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## Technology-enhanced Language Learning for Digital Natives

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### Abstract

Using technology in classrooms has many advantages especially as students become increasingly digitally literate in recent years. Young learners live their life through technology. “They are web generations and they are hungry for more” (Dale, 2014, p.1). This case has led to an increasing focus on using technology in schools and a need for developing computer skills. Pupils are so enthusiastic about using a variety of technologies in their daily life that it is essential to embed their enthusiasm into the language classroom. For that reason, language teachers have started to use different technological tools and software to enhance their instruction. They have begun to use projectors, interactive whiteboards, tablets and the Internet. They have started to use power point presentations to introduce a topic or explain a grammar point, use authentic texts from the Internet to improve reading/listening skills, apply online vocabulary quizzes or assign projects to the learners. They have changed the way they teach English by making use of these tools. These technological tools also allow teachers to extend classroom communication outside the walls of the classroom, thus, provide learning lifelong. There is a huge variety of available web sources that can be used by both teachers and learners to improve language learning experience. Yet, it is essential for language teachers to guide learners to use these web-based instructional tools to learn and practice English language skills. The purpose of this study is to introduce some of these web-based technologies, especially the ones appropriate for young learners to improve different language skills and to explain their benefits in developing language skills.

**Key words:** technology-enhanced language learning (tell); digital native; web-based technology; young learner.

### Introduction

The use of technology in teaching becomes more and more important in recent years. The developments in technological field have inescapably resulted in the integration of technology in education. Therefore, language teachers need to keep up with the technological knowledge of their students to meet the expectations of today’s digital natives. Otherwise, they are likely to be considered behind the times (Chapelle, 2008).

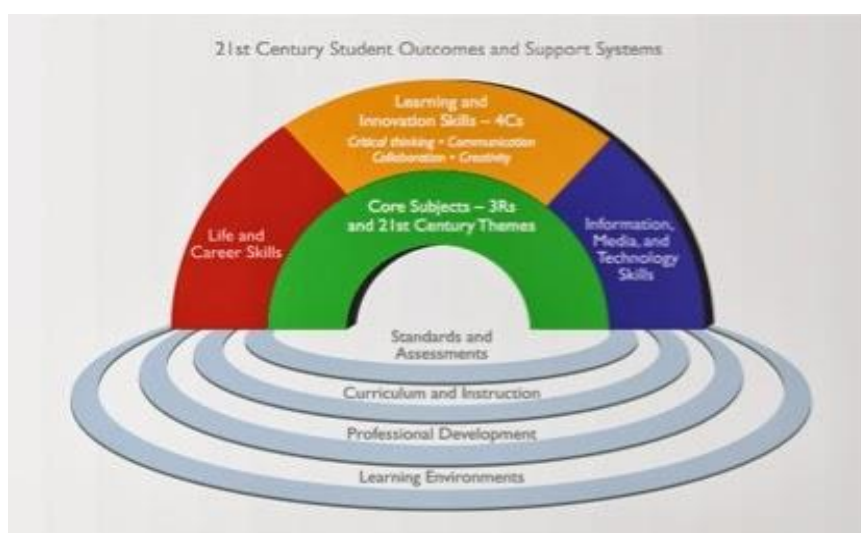
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As we are living in the 21st century, it is extremely important for teachers to equip their learners with the skills of this age. For that reason, student learning should not only include the mastery of core subjects but also develop 21st century knowledge and skills like critical thinking, communication, collaboration and technology literacy in order to succeed. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2010:9-10) lists the skills, knowledge and expertise students must master to succeed in work and life as follows:

- Learning and innovation skills: Critical Thinking and Problem Solving; Creative Thinking and innovation; Collaborating; Communicating.
- Information, Media and Technology Skills: Information Literacy; Media Literacy, and Technology Literacy.
- Life and Career Skills: Flexibility and Adaptability; Initiative and Self-Direction; Social and Cross-Cultural Skills; Productivity and Accountability; Leadership and Responsibility.

**Figure 1:** 21st Century Student Outcomes and Support Systems



The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2010:8)

The new generation is called as “digital natives”. This term was coined by Marc Prensky (2001) to refer to the entire youngsters- from kindergarten through college- who have had access to the new technologies since birth and they are “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, the Internet. They have grown up with computers, smart phones, video games, and the Internet and use these tools effectively as they are natural parts of their lives. On account of digital technologies, especially the Internet, educators have opportunities to design new learning environments where student can easily reach the information based on their interests, needs and capabilities without any time or location restriction. They can also redirect and redesign their learning experience thus, become autonomous learners rather than being passive receivers of the information given.

The role of digital technologies is non-negligible in language learning as well. The number of language teachers using these technologies is increasing day by day to enhance their teaching and students’ learning. As Chirimbu and Tafazoli (2013), Doughty and Long (2003) and Golshan and Tafazoli (2014) state digital technologies are not only useful tools for learning a language but also provide opportunities for learners to actually use their

second/foreign language in everyday life. They also make language teaching and learning become more flexible and make students' learning become more individual and more autonomous.

### **Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL)**

The use of multimedia technology for foreign language instruction is not a new concept and has become the main concern of many studies since 1960s under the term Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). However, it has expanded promptly during the past two decades due to rapid technological improvements. In many studies the term Technology-Enhanced Language Learning is used as a synonym for Computer-Assisted Language Learning (Golshan and Tafazoli, 2014; Hubbard, 2013; Oxford, 2006; Pacheco, 2013; Yang and Chan, 2007). On the other hand, Bush and Terry (1997) claim that these terms are different and this difference stems from the fact that the computer simultaneously become less visible yet more ubiquitous. "The change in emphasis from computer to technology places direct importance on the media of communication made possible by the computer, which itself often remains unseen, rather than on the computer itself" (p. vii).

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) is the study of applications of the technology in language teaching and learning. It refers to "the use of the computer as a technological innovation to display multimedia as a means of complementing a teaching method" (Patel, 2014, p.1). The main aim is to find ways for using technology to improve and facilitate language learning. For that purpose to come true, any kind of computer technology like the Internet, software or hardware is used. Using an electronic dictionary to look up the meaning of an unknown word; listening to a song online; reading news website; participating online discussion forums, and creating a video and sharing it online are among the activities to be used.

TELL offers a great deal of advantages as follows (Carr, et al., 2011; Chirimbu and Tafazoli, 2013; Patel, 2014; Yang and Chen, 2007):

- It provides a lot more flexibility and addresses different learning styles and needs of the language learners,
- It can be used alongside textbooks for a much more in depth learning experience,
- TELL turns the classroom into a student-centered environment. Students can:
  - o Select order in which material is presented to them
  - o Control the material presented to them
  - o Control the pace of progress

Thus, TELL promotes LEARNER INDEPENDENCE,

- It increases student engagement and motivation and develops better attitudes in students towards learning,
- facilitates communication,
- reduces anxiety,
- encourages oral discussion and provides opportunities for meaningful interaction in which technology-related tasks approximate more and more real-world conditions for conversation and communication,
- develops the writing/thinking connection,
- nurtures social or cooperative learning,

- promotes egalitarian class structures,
  - improves different language skills,
  - provides opportunities for linguistic practice, review, and feedback,
  - provides access to target culture and facilitates cross-cultural awareness.
- Students can broaden their international perspectives, learn diverse knowledge forms, and appreciate and accept different cultures,
- increases authentic input,
  - can be a huge time saver for teachers and can make some of the most difficult tasks quick and easy,
  - teaches students valuable tools for the future,
  - It offers mobility-
    - It isn't enough to have access to unlimited information, entertainment and communication tools if we are limited to where we can access these tools.
    - Learning environment is enlarged. Students can learn about language at home and practice language in class or vice versa.
    - The most authentic experiences with the language often happen outside of the classroom.
  - Instructions used in the software are all in the target language being learned, this helps students develop vocabulary, comprehension, spelling and even pronunciation for software that includes voice.
  - Course materials are not confined to a textbook and/or classroom,
  - Alerts, notifications and online communication tools keep students thinking about the material long before and after the class.

Every coin has two sides so does technology. Though it offers many advantages, there are some negative aspects to take into account (Jung, 2005; Lai and Kritsonis, 2006; Patel, 2014).

The first disadvantage of TELL is about the cost of technology and media. They will increase educational costs and create unfair educational conditions for poor schools and students, thus, harm the equity of education. Low budget schools and low-income students usually cannot afford a computer, software or any other digital tool.

Second, before applying digital technologies to assist second language teaching and learning, it is necessary that both teachers and learners to have basic technology knowledge. If the teacher or the students lack training in the uses of computer technology, they cannot utilize computer. Teachers must be comfortable with using technology. Unfortunately, however, most teachers do not have sufficient technological training to guide their students for using those language applications and programs.

Third, students sometimes concentrated only on the features of technology, rather than the contents. Fourth, although a variety of materials can be found on the Internet, their integration into second language curriculum can be difficult. Otherwise, it may be just a waste of time if it does not depend on a language curriculum. Fifth, computers cannot handle unexpected situations. Computer technology is unable to deal with learners' unexpected learning problems and response to learners' question immediately as teachers do. Moreover, technology is not 100% fault proof. Sixth, the software occupies the class time a lot. Therefore, students sometimes do not have a chance to practice and negotiate meaning with their classmates. Next, technical problems may also impede the flow of language lessons. Last but not least, one of the major problems of TELL is the access issues outside the classroom.

Despite these drawbacks, if applied appropriately, the benefits of TELL still prevail as indicated afore mentioned studies. In the light of these positive effects, an increasing number of language teachers have embraced multimedia technology. Because using these technologies such as computers, cell phones, tablets and etc. break the constraints of time, space and conditions in learning. Moreover, especially young learners have natural enthusiasm to use these tools in their daily life. Therefore, it would be a great opportunity for teachers to make use of them purposefully in their language classrooms to develop their learners' language skills and to provide more authentic resources (Dale, 2014). In the next part, the application of some of the web-based technologies, especially the ones appropriate for young learners, are introduced.

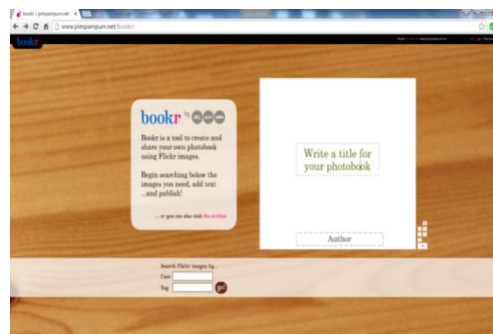
### Some Applications for Digital Natives

Digital technologies offer a colorful and creative world to explore. Students develop positive attitudes as they are really engaged and this increases their achievement. They promote collaborative learning environment and support learner autonomy. Wheeler (2001, pp.10-11) states that through computers and new technologies children can connect internal thinking with external social interactions and master the ability to communicate effectively using these tools. Children can reach the resources outside the classroom as well. In addition to that, they can learn how to access, manipulate, modify, store, and retrieve information. These tools also enable them to use their own strategies to study. When this is the case, utilizing technology in language classrooms becomes inescapable. Here are some of the web-based technologies which can be used in young learners' classrooms.

#### **Bookr**

Bookr is a tool to create illustrated bookd from flickr photos. With Bookr, users can easily create “photobooks” that display the selected photos they have chosen from their Flickr photo library. Children can create a story book by using their own photos and writing captions. They can add color, text; edit their photobook; share it with their friends, family, or other Bookr users. Bookr does not require a registration. This app requires little academic skill to use, and features a simple interface, making it recommended for users ages 8 and up. It promotes students' imagination and creativity as they locate appropriate images and design a photobook and critical thinking skills while determining necessary tags and planning the sequence of the book (<http://www.pimpampum.net/bookr/>).

Figure 2:Bookr



## FlickrPoet

It is a great tool to show your students that poetry is more than words on a page. It lets you create a visual representation of your words with pictures that are taken from Flickr itself. You just need to write a text, a sentence, a poem, some lyrics or even just a few random words and then click “Show Story”. The tool will find matching photos on Flickr based on a search of tags, titles and descriptions of the photos. If you do not like the pictures, click on “Show Story” button again to find new pictures that will go with your story. When you finish it, you can share your story with others via different networking tools like Facebook or Twitter. You can ask your learners work together to create different photo versions and discuss which best brings their words to life (<http://www.storiesinflight.com/flickrpoet/index.php>).

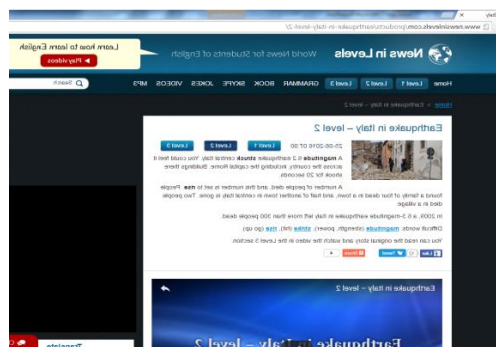
Figure 3:FlickrPoet



## News in Levels

News in Levels is designed specifically for English learners. It provides world news for students of English written in three different levels. Students can read the articles which include relevant videos with each article. They can work on the highlighted words; answer the questions under today’s news and write them into the comments. Moreover, they can talk about today’s news with the people they choose from SKYPE section. It is also great in that readers can comment via Facebook on the articles (<http://www.newsinlevels.com/>).

Figure 4: News in Levels



## LearnEnglish Kids

LearnEnglish Kids is the British Council's website for children around the world who are learning English as a second or foreign language. There are many free online games, songs, stories and activities for children. They can read or listen to the stories, do the related activities and work on the vocabulary or grammar. It is great fun for children to sing the songs and improve their speaking skills (<https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en>).

Figure 5: LearnEnglish Kids



## Voki

Voki is a free collection of customizable speaking avatars for teachers and students that enhances classroom instruction, class engagement, and lesson comprehension. Vokis are great for practicing speaking skills. It enables users to create an avatar with a customizable background reflecting a range of cultures. Children can customize the look of their avatar by choosing the head, clothes, accessories and so on. You can put your voice in your avatar or type in what you have to say and it will read it for you. Creating an animated character and giving it a voice is fun to do and breaks down the inhibitions that students often have when faced with making an oral presentation or recording themselves speaking (<http://www.voki.com/>).

Figure 6: Voki



## **GoAnimate**

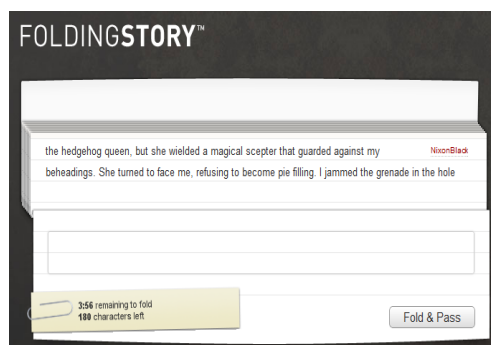
It is free animation software that lets users quickly generate videos that incorporate a selection of characters, backgrounds and technical effects. Variety of scenes, templates and characters may be chosen from the site and you can either use the voices provided by the website or you can record your own. Animated videos are directly created online, so there is no need to install the application. The only need is any Internet-connected computer, tablet or mobile phone. It also provides a basic text-to-speech moviemaker program with features like character movement and scene changes. Students are encouraged to engage in collaborative work with their peers to create a video. In addition, it is a fun way of learning. Students can decide when and what to learn and are not necessarily bound to scheduled class times. Self-competence, creativity and critical thinking skills of the students are developed (<https://goanimate.com/>).

**Figure 7:GoAnimate**

## **Folding Story**

This is a group storytelling game and easy to use. This free site lets your students collaborate on stories you assign. After registering and activating your account you have three options: Read, Create or Add. If you take part in already started story, you need to select the story and then click on add button. Then you are given 4 minutes to create and post your 140 character sentence. Different people write different sentences only knowing what the person before them wrote. You can only see the line written just before you (<http://foldingstory.com/>).

**Figure 8:FoldingStory**



## **Storybird**

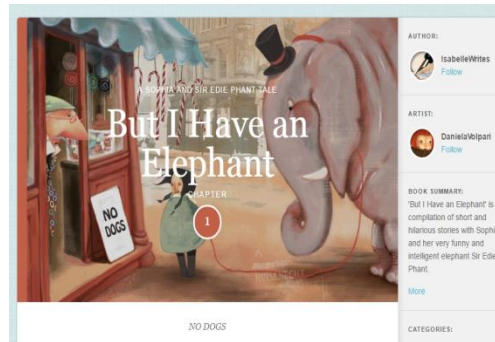
Storybird is another collaborative app through which students create their own virtual stories using pictures and images. Thus, they get a chance to practice their reading and writing skills. It is very simple to use, extremely engaging and suitable for even very young students. It allows them to create their own picture books. It is also great for teachers because they can easily create student accounts and assignments for students.

To create a story click the “write” button; select an image (you can also search images by tags); once you find a collection you like, select “use this art”; choose to create a multi-



chapter or multi-page book; create your story by dragging and dropping art and adding your text; after you have finished creating your book, click the “menu” button and select publish; you can also add a summary, category or tag to your book. When you are ready, click the “publish” button (<https://storybird.com/>).

**Figure 9:** Storybird



### ***Story Time for Me***

Story time for me is a free website designed specifically for children in early elementary school, allowing them to read and listen to enjoyable, online interactive picture books. The books are animated and narrated and the sentences being read are highlighted so that children can follow the lines and keep their place in the story. Learners can also click on any word to hear how it is pronounced. The stories can be read either in auto-mode or manually, allowing children to turn the pages at their desired pace. This gives young readers the flexibility to enjoy the stories according to their reading ability (<http://www.bystephanielynn.com/2010/10/story-time-for-me-book-giveaway-everyone-wins.html>; <http://www.storytimeforme.com/>).

**Figure 10:** Story Time for Me

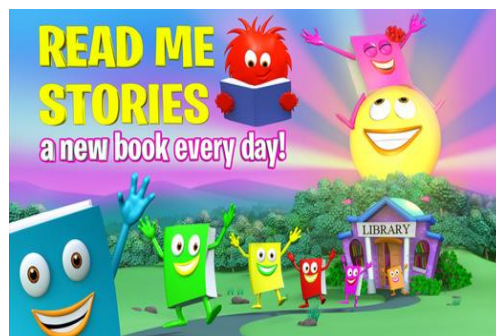


### ***Read Me Stories***

Read Me Stories is an interactive reading app with a vast library of audio books for younger users looking to increase their reading fluency and vocabulary. The majority of these audio books are free. There is an option to read without the accompanying voice over, but in many ways, the colorful narrators give life to a story that otherwise might not hold users’

attention. When the narrator begins to read, the words read turns yellow in color that allows readers to carefully follow along. Soon users will begin to associate the written word with the sound it makes (<http://learningworksforkids.com/apps/read-me-stories/>; <http://readmestoriesapp.com/>).

**Figure 11:** Read Me Stories



### ***Fun English Games***

This is the web site to find free interactive English games that are perfect for students learning English as well as teachers looking for educational resources online. These games and activities can easily be adapted in language classrooms and allow children to improve their English language skills in an interactive way while having fun. Topics include reading, writing, grammar, spelling, poetry, debating, punctuation, dictionary use, conversation and so on for children from kindergarten to 8th grade (<http://www.funenglishgames.com/>).

**Figure 12:** Fun English Games



### ***SpellingCity***

VocabularySpellingCity is a game-based, interactive educational website. It builds literacy skills with phonics, vocabulary, & spelling. It is really fun to learn spelling and vocabulary words by playing engaging learning games using any word list. The most popular activities are Spelling TestMe, HangMouse, and our vocabulary and phonics games, available to Premium Members. You can log on as a group, or let students play individually or in teams (<https://www.spellingcity.com/>).

**Figure 13: Vocabulary Spelling City**



### ***ESOL Help***

ESOL Help is a free English language learning software for beginner to intermediate level language learners featuring an online picture dictionary with sounds, interactive ESL games, online tests, flashcards and printable worksheets. Words are organized thematically (<http://www.esolhelp.com/>).

**Figure 14: ESOL Help**



### ***VoiceThread***

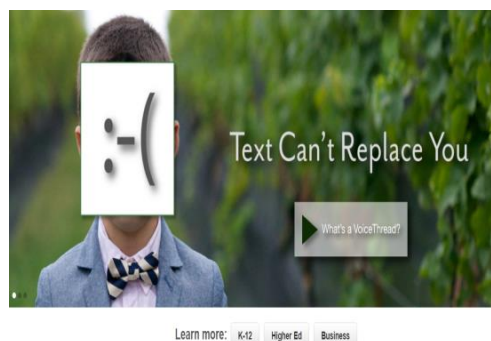
VoiceThread is a cloud application. Therefore, it does not require any software to install. You just need to have up-to-date version of Adobe Flash and internet connection. It is a collaborative, multimedia slide show that holds images, documents and videos. You can upload, share and discuss documents, presentations, images, audio files and videos and leave comments. Ferriter (n.d, p.1) states that

VoiceThread allows users to have ongoing digital conversations built from text, audio, and/or video comments added by small groups of participants around any content imaginable. Some teachers upload PowerPoint presentations filled with quotes, charts, graphs, and statistics for their students to study. Others upload Word documents, provocative images, and/or short video clips. Regardless of the kinds of content choices that you make, VoiceThread has the potential to engage your students and —

if you're willing to find professional partners to play with — to connect your class with students across counties, countries, or continents.

It can be used either within or outside of the lesson; giving everyone a voice or it can be used as a means of communicating with other classes in other schools. Group conversations are collected and shared with contributors. Voicethread is engaging and easy to use. You can also work on VoiceThread presentations at any time as it is asynchronous (Ferriter, n.d.; <https://voicethread.com/>)

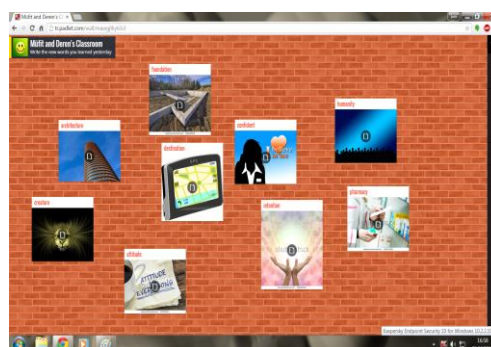
**Figure 15:** VoiceThread



### ***Padlet***

Padlet is a virtual internet wall tool, online bulletin board and a free web-based application. It is easy to use. That's to say, it is like a piece of paper and pencil on the web. It can give users a chance to express, share, publish, and discuss their opinions on any kind of topic on this wall. It is also possible for user to support their opinions with images, illustrations, videos, drawings, pictures and all other possible visuals. Therefore, it supports collaboration among learners. Teachers can use it to activate learners' background knowledge, to brainstorm and to share ideas while working on their projects. It is possible to make this wall interactive. Padlet walls can be set to private or public view. Private walls require a password to access them or can be accessed by registered users whose email addresses have been specified by the wall creator. The creator of a public wall can specify who can or can't post notes to the wall. They can also moderate all notes before they appear (<http://c4lpt.co.uk/top100tools/padlet/>; <http://ctreichler.wikispaces.com/What%20is%20Padlet%20formally%20Wallwisher>; <https://tr.padlet.com/>).

**Figure 16:** Padlet



## Conclusion

Technology plays an important role in every aspect of the life just like in education. Researchers, educators and policy makers are now aware that current education models do not meet the needs of today's digital natives. According to report of 21st Century Literacy Summit (2005)

students come to school equipped to learn on many levels, using multiple pathways and drawing on multiple intelligences, but today's curricula do not meet their needs, and too often school is the least engaging part of a student's day. Schools do their students a disservice when they fail to teach literacy in the expressive new language that their students have already begun to use before they even arrive (p.2).

Therefore, it is very essential for teachers to keep the pace with the incredible progress of science and technology and use the outcomes in educational field. It is also vital to figure out ways to use natural skills of young learners regarding technology to help them effective communicators and better learners. For that reason, teachers should first find the ways to ensure successful integration of technology that will be beneficial to their students and then find resources that support learning.

Prensky (2010, p.3) states that today students are eager to learn in different ways than that of the past. "They want ways of learning that are meaningful to them, ways that make them see- immediately- that the time they are spending on their formal education is valuable, and ways that make good use of the technology they know is their birthright". We should find ways to motivate and engage our students. Just adopting a few ideas or instructional practices at a time can go a long way. There are powerful tools to achieve this purpose. In this study some of these tools are presented.

Yet, one major issue has to be taken into account: teachers. The implementation of technological resources is directly related to the way teachers perceive their use and functionality. There are still many teachers in the field who resist integrating technology in their classes. Unless teachers develop positive attitude towards technology, there is no use to keep those technological tools in the classroom spending high budgets. Of course, one cannot expect teachers to know everything about technology and its use, but having blinkers on technological improvements does not make any sense. If it is the teachers' responsibility to equip their learners with the necessary 21st century skills for life and work, they should adapt themselves to the requirements of the new world.

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