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An Evaluation of English Language Teaching Curricula in Turkey in terms of the Opportunities for Technology Integration

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ABSTRACT

Technology integration into foreign language learning and teaching process is attached great importance with the advent of recent developments in mobile, computer, and web-enhanced language learning opportunities. This study aims to uncover the opportunities for technology integration presented in the current English language teaching (ELT) curricula for 2nd -8th and 9th-12th grades. Document analysis of the curricula indicated that technology integration is strongly recommended in language learning and teaching process in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context of Turkey. The emphasis on technology use is particularly included in the major philosophy of the curricula. It was also determined that technology integration is specifically recommended for providing enriched contexts, designing technology-enhanced tasks, activities, and assessment techniques for learners.

Key Words: ELT Curriculum, technology integration, ICT, technology-based curriculum

Türkiye'de İngilizce Öğretim Programlarının Teknoloji Entegrasyonu Fırsatları Açısından Değerlendirilmesi

ÖZET

Yabancı dil öğrenme ve öğretme sürecine teknolojinin dâhil edilmesi; mobil, bilgisayar ve internet destekli dil öğrenme fırsatlarındaki son gelişmelerin ortaya çıkmasıyla büyük önem kazanmıştır. Bu çalışma, 2-8 ve 9-12. sınıflar için mevcut İngilizce öğretim programlarında sunulan teknoloji entegrasyonu fırsatlarını ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Yapılan doküman incelemesinden elde edilen bulgulara göre, İngilizce öğretim programlarının teknoloji entegrasyonunu açıkça tavsiye ettiği belirlenmiştir. Teknoloji kullanımına yapılan vurgu, özellikle öğretim programlarının da ana felsefesine dâhil edilmiştir. Ayrıca, teknoloji entegrasyonunun, öğrenciler için zenginleştirilmiş bağlamlar sağlamak, teknolojiyle geliştirilmiş görevler, etkinlikler ve değerlendirme teknikleri tasarlamak için özellikle tavsiye edildiği belirlenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngilizce öğretim programı, teknoloji entegrasyonu, BİT, teknolojiye dayalı program

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Introduction

Curriculum is defined as a statement reflecting the national educational policy of a country. It has four interrelated dimensions: objectives, content, methods, and evaluations. Used as an umbrella term, curriculum reflects general objectives of an education policy. It also covers related approaches, methods, activities, and syllabi. Thus, it leads the way of how practitioners can achieve the stated goals of an education policy making some suggestions regarding the appropriate learning activities and assessment. Null (2011) states that curriculum determines what and how to teach taking learners and circumstances into account. In other words, curriculum provides a basic framework concerning the content and methods of what is going to be taught in a subject matter.

Reflecting the foreign language education policy in Turkey, English language teaching curricula have evolved over years and determined Turkey's foreign language education road map. The first and foremost reform was in 1997 when a major curriculum innovation project in English Language Teaching (ELT) was initiated. With the curriculum reform in 1997, English language was introduced to Grade 4 and Grade 5 students for the first time, which means that the introduction of English was shifted from secondary to primary schools for providing a longer exposure to the foreign language (Kırkgöz, 2007). The idea behind the philosophy of the curriculum was to develop students' communicative capacity to involve them in communicative activities in the classroom as users of the target language. The general objectives of the 1997 curriculum were specified as follows (a) to be aware of the existence of other languages apart from Turkish, (b) to be enthusiastic about learning English as a foreign language, (c) to be willing to communicate in English, (d) to comprehend the difference between Turkish and English language in terms of different sounds, (d) to comprehend the difference between Turkish and English language in terms of intonation and pronunciation, (e) to be able to use the patterns of the target language conveniently, (f) to be able to use the target language in daily life, (g) to be able to read the dialogues appropriate for their level, (h) to be able to comprehend the dialogues appropriate for their level, (i) to be able to write the words and sentences of the target language (MoNE, 1997, p. 607).

Following the 1997 curriculum, another curriculum reform was in 2005. Because of the new regulations which abolished one-year preparatory class education in the secondary level schools, the 1997 curriculum was revised and thus, the duration of high schools was expanded from three to four years. The 2005 curriculum was more comprehensive and innovative than the previous one in terms of adopting a new assessment system in conformity with the norms of the EU (Kırkgöz, 2009). Some important concepts such as constructivism, multiple intelligences, active learning, content and language integrated learning, performance-based assessment, English Language Portfolio (ELP), etc. were emphasized in the curriculum. The 2005 curriculum referred to technology integration, albeit limited, suggesting the use of computer software/hardware, DVD and video cassettes, CDs, CD players, multimedia lab, and language laboratory (MoNE, 2006).

With the changing education system called 4+4+4 model, the new English language curriculum was prepared in 2013. The new model lowered the starting age at which English was to be taught from Grade 4 to Grade 2 (Kırkgöz, 2017). Planned and prepared by Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in cooperation with The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK), the new curriculum suggested practitioners to give students chances for meaningful communication in the target language by providing them with real-life contexts for relevance in their daily lives. The 2013 curriculum was designed closely following the principles of Common European Framework of

Reference for Languages (CEFR): Learning, Teaching, and Assessment. The 2013 curriculum was the first curriculum in the history of ELT which attached great importance to technology integration. Integrating various technology tools into courses was clearly suggested in both 2nd - 8th Grades and 9th - 12th Grades English language teaching curricula. The curricula in action today in Turkey are mainly based on the general philosophy of the 2013 curricula. MoNE initiated an extensive review and revision project for all curricula to include values and key competences in 2016. Within this context, the 2013 English language curriculum was revised on the basis of values education and key competences which refer to the basic skills that each and every citizen is to acquire during formal education. In the 2018 curriculum, the revision included two major dimensions such as revisions of theoretical framework in terms of values education, basic skills, testing and evaluation and revisions related to the targeted language skills, update of the contexts, tasks, activities, functions and forms covered (Ekmekçi, 2019).

Given that technology can serve one of the greatest sources in this digital era, tracing the opportunities the new curricula present for possible technology integration into contexts, tasks, and activities suggested will help syllabi designers, practitioners and teachers. To this end, the aim of this study is to uncover the opportunities available in the 2018 ELT curricula for technology integration attempting to find answers to the following research question;

What are the opportunities for technology integration in the current English language teaching curricula for 2nd -8th and 9th -12th grades?

Related Research on Technology Integration in Foreign Language Education

The concepts of 'Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Integration' and 'Technology Integration' are used interchangeably in the literature. From a broader perspective, it is reported in the related research that countries include technology integration policies in their curricula in order to reach the targeted learning outcomes since curricula are accepted a reference point for teachers (Özmen, 2017). For this reason, it is of great importance to include technology integration references in the curricula of countries for a professional, principled, and systematic integration.

Research in the literature conducted in different contexts and time regarding technology or Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) integration mainly focuses on the advantages of technology use in foreign language teaching and learning process. (Bruce & Levin, 2001; Friggard, 2002; Miner, 2004; Timucin; 2006; Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Studies concerning technology integration in language learning dates back to time when technological developments in education started and gained popularity. Most of these studies are mainly related to the impacts of technology integration in foreign language education on learners' motivation (Riasati, Allahyar, & Tan, 2012), anxiety (Chapelle, 2001), communication, interaction and collaboration skills (Murphy, 2006). In addition, the effects of technology integration in foreign language learning and teaching process on students' overall achievement (Seferoğlu, 2005; Kılıçkaya, 2010), autonomous learning and improvement of language skills (Lin & Yang, 2011) have been researched as well. Teachers and students' beliefs and perceptions towards technology use (Hişmanoglu, 2012) and contributions of technology integration to culture learning are also among the issues researchers have addressed so far in the literature.

Although extensive research has been carried out on the benefits of technology integration into foreign language learning, limited studies exist on technology integration policy in foreign language education curricula at macro level. Hua (2020), for instance, explores and analyses the integration mode of computer network technology and college English curriculum. With the effects of Bologna Process initiated in 1999 with the Bologna Declaration, higher education curricula throughout Europe were restated focusing on the attainment of learning outcomes, and the promotion of creativity, application and lifelong learning (Livingstone, 2019). Likewise, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was launched in 2001 (Council of Europe, 2001). It also had a great effect on learning, teaching and assessment of languages. Both Bologna Process and CEFR affected curricular practices considerably throughout Europe and countries started to redesign their foreign language curricula in accordance with the principles of CEFR and objectives of Bologna Process. Technology-integration into education in general and in foreign language learning in particular was one of the consequences of the afore-mentioned developments. Livingstone (2019) explains the reasons for technology-integration into curricula as follows;

ICTs should be considered and incorporated into educational curricula for many reasons: they can transform didactic practices and activate pedagogical innovation; promote learner engagement; attend to student learning diversity; foster learner independence and autonomy; heighten interaction and communication among learners, and encourage intellectual expressiveness and creativity of learners, application, and lifelong learning (p. 182).

As it is clear from what Livingstone states, integrating technology into educational curricula means activating pedagogical innovation. This pedagogical innovation must be integrated into curricula in a systematic and principled way. Since the hot topics such as authentic material use, longer exposure to the target language, ICT tools as a new means of communication, authentic interactive opportunities between teachers and learners, and the popularity of English as a lingua franca are still on the agenda of language researchers, the language teaching curricula must include references to appropriate technology integration for a more systematic and conscious technology use. Therefore, the current study attempts to uncover possible opportunities the ELT curricula of primary, secondary and high schools present for technology integration in English language courses.

Method

The study has a qualitative research design which employs document analysis method for data collection process. The data obtained through document analysis can increase the validity and reliability of the qualitative research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Document analysis is frequently used in most program evaluation studies (Lynch, 1996). In the current study, the 2018 ELT curricula of 2nd - 8th and 9th - 12th grades published by MoNE (2018a; 2018b) were evaluated in terms of the opportunities they present for technology integration in English language courses.

Findings

The 2nd -8th Grades ELT Curriculum

ELT curriculum for 2nd -3rd grades was revised in terms of the theoretical framework in which values education and basic skills are added in 2018. The curriculum revision also included the targeted language skills and their linguistic realizations, evaluation and the update of the contexts, tasks and activities, and analysis and general update of the curriculum in terms of functions and forms covered

(MoNE, 2018a). The principles and descriptors CEFR were closely followed in designing the new English language curriculum. The curriculum emphasizes language use in an authentic communicative environment as particularly stressed in CEFR.

In the new curriculum, an action oriented approach was adopted for allowing learners to experience English as a means of communication, rather than focusing on the language as a topic of study (MoNE, 2018a). It is suggested that an enjoyable and motivating learning environment should be created since young learners of English need to feel comfortable and supported throughout the language learning process. Speaking and listening are emphasized at the 2nd and 3rd grade levels and once students become more advanced, reading and writing skills are added in higher grades. The new curricular model is focused on language learning as communication and it suggests that language should be presented in context in which the tasks, activities, and materials used should have relevance in students' daily lives. It is clearly put in the curriculum as 'classroom materials and teaching tools are drawn from authentic sources as much as possible in order to demonstrate English as it is used in real life' (p. 4).

Another aspect of the new curriculum revision is to include the key competences and values as themes or topics presented in the syllabi for each grade. Key competences are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The competences are explained in the official recommendation document of European Union (2018) as follows;

The key competences are all considered equally important; each of them contributes to a successful life in society. Competences can be applied in many different contexts and in a variety of combinations. They overlap and interlock; aspects essential to one domain will support competence in another. Skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, team work, communication and negotiation skills, analytical skills, creativity, and intercultural skills are embedded throughout the key competences (p. 7).

Eight key competences specified in the framework are; (1) Literacy competence, (2) Multilingual competence, (3) Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, (4) Digital competence, (5) Personal, social and learning to learn competence, (6) Citizenship competence, (7) Entrepreneurship competence, (8) Cultural awareness and expression competence.

The new curriculum also focuses on values education. The key values that should be integrated in the curriculum are: friendship, justice, honesty, self-control, patience, respect, love, responsibility, patriotism and altruism. These values are suggested to be embedded into the themes and topics of the syllabi. As for testing and evaluation aspect of the new curriculum, it is clear that the theoretical frame of testing, assessment and evaluation processes is based on the CEFR. Alternative and process oriented testing procedures as well as self-assessment are emphasized in the curriculum. A set of formative and summative testing procedures are recommended in the new curriculum as well.

The 9th- 12th Grades ELT Curriculum

As in the case of the curriculum for 2nd - 3rd grades, ELT curriculum for 9th - 12th grades was designed in accordance with the principals of CEFR. The main objective of the curriculum is explained as 'to engage learners of English in stimulating, motivating, and enjoyable learning environments so that they become effective, fluent, and self-directed users of English' (MoNE, 2018b, p. 4). The 9th -12th grades curriculum is the continuum of the 2nd -8th grades curriculum. Considering learning experiences and needs of the students at high schools, the curriculum suggests using much more

instructional technology in English classes. The curriculum mainly addresses language functions and four language skills in an integrated way and it asserts that collaboration and cooperation is quite important for adolescents rather than competition. Autonomous learning is the important aspect of new curriculum which is accompanied by teachers, peers, learning materials, activities, and tasks. It is stated that the students are encouraged to be involved in task-based, collaborative, and project-based language activities in English courses (MoNE, 2018b). As for assessment and evaluation, authentic assessment tools which support communicative assessment are included in the curriculum. In addition, alternative assessment techniques are supported with instructional technology for increasing the practicality of data analysis. As alternative assessment techniques and tools, the new curriculum includes e-portfolio, video blog entry (v-logs), and Tech Pack. Computer-mediated feedback is highly recommended in the curriculum as well.

As in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools, the same values are suggested to be embedded into the themes and topics of the syllabi. The curriculum asserts that teachers and material designers need to take learners' ages, psychological and sociological levels into consideration while selecting characters, texts, visuals to be used in the classes.

One of the distinguishing features of the new ELT curriculum for 9th - 12th grades is its particular emphasis on the use of technology and blended learning in English classes. It specifically refers to Crawford (2007) who 'claims that technology cannot be overlooked if we want to bridge the growing disconnect between the adolescents' lives and school experiences to tap into the interests of adolescents' (MoNE, 2018b, p. 15). To this end, the new curriculum encourages the use of various technology-enhanced practices such as chat rooms, virtual worlds, electronic discussions, video conferencing, blogs, and so on. Taken together, the new curriculum recommends a blended learning environment in which both face-to-face and online learning go hand-in-hand in a principled way.

Technology as Context Provider for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Setting

As stated clearly in the curriculum for 2nd-8th grades, English language programs are not based on any course content since language programs aim at teaching language skills and developing communicative competences (MoNE, 2018a). The curriculum is based on CEFR and it includes the functions and the useful language, language skills and learning outcomes as well as suggested materials, tasks, contexts and assignments. Among the important issues for the application of the curriculum, it is emphasized that communication is focused on the creation of real meaning and students listen and speak just as they would in a target language community. In addition, it is stated in the curriculum that students are continuously exposed to English through audio and visual materials and the focus of learning is on deepening communication, rather than on completing curricular items within a given period of time (p. 12). Considering the importance attached to providing meaningful and authentic context to students, context resources are crucial particularly in EFL settings. The list of the suggested contexts in the curriculum (p. 15) is as follows;

Advertisements	Catalogues
Biographical Texts	Chants and Songs
Blogs	Charts
Brochures	Conversations
Captions	Diaries/Journal Entries
Cards	Dictionaries
Cartoons	E-mails

Fables	Poems
Fairy Tales	Postcards
Formal Letters	Posters
Humorous encounters	Probes/Realia
Illustrations	Questionnaires and Surveys
Instructions	Radio Recordings
Jokes	Recipes
Lists	Reports
Maps	Rhymes
Menus	Signs
News reports	Songs
Notes, Memos, and Messages	Stories
Notices	Tables
Personal Letters	Tongue Twisters
Phone Conversations	TV Programs/News
Picture Dictionaries	Videos
Picture Strip Stories	Weather Reports
Plays	Websites
Podcasts	

The suggested contexts which are not limited to the ones in the list can be provided via thousands of web pages and numerous ICT tools. Coursebook authors can suggest using some of these tools and web pages or they can benefit from technology in terms of finding authentic contexts in the course of preparing the coursebooks; however, it is the foreign language teacher who should support coursebooks and provide the students with adequate comprehensible input. The students particularly learning English in EFL contexts, as in the case in Turkey, need much more comprehensible input and exposure to the target language. All of the suggested contexts in the curriculum can be supported through using appropriate web technology and tools in today's digital world.

Utilizing appropriate technology can also provide input enhancement that can be defined as a technique for making students notice the grammar item which the teacher wants to introduce. Nunan (2005) states that 'with this technique, teachers draw students' attention to items that are meant to be noticed by "flagging" them in some way such as through highlighting, underlining, or coloring'. Chapelle (2003, p. 40) also emphasizes the types of input enhancement as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of input enhancement

Input Enhancement	Description
Salience	Marking a grammatical form on the screen or phonologically through stress
	Repeating a grammatical form or lexical phrase
Modification	Making the input understandable to the learner through any means that gets at the meaning (e.g., images, L1 translation, L2 dictionary definitions, simplification)

Elaboration	Increasing the potential for understanding the input through addition of plausible, grammatical L2 elaborations to the original text (e.g., defining relative clauses)
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The activities and tasks that are related to the three types of input enhancement can be prepared via ICT tools and certain web pages. For instance, activities or tasks that include marking a grammatical form on the screen or phonologically through stress can be conducted with the help of some specific software, tools or web pages. Likewise, the activities and tasks in modification and elaboration types can be easily supported through appropriate technology.

The curriculum already suggests technology-enhanced contexts to use in language education including the ones such as *Blogs, E-mails, Podcasts, Radio Recordings, Songs, TV Programs, News, Videos, Weather Reports, and Websites*. Therefore, foreign language teachers are highly appreciated if they can use appropriate technology and support the input the students need with technology-enhanced contexts.

Likewise, the curriculum for the 9th-12th grades encourages teachers and coursebooks authors to include technology-enhanced contexts for learners. The following list presented in the curriculum (MoNE, 2018b, p.17) as suggested materials that can be utilized in the learning process confirms the fact that technology can provide valuable contexts if used in appropriate ways.

Movies	Advertisements
TV/Radio Recordings	Shopping Lists
Commercials	Product Catalogues
Podcasts	Recipes
Infographics	Coupons
PPP Presentations	Call Center Dialogues
Wikis	Transportation Schedule Boards
Blogs	Travel Guides
V-logs	Notes/Messages
E-mails	Monolingual Dictionaries
Simulations	Planners
Animations	Postcards/Greeting Cards
Animation Makers	Letters
Virtual Environments	Tickets
Games/Fun	Short Documentaries
Comics	Short Lectures
Maps	Interview Dialogues
Road Signs	Phone Conversations
Posters	Announcements
Tables	Songs
Timelines	Websites
Patient Information Leaflets	Synchronous and Asynchronous CMC
Brochures	Online / Offline Newspapers /Magazines
Advice Columns	Online/Offline Pictures
Invitee Lists	Picture Albums

Contests/Quiz Shows	Collaborative Stories
Illustrations	Biographies
Realia (Real Objectives)	Diary Entries
Flashcards/Picturecards/Wordcards	Reflection Reports
Song Lyrics	Peer and Self-Evaluation Checklists
Charts/Graphs	Jigsaw Readings
Graphic Organizers	Descriptive Texts
Application Forms	Expository Texts
CVs/Letters of Intention	Narratives
Myths/Rhymes	Compare and Contrast Paragraphs
Poems	Cause and Effect Texts
Plays/Drama	Persuasive Texts
Surveys	Argumentative Texts
Short Stories	Menus

Among the suggested materials in the curriculum, the ones that are directly related with technology integration are *TV/Radio Recordings, Podcasts, PPP Presentations, Wikis, Blogs, V-logs, E-mails, Animations, Animation Makers, Virtual Environments, Websites, Synchronous and Asynchronous CMC, Online / Offline Newspapers /Magazines, and Online/Offline Pictures*. It is clear that the curriculum for the 9th-12th grades presents more opportunities for technology integration. In addition to the technology-enhanced contexts, the curriculum encourages teachers and coursebook authors to integrate technology in all aspects of English language teaching and learning. The use of digital cameras, mobile devices, Tablet PCs, DVDs consisting of movies, interactive learning software, teachers' e-office as well as an e-classroom, individual learner's learning corners, chat rooms, online bulletin boards, e-portfolio, and v-logs are highly recommended in the curriculum. In terms of providing students with enriched content allowing a multisensory learning process, the curriculum emphasizes blended learning and e-learning environments.

Technology Integration for Suggested Testing Techniques and Assessment

In the curriculum for 2nd-3rd grades, it is obviously stated that learning, teaching and testing are part of a whole. These three aspects constantly interact with each other; therefore, making use of appropriate technology in assessment of language skills is quite important as the theory of the testing procedures in the curriculum is not different from that of learning and teaching (MoNE, 2018a). The curriculum suggests using both formative and summative testing techniques, which promotes diversity strengthening the learning experiences of the students. For this reason, suggested testing techniques assessing four language skills in separate and integrated ways such as information gap, opinion gap, recognizing phonemic variations, selective listening for morphological structure and affixation, spotting text mechanics, solving a puzzle, note taking, preparing an outline, cloze test, paraphrasing, and so on can be supported via various tools, software and web pages.

Similarly, the curriculum for 9th-12th grades encourages the use of alternative, traditional, and electronic assessment types together. The use of v-logs, Tech Pack, E-portfolios, projects, etc. is highly appreciated. It is stated in the curriculum that 'the emphasis is given to designing communicative assessment tasks and assessing production of language in the implementation of the curriculum' (MoNE, 2018b, p. 11). In addition, the curriculum suggests integrating European Language Portfolio

(ELP) which was developed by the Language Policy Programme of the Council of Europe. Its aim is to support the development of learner autonomy, plurilingualism and intercultural awareness and competence and to allow users to record their language learning achievements and their experience of learning and using languages (Council of Europe, 2006). Digital version of ELP has also been published as an output of an EU project and the electronic European Language Portfolio can be integrated into foreign language learning process, as recommended in the curricula.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Considering the recent developments in technology and the potentials of its use as a valuable source in foreign language learning and teaching, technology integration in educational curricula of countries has been on the agenda of researchers, practitioners and administrators in recent years. This study attempts to uncover the opportunities for technology integration available in the current ELT curricula for 2nd-8th and 9th-12th grades. Document analysis of both curricula indicated that technology integration is strongly recommended in language learning and teaching process in the EFL context of Turkey. The emphasis on technology use was particularly available in the major philosophy of the curricula. It was determined that technology integration is specifically recommended for providing comprehensible input for the students. In other words, the use of technology is encouraged in both curricula as contexts provider since the suggested lists of context and materials can be directly supported with various ICT tools, software, and web pages.

It was also found that the tasks and activities suggested in the curriculum for 2nd-8th grades might be exploited through various digital tools providing enriched learning environments and enabling multisensory learning process. The curriculum also encourages teachers and coursebook authors to include various assessment techniques for language skills on separate and integrated models. Considering the variety of testing techniques as both formative and summative assessment aspects, the assessment process can be supported with appropriate technology and integrated into the process.

Another important result of the document analysis is that the curriculum for 9th-12th grades strongly recommends the integration of blended learning model in the English language learning and teaching process. The rationale behind this is explained with today's students' motivation and interest in digital tools and software. This motivation and interest can be exploited through the integration of various tools such as v-logs, e-portfolio, electronic ELP, digital cameras, mobile devices, Tablet PCs, DVDs consisting of movies, interactive learning software, teachers' e-office as well as an e-classroom, individual learner's learning corners, chat rooms, and online bulletin boards.

All in all, the opportunities put by the current curricula for technology integration cannot be ignored and must be analysed by ELT teachers, coursebooks authors and administrators. Based on the findings of the current evaluation of ELT curricula in Turkey, it is suggested that coursebook authors might devote a special section at the end of each unit for some recommendations and implementations of appropriate technology and ICT tools. Teachers can also make use of what is suggested in the curricula and coursebooks in a systematic way for creating technology-enhanced learning environments which will certainly attract the attentions of today's digital natives. Further research can focus on the classroom implementations of the tools, web pages, and software based on the principles determined in the curricula, thus more practical reflections of the curricula regarding technology integration can be presented.

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