



OPTIMIZING FACE TO FACE INTERACTIONS IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM BLENDED LEARNING OF HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL[§]

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses Blended Learning after the flourished utilization of Learning Management System (LMS) in English classrooms. LMS is found to be one of the efficient digital tools in delivering the content learning, especially English subject. Almost all language skills can be exploited by LMS. It provides English learning both synchronous and asynchronous modes; which meet the purpose of personalized learning. However, there still could be found that LMS has been mistakenly used and created blended learning becomes inefficient learning strategy in the classroom, mostly in face to face meetings. To tackle the problems, this paper attempts to propose the concept of face to face interactions in blended learning classroom. It will be seen from LMS's ability in the classroom, characteristics of Generation Z students, and the demand of 21st century skills for future workforce.

Key Terms: Blended learning, Learning Management System, Generation Z, Face to Face Interactions, TESOL

INTRODUCTION

Blended learning is one of the learning strategies widely used in all educational institutions. As its definition 'blending both face to face and online educational technology', Blended learning offers amount of teaching and learning benefit, such as providing efficient content delivery, supporting interactive media, as well as increasing students' digital literacies and deep thinking (Kaur, 2013; Krasnova & Popova, 2015; Bowyer & Chambers, 2017; Mudra, 2018). Besides, high students' achievement and the immense favoured of attending face to face classes were also reported to be the advantages of employing Blended Learning in the classroom (Stockwel et al., 2015). Students found that Blended Learning suit with their learning styles and pace, which result in their significant academic performance.

The development of Blended Learning has swiftly transformed the strategy of the subject content delivery. The initial blended learning experience using digital tools was

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witnessed by Guzer & Caner (2014) who combined both face to face meetings and administered the website page into classroom. As the advances in technology and internet and the emergence of social presence in online learning, learning activities began using forums, blogs, Wiki, and social media platforms. Then, there was a demand to built an online platform that the teachers can create, organize, and propose various teaching and learning activities online, namely Learning Management System (LMS) (Ouadoud et al., 2018). It is a form of a computing device that enable the users, such as teachers, students, coordinator, as well as administrators to involve in the learning system accompanied by several digital tools to support the system. It is built based on the educational theory rationale which emphasize on teachers and students' necessities.

Currently, LMS has been widely used in all education sectors as the tool of blended learning process and received prominent parts for higher educational institutions around the world (Snytnikova, 2016). LMS facilitates most current traditional teaching operations, for instance delivering, tracking, and managing the process of teaching and learning. It is able to automate the administrations of the courses, to record courses, to record the information of both students and teachers' performance, and to provide report to the course administration (Lonn, 2009; Oliveira et al., 2016; Tantri, 2018). Its advanced features, such as gradebook administration, mobile learning, learning analytics, social learning, student portal, testing/assessment, and video conferencing, bring LMS to be able to administer in two learning modes; synchronous and asynchronous learning modes. Furthermore, all communication interactions required for learning a language can be conducted by using LMS. According to Prohorets & Plekhanova (2015) LMS can maintain low into high level interaction of communications. In the low level interaction of communication with minimal teacher's guidance, the students can learn English news sites, join quizzes, watch OERs, and work with provided glossaries. The intermediate level which associates to social and technological interactions can make use of online discussion forum and online-collaborative activity by posting messages and providing feedback asynchronously. Additionally, a high level interaction of communication that acquires immediate responses can be generated in the form of conference calls, video conferences, group student presentations, project collaboration forums, and group collaborative video/web analyses. The classroom activities which include the low up to the high level interaction of communications between Face to Face interactions and online mode employing LMS based on time or space can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. The activities comprised by F2F and Online (LMS) Mode based on Galvis (2018) and Chaeruman et al. (2018)

Classroom Type	Face to Face	Online/ Virtual (LMS)	
Time/space	Synchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Activities	Lecture Discussion Presentation	Lecture, discussion, presentation, seminar, speaking	Lecture (e-tutorial, digital video) Discussion (LMS,

	Workshop/ Demonstration Seminar Drill and practice Role play Test/quiz Watching video Reading Listening Writing Speaking	(video conference, web-based conference)	discussion forum) Workshop/demonstration (digital video) Drill and practice Test/quiz Watching video Reading Listening Writing
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These highly developed LMS features support the second language learning practice in four main areas, such as comprehension in reading and listening, use of English (cloze tests, matching, multiple choice, and gap-filling exercises), speaking, and writing (Arcos et al., 2009). In traditional English classroom, listening and reading comprehensions sometimes administer in the modes of lecturing or practice-lab. While in online learning modes, the listening and reading materials can be digitized and upload them into LMS. The teachers, for example, can make use of quiz feature as the part of language receptive skills comprehension. In addition, productive language skills such as speaking and writing that needs interactions between people can be gained by conducting online discussion forum that support recording feature (for speaking activities) or online discussion group of case discussion (for writing activities). LMS is useful for teaching language skills that require three components; transmission of knowledge, interaction and collaboration between people, and comprehension of learning specific objects (Galvis, 2018).

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on the practice of blended learning using LMS, especially in Indonesia education higher context. Masyitah et al. (2014), for example, investigated blended learning using LMS for teaching listening skill. They found that LMS have benefited both the teacher and students. Based on their interview results, the student felt that online forum in LMS helped them to improve her fluency. In addition, the teacher mentioned that LMS helped him to manage students' assignments. Next, Wihastyanang et al. (2014) studied the use of LMS for teaching argumentative writing. They found that students who were taught writing by using LMS have higher score that those who did not use LMS in their learning activities. Further, Zainuddin et al. (2019) investigated the self-directed learners in EFL flipped-class model which used LMS. According to their results of the research, the LMS helped the students to practice and enhance the students' listening, writing, reading and vocabulary skills. Also, it helped students to prepare the speaking materials and contributed to be more efficient face to face speaking classroom meetings. The other research on using LMS in blended learning also has been studied by Zainuddin and Keumala (2018). They claimed that Indonesian higher education institutions have significant potential development of blended learning model using LMS and mentioned several higher educational institutions that have already possessed e-learning platforms.

Despite the satisfactory reactions of using LMS in teaching English class, almost all studies emphasize on the the digital tools used on the online phase of blended learning. An

intriguing area in the field of blended learning in English classroom is to ‘blend’ the face to face phase behind the advanced of online digital tools that exploit so much area in traditional teaching. It has been stated by Chaeruman et al. (2018) and Zainuddin and Keumala (2018) that some teachers have difficulties in ‘blending’ the materials for teaching. As a result, teachers sometimes conduct double materials and taught them both in face to face and online phases. On the other hand, teachers sometimes neglect planning the face to face meetings because they thought that they have already planned carefully and provided the materials on online phase. They carried out the face to face meetings only for confirming whether the students understand the online materials or not and did not emphasize on individual students’ difficulties. Imprudent planning in both face to face and online learning will create inefficient blended learning experience even though the institutions have provided the most advanced digital tools and technology in the classroom.

Moreover, massive investigation on the benefits of LMS create the conclusions that it is a matter of delivering the materials and tools for providing mechanical language exercise called a drill center (Emelyanova & Voronina, 2014, Huang 2016). Rigorous features provided by LMS affect the teacher’s perceptions on how they should teach in blended learning. Teachers rely too much on LMS due to the fact that it can put into action any pedagogical activities and, unfortunately, create disengagement of students activities in blended learning classroom (Emelyanova & Voronina, 2014). Abundant of reading and video materials, exercises, and practices in online phase as well as the failure of teacher’s investigation of students’ needs in the face to face phase result students less interest and fruitless role in the blended learning mode. Seeing the drawbacks related to the effect of LMS used in the English blended learning classroom, this paper aims to explore the face to face activities employed in the classroom for effective blended learning mode.

The plentiful assistances provided by using LMS for teaching English blended learning classroom leave face to face interactions open into discussion. This article further will explore several literatures deal with characteristics of higher education students in digital era and the demand of soft skills for Education 4.0, then propose the prospective concept of face to face interactions in English blended classroom.

Characteristics of Higher Education Students in The Digital Era

Current Higher Education students are dominantly people who born after the year 1995. These people are labelled as Generation Z or Digital Natives (Mohr & Mohr, 2017; Dolot, 2018). Gen Z students have grown with the Information Age and are exposed more to much on technology compared to the previous generations. Since they are mostly connected to the social webs, Gen Z has informal, individual with straight way of communication form, and social networker. Moreover, they are loyal, thoughtful compassionate, open-minded, and responsible which make them able to focus to finish one task to the other.

Even though Generation Z have positives attributes toward their surroundings environment, they have doubtful views about themselves. Generation Z students see themselves as technology savvy but they lack solving problems skills and have difficulties in responding contemporary issues (Singh et al., 2016). They are entrepreneurial but they do not see themselves creative. They are excited about recent phenomena but feeling fearful about

future. Generation Z is self-directed and less preference to work with others (Strong, 2016). Interestingly, Gen Z have significant different attitudes toward their characteristics compared to the other generations, Gen Z students prefer to have education that can help them to search a meaningful career and value it as the part of their life (Mohr & Mohr, 2017). The comparison between the characteristics of Generation Z and the previous generation, which is Generation Y or Millennials, can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Description Comparison of Generations Y and Z (Mohr & Mohr, 2017)

Generation Y (Millennials)	Generation Z		
High expectation	Not focused	Thoughtful	Not spontaneous
Optimistic	Over- confident	Loyal	Not conservatif
Educated	Connected	Entrepreneurial	Not focused
Parent-supported	Ambiguous	Compassionate	Not creative
Tolerant	Unstructured	Interactive	Critical of peers

Promoting learning environment within Gen Z students in the classrooms involves giving the priority on the arrangement of instructional course assignments and the way of the teacher's communication. The learning theme that most Gen Z students chosen are the competencies of their future professions and the skills need to accomplish their pursued career (Singh et al., 2016; Mohr & Mohr, 2017). Therefore, the course assignments may lead to the encouragement of individual's function in work-related roles in the future. Students of Gen Z are able to work alone, assisting by digital tools and technology products, such as Youtube and social media, yet they are less concerned on current events. Consequently, teachers need to emphasize their instructional course and learning projects on how to relate students' preferred learning theme with current issues while compiling it with rational thinking, taking-decisions, and collaboration skills. In addition, teachers are encouraged to provide guidance on sorting, evaluating and synthesizing the information because students of Gen Z are the consumers of the digital products. Teachers need to build clear paths, goals, time-spent, and evaluate materials that require accessing information online so that students do not a way to lost on the internet.

Second, the ways of the teacher's communication in the classroom also become the influential part in learning. Gen Z students typically are easily bored with common tasks. Thus, providing the frame of teachers' communication with the relevance of tasks will meet the Gen Z students' preference (Mohr & Mohr, 2017). Teachers require to carefully explain the value of assignments and highlight them for their purpose in the future or career. Furthermore, honest and open feedbacks from their teachers are desirable to Gen Z students

(Singh et al., 2016). Therefore, typical activities in English classroom that can contribute to the learning characteristics of Gen Z students are more emphasized on problem based-learning, case discussions, and individual consultation. These activities can help the students to enhance their soft skills in digital era, especially in critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

The Demand of Teaching Soft Skills for Industrial Revolution (IR) 4.0

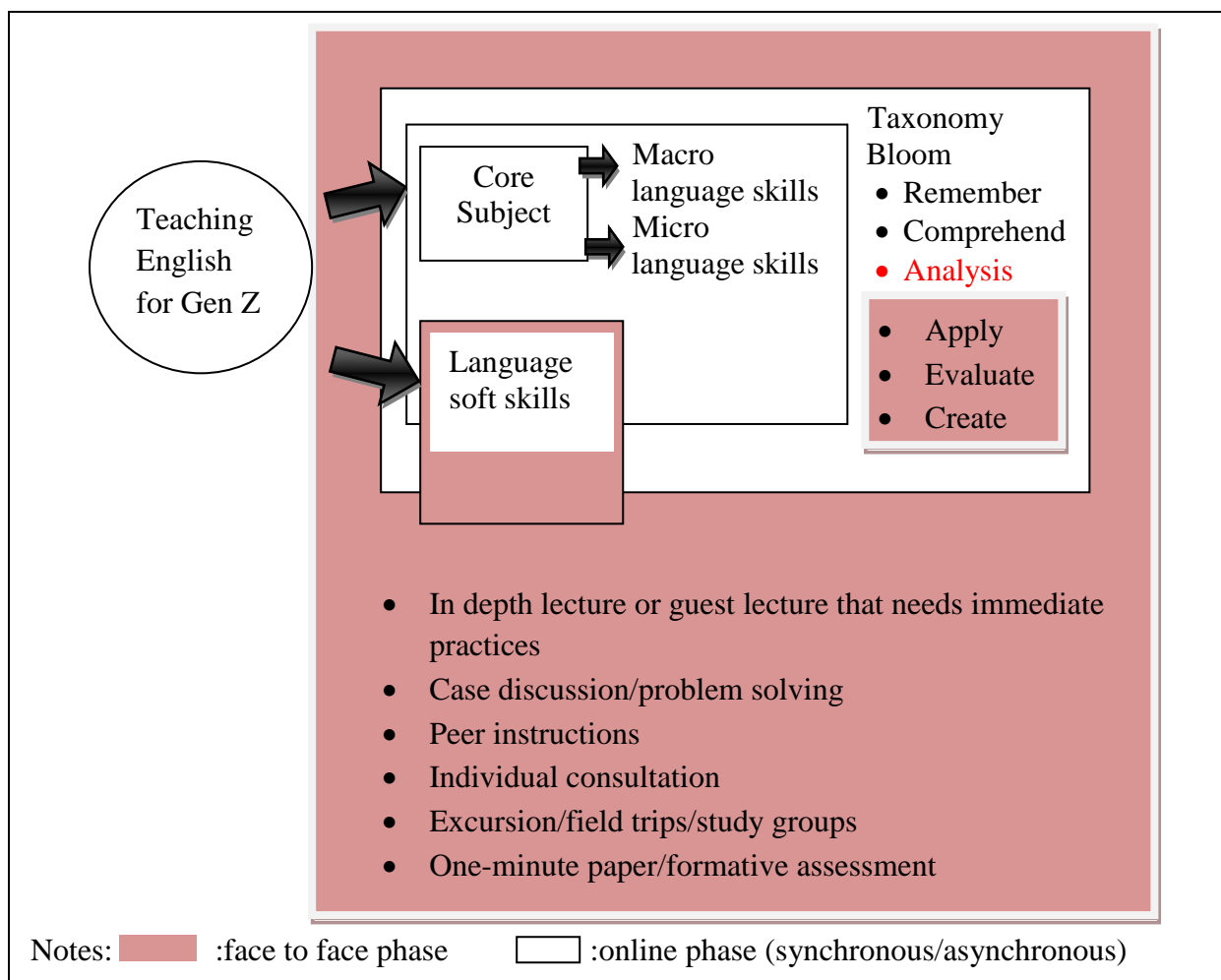
Industrial Revolution (IR) 4.0 begun since there were changes of development of digitized work systems in industry. IR 4.0 is characterized by collaboration works between machines, devices, or robots, as well as, people and internet (Hermann et al, 2016). These phenomena are not only effected on industrial field but also in education sector. Automation and artificial intelligence will do manual and repetitive jobs that human previously did. Teachers will transform their roles, not as the agent of knowledge transfer, but as the learning facilitators (Afrianto, 2018). In the introduction section, it has been explored that LMS can contribute to the part of delivering and transferring the knowledge and subject contents. Thus, the way of teachers see themselves at the classroom should also be changed so that there will be not any inefficient teaching and learning practices in the face to face classroom.

Seeing the impacts of IR 4.0, technology and internet phenomena, and the learning characteristics of Generation Z, the 21st century skills framework yield to answer the Generation Z learning issues. The 21st century skills require skills that are not only about technology literacy but also about comprehending critical thinking, problem solving, communication and network (Ledward & Hirata, 2011). The framework includes the core subject (content), such as language subject, and interdisciplinary themes, for instance global awareness, financial, economic, business, entrepreneurial literacy, civil literacy, health literacy, and environmental literacy (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007). This in line with Shafik (2018) that to be able to compete the machine, next generation should be taught soft skills, for example independent thinking, values, team-work, research skills, the ability to find information, synthesizing, and creating something. Therefore, the prevailing approach on designing English language instruction should emphasize on the use of the language in surrounding students' contexts and needs both in face to face or virtual classrooms.

The Prospective Concept of Face to Face Interactions in English Blended Learning Classroom

Viewing the impact of technology and internet in education sector, such as the effect of LMS toward teaching styles in the classroom, Generation Z students' learning characteristics, and the demand of 21st century skills for future workforce mentioned above, the conceptualization of face to face activities in English blended learning classroom is needed to be constructed so that there is no ineffective teaching and learning practices. The implementation of English teaching and learning styles at present is still based on the notion of time and place, which the proposed concept of face to face activities will refer to the concepts of synchronous and asynchronous learning by Chaeruman et al. (2018).

Figure1. Blended Learning Activities Concept for Higher Education Students



The English language aspects in the figure is shown by the area colored with red, which indicate the activities that can be implemented in face to face phase. The white color is the indication of area that can be taught online or virtual mode. The fundamental notion of selecting the activities is because face to face activities in the classroom should be intended to the interactions that need immediate responses (Lalima & Dangwal, 2017; Jones, 2018). The language competencies of micro skills and macro skills in remember and comprehend of Taxonomy Bloom levels can be delivered by using LMS or other digital tools (Chaeruman et al., 2018). Therefore, the highest Taxonomy Bloom levels that needs physical practices and

immediate feedback will be suitable to be applied in face to face interactions. However, the exceptional Taxonomy Bloom level of analysis which has red color in white space can be applied in both face to face and online phases. Analysis level can be delivered by using online but the response or feedback should be given in time.

The highlighted aspects in the figure should be given to the language soft skills and the activities in the red area. Referring to the needs of students for Gen Z and the raise of IR 4.0, learning a language, such as English, should be concerned with how to use English in the information age and digital era. Therefore, teachers are advised to teach, discuss, and facilitate language soft skills in virtual, yet, more portions in the face to face classroom. Soft skills are the competences that Gen Z students do not possess and they need immediate interactions in learning these skills (Mohr & Mohr, 2017). Language soft skills should involve not only to produce and interpret texts, but also critical awareness of the relationship between texts including interactive, linear and nonlinear texts, multi-meaning texts, texts using paper, screens or live media, discourse conventions, and social and cultural contexts (Fandino, 2013). They can also be in the form of participating in diverse discourse communities that can increase the students' critical awareness. Moreover, the form of language soft skill interactions should also be taught, for instance communication strategies, negotiations, and the use of informal-formal language. Thus, these learning themes should be highlighted mostly in the face to face meetings by emphasizing the values of learning language soft skills. Face to face interactions contribute to the influence of personality, behavior, and value system to the students because it gives human touch to the learning process (Jones, 2018; Lalima & Dangwal, 2017).

The activities on the face to face classroom can be done by implementing several activities in the widest red area in the figure. Face to face classroom comprises human, managed, synchronous, and collective learning intervention (Jones, 2018). Therefore, the activities selection should be based on these characteristics that are not provided by online or virtual mode. Teachers can maintain in depth lecturer or guest lecturer that is related to the most crucial problems in the core subject and give real-time and interactive discussions with the students. Additionally, the delivery of values of learning core subject content and language soft skills can be given priority in the case discussion/problem solving, peer instructions, and excursions or study trips activities. These activities promote collaborative learning, enhance critical thinking skills, as well as improve social skills (Sinha, 2017). Further, teachers can identify students' difficulties and provide feedback based on one to one student on individual consultations (Lalima & Dangwal, 2017). In face to face activities, teachers can also administer the test to investigate the students' real-time language competence and provide quick evaluation for further teaching improvement.

CONCLUSION

Teaching and learning English in the Information Age and digital era provided abundant technology tools to transfer the knowledge. Learning Management System (LMS) is one of the digital tools in blended learning that facilitates most current traditional teaching operations. Seeing from the characteristics of Generation Z students, the advanced of technology, and the demand of 21st century skills for future workforce, teachers are urged to

modify their teaching style in the face to face classroom. The oppression of teaching soft skills and how to implement the soft skills in the English classroom should be considered. Face to face activities in the forms of in depth lecture or guest lecture, case discussion/problem solving, peer instructions, individual consultation, excursion/field trips/study groups, and one minute paper/formative assessment, are advised to the teacher who conduct classroom teaching in blended learning mode.

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Appendix. The needs analysis instrument

Needs Analysis Questionnaire for SEP teachers

To provide you with a course that meets your expectations and needs,

We would appreciate if you could answer this questionnaire.

I.

1. How long have you been an English Teacher? _____

2. Where do you work? _____

3. According to the CEFR, How do you consider your level of English?

A1 _____ A2 _____ B1 _____

Why? _____

II.

1. What skill do you consider the most important to perform your work? (Order the skills from 1-4 being 1 the most important for you)

Listening _____

Speaking _____

Writing _____

Reading _____

2. What are some of the activities you have to do in the classroom using English?

3. What kind of activities would you like to do in your English course?

4. How do you describe your ideal English course?

III.

1. In what way will English help you in your job?

2. How do you feel about using technology in the classroom?

3. How many hours are you willing to invest in your English learning?

In classes _____

At home _____

Thank you very, your answers will help us in making your course more relevant for you. Contact aracelisalas@yahoo.com in case of doubts or if you need additional information regarding this questionnaire.

