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## A Bibliometric Analysis of the Studies on 21<sup>st</sup>-century Skills in ELT

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### Abstract

The more the era has been changing, the more the skills we need have been changing, as well. Living in such a new era brings along the requirement for new skills. 21st-century skills are the skills that we exactly need nowadays as researchers, students, executives, etc. Due to globalization and digitalization, the research focus on 21st-century skills has been increasing day by day, and it is important for researchers to know the gaps in the field and the topics being researched so that they can focus on the gaps and have the possibility to study more to fill those gaps. Grounded on this, the present study aims to find out the most searched topics/keywords, the most cited authors, and the most productive countries on the topic of 21st-century skills in the field of English language teaching, by conducting a bibliometric research study. The results showed that most of the studies focused on creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking, with scant attention to life and career skills while giving an increasing interest in digital literacy skills.

**Keywords:** 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, bibliometrics, English language teaching

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# İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Alanında 21. Yüzyıl Becerileri Üzerine Yapılmış Çalışmaların Bibliyometrik Analizi

## Öz

Çağın değişmesi ile birlikte ihtiyacımız olan beceriler de değişmekte ve böylesine yeni bir çağda yaşamak, yeni becerilere olan gereksinimi de beraberinde getirmektedir. Günümüz dünyasının araştırmacıları, öğrencileri, yöneticileri olarak 21. yüzyıl becerileri tam da ihtiyacımız olan becerilerdir. Küreselleşme ve dijitalleşme nedeniyle 21. yüzyıl becerilerine yönelik araştırmalar gün geçtikçe artmakta ve araştırmacıların alanlarındaki boşlukları ve araştırılan konuları bilmesi, bu boşluklara odaklanmaları ve bunları doldurabilmek için gerekli çalışma yapabilmeleri adına gereklidir. Buradan hareketle bu çalışma, bibliyometrik bir analiz çalışması yürüterek İngiliz dili eğitimi alanında 21. yüzyıl becerileri konusunda en çok çalışılan konuları/anahtar kelimeleri, en çok atıf yapılan yazarları ve en çok yayın üreten ülkeleri ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Sonuçlar, çalışmaların çoğunun yaratıcılık, işbirliği, iletişim ve eleştirel düşünmeye odaklandığını, yaşam ve kariyer becerilerine çok az değinildiğini, aynı zamanda dijital okuryazarlık becerilerine ise artan bir ilgi olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Keywords:** 21. Yüzyıl becerileri, bibliyometrik çalışma, İngiliz dili eğitimi

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world is changing and unavoidably we are experiencing a new era which is much more different than the previous centuries. In terms of education, it is required to be aware of some certain skills which are also known as the 21st century learning and innovation skills. It is insufficient to teach core subjects by applying traditional methods, therefore teaching must be combined with the skills of 21st century; communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, digital literacy skills, and life and career skills (Taylor, 2009). Today's learners are required to master these skills and apply them effectively to overcome challenges and become successful future citizens (Otlu, 2020). In order to prepare learners for their unpredictable future careers and academic lives, integrating the 21st century skills to the education programs and curricula is required (Gilroy, 2015). Teachers are expected to be aware of these skills and their importance if they aim to bring success for their students since they are required to succeed in the 21st century by getting the education in accordance with their needs and interests (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Hence, the current study focused on the 21st century skills since they are considered as a gateway to succeed in this era which is much more demanding, complex and challenging.

Several frameworks, seminars, professional development organizations and teacher training programs have established and teachers, learners and educators have attended them to understand and manage these skills better. Any individuals in teaching and learning contexts are supposed to encounter, engage and exploit these skills in order to maintain success and overcome challenges and

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problems (Eker, 2020). Furthermore, a variety of frameworks such as Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) and Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have formed to provide a guideline for both teachers and learners in which there are scaffolded and diverse approaches as well as fundamental information about when and how to apply the 21st century skills (Ambrose, et al., 2010).

In the era of the 21st century, learners and teachers should have various capabilities such as effective communication, fruitful collaboration with peers, analytical and critical thinking, using innovative and creative approaches, solving the problems in different point of views, successful teamwork, making reasonable decisions, applying alternative ways in learning and teaching (P21, 2009; OECD, 2006). It is clear that today learners and teachers are required to be ready for this new world. Language learning along with these progresses in the world is more precious and regrettably knowing a language without these skills will not bring success for future. Especially for the English language, the 21st century skills are requisite for learners and teachers since the English language facilitate communication among people in the world and it is also known as the mutual language as a result of globalized world (Punar Özçelik, 2022; Wang, 2016). During the process of English language teaching and learning, the focus should be on what is learned and what is adapted, instead of what is taught, and this change is very essential to motivate in-service and on-service teachers and students for the 21st century (Miles, 2014). ELT teachers' awareness and implementation of these skills and their interpretation for their classroom practices are major factors that affect students' academic success and future. Therefore, foreign language educators' perceptions and awareness towards the 21st century skills should be encouraged with the 4Cs, digital literacy skills and life and career skills.

### **Communication, Collaboration, Creativity and Critical Thinking (The 4Cs)**

We are in the period of the 21st century and this century includes a well-known skillset that consists of the 4Cs, "communication", "collaboration", "creativity" and "critical thinking". To prepare learners for this century with its demands, these skills have an essential role among EFL teachers and learners (Saleh, 2019). According to the National Education Association (2015) the 4Cs are required to be integrated into learning and teaching process immediately to bring up well-prepared future citizens and workers for the 21st century.

Among the 4Cs, the communication skill is one of the fundamental elements for life, work and education environment to survive and transfer the messages since it is also known as a tool to communicate, exchange information, transmit opinions by oral or written ways or using some other medium. "Communication plays an important role in the preparation of students to be not only lifelong learners, but also members of a larger community with voice and a sense of responsibility to others" (OECD, 2009, p.10). Furthermore, after the pandemic all around the world, communication, especially

the online communication has become more popular among young generation. Orak (2019) stated that, online communication has transcended the face-to-face communication and as a result of this situation teachers and decision-makers are supposed to establish communicative platforms which are not only face-to-face but also online ones.

Apart from communication, collaboration is also accepted as one of the building blocks of the 21st century skills, which means working with others effectively and efficiently. It is also described as individuals' working together to maintain, generate and succeed the same thing (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Bedir (2019) stated that the term collaboration is a kind of commitment to work or study skillfully with other peers in groups, that is with the help of collaboration, teams may come up with different ideas and attitudes and they understand the importance of group work to achieve the common goal. Collaborative tasks help students and teachers to see the different point of views, facilitate different ideas and opinions, guide to learn from others and the collaboration can be accepted as a social platform on which peers improve learning and other skills (Miller, 2016).

Creativity and innovation are the skills that shape individuals' opinions to bring new ideas, perspectives, strategies and implementations and as a result of this novelty, peers can come up with new and original output (O'Sullivan, 2018). Creativity is also accepted as a concept that matches with cognition in education and being innovative, creative and having imagination are the requisites for learners and educators to make the difference in the era of 21st century. Therefore, professional development activities and workshops are necessary for teachers and learners to increase awareness and contribute the learning and teaching process. An American psychologist, Robert Jeffrey Sternberg (2007) stated that successful individuals are the ones who have creativity and imagination since they are capable of producing new visions to make the world a better place for living. Hence, teachers are required to be aware of the importance of creativity and innovation and they should scaffold their students to lead them create and imagine during their learning journey with the help of some activities such as brain-storming, opinion-gap activities, giving situations and learning stations.

Among 21st century skills, the critical thinking skills include a number of cognitive activities such as analyzing, problem-solving, evaluating and assessing, constructing and generating ideas and thinking deeply to overcome challenges and solve unfamiliar problems (Kivunja, 2015). Although the skill of critical thinking is among 4Cs, there is lack of information and awareness towards it and teachers' level of implementation and tendencies of this skill has remained either at medium or low level (Petek & Bedir, 2015). Therefore, teachers and learners are needed to be trained and the activities are required to be provided to develop and understand this skill better to be successful in academic and daily life in the 21st century. Especially for language learning and teaching, modelling and providing the critical thinking skill and implementation of this skill help the process to build more successful classroom environment and increase the quality of teaching (Brookfield, 1997).

According to the P21 (2007), many curricula and frameworks have been developed to integrate these skills to the lesson plans and programs, in which they include the recommended materials, teaching methods, and assessment strategies. The 4Cs are regarded as the key skills in the era of the 21st century in language learning and teaching for both students and teachers, therefore they need to be taken into consideration during classroom practices since they are the core of the 21st century learning and innovation skills (Figure 1). Taylor (2009) stated that especially English language teachers should concentrate on more updated methods which are integrated with the culture, technology, content and lifelong skills. It is undeniable that English language teachers' classroom practices and their implementations with the 21st century skills decide and shape the lessons' outcomes.



**Figure 1.** The 4Cs in education

Retrieved from: <https://eem81821.school.blog/2019/06/12/the-4-cs-in-my-world/>

## Digital Literacy Skills

Apart from the 4Cs, there are some important other skills in academic and career lives which need to be taken into consideration by individuals in educational contexts. Among these skills, the digital literacy skills are the ones that guide learners and teachers to implement the technology and its tools by providing the necessary information about when and how to use them. According to Yeni & Can (2022), the digital literacy skills include information literacy, media literacy and ICT literacy. As a result of the coronavirus problem, teachers and learners started to use and manage the technology more than before and unavoidably students learn these skills to acquire target subjects. In order to be an active and successful individual of this century, the digital literacy skills must be in educational settings, learners and teachers are required to create and use information by applying media and technology.

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## Life and Career Skills

The 21st century skills knowledge and awareness is not sufficient to be a successful citizen of today's global world. Being able to apply them, knowing how to implement and where to use these skills are as essential as these skills. Not only for learners but also for teachers it is vital to transmit these skills into their daily lives to keep up to date with the changes and overcome challenges. Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robinson and Weigel (2006) indicated that life and career skills scaffold and guide individuals about the 21st century skills and the opportunities of them, furthermore they serve the required information to use them in life, career and education. Teachers, educators, decision-makers and learners must be aware of the changing situations and they must be flexible and adaptive with the help of these skills. Furthermore, life and career skills help individuals to manage and set their self-directed goals by effective time-managing skills and well-built self-confidence.

When all these aspects are taken into consideration, it is unquestionably said that 21st century skills play a significant role in every field of education. Employing these skills especially for the field of English language teaching is significantly required for educating and preparing promising generations since the English language is accepted as a common language all around the world. Grounded on this role, the present bibliographic study aims to uncover the most studied topics and keywords, most productive countries, and most cited authors on the topic of the 21st century in ELT in order to see the trends and gaps in the field. Therefore, the present study finds answers to the following questions;

1. Which authors are cited most in the studies on 21st century skills in the field of ELT?
2. Which countries have been most productive in research and publication?
3. Which keywords are used most in the studies on 21st century skills in the field of ELT?
4. Which keywords are used most in the abstracts of the studies on 21st century skills in the field of ELT?

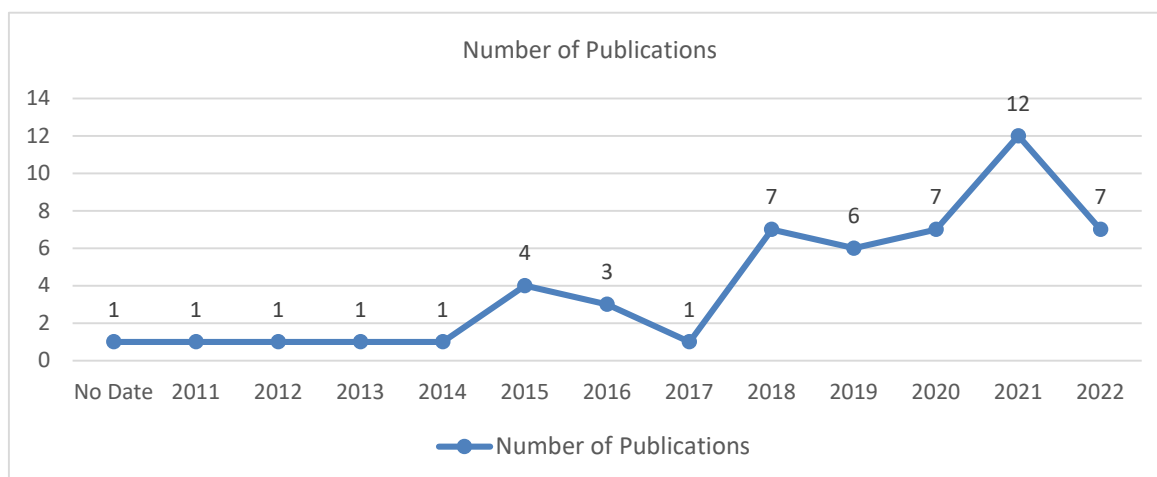
## 2. METHODOLOGY

The present study is a bibliometric research study, which is defined as “the application of mathematics and statistical methods to analyze the scientific publications” (Pritchard, 1969, p.348). It is significant for researchers and academicians to stay update and to find out the trends and gaps in the field. Bibliometric research gives important information about the words used mostly in the studies, countries and authors cited or co-cited most. Hence, it was applied in this study.

As database, Web of Science was chosen and the search was done based on the following filters: ALL: (“21st century skills”) AND ALL: (“English language teaching”) OR ALL: (ELT) AND ALL: (EFL), with no date limitation. In total, 59 studies were accessed. The necessary file was downloaded as tab delimited file and dataset was analyzed in VosViewer, which is a program used for bibliometric mapping analysis.

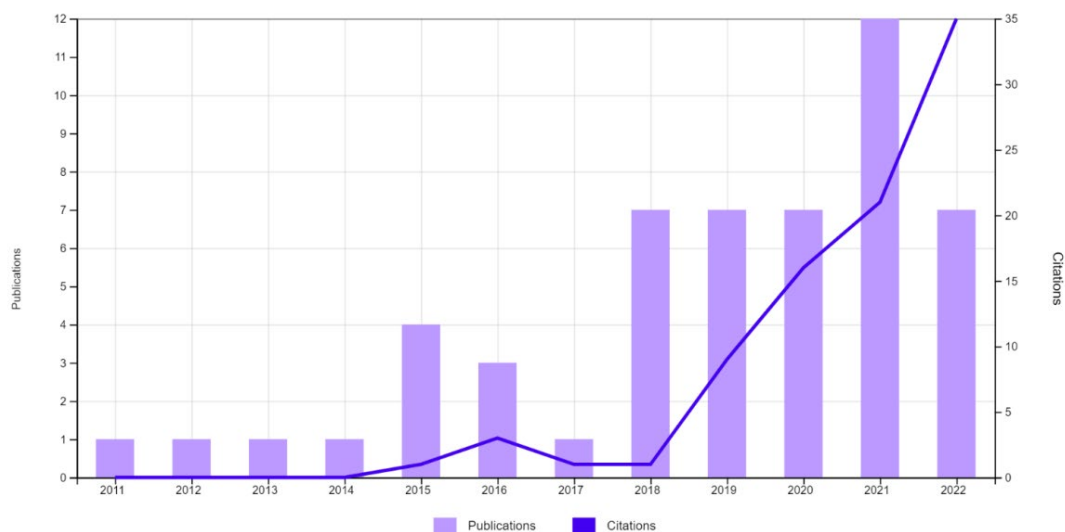
### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The number of studies on 21st-century skills in the field of ELT has shown an increase year by year, even if there seem some fluctuations. So far, the highest number of publications was made in 2021 with 12 studies, and even in the first half of 2022, there were 7 studies, which might be interpreted that the number of publications in this year would increase. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the number of publications over the years. The topic of 21st century skills in ELT is one of the developing, dynamic topics in the field (Santosa, 2022), so the increasing number of publications in recent years is not a surprising result.



**Figure 2.** The distribution of publications over years

In figure 3, the distribution of citations over the years can be seen. The increase in citations might show that the academic interest in this topic is also increasing, as it is not surprising of living in such an era.



**Figure 3.** The distribution of citations over years.  
Taken from Web of Science

The most cited three publications on 21st century skills in the field of ELT have been demonstrated in Table 1. On analyzing the most cited three publications, it is seen that 21st century skills are mostly integrated with speaking skills and critical thinking. Even if the second highest cited study’s title seems not related to 21st century skills, its abstract mentions 21st century skills as the digital literacy and technology is one of the aspects of 21st century skills.

**Table 1.** The most cited three authors

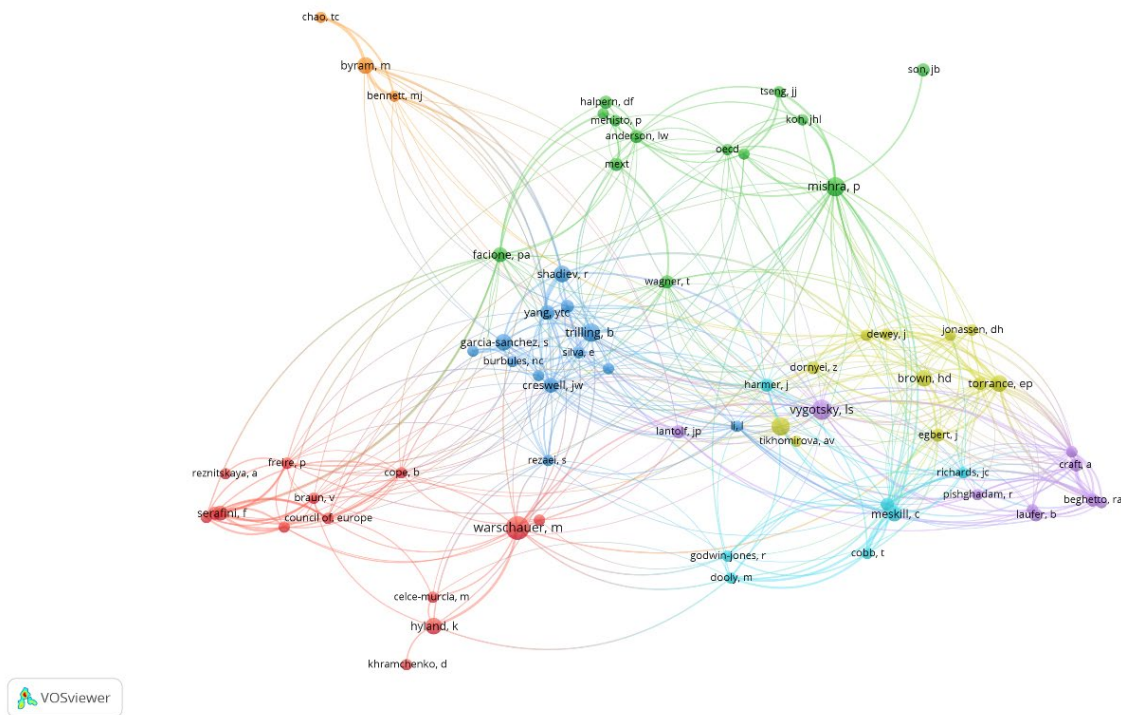
Author	Title	Year	Journal	Times Cited	Type	Index
<b>Kusumoto, Yoko</b>	“Enhancing critical thinking through active learning”	2018	LANGUAGE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION	11	Article	Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)
<b>Abugohar, Mohammed Abdulgalil; Yunus, Kamariah; Ab Rashid, Radzuwan</b>	“Smartphone Applications as a Teaching Technique for Enhancing Tertiary Learners' Speaking Skills: Perceptions and Practices”	2019	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES IN LEARNING	10	Article	Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)
<b>Motallebzadeh, Khalil; Ahmadi, Fatemeh; Hosseinnia, Mansooreh</b>	“Relationship between 21st Century Skills, Speaking and Writing Skills: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach”	2018	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INSTRUCTION	9	Article	Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)

Co-citation relationship shows the occurrences of two sources cited in a same document, and based on the co-citation analysis of authors, it is seen that Warschauer (f:12), Vygotsky (f:9), Mishra (f:8), Nunan and Trilling (f:7) are among the most co-cited authors. Mark Warschauer is a well-known



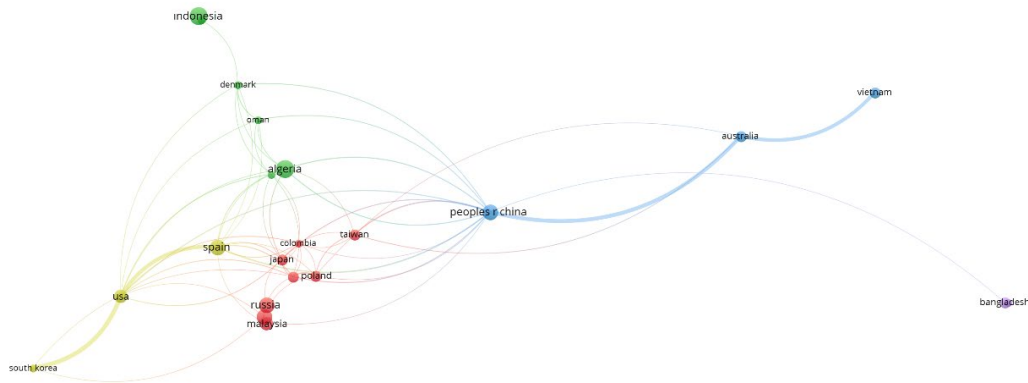
scholar studying Computer Assisted Language Learning, and as digital literacy is among the 4C's of 21st-century skills, the researchers cited him for his prevailing studies. Lev Vygotsky is the founding father of collaborative learning theory which is rooted in the Zone of Proximal Development, and collaboration is among the 4C's of 21st century skills. Rahul Mishra, David Nunan and Bernie Trilling are the scholars who are studying 21st century skills in general.

Figure 4 shows the co-citation relationship and density of the studies.



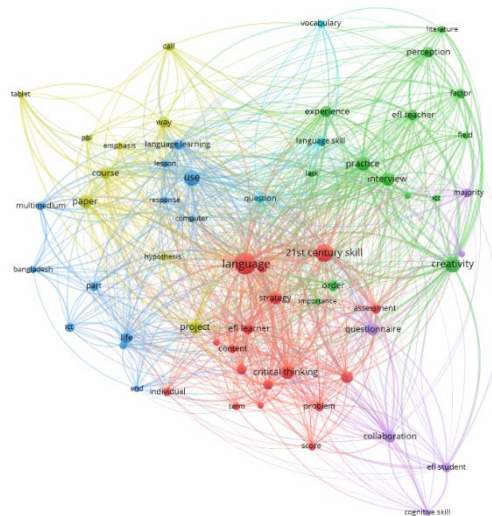
**Figure 4.** The co-citation relationship and density of the studies

Bibliographic coupling shows the overlap in the references of publications, and as a result of bibliographic coupling of countries analysis, the map seen in Figure 4 was created and it shows that Indonesia and Algeria (f:5) have the highest frequency, followed by China, Russia, Iran, and Spain (f:4).



**Figure 5.** Bibliographic coupling of countries

Figure 6 demonstrates the map of showing the mostly-used words in abstracts of the studies. The map shows six clusters and “language” is the most used word in the abstracts (f:48). The other mostly used keywords are as follows: “21st century skill” (f:31), “creativity” and “use” (f:25), “project” and “critical thinking” (f:20), “practice” (f:19), “interview” (f:17), “collaboration” and “communication” (f:15). The results showed that, as creativity, collaboration, critical thinking and communication are among the 21st century skills, the studies mostly focused on these aspects by using interviews and projects. It might be interpreted as the studies were concentrated on 21st century learning skills and somehow digital literacy skills, as well, since we can see some keywords such as media and technology. However, it is clearly seen that there is the lack of studies focusing on life and career skills.



**Figure 6.** Abstract keywords

Figure 7 demonstrates the map of the distribution of keywords used by authors over years. The minimum number of occurrences of a term was chosen as one. The map shows that “EFL” is the mostly-used keyword by authors (f: 14), followed by “21st century skills” (f:6) “critical thinking” (f:5), and “creativity” (f:3). This shows that the researchers are mostly focused on critical thinking and creativity among the 21st century skills. On the other hand, Petek and Bedir (2015) reported in their research that there is a lack of studies on critical thinking skills in the field, and the results of this present study show that the number of publications focusing on critical thinking has been increasing recently, as it can be clearly seen in Figure 6. When the year-by-year analysis is examined, it is seen that recent studies are concentrated on education quality and computer assisted language learning, which is related to digital literacy and as a usual result of digitalization around the world.

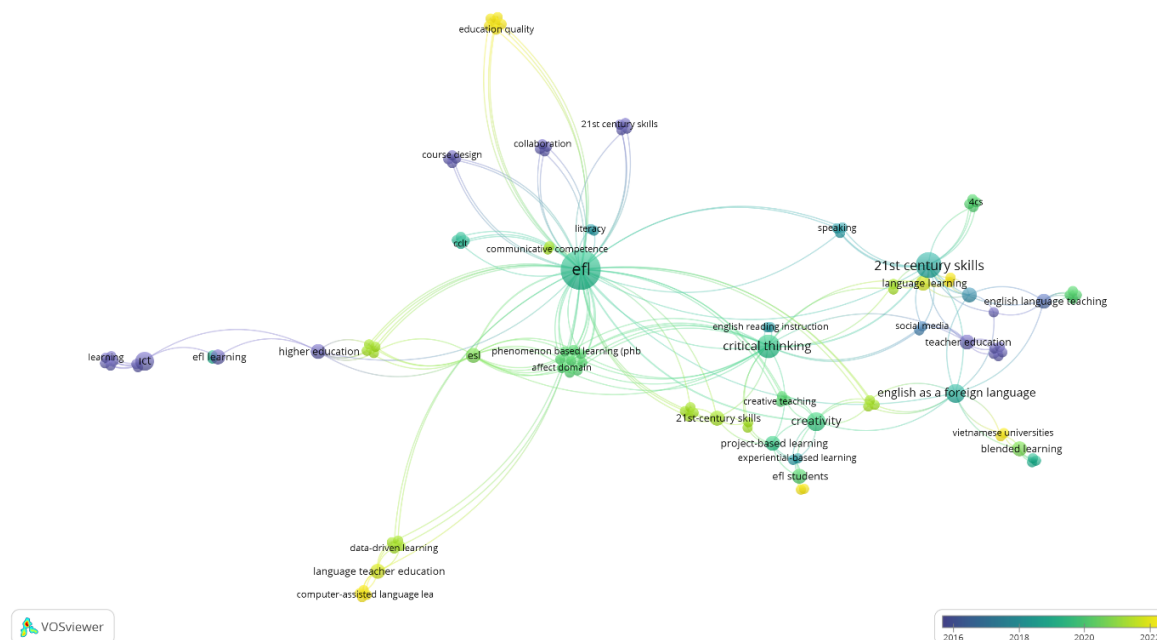


Figure 7. Author keywords and distribution over years

#### 4. CONCLUSION

English language teachers’ awareness, perceptions, beliefs and actual practices on the 21st century learning and innovation skills are essential to cultivate well-qualified citizens for the future since the English is accepted as lingua franca. To keep up the date with the changes, educators of English language should follow the recent studies about the topic of 21st century skills and broaden their horizons while expanding their classroom practices. In order to achieve this, it is vital to be aware of today’s world and literature about these skills and their focus as well as their results.

On following the aim of finding out the most searched topics and keywords, the most cited authors and the most productive countries on the topic of the 21st century skills in the field of ELT, the present study administered a bibliographic study. The results showed that, among the increasing number of publications over years, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication, which consist of 4Cs of the 21st century skills, are the trend topics, while a little but increasing interest in digital literacy skills and limited focus on life and career skills. About the most co-cited authors, it is clearly seen that the researchers also concentrate on theoretical aspects of 21st century skills by referring Warschauer and Vygotsky.

Based on the results of the present study, further studies can be carried out to illuminate the importance and integration of life and career skills in the field of ELT. Additionally, more research can be conducted to raise awareness in terms of digital literacy skills of language learners and teachers, as well.

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## Geniş Özet

Dünya hızla değişmekte ve bunun sonucunda önceki yüzyıllardan çok daha farklı bir dönem yaşamaktayız. Eğitim açısından 21. yüzyıl öğrenme ve yenilikçi becerileri olarak da bilinen bazı becerilerin farkındalığının oluşması önem arz etmektedir. Bu dönemde temel konuların geleneksel yöntemlerle öğretilmesi yetersiz kalmakta ve bu nedenle öğretim süreçlerinde iletişim, işbirliği, yaratıcılık, eleştirel düşünme, dijital okuryazarlık, ve yaşam ve kariyer becerilerinden oluşan 21. yüzyıl becerilerinin de entegre edilmesine ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır.

Dünyadaki birçok gelişme ile birlikte dil öğrenimi daha değerli hale gelmiş, fakat 21. yüzyıl becerilerine sahip olmadan da bir dil bilmenin ilerisi için başarı getirisi yeterli görülmemektedir. Özellikle dünyadaki iletişimi kolaylaştıran ve küreselleşen dünyanın bir sonucu olarak ortak dil olarak da kullanılan İngilizce açısından, dil öğrenen ve öğretenlerin 21. yüzyıl becerilerine sahip olması gerekmektedir. İngilizce öğretimi alanındaki öğretmenlerin bu becerilerin farkında olması, uygulaması ve bunları sınıf uygulamalarında yorumlaması, öğrencilerin akademik başarılarını ve geleceklerini etkileyen önemli faktörler arasındadır.

Tüm bu hususlar dikkate alındığında 21. yüzyıl becerilerinin eğitimin her alanında önemli bir rol oynadığı tartışılmaz bir gerçektir. Bu becerilerin, özellikle İngilizce öğretimi alanında kullanılması, İngilizce'nin tüm dünyada ortak bir dil olarak kabul edilmesinden dolayı, gelecek vaat eden nesillerin yetiştirilmesi ve hazırlanması için önemli ölçüde gereklidir. Buna dayanarak, bu çalışmada bibliyometrik bir analiz süreci ile İngiliz dili eğitimi alanındaki 21. yüzyıl becerilerine odaklanan güncel çalışma eğilimlerini ve çalışma boşluklarını ortaya çıkarmak amaçlanmıştır. Bibliyometrik araştırma ile alandaki en çok çalışılan konuları ve anahatar kelimeleri, en çok yayın üreten ülkeleri ve en çok atıf yapılan yazarları belirlemek çalışmanın hedefleri arasındadır.

Web of Science veritabanı kullanılarak veri toplanan bu çalışmada, belirli anahtar kelimelerle toplam 59 çalışmaya ulaşılmıştır. Analiz sonucunda, İngiliz dili eğitimi alanında 21. yüzyıl becerileri üzerine yapılan çalışmaların sayısında, bazı dalgalanmalar görülse de yıldan yıla artış olduğu fark edilmektedir. Şimdiye kadar en fazla yayın 12 çalışma ile 2021 yılında yapılmış ve hatta 2022'nin ilk yarısında 7 çalışma olması bu yılki yayın sayısının da artacağı şeklinde yorumlanabilmektedir. Analiz sonucunda, yapılan atıf sayılarında da artış olduğu görülmekte ve bu da konuya ilişkin akademik ilginin de arttığının göstergesi olarak yorumlanabilmektedir. En çok atıf yapılan üç yayın incelendiğinde, 21. yüzyıl becerilerinden eleştirel düşünmenin çoğunlukla konuşma becerileri ile entegre edildiği görülmektedir. Aynı çalışmada atıf yapılan iki kaynağın tekrarını gösteren ortak atıf ilişkisine göre en çok ortak atıf yapılan yazarlar Warschauer, Vygotsky, Mishra, Nunan ve Trilling olarak görülmektedir. Yayınların kaynakçalarındaki örtüşmeyi gösteren bibliyografik eşleştirmenin ülke bazındaki analizi sonucunda Endonezya ve Cezayir'in en yüksek frekansa sahip olduğu görülmektedir.

Çalışmalarda en çok kullanılan anahtar kelimelere bakıldığında en çok "dil" sözcüğünün kullanıldığı ve yaratıcılık, işbirliği, eleştirel düşünme ve iletişimin 21. yüzyıl becerileri arasında yer alması nedeniyle,

arařtırmaların daha çok bu beceriler üzerinde görüřmeler ve projelere yoğunlařtıđı görülmektedir. Yazarlar tarafından kullanılan anahtar kelimelerin yıllar içinde dađılımları ise arařtırmacıların 21. yüzyıl becerileri arasında daha çok eleřtirel düşünme ve yaratıcılıđa odaklandıklarını göstermektedir. Yıl bazında incelendiđinde, son yıllarda yapılan çalışmaların eğitim kalitesi ve dijital okuryazarlık ile ilgili olan ve dünya çapında dijitalleşmenin olađan bir sonucu olarak bilgisayar destekli dil öğrenimi üzerinde yoğunlařtıđı görülmektedir.

Bu çalışmanın sonuçlarına dayanarak, İngiliz dili eğitimi alanında yaşam ve kariyer becerilerinin önemini ve entegrasyonunu daha iyi anlaşılır hale getirmek için daha fazla araştırma yapılabilir. Ayrıca, dil öğrenenlerin ve öğretmenlerin dijital okuryazarlık becerileri konusunda farkındalığı artırmak için daha fazla araştırma yapılabilir.