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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS: ANALYSIS OF THE LESOTHO GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION SYLLABUS

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### Abstract

Under the lens of 21st-century skills, this study examined the applicability of English Language instruction for the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE), as well as its context in Lesotho, the world, and this period. The LGCSE English Language syllabus document was subjected to a qualitative document analysis. The findings demonstrated that a representation of each of the four ATC21s is available for each of the four aims proposed by the syllabus. In each aim, new methods of thinking, ways of living, ways of working, and ways of thinking arise. All goals appear to address 21st-century talents, according to these outcomes, which provide confirmation. The way these talents are represented in the four curriculum aims varies just a little. For example, all four of the goals included examples of communication, life, and professional skills. However, only aims 1 and 4 featured collaboration. Similar to this, aim 1, 3, and 4 solely considered critical thinking and metacognition as subskills. Only aims 2 and 3 have information literacy in them. Only aim 2 selected creativity and innovation. These findings offer corroborating proof and solidly establish the English Language as a legitimate subject with a place in the LGCSE curriculum. Learning ideas like heutagogy, which refers to managing learning for self-managed learners, can be utilized to design teaching and learning strategies that are in line with learners' desire to choose their own goals and provide methods for achieving those goals.

### Keywords

21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, English Language teaching, LGCSE, Syllabus



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Excellence in education is, currently, more important than ever to wrestle with the challenges facing our societies. An educated society, one that is prepared for the significant problems we face, is necessary for reviving the economy, gaining independence with alternative technologies and green jobs, and strengthening our healthcare system (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010). There is general agreement, however, that our educational institutions fall short of fully preparing all learners with the information and skills critical to success in the 21st century, including success in life, the workplace, and civic engagement. Many envision a world where learning is changing into a self-paced process of accessing information or gaining skills just when and where they are needed, surrounded by smart machines (Riel, 2000). It is an undeniable fact that any educational subject that wishes to be relevant must address both national and international development objectives. The subject should also be in line with the curriculum assessment policy, which specifies the kind of information that should be given to learners to help them meet their academic objectives (Moea, 2023b; Raselimo & Thamae, 2018).

Everyone is affected by educational issues, whether personally, professionally, or as citizens of our own countries and the world, and Lesotho is not trailing behind in this regard. In the context of Lesotho, the education system attempts to reflect the needs and political objectives of the nation as it develops (Moea, 2022a). The key to education is the provision of opportunities for skill development, educational programs, cultural values, and activities that promote an individual and a society, as well as an adequate number of people with the necessary managerial, technical, and occupational skills to contribute to socioeconomic development (Education, n.d.). Like other developing nations, Moea (2022a, b) argues that Lesotho has presented itself as a member of a globalized society while preserving its unique morals, ethics, and culture and passing them on to future generations.

There are numerous issues that learners nowadays must deal with, even though education is still entrusted with the essential responsibility of fostering humanity. International comparisons of learner achievement show only mediocre results, too many learners leave school before finishing high school, a low percentage of learners graduate from college, and many of those who do are not considered employable by employers (Harvard Advanced Leadership Initiative [HALI], 2014). Additionally, there are major disparities in that learners from socially disadvantaged homes are more likely to experience poor education, are less likely to graduate from high school, and are less likely to enroll in college. These outcomes are a result of a system that is disjointed between educational levels, educational institutions and communities, and educational and social institutions (HALI, 2014).

Lesotho's ability to compete is harmed by these subpar educational outcomes, which also repeat and exacerbate social inequality and generally reduce people's abilities to enjoy good health, enough wages, and active participation in their communities. It is vital to improve education given the current dire circumstances. Employers, and civic, and social leaders are increasingly aware of the need for the educational system to provide a new set of 21st-century skills for learners in addition to present issues (HALI, 2014). Schools will become less and less relevant if they do not make fresh efforts to assist learners in developing the skills necessary to fulfill the demands of democracy, competition, and life. A curriculum that develops subjects in line with the needs of the 21st century era as well as necessary abilities in this age is required to meet these expectations.

Education institutions face significant challenges in the globally interconnected world today, including how to help learners effectively advance their professional growth, acquire the necessary skills for 21st-century interactions, and begin new occupations (Czerkawski & Berti, 2020). Global

and domestic development goals must be covered in every subject that seeks to be relevant in education. The subject should also be aligned with the curriculum assessment policy, which establishes the kind of information that should be given to learners to help them meet their academic objectives (Moea, 2023b; Raselimo & Thamae, 2018). Some scholars have suggested that in the context of teaching foreign languages (FL), language proficiency and oral communication have been prioritized, while the integration of higher-order and critical thinking abilities with language learning has lagged, particularly in lower-level language courses (Correa, 2011; Garrett-Rucks, 2013; Yamada, 2010).

There is no one denying the contribution of the English language to the growth and development of a skilled labor force that is compatible with the rest of the world (Moea, 2023a). Suffice it to say, in a metaphorical sense, just as oxygen is necessary for survival, so too is English in the cutthroat environment of today. Contemporarily, English is more than just a common language spoken throughout the world; it is also a tool for advancement and a prerequisite for success in all spheres of life. No language, historic or contemporary, can compare to English in terms of its prestige on a global scale (Jha, 2014). As a result, English has already been designated as an official language in numerous nations. Surprisingly, English has overtaken native English speakers as the world's most popular language, with non-native speakers now outnumbering native speakers. Sampath and Phil (2018) assert that the English language is crucial to our lives since it facilitates communication. In Lesotho, according to Moea (2023a), and in other parts of the world, it is the primary language for studying any subject. For learners, learning English is crucial since it broadens their horizons, cultivates their emotional intelligence, and enhances their quality of life by opening work options (Moea, 2023a). Since English is the most widely used language in the world today, its significance cannot be downplayed or overlooked (Nishanthi, 2018). However, it takes perseverance and consistent practice to master English. Learners frequently have the belief that they cannot become fluent or proficient in the English language (Nishanthi, 2018). Learners who have this propensity are unable to learn English. Since most learners study English with an eye toward exams, they are unable to generate even one sentence free of grammatical errors (Nunan, 2003). Additionally, learners do not receive enough practice to acquire a language (Nishanthi, 2018). If one wishes to advance in life, knowing English is a requirement. The modern world's primary window is English. This is especially true in instances when sophisticated nations have made employment opportunities available to people with technological skills (Nunan, 2003). The position is only granted to those with a strong command of the English language.

Additionally, because it is frequently the only language used for communication, English is becoming more and more widely used on a global scale. Most authors choose to write in English because most readers only have a working knowledge of it and because it allows them to express their ideas most effectively. English is also widely used in the literature and media sectors to publish books. Given that English is the most widely spoken language in the world today, the significance of learning English cannot be overstated or overlooked (Putra, 2020). English serves as a communication tool, but it can also facilitate our ability to work and adjust to our surroundings in the present and the future.

Crystal (2000) and Nunan (2001), cited in Putra (2020), as well as the British Council (2013), contend that the spread of English gave people unrestricted access to the modern world of science, information, and communications technology (ICT), money, power, international communication, intercultural understanding, as well as entertainment and many other fields (Nishanthi, 2018). According to reports, 60 nations officially recognize English as a second language (Hakim & Chiani, 2019). In addition, learning a language that is not our native tongue boosts intellect since it develops

brain intelligence, especially in children (Putra). This is a fantastic way to encourage learners to pick up English during its prime (Hakim & Chiani, 2019).

English is spoken in Lesotho as a second language, an official language, and a language of instruction. Along with Sesotho, the native tongue, it is both an official language and a language of teaching (Moea, 2023a). The curriculum and assessment policy (CAP) stipulates that the first three years of schooling (Grades One through Three) should be taught in the mother tongue or the indigenous language; Sesotho, and in Grades Four through Twelve as well as Tertiary Institutions, English is used as the medium of instruction (MOET, 2009 cited in Moea, 2023a).

At the primary level, learners start studying English as a subject and a second language in Grade 4, while the reception grades(1 to 3) use the mother tongue as a language of instruction. According to the Lesotho 2009 CAP, the curriculum should be able to lay the groundwork for language and its utilization in addition to other crucial areas (MOET, 2009). The policy also emphasizes the importance of language as a tool for promoting successful communication in all forms and as a means by which all learning areas can be sufficiently and effectively given. The acquisition and comprehension of linguistic abilities required for efficient communication in many circumstances, as well as the application of linguistic, creative, and other skills in promoting literary works for socioeconomic development, should be developed in the language and literacy curricula (MOET, 2009).

Despite the benefits of studying English as a subject that has already been mentioned, one frequently hears loud arguments among Basotho learners and adults disputing the status of English and even saying that it is inappropriate as a subject and a medium of instruction and that it is not a test of intelligence. In a world where learners need to handle complex realities and continuously changing situations, the dearth of worthwhile activities that interest learners beyond vocabulary and grammatical structures has turned into a problem (Czerkawski & Berti, 2020).

To determine the place and significance that the English Language syllabus for the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education plays in the development of Basotho children and the nation, this study will examine the syllabus' alignment with 21st-century skills. The four general syllabus goals are examined for alignment with 21st-century skills. The emphasis on the four overarching syllabus goals stems from the fact that they serve as the foundation for all other goals, particularly the evaluation goals.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Education**

As a goal and a part of growth, education is crucial to the greater idea of enlarged human capabilities, which is at the heart of the creation of meaning (Noddings, 2016). According to Arslan (2018), education is a lifelong process that starts at birth and continues as an older generation's influence over younger generations that are not yet ready for social interaction. Education is characterized by Rinenggo and Kusdarini (2021) as a significant investment in raising the standard of human resources. Ballam, Perry, and Garpelin (2017) define education as an interactive process and strategy for growing opportunity, aspiration, and hope in families, educators, and the educational system around the transition to school, as well as the theories and beliefs underlying them.

Nelson Mandela claims that the most effective tool for transforming the world is education. According to Plato, education must build a person's spiritual traits from the inside out. This is

furthered by Aristotle, who defined education as the process of creating a sound mind in a sound body. Analytically stated, education is the process through which a person's innate divine perfection is revealed, yet for many people, education is just schooling. Considering this, it can be said that it draws out the best qualities in both children and adults, creating a completely formed body, mind, and soul for the sole aim of nurturing and developing personal abilities. This, however, should not compel us to allude to the wider notion of education that exists outside of a classroom setting. Because it involves a modification of conduct (behavior) and varied experiences from a wide range of educational tools, it necessitates comprehension as a lifelong process. As a result, it is accurate to describe education as a tool for preserving societal harmony.

According to Wallace (2015), education is an organized pedagogic process that includes training and learning primarily aimed at enhancing knowledge and fostering skill development. This demonstrates how education must prepare a person to carry out their responsibilities with justice, skill, and kindness in all situations. A person who has gone through the educational process ought to be useful and functional in society.

In the same tandem, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Lesotho is charged with providing all Basotho with excellent and valuable educational services, with the unwavering intention of ensuring that every Mosotho has the chance to be well-educated and productive, with a foundation in moral and ethical values (MOET, 2016). The primary objective of the government's education policy is to give learners the chance to develop into responsible and respectful members of society by offering a sustainable, enhanced, quality-assured education that values each learner's unique learning process (ibid, 46). The 21st-century skills are one of the developments brought about by the changing educational landscape.

## **2.2 The 21<sup>st</sup> century skills**

The teaching of 21st-century skills calls for a definition and useful instructional recommendations. The teaching as transmission concept, in which a teacher imparts factual knowledge to learners, is no longer relevant in today's interconnected global ecology (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). The knowledge, life skills, professional skills, habits, and characteristics known as 21st-century skills are those that are essential for learner success in the modern world, particularly when learners transition into higher education, the workforce, and adulthood (Moea, 2023b). The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2011), which created a 21st-century skills map to give educators, administrators, and policymakers practical examples of how to incorporate such abilities in language courses, has emphasized 21st-century skills.

The most significant factor influencing success in higher-level courses in the workplace, according to professionals in higher education and business, is the development of soft skills. Our schools today are training pupils for careers that may not even be in existence now. Giving pupils a complex range of abilities that can help them be ready for the future is what it means to be career-ready. Human interaction has altered as a result of social media, which has also made interacting in social settings more difficult. The availability of knowledge has significantly grown in the Internet era. Learners must learn how to sort through and evaluate a lot of data. Core topic content knowledge can only go so far; learners need to learn how to apply information to difficult challenges. All of this serves as an inspiration for us to start incorporating 21st-century skills into our curricula so that we can better prepare our learners for the modern world in general.



21st-century skills are the ones deemed necessary for both the classroom and the workplace in the modern economy. Three categories of skills are described by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21, 2007): learning skills (creativity and innovation; critical thinking and problem-solving; communication and collaboration); literacy skills (information literacy; media literacy; ICT literacy); and life skills (flexibility and adaptability; initiative and self-direction; social and cross-cultural skills; productivity and accountability; leadership and responsibility).

Critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, and social skills make up the list of the twelve 21st Century Skills. Learning and innovation skills, literacy (information, media and technology) skills, and life and career skills are the three areas into which each 21st Century skill is subdivided (Kurata, Mokhets'engoane & Selialia, 2022; Moea, 2023b).

Through a sponsored project with its headquarters at the University of Melbourne, major corporations like Cisco, Intel, and Microsoft propose the Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21s) framework to address the shortcomings of formal education systems that have not kept up with the changing needs of the times. The framework, also known as the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and ethics (KSAVE) framework, groups ten skills: (1) innovation and creativity; (2) critical thinking; (3) knowledge of cognitive processes; (4) communication; (5) teamwork; (6) information literacy; (7) ICT literacy; and (8) citizenship—local and global; (9), "life and work," (10), "personal and social responsibility," which includes "cultural competency,"(Binkley et al., 2012) into four categories being ways of thinking, ways of working, tools for working and ways of living as shown in Figure 1.



For further detail please see: Binkley, M., Erstad, O., Hermna, J., Raizen, S., Ripley, M., Miller-Ricci, M., & Rumble, M. (2012). *Defining Twenty-First Century Skills*. In Griffin, P., Care, E., & McGaw, B. *Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills*, Dordrecht, Springer.

**Figure 1.** Adapted from Binkley et al. (2012).

For this study, therefore, the ATC21Scategorization will be used for the analysis of the 21st-century skills embedded in the LGCSE English Language syllabus.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitatively conducted where data were presented in non-numerical form (Creswell, 2014; Moea, 2023c) and meaning was interpreted from the data to help understand social life through the study of specific populations or locations (Flick, 2014; Moea, 2023b). This approach helped the researcher gain an understanding of a phenomenon under study. This is because qualitative research is a type of social science research that collects and seeks to interpret meaning from these data that help understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places (Flick, 2014). Document analysis (DA) was instrumentalized because it is a way of producing or refurbishing knowledge and in creating novel ways of comprehending phenomena, facts interpretation, and summary of information, tendency determinant, and inference making (Andrade et al., 2018). Because DA is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, either printed or electronic material (Bowen, 2009), it was appropriate to use it for this study. The document studied was the LGCSE English Language syllabus document.

### 4.0 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

*Table 4.1* shows the relationship between the LGCSE English Language Syllabus and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

SYLLABUS AIMS	21 <sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS	SUB- SKILLS
1)The syllabus aims to equip the candidates with the ability and skills to communicate effectively with clarity, relevance and accuracy using Standard English.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ways of working</li> <li>2. Living in the world</li> <li>3. Tools for working</li> <li>4. Ways of thinking</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Communication</li> <li>2. Life &amp;careerskills, personal&amp;social responsibility</li> <li>3. Communication, collaboration</li> <li>4. Critical thinking, metacognition, learning to learn</li> </ol>
2) The syllabus aims to equip the candidates with the ability and skills to use language, experience, imagination, and creativity to respond to new situations relevantly, create original ideas and make a positive impact.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ways of thinking</li> <li>2. Ways of working</li> <li>3. Tools for working</li> <li>4. Living in the world</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creativity &amp; innovation, problem-solving, decision-making, metacognition</li> <li>2. Communication</li> <li>3. Information literacy</li> <li>4. Life &amp; career skills, personal &amp; social responsibility</li> </ol>

3)The syllabus aims to equip the candidates with the ability and skills to apply critical skills that will afford opportunity to scan, filter and analyse different forms of information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ways of thinking</li> <li>2. Ways of working</li> <li>3. Tools for working</li> <li>4. Living in the world</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critical thinking, learning to learn, metacognition</li> <li>2. Communication</li> <li>3. Information literacy</li> <li>4. Life &amp; career skills</li> </ol>
4) The syllabus aims to equip the candidates with the ability and skills to Develop cross-cultural awareness by engaging with issues inside and outside their own communities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ways of thinking</li> <li>2. Ways of working</li> <li>3. Tools of working</li> <li>4. Living in the world</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critical thinking, problem- solving, learning to learn, metacognition</li> <li>2. Communication, collaboration</li> <li>3. Communication, collaboration</li> <li>4. Citizenship, life &amp; career skills, personal &amp; social responsibility</li> </ol>

Table 4.1 above presents the findings of the relationship between the LGCSE English Language Syllabus and the 21<sup>st</sup> century as per ACT21s. There are four main aims of the LGCSE English Language Syllabus through which upon attainment learners will be able to compete in the international community. Some scholars in Lesotho hold the view that one of the main reasons for curriculum metamorphosis in Lesotho was to ensure that there are certain competencies learners should acquire to remain relevant in the perpetually transforming world (Kurata et al. 2022; Lekhanya and Raselimo, 2022).

Remarkably, results emerging from the data are that of all the four aims posited by the syllabus, a representation of the four ATC21s is available. That is, ways of thinking, living in the world, tools for working, and ways of thinking emerge in each aim. It is astounding to highlight that; these results provide confirmatory evidence that all aims seem to address the 21st century skills as illustrated in Table 4.1. Nonetheless, it is apparent that when it comes to the embedded sub-skills, there is a slight difference in the representation of such skills across the four curriculum aims. For instance, communication, life, and career skills were depicted in all four aims. However, collaboration only appeared in aims 1 and 4. Similarly, critical thinking and metacognition were only seen as sub-skills in aims 1, 3, and 4. When it comes to information literacy, only aim 2 and 3 had it. Creativity and innovation were only picked in aim 2.

Conversely, creativity and innovation were the least represented sub-skills which is presented in only one aim which is aim 2. It is based on these grounds that the researchers can deduce that the evidence given in Table 1 denotes that the English Language promotes 21st-century skills. It can therefore be concluded that all the four aims of the syllabus are at par with ATC21s.



The findings of this study concur with Martin's (2017) findings that the integration of 21st-century skills in the curriculum is of paramount significance as it prepares learners for future success in the rapidly changing. Similar sentiments are echoed through the study of Ulfah (2018). The researcher discovered that as much as there is a need for further implementation of 21st-century skills in the classrooms, the national curriculum of Indonesia has incorporated 21st-century skills into its framework, making it internationally competitive.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development ([OECD], 2018) has provided an analysis of the need for national curriculums to align with the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century which include problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and communication, to mention but a few. These skills articulated by OECD (2018), as well as Junaidi (2016), strengthen the findings of the study under exploration. The reports argue that these skills are increasingly essential for success in the rapidly changing world of work.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study was set to investigate the alignment between the LGCSE English Language syllabus and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The results revealed that the LGCSE English Language curriculum prepares learners to be part of the 21st-century world, offering learners the necessary skills for survival. However, it must be noted that this is done in different degrees. The results emerging from the data are that of all the four aims posited by the syllabus, a representation of the four ATC21s is available; ways of thinking, living in the world, tools for working, and ways of thinking emerge in each aim. These results provide confirmatory evidence that all aims seem to address the 21st-century skills as well as deeply trenching the English Language as an appropriate subject rightly occupying space in the LGCSE curriculum. Nonetheless, it is apparent that when it comes to the embedded sub-skills, there is a slight difference in the representation of such skills across the four curriculum aims.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

Teaching and teachers do have an important role in supporting the requisite sustainability learning process but their principal role is no longer simply to transmit knowledge to learners. Education is not about filling a pail it is about lighting a fire. In the digital age of the 21st century, teachers cannot possibly expect to be the omniscient source of knowledge. Their role instead is to inspire and guide their learners- as learners. Unfortunately, this is not the way most teachers have been educated to teach. Conventional approaches to teaching must be modified for the 21st century. There is a large gap – perhaps even a chasm – between the evidence on effective learning environments for the 21st century and established practice in today's schools and classrooms" (Bell, n.d.). According to Bell, a new pedagogy of transformative education must replace the transmission model of teaching and learning that continues as the dominant practice in most schools in the world.

Changing instructor roles in professional language learning is another area that needs to be explored. Professional language learning may require more customization of instructional content and materials than traditional language teaching, as we see it today. This constant customization of the curriculum and teaching strategies requires flexibility on the instructor's part as well as at the department level. Academic language departments should seek interdisciplinary collaborations enabling language teachers to collaborate with experts in various disciplines and create learning opportunities for learners that fit their needs. The teacher and curricula flexibility become of central importance so that learners can focus on what is relevant to them and their future. All in all, more research is needed to

better understand how teachers can adapt to the new circumstances and how the language curriculum can be customized to fit the needs of the 21st century. Transformation in professional language learning starts with a new approach to curriculum development using best practices in the learning design field, where learners and their needs guide the curriculum development process. Learning sciences and concepts such as heutagogy (the management of learning for self-managed learners) can be used to devise teaching and learning strategies that are in line with learners' desire to select their own goals and offer strategies to reach those goals.

It is highly recommended that teacher-training programs for 21st-century skills should be available for all teachers at all levels for the skills to be incorporated into the lessons and teaching methodologies. The 21st-century skills need to be articulated and highlighted to teachers to ensure proper implementation of these skills. Another recommendation is for teacher-training programs in up-to-date and sophisticated technologies which provide better access to information, knowledge, and collaboration and that will enhance teachers' critical thinking which will in turn benefit the learners. The role of teachers of English should be emphasized because they are the ones who are teaching this lingua franca; the language that is connecting the whole world. For learners to become citizens of this century, they also need to be citizens of the world, and to be citizens of the world, they need English as an essential tool for communication and collaboration.

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