

## **EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Promoting 21st-Century Learning and Innovation Skills in Burundi Post-Basic Schools**

**Juvénal Habonimana<sup>1\*</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

Today, global education seeks to equip learners with the skills necessary to address complex challenges arising from a rapidly changing, competitive, and technology-driven world. Consequently, many countries have reformed their educational systems to meet the requirements of 21st-century pedagogy. In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), teachers play a central role in implementing these pedagogical approaches. This study describes EFL teachers' perceptions of promoting 21st-century learning and innovation skills among Level 2 learners in the Languages Track of post-basic schools in Burundi. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from 17 post-basic teachers using a Likert-scale questionnaire. Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS; Version 22) and R software (Version 4.1.2). Findings were analyzed thematically. The results indicate that English teachers' overall perceptions of promoting 21st-century learning and innovation skills were moderately positive, reflecting limited engagement in teaching and assessing these skills. Such perceptions may negatively impact the quality of language education required for learners to meet the demands of contemporary living and working environments. The study provides valuable insights for educational stakeholders, highlighting the need for targeted support to develop learners' 21st-century skills and competencies.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Burundi. Bujumbura, Burundi. Email: [habonajuvenal@gmail.com](mailto:habonajuvenal@gmail.com) \*Corresponding author

## INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has witnessed unprecedented advances in science and technology, significantly improving humanity's ability to think, live, work, and interact. Still, society faces ongoing challenges like healthcare, quality of life, safety, resources, and shortages (Tuzikov et al., 2019). In the search for sustainable solutions to these issues, people explore different approaches. Furthermore, education remains the most valuable lifelong tool for empowering minds and teaching individuals how to think creatively and solve complex problems. According to Tuzikov et al. (2019), "one of the effective answers for the global challenges is the idea of integrative educational programs which can merge the most important knowledge and skills from ecology, technology, natural and social sciences, business, and management into engineering education"(p.33). Based on Tuzikov's argument, the 21st century requires learners, beyond subject-specific knowledge acquired in the classroom, to develop skills and competencies that enable them address real-world problems.

From the perspective of aligning education with real-world needs, particularly in English language teaching (ELT), pedagogical practices have undergone significant evolution. In fact, pedagogical approaches now subscribe to 21st-century teaching that seeks to impart to learners skills and competencies necessary for the 21st-century world. In this vein, Savvidou (2020) argues that "modern Second Language Teaching (SLT) now operates within what is known as the 'post-methods era', focusing on ideas of principled pedagogy, context-based teaching, technology-enhanced learning, and values of citizenship that play a significant role" (p.2). Therefore, critical thinking, creativity, innovation, collaboration, cooperation, and reflection are skills students need (Mbenza, 2025). In this regard, educational institutions in various geographical settings have questioned the relevance of their training in relation to the demands of the 21st century. As such, many countries have reformed their educational systems with the view of promoting learners' 21st-century skills. It is worth mentioning that teacher training is one of the dimensions most prioritized to ensure that teachers implement what they understand.

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), teachers are the front line and must have knowledge, skills, and support to be effective 21st-century teachers (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Indeed, the teacher is a crucial component in the teaching and learning process (Anagün, 2018); teachers are also considered key gatekeepers to educational reform and innovation (Borko, 2004; Butler and Schnellert, 2012, cited in Sang et al., 2018). In essence, teachers remain key educational stakeholders who substantially implement a given language program at the classroom level. Previous studies conducted in different EFL settings have highlighted the importance of 21st-century skills in teacher education and how teachers perceive teaching these skills (Yildirim et al., 2022; Bedir, 2019; Tuzlukova et al., 2018). Other research findings revealed that teachers hold positive perceptions towards the development of 21st-century competencies (Tsourapa, 2018; Anagün, 2018; Bani-Amer, 2022). Still, other language teachers doubt about the integration of these skills in their teaching process (Pardede, 2020).

In the context of Burundi, pedagogical reforms were undertaken since 2010 at various levels of schooling to align school programs with the demands of 21st-century living and working environments. At the post-basic education level, revised programs aim to apply, among other things, the principles of 21st-century pedagogy, thereby providing learners with skills and competencies that help them to solve real-world problems (Ministère de l'Éducation de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique, 2017). In line with this educational transformation, in-service teacher training was also organized to conform to the

reform, something which requires a new teacher profile (Varly & Mazunya, 2017). In fact, as part of their professional development, teachers were inducted about the philosophy of the reform, including a shift from teacher-centered to learner-focused teaching that engages learners in the joint construction of knowledge, skills, and competencies. Yet, there is increasing concern that some teachers are challenged by its implementation. Further, the room for the 21st-century pedagogy is unclear, which may jeopardize the development of 21st-century learning and innovation skills. Therefore, after nearly a decade, teachers of the post-basic schools were trained about the new pedagogy, and to the researcher's knowledge, there is no empirical evidence on the teachers' understanding of the 21st-century pedagogy and their preparedness to effectively train learners to become good communicators, collaborators, critical thinkers, problem solvers, and innovators.

This study then aims to address a gap in English Language Teaching (ELT) literature by describing English teachers' perceptions of the teaching and assessing 21st-century learning and innovation skills among Level 2 learners of Languages Track in Burundi's post-basic schools. The study findings are expected to guide educational stakeholders, enabling them to take timely action to support the development of skills and competencies learners need to thrive in 21st-century society and workplace. This study is guided by the following question: What are English language teachers' perceptions regarding the integration of 21st-century learning and innovation skills in their teaching practices?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Rationale for Developing the 21st-century Skills**

The 21st century stands as an era marked by significant advancements in science and technology. As such, it has greatly influenced individuals' lives and created vast needs that require a specific set of skills and competencies. Educational institutions have taken the lead in preparing students to effectively and efficiently navigate this technology-driven era (Beers, 2011). Consequently, students are trained to acquire 'crucial skills' (Beers, 2011), also known as 21st-century skills. These skills are described as 'the combination of knowledge, skills, literacy, and expertise necessary for success in work and daily life' (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). Thus, they are even regarded as new competencies that individuals must develop to face complex and rapid changes of the 21st-century world.

It is thought that to respond to the demands of the 21st century, "the workforce must possess basic skill sets and be endowed with higher-order thinking skills; they have to learn how to communicate, collaborate, and problem-solve creatively with people beyond national boundaries" (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012,p.5). Therefore, actions to develop 21st-century skills have followed, resulting in the framing of a new approach to teaching these skills. This instructional model, commonly named '21st-century pedagogy,' is intended to bring the power of technology to all aspects of teaching and learning (Partnership for 21st-Century Skills, 2009). It is also considered a new teaching paradigm conceived as the vision for students' success in the new global economy (Kivunja, 2014).

### **Approaches to Teaching and Assessing the 21st-century Learning and Innovation Skills**

Emphasis on 21st-century skills in teaching and learning marks a shift from traditional key learning areas to include skills that address significant issues and real-world problems faced by individuals, industries, and jobs today (Kivunja, 2014). Consequently, inputs, content,

methods, and procedures must align with this philosophy. Effective teaching and assessment in the 21st-century context require meaningful and substantial changes in classroom practices. It involves adopting a constructivist teaching model that focuses on learners and allows them to actively engage in language activities, aiming to develop 21st-century skills. In this regard, language teaching inculcates in learners a sense of authenticity, autonomy, and responsibility, which are the long-term educational purposes of second language education (Jamiai & El Karfa, 2022). Additionally, learning occurs when students interpret and make sense of their surroundings (Anagün, 2018).

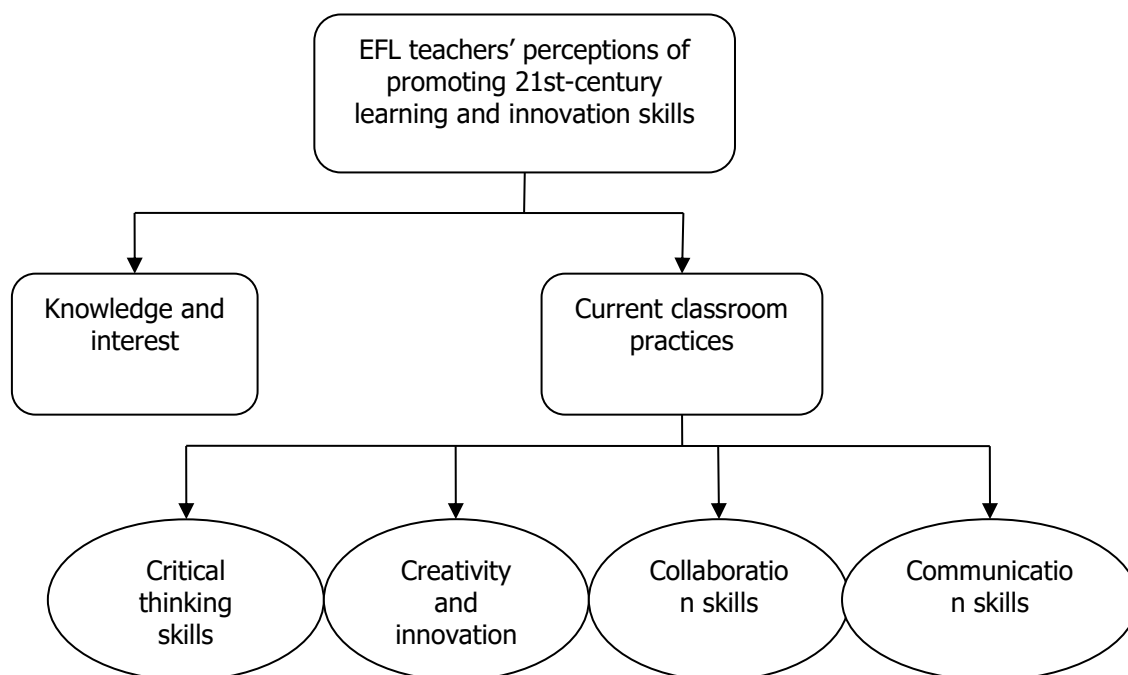
In light of the development of 21st-century skills, and in addition to the constructivist approach, language teachers must implement communicative tasks that enable learners to "analyze, interpret, express, and negotiate the meaning" (Savignon, 2001). Integrating critical, thought-provoking and problem-posing questions into classroom discussions enhances learners' critical thinking abilities, promotes active engagement in learning, and fosters an environment that encourages the demonstration and development of these skills (Jamiai & El Karfa, 2022). More specifically, teachers should select tasks and activities that foster learners' critical thinking, collaboration, independent learning, and effective communication of their ideas. Such teaching strategies, together with language activities, not only help learners practice the language but also enable them to demonstrate their ability to solve complex tasks similar to real-life situations. According to Pardede (2020), "EFL classrooms, including integrated skills learning, is [sic] the most effective environments for promoting communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity" (p.81). Overall, these approaches create valuable opportunities for learners to develop 21st-century skills.

Regarding assessment, it is an essential component of the teaching and learning process. To ensure its effectiveness, language teachers are advised to adopt 21st-century assessment practices that evaluate both core academic contents and 21st-century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2002). In other words, language teachers should focus on language proficiency and the performance of 21st-century skills. To this, big issues for language teachers lie in the "lack of comprehensive understanding of the nature and development of the skills, about their multidimensionality, and about how to partition variance in behaviour that is attributable to knowledge, or attributable to skill" (Care & Kim, 2018, pp.22-23). Assessing these skills can also be challenging in the context of Burundi. Some of the particular challenges include large class sizes, insufficient tools for teaching and assessing 21st-century skills, and teachers' limited financial means to buy or create their own teaching materials. Nonetheless, teachers play key roles in implementing new approaches to learning (Anagün, 2018). Language teachers must fulfill their responsibilities by selecting and adapting pedagogical practices suitable for the learners' learning environments. Additionally, they should choose and implement language activities that promote classroom interaction, thereby boosting learners' 21st-century learning and innovation skills.

Given the scope of the present study, the focus is placed on learning and innovation skills. The framework below synthesizes relevant theoretical perspectives on the development of these skills and outlines the constructs measured in the questionnaire. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study. Teachers' perceptions constitute the central phenomenon under investigation. These perceptions are explored through knowledge and interest, including current classroom practices. The theme of knowledge and interest captures what teachers know about these skills and how they interpret their importance in the educational context. The second theme, current classroom practices, reflects how teachers implement learning and innovation skills in their daily

instructional activities. The promotion of learning and innovation skills is operationalized through critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. Overall, the diagram provides a structured representation of the key themes guiding data collection, analysis, and interpretation in the study.

Figure 1  
Conceptual framework



## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

This study employed a quantitative approach, adopting a survey research design, as teachers' perceptions of promoting 21st-century learning and innovation skills were measured using a structured questionnaire and analyzed descriptively.

### Population and sample

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the provincial and communal directorates of education in which the schools are located, namely the Communal Directorates of Education (CDE) of Ntahangwa (West of Burundi) and Kayanza (North of Burundi). With this technique, the researcher uses his/her own judgment or common sense regarding the participants from whom information is to be collected (Amin, 2005). The choice of two communal directorates of education in different geographical areas was mostly motivated by one single reason. Nowadays, networking is one of the strategies used in Burundi post-basic schools to ensure that teachers of the same subject or discipline collaborate, share, and update knowledge about their daily teaching practices or any other academic or scientific information related to their teaching profession. Thus, the researchers believed that participants in the study could be teachers in post-basic schools from different locations, which would ensure a collection of varied and rich information about the phenomenon under

study. The Communal Directorates of Education of Ntahangwa and Kayanza, respectively, count 30 and 8 post-basic schools. The study targeted all the post-basic schools offering the Languages Track. Accordingly, 15 schools were selected in Ntahangwa and six in Kayanza, yielding a total of 21 schools. The selected teachers taught at Class Level 2, and one teacher was chosen from each school. All 21 English language teachers from the selected schools were invited to participate in the survey; however, only 17 teachers returned completed questionnaires. Detailed information regarding the respondents is presented in the first paragraph of the Findings section. The final sample, therefore, comprised 17 English language teachers, including five females and 12 males. In Burundi, qualification as an English teacher at the post-basic level requires a university educational background; consequently, all participants held either a bachelor's or a master's degree. Participants' age and teaching experience were not considered in the present study, as these variables were not assumed to influence the phenomenon under investigation.

### **Research instrument**

This study used a Likert scale questionnaire to collect data from English language teachers. The questionnaire was intended to explore the teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and interest in promoting learners' 21st-century learning and innovation skills. To ensure methodological rigor and comparability with previous research, the study instrument was adapted from questionnaires developed by Ravitz (2014) and Kelley et al. (2019). The original instruments served as a foundation for the study questionnaire, with modifications made to suit the context of the study. These adaptations primarily involved the removal of items that were not directly aligned with the research question.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted largely of closed-ended items. Closed-ended questions are advantageous because "they elicit specific responses which are easy to analyse; all respondents consider the same universe of content; are economical in terms of time since they take little of the respondent's time and that of the researcher in administering and analysing them." (Amin, 2005) Amin's views guided the researcher while elaborating the questionnaire. Therefore, the researcher designed a set of questions for each of the four domains that fall under learning and innovation skills. Each respondent was asked to choose the response that best describes her/his reaction to each statement under each section.

### **Questionnaire Validity and Reliability**

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section, entitled "Teachers' knowledge of and interest in 21st-century learning and innovation skills," aimed to determine whether English language teachers possess knowledge of these skills. It also examined the extent to which they are interested in integrating them into their daily teaching practices, thereby facilitating learners' acquisition of these competencies. The second section, entitled "Teachers' current classroom practices," sought to investigate which of the proposed activities teachers use to support learners in developing learning and innovation skills. To ensure the questionnaire's consistency, validity, readability, and comprehensiveness, the researcher first gave it to other researchers in the field for comments. Their feedback allowed the researcher to design the near-final version. Second, the questionnaire was administered to three English teachers outside the research area. These respondents share the same characteristics as those in the sampled population: they are English teachers at the post-basic education level, especially at Level 2. The intention was to ensure they understood the items and replied accurately to them. Their feedback enabled the researcher to correct some

mistakes, restructure some statements, and design the final version that was administered to the sampled population.

### Procedure

First, the researchers asked for a research permit from the Provincial Directors of Education of Bujumbura Municipality and Kayanza to visit the schools that host the Languages Track. Second, the researcher contacted the hierarchical administration in education from the commune to the school level to inform them about the research activity. The principals of the schools helped, in turn, to contact the English teachers who had to answer the questionnaire.

### Data collection

The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale to measure, analyse, and compare teachers' responses. Two types of response options were employed. The first category includes not really, to a minor extent, to a moderate extent, to a great extent, to a very great extent. The second includes almost never, a few times a term, 1-3 times per month, 1-3 times per week, almost daily. The chart below indicates the response options rating.

Table 1  
Rate of response options

Response options		
Category I	Category II	Numerical value
Not really	Almost never	1
To a minor extent	A few times a term	2
To a moderate extent	1-3 times per month	3
To a great extent	1-3 times per week	4
To a very great extent	Almost daily	5

### Data analysis

Given that the purpose of the study was to describe EFL teachers' perceptions of promoting 21st-century learning and innovation skills, data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and 95% confidence intervals (CI). Data cleaning was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 22), and statistical analyses were performed using R software (Version 4.1.2). Then, the findings were analyzed thematically.

### Ethical considerations

Adhering to ethical standards is essential to protect the researchers and the participants. This study complied with principles of honesty and integrity in the collection, analysis, and reporting of the data. Before accessing the research site and target population, the researchers obtained a research permit from the University of Burundi through its Research Directorate. This permit was subsequently submitted to the relevant provincial directorates of education to obtain their authorization. Thereafter, visits were conducted to the target schools to establish contact with the school principals and potential participants. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly within the Burundian context. To ensure anonymity, participants were instructed not to write their names on the questionnaires, thereby maintaining confidentiality.

The researchers adhered to established scientific research procedures to ensure the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

### FINDINGS

The researcher distributed a questionnaire to 21 EFL teachers. However, 17 respondents (80.9%) returned the completed questionnaire. The reasons are that some respondents outright refused to answer, despite receiving the questionnaire and agreeing to respond; others claimed to have answered the questionnaire and promised to return it, but ultimately failed to do so. The researcher was even given multiple appointments to collect the questionnaires, but these were not honored. The researcher decided to analyze the available questionnaires. It is important to note that among the returned questionnaires, some statements were left unanswered by the respondents. Therefore, to maintain the sample size and reduce bias, missing data were estimated and replaced. Consequently, the results of the statistical analysis are presented thematically.

### Teachers' perceptions of their knowledge of and interest in 21st-century learning and innovation skills

Under this rubric, informants (English teachers) were asked to reveal the extent to which they agreed with given statements (Figure 2 below), and the question was twofold. On one hand, it sought to investigate whether English teachers possess knowledge about the 21st-century learning and innovation skills. On the other hand, it examined the extent to which teachers integrate these skills into their daily pedagogical practices, thereby encouraging learners to develop them. Therefore, the respondents had to choose among the following options for each statement: not really, to a minor extent, to a moderate extent, to a great extent, to a very great extent. As indicated above (Table 1 in this work), a 1-5 scale was used to collect scores of the respondents' answers. The bar chart below shows the mean score of the respondents' answers to each of the statements.

Figure 2  
Teachers' Knowledge About and Interest in 21st-Century Learning and Innovation Skills

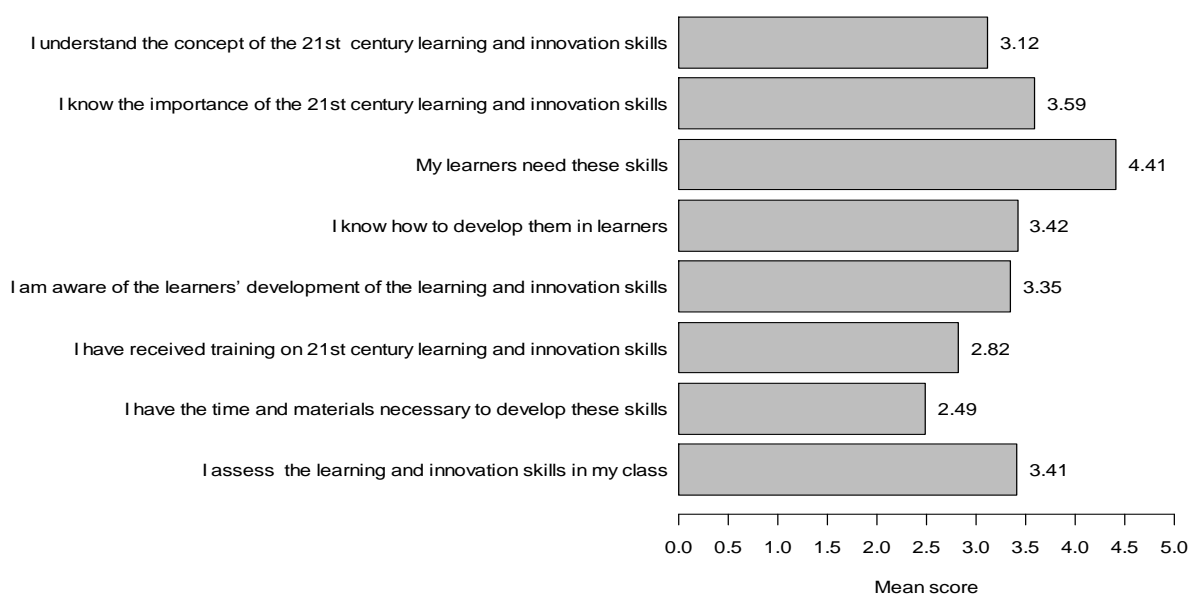


Figure 2 above shows that English teachers agreed, to a great extent (mean score: 4.41, 95% CI: 3.99-4.82), that learners need 21st-century learning and innovation skills. However, regarding their knowledge of the concept of 21st-century learning and innovation skills and their interest in developing and assessing these skills, the respondents agreed to a moderate extent, with a mean score ranging from 3.12 (95% CI: 2.68-3.56) to 3.59 (95% CI: 3.04-4.14). Findings indicate that the same teachers reported, to a limited extent, that they were trained in 21st-century learning and innovation skills and had the time and materials necessary to develop these skills. The corresponding mean score falls within the range of 2.49 (95% CI: 1.93-3.04) to 2.82 (95% CI: 2.19-3.46). Overall, teachers' perceptions regarding their knowledge of 21st-century learning and innovation skills, as well as their interest in promoting these skills, are moderately positive. This may be primarily attributed to their low level of agreement (mean score: 2.82) regarding having been trained in such skills.

**Teachers' perceptions of current classroom practices**

Questions under this theme sought to investigate which of the suggested activities English teachers use to help learners develop learning and innovation skills. Respondents had to choose from the following options: almost never, a few times a term, 1-3 times per month, almost daily. The results for each component of the learning and innovation skills are displayed in charts.

Figure 3  
Perceptions of Critical Thinking Skills

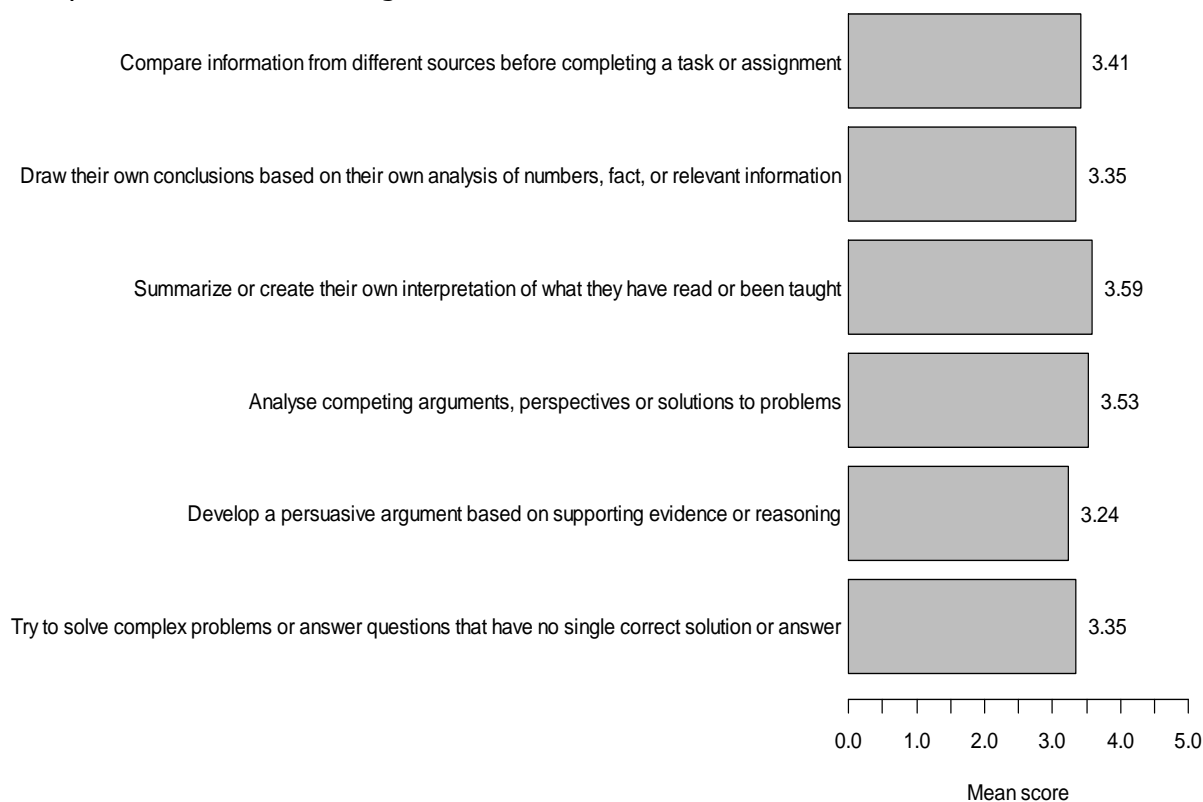


Figure 3 shows that English teachers use activities that develop learners' critical thinking skills to a moderate extent, with a mean score ranging from 3.24 (95% CI: 2.47-4.00) to 3.59 (95% CI: 2.98-4.19). The mean score shows that the teachers' perceptions are moderately positive.

Figure 4  
Perceptions on Collaboration Skills

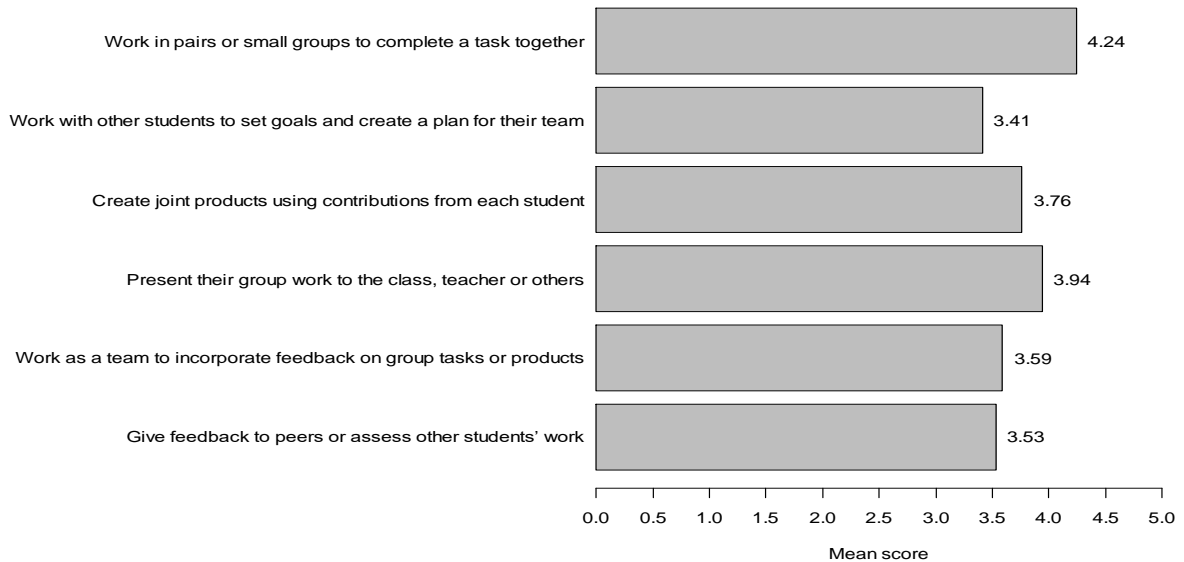


Figure 4 indicates that the highest mean score, 4.24 (95% CI: 3.70-4.77), is for working in pairs or small groups to complete a task together. The remaining practices have a mean score that ranges from 3.41 (95% CI: 2.60-4.23) to 3.94 (95% CI: 3.30-4.58). These results indicate that English teachers primarily involve learners in classroom activities that require group work. Most of the proposed practices are implemented at a moderate level, suggesting that teachers hold moderately positive perceptions of collaborative skills.

Figure 5  
Perceptions of communication skills

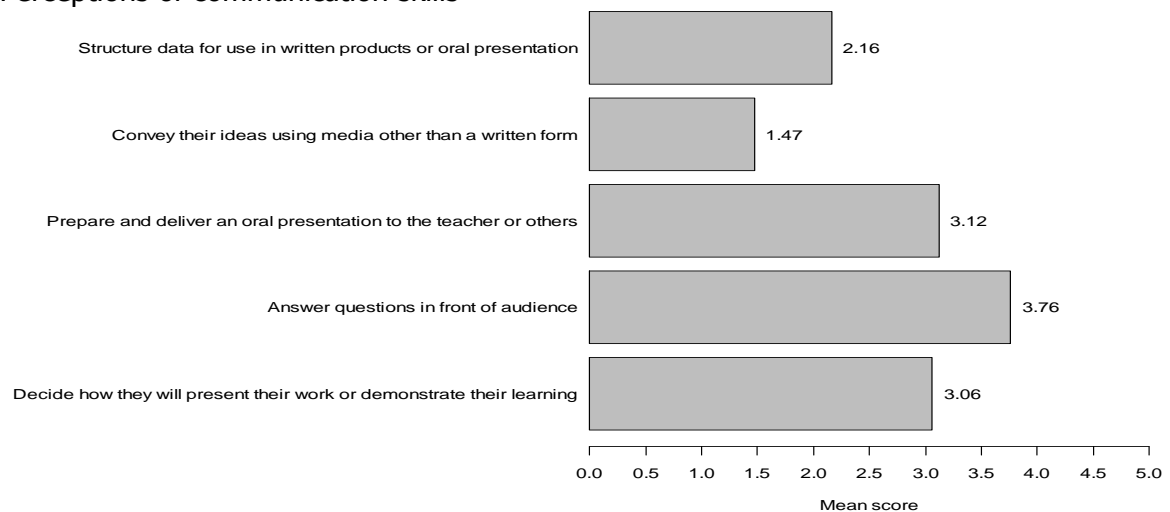


Figure 5 shows that three of the five given practices favorable to the learning of communication skills have a mean score ranging from 3.06 (95% CI: 2.28-3.84) to 3.76 (95% CI: 3.03-4.50), suggesting moderate positive perceptions among English teachers. The mean score of the remaining proposed practices ranges from 1.47 (95% CI: 1.06-1.88) to 2.16 (95% CI: 1.32-3.01), indicating that these practices are regarded as less important.

Figure 5  
Perceptions of creativity and innovation skills

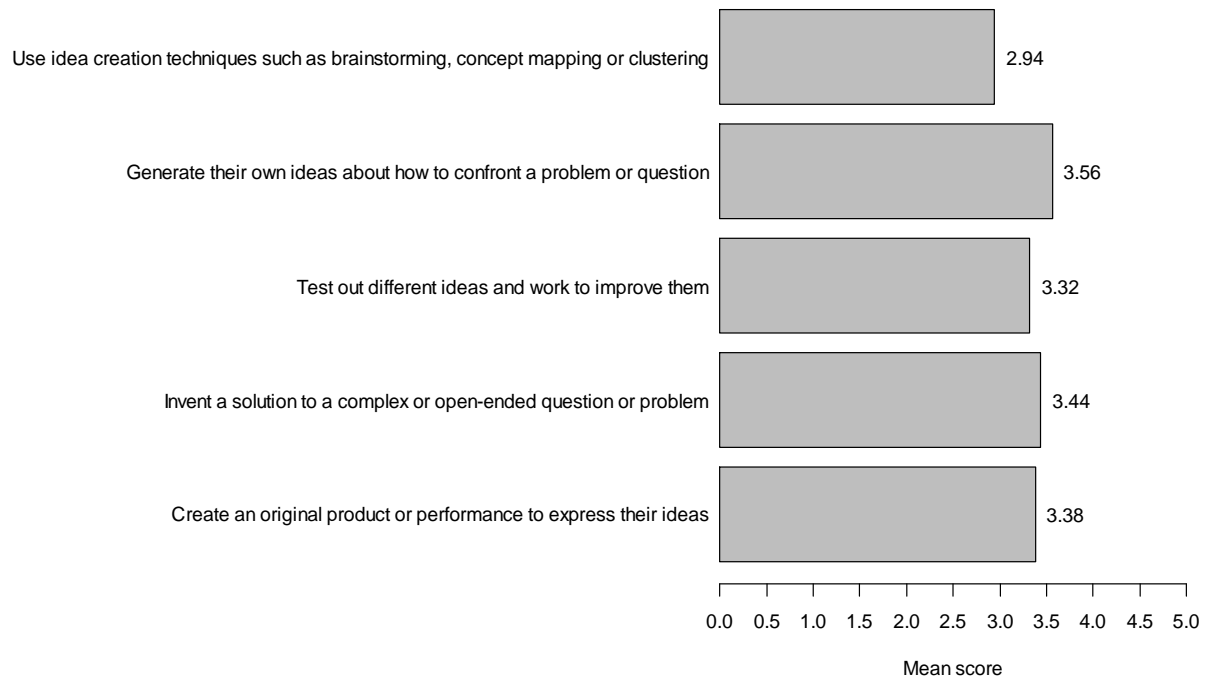


Figure 5 illustrates that four of the five suggested practices received a mean score ranging from 3.32 (95% CI: 2.54-4.10) to 3.56 (95% CI: 2.84-4.29). It indicates that teachers use these classroom practices to a moderate extent to foster learners' creativity and innovation skills. Similarly, teachers engage learners in the 'use of idea-creation techniques such as brainstorming, concept mapping, or clustering'; however, this practice is given little emphasis, with a mean score of 2.94 (95% CI: 2.15-3.73). Overall, teachers hold moderate perceptions of creativity and innovation skills for this component.

## DISCUSSION

This study sought to answer the question: "What are English language teachers' perceptions regarding the integration of 21st-century learning and innovation skills in their teaching practices?" The findings showed that, though English teachers acknowledge the need to promote 21st-century learning and innovation skills, their level of knowledge of and interest in these skills is described as moderate. This was emphasized when they agreed to a minor extent that they had been trained in the 21st-century skills (Graph 1, Mean = 2.282). Although English teachers for post-basic schools in general, and for the Languages track in particular, received induction about the Pedagogy of Integration, the findings revealed that they possess little knowledge about these skills in demand, which may also jeopardize the development of such skills in learners.

Concerning the teachers' perceptions on current classroom practices, it was found that they generally pay attention to critical thinking skills in their daily teaching practices, but the emphasis on such skills is not as high as expected (Graph 2). It follows that the teachers are unconscious of the importance of the 21st-century skills. However, regularly engaging learners in language activities that are designed to develop their thinking skills is essential for effective learning. They provide learners with greater opportunities to think critically, discuss ideas, and express themselves. Furthermore, they also activate their general knowledge and that of the English language. This aligns with the argument that learners should be able to employ creative and critical thinking when using the language (Kabilan, 2000, cited in Tuzlukova et al., 2018).

Regarding collaboration skills, the highest mean score is 4.24, indicating that English teachers regularly use instructional practices that require group work. Although other classroom practices aimed at developing these skills are rated at a moderate level (Graph 3), the findings suggest that teachers deliberately engage learners in language activities that promote individual participation and facilitate peer feedback on group tasks or outputs. This may be attributed to the requirement for English teachers in Burundi's post-basic schools to implement the Pedagogy of Integration (PI), an approach that strongly promotes learner-centeredness. This approach primarily seeks to coordinate the learned knowledge and skills at the end of an entire program of study (Roegiers, 2010). Therefore, teachers are advised to select and implement daily language activities that encourage learners to develop collaborative skills.

As to communication skills, the findings indicate that the English teachers surveyed hold moderate positive perceptions of their integration in classroom practice. For instance, instructional practices that require learners to convey their ideas through media and to structure information for written products or oral presentations received the lowest mean score (1.47). However, these practices are essential in the language learning process because they familiarize learners with organizing their ideas and conveying them in various forms. Two reasons may account for the non-use of such practices. On the one hand, this suggests that some teachers do not supplement existing materials with additional activities that help learners organize and present information using charts, tables, or graphs. On the other hand, the scarcity of resources may prevent teachers from engaging learners in such activities. For example, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) tools (telephones, laptops, smartphones) in language classrooms is prohibited in Burundi's secondary schools, except in programs that provide technology-focused training. However, research consistently shows that integrating ICT into EFL classrooms can make learning more engaging and effective (Monib, 2023).

In addition to the practices proposed in the questionnaire, one respondent suggested the need for an appropriate use of body language, such as facial expressions or body gestures, to convey information and support reliance on communication strategies, which may avoid communication breakdowns or overcome communication problems. Paralinguistic features are a part of non-verbal communication; they therefore deserve due attention in the teaching and learning process. They play an important role in conveying more meaning than what single words can convey. Therefore, teachers should train learners to use these strategies effectively to ensure successful communication, as students' willingness to communicate in the classroom is likely to influence the successful implementation of communication skills (Monib, 2023).

The findings related to creativity and innovation skills indicate that, of the five suggested practices (Graph 5), four are employed to a moderate extent. This suggests that daily teaching practices provide limited opportunities for learners to engage in creativity and innovation. Some of the reasons may be the large number of learners typically found in many classrooms, especially in the Languages Track. This is likely to limit the number of writing or speaking tasks that teachers can use to develop learners' creativity and innovation skills. However, failing to provide such activities contradicts contemporary 21st-century educational practices, which aim to prepare students, workers, and citizens to address multifaceted problems by using their creativity to draw on diverse sources of ideas (Silva, 2008). Another reason may be learners' lower linguistic proficiency, which can make some teachers reluctant to assign creative tasks, for fear of burdensome correction and feedback. It therefore jeopardizes the effective implementation of the Pedagogy of Integration, even though this approach is primarily intended to help learners integrate knowledge and skills to solve complex tasks using their cognitive abilities.

The findings revealed that English language teachers rated collaboration skills higher than all other skills, followed by critical thinking skills. Creativity and innovation skills, as well as communication skills, ranked next. These results suggest that teachers perceive classroom activities that promote the development of collaboration skills as more important than those targeting other competencies. The frequent use of individual and group work activities may explain why critical thinking skills were also highly rated.

Despite the differences observed in the findings, the goal of 21st-century language pedagogy is to enable teachers to develop not only learners' linguistic skills but also competencies and attitudes necessary to meet the demands of contemporary living and working environments. To achieve this goal, teachers must demonstrate a clear understanding of such pedagogy and a readiness to prepare learners to become effective communicators, collaborators, critical thinkers, problem solvers, and innovators.

Overall, the promotion of 21st-century learning and innovation skills in Burundi's EFL context largely depends on teachers' awareness of and commitment to these competencies. In this regard, the teachers' moderately positive perceptions may partly account for the limited development of learners' skills and competencies required for success in the 21st-century world.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study investigated the perceptions that EFL teachers in post-basic schools in Burundi hold regarding the promotion of 21st-century learning and innovation skills. It was based on the assumption that English teachers in the Languages Track in Burundi at the post-basic education level are trained in the teaching and assessment of 21st-century skills and therefore hold positive perceptions toward promoting these skills. The findings revealed that teachers' overall perceptions of promoting the 21st-century learning and innovation skills were moderately positive, suggesting a relatively low level of interest in teaching and assessing these skills. An implication may be their negative impact on the quality of language education expected to enable learners to meet the demands of 21st-century society and the workplace.

This study was limited to data from English teachers, which does not provide detailed information about the perceptions of curriculum developers and language learners regarding the promotion of 21st-century learning and innovation skills. Such information would enable more concrete conclusions about the quality of teaching and learning in Burundi's EFL

context. This limitation opens avenues for further research. One possible direction is to involve curriculum designers and language learners to gain comprehensive insights into the perceptions of key stakeholders in English language education. Another direction is to conduct research in actual EFL classrooms to examine current pedagogical practices and their potential to develop learners' 21st-century learning and innovation skills.

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations can be made for English teachers in Burundi's post-basic schools, as well as for members of the bureau responsible for in-service pedagogical training. From the research, language teachers acknowledged the importance of learning and innovation skills. It follows that these teachers should place a particular emphasis on developing learners' learning and innovation skills in the teaching and learning process. As part of their professional development, language teachers should include, among other activities, research on approaches to teaching and assessing these skills. This would equip them with prior knowledge, skills, and competencies to effectively support learners. In the short term, the Bureau responsible for pedagogical training for post-basic education language teachers should incorporate in-service training that promotes the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for fostering learners' 21st-century learning and innovation skills.

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