

# Who is the “Ideal Teacher” in the Digital Age?

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**Abstract** – This article presents a portrait of the ideal teacher as seen in research literature and from the point of view of pre-service teachers. The main research question examines what are the attitudes of pre-service teachers towards the picture of the ‘ideal teacher’. In the ideal teacher, it would seem that both the professional and the personal are intertwined. It is also clear that the usage of ICT tools in teaching is of significant benefit to teaching and learning. Teaching methods that draw upon IT serves to meet the needs of the student, at the same time as contributing to the professional development of the teacher. Here we examine the views of 70 pre-service teachers as to what constitutes the ideal teacher. Professional components are given pride of place, but, amongst the 10 chief components were found characteristics connected – albeit indirectly - with the teacher's attitude towards combining computer and internet tools in his work. The main conclusion is that in a technological world one characteristic of an ideal teacher is the openness towards instruction that integrates ICT tools and an e-learning environment in the teaching/learning process.

**Keywords** – Digital-age, Pre-services Teachers, Teachers.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The subject of the ‘ideal teacher’ has been important to researchers, educators and philosophers for many generations, and the definition of the ideal teacher has implications for teachers' training and those engaged in teaching.

The teacher in every society and culture aspires to the model of the ideal teacher as perceived by the surrounding society. This model has of course changed during the history of education, and the ideal teacher today is not necessarily the ideal teacher of former times. The ideal teacher model is inevitably influenced by philosophical and educational perceptions that define the society's values and what it sees as being at the core of education (Aloni, 2000; Dewey, 1916; Lam, 2000; Zeichner, 1994).

Today, virtually all areas of life, including education and the environment in which teachers and students function – have become inextricably connected with technological developments. (Shinar, 2001).

Web based learning is used all over the Western world, and technological changes have influenced the development of e-learning environments (Bates 1997, 1999; Fetterman, 1998; Fox, 1999; Schifter, 2000). These changes moreover, have had a psychological effect on many teachers, and especially those of long standing in their work. Research studies have found frustration and fears as well as interest and enthusiasm amongst teachers who are faced with having to integrate new technologies into their teaching (Hughes & Hewson, 1998; Moore, 1999; Curtis & Lawson, 2001; Mason, 1998). Teachers who continue in the use of traditional methods and who avoid the computer and the internet, often claim that they

still can be excellent teachers without a need to integrate the computer and the internet in their teaching.

The aim of this study is to examine whether a teacher nowadays can be good even if he opposes computer and internet integration into teaching. In other words: Have the characteristics of the “ideal teacher” changed following the technological changes?

In this study I will describe the characteristics of the ideal teacher and the contribution of the web based learning to the teaching process, and based on these two “legs”, I will suggest the conclusion regarding the ideal teacher model nowadays.

## II. THE IDEAL TEACHER

Today in the West, the ideal teacher image is perceived similarly in different countries and among diverse age and profession populations.

Many research studies examine the ideal teacher image from the perspective of students, parents, pre-service teachers and teachers at work in their profession. And it is found that this image contains two components: professional and personal. The professional component relates to the teaching quality (for example: “she teaches in an interesting way”); the personal component is the combination of qualities present in the personality of the teacher (Kutnick & Jules, 1993; Musgrove & Tylor, 1972; Fridman, & Korengold, 1993; Miron, 1983).

Goldberg defines the good teacher by his attitude towards students and by the depth of his obligation toward the teaching, his ability to manage and to supervise the learning, his pedagogical ability, and his values and cultural interests. Friedman (1998) divides the teacher's behavior into two parts, which include – the teaching role which requires skills for managing the class and monitoring the learning, and the teacher's personality as he works with the needs of the students. Felix, Fisherman & Resler (1997) identified four main teaching skills that are demanded from the teacher: Arrangement, Exploration, Professional development and Tracking the teaching.

Zilberstein & Katz (1998) maintain five features of the good teachers: Mastering the discipline of teaching; Caring; Mastering the language of teaching; The ability to evaluate the progressing of each student; Making the learning process relevant, interesting and comprehensible.

According to Meighan (1981), students perceive a teacher as “good” when certain qualities are present:

The teacher needs to be a warm person and to be personable towards his students. This means he should be understanding, patient, encouraging of his students' endeavour, and be ready to listen to them. The good teacher is open to the student's opinion, to possible criticism and without the expectation that the student be subservient to the teacher. It is also important for students

that the teacher share with them in various activities. It is important to the students that the teacher will be punctual, ready to invest time to his students and enthusiastic during class.

Kobobi (1977) in the research amongst elementary school students, found that the students appreciated respect towards them from their teachers, and perceived it as one of the most important factors contributing toward a positive feeling in the student/teacher relationship. The "good teacher's behaviour is characterized by accepting the students equally and without discrimination, by lack of stipulations as to what the student achieves, by turning to their adult side whilst being attentive to their needs, considering their wishes, by paying attention to the unique personality of the individual student and his or her behaviour, and by caring for their well being.

In Kfir&Bachar's research (1996) the researchers examined the perceptions of the importance and desired characteristics of the teacher and his training, among eight groups, each with a different connection to teaching. Among the group was included a group of parents and a group of students. One of the conclusions of this study was that the variation of perspective as to what makes the good teacher. For example, students' expectations were of a teaching that included clear explanations and fair assessments without reference to values and social issues. The parents, who likewise care about fair and impartial judgments in the teaching, think that a teacher should also understand the student as an individual, taking cognizance of his personal problems and attending effectively in discipline issues that might arise; but also and that it is important – contrast to the view of the student group - that the teacher has the ability to impart values and social awareness

Darling Hamond, (2000 a,b) maintained the importance of certain qualities in the successful teacher, among which were clear requirements of the latter's part toward his students, and high expectations, A long term commitments to his students and the capacity to monitor their students were also considered desirable.

All these are very important since it was found that good teachers influence their students' learning and achievements (Darling-Hammond, 1998, 2007; Ingersoll, 2007).

According to Cochran-Smith, (2003) the public, member of the Education Profession, researchers, legal advocates, and policy makers all seem to agree that the quality of teaching makes an important difference in students' learning, their achievement, and their life opportunities.

The ideal teacher is required to be flexible and adaptable toward his students. This is possible only if he will study and evolve during the course of his career, both by himself and in relation to colleagues.

Darling Hamond (2010) presenting her perceptions about effective teaching, gives the following as being important to good teaching:

- Engage students in active learning
- Create intellectually ambitious tasks
- Use a variety of teaching strategies

- Assess student learning continuously and adapt teaching to student needs
- Create effective "scaffolds" and supports
- Provide clear standards, constant feedback, and opportunities for revising work
- Develop and effectively manage a collaborative classroom in which all students have membership

Therefore, the ideal teacher has two main characteristics: The ability to be attentive to his students and responsible to their needs, both as a group and as an individuals; The ability to be an expert in his discipline, to study and to evolve along his professional path.

The "bridge" between these two characteristics is the ability of the teacher to use his knowledge and his professionalism to adjust teaching methods and learning contents to students according to educational and teaching goals and to the diversity of students.

What happens to these characteristics required from the teacher in the social-technological age nowadays?

### III. THE TEACHER IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The developments of advanced technologies – especially the development of computers and information technology – have created significant changes in the Western society. Among those life area subject to such changes is that of education and its goals. E- learning environments have created new options in learning and teaching, enhancing effective communication between teachers and students and between the students and other students. The influence was bi-directional – the societal changes leading to the need to develop learning environments and suitable learning tools, affording greater opportunities in the learning and teaching process and thus benefiting both teachers and students.

Many studies provide evidence that the web based learning through the greater availability of information, contributes to the quality of the teaching and learning skills) (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999).

Other researchers claim that the usage of new media tools in teaching change the nature of the knowledge. These changes lead necessarily to significant changes in the teacher's work and his role (Mielk, ; 1999 Moore, 1999 ; Bates, .1999).

The uniqueness of the learning integrating ICT is – among other things – the provision of opportunities for interaction and communication between students and instructor, and between the students themselves, and the greater accessibility to information resources. (Anderson & Kanuka, 1997; Roblyer&Ekhaml, 2000; Johnassen& Rohrer-Murphy; Hughes & Hewson, 1998; Wegerif 1998 ; 1999; Harasim,2012).

The communication interaction in web-based learning can be interaction between the learners with the computer, interactions between the learners and the instructor and between the learners (Hughes. & Hewson, 1998; Moore, 1999; Salomon, 1995; Wegerif, 1998).

Other studies emphasize the major influence of technology overall, and especially information technology – on processes of thinking and learning. According to

Daniels (2002) ICT has become, within a very short time, one of the basic building blocks of modern society. Many countries now regard understanding ICT and mastering the basic skills and concepts of ICT as intrinsic to the core of education, alongside reading, writing and numeracy.

Learning approaches using contemporary ICT tools provide many opportunities for constructive learning, and through its provision and support for resource-based, student centred settings it enables learning to be related to the context and to practice (Berge, 1998; Barron, 1998).

The usage of web-based learning is common in many frame studies and includes many components which contribute to learning (Mioduser, Nachmias, Oren, & Lahav, 2000).

In 2006 a study (was done in 72 countries, in order to examine the integration of computers and communication in educational processes in school (Carstens, & Pelgrum, 2006). The research was arranged by IAE- International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. Among other positive results of this extensive research, it was found that more than 70% of the teachers that used ICT in teaching reported that ICT increases their personal abilities, enriches them in innovative teaching methods, and contributes to the accessibility of high-quality teaching resources and collaboration with colleagues. In addition, over one half of teachers reported that they had improved teaching processes in the classroom.

In beta report-(2010) assessing practitioner e-maturity:

- Developing a benchmarking tool to measure practitioner ICT – 2264 participants from 5 countries were examined, and among other results were found the next results:
- Both learners and teachers believe that ICT has a beneficial impact on the
- effectiveness of learning, and on learner satisfaction.
- Learners expect ICT to figure extensively in their learning.
- There is widespread recognition by teachers that ICT has a positive impact on working practices.
- Teachers believe that extensive deployment of ICT increases both the efficiency and effectiveness of their teaching and administration
- Learners are confident in their use of ICT and expect it to be used throughout their learning.

Therefore, it is clear regarding all these studies and many others, that computer and web-based learning in all its forms, has made a valuable contribution to learning and especially to the knowledge builders of the learners.

From the review two conclusions arise:

A: There is an agreed model – more or less – of the character of the ideal teacher. The main characteristics include the professional aspect and the personal aspect. From the professional aspect the professional ability is emphasized: A proficiency in the content and an ability to evolve and grow professionally.

From the personal aspect – some personal traits are emphasized, mainly as qualitative communication with the learners and an ability to listen to them and to support them.

These two aspects from a whole, since the attitudes toward students includes also the professional ability to adjust learning methods and programmes to the needs of diverse learners. For this purpose, the teacher has to continue evolving, to study and keep abreast of change in his field.

Integrating ICT and e-learning in the instruction definitely contributes to the knowledge construction of the students. ICT tools and the usage of computer and internet – whilst also engage with instruction, monitoring and control – contribute – undoubtedly to learning and teaching processes.

In light of these two conclusions there arises a common conclusion: the good teacher integrates ICT in his work.

This conclusion, however, has created difficulties amongst teachers who have difficulties adapting to the rapid changes. This is most evident amongst older members of the teaching profession where there can be strong feelings of resistance, arising from fear, hostility towards changes, lack of familiarity and ease in computer environments and frustrations watching the change in the image of the teacher. The teacher who was considered once an excellent teacher thanks to his teaching skills and his communication with the students and the staff – is suddenly seen as outdated, and – if he chooses to resist integrating IT in his work, lacking in relevant teaching skills. This type of teacher asks why that which was good for the past generations is no longer good for our students. Why then is not sufficient being done to utilise methods once proven useful and help integrate these in the development a technologically advancing society? Is it really necessary that the ideal teacher be an internet and computer oriented? Perhaps it is only one characteristic among others which are also important?

In this issue it is interesting to examine the attitudes of the future teachers – student teachers – during their study years. The ideal teacher is that toward which they desire to develop professionally. The image of the ideal teacher thus envisaged and defined by this generation of teachers may determine that which will be essential to the education of the future.

Therefore the main question is about the nature of the image of the ideal teacher in the eyes of these future teachers.

To understand this, it was necessary to exam the attitude of pre service teachers in educational college from many courses and departments.

## **THE RESEARCH AIM**

The research aim was to re-examine the definition of the ideal teacher from the point of view of the future teachers in the context of technological change.

## **THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

What is the ideal image of a teacher according to pre-service teachers?

**THE RESEARCH POPULATION**

The research population included 70 students from 2 colleges of education. The students belong to 11 different classes and came from different departments. The average age was 26 years and 7 months.

**IV. METHODOLOGY**

**Procedure:** The students received information about the research subject, its purpose and its significance to teachers' training. They were asked to fill an online questionnaire. There was no obligation to complete the questionnaire, which was distributed among 210 students. Of these, 70 students filled in the questionnaire. The data was collected within one month.

**Tools:** The research tool was, as said, an online questionnaire. The questionnaire included two parts. Part A included 30 different statements, descriptive of the ideal teacher. The questionnaire was based on previous questionnaires in the subject of the best teacher (resource) and on a pilot in which the participants were asked to write freely what they considered to be the characteristics of the ideal teacher. From their answers more statements were formulated. The ideal teacher description included both professional and personal statements. Changes were made to the questionnaire in accordance with the study's purpose, and the final questionnaire was delivered to six persons with experience in education. In light of their comments other changes were made in formulating the questions. The final questionnaire consisted of two parts : Part A consisted of 30 different statements that describe the characteristics of the ideal teacher. The students were asked to scale their agreement with each statement in a 5 ranks scale ranging from a high level of agreement to no agreement at all. In part B of the questionnaire the participants were asked to choose the most important statements of all the statements in their opinion and scale these from the most important character to what was considered to be the 10th in importance. All data was analyzed.

**V. RESULTS**

Part A: As expected, and in accord with similar previous studies, the personnel characteristics of the teacher were found, by most students to be very important. For example:

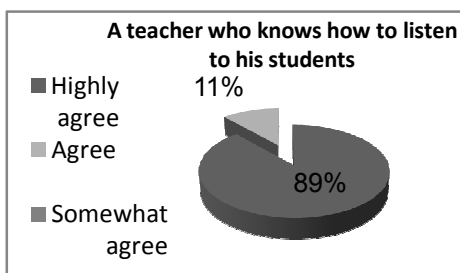


Fig. 1. "A teacher who knows how to listen to his students."

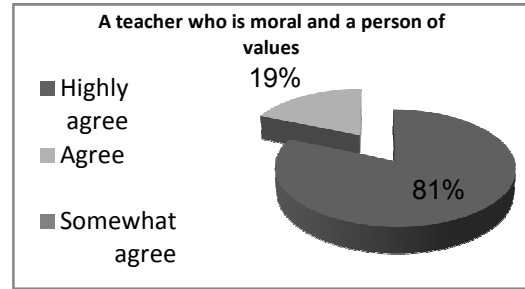


Fig. 2. "A teacher who is moral and a person of values"

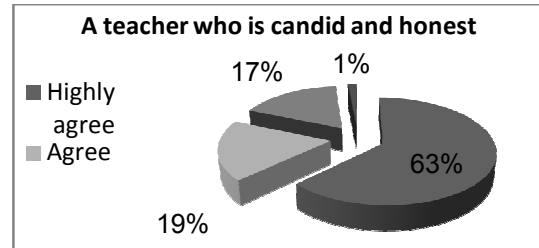


Fig. 3. "A teacher who is candid and honest." Professional aspects were also found as very important. For example:

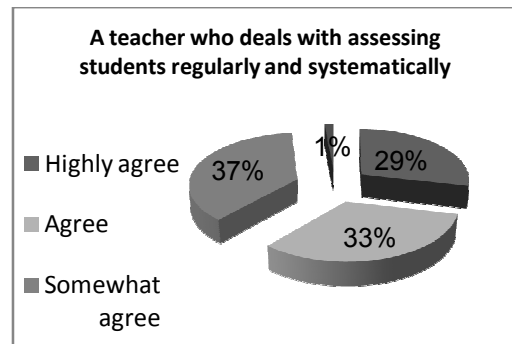


Fig. 4. "Teacher who deals with assessing students regularly and systematically."

Certain desired characteristics were referred directly to the teacher's use of technology. Here, too, the statements of this type received a high consensus, although not as high as in personal characteristic. For example:

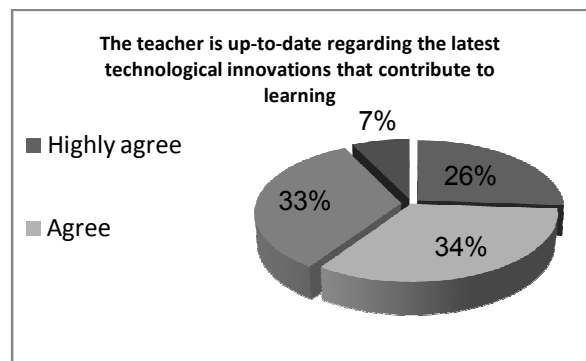


Fig. 5. "The teacher is up-to-date regarding the latest technological innovations that contribute to learning."



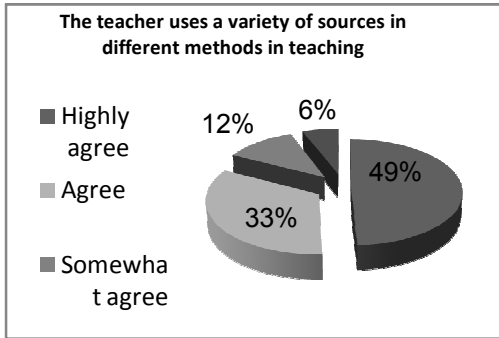


Fig. 6. "The teacher uses a variety of sources in different methods in teaching."

It should be noted that in addition to direct statements, there are statements that describe the characteristics of the ideal teacher, relevant to the teacher who uses technology. For example:

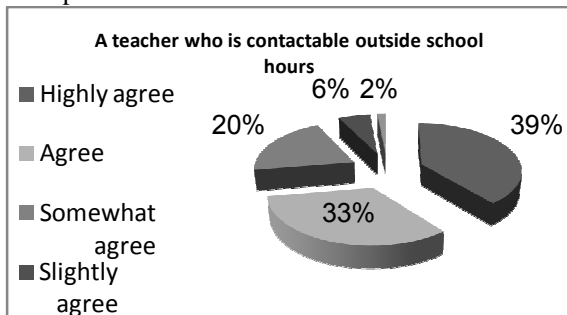


Fig. 7. "A teacher who is contactable outside school hours."

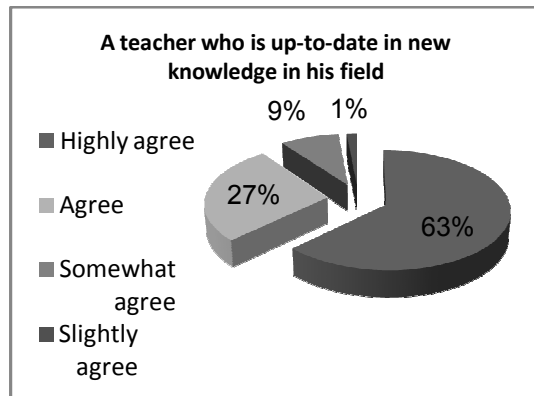


Fig. 8. "A teacher who is up-to-date in new knowledge in his field."

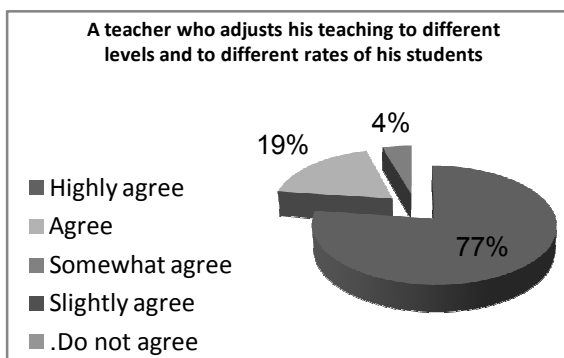


Fig. 9. "A teacher who adjusts his teaching to different levels and to different rates of his students."

The following table summarizes average scores and standard deviations for each statements in the questionnaire:

Table 1.

Average scores and standard deviations for each statements in the questionnaire

The statement	The weighted average	Standard deviation
A patient teacher.	4.81	0.42
A teacher who knows how to listen to his students.	4.89	0.32
A teacher who gives personal example that fits his methods of education and work	4.71	0.64
A teacher who adjusts his teaching to different levels and to different learning rates of his students.	4.73	0.53
A teacher who is moral and a person of values	4.81	0.39
A teacher who encourages his students to deepen their learning.	4.50	0.65
A teacher who teaches in interesting and varied ways.	4.64	0.54
A charismatic and influential teacher	4.60	0.57
A teacher who teaches content and learning methods that are relevant and important to life.	4.67	0.58
A teacher who documents and tracks the learning and progress of each of his students.	4.54	0.67
A teacher who has the ability to control the class.	4.56	0.58
A teacher who is a good leader.	4.39	0.78
A teacher who is consistent and equitable in his demands.	4.50	0.69
This teacher's lessons are interactive and require much communication between him and his students and between the students themselves.	4.26	0.91
A teacher who requires disciplined effort from his students in their studies.	4.41	0.69
A teacher who has a prominent and significant presence.	4.44	0.65
A teacher who is candid and honest	4.41	0.84
A teacher who is friendly.	4.40	0.76
A teacher who is up-to-date in new knowledge in his field.	4.51	0.71
Teacher up-to-date and abreast of teaching methods.	4.23	0.83
A teacher who uses varied sources and different methods to teach.	4.26	0.87
A teacher who deals with assessing students regularly and systematically.	3.89	0.84
A teacher who has a sense of humor.	3.77	0.96
A teacher who is contactable outside school hours.	4.04	0.98
A teacher who includes e-learning in the study/teaching environment.	3.59	0.87
A teacher who is available through technological means such as cell phone messages and e-mail	3.67	0.91
A teacher who makes effective use of web sites and software in his teaching, with the aim of facilitating the learning process.	3.77	0.97
A teacher who combines the use of computers and the Internet in his teaching.	3.57	0.96
A teacher who works collaboratively with colleagues.	3.96	1.01
The teacher is up-to-date regarding the latest technological innovations that contribute to learning	3.80	0.92

according to students. The average scores taken from the students were calculated on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the most important character and 10 is the 10<sup>th</sup> most important character. The table below present the averages and the standard deviations of the ten most important statements.

Table 2.

The averages and the standard deviations of the ten most important statements

	Average	Standard deviation	The place in the 10 important characteristics
A teacher who knows how to listen to his students.	4.89	0.32	1
A teacher who is moral and a person of values	4.81	0.39	2
A patient teacher.	4.81	0.42	3
A teacher who adjusts his teaching to different levels and to different learning rates of his students.	4.73	0.53	4
A teacher who gives personal example that fits his methods of education and work	4.71	0.64	5
A teacher who teaches content and learning methods that are relevant and important to life.	4.67	0.58	6
A teacher who teaches in interesting and varied ways.	4.64	0.54	7
A charismatic and influential teacher	4.60	0.57	8
A teacher who has the ability to control the class.	4.56	0.58	9
A teacher who documents and tracks the learning and progress of each of his students.	4.54	0.67	10

It should be noted that none of the statements relate directly to the subject of technology. However, the following statements relate, albeit indirectly, to the teacher who uses advanced technologies:

The 4th place in the level of importance: A teacher who adjusts his teaching to different levels and to different learning rates of his students.

The 6th place in the level of importance: A teacher who teaches content and learning methods that are relevant and important to life.

The 7th place in the level of importance: A teacher who teaches in interesting and varied ways.

The 10th place in the level of importance: A teacher who documents and tracks the learning and progress of each of his students.

In addition, it should be noted that looking at statements which refer directly to technology, there were found many students who chose them among the ten most important characteristics.

The statement “A teacher who combines usage of e learning environment” was chosen by 39 (55.7%) students, as one of the 10 important characteristics.

The statement “A teacher who makes an effective use of web sites and software to improve learning”, was chosen by 37 (52.85%) students as one of the 10 important characteristics.

The statement “A teacher who is up to date in technological innovations that contribute to learning” was chosen by 34 (48.57%) students as one of the 10 important characteristics.

## VI. DISCUSSION

Computerised teaching contributed to the teaching and learning processes. Despite its shortcomings and limitations, not listed in this article, the evidence shows many benefits the importance of which is unquestionable.

The claim in this study is that no computer and Internet orientation stands on its own, and it is not simply one more field dispensable expertise. The “online learning teacher” is open to learning environments, new technologies and ICT tools and incorporates these into his work with students. This does not by itself ensure that the teacher matches the ideal. It is a “necessary but not sufficient” condition. On the other hand, the teacher who opposes technological innovations and the assimilation of them into his teaching work can no longer be perceived currently as the ideal teacher, even if he possesses the characteristics considered as important. If he opposes the integration of ICT, then his work lacks important features, such as: the need to develop and learn, to be professional in his field, to innovate and adjust, in accordance with changes in the educational field, and the need to initiate and to diversify teaching methods to in order to makes these available to his students..

Openness to learning and assimilation of ICT tools in the teaching environment is not cut off from these features, and a teacher who ignores these options is similar to a teacher in the past who opposed writing on a chalkboard, claiming that it was better to engrave on wood.

Here are some examples:

The digital world today lets us see interactive maps and satellite images, enabling the student’s understanding the essence of a map, to “tour” around the world, and even in his own place of living, to plan routes and mark target locations. Why then would geography teacher for example prefer the map on the wall and manual calculations in notebook with paper and pencil to this new method of learning!

Similarly, the teacher is more capable of demonstrating chemical simulations of molecules, rendering the older plastic model obsolete, and biology teacher can show videos about systems in the human body, to which he can add comments and questions of his own..

Moreover, there are applications which help in mathematics, its practice and the obtaining of immediate feedback. Likewise, there is software and courseware in the practice of reading and comprehension, facilitating ease and fluency with each. In other instances, as in blogs software of various kinds, the students can express himself in writing, via text or graphic elements.

New learning environments can also enable to complete and submit his homework in a variety of ways, enabling preparation for assignments and facilitating both individual and cooperative learning.

These examples are but a very small part of what is possibilities thus opened up to teachers and students, These types of learning methods and experiences not only contribute to the specific purpose of the learning, but also prepare the student for the reality of life itself.

As for inhabiting a world of high technology world, every person must know how to book an appointment and show tickets through the Internet, receive the results of laboratory tests, present his views, search for information, manage his bank account, undertake professional development, and expand the circle of friends and professional colleagues.

A teacher who chooses to ignore these new options can still of course be diligent and attentive to his students, responsible and orderly, sensitive and strive toward goals. However, his achievements as a teacher would not be complete, and this because he is not open to experience and reveal the varied and innovative ways toward learning and teaching enrichment made available through the digital world

In this article the characteristics of the ideal teacher were reviewed, emphasizing the characteristics of professional ability to learn to develop and to keep abreast of contemporary technological advances. These characteristics can be expressed in the exploration and implementation of new teaching methods and modern approaches to learning, in which modern technological methods play a central part.

The ideal teacher is an image in the eyes of those who define it. Groups such as the parent population, the population of students, etc., define the ideal teacher in different ways. But in the modern world the population of teachers and future teachers will be those have the most influence upon what this image is to be. Their definition of the ideal teacher is that which they will desire it to be. Therefore, what these group define as the good teacher will shape the future of education. It is thus important to understand the attitudes of the future teachers toward changes that have occurred in the digital age and the new requirements these make of the educator.

In this study, we used an online questionnaire to determine how teachers in training perceive the attributes of an ideal teacher, with the aim of assessing if this ideal model also represents the characteristics of the

technologically oriented teacher. The study examined the perceptions of 70 pre service teachers. These students emphasized personal characteristics as the most important characteristics. However, among the most important characteristics, some were found to exist within teachers with technological orientations, as in " A teacher who teaches in an interesting and varied ways", and "A teacher who adjusts his teaching to different levels and to different rates of his students," "A teacher who teaches content and learning methods that are important to life," and A teacher who documents and tracks the learning and progress of each of his students".

## VII. CONCLUSION

It seems that in the eyes of pre-service teacher, the teacher's personal qualities come first in the image of the ideal teacher. When it comes to professional characteristics, the students didn't choose attitude towards computers and technology as one of the main characteristics. Probably because they saw it as an extension of other, more general characteristics. Nonetheless, the latter require of the teacher, to a large extent that there be technological orientation. The use of diverse methods and ways becomes easier in a technological environment, facilitates monitoring and control, and the development of personal learning pathways for students.

In the training of future teachers it is very important to create a model of the ideal teacher toward which the student will aspire. Such a model will include professional and personality traits such as, among others, the ability to explain clearly educational material to the diversity of learners, to be attentive to the needs of students, to develop and keep apace of change.

In my humble opinion, building a virtual image of the ideal teacher toward which the students can work we must include in the field teacher training the use of the computer, the Internet and ICT.

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