



English Language Teacher's Roles as Viewed by EFL Students

Resna Suci Nurfalah

English Education Department, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, West Java, Indonesia

Emmas Mas Pupah

English Education Department, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Central Java, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: emmasmaspupah@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The teaching profession is complex and multifaceted. Beyond simply educating, teachers have many critical roles in the classroom. Recent research on teachers' roles has revealed crucial roles that differ by educational level. However, little is known about EFL students' perceptions of the functions of English language teachers, particularly at primary and secondary education levels. To fill the gap, this descriptive qualitative research reflects on EFL students' perception of English teachers' role in the classroom. The questionnaire, followed by a semi-structured interview to examine the data in more detail, was given to the first-grade junior high school students. After analyzing the data by using mixed-method, it was determined that students viewed the teachers' position as the resource to be the most important and the teachers' role as the organizer to be the least important. This result means that in most classroom activities, the students still depend on their teacher and see the teacher as the center of the class. This research can serve as a reflection for teachers to switch roles as organizers rather than be the students' sources. Hence the students can independently be responsible for their learning with teachers' support. Further research is recommended to investigate the teachers' role from students' and teachers' perspectives.

Keywords: *Students' perception; Teachers' role; EFL context*

ABSTRAK

Profesi guru adalah profesi yang kompleks dan beragam. Selain mendidik, guru memiliki banyak peran penting di kelas. Penelitian terbaru tentang peran guru telah mengungkapkan peran yang berbeda menurut tingkat Pendidikan. Namun, sedikit yang diketahui tentang persepsi siswa tentang peran guru Bahasa Inggris terutama di tingkat Pendidikan dasar dan menengah. Untuk melengkapi kesenjangan tersebut, penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dilakukan untuk merefleksikan persepsi siswa tentang peran yang mungkin dilakukan guru di kelas. Kuesioner, yang dilanjutkan dengan wawancara semi terstruktur untuk menguji data secara lebih rinci diberikan kepada siswa kelas satu SMP. Setelah menganalisis data secara kualitatif, ditemukan bahwa siswa melihat posisi guru sebagai sumber belajar yang paling penting, dan peran guru sebagai penyelenggara pembelajaran menjadi yang paling tidak penting. Berdasarkan hasil ini berarti bahwa dalam sebagian besar kegiatan kelas, siswa masih bergantung pada gurunya dan melihat guru sebagai pusat kelas. Penelitian ini dapat menjadi refleksi bagi guru untuk beralih peran menjadi penyelenggara pendidikan dari pada menjadi sumber utama bagi siswa. Oleh karena itu siswa dapat secara mandiri bertanggung jawab untuk belajar dengan dukungan guru. Penelitian lebih lanjut direkomendasikan untuk menyelidiki peran guru dari perspektif siswa dan perspektif guru.

Kata Kunci: *Persepsi siswa; Peran guru; Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris*

Received: July 1, 2022			Accepted: August 26, 2022			Published: August 31, 2022		
How to cite:								
Nurfalah, R. S., & Pupah, E. (2022). English Language Teacher's Roles as Viewed by EFL Students. <i>English Learning Innovation</i> , 3(2), 154-163. https://doi.org/10.22219/englie.v3i2.22135								

INTRODUCTION

Teachers have many crucial roles in the classroom in helping students learn the language. The roles also deal with the classroom environment and students' success (Morrison et al., 2020). The teachers are ethically obligated to do something that is best for their pupils (Chung & Wei, 2020; Nugroho, 2018) because they are central to educational change (Datnow, 2020). The teacher can decide whether the materials are suitable and fit the student's needs, what should be maintained or changed in their teaching-learning process, and whether they provide appropriate learning experiences for their students. Therefore, at least in their class, teachers have the privilege to participate in pedagogical decisions.

In light of recent events in teachers' pedagogical practice, making a pedagogical decision and choosing suitable roles to play in the classroom is difficult (Nugroho et al., 2020). Teachers often face dilemmas in making decisions dealing with their teaching practices. This challenge deals with the conceptual understanding of the particular subject taught and how it is delivered (Nugroho et al., 2020). Another challenge comes from the different perceptions between teachers and students, which can contribute to a severe problem. In response to this issue, teachers need to recognize and consider their students' perceptions in making such pedagogical decisions (Panggalih, 2020; Rianto, 2020) so that the teacher can also play the ideal role in encouraging effective language learning. Hence, students' expectations and opinions about the role of the teacher are good starting points for beginning to understand and meet students' needs (Rianto, 2020).

Teachers' role has been well-documented in education since the development of effective teaching methods in the 20th century. According to the grammar-translation method, as captured by (Allen, 1983), the roles of teacher and students are very traditional. The teacher is the authority in the classroom and acts entirely as a controller. However, the studies about teachers' roles did not end up with the traditional concept. One research related to this issue was conducted by (Arafat, 2005). In her research, she tried to explore English language teachers' role from the university students' perspective. Her research findings are against the traditional concept, which has been explained before. Arafat (2005) found that students perceived the role of the teachers as an investigator; the students do not see the teachers as controllers. Further research by (Atai et al., 2018), which did an exploratory

study, probed Iranian in-service EAP teachers' cognitions of language teacher role identities. They found eight teacher role identities: creator, selector, assessor, researcher, observer, learner, educator, and facilitator.

According to Harmer (2007), the teacher can take the role of controller, prompter, participant, resource, tutor organizer, and performer in the classroom. Besides, the Total Physical Response Method (Asher, 2009) believed that the teacher's most important role is the director of students' behavior. The teacher initiates the work, and the learners imitate the teacher's nonverbal model. At some point later, after several hours of instructions, students will be ready to speak, and then, at this point, there will be a role reversal with one student directing the teacher and other students. According to the situational approach, such as the last two examples mentioned above, the role of the teacher is to provide students with different situations related to real life. The teacher is supposed to pay attention to the student's needs. The teachers provide texts for the students that introduce them to using English in particular ways. The role of the teacher is to show students how to perform language functions, and they may decide which functions are more important for which levels.

As the provider of learning, teachers must ensure that they recognize the student's perceptions so their needs can be fulfilled. However, EFL students' perception of the role of English language teachers, especially at primary and secondary education levels, remains sparsely investigated. To fill this void, this research has been conducted to report the perception of EFL students at the secondary education level, especially in the first grade of junior high school. Two research questions are addressed in this recent study; (1) what are the students' perceptions regarding English language teachers' roles? (2) in what way do the teachers' role assist the students' learning? Thus, students' perspectives on teachers' roles need to be taken into account to succeed in the teaching and learning process and maximize the effort the teachers can make to assist students learning.

METHOD

Research Design

The research uses mixed method. The researchers analyzed the data qualitatively, and the result was presented as an explanation of words supported by data presented in tables. The data from the questionnaire were analyzed by data presented in the form of percentages or quantitatively. The initial data from the questionnaire then became the base for

interviewing to gain a more in-depth understanding of the previous questions given in the questionnaire.

Data Collection

Research Participants

The participants of this study were seventh-grade students of junior high school in Garut, West Java, Indonesia. The researchers coded the participants to ease the process of reporting the data.

Instrument of Research

The researchers adapted questionnaires (Arafat, 2005). The questionnaire consisted of twenty-four items covering six significant roles of English language teachers proposed (Harmer, 2007). The questionnaire was used for gaining students' insight and put another way as a brainstorming related to teachers' roles. Furthermore, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews to obtain further information on the participants' answers. Before the interviews, an interview guideline was developed to help the researchers focus on the questions.

Procedure

The researchers did some steps in order to obtain the data. In the first step, after getting permission from the school staff, the researchers distributed the questionnaires. The questionnaire data was then qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed and presented in a table to easily track the results. Moreover, the researchers also conducted an in-depth interview in the following week. The interview was recorded, and it was done in both Bahasa Indonesia and Sundanese. It was then transcribed and translated into English in the data analysis process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

English Language Teachers' Roles as Viewed by EFL Students

Table 1. Students' Perception of Teachers' Roles

No	Teachers' Role	Means	Percentage
1	Controller	4.08	81.6
2	Prompter	4.13	82.6
3	Participant	3.92	78.4
4	Resource	4.33	86.6
5	Tutor	4.25	85.0
6	Organizer	3.50	70.0

Mean of Total Score	4.035	80.7
----------------------------	--------------	-------------

The data shows that students perceive teachers' roles as 80.7%. This means that students' perceptions of the teachers' roles were very high, which indicates that the student's perception of the significance of the teachers' fundamental role was very high. This implies that teachers could not just play one role in the classroom. The result is in line with Underhill (1989), who stated that teachers could play different roles in English classrooms. In addition, the most significant role in the classroom (86.6%) and the second the most important role is as a tutor (85%). Other roles as prompter and controller are also very high, which means that those roles are also seen as very important. Two more roles, as participant and organizer, are also at a high degree, meaning that the students saw them as essential but least important than the other four roles. Furthermore, from table 4.1 above, we can see that the teachers' role as an organizer was least important than the other roles.

Table 2. Students' Perception of Teachers' Roles in Each Statement

Roles	Statement	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F	Total	Percentage
Controller (98)	1	5	5	4	5	4	5	28	93.33
	2	2	5	4	4	4	5	24	80.00
	3	4	4	3	5	3	4	23	76.67
	4	3	4	3	4	4	5	23	76.67
Prompter (99)	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	27	90.00
	6	5	5	5	4	3	4	26	86.67
	7	2	3	5	2	5	4	21	70.00
	8	5	5	3	4	3	5	25	83.34
Participant (94)	9	5	4	5	5	4	4	27	90.00
	10	5	5	3	3	5	2	23	76.67
	11	5	5	5	5	4	5	29	96.67
	12	3	4	2	2	2	2	15	50.00
Resource (104)	13	5	5	3	4	5	4	26	86.67
	14	4	5	3	5	4	5	26	86.67
	15	3	5	5	5	5	5	28	93.33
	16	4	4	2	5	4	5	24	80.00
Tutor (102)	17	4	4	4	4	4	4	24	80.00
	18	5	5	3	5	5	5	28	93.33
	19	4	5	3	4	4	4	24	80.00
	20	3	5	4	5	4	5	26	86.67
Organizer (84)	21	5	5	5	4	5	4	28	93.33
	22	5	5	5	3	4	3	25	83.34
	23	4	3	3	4	3	4	21	70.00
	24	2	4	2	2	2	2	14	46.67

The data shows that mostly the students agree with the statements about teachers' role in the questionnaire. This indicates that the level of the student's perception of the teachers' significance in most of the roles was very high. However, two statements have low and very low-level significance. The students mostly disagreed with the statement 'the teacher should not try to dominate classroom activity' and another statement which says 'the teacher should explain to the students only what they need to do in a particular task; they should not try to understand everything. The results indicate that somehow there were some efforts teachers can make to help students learn a language. These efforts are implications for teachers' roles in the classroom. One of the efforts is giving positive feedback. It could be in many ways, such as giving good marks, telling them they are excellent, or giving a gift. The findings show that students want to get positive feedback from their teachers. This is in line with Harmer (2007) revealed that teachers who had a gift for just such kind of instruction and who inspired and motivated with their knowledge and charisma are very memorable for students.

Teachers' Roles in Assisting Students' Learning

The results indicate that somehow there were some efforts teachers can make to help students learn a language. From table 1 above, it can be seen that the students need an inspirational and motivational teacher. They tend to have more desire when they get motivation and inspirational stories from their teacher. They also could be inspired by teachers who are good at explaining materials and have excellent knowledge and skills. It can also be seen from the interview.

"Hmmm, teachers need to motivate in a good way, not rude, such as find several interesting activities in the class so that the students get the motivation to participate and learn better."—student A

"do not force us to do anything, but try to motivate us in a good way. The teacher can also give us inspirational and motivational stories to make us learn better."—student B

"Yes, we need an inspirational and motivational teacher because the teacher is a role model, right? So, whenever the students struggling with the task or subject, the teacher can give us motivation and inspiration, for example, from their experiences, so that we can learn better and get spirit"—student D

Besides being inspirational and motivational, teachers are also expected to have good skills in explaining materials and giving instruction.

"even if the students do not need more explanation, it will be better if the teacher explains it clearly so that the students would not be misunderstanding"—student A
"the teacher maybe does not know when his/her students do not understand because the students also sometimes did not indicate it. So, it will be good if the teacher gives obvious information and then check whether the students understand it or not"—student D

"Teachers need to make sure that we understand and explain and explain again until we understand"—student F

Moreover, teachers are expected to control the class and sometimes to be just a participant in the class to maintain a good and friendly rapport with the students. They believe that teacher participation gives students great chances to practice better when they have a good rapport.

"I agree that the teachers need to be evenhanded in the classroom. Teachers also need to maintain a good rapport with the students. They can participate and be closer with us. It will be enjoyable to learn with such teachers. I will love to practice my English with them"—student C

"I would love to be controlled by the teachers. I love to see students and teachers can be close to each other. However, it would also be nervous if the teacher is around when I am doing my assignment"—student E

In order to comprehend English better, all students agree that their mother tongue could be practical and helpful to be used in the classroom to explain something complicated and challenging. However, the teacher may try to use gestures and mime first before directly using other languages. The students said it is a good way.

"Teachers need to make sure whether the students understand or not, and because not everyone is good in English, for some complex matter or materials, teachers need to use Bahasa or Sundanese, I meant if it is tough to understand"—student E

"Yes, it will be very helpful using Bahasa"—student C

The interview revealed that the students expected the teachers to use their first language to support the learning process. As Carson & Kashihara (2012), Students at the beginner level tend to rely on L1 (first language) support because they prefer knowing they can rely on it to needing to hear it.

From the questionnaire, it could be seen that most students disagreed with the statement *"the teacher should not try to dominate classroom activity."* After conducting the

interview, the researchers found that all students thought English teachers needed to be active in the classroom. Moreover, the teachers need to be more active than the students. It is a key to promoting students' participation in the classroom. Therefore, they disagreed that the teachers should not dominate the classroom. It did not mean that the students did not want to be active, but they said, "teachers first." It shows that the students want to be guided by the teachers.

CONCLUSION

From the results explained above, it was concluded that students perceived the role of the resource as the most significant role and the role of the organizer as the least significant role. These results agree with (Anderson & Osborn, 2022), which indicated that the teacher should help the students in their struggle to learn a foreign language which could be threatening to the students, so the teacher skillfully understands this and helps the students to overcome the difficulties of dealing with the foreign language. The students will tend to always ask for help and ask questions to the teacher. The result does not suit the idea of communicative-based classrooms, which de-emphasized the role of the teacher as a controller and emphasized the role of facilitator, manager, advisor, and co-communicator. In other words, the result tends to emphasize the role of the teacher as a controller than the roles mentioned in communicative-based classrooms.

The results indicate that EFL students at the junior high school level are still very dependent on their teachers. They tend to find an inspirational and motivational teacher who can support them learn better and seeing the future brighter. They want to have an active and friendly teacher in the classroom who can give them information and practice English with them. Their expectation of their teachers as role models is enormous, so their behavior will depend on the teachers' treatment of them in the classroom.

This study offers some suggestions based on the research findings, discussion, and conclusion presented above. First, identifying students' perceptions of teachers' roles in the classroom is essential for an effective teaching-learning process. This identification result would lead the teachers to see students' needs and expectations of the teachers. It could also be used to equate the perception and discuss it so that students and teachers can understand each other. Second, it is also suggested that teachers should play various roles in the classroom and maximize their efforts to provide opportunities for students to practice more English. A good teacher knows when to act as a controller, a prompter, and other roles. Students and activities in the classroom should meet a suitable role played by the teacher as

it will affect the result of those activities, whether it is successful or not. For further research, it will be good to conduct research on English language teachers' roles from both students' and teachers' perspectives. The similarities and differences between those perspectives will help teachers be more objective in reflecting on their roles. Furthermore, the result can also be discussed by the teachers and the students in the first-class meeting to understand each other.

REFERENCES

- Allen, V. F. (1983). *Techniques in Teaching Vocabulary*. Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, P., & Osborn, T. (2022). Responding to Literature in the Foreign Language Classroom: Aesthetic Dimensions of Fluency. In *Future of Foreign Language Education in the United States* (pp. 1–209). Bergin & Garvey.
- Arafat, S. (2005). The Roles of English Language Teachers as Perceived by Learners of English as a Foreign Language at An-Najah National University. *J. Res. (H. Sc.)*, *19*(2), 679–721.
- Asher, J. (2009). *Learning Another Language Through Actions*. Sky Oaks Productions.
- Atai, M. R., Babaii, E., & Gaskaree, B. L. (2018). A Narrative Study of In-service EAP Teachers' Cognition on Language Teacher Role Identities Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, *6*(2), 97–115. <http://ijltr.urmia.ac.ir>
- Carson, E., & Kashihara, H. (2012). Using the L1 in the L2 classroom: The students speak. *The Language Teacher*, *36*(4), 41–53. https://jalt-publications.org/sites/default/files/pdf-article/36.4_art1.pdf
- Chung, J. H. J., & Wei, X. (2020). Teach effectively or guide wisely? Discussing the application of wisdom approach to language teaching in Thai higher education. *International Journal of Language Education*, *4*(3), 322–333. <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v4i3.15097>
- Datnow, A. (2020). The role of teachers in educational reform: A 20-year perspective. *Journal of Educational Change*, *21*(3), 431–441. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-020-09372-5>
- Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (fourth). Pearson Longman.
- Morrison, J., Frost, J., Gotch, C., McDuffie, A. R., Austin, B., & French, B. (2020). Teachers' Role in Students' Learning at a Project-Based STEM High School:

Implications for Teacher Education. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10763-020-10108-3>

Nugroho, H. A. (2018). Efl teachers' need of language proficiency professional development: When policy and practice collide. *International Journal of Language Education*, 2(2), 74–82. <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v2i2.6373>

Nugroho, Ilmiani, D., & Rekha, A. (2020). *EFL Teachers ' Challenges and Insights of Online Teaching amidst Global Pandemic*. 4(3), 277–291. <https://doi.org/10.31002/metathesis.v4i3.3195>

Panggalih, W. B. Cahyono. B. Y. (2020). EFL Students ' Perception on the Use of “ Rhetorical Précis ” as a Summarizing Template. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 5(1), 109–120.

Rianto, A. (2020). Blended learning application in higher education: EFL learners' perceptions, problems, and suggestions. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 5(1), 55–68.

Underhill, A. (1989). Process in humanistic education. *ELT Journal*, 43(4), 250–260. <http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/>