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The Representation of 21st-Century Themes in the English Textbooks in the Philippines

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Abstract

In an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world, the need to equip students with relevant skills and knowledge has become a critical educational priority. English language teaching (ELT) textbooks play a crucial role in preparing them for the multifaceted challenges of modern society. However, there is limited research on how effectively these textbooks integrate 21st-century themes. Thus, this study investigates the representation of 21st-century themes in ELT textbooks used in the Philippines. Specifically, this study examines the extent of using 21st-century themes in the ELT coursebooks, the ways these themes are incorporated into the textbooks, and the types of assessment activities where 21st-century themes are incorporated. A descriptive approach was employed to examine 30 textbooks from three major educational publishers. Findings reveal significant variability in the representation of themes such as civic literacy, health literacy, and environmental literacy, as well as the three primary methods of integrating these themes. The study highlights a lack of systematic integration of 21st-century themes, largely influenced by the absence of a standardized national curriculum framework and the varied orientations of textbook authors. These results underscore the need for a more comprehensive and balanced integration of 21st-century skills across educational materials. Implications for curriculum development, textbook design, teacher training, and future studies are discussed.

Keywords: 21st-century learning, 21st-century themes, English language teaching, English textbooks, textbook analysis.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this globalized era, educational content must not only deliver traditional academic knowledge but also integrate contemporary themes that equip students with the skills needed to succeed in a dynamic and interconnected world. Research demonstrates that the integration of 21st-century skills not only enhances students' academic performance but also significantly improves their competitiveness in a global context (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022; Herlinawati et al., 2024). These skills enable students to adapt to diverse cultural and technological landscapes, navigate complex problem-solving scenarios, and contribute meaningfully to the workforce and society (OECD, 2020). Additionally, recent studies emphasize that 21st-century skills foster critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration; capabilities that are indispensable for succeeding in today's knowledge-based economy (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). Consequently, educational reforms strongly advocate for integrating these skills into curricula to equip students with the tools necessary for thriving in the evolving global landscape (Acedo & Hughes, 2014; Barrot, 2022; Erstad & Voogt, 2018; Gut, 2010).

One critical component of actualizing 21st-century learning in the English classroom is through textbooks. Few studies have explored how 21st-century learning is integrated into English textbooks (e.g., Rakhmawati & Priyana, 2019; Rinekso, 2021; Seitova & Narymbetov, 2021). However, these studies primarily focused on 21st-century skills, inadvertently excluding 21st-century themes relevant to students' success (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009). To clarify, 21st-century skills refer to a set of abilities that students must develop to succeed in a rapidly changing, technology-driven environment, such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (OECD, 2020). These skills emphasize how students learn and apply knowledge to solve real-world problems. On the other hand, 21st-century themes encompass broader interdisciplinary topics integrated into the curriculum, including global awareness, financial literacy, civic literacy, health literacy, and environmental literacy. These themes focus on what students learn to become informed, active participants in society (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009). While skills emphasize the application of knowledge, themes provide the contextual foundation for equipping students with a holistic understanding of their roles as global citizens. In the Philippines, preliminary observations suggest a lack of systematic integration of 21st-century themes into the English curriculum (Barrot, 2019). This issue could potentially limit their presence in English textbooks and hinder students' ability to effectively communicate and operate in a multicultural and digital landscape.

This study is motivated by the need to analyze the integration of 21st-century themes in English textbooks used in Philippine schools. It aims to examine the prevalence and representation of these themes, assess the methods and approaches used to incorporate them into textbook content, and identify the types of assessment activities that include these themes. By addressing these objectives, the study provides actionable strategies for teachers, policymakers, and materials developers to enhance the integration of 21st-century themes, ensuring that students are well-prepared to meet the demands of a globalized and interconnected world.

Despite ongoing discussions about making ELT textbooks relevant to modern educational goals, the representation of 21st-century themes in these materials remains underexplored. This research builds upon these discussions by addressing the following questions: (1) What is the extent of using 21st-century themes in the ELT coursebooks? (2) In what ways are these themes incorporated into the textbooks? (3) What types of assessment incorporate 21st-century themes? By answering these inquiries, the study sheds light on the alignment of ELT textbooks with international standards and their role in preparing language learners for the complexities of contemporary society. Furthermore, understanding how these themes are assessed is essential to ensure that students can apply the knowledge and skills they acquire, reflecting a holistic educational approach that informs ongoing improvements in ELT materials and strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Framework for 21st Century Learning (also known as the P21 framework), developed by Partnership for 21st Century Skills. The framework advocates for the integration of specific skills and knowledge that students need to succeed in work, life, and citizenship in the 21st century ([Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009](#)). One of the cornerstones of this framework is the traditional subjects that promote 21st-century interdisciplinary themes to ensure that learners are well-versed in essential disciplines and understand content at a much higher level. These themes include global awareness, financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy, civic literacy, health literacy, and environmental literacy ([Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009](#)). Beginning with global awareness, this theme fosters an understanding of international issues, advocates the appreciation of diverse perspectives, and enhances the ability to collaborate across cultures. This component is crucial in preparing students for the interdependent world of tomorrow, cultivating cross-cultural understanding and respect. Financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy (shortened as financial literacy) then builds upon this by instilling the significance of financial competence in personal and business realms, coupled with a grasp of economic principles and entrepreneurial insights that boost workplace efficacy and expand career pathways. Civic literacy is integrated to deepen understanding of a citizen's role within a democracy, knowledge of governance at various levels, and the development of skills for active, informed participation in civic life. Health literacy contributes by enabling students to access, interpret, and comprehend essential health information and services, fostering the ability to make sound health choices and contribute to communal health and well-being. Lastly, environmental literacy aims to impart an understanding of ecosystems and processes, promote sustainable practices, and empower learners to make ecologically responsible decisions. Collectively, these components of the P21 framework converge to create a holistic educational strategy that prepares students not just academically, but as conscientious global citizens.

The P21 framework provides a theoretical foundation for evaluating educational content. The research could explore how well English textbooks in the Philippines incorporate these five themes into their content and assessment activities to prepare students for the multifaceted challenges of the contemporary world. By doing so, the research could assess the relevance, scope, and depth of the textbooks' content in fostering comprehensive 21st-century competencies among Filipino English language learners.

2.2 21st-Century Learning

Technological advances and a greater understanding of cultural diversity and globalization have transformed traditional education into what is commonly known as 21st-century learning. This learning paradigm is characterized by a broad set of skills and knowledge that students need to thrive in the digital era ([González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022](#); [Herlinawati et al., 2024](#); [Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010](#)). It focuses on essential skills such as gathering, managing, assessing, and producing information with available resources, crucial for operating within a globalized economic landscape ([Borsheim et al., 2008](#); [So & Kang, 2014](#)). Cheryl (2002) also identified four key areas of 21st-century learning competencies: digital-age literacies, inventive thinking, effective communication, and high productivity. These competencies range from a thorough understanding of basic to global literacies, the application of advanced thinking and technological skills in complex situations to fostering adaptability and creativity, the necessity for effective social interaction skills, including collaboration and personal responsibility, and the ability to achieve high-quality outcomes efficiently in the workplace.

Furthermore, 21st-century learning promotes a curriculum that is enriched with contemporary themes, integrating critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration; skills essential for future success ([Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023](#)). The Organization for Economic Co-operation

and Development (OECD) highlights the importance of these learning standards as they set a benchmark for global educational practices. These standards advocate for a holistic development approach, integrating cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills crucial for success in today's fast-evolving, technologically driven environment (OECD, 2020). Education systems are encouraged to evolve by integrating these skills into their frameworks, which necessitates a redesign of curriculum, pedagogy, instructional materials, and assessment methods to keep pace with global demands and future challenges.

2.3 ELT Textbooks as a Tool to Represent Various Concepts and Beliefs

ELT textbooks serve as crucial educational tools that reflect and disseminate a wide range of concepts relevant to language teaching and learning. They are not just vessels of factual knowledge but also mediums through which beliefs, knowledge, and values are conveyed and instilled (Al-Issa, 2019). Hence, several studies have been undertaken to examine how these concepts are represented in ELT textbooks. These examinations revealed the underlying ideologies and biases that may influence learners' worldviews. Yuen (2011), Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2015), and Ariawan et al. (2022) analyzed how cultures are represented in ELT textbooks and found that English-speaking cultures were comparatively more evident than local and non-English-speaking cultures. Yuen (2011) conducted a study in the Hong Kong context, uncovering a preference for English-speaking cultures over local Chinese culture in the textbooks analyzed. Similarly, Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2015) focused on Iranian ELT textbooks and found a similar pattern, where English-speaking cultures were prominently featured, often overshadowing Persian and other non-English-speaking cultural narratives. Ariawan et al. (2022) examined Indonesian ELT textbooks and revealed that English-speaking cultures dominated the content, with limited representation of Indonesian cultural elements. Yuen's (2011) study also revealed that the cultural depth of these materials was lacking; instead, they focused more on popular products. A related study was conducted by Bowen and Hopper (2023), who investigated the inclusivity of race in ELT textbooks by analyzing 1,648 images of participants from five popular textbooks. Similar to the two previous studies, results indicated a significant bias towards the representation of Whites over other races in the textbooks, both in terms of overall numbers and spatial affordance. Moreover, Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2020) investigated how gender is constructed in newly published Iranian English language textbooks. They found these textbooks gender conscious as reflected by the use of gender-neutral vocabulary and fair distribution of male and female discourse. Meanwhile, other scholars focused on political ideology, such as Jalalian Daghigh and Abdul Rahim (2021), who examined neoliberalism in ELT textbooks in Malaysia. They found that both imported and locally developed textbooks reflect several neoliberal themes, such as consumerism and material wealth, but only minimally in the latter. These findings were linked to global demand for competition and economic growth.

Continuing from these analyses, recent studies have also focused on how 21st-century skills are represented in ELT textbooks. For example, Rakhmawati and Priyana (2019) analyzed the extent and approach of integrating 21st-century skills into high school English textbooks in Indonesia. The findings revealed that the textbooks incorporated 11 essential skills: critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation, information and communication technology, media literacy, leadership and responsibility, productivity and accountability, social and cross-cultural skills, initiative and self-direction, and flexibility and adaptability. These skills were embedded using Nunan's task components, such as goals, inputs, procedures, teacher roles, learner roles, and settings. However, these findings might not have fully reflected the extent of integration since they only analyzed Grade 10 textbooks. Rinekso (2021) undertook a similar study by examining a Grade 7 English textbook in Indonesia through content analysis. His findings revealed that most 21st-century skills were represented in the textbook, with particular emphasis on communication and collaboration. These skills were integrated through learning activities/tasks found in goal, input, procedure, teacher/learner role, pictures, and notes. Meanwhile, Seitova and Narymbetov (2021) examined the representation of the 4Cs – communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity – in a Grade 9

coursebook series. Their findings revealed that, while the series integrated the 4Cs to some extent, it exhibited significant limitations in addressing other essential skills such as creativity, responsibility, social and interpersonal skills, flexibility, adaptability, media literacy, ICT proficiency, cross-cultural competencies, productivity and accountability, initiative and self-direction, and leadership. As shown, these three studies indicated similar results. They primarily focused on 21st-century skills and inadvertently excluded equally relevant aspects of 21st-century learning, such as themes.

3. METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive design to explore the integration and representation of 21st-century themes in ELT textbooks in the Philippines. The descriptive design was deemed appropriate for this research because it allows for a systematic analysis of content, focusing on identifying patterns, trends, and gaps in the representation of 21st-century themes. Unlike experimental or correlational designs, which emphasize testing causal relationships or predicting outcomes, a descriptive approach is well-suited for exploratory studies that aim to document and interpret phenomena as they exist (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches enables the study to provide a more complete understanding of the research questions (Molina-Azorin & Fetters, 2019; Plano Clark, 2017). This is essential for a nuanced inquiry into textbook content, which involves not only quantifying the extent of theme integration but also understanding the context and depth of that integration. The quantitative aspect of the design allowed for the systematic collection and analysis of data on the frequency and distribution of 21st-century themes across the textbooks. This objective measurement helped identify patterns or gaps in the presentation of these themes. Meanwhile, the qualitative component provided deeper insights into the context, approach, and depth of integrating these themes into the textbooks. Consequently, it would shed light on the pedagogical intentions behind their inclusion, the relevance and applicability of the themes, and the educational value they add to the textbooks.

3.1 Data Sources

The data source used for text analysis was 30 ELT textbooks published by three major educational publishers for basic education in the Philippines (“Charting the future,” 2014). The textbooks were selected based on the following eligibility criteria: (1) the books use 21st-century learning as one of the frameworks, (2) they have complete English series from grades 1 to 10, and (3) they are the most recent main English textbook series of the publisher. Table 1 presents the selected ELT textbooks and their corresponding description. Each textbook series is composed of 10 different grade levels, with each level covering four units and 16 to 84 lessons. Codes have been used to protect the anonymity of the selected textbooks and publishers.

Table 1. ELT textbook series.

Grade level	Textbook title	Year	No. of lessons	Publisher
1	SE1	2023	32	AA
2	SE2	2023	32	
3	SE3	2023	32	
4	SE4	2023	32	
5	SE5	2023	32	
6	SE6	2023	32	
7	SE7	2023	16	
8	SE8	2023	16	
9	SE9	2023	16	
10	SE10	2023	18	
1	ED1	2018	32	BB
2	ED2	2019	32	
3	ED3	2018	32	BB
4	ED4	2018	37	

Table 1 continued...

5	ED5	2019	40		
6	ED6	2018	40		
7	ED7	2020	84		
8	ED8	2020	81		
9	ED9	2020	80		
10	ED10	2020	79		
1	NX1	2022	32		CC
2	NX2	2022	32		
3	NX3	2022	24		
4	NX4	2022	32		
5	NX5	2022	32		
6	NX6	2022	20		
7	NX7	2022	44		
8	NX8	2022	28		
9	NX9	2022	28		
10	NX10	2022	32		

3.2 Data Analysis

To address the research questions concerning the representation of 21st-century themes in ELT coursebooks in the Philippines, content analysis was employed. Content analysis is a method used to analyze various types of data by categorizing phenomena or events for interpretation (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). This method was chosen to quantitatively analyze how these themes are presented, integrated, and assessed within the ELT textbooks. Firstly, I reviewed each textbook to identify all instances of 21st-century themes, namely global awareness, financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy, civic literacy, health literacy, and environmental literacy. The coding process involved identifying the 21st-century themes presented in all lessons across three ELT textbook series. Each instance was recorded with its page number and textbook section to facilitate detailed analysis.

To answer the first research question regarding the extent of the integration of 21st-century themes, the frequency of coded instances across all textbooks was calculated. This quantitative measure provided an overview of how prominently each theme was featured in the textbooks. Additionally, the distribution of themes across different textbooks was identified. For the second question, the content analysis focused on the context and methods of theme incorporation. This involved examining the information presented and the ways themes were incorporated into each lesson of the ELT textbooks. To determine how 21st-century themes are assessed, I reviewed the nature of assessment tasks related to each theme. This involved identifying whether assessments were formative (ongoing feedback during the learning process to enhance both teaching and student performance, such as quizzes and lesson activities) or summative (overall achievement at the end of an instructional period through unit assessment and major exams or projects), traditional (recalling information using structured formats, such as multiple-choice questions) or alternative (applying knowledge in practical tasks), and selected response (choosing the correct answer from given options) or constructed response (generating own responses to questions or prompts). The final step involved synthesizing the data to form an overall picture of how 21st-century themes are utilized in ELT coursebooks.

As part of inter-coding, another experienced teacher-researcher carried out the data analysis to ensure its rigor. This intercoder has 10 years of experience in language instruction and a strong grasp of 21st-century themes and the P21 framework. Before starting the analysis, human coders were briefed on the textbook analysis procedure to standardize their approach. To further strengthen and validate the agreement between coders, an intercoder reliability (ICR) test was conducted using Cohen's Kappa, a statistical measure widely used to assess the consistency between raters (Rau & Shih, 2021). The test yielded a Kappa value of 0.72, indicating substantial agreement and, together with coder discussions, ensured reliability and confidence in the findings.

4. RESULTS

The current study examines how 21st-century themes are represented in the recent ELT textbooks in the Philippines. Specifically, this study provides insights into the extent of using 21st-century themes in the ELT textbooks and the ways these themes are incorporated and assessed. The following section presents the answers to the posted research questions.

4.1 Extent of Using 21st-Century Themes in the ELT Textbooks

Table 2 provides a detailed examination of the integration of five key 21st-century themes across multiple textbook series, each spanning from grades 1 to 10. It allows for a comparative view of how each series addresses these themes and highlights differences in emphasis across the textbooks. Overall, the table underscores significant variation in the degree of theme integration, revealing that some series prioritize certain literacies more than others.

Table 2. Extent of integrating 21st-century themes.

Textbook series	No. of lessons	Global awareness	Financial literacy	Civic literacy	Health literacy	Environment literacy
SE1	32	0	2	14	8	8
SE2	32	0	1	8	4	4
SE3	32	1	0	9	1	9
SE4	32	0	3	9	6	5
SE5	32	1	1	4	6	6
SE6	32	0	0	9	2	5
SE7	16	0	1	9	0	6
SE8	16	11	0	6	3	1
SE9	16	1	1	2	5	2
SE10	18	1	6	7	2	13
Total		15	15	77	37	59
ED1	32	0	0	6	0	4
ED2	32	0	0	4	0	4
ED3	32	0	2	4	1	2
ED4	37	0	0	4	0	5
ED5	40	0	0	8	0	4
ED6	40	1	0	5	0	0
ED7	84	0	0	2	0	0
ED8	81	4	0	5	0	0
ED9	80	1	0	2	1	1
ED10	79	1	0	4	0	0
Total		7	2	44	2	20
NX1	32	0	0	0	0	1
NX2	32	0	0	0	0	0
NX3	24	2	0	0	2	1
NX4	32	1	0	1	0	3
NX5	32	0	0	4	1	10
NX6	20	0	0	3	1	2
NX7	44	0	1	4	5	6
NX8	28	1	3	7	1	1
NX9	28	1	3	16	5	3
NX10	32	1	2	5	4	0
Total		6	9	40	19	27

The analysis reveals significant variability in the extent to which these themes are incorporated into these ELT textbooks. In the SE series, civic literacy emerges as the most prominently integrated theme, with a total of 77 instances across the 10 textbooks. Notably, SE3 and SE10 stand out with 9 and 7 instances, respectively, focusing on this theme. Environmental literacy follows closely, with 59 instances, with SE10 contributing the highest number of instances (13). Health literacy is also well-represented in the SE series, particularly in SE1 and SE10, which feature eight and 13 instances, respectively. In contrast, global awareness and

financial literacy are less emphasized, with 15 instances each, though SE8 (11 instances) and SE10 (six instances) show more substantial integration of these themes.

The ED series, on the other hand, presents a more modest integration of these 21st-century themes. Civic literacy again takes precedence, with 44 instances overall, and ED5 leading with eight instances. However, the integration of other themes is limited. For instance, global awareness is addressed in only seven instances across the entire series, and financial literacy is included in just two instances, predominantly in ED3. Health literacy is scarcely featured, with only two instances, while environmental literacy, though somewhat more represented, still accounts for only 20 instances, with ED4 offering the most (five instances).

The NX series shows a more balanced but still focused integration of 21st-century themes compared to the ED series. Civic literacy is once again the most emphasized theme, with 40 instances, significantly highlighted in NX9 with 16 instances. Environmental literacy is also prominently featured, with 27 instances, the most notable contribution being from NX5 (10 instances). Health literacy receives moderate attention, with 19 instances overall, with NX7 and NX9 each including five instances. Global awareness and financial literacy, however, are less consistently integrated, with six and nine instances, respectively, across the series, although NX3, NX8, and NX9 provide more focus on these themes.

Overall, the analysis reveals a negligible to limited integration of 21st-century themes across the curriculum. On average, the SE series incorporates just 0.79 of these themes per lesson, while the ED series integrates an even smaller average of 0.14 themes per lesson. The NX series falls between the two, with an average of 0.33 themes per lesson. These figures indicate that, despite the growing importance of 21st-century learning in education, the current ELT textbooks only sparsely embed these critical themes, suggesting a significant gap in the preparation of students to meet the challenges of the modern world.

4.2 Ways 21st-Century Themes Incorporated into the Textbooks

The five 21st-century themes were integrated into ELT textbooks through three distinct approaches: as part of the passages, as part of the discussion, and as part of assessment activities. The results are shown in Table 3. Overall, the data suggest that most textbook series embed these themes more prominently within reading passages and assessment tasks than in classroom discussions.

Table 3. Extent of integrating 21st-century themes using the three approaches.

Textbook series	Passage	Discussion	Assessment
SE Series	103	25	75
ED Series	36	1	38
NX Series	37	0	64

Table 3 provides a detailed comparison of how different textbook series, i.e., SE, ED, and NX, incorporate 21st-century themes through three distinct approaches. The first approach involves embedding 21st-century themes directly into the passages that students engage with during lessons. These passages are not limited to traditional text; they include a variety of multimodal texts such as videos, images, audio clips, and infographics. The SE series leads significantly in integrating 21st-century themes within the passages, with a total of 103 and an average of 10.3 per textbook, indicating a strong emphasis on including relevant content in the text. In contrast, the ED series shows a lower level of integration in the passages, totaling 36 with an average of 3.6 per textbook. The NX series also demonstrates limited integration in the passages, with a total of 37 and an average of 3.7 per textbook.

The second approach focuses on discussions that occur around the lesson topics and subtopics. In this method, 21st-century themes are brought into the classroom dialogue as students and teachers explore and explain the content of a lesson. All three series show minimal integration of 21st-century themes into the discussions. The SE series, despite its overall high thematic integration, has only a total of 25 and an average of 2.5 per textbook for the discussions. The ED

series has an even lower total of 1 and an average of 0.1 per textbook, indicating almost no emphasis on integrating themes into the discussions. The NX series also shows no integration into the discussions, recording none across all textbooks.

The final approach involves integrating 21st-century themes into the assessment methods used to evaluate student learning. This might include using these themes as topics for writing assignments, speaking activities, quizzes, and other forms of assessment. Among the three ELT textbook series, the NX series registers the highest integration of 21st-century themes into the assessments, with a total of 64 and an average of 6.4 per textbook. The SE series also demonstrates a moderate emphasis on integrating themes into the assessments, totaling 75 and averaging 7.5 per textbook. The ED series shows relatively low integration in the assessments, with a total of 38 and an average of 3.8 per textbook.

4.3 Types of Assessment that Involve 21st-Century Themes

Table 4 presents data on the extent of integrating 21st-century themes into different types of assessment activities in the ELT textbooks. They are classified as follows: formative vs. summative assessments, traditional vs. alternative assessments, and selected vs. constructed responses. Overall, the data show that integration is more evident in formative, alternative, and constructed-response assessments across the three textbook series.

Table 4. The extent of integrating 21st-century themes into different types of assessment.

Textbook series	Formative	Summative	Traditional	Alternative	Constructed response	Selected response
SE Series	59	16	31	44	71	4
ED Series	26	12	10	28	38	0
NX Series	48	16	7	57	63	1

Results reveal that 133 of the 177 (75.14 per cent) assessment activities in the ELT textbook series are formative assessment, that is, 59 instances in SE, 26 in ED, and 48 in NX. Meanwhile, the remaining 44 activities (24.86 per cent) are summative assessments (16 in SE, 12 in ED, and 16 in NX). This smaller proportion of summative assessments is expected due to their association with unit tests, which are fewer in number compared to the total lessons present in each textbook. Typically, textbooks are structured with a limited number of unit tests, often around four per book, designed to evaluate comprehensive knowledge and understanding at the end of significant learning units. This structured approach underscores the targeted use of summative assessments to measure broader learning outcomes while relying more heavily on formative assessments to support ongoing student development.

An interesting trend is noted in the use of traditional versus alternative assessments. Traditional assessment methods show moderate usage with totals of 31 for SE, 10 for ED, and seven for NX. In contrast, alternative assessment approaches are more prevalent, with SE showing 44 instances, ED having 28, and NX totaling 57. This data suggests that ELT textbooks are increasingly moving away from conventional assessment methods towards more innovative, flexible, and inclusive ways to assess student understanding and skills.

The dominance of constructed response items over selected response items is evident from Table 4. Constructed responses are used extensively across all sets, with 71 instances in SE, 38 in ED, and 63 in NX. Selected response items are minimally used, with only four instances in SE and one in NX, and are completely absent in ED. Constructed responses, which require students to generate their own answers, are clearly favored, highlighting an emphasis on deeper cognitive processing, personalized expression, and the application of knowledge rather than simple recall, which is often associated with selected response formats.

5. DISCUSSION

This study examines how 21st-century themes are represented and integrated into ELT textbooks used in the Philippines, with a specific interest in the extent of their usage, the methods of incorporation, and the types of assessments involved. The findings revealed significant variability across different textbook series in terms of theme integration. The study also identified that the three primary methods of integrating these themes are through passages, discussions, and assessments, with passages being the most commonly used method. There was also a notable preference for formative assessment, alternative assessment methods, and constructed response formats, which suggests a shift towards more innovative and engaging approaches in evaluating student understanding and skills. The limited yet varied incorporation of themes such as civic literacy, health literacy, and environmental literacy across different textbook series reflects the partial alignment with the P21 framework's objectives. The data suggest that while there is a foundational effort to incorporate 21st-century themes, there is still a significant need for more comprehensive and balanced integration to fully realize the holistic educational strategy envisioned by the P21 framework.

The findings of the current study align with and extend previous research on the role of ELT textbooks as conveyors of various concepts and beliefs. Similar to how [Yuen \(2011\)](#), [Tajeddin and Teimournezhad \(2015\)](#), and [Ariawan et al. \(2022\)](#) highlighted the predominance of English-speaking cultural representations in ELT materials, the current study reveals an uneven integration of 21st-century themes, such as global awareness and financial literacy, suggesting potential biases or gaps in thematic coverage that could influence learners' perspectives. The underrepresentation of certain themes might mirror the focus on popular and dominant cultural narratives observed in earlier studies, where depth and inclusivity were found lacking. Moreover, [Bowen and Hopper's \(2023\)](#) findings on racial biases and [Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei's \(2020\)](#) observations on gender representation highlight how ELT textbooks serve as reflections of broader social and cultural ideologies, which the current study further supports by showing selective emphasis on certain themes like civic literacy. The inclusion of these themes, or lack thereof, may be indicative of the underlying ideologies and priorities embedded within educational content, resonating with [Jalalian Daghigh and Abdul Rahim's \(2021\)](#) study on neoliberal themes, which align with neoliberal ideologies that promote individualism, market-driven values, and the commodification of education, raising concerns about their impact on local cultural norms and educational goals. Additionally, while [Rakhmawati and Priyana \(2019\)](#) and [Rinekso \(2021\)](#) focused on the inclusion of 21st-century skills such as critical thinking and collaboration, they often did not comprehensively address broader thematic integration, which this study highlights as an area needing more balance and consistency.

The findings of the study can be attributed to several key factors. One of the primary reasons for the limited and unsystematic integration of 21st-century themes into ELT textbooks is the absence of a systematic framework within the national English curriculum, as emphasized elsewhere ([Barrot, 2019](#)). Without clear guidelines or standards that mandate the inclusion of these themes, the approach to incorporating them becomes fragmented and inconsistent. When such a curriculum lacks explicit emphasis on 21st-century skills and interdisciplinary themes, it leaves textbook authors without a clear roadmap, leading to varied and often minimal inclusion of these important themes ([Barrot, 2019](#); [Fullan & Langworthy, 2014](#)). This gap can result in students not being adequately prepared with the critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills that are essential for success in the modern world, which are key components of the Framework for 21st Century Learning ([Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009](#)).

The inconsistent integration of 21st-century themes into ELT textbooks may also be influenced by the orientation and understanding of the authors involved in their development. Many authors may lack a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes 21st-century themes due to insufficient training or exposure to these concepts. Moreover, the availability of resources plays a crucial role in shaping the content that authors can incorporate. Limited access to updated materials, research findings, and professional development opportunities can hinder authors from effectively embedding these themes into textbooks ([Reimers & Chung, 2016](#)). Without proper

training and a strong grasp of these emerging educational priorities, authors may default to traditional content areas, inadvertently limiting the scope and relevance of the educational materials they create (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013).

Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of 21st-century skills, there is still a predominant focus on traditional themes and topics within ELT textbooks. This inclination is often driven by longstanding educational practices and norms that prioritize language skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension over broader interdisciplinary skills. Similar patterns have been observed in other contexts. For instance, studies in Indonesia and Malaysia revealed that ELT textbooks continue to emphasize conventional language teaching areas, often at the expense of integrating contemporary themes and skills (Jalalian Daghig & Abdul Rahim, 2021; Rakhmawati & Priyana, 2019). Similarly, research conducted in Iran highlighted the dominance of traditional topics, with limited representation of 21st-century skills and themes such as critical thinking, global awareness, and media literacy (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015). Authors may feel more comfortable adhering to familiar content areas that align closely with traditional assessments and educational outcomes (Richards, 2017). This focus on conventional topics can marginalize newer, more contemporary themes, resulting in textbooks that do not fully address the competencies needed for students to thrive in a rapidly changing, globalized world. The reluctance to shift from traditional to more innovative content further underscores the need for a systematic, curriculum-driven approach to ensure that all students gain exposure to critical 21st-century skills (Cuban, 2013).

6. CONCLUSION

This study reveals significant variability in the integration of 21st-century themes, namely, global awareness, financial literacy, civic literacy, health literacy, and environmental literacy, across different textbook series. These themes were incorporated using three primary methods: through passages, discussions, and assessments. Despite these efforts, the overall integration of 21st-century themes remains limited and inconsistent. This inconsistency is largely influenced by the absence of a systematic national curriculum framework that mandates the inclusion of these themes and the varying orientations and understanding of textbook authors regarding 21st-century educational priorities.

The findings of this study have significant implications. For curriculum development, the results suggest a need for national standards that systematically incorporate 21st-century themes to ensure consistency and comprehensive integration across all educational materials. In terms of ELT textbook design, publishers and authors should prioritize a more balanced representation of themes such as global awareness, civic literacy, and environmental sustainability, using diverse methods, including passages, discussions, and varied assessment types to engage students effectively. Teacher training programs should be enhanced to equip educators with a solid understanding of 21st-century skills and themes, enabling them to implement these effectively in classroom instruction and to support textbook content. These findings also underscore the importance of aligning educational materials with curriculum frameworks to ensure that teaching practices are not only focused on language acquisition but also on developing students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and global citizenship skills. Finally, these results highlight the importance of ongoing research and evaluation to ensure that educational practices keep pace with societal changes and the evolving needs of students, preparing them for future challenges and opportunities.

This study acknowledges several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. One limitation of this study is its reliance on content analysis of textbooks, which may not capture the full extent of how 21st-century themes are taught or perceived in actual classroom settings. Future research should include classroom observations and teacher interviews to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how these themes are implemented in practice. Another limitation is the focus on textbooks from only three major publishers, which may not reflect the diversity of materials used across different educational contexts in the Philippines. Expanding the

sample to include textbooks from a broader range of publishers and educational institutions would provide a more representative analysis. Lastly, the study primarily uses a quantitative approach, which, while being systematic, may overlook the nuanced ways in which themes are integrated. Incorporating a stronger qualitative component, such as thematic analysis of textbook content, could provide deeper insights into the pedagogical strategies employed.

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