of 21st century main skills:

Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication and Collaboration

A total of 897 instances of the 4C skills are identified within the textbook. The following figure shows the overall number of occurrences or coding units of these main skills in each lesson.

Figure 1.

Representation of the learning and innovation skills across the lesson units.



As the above graph shows, ‘Communication’ is the most prominent skill in most units, followed by ‘Critical Thinking’ and ‘Collaboration.’ ‘Creativity’ is the least represented of the learning and innovation skills. On average, each lesson comprises approximately 7, 33,

47, and 25 instances of the skills ‘Creativity’, ‘Critical Thinking’, ‘Communication’, and ‘Collaboration’, respectively, rounded to the nearest whole number. Next, we take the four main skills and their subcategories for more elaboration.

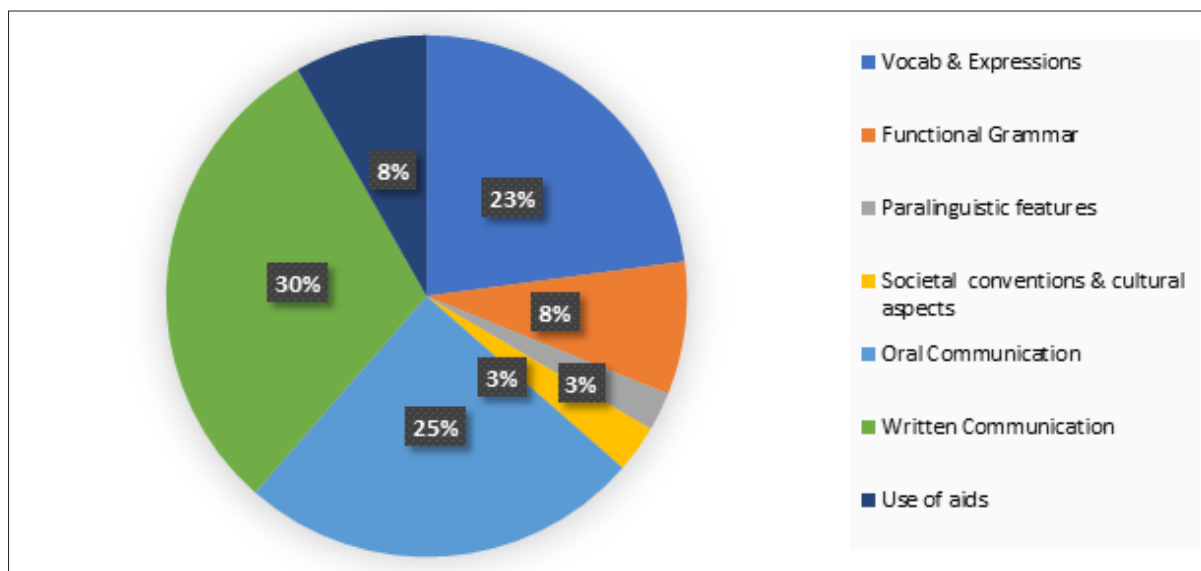
Communication

Communication refers to the ability to convey and comprehend knowledge and ideas across diverse contexts and for various purposes. It encompasses competencies in verbal, nonverbal, and written communication. (Griffin & Care, 2015; Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2019). It is the most evident skill with a total of 376 occurrences across the

8 units. The subcategories of communication are *Vocabulary & Expressions*, *Grammar*, *Paralinguistic Features*, *Societal Conventions & Cultural Aspects*, *Oral Communication*, *Written Communication*, and *Use of Aids*. In Figure 2 we depict the representation of these subcategories of ‘Communication’ in the textbook.

Figure 2.

Representation of the subcategories of communication.



Written Communication is the most visible subcategory, and the related activities involve writing or reading and understanding different texts and adopting strategies appropriate to various reading purposes. Writing tasks include writing essays, verses, dialogues, formal and informal letters and emails, short descriptions, summaries, and writing in point form. However, tasks related to academic writing are not evident other than an activity that addresses academic writing conventions through the introduction of paraphrasing and citations. A study conducted on the difficulties faced by TESL students in academic writing

in the South-Eastern University of Sri Lanka found that students attributed their difficulties to inadequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and lack of exposure to academic writing skills and conventions (Navaz, 2021). The researcher further states that, like most ESL learners in Sri Lanka, these students were not equipped with these skills during secondary education, resulting in difficulties in academic writing in tertiary educational institutions. Therefore, it is important to include more activities that focus on the conventions of academic writing and the areas related to academic writing (Gamage, 2017).

Reading tasks include reading essays, poems, formal and informal letters and emails, descriptions, and advertisements. However, academic articles or essays are not included in the reading materials. While students are given references to academic articles and books, such text is not presented in the textbook itself. Therefore, it is necessary to include academic reading texts to foster critical reading skills and expose learners to the conventions of academic writing.

Oral Communication involves listening to and understanding various spoken messages in a variety of communicative situations, and articulating thoughts and ideas concisely and clearly. Speaking activities in the textbook include tasks such as making presentations, debating, and taking part in role plays / mini dramas and dialogues. While speaking involves interactive listening, several non-participatory tasks involve students listening for specific information. An example of such a task is listening to a poem about irregular plural nouns and filling in the blanks (GE textbook, p.81). Nevertheless, the number of listening activities is quite low compared to reading and writing activities. Dunkel (1991) referring to theories such as the monitor model, the information processing model, the interaction model, and the intake model, emphasises the importance of listening in language development. Therefore, it is important to include more listening activities in the textbook. Another drawback is the lack of academic listening tasks in the textbook. Herath (2011/2012) points out that since academic listening skills differ from conversational listening skills, academic listening should be taught specifically, as lectures are the primary mode of delivery

in universities, and therefore, developing listening skills in an academic context is especially important for students transitioning to tertiary education.

Vocabulary & Expressions is concerned with the knowledge of words, phrases, and expressions. An example is matching words and meanings. Teaching vocabulary in context enables students to incorporate it into their language repertoire and use it with confidence (Konza, 2016). It was observed that most reading and listening activities dealt with key vocabulary, phrases, and expressions in the pre-reading/ listening activities, thereby enhancing the comprehension of the text. Additionally, some activities introduce useful language structures and sentence frames. An example of one such activity: “Tell the rest of the group about the most interesting information you found out about the members from your group. You can use the following structures to help you ...My friend’s family always watches the channel because ...” (GE textbook, p.34). Sentence frames assist students in conveying ideas effectively, utilizing vocabulary and structures they might not be able to generate independently (Carrier, 2005). Sentence frames further allow students to focus on the content and develop fluency and accuracy by learning correct sentence structure/ grammar through clear input, modelling, and repetition (Reyes, 2015).

Functional Grammar activities are concerned with understanding how language is structured to convey meaning for specific purposes and play a critical role in enhancing the coherence of communication. Typically, grammar points are introduced at the conclusion of most units and are often connected to the main content

of the unit. However, there are instances when grammar is presented without a proper context or in a context that bears no relation to the remainder of the unit. According to Nunan (1998), the context and purpose of the communication are important to make suitable grammatical choices, and therefore, presenting grammar points without a proper context can undermine the development of grammatical competence.

Activities under the subcategory *Using Aids* require the use of tables, graphs, charts, notes, diagrams, and maps to create, present, or comprehend complex texts. For example, in Lesson 7, students are instructed to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of co-educational schools and summarise the discussion in a table. However, activities related to the use of charts and graphs, such as pie charts and bar charts/graphs, were not evident. Although the performance standards in the teachers' guide (NIE, 2017) explicitly state that students are expected to understand graphically stated information in charts and graphs, and the A/L general English exam paper includes questions on chart/ graph descriptions (Department of Examinations, 2019). Yet, no related activities are included in the textbook.

The subcategory *Paralinguistic Features* involves the use of features such as voice quality, facial expressions, and postural and gesture systems in communication. For example, using gestures and facial expressions when reciting a funny poem. Activities such as role plays, mini dramas and skits indirectly promote the use of these features as well and can be found throughout the textbook. Since, paralinguistic features or non-verbal

communication constitute the majority of communication and are part of culture and language (British Council, n.d; Rahman & Verma, 2019), it is essential to include them in language teaching. Incorporating paralinguistic features in language lessons helps students develop strategic competence, which refers to strategies that speakers use to compensate for breakdowns in communication. However, activities which explicitly refer to paralinguistic features are not found extensively in the textbook.

Societal Conventions and Cultural Aspects are concerned with the variation in language use across different geographical, social, and communicative contexts. For instance, one activity explores the differences between American, British and Sri Lankan English, while another examines linguistic variability in distinct social settings. An example of an activity: "Here are some words and expressions that you will hear in the dialogue. Some of them are quite informal, and useful, when speaking to friends and other peers." (GE textbook, p. 151). Although tasks addressing societal conventions and cultural aspects are present in the textbook, the number of tasks appears insufficient. The inclusion of additional activities would be beneficial, as a comprehensive understanding of language variation in various environments is essential for the development of sociolinguistic competence.

Critical thinking

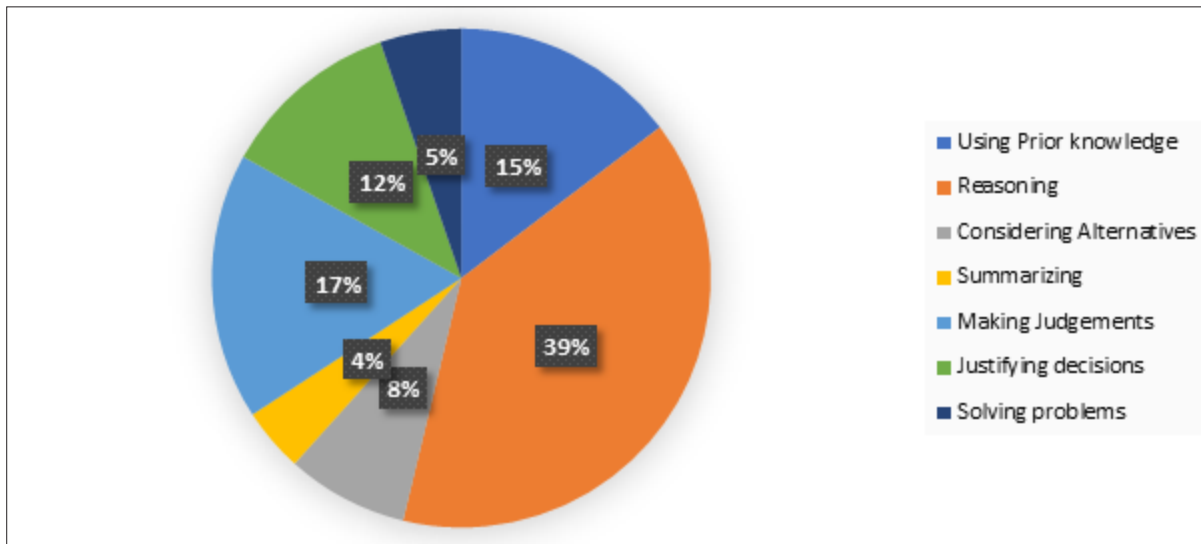
'Critical Thinking' is the second most visible skill in the textbook with 266 occurrences. 'Critical Thinking' can be described as the ability to reason effectively, use systems

thinking, analyse and evaluate evidence to make judgements and decisions, and solve problems (Griffin & Care, 2015; Partnership for 21st century Learning, 2019), and subcategories being *Using Prior Knowledge*,

Reasoning, *Considering Alternatives*, *Summarizing*, *Making Judgements*, *Justifying Decisions*, and *Solving Problems*. Figure 3 illustrates the representation of these subcategories in the textbook.

Figure 3.

Representation of the subcategories of critical thinking and problem solving.



Reasoning activities involve making connections among information or ideas to draw inferences, make forecasts, decisions, judgments, and identify trends. For instance, subsequent to a reading activity about a girl who followed a course with on-the-job training, students are asked the following question: “What do you think Vinotha is doing now? Give reasons based on the text” (GE textbook, p.148). Another type of activity that involves reasoning is related to making judgments and selecting the ‘best’ or ‘most.’ An example of such an activity: “Following a listening activity involving a conversation among four friends, students are tasked with deciding ‘who is the most serious one among the friends? Who is the most carefree one?’” (GE textbook, p.152). These types of activities represent the ‘evaluate’ category of the revised Bloom’s taxonomy, which is one

of the higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) (Krathwohl, 2002).

Using Prior Knowledge involves utilising background and previously acquired knowledge as context for new learning and making real-world connections. For instance, prior to a reading activity focusing on a contemporary Sri Lankan achiever, the students are instructed to reflect on and discuss Sri Lankan achievers they are familiar with (GE textbook, p.4). Similar to the ‘remember’ category of Bloom’s revised taxonomy, which involves retrieving relevant knowledge from long-term memory (Krathwohl, 2002), activities such as these help students make connections between their learning and the world they live in, thus making learning more meaningful and long-term.

Activities that involve *Justifying Decisions* require students to construct persuasive arguments grounded in supporting evidence or logical reasoning and/or explain the decision-making process by demonstrating how the available evidence culminates in a specific conclusion or decision. For instance, in the example given above, the question “who is the most serious one among the friends? Who is the most carefree one?” is followed by the question “Give reasons for your answers.” (GE textbook, p.152). Such activities foster the development of higher-order thinking skills. Additionally, the process of formulating and presenting arguments and explanations enables students to recognize biases and prejudices, thereby promoting rational decision-making rather than impulsive decision-making (Bensley, 2020).

The subcategory *Considering Alternatives* involves comparing information from various sources and /or analysing competing arguments, perspectives, or solutions to a problem. An example of such an activity is having mini debates on assorted topics. Other activities involve thinking of more than one interpretation for given phrases or diagrams. Similar to the ‘evaluating’ stage of the revised Bloom’s taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002), it is important for higher studies and for living in society, as students should be able to consider any matter from different perspectives and should not ignore counterarguments or evidence that is contrary to their belief or position (University of Hull, 2023).

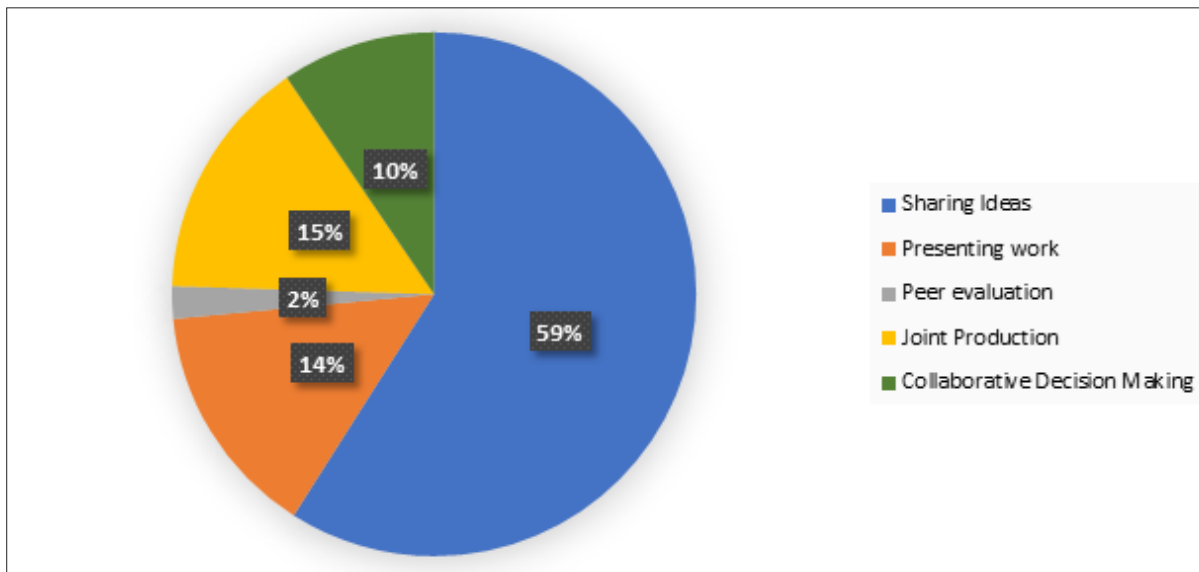
Solving Problems is concerned with developing or formulating a solution to a complex, open-ended question or problem in both conventional and innovative ways. An

example of such an activity: “Imagine that one of your best friends is getting messages on social media from two classmates insulting him/her all the time...Work in pairs or groups of three to decide on advice you would give your friend on how to deal with the situation.” (GE textbook p.132). Including activities which are relevant to their experiences encourages students to engage in meaningful communication and thereby facilitates the meaningful processing of language and the development of higher-order cognitive skills simultaneously (Krathwohl, 2002).

Collaboration

‘Collaboration’ can be described as the ability to interact and work effectively and respectfully with others to achieve a common goal (Griffin & Care, 2015; Partnership for 21st century Learning, 2019). It is the third most evident skill in the textbook, with 200 occurrences. *Sharing Ideas, Presenting Work, Peer Evaluation, Joint Production and Collaborative Decision Making* are the subcategories of ‘Collaboration.’ Figure 4 illustrates the representation of these subcategories in the textbook.

Figure 4.
Distribution of the subcategories of collaboration.



Sharing ideas involves pair or small group discussions, during which participants contribute ideas, opinions, information, support, and efforts to complete a task. For example: “Look at the picture below and describe it with a friend” (GE Textbook, p.32). The follow-up activities are then expanded to include more students/ bigger groups. These activities are rooted in the Think–Pair–Share (TPS) active-learning strategy (Cooper et al., 2021), which (encourages students to first reflect individually and then share their thoughts with a partner or small group before presenting them to the entire class. A study conducted by Mundelsee & Surkowski (2021) reveals that these types of activities reduce anxiety in students, resulting in higher volunteered sharing/hand raising in classroom discussions. Narang et al. (2021), in their study of online classrooms found that idea sharing had a positive impact on learner engagement which they refer to as “idea advantage”.

Joint Production involves students collaborating to create mini dramas, skits,

poems, or presentations. For instance, students may work in small groups to dramatize a given story. This collaborative approach enhances writing accuracy (Sang & Zou, 2022), strengthens interpersonal skills such as negotiation (Ubilla-Rosales et al., 2020), and fosters the exchange of knowledge (Shehadeh, 2011, cited in Ubilla-Rosales et al., 2020). Furthermore, collaborative writing activities play a critical role in developing skills essential for co-authoring in both academic and professional settings (Ubilla-Rosales et al., 2020). Research on the collaborative production of dramas in English as a second or foreign language contexts indicates that such activities positively impact student motivation, confidence, speaking abilities, vocabulary acquisition, and interpersonal skills (Athimoolam, 2004; Banerjee, 2014; Mardiani & Hanifah, 2022).

The activities related to the subcategory *Presenting Work* involve students sharing their work with others upon the completion

of their assignments. Although most tasks in this subcategory involve sharing within the class, some activities require students to share their work with others outside the class, such as organising a mini exhibition in school. According to Walton (2019), knowing their work will be shared with others increases student motivation, engagement, responsibility, and confidence, resulting in more meaningful, high quality and authentic work.

Collaborative Decision-Making entails students engaging in the processes of decision-making and reaching consensus as pairs or groups. Example of such an activity: “Get into groups of five or six. Select one member from your group. Discuss which post suits him / her best” (GE textbook , p. 177). This type of activities fosters discussion and focus on agreement, and in the process, helps develop language and social skills such as negotiation and arguing constructively (Burns, 2016).

Peer Evaluation involves giving feedback to peers or assessing other students’ work. An example of such a task: “Comment on each other’s poems and symbols, pointing out their strengths and weaknesses, with reasons.” (GE textbook, p.44). Peer assessment has emerged as an important segment of alternative assessments. It helps students “develop objectivity in relation to standards which can then be transferred to their own work (Liu & Carless, 2006, p. 281), and thereby, improve learning and performance in examinations. Peer assessment is also timesaving as students can receive feedback from peers more quickly than from the teacher. Studies show that students are able to assess their peers’ work reasonably well (Liu & Carless, 2006).

Despite the advantages of peer evaluation, it is rarely used in the textbook.

Research based on Piagetian, Vygotskian, and shared cognition approaches demonstrate the academic, social, and psychological benefits of collaborative learning (Lai, 2011; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012), and the activities in the textbook offer opportunities to gain these benefits. However, challenges exist in task design. For instance, although the activities described in each of the above subcategories indirectly promote essential collaboration skills negotiation skills, conflict resolution skills, responsibility, being respectful to others, and turn-taking, it should not be assumed that these skills will be automatically acquired. Moreover, improper monitoring can lead to issues with group dynamics and power imbalances. Fiore (2019) found that a significant percentage of students struggle to resolve conflicts and manage teamwork obstacles. Therefore, Lai (2011) and Barnett et al. (2017) suggest that explicit instruction and modelling of these skills are necessary. Additionally, despite the advantages, collaborative learning may not yield significant academic benefits for high-ability students (Lai, 2011). To address these challenges, task design should clearly define roles, subtasks, and assessment criteria (individual & group), while also incorporating explicit teaching of conflict resolution and negotiation skills.

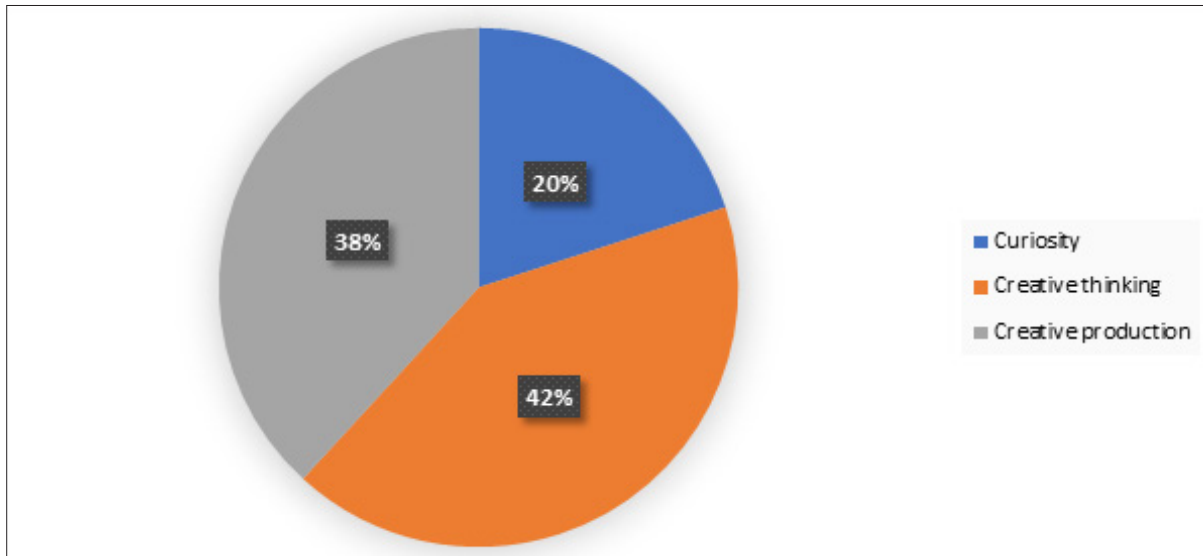
Creativity

‘Creativity’ can be defined as the capacity to generate innovative ideas and solutions using idea creation techniques and produce original work (Griffin & Care, 2015; Partnership for 21st century Learning, 2019). It is the least evident of all learning and innovation skills

with 55 occurrences. Creativity has three main subcategories: *Curiosity*, *Creative Thinking*, and *Creative Production*. Figure 5 depicts the

representation of these three subcategories in the textbook.

Figure 5.
Representation of the subcategories of creativity.



Creative Thinking activities involve the use of imagination, idea-creation techniques such as brainstorming, and distinctive styles of thinking. Nevertheless, almost all instances of *Creative Thinking* in the textbook are related to using imagination, primarily in role-playing. For example: “Imagine that you are Sidath sir [a teacher whose name is Sidath]. You are angry with the students. Create a short dialogue that takes place between Sidath Sir and the four students.” (GE textbook, p.152). However, imagination could be used more effectively to develop creativity skills by presenting more complex scenarios, and problems, or imagining alternatives or possibilities. For example, “After listening to dialogues in class, ask learners to imagine how the conversation might have ended differently or taken a different direction” (Cambridge University Press, 2022, p.10). Furthermore, it is essential that other creative thinking

patterns and idea-creation techniques are also introduced, as it is important to explicitly teach creative thinking in the classroom (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). For example, brainstorming could be used to generate creative ideas and mind mapping could be used to organize these ideas.

Creative Production encompasses the creation of original products, performances, or processes. The related activities in the textbook include writing stories and verses, producing role-plays, skits, and mini dramas. For example, an activity in Lesson 4 instructs the students to “Write a humorous story or a children’s story using at least six of the irregular nouns...” (GE textbook, p.82). Writing stories and verses is considered beneficial for fostering general creativity and enhancing creativity in language use. There are several activities involving role plays in the textbook

as well. Role playing is considered a tool for developing creative use of language (Moore & Russ, 2008; Russ, 2016), as it involves constructing new utterances of understanding and self-expression, instead of repeating the language in the textbooks. Consequently, students stretch their interlanguage, discover what they can do, and ‘notice’ the gap between the target language and their interlanguage, which according to Swain (2000), motivates them to seek solutions to their linguistic difficulties. Furthermore, re-enacting stories and scenarios develops creativity skills in general (Moore & Russ, 2008), as it involves the development of the story/scenario into actions, characters, and scenes.

The activities under *Curiosity* are concerned with a desire or an interest to explore, investigate or learn something, and fill gaps in knowledge. Curiosity is essential for creativity as it drives people to explore, experiment and ask questions. Nevertheless, there are very few instances where students were encouraged to question and find out missing/required information. One such activity requires students to ask questions after listening to presentations. Thinking of their own questions is a constructive activity for students. However, the questions mostly focus on finding information, whereas there is a lack of “What if...?” and “Why...?” questions that encourage creativity and critical thinking (Kazemi, 1998, cited in University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, 2021) are lacking.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The result of the study indicates that all four learning and innovation skills are integrated into the Advanced Level General English Textbook with ‘Communication’ being the most prominent and ‘Creativity’ the least. Nevertheless, not all subskills of each skill are evident or represented adequately. In ‘Communication’, the subcategories such as *Written Communication*, *Oral Communication*, *Grammar*, *Vocabulary & Expressions*, and *Using Aids* are adequately represented with activities presented in real-life contexts, thus promoting students’ grammatical and discourse competence. However, a notable gap is the insufficient coverage of communication in academic settings, which is crucial since one of the objectives of the course is to prepare students for higher education. The teacher’s guide outlines that students should engage with academic materials such as lectures and journal articles (National Institute of Education, 2017), but these were not included in the textbook. Additionally, the subcategory of *Using Aids* lacks activities involving graphs and charts necessary for students to meet performance standards related to writing about graphically presented information (NIE, 2017). Another drawback is presenting certain grammar points without proper contextualization, which conflicts with established grammar teaching principles (Nunan, 1998). Furthermore, the subcategories of *Societal Conventions and Cultural Aspects*, and *Paralinguistic Features of Communication* were underrepresented. These can be considered additional limitations.

Activities related to ‘Critical Thinking’ and its subcategories, for the most part, were suitable for A/L students in terms of age and level and aligned with higher-order thinking skills outlined in the revised Bloom’s taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Krathwohl, 2002).

Other than *Peer Evaluation*, all subcategories of ‘Collaboration’ were fairly well represented in the textbook. However, important task elements such as clearly defined roles, subtasks and assessment were not evident in the textbook, except in a few instances. Furthermore, important aspects of collaboration, such as negotiation skills, conflict resolution skills, responsibility, and being respectful to others, were not explicitly mentioned or taught in the textbook.

In ‘Creativity,’ the activities related to the subcategory *Creative Production* were suitable for the age and level of the students and included a range of creative activities. However, activities promoting *Creative Thinking* were lacking as they were mainly restricted to imagination. Another subcategory that was lacking was *Curiosity* as activities that encourage students to go beyond finding missing information were not evident.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested to enhance the effectiveness of English language textbooks/materials in promoting the development of learning and innovation skills among students.

It is suggested that the present textbook be revised to ensure a balanced distribution of

learning and innovation skills throughout all lessons. This revision would entail incorporating age and level-appropriate activities that promote these skills. The frameworks that provide guidelines for integrating 21st century skills into English Language teaching/learning for diverse levels and grades (Cambridge Framework for Life Competencies, P21 Map for English Language) could be considered when revising the textbook, and the activities could be modified to suit the local context. Moreover, communication within the academic context should be given more weight, with academic/professional listening, reading, and writing skills being emphasized. For this purpose, we suggest integrating input from the content areas of diverse fields and considering a content and language integrated learning approach (CLIL) to teaching.

Some grammar sections are recommended for revision to present target grammar points within suitable contexts and provide opportunities for students to practice these points in realistic, communicative situations to enhance their language proficiency. In terms of collaborative tasks, the recommendation is to improve the task designs by providing specific guidelines for students and teachers regarding member roles, subtasks, assessment criteria, and feedback mechanisms.

The inclusion of more peer assessment opportunities, supported by clear assessment criteria and rubrics, is also recommended. Finally, we suggest that Teacher Instructional Guides be revised to accommodate any amendments to textbooks/materials. Another vital component is teacher continuing teacher professional development to ensure that

the expectations of the textbooks are met at the grassroots level and the learning and innovation skills are acquired by ESL learners.

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