Rethinking the Roles of English Lecturers in the Digital Era

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Abstract

Along with the era of rapid technology advancement on the performance of *Artificial Intelligence* (henceforth AI), there have been intense discussions and debates among educationists about the future of human teachers and AI teachers. When information can be accessed easily amidst the rapid development of online learning, it is intriguing to listen to students' perspectives on the roles they expect from their teachers, especially in learning English subjects, when abundant resources are available and accessible online within their fingertips in social media platforms and online learning websites. In short, to identify what cannot be fulfilled online. To serve that purpose, 160 students from a private university in Indonesia were recruited as research participants. They are from 16 different study programs recruited as participants through a purposive sampling method to see if findings are bound to study program types. Data were collected through an online questionnaire and an interview. The results indicated that the students perceive their teachers as someone to guide their learning by providing good online resources and immediate feedback rather than expecting their teachers to be a content expert or to have a linguistic performance like native teachers.

Keywords: digital, English, lecturers, role

Introduction

Technology shifts civilization. As someone born and raised at the end of the 20th century, millennials have experienced that technology has changed human beings routines and needs in many ways. In the late 20th century, access to information was not as massive as today. People were still tame, patient, and sufficed with the "slow-paced" life.

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With the increasing use of blended learning approaches in the classroom, various kinds of technologies are incorporated to provide digital teaching and learning resources to support students. Education nowadays involves technology on its daily basis. The teacher is not the only source of information anymore but more precise information is now provided at our fingertips; there has even been a phrase "google it" in the term of asking someone to seek certain information on Google. Learning becomes more colorful and visual and the unexpected challenge grows.

Many schools or universities have developed its own online learning which can reduce the direct interaction between educators and students in the classroom. It is not only about how to create intelligent students cognitively but also how to create students who are able to deal with billions of information provided on the internet, to choose which information is fact or hoax, and to focus. Furthermore, social-emotional intelligence is an important issue to develop in this digital era since millennials and post-millennials will be responsible for taking the role of active contributors to the future world and its citizens.

In addition to that, because of the sprouting emergence of social media platforms, exposure to English language use in daily life context is higher. One may live in the Expanding Circle countries (Kachru as cited in (Mollin, 2006), but manage to be exposed to, or even use, English just like how English is used for daily communication in the Inner and Outer Circle countries just by using a smartphone. It is easy to notice how young people these days confidently share or comment on an issue on social media using English.

Educators must realize that in order to survive civilization, one must adapt and have the skills that are necessary at that time. According to some researchers, the era of the 21st century is the creativity and digital era. When all information can be accessed easily, some questions appear amidst this rapid change; if all knowledge can be accessed within our students' fingertips, to what extent do millennial and post-millennial children still need teachers in the classroom? What are the roles of teachers in the classroom that technology does not provide? There have been some studies discussing about education in the digital era which suggests that an educator's role is to be a facilitator, but do our students agree with that consensus? Is it culture-bound? Since most of the existing studies are conducted in western countries, in which students' learning independence is high, and students and teachers are deemed equal, it is really intriguing to listen to students in Indonesian university's perspectives on the roles which they expect their lecturers to take.

Along with the era of rapid technology advancement on the performance of *Artificial Intelligence* (henceforth AI), there have been intense discussions and debates among educationists about the future of human teachers and AI teachers. Long before online learning platforms started to sprout, it has been predicted that "the new technology will not change the work of the teachers fundamentally, but will, nevertheless, have a profound impact on how the various approaches to

teaching can be implemented in radically different technological and organizational environments" (Ljoså, 1998). On the other hand, in a more recent study, other experts (Susskind & Susskind, 2015) argued that technology will transform the work of human experts, including teacher profession. They further elaborated that, for now, human teachers and AI teachers will still operate in parallel, but in the longer run, gradual dismantling will occur, leading to the domination of AI teachers.

Regardless of the ongoing debate, however, there seems to be a consensus among those researchers that both human teachers and AI teachers will co-exist, but in various levels of dominance. Therefore, it is emphasized that schools need a transformation of pedagogy and practice as well as broaden learning experiences (Tan, 2013) and better address students' diverse learning needs (Poon, Kong, Yau, Wong, & Ling, 2017). Tan's idea indicates that the person behind the scene - the scene here means learning process - is still important to design an effective teaching and classwork who will still prepare the lesson planning and continuous assessment for the students, which is something that cannot be completely done by technology only.

The Roles of Technology

The role of technology, in a traditional school setting, is to facilitate, through increased efficiency and effectiveness, the education of knowledge and skills (Courville, 2011). Nowadays, learning can be done online as well. Many terms have been developed such as blended learning, distance learning, online course and many more. Courville adds that it is no longer necessary for students to have geographical proximity to a university in order to pursue higher education and certification. This trend towards online classes and educational opportunities has even become so prevalent that there are universities which consist of online classes only, allowing students to complete an entire course of study through distance learning (Dempsey & Van Eck, 2012). Second, the use of distance learning is not limited to the university setting, but also found in the school site, district, and state levels of professional development for teachers, with the emergence of web-based conferences and seminars. This indicates that online learning becomes one method of teaching because, for some reason, it can diminish things that can be some obstacles, such as course cost, geographical restraints, and time restraints (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009). Furthermore, improving language skill through extensive practices by the students is also made possible by creating a website which students can use to improve their skill. Thus, students can learn independently, and most importantly, can learn at their own pace (Ratnaningsih & Wulanjani, 2019).

According to the office of technology of U.S Department of Education (28, 2017), technology can empower educators to become co-learners with their students by building new experiences for deeper exploration of content. This enhanced learning experience embodies John Dewey's notion of creating "more mature

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learners." Side-by-side, students and teachers can become engineers of collaboration, designers of learning experiences, leaders, guides, and catalysts of change. The following are some descriptions of these educator roles and examples of how technology can play an integral part. Technology does not change the role of educators, yet together teacher, students, and technology collaborate to explore new experiences in learning.

Another study was conducted and focused on the use of nonlinear pedagogy in Physical Education (Lee, Chow, Button, & Tan, 2017). Nonlinear pedagogy is a learner-centered method emphasizing autonomy and guided discovery. Findings from this study, which involves primary school students, show that such pedagogies facilitate social skills and teamwork. The application of nonlinear pedagogies essentially gives students more freedom to explore, resulting in greater perceived competence in their learning, as well as more opportunities to demonstrate problem-solving and creativity. Our students need inclusive pedagogy which is the integration of qualified learning with technology to meet the standard that is demanded by the 21st century.

The Roles of Teachers

From the perspective of the *Triarchal Instruction Model* (Guey, Cheng, & Shibata, 2010), the roles of teachers can be categorized as behavioral, cognitive, and humanistic work. This is based on the more explicit roles proposed much earlier by Bjorgen (as cited by Ljosa, 1998). These explicit roles are the *sculptor*, the *entertainer*, the *coach*, and the *manager*. The following is the explanation of each role:

1. The *sculptor* role is to be fully responsible for the presentation of all relevant materials. He determines the schedule and the curriculum concepts as well as the work of the students. This type does not pay much attention to motivate the students as it is considered the students' responsibility to learn what the teacher tells them. The focus of classroom interaction is to clarify the content of the textbooks and to correct students' work.

2. The *entertainer* role resembles the role of an actor, responsible for arousing students' interest so that it is easier for the students to understand the subject. He maintains an active dialogue in presenting or accentuating his view.

3. The *coach* acts as a catalyst to make the students get the work done by themselves and to maximize their individual attainment. He is clear on the subject goals, assessment criteria, and provides supportive feedback.

4. The *manager* perceives the classroom as a working place, thus manages students to work in groups. In doing so, he acknowledges the uniqueness of each student and their differences. He is responsible for making sure that all students can co-operate with one another to achieve the best possible result.

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Research Gap: The Integration of Technology into Classrooms

Tan (2013) excerpts Richard Elmore's term "Core of Educational Practice" to visualize that teachers must understand the students' nature of learning. At the beginning of this research, it has been explained that students of the 20th century have many differences in nature with students of the 21st century. What matters the most in this century is the ability to communicate, collaborate, being creative, and have critical thinking. In addition to that, they are so close to the technology that the absence of such things in the learning process can lead to unfamiliarity and less motivation (Israel, 2015). Therefore, the teacher must adapt and be able to provide these needs to their students to experience the learning process and achieve the result at its best.

In general, students nowadays are often assumed to be digital natives or are more familiar with technology (Prensky, 2001). This familiarity with technology is often interpreted as them being able to make use of online resources for independent learning with very little, if not any, guidance from their teachers (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008).

However, some more recent studies reveal that such a claim seems to be overrated for some reason. First, students tend to be overwhelmed with the abundant number of contents on the Internet (Kim & Frick, 2011). Another study also found that although Instagram provides abundant and authentic exposure of English in use, which is an ideal input in language learning process, when the students are promoted to use Instagram for language learning purposes, they seem to be easily distracted and use Intagram for general use, instead of for language learning purposes (Al-Arif, 2019). Second, it is claimed that technology provides students with too much available information which increases students' passivity and interferes with the active learning pedagogy that should be the hallmark of a law school classroom (Caron & Gely, 2004). In addition to that, it is also found that English language proficiency impedes online learning success, especially those who do not speak English as their first language (Shariman, Razak, & Noor, 2012). Furthermore, in a more recent study, Another study (Selwyn, 2016) rings the bell to balance our enthusiasm for what we consider might be achieved through technology-enabled learning, with the unsatisfactory realities of students' encounters with digital technology. Based on his survey of 1,658 undergraduate students from two Australian universities, his study finds out that there are four distinct digital downsides that students often see as the source of frustration and confusion that drag them down from effective learning.

In conclusion, those studies suggest that students' digital nativeness should not be overrated and that teachers should step in and play their '*newly adjusted teacher's roles*', responding to the unique challenges students encounter when learning with online resources. Hence, the researchers believe that research into students' perspectives should be one of the fundamental bases to formulate effective

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and customized teachers' roles. This is the gap that this research tries to fill in. By listening to the opportunities and challenges students encounter, teachers can better rethink, re-question, and redesign their approach in teaching in order to achieve greater learning attainment.

Thus, this study seeks to achieve the aforementioned purposes, and the issues to be discussed in this study can be summarized in the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the Internet support students' learning activities for English subject?

2. What roles do students expect their lecturers to take in their learning process in the midst of abundant online resources?

Method

Research Design

The current study employs a mixed-method approach to put quantitative and qualitative data together. The quantitative data is derived from the questionnaire while the qualitative data is obtained through an interview. Data from both instruments will be compared and contrasted. Different methods are used to address the same phenomenon concurrently to approach the same phenomenon from different perspectives. The study adopts such triangulation design to allow the researchers to figure out if there is convergence, differences, or some combination (Cresswell, 2009).

Participants

The study was conducted from November-February 2020 involving 160 students at President University, West Java. There are sixteen study programs in this university, ranging from school of business, school of humanities, and school of computing. All of those study programs will be represented by an equal number of students. This purposive sampling was implemented to capture the extent to which the incorporation of technology in the learning process varies across study programs, which might then affect students' responses to their perceptions on the roles of lecturers. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, all students were provided with the consent form, the types of lecturers' role, and the overall picture of the research significance.

Instruments

Questionnaire and interview were used to collect data in this research. Prior to the distribution of research instruments, all research participants were gathered and informed about the research purposes. They were then given an informed consent form as well as the introduction to the theories used in this research, including the four types of teachers' roles and the four types of learning styles. Only after the study framework was understood was the data collection started.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was distributed online and designed based on the theory of roles of lecturers in teaching and learning process (Guey, Cheng,

& Shibata, 2010). The questionnaire consists of 15 closed-ended questions using a six-Likert scale and three open-ended questions. The questionnaire was administered to capture the intensity of technology use in their classrooms, the benefits and challenges of using online learning resources and the roles they wish their teachers take. After that, an interview was conducted to 32 students. The interview (see Appendix 2), which consists of five questions, aimed to gain an in-depth explanation and description on the roles of lecturers in the learning process given that there has been abundant number of resources online which might have replaced some of the roles of lecturers throughout their learning process.

Data Analysis

The data from students' closed-ended questionnaire was statistically computed to find out the percentage of each statement and then were interpreted descriptively. Responses for each scale of the likert-scale questionnaire was presented in percentage to see the distribution of the participants' responses and the trend for each question. From the results of the questionnaire, 32 students were invited to an interview for further exploration regarding the interesting findings from the questionnaire. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed for repeating key features to sharpen, confirm, or clarify the ideas which have previously been obtained through the questionnaire.

Finding and Discussion

How Much the Internet Supports Students' Learning

The following pie chart depicts the participants' perspectives on how much the Internet supports their learning.
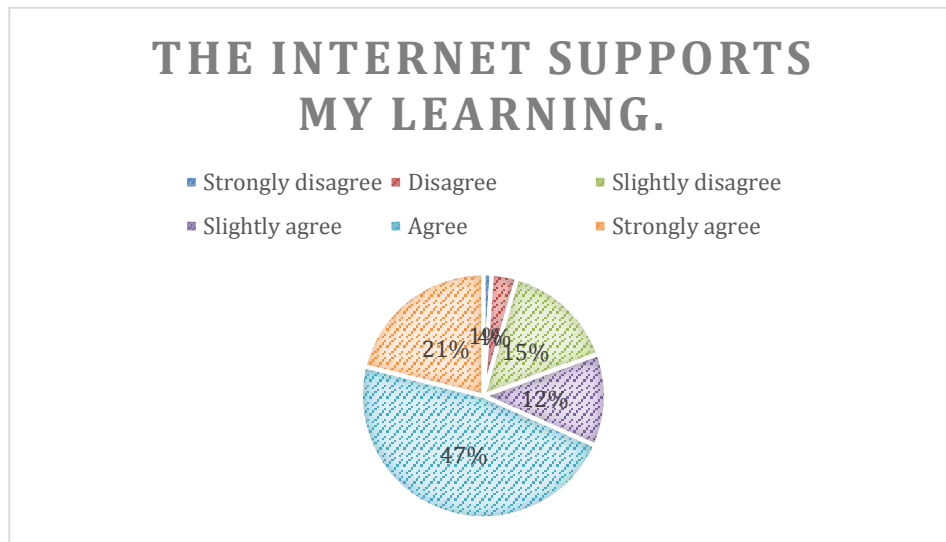

Figure 1. How Much the Internet Supports Students' Learning

It can be observed from the pie chart that 145 over 180 (80.5%) participants reported that the Internet has supported their learning. It was further claimed that the ease of learning through the Internet is due to the instant answer they get just by typing the questions they have in the search engine. This is in line with the previous study conducted by (Palocsay, White, & Zimmerman, 2004). They explained that the Internet has become a platform for individuals to search for information, understanding and solutions.

On the other hand, the 35 students who did not seem to benefit from the Internet further reasoned that they were easily distracted when learning with their gadget or computer with the Internet connection. The sources of those distractions include pop-up advertisements, social media notifications, unstable connection, and difficulty to stay focused on getting the information they need.

Students' Learning Preferences

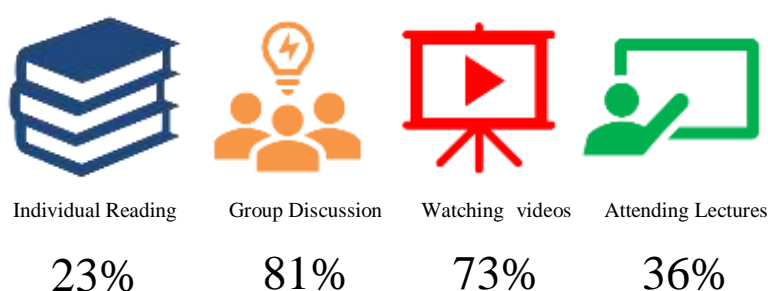| Individual Reading	Group Discussion	Watching videos	Attending Lectures
23%	81%	73%	36%

Figure 2. Students' Learning Preferences

From the figure, it is clearly seen that millennial students have an inclination for learning through group discussion and watching videos/visuals. The inclination toward the former looks like a surprising fact. Millennials' addiction to gadgets is often associated with their tendency to be isolated to their surroundings. Interestingly, however, when it comes to making sense of complex issues or abstract ideas, and solving complicated problems, millennials love working in groups, particularly small group. This similar thing was admitted by more than two-thirds of the interviewed participants. This might be linked to their difficulty in sustaining concentration when working by themselves (Marcus, 2011), which could also explain the participants' reluctance to do the individual reading (23%).

In addition to that, millennials' inclination toward watching videos echoes Tapscott's findings (Tapscott, 2008) which also acknowledge that millennials have relatively more advanced visual memory and visual processing skills compared to the previous generations. Attending lectures, which is viewed by 33% of the participants as a long boring one-way speech by the lecturers, often does not incorporate the projector technology to display interactive presentation slides. And if presentation slides exist, they are often in the form of long words rather than a visual aid which provides a clearer picture of the topic being discussed.

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Expected Roles of Lecturers

1. Accommodating discussion

One of the most expected roles lecturers to take is to accommodate discussion (81%). This means initiating or providing a more interactive discussion during classroom meetings, not only a one-way lecture. In other words, ideas do not only come from the lecturers (one way), but two ways, in which students are given the opportunity to voice their thoughts and gain feedback from their lecturers and peers.

2. Providing immediate and frequent feedback

It has been discussed that millennials "thrive in situations where expectations are made explicit and ambiguity is limited" (Moore, 2012). In other words, they expect room for creativity and trial for error. They are also often described as a relaxed type of learners who like to experiment and learn by doing, not being afraid of making mistakes. Therefore, they do not try to reach perfection and prefer to start with whatever level they are and expect the lecturers to provide immediate feedback. This impatience might be the cause of instant gratification of the fast Internet.

3. Guiding Learning

Students may develop frustration due to the digital divide between them and their lecturers. When lecturers are not up to date in their technology, they (especially those from the previous generation) may not have adequate, if not equal, digital literacy rate by not incorporating open online library to find more recent facts about the current issue in their field, but instead, rely on the university library which provides books talking about the old less irrelevant issues students might not relate to. Another example, 83 participants reported, is the policy to submit printed work rather than online file shared on Google Drive, through which a thesis adviser can give comments on the advisee's work at his/her convenient time without asking the student to come to campus and wait for several hours due to the busy schedule of the adviser for thesis supervising appointment. Instead of guiding students' learning, these lecturers have given the students some frustration which might lead to distrust and disrespect which might distract them from gaining knowledge from their lecturers.

Just over half of the participants (83) acknowledged that they seem to be easily distracted when surfing online, especially when there is no or only limited guidance given about the website to visit. Googling the keywords to find the perfect source forces students to check the appearing results one by one, which is very time-consuming. In addition to that, they are also distracted by the less relevant but seemingly interesting article, and before they know it,

they have spent hours of being exhausted reading something not really relevant to what they need. Therefore, the role of lecturers in prescribing reliable websites is crucial.

4. Assigning more group work

While millennials are often praised by their multitasking skill, they seem to struggle to sustain concentration in a long period of time by themselves due to that skill. Consequently, putting them to work in a group is one way to keep them on the right track to approaching their task accomplishment (74%). In addition to that, some argue that group work gives them a sense of social task fulfillment which they cannot get online (68%).

From the descriptions above, it can be concluded that the roles of lecturers millennials expect from in the midst of abundant online learning resources are a combination of *Coach* and *Manager* types described by Ljosa (1998), which has been reviewed in Literature Review Chapter.

If Human Teachers Would Ever be Replaced by AI

About three-quarters of the interviewed participants (78%) argue that human teachers would never be replaced by machines or AI robots. Their reasons vary, from highlighting the importance of discussion/negotiation, giving constructive and understandable feedback, to giving them motivation. On the other hand, 22% of them explain that it is possible that human teachers will be replaced as they are more accurate, fast, automatic, and well-structured.

Conclusion

The changing landscape of the millennials' world has indicated that there is a strong need to adapt teaching and learning practices to millennials' lifestyle. In the future, this generation is expected to be able to work with the Internet and to utilize it for maximizing potentials and more efficient use of time, energy, and resources. However, they need a patron to guide them and teachers' attitude towards learning has to be more welcoming.

This study brings some enlightenment that students' expectations towards their teachers' roles have, to a certain degree, shifted. They perceive their teachers as someone to guide their learning by providing good online resources and immediate feedback rather than expecting their teachers to be a content expert or to have a linguistic performance like native English teachers.

The digital divide between the lecturers and students is clear in this study and has led to several unintended result. Consequently, lecturers are expected to have adequate, if not better than their students, digital literacy skill to guide them distinguishing the reliable source of information, distinguishing facts and hoaxes, and honing their critical thinking skills. Students might seem to be more digital literate than their lecturers, but they still lack critical thinking and content

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knowledge basis. Therefore, the implication is that, in order to meet the expected role (as a guide in learning), English teachers need to be resourceful, especially when it comes to utilizing available online learning resources.

Acknowledgement

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire

No.	Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1.	I learn best through attending lectures.						
2.	I learn best through videos/visuals.						
3.	I learn best through individual reading.						
4.	I learn best through group discussion.						
5.	I expect my lecturers to upload all learning materials online so I can learn in my convenient time and class time is the time to discuss those materials in case we have questions/concerns.						
6.	I expect my lecturers to discuss all learning materials during class time.						
7.	I expect my lecturers to be content experts.						
8.	I expect immediate feedback from my lecturers.						
9.	My lecturers have ever assigned me to join webinars.						
10.	My lecturers have ever introduced websites/apps/links to facilitate the learning of their subjects.						
11.	My lecturers have ever introduced websites/links/apps to download ebooks/journal articles.						
12.	My lecturers give clear explanation on how to use those online resources.						
13.	I find it easy to find relevant learning sources online without my lecturers' guidance.						
14.	I am easily distracted by ads or other contents if I have to surf online without any specific books/websites/links from my lecturers.						

15.	I benefit a lot from the online resources my lecturers gave me.					

Appendix 2. Interview

No.	Questions	Responses
1.	Which one is your most preferred learning style (visual, auditory, audiovisual, kinesthetic?	
2.	What are the websites/links/apps your lecturers have introduced you?	
3.	In general, to which categories do English lecturers in PU belong to (Sculpture, Entertainer, Coach, Manager)?	
4.	With the abundant online learning resources and the advancement of technology, which role do you expect your lecturers to take? Why?	
5.	Do you agree that technology can replace human lecturers? Why/Why not?	