

Technology Empowerment and Humanistic Commitment: The Transformation and Persistence of English Teachers' Roles under the guidance of The 2024-2035 Master Plan on Building China into a Leading Country in Education

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Abstract

With the development of artificial intelligence (AI) and its application in education, while driving transformations in English teaching models and evaluation systems, it also presents new demands for the teachers' role. Based on the requirements in The 2024-2035 Master Plan on Building China into a Leading Country in Education, this paper analyzes the unity of "Transformation and Persistence" in the English teachers' role. "Transformation" refers to the need for teachers to undergo a triple transformation: transitioning from knowledge transmitters to AI-guided learning facilitators, using AI to design personalized learning plans; evolving from instructors to educators, integrating cultural awareness and cognitive development within language training; and shifting from solo practitioners into collaborative team players, building interconnected education networks to address the demands of educational digitization reform. "Persistence," however, means that teachers must firmly uphold education's fundamental mission of morality education, ensuring technology serves the all-round development of individuals.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence; English Teachers' Role; Technology Empowerment; Morality Education

1. Introduction

The rapid development of new-generation information technologies like artificial intelligence, big data, and the Internet marks humanity's entry into a digital and

intelligent era characterized by human-machine collaboration. In recent years, the application of AI technology in English teaching practice has become increasingly widespread. This shift has not only transformed traditional knowledge delivery models but also posed a lot of challenges to the role of English teachers. As AI provides students with personalized learning paths and real-time feedback, the traditional authority of teachers as sole knowledge holders and classroom dominators is being questioned. Therefore, the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly called for “advancing the digitization of education” and “cultivating a high-quality teaching workforce[1].”

In response to the guiding principles, the Ministry of Education issued the Teacher Digital Literacy, which establishes a framework for teachers’ digital competence[2]. This provides crucial support and actionable guidance for enhancing teachers’ awareness, capability, and responsibility in using digital technologies to optimize, innovate, and transform educational activities. Furthermore, The 2024-2035 Master Plan on Building China into a Leading Country in Education (hereinafter referred to as the Master Plan) also emphasizes that “building a high-quality, professional, and innovative teaching workforce is fundamental to establishing a powerful education system[3].” The impact of AI technology, the requirements set forth in the 20th National Congress report, and the Master Plan’s expectations for teacher development form the driving forces behind the current transformation of English teachers’ roles. On one hand, technological advancements are reshaping teachers’ traditional control over knowledge and classroom dynamics, pushing them toward becoming learning facilitators. On the other hand, the Master Plan’s goals for educational digitization and collaborative education mechanisms require teachers to enhance their digital literacy and better integrate education with AI.

Based on the context, this article focuses on the dialectical evolution of English teachers’ roles in the AI era: they must proactively adapt to technological innovations and policy directions while steadfastly upholding the fundamental educational mission of cultivating well-rounded individuals. To deeply explore this dialectical relationship, it is first necessary to clarify AI’s impact on educational models, knowledge authority, and evaluation systems, thereby striking a balance between what transforms and what endures in the teachers’ role.

2. Challenges and Transformations for English Teachers in the AI Era

The development of artificial intelligence presents new challenges for English teachers, including shifts in teaching models, expanded ways to access knowledge, and updates to teaching evaluation systems. Facing these challenges, teachers need to proactively adapt to better meet the demands of the digital age.

2.1. Transformation of Teaching Models

In traditional classrooms, teaching follows a fixed path: teachers explain content, conduct drills, and administer standardized tests, forming a closed instructional loop. While this teacher-centered approach delivers knowledge, it falls short of meeting the broader goals emphasized in the Master Plan—such as deepening educational reform and advancing quality education—which require developing both language proficiency and cultural awareness [3].

The rise of AI in education has enabled a shift toward human-machine collaboration. AI tracks students' cognitive processes, analyzes their learning behaviors, and supports personalized learning paths, moving beyond the “one-size-fits-all” model [4]. This transformation encourages teachers to redesign their teaching. For example, before class, they can use AI to analyze content and student needs to set tailored objectives and activities. During class, AI helps create authentic environments for learning by doing. Afterwards, AI-generated feedback promotes the integration of teaching, learning, and assessment, as encouraged by the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)[5]. This reduces repetitive tasks and allows teachers to focus on more creative and impactful instruction [6].

Nevertheless, these technological advances bring challenges. As AI handles routine work, some teachers may over-rely on technology and neglect their core role in nurturing students' character [7]. English teachers must navigate the ethical use of AI, ensuring it supports—rather than replaces—their educational mission [8]. Only by transforming smart assessment data into genuine understanding, and virtual scenarios into spaces for cultural and emotional growth, can technology truly serve the aims of quality education and the all-round development of students, as envisioned in the Master Plan.

2.2. Breaking the Knowledge Monopoly

In traditional English teaching, the relatively singular mode of information dissemination positioned teachers as authoritative knowledge providers. This objectively led to a single source and channel for knowledge[7]. When the Curriculum Standards called for expanding students' learning channels and requiring them to utilize digital resources for self-directed learning[5], this singular mode of knowledge provision clearly fell short of meeting these requirements. With the development and integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technology, students can now break the constraints of time and space in the classroom, gaining real-time access to vast learning resources and academic achievements. The convenience and breadth of this resource access not only advance the goal of “promoting educational equity” outlined in the Master Plan[3], but also challenge the traditional positioning of teachers as the sole source of knowledge.

However, this technology-enabled access to massive resources also brings new challenges. Some students may struggle to effectively discern the authenticity and quality of information, while potentially becoming overly reliant on AI[9]. This needs teach-

ers to master various smart education applications, understand the boundaries and strengths of technology, and better utilize AI to assist instruction[10]. Teachers' roles must also shift from "knowledge transmitters" to "learning facilitators and information gatekeepers." This means teachers need to cultivate students' critical resource-screening abilities. For instance, by comparing semantic variations in AI translation tools across different contexts, teachers can foster students' awareness of technological limitations. By organizing activities like sharing sessions, they can guide students to collaboratively evaluate the authenticity and cultural appropriateness of digital information. These activities directly target and effectively fulfill the Curriculum Standards' aim of developing students' thinking quality, enabling them to exercise judgment and discernment when using technology to acquire knowledge.

Furthermore, teachers can provide intelligent learning platforms. These platforms can make teaching contents more intelligent and data-driven, which can answer students' diverse questions and offer personalized learning materials based on their actual proficiency levels[4]. In this process, teachers and students establish a more equal and collaborative relationship, jointly participating in the exploration, analysis, and meaning-making of knowledge. This not only echoes the Curriculum Standards' teaching philosophy of learning through creation, but also implements the Master Plan' s requirement for collaborative education.

2.3. Innovation in Evaluation Systems

The traditional English assessment system, which relies heavily on final exam scores, often fails to capture students' ongoing progress and overall development, conflicting with the educational goal of fostering well-rounded competencies [11]. This test-centric approach creates pressure and can harm teacher-student relationships [12], despite national policies urging reform to move beyond sole reliance on test scores [3]. Clearly, conventional paper-based exams are inadequate for supporting quality-oriented, all-round education.

Artificial intelligence (AI) offers a shift by enabling real-time, multidimensional feedback on aspects like oral fluency and grammar. This transforms the evaluation system: teachers evolve from being the sole evaluators into interpreters of assessment data. By aligning with the principle of integrating teaching, learning, and assessment [5], teachers can use AI-generated data to design differentiated instruction that is more responsive to student needs, ultimately helping to reduce learning anxiety.

However, AI assessments have inherent limitations [13], including concerns about fairness, technical errors, and the need to explain results to parents and students. Addressing these challenges requires not only technical improvements but also greater teacher responsibility and assessment literacy. Thus, educators should use AI as an assistant while strengthening their own professional judgment to provide more authentic and comprehensive evaluations.

3. Transformation of English Teachers' Roles in the AI Era

Compared to teachers in traditional, single-environment education, educators in the age of artificial intelligence need to proactively shift their established roles. They must actively respond to and skillfully leverage the benefits and challenges brought by technology-enabled education to achieve educational goals more effectively.

3.1. From Knowledge Transmitter to Learning Facilitator

The rise of AI is changing how students learn, encouraging greater autonomy and shifting the teacher's role from "transmitter of knowledge" to "facilitator of learning." As students access information through diverse channels like apps, TV, and the internet, teachers must now focus on helping them evaluate and use information wisely [10]. In addition, as knowledge alone is no longer the main measure of ability, education should prioritize critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and mental well-being [6]. This aligns with the goal stated in the Master Plan to strengthen students' innovative capabilities [3], highlighting the need for educators who foster critical thinking rather than simply deliver content.

As facilitators, teachers should guide students in how to learn, not just what to learn. Their key task is to spark curiosity and a desire to explore. For example, instead of following a rigid textbook structure, teachers in the AI era can inspire students' interest and show them how to use AI tools to support their own learning [14]. This shift reflects the wisdom of the saying: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

To succeed in this role, teachers should uphold the principle of "empowering student agency" as proposed in the Curriculum Standards, balancing technology with humanistic support. For instance, when an AI system assigns repetitive listening drills, the teacher might redesign them as meaningful, immersive tasks. If an AI grammar checker flags a student's creative expression, the teacher should discern whether it is an error or an innovative attempt, thus protecting the creative development emphasized in the Master Plan. Ultimately, this transformation refocuses education on the student's ability to learn, turning the classroom from a place of knowledge transmission into a space for cultivating core competencies.

3.2. From Instructor to Educator

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in education is reshaping the role of teachers—from simply imparting knowledge to fostering students' holistic development. As AI handles more routine instructional tasks, teachers can focus on the essential mission of education: nurturing character and well-rounded individuals [3]. While AI excels at delivering information and analyzing cognitive performance, it cannot replace the teacher's human role in emotional support, value guidance, and interpreting complex educational situations [15][16]. Teachers must therefore deepen their professional practice by integrating emotional, ethical, and social de-

velopment into learning experiences.

This shift requires multi-dimensional competencies. For instance, when AI detects exam anxiety, teachers should distinguish between normal stress and deeper issues; in AI-assisted cross-cultural activities, they should help students recognize algorithmic biases; and with analytics revealing social isolation, teachers can create inclusive collaborative tasks. This approach is likened to medical practice: using AI for assessment, but applying human insight for personalized “educational remedies” [17].

Ultimately, education is no longer just about transferring knowledge—it’s about generating meaning. As Nel Noddings noted, true education cultivates empathy and understanding. In an AI-enhanced classroom, teachers become guides to life itself, helping students connect learning to real-world values and responsibilities. This aligns with the goal of holistic human development outlined in China’s Education Modernization 2035 [18].

3.3. From Solo Practitioners to Team Collaborators

Traditional English teachers often worked in isolation, focusing on self-contained tasks like lesson planning and assessment within their own classrooms. However, this “solo practitioner” model is increasingly inadequate in light of curriculum standards that promote cross-disciplinary thematic learning.[5] As education shifts toward integrating technology, culture, and society to foster students’ core competencies, individual teachers’ knowledge and perspectives fall short of supporting the broader goal of “developing quality education” outlined in the Master Plan.

The deep integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) with education is breaking down subject barriers, pushing teachers to evolve from solo practitioners into “team collaborators”[6]. AI not only connects people but reshapes collaboration—overcoming time, space, and partnership constraints. Teachers can now collaborate more deeply, whether through same-subject planning groups or cross-disciplinary integration. By specializing in roles such as curriculum designer or data analyst, they complement each other’s strengths. AI serves as both an assistant and an agent, enabling creative co-design of authentic learning situations through digital platforms. This fosters organic teamwork rather than superficial cooperation, extending beyond the classroom into curriculum development and post-lesson reflection.

As human-AI collaboration becomes the norm, English teachers must ask: how can a refined division of labor maximize the strengths of both humans and AI to improve teaching efficiency?[7] The answer lies in teachers embracing their role as collaborators—aligning with the Master Plan’s goal to “expand educational presence in cyberspace and explore collaborative education mechanisms.”[3] For example, when an adaptive learning platform adjusts task difficulty based on student data, the teacher should act as an “algorithm collaborator”—understanding the technology’s logic, identifying potential biases, and incorporating emotional and situational insights that AI may miss. This requires critical thinking about technology and a stead-

fast student-centered approach. Such practice reflects what Zhu Zhiting termed the “Smart Teacher”—a creative, critical educator who blends human and artificial intelligence, moving beyond traditional roles[19].

4. The Persistence of the English Teacher's Role in the AI Era

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has expanded its application across various fields, and the integration of AI technology into education is an unstoppable trend. Compared to English teachers, AI possesses undeniable advantages in the teaching process. However, we must recognize its limitations. This requires teachers to ground themselves in their unique strengths, consciously reinforcing their commitment to their role, ensuring they don't lose their way amidst the wave of AI.

4.1. Upholding Humanistic Care

While AI enhances teaching efficiency, it cannot replicate the emotional warmth and personal connection that human teachers provide. AI may assist in transferring knowledge, but it falls short in nurturing character and emotional growth. Teachers offer irreplaceable personal attention and guidance—key to students' emotional development. This gap highlights the need for English teachers to uphold humanistic care, in line with the Curriculum Standards goal of “fostering virtue and talent” and the Master Plan's call to strengthen ideological and moral education[3].

In cross-cultural learning scenarios, AI can only give standardized responses, whereas teachers act as cultural mediators. They notice subtle cues—like a hesitant glance or silence—and create a safe space for discussion. By comparing Eastern and Western values such as “individualism,” and through shared reading of immigrant stories, teachers help students understand cultural emotions in a way technology cannot[20].

Moreover, teachers extend care beyond labels. AI might classify students as “weak in oral skills” or “high-anxiety,” but teachers focus on the individual. They design supportive tasks, offer encouragement at each step, and foster confidence. While AI identifies problems, teachers inspire hope and nurture empathy. Education is not just cognitive—it is ethical and spiritual.

Therefore, teachers must maintain a critical perspective on technology. When AI prioritizes fluency, teachers value sincerity and effort. As the Master Plan warns against replacing character education with technology, humanistic care means balancing algorithmic efficiency with educational warmth—making the classroom a “cultural-emotional community.” Even as AI transforms educational methods, the core mission of cultivating well-rounded people remains. Teachers must continue to prioritize human development, ensuring that the goal of fostering virtue and talent is never overshadowed by technology.

4.2. Upholding Professional Competence

Recent studies have redefined teacher professional development, framing it not only as a means to support student growth but also as part of teachers' lifelong learning and personal growth [23]. The integration of AI into English teaching brings efficiency and personalized support, yet it also challenges teachers' professional identity. Overreliance on AI may lead to "instrumental rationality," where technical efficiency overshadows ethical judgment and human connection in education [24]. This highlights the need for teachers to strengthen their professional role in the digital age. True professionalism now requires the critical and purposeful use of technology to enhance—not replace—the human core of teaching [25].

A key aspect of this professionalism is assessment literacy and insight. When AI provides data and diagnostics, teachers must actively interpret and question the results—not just accept them. They should see beyond labels to understand the individual student, turning data into meaningful insights and fostering emotional and cultural empathy [26]. For example, if AI flags an essay as "culturally ambiguous," the teacher should explore whether the issue stems from language ability, cultural perspective, or expression style, and respond constructively. This reflects the true spirit of data-informed teaching and digital evaluation emphasized in Teacher Digital Literacy[2].

Moreover, teachers must uphold ethical judgment and value clarity. AI systems have inherent biases and limitations. Teachers should serve as ethical guides, identifying where technology may be unfair or inappropriate, and prioritizing educational ethics when AI conclusions conflict with student needs [22]. While using AI to improve efficiency, they must also enhance their own digital literacy to nurture innovative, well-rounded individuals as envisioned in the Master Plan for the AI era.

In summary, teacher professionalism in the AI age means balancing technology with human agency. It calls for using tools critically, enriching data with educational meaning, and ensuring that teaching remains ethically grounded and student-centered. Only then can teachers truly guide students toward holistic development, even amidst digital transformation.

5. Conclusion

The advancement of Artificial Intelligence is profoundly reshaping English teaching models and assessment systems. It also presents a crucial opportunity to achieve the core competence goals outlined in the Curriculum Standards and to support the strategic objectives of the Master Plan. This paper explores how the evolution of the English teachers' role embodies a dialectical unity of "transformation and persistence."

On the dimension of transformation, teachers must proactively embrace technological innovation and policy directives. They need to transform from knowledge transmitters into learning facilitators, using intelligent tools to design personalized learning instructions; deepen from knowledge instructors into moral educators, integrating cultural awareness and cognitive skill development within language training; and

shift from sole practitioners into team collaborators, building interdisciplinary networks for student development. These transformations respond not only to AI's challenge to classroom authority but are also essential for implementing the "quality-oriented education" mandate of the Master Plan. On the dimension of persistence, however, the fundamental nature of education as nurturing remains constant regardless of technological change: teachers must steadfastly uphold the core mission of fostering virtue and talent, deeply integrating instruction with character development. Guided by this principle, they must ensure technology serves education rather than replaces it, promoting genuine human-AI collaboration, ultimately directed towards the well-round development of the individual.

Education persists as a human-centered thing across all technological eras. As machines significantly enhance the efficiency of knowledge transmission, teachers must become guiding beacons of values. In this rapidly evolving intelligent era, they should cultivate students' innovative spirit and promote their all-around development. Only by balancing transformation with an unwavering commitment to nurturing, and by sustaining education's essence amidst innovation, can we truly cultivate a new generation equipped with global vision and cultural confidence. This is how the core value of English education is authentically realized.

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