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Assessing the 21st Century Learning Skills among Cambodian Children: A Comparison of the Learning Skill Levels of Primary School Students of State and Muslim Religious Schools

Sambo Ke* and Piseth Neak

Faculty of Education, Royal University of Phnom Penh,
Phnom Penh, 120101-121407, Cambodia

**Corresponding author's e-mail: ke.sambo@rupp.edu.kh*

Abstract This research aimed to mainly compare the levels of learning skills of the 21st-century in learning languages of children from Muslim and state schools in the Cambodian context. A causal-comparative design was employed to respond to the main research objective. Researchers invited five hundred ninety-two primary school students learning Khmer and Arabic to fill in the questionnaires about 21st-century learning skills. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was the statistical tool used to compare the levels of the student's language learning skills in the 21st century among these two school communities. As a result of the statistical comparative levels ($p<0.05$) of each learning skill, critical thinking (0.07) and communication (0.65) skills were not significantly different. At the same time, collaboration (0.00), creativity (0.00), personal competence (0.02), and problem-solving (0.00) were observably different among these two school types. The implication of this study was the development of learning facilitation to enhance the students' learning skills discussed in line with Cambodian classroom contexts.

Keywords The 21st century learning skills; Muslim religious schools; State schools; Primary school education; Cambodian children

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Introduction

As a dimensional construct, learning skills of the 21st century have been defined variously due to the purposes of each study. The 4C (critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity) were known as the dimensions of learning skills of the 21st century. Critical thinking is the logical evaluation of information, ideas, and arguments (Lai, 2011). More specifically, critical thinking requires carefully and proactivel examining evidence, concepts, and phenomena to form well-informed judgments and sound logic. It should go beyond accepting information at face value and instead look at the issues through various challenging questions (Beyer, 1995). However, critical thinking requires evaluation, inferences, analysis, problem-solving, reflection, and open-mindedness (Wechsler et al., 2018). Norman (1988) defines problem-solving as the ability to handle problems constructively and effectively, both personally and socially. In addition, problem-solving is one part of self-awareness as problem-solving helps to control and alleviate side-effects of facing issues. According to Boland and Tenkasi (1995), learners should develop successful communication and problem-solving skills to have a better understanding of authentication issues. Bosworth (1994) defines collaboration as a unique ability and attitude to work together to attain a common goal (Bosworth, 1994). Moreover, successful collaboration will lead to better communication, teamwork, innovation, and problem- solving. Collaboration is associated with teamwork, cooperation, and leadership scales (Vance & Smith, 2019). Collaboration competence accelerates the significance of the trend toward team-based work in the organization. Communication is a part of relationship management and is associated with teamwork and collaboration (Maguire & Pitceathly, 2002). Communication refers to competencies that enable everyone to effectively convey and exchange information, thoughts, and ideas with others. Communication is essential for personal and professional settings and contributes to building relationships, resolving conflicts, and fostering understanding (McKay et al., 2009). Communication can be defined as the ability to send clear and convincing messages. Communication has some components, such as verbal and nonverbal communication, active listening, empathy, adaptability, clarity and conciseness, emotional intelligence, feedback, and constructive criticism (Jacobson, 1999; Burgoon & Bacue, 2003). Fasko (2001) defines creativity as the ability to produce original ideas, think outside the box, and solve problems in innovative ways. Creativity involves connecting and combining diverse concepts, perspectives, and experiences to novel solutions. In addition, creativity could promote significant changes in one organization (Amabile, 1996). Some components of creativity include flexibility, originality, demonstration, divergent thinking, convergent thinking, problem framing, curiosity, and resilience (Amabile, 1996). According to Williams (1994), personal competence has three dimensions: decision-making, self-control, and self-regulation skills. However, previous studies articulated that personal competence is associated with cognitive and behavioral self-management strategies (Labouvie et al., 1990).

Generally, the 21st-century learning skills among children were relatively low (Buckle, 2022). Consequently, low levels of learning skills predicted negative impacts later, such as the graduates' unsatisfied learning skill levels (Stehle & Peters-Burton, 2019), adults' fewer chances of being employed with high wages, working incompetent, and less working productivity (Care et al., 2018). The unemployment rate among Cambodian graduates, 7.7 % (Sam, 2018), is suspiciously seen because of having inadequate skills in the 21st century. Therefore, insufficient learning skills among younger students must be addressed initially before declining its effects. However, the development of competencies consumes time (Dolmans et al., 2010), practical training approaches (Gorard & See, 2013), and systematically ordered techniques (Higgins & Katsipataki, 2015). Learning context and culture that shape the teaching and learning designs might be distal factors determining students' skills (Turhan & Demirci, 2021). Hence, examining the 21st-century learning skills might contribute to understanding the relative influential factors of various learning environments in a specific time and space.

The Cambodian policy on inclusive education (MoEYS, 2018) emphasizes the need to ensure learning services and 21st-century skills for both majority and minority groups of children. However, the extent to which the implementation to increase learning skills in the 21st century still needs to be revealed through scientific research. Islamic education group, known as the minority in Cambodia, is concerned with developing learning and higher-ordered thinking skills due to its conventional learning design (Sumardi et al., 2020) and religious education form (Uyuni & Adnan, 2020). Previous related studies that assessed the learning skills in Islamic contexts were limited to a single thinking skill, such as critical thinking and higher-order thinking among primary school students (e.g., Kosasih, 2022); however, the other dimensions of the 21st-century learning skills have not studied among these particular students. Moreover, researchers have not empirically explained how teaching and learning environmental designs cause varied levels in the other learning skills of primary school students, except for thinking skills. Research studies about learning skill assessment were conducted previously (e.g., Boyaci & Atalay, 2016); however, comparing the learning levels in different contexts was not focused, especially in the domain specific to language learning. For this reason, the World Bank, 2012 called for scientific research on the association between contextual differences and cultivating 21st-century learning skills among majority and minority students. To address the limited understandings of the causal relationship between the learning context and learning skills, this study extensively assessed the levels of various components of learning skills and viewed how varies in each learning skill was influenced by the existing learning environments and practices in the specific context of early adolescent students and language learning subjects. In addition to using its assessment result to enhance students' learning skills, this study would contribute to the existing knowledge by pinpointing how different classroom practices effect the various learning skills proposed in this study.

Context and reviewing of literature

Theories related to the development of learning

Integrating 21st-century skills into learning has been designed thoroughly to approach the higher levels of expected learning outcomes ranging from application and analyses to evaluation and creation. In this way, acquiring learning skills of the 21st century is paralleled with achieving complex learning outcomes. The level of cognitive ability, knowledge acquisition, and learning outcome are linked together. For instance, students' cognitive learning ability in creativity may stem from their creative skills, which align with the development of their metacognitive knowledge (Porras et al., 1981). Enhancement of skill performance may depend heavily on instructional designs and learning facilitation that allow learners to practice and apply the learned concepts. Basic learning theories have been developed to provide a framework for investigating the hierarchical levels of skills involved in student learning processes. They also revealed the factors associated with skills improvement and, in turn, affect student learning. Scholars have discussed the two core philosophical approaches of learning that are anchored on Ideas or Experience for many decades. These aspects brought many different theoretical learning perspectives, such as Idealism, Empiricism, Behaviorism, Cognitivism, Constructivism, and Social Constructivism (O'Neil & Moore, 2005). The perspective of these theories shapes different learning realities and pedagogical approaches. Religious educational forms, which emphasize memorizing and understanding the Bible and follow guided religious philosophies, might draw from the core idea of idealism, which emphasizes learning through principles before engaging in practices and laboratory work. These concepts contradict Empiricism, which states that learning is rooted in experience in the real world and active learning. This theory believes that senses initially create knowledge in an individual's mind. Thus, learning as a cycling process begins with concrete experience and moves to the reflective observation that creates abstract conceptualization to be tested experimentally (Kolb, 1984). Under this perspective, experiential learning activities allow learners to apply various learning styles and strategies to ensure their learning performance. They are anchored

in the experiment to understand learning approaches without considering motivations or mental processes. Behaviorists believe in behavioral observation and learning from created conditions stimulus-response mechanisms. Observation of a pattern, repetition, reinforcement, and feedback form learning (Ktistis, 2014). These learning aspects may be popularly applicable to religious learning environments where learners must memorize religious principles accurately and fluently. Cognitivism developed the concept of human thought processes as part of evolving learning theory. Unlike behaviorists who disregard mental activity or motivation, acquisition knowledge is mainly a learning process from sensory memory to long-term memory through a mid-phase of short-term memory (Ktistis, 2014). Behaviorism and cognitivism are likely to focus students thinking and learning development on instructors who design and direct student learning structurally. In contrast, constructivists and later social constructivists revealed that instructors cannot be in charge of student learning due to the belief that students can construct their knowledge. These theoretical perspectives value autonomy and support of learning. They determined the role of teachers as facilitators or mediators in particular learning activities (Vygotsky, 1934). Teachers assist learners in discovering meaning and understanding by themselves. Learning through an accumulation of information is criticized. Thus, knowledge gained varies according to individual learners. We can distinguish constructivism and social constructivism by their focus on individualistic and socialistic focuses, respectively. The components of 21st-century skills are assumed to be the outcomes of the learning approaches developed from these theoretical perspectives. Considering the model of the 21st-century skills of this study, critical thinking, decision-making, personal competence, and creativity are individual-oriented competencies that align with the constructivists. In contrast, collaboration and communication skills are socially oriented competencies under social constructivist perspectives. Cognitive, social, and cultural integration ensures the holistic development of the learners. According to the Zone of Proximal Development Theory (ZPD), effective learning occurs when knowledgeable adults, teachers, peers, and parents provide guidance and support to help low-performing students. The theory posits that learning transforms a student's actual level of development into their potential level of development (Ktistis, 2014). The main model of this study that intends to examine the relationship between learning realities and the level of student's learning skills for the 21st century is fit to the Social Constructivism theoretical perspective, as proposed by Vygotsky (1934), suggests that learners can acquire knowledge and information they cannot achieve independently through social interaction with other. This perspective guided classroom practitioners to design and facilitate cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies, inside and outside classroom interdependent learning activities, supportive learning environments, and self-regulation to produce better self-regulated learning skills and performance (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). The assumption is that the more the learners apply the social constructivist learning approaches, the better the 21st-century skills. Social constructivist learning approaches allow learners to improve their academic skills for the 21st century, such as higher-order thinking and personal, and social skills. To what extent the constructivist learning environments the students applied and the 21st-century skills they possessed among the two learning realities, Muslim religious schools and State schools, are still unknown in the Cambodian context. In terms of learning skill framework, this study used a model extracted from Kelley~~,~~ et al. (2019~~);~~ Fleming and Watts (1980) and Bugen and Hawkins (1981).

Influential factors of the development of the 21st-century learning skills

Factors that contribute to the varied levels of learning skills and their sub-skills have been studied previously on a global scale. In a study conducted by Laar and his colleagues (2020), as an extension of the effects of demographic and socioeconomic dimensions, psychological and social factors significantly determined the alternatives of skills of the 21st century in a digital learning circumstance and identified how individual and social support changes the values of this skill. Beyond

general education, formulation of the 21st-century skill was concerned with undergraduate students (e.g., Chaiyama & Kaewpila, 2022) and pre-service teachers (e.g., Turhan & Demirci, 2021); therefore, curriculum and teaching approaches are necessary bases for the enhancement of this skill. For instance, project-based and problem-based teaching and learning approaches effectively enhanced this skill because students' self-direction and deep learning were exercised (e.g., Rais et al., 2021; Hanan, 2022). Thus, transforming unhelpful educators' mindsets was suggested so traditional education approaches could be updated innovatively (Fuad et al., 2020). Guven and Alpaslan (2022) proved that creative problem-solving as a component of this skill, resulted from interdisciplinary science activities in primary school. They suggested that integrated learning approaches could increase skill levels. Alongside identifying the association of 21st-century learning skills and its factors, Abdullah and colleagues (2022) studied the second-ordered factor analysis and found 8 factors ranked from (1) teacher quality development, (2) educational evaluation, (3) teaching and learning management, (4) learning environment, (5) curriculum, learning media, and technology, (6) budget for education, (7) community cooperation, and (8) volunteer supervision that could enhance the 21st-century–skills in primary school education.

The diversified learning environment that may cover learning and teaching practices and cultural perspectives can make different levels of learning skills for the 21st-century in language learning in different realities of learning among children in Muslim religious schools and state schools in Cambodia. Children must obtain learning skills of the 21st century to enable them to function and cope with real-world problems, and children's acquisition of these skills is greatly influenced by their surrounding learning environment (Rentzou, 2021). The classroom environment needs to be flexible and adaptable; providing flexible and adaptable learning spaces allows children to engage in different learning modalities. Such environments are back to personalized learning, allowing children to pursue their interests, work at their own pace, and take ownership of their learning process (Papanastasiou et al., 2019). Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) suggest that offering various learning opportunities, exposure to different viewpoints, and chances to engage with real-world challenges can help accomplish these learning activities. Student-centered approaches are important to implement in the classroom as they provide students with an effective learning environment that focuses on each child's individual needs, interests, and strengths (Kellett, 2005). As we live in a digital world, the learning environment should incorporate technology effectively. By including technology tools, such as computers, tablets, educational software, and internet resources, children can promote digital literacy, information literacy, and technological proficiency, and these skills are vital for navigating the digital world and adapting to technological advancements (Sahin et al., 2015). Project-based learning activities can affect the levels of children's learning skills in the 21st century, as implementing this type of learning environment enables children to apply the skills in real-world contexts (Bell, 2010). The learning environment should be more creative and innovative to expose the children to creative expression, arts, design thinking, and problem-based learning. Consequently, children can develop their imaginative thinking, originality, and ability to generate novel ideas, as these skills are essential for entrepreneurship, innovation, and addressing complex societal issues (Qian & Clark, 2016).

Khmer-cham education context of Cambodia

The Cambodian educational system has recently to follow its inclusive education principles. As a result, Islamic schools were diversified to include Khmer-cham students in formal education and achieve Education for All (EFA). In addition to those integrative general primary education schools where Khmer and Khmer-Cham students study together, two other types of schools, namely pure Muslim religious schools and Muslim community schools, have offered their education services for Khmer-cham students. Pure Muslim religious schools provide ethical education guided by the Koan

bible, while Muslim community schools serve religious rules, Arabic language, and general education following the state school curriculum (Musharraf & Nabeel, 2015). The learning outcomes of schooling in these two types are to equip the students with general education, which covers literacy, and numeracy, and religious education, which focuses on memorizing the bible and moral ethics. Although a standard primary education curriculum is applied, the lack of trained teacher resources competent in pedagogy has become a big challenge for these typical schools. The right implementation of the curriculum and instructional approaches to gaining acceptable learning skills for the 21st century in these Khmer-cham schools is constantly questioned. In pure religious schools, their curriculum solely focuses on reading Koan and the Muslim religious praying songs/poems. Since 2018, the government has provided 1500 government teachers who are Muslim religious followers to work for Muslim religious schools. However, they usually teach religious education rather than general education. These teaching and learning forms are different from those of state schools containing various subjects like mathematics, Khmer language, applied sciences, social studies, and other life skill subjects (Bredenberg, 2004), and they are far from achieving higher-ordered learning outcomes. The previous related studies did not explain how learning language and moral lessons derived from religious ideology can develop learners' skills in collaboration, creativity, communication, critical thinking, and so on. Muslim community schools generally offer general education, religious education, and language learning, which do not exist in every province of Cambodia. with sponsored by international Muslim communities in Malaysia and other Arab countries. Forty-seven Muslim community schools operate in all provinces except Siem Reap, Preh Vihea, Banteay Meanchey, and Odor Meanchey, where students are enrolled in primary school education in state schools. On the other hand, each class in this type of school has 25 to 40 Grade 6 students. Muslim religious schools are found in each province where Khmer-cham lives. The traditional teaching approach among Muslim education teachers is still a noticeable issue worldwide in the increasingly passive competition for human qualities of the modern era (Komariah & Nihayah, 2023). For instance, most schools in West Africa still use memorizing techniques and textbooks rather than more advanced methods that are now accessible. They chose these ways because they expected that the oral traditions were the best way to revive their historical account and keep it much longer (Lubis et al., 2011). However, these particular surface learning approaches might limit students' creative potential and minimize the possibility of developing the skills they need to live their current lives. The learning environment implementing a specific curriculum and half-modernized teaching approaches, like in state schools, remains a concern to ensure sufficient 21st-century skills, although formal inspections are conducted following the preset teacher training. It becomes even riskier for those Charm community schools where teachers have not been appropriately trained and are likely attached to traditional teaching mindset caused by the mentioned cultural perspectives.

Research question and objective of the study

What are the different and similar learning skills of the 21st century in language learning of early adolescent students from Muslim religious schools and state schools in the Cambodian context?

This study compared the learning skills of the 21st century in language learning of early adolescent students from Muslim religious schools and state schools in the Cambodian context.

Research method

Research design

This research study was a causal-comparative study that mainly examined the dimensions of learning skills of the 21st century in different realities of learning among children from Muslim religious schools and state schools in Cambodia. It was essential to employ a quantitative approach since the researchers planned to assess the levels of each investigated component of children's learning

skills in the 21st century (dependent variables) at different types of community schools (independent variables).

Population and sampling design

Twelve-year-old primary school students will be the population of this study. Additionally, the population was categorized into two groups of school communities: Islamic community schools and state schools. The students from the two categorized schools in Phnom Penh and provinces with Islamic community schools and State schools were usually in each commune of Cambodia while Islamic schools were not. Since the researchers conducted a comparative study, these two types of schools must be located in the same areas to minimize the effects of geographical and living environments on the relation of learning context and competencies. A probability sampling method, a stratified sampling technique, was used to randomize sites and participants in this study. In this way, school sites, including the capital city and the available provinces, were randomly selected through the stratification sampling method. Through this method, twenty schools were selected from a capital city and 05 provincial zones, randomly selected from the 05 provincial regions. 02 schools were from the capital city, and the other 8 schools were from the chosen provinces. Among those, each of the 05 Muslim religious schools and state schools was equally selected through a lucky draw. Lucky draw techniques were used to select provincial and school zones. The researchers utilized a student list to select 60 students from each 10 selected schools randomly. In total, 600 participants were invited to fill in the questionnaire. In reality, 99% of the proposed participants (592 in total, with 257 females) completed it. The number of participants from the two types of schools was likely equal; There were 304 participants (Female= 123) from state schools and 288 participants from Islamic Schools (Female=134). Overall, the number of male participants (332) was slightly higher than that of female participants (257).

Research measure

The key research instruments in this survey focused on the 21st-century learning skills of 12-year-old children. The tool will be designed based on a 21st-century learning skills survey questionnaire developed by various authors. This study partially used the 4C 21st-century skills developed by Kelley and colleagues (2019). It was an instrument designed to measure learning skills of the 21st century among secondary school students. It consisted of 4 dimensions with 30 items. The number of final items was not equal; for instance, 11 items in critical thinking (e.g., justify choices of evaluation criteria), 9 items in collaboration (e.g., follow the rule for team decision-making), 5 items in communication (e.g., organize the information well), and another 5 items in creativity (e.g., elaborate and improve on ideas). Researchers observed the psychological properties of this measure ($\alpha = .878$ to $\alpha = .749$) at optimal levels. In addition, personal competence, measured by confidence in scholastic ability and problem-solving skills that may be useful for academic journeys, the world of work, and lives, was rarely included in assessing the learners' competencies of a specific context. The four-item Confidence Scale on Scholastic Ability developed by Fleming and Watts (1980) was adapted and used to measure students' confidence in their competence. This scale consisted of sub-dimensions such as self-evaluation regarding school assignments and concern toward schoolwork (e.g., When you have to read an essay and understand it for an assignment, how worried or concerned are you?). Moreover, the researchers used a measure of Problem-Solving Skills extracted from one of the sub-dimensions of the Transactional Skills in the Coping Assessment Battery originally developed by Bugen and Hawkins (1981). This was a nine-item scale (e.g., Whenever I have a problem; I know the various alternatives that exist before taking any direct action.) that measures how an individual addresses the problem. Thus, researchers added these variables as extra dimensions to the model to test them statistically. Seven rating scales ranging from strongly disagree to agree strongly were used

to measure the learning skill variables. These questionnaires would be adaptively developed by checking IOC conducted following content and face validity procedures to obtain the rating scores and comments from 5 experts in the field. Researchers translated the produced items into the Cambodian language using a back translation process before piloting them with real participants and launching them for this survey study. The researchers thoroughly conducted the content, face, and construct validity to ensure the instrument was reliable and valid before launching the data gathering. The researchers tried to contextualize the contents of each variable to fit the local language and its meaning. As a result, researchers reduced some items in each variable to fit the Cambodian context. The remaining items were critical thinking (7), communication (4), collaboration (9), creativity (5), problem-solving (4), and personal competence (3).

Data analysis

This research aims to explain the similarities and differences in the existing 21st-century learning skill levels among children attending Muslim religious schools and state schools in the Cambodian context. Therefore, in addition to the descriptive statistics, MANOVA was mainly employed since this study aimed at examining the levels of the six learning skills of the 21st-century skills (outcome variables). They were examined individually as a causal-comparative among the two school groups (independent variables). The researchers assessed the differences and similarities between each pair by checking for significance, and the Mean levels were revealed statistically.

Finding results

The data is normally distributed, with skewness ranging from −0.90 to +0.64 and kurtosis from −1.03 to +1.00, both within optimal ranges. The equality of variance was significant with p-value =.05, meaning there was an unequal variance among Islamic schools and State schools. Therefore, researchers recommended Pillai's test for interpreting the MANOVA output. The test result revealed that different types of schools were significantly different in terms of critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, personal competence, and problem-solving skills (p-value =.00). Learning skills of each component in both school types ranged from M=2.64 to M=2.98 out of 4.00. Among the six learning skills, collaboration and creativity were observably higher than other learning components in state schools (M=3.25, M=3.18) and Muslim schools (M=3.11, M=3.18), respectively. Personal competence and problem-solving levels were lower than other components in state schools (M=2.64, M=2.91) and Muslim schools (M=2.77, M=2.77).

According to the multivariate effects across all 4 dependent variables (collaboration, creativity, personal competence, and problem-solving), the school, whether Islamic State, is significantly different (.00, .00, .02, .00) respectively. In contrast, the 2 dependent variables, critical (thinking (.07) and communication (.65), are not significantly different (see table 1).

Table 1 Summary of MANOVA results across the schools

Learning Skills	MANOVA		Muslim Religious Schools		State Schools	
	P	F-Value	M	SD	M	SD
Critical thinking	0.07	3.34	2.93	0.35	2.98	0.38
Collaboration	0.00	18.68	3.11	0.38	3.25	0.42
Communication	0.65	0.21	3.09	0.41	3.11	0.45
Creativity	0.00	15.34	3.04	0.43	3.18	0.40
Personal Competence	0.02	5.13	2.77	0.66	2.64	0.73
Problem-solving	0.00	3.34	2.77	0.56	2.91	0.48

N=592, P<0.05

Discussion and conclusion

Discussion

In general, Cambodian primary school students are chasing behind the modern language learning situations that bring the students to the stages of language application, the higher levels in the Bloom Taxonomy (Chhinh & Tabata, 2003) since the students' overall levels of learning skills in the six dimensions were just above the average (M=2.98; Max=4.00). The existing learning skill levels may reflect classroom activities dominated by surface learning techniques and focused on cultivating learning outcomes at the level of understanding key concepts, with occasional practices (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

The strengths in collaborative learning skills (M=3.25; Max=4.00) among these students may be relevant and linked to collective cultural patterns (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227) that their positive attitudes have been daily shaped in the family and having been influenced by the relatedness with the sense of belongingness to work in the group and produce group academic achievement, the students in this context engage in performing academic tasks to succeed together (Conesa et al., 2022, p. 3). As stated by Stevens and Slavin (1995) in a study on collaborative behaviors among primary school students, this sense made them maximize their active academic ownership behaviors and teamwork spirits by respecting other people's perspectives, providing equal values to group members, offering and seeking help, collaborating to review after having constructive feedback, forming groups to make decisions, and so on (Kelley et al., 2019). These collective learning attributes strengthen individual collaboration skills (Han et al. 2023).

The weaknesses in personal competence among Cambodian primary school students were the representatives of limitation of confidence and beliefs of ability in performing language-related skills (Fleming & Watts, 1980). The language-skill belief deficiency could result from low self-efficacious personality traits influenced by culture (Klassen, 2004, p. 207) and the shared mindset of older people who perceive highly efficacious expression as an overt proud manner leading to negative consequences. As a Khmer metaphor, they infer self-efficacy to a crop of rice plants in which the rising position is an unproductive seed while the bending down position is the form of a full or productive seed. These young students may not be confident enough to express their responses to the asked questions or perform the given academic tasks. However, they know the answers or can accomplish them. As a result of this attitude, primary school students seem to be concerned about reading the articles for comprehension, worrying about convincing the teachers with their written essays and expressing ideas to represent their thoughts accurately in written and spoken forms (Fleming & Watts, 1980). Furthermore, lower personal competency levels can be caused by classroom situations that make the students feel that it is shameful or scary to make mistakes and disappoint the teacher when accuracy and fluency are not provided in performing the language tasks. These attributes were similar to those of grade 5th students learning writing (Pajares & Valiante, 2017). Thus, designing appropriate learning environments that allow the students to make mistakes and improve themselves from those mistakes is important to partially address these unhelpful to address these unhelpful students' attitudes partially.

The nature of the language learning subject (Renau, 2016) and teachers' teaching innovation (Nurutdinova, et al., 2016) could be the reasons for cultivating similar levels of students' critical thinking among these two groups. The basic input (reading and listening) and output (speaking and writing) skills (Turgunnova & Abdurahimovna, 2023) offered in both learning contexts are very similar and depend heavily on the nature of language learning subjects, which focus more on practices and drills. Pakpahan et al. (2021) anchored the learning outcomes of the language classes on reading texts and completing on-the-line questions, which might not extend the students' cognitive ability to higher-order thinking levels as outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy. Similarly, these language learning

classes used textbook-based learning methods, memorization, and simple assigned tasks as tools to develop students' cognitive skills. Because of their limited pedagogy skills, the teachers in both schools may perceive that language learning skills are not necessarily critical and that younger students should be fit to just those levels (Wilia, 2012). Mansurovna et al. (2021) emphasized the need to improve communication skills through thorough techniques, encouraging interaction among peers both inside and outside the classroom. The communication skills in these learning contexts were limited to organizing the given and received information, and interaction among group members to accomplish the assigned tasks to meet the deadline (Kusmiarti, et al., 2020) were conducted similarly among these two types of schools. Furthermore, they are indifferent because the students have similar opportunities, online tools, and classroom conditions to communicate with peers and teachers inside and partly outside the classroom. However, students' cognitive and communicative skills, according to Tsoupikova, et al. (2019), should be developed further than those practiced in that contexts.

The research findings showed that the children in state schools tended to have higher levels of collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving skills than those from Muslim religious schools, except for personal competence. Practices of teaching and learning methods derived from various theoretical perspectives (e.g. constructivist and social constructivist) were the antecedents of skills improvement (Amineh & Asl, 2015). They would be used to discuss the differences between those skills among the two learning realities (Bunlay et al., 2010).

The result showed that collaboration levels of students at state schools are significantly higher than those of Muslim schools. For instance, collaborative learning and help-seeking, activities are important to determine the development of students' collaboration skill levels (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Supportive, collaborative and cooperative learning methods, as well as the influential paradigms of constructivist and social constructivist points of view, influence student learning (Kim, 2012). Working as a group or in pairs, sharing individual and group ideas via digital applications (e.g., Telegram or Messenger), and seeking help from one another were often observed in state schools. Muslim schools commonly practiced individual learning activities as part of learner-centered methods. The students were encouraged to think as doing a task or before answering a question. These practices revealed the necessity of applying the learner-centered learning method. However, maximizing socially engaged learning methods conducted by state schools is even more important. Sumardi et al. (2020) consistently argue that the learner-centered method is generally more effective than the teacher-centered method when applied correctly and adaptively to various classes and students' situations and it is more on individually than socially developed learning patterns (O'Neil & Moore, 2005).

Deep versus surface learning strategies determine the levels of creativity (Vong & Kaewurai, 2017). The ability of teachers who experience teaching with high pedagogical skills is salient to designing and facilitating deep learning projects (Nurutdinova, et al., 2016). In Cambodia, lacking skillful teachers is a major concern, especially in Muslim schools. Most teachers are pedagogically untrained. The teachers of language classes at Muslim schools use the textbooks as an essential guide and follow all the points in the textbook. Remarkably, textbooks used in language classes in Muslim schools are more on the religious-related contents of Koan. As a result, the students at Muslim schools observably apply more surface learning strategies as directed by their teachers or strategic learning strategies to adapt to the requirements of the classes but less on deep learning strategies, which affect the underdevelopment of the student's creativity (Aytaç & Kula, 2020; Sumardi, et al., 2020). Although both school groups commonly use textbook-based teaching techniques, state school textbook's structure lessons and exercises in a way that allows teachers to modify the introduced lesson concepts. The state school teachers offered to widen the path for the students to get out of the box and reinforced them to apply the insights gained from the lessons to other similar situations, elaborated to improve the learned ideas and searched for relevant information from various sources (Nurutdinova et al., 2016).

The state schools' problem-solving skill levels are higher than those of the Muslim schools, which reflects the practicality of the right teaching and learning tasks. Bonotto and Santo (2015) suggest that teachers can provide practices for solving problems through assignments and assessment forms. At the state schools, these forms are conducted and checked regularly in every language session through the learning process phases, from reviewing the completed homework in phase 2, introducing new lesson concepts in phase 3, and reviewing and strengthening knowledge in phase 4. The practices of learning activities at the state schools that focused on eliciting and introducing problems, followed by students' responses and teachers' feedback during each session, activated students' critical thinking skills in problem-solving (Pratiwi et al., 2019). Getting through these thinking and deep learning processes, the students have to locate sources of information for making decisions and anticipate the various solutions and their outcomes (Bugen & Hawkins, 1981). As discussed in a study by Diana, et al. (2016) on deep and surface learning in problem-based learning, the lower problem-solving skills of students in Muslim schools may be caused by classroom learning practices that maximize memorization and basic writing tasks rather than problem-solving tasks in their learning processes.

Reversely, the students' competence levels in state schools are lower than those of Muslim schools. The classroom learning environment might explain this difference. Ryan and Deci (2008) argue that individuals feel competent when teachers assign optimal academic tasks and provide freedom in learning. In fact, learning Arabic required simple tasks such as reading and memorizing words or phrases, translating sentences, and completing simple multiple-choice questions that made the students feel that they could accomplish without so much worry about performance and evaluation. On the other hand, the students in the language class of the state schools felt incompetent when faced with more complex tasks that demanded convincing problem-solving skills, higher academic requirements, competitive learning environments, and regular performance evaluations (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Conclusion

Cambodian primary students, both majority and minority, must improve their learning skills to survive academically and live productively in the 21st century. Developing these learning skills consumes time, requires complex technical methods, and must be actively involved by the students and educators, especially teachers. Improving these learning skills as an intervention program separately from the existing subjects might produce unfruitful results. Thus, mainstreaming learning skills improvement into each lesson of the language subjects would be the most applicable. Teachers can improve it through sufficient practice and application in the real classroom. Critical instructional designs and creative teaching facilitation are the key supportive factors for increasing the student's learning skills. The teachers are the people who prioritize planning, implementing, and evaluating improvement. Thus, qualified and well-trained teachers. The findings reveal that teachers who possess a high level of 21st-century teaching and design skills will produce students with a high level of those learning skills. This finding informs students about their insufficient learning skill levels and enables teachers to identify the gaps in their effective teaching implementations. Besides adjusting the teaching designs, assessment forms, and learning materials appropriately, transforming the students 'learning strategies from surface to strategic strategies, and deep learning strategies must also be considered. Although language subjects require practice and drills, adding higher cognitive learning strategies innovatively might be necessary. Self-regulated learning consists of cognitive learning and self-regulation strategies—the important themes for developing Cambodian student learning attitudes and competencies to reach higher academic achievement and lifelong learning goals and must be mainstreamed into the students' daily learning activity of minority and majority groups to ensure inclusivity. The teachers' intention and the influence of context helped this particular student develop a strong collaborative learning skill, which must be sustained by applying cooperative, collaborative

learning methods, or scaffolding learning methods. This important skill should also be the foundation for improving other learning skills. Teachers constantly find that learning techniques adapted from the perspective of behaviorism, such as rehearsal techniques, fit well for language learning; however, they should be combined with other learning methods that assist students in approaching long-term memory and higher-order thinking levels. Furthermore, although the learner-centered learning method derived from constructivist perspectives is useful for learning languages, it should be implemented adaptively to the collective cultural context where the low- ability students can seek out help from the outperformers and work with peers cooperatively, effectively, and harmoniously.

Recommendation

The school psychologist and primary school teachers should design their classroom intervention programs to enhance students' low personal competency through developing student motivation to engage in accomplishing classroom projects actively, offering autonomous learning environments that can provide students chances to make decisions, creating open-minded classrooms for students to make mistakes with given constructive feedback, and decrease competitive learning environments that encourage collective achievements and mastery goal- oriented among the state school students. In terms of indifference in critical thinking and communication skills, similar teaching inputs are alerted due to the nature of the study subject and teaching practices among teachers in both school groups. Action researchers and teachers may seek alternative teaching approaches to teach languages to improve those skills more productively specifically. The result that revealed the lower level of creativity of Muslim students because of the surface learning methods applied informs not only Muslim language teachers themselves but every primary school teacher teaching language to diversify teaching activities and assignments that can maximize various learning strategies and deep learning strategies. Furthermore, the finding results that state school students had lower personal competence levels—lower confidence levels in accomplishing the tasks—may stimulate primary state school teachers and other teachers to design positive classroom climates, assign tasks appropriately to students' abilities, and offer assistance to students for complex tasks by utilizing ZPD model. Higher levels of collaboration among state school students as the result of applying more collaborative learning activities show the lesson learned to primary school teachers to value the social constructivist perspectives such as peer learning and help-seeking and initiate their instruction to support these values. Finally, Primary school teachers should develop student problem-solving skills by identifying their teaching roles in facilitating student thinking processes, and maximizing problem-based teaching activities.

Limitations of the study and further research suggestions

This research was limited to some learning skills of the 21st century of early adolescents from Muslim religious schools and state schools in Cambodia only. Thus, researchers should include other learning skill variables in the next study. Methodologically, more than running only the EFA as a construct validity was needed, and using MANOVA as the statistical tool for causal-comparative investigation might be limited to analyzing the data compared to running measurements of variants. Prospective scholars and researchers shall add the other types of construct validity and run the measurement of the variant.

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