THE INTERACTIVE WHITEBOARD IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) CLASSROOM

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Abstract:

This study describes and analyses the uses of Interactive WhiteBoards in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. It tries to answer the following questions; first, how can an Interactive WhiteBoard be used in a learning environment?, second, how can Interactive WhiteBoards promote student engagement?, and what are Interactive WhiteBoard activities in the EFL classroom?The researcher's impression is that the interactive whiteboard is a very innovative and powerful support for language acquisition. First of all, it provides a bridge that allows using the features of computers without breaking communication. Secondly, it may enhance new kinds of learning processes. Finally, it offers a very interesting option for bringing the Internet into every EFL class.

Keywords: Interactive, white board, EFL, classroom, English

Introduction

Technology, ever changing, has become more accessible to teachers in the last few years. Teachers need to be able to use technology to increase their professional development and to have positive contact with students on a regular basis. The Interactive WhiteBoard proved to be an exciting and fun bit of technology to integrate. It affects learning in several ways, including raising the level of student engagement in a classroom, motivating students and promoting enthusiasm for learning(Bacon,2011). Interactive WhiteBoards

support many different learning styles and are used in a variety of learning environments(Chapell,2003).

Research shows that designing lessons around interactive whiteboards helps educators streamline their preparation, be more efficient in their Information and Communication Technology (ICT) integration and increase their productivity overall.

Research also indicates that notes taken on an interactive whiteboard can play a key role in the student review process, leading to higher levels of student attendance   (Solvie 2001, Kent2003, Allen2010 and Bacon 2011). Gerard and Widener (1999) find that "the Interactive WhiteBoard supports interaction and conversation in the classroom; it helps with the presentation of new cultural and linguistic elements."

Solvie (2001) investigated the correlation between the use of an Interactive WhiteBoard as a delivery tool for literacy instruction in a first-grade classroom and student attention to and participation in the literacy lessons. Her research found: The Interactive WhiteBoard was novel and created enthusiasm for learning on the part of the students as evidenced in remarks made during the lessons presented using the Interactive WhiteBoard and during individual student interviews, such as "I like touching the Interactive WhiteBoard," "my finger is magic," "I like when the lines get different," "it's a lot more easy using the interactive whiteboard, but I don't know why," and "the board is magic." Students were engaged when they actually touched the Interactive WhiteBoard or manipulated text on it.

In 2004, Solvie focused her research on Interactive WhiteBoards, she reported, "It engaged my primary students in literacy learning.. I was able to interact with the class, demonstrating, modeling and manipulating what was on the board by touch. I was not confined to, or focused on, a computer that separated me from the class…. Visual display in the form of diagrams, webs and pictures, as well as use of colors and shapes to highlight text, prompted engagement."

Additional U.S. research focusing on middle-school students and teachers, and their attitudes towards Interactive WhiteBoards indicates a strong preference for the use of Interactive WhiteBoards in the classroom. As Beeland (2002) asks,"Does the use of an interactive whiteboard as an instructional tool affect student engagement? The unequivocal answer, based on the results of both the surveys and questionnaires, is yes…. The results of the survey indicate that interactive whiteboards can be used in the classroom to increase student engagement during the learning process."

Reed (2001) studied students' initial responses to use of an interactive whiteboard during classes. The immediate advantage of this arrangement compared to seating students at individual workstations has been that websites can be examined as a group activity so that communication between members of the group continues, whether in English or in a foreign language. A further benefit is derived from the fact that several members of the group are not especially computer literate and are daunted by the prospect of seeking out and using websites on their own, particularly interactive sites which require regular responses from them.… It allows members of the group to ask and hear others' questions and reactions before starting tasks individually.

Other researchers have also found correlations between interactive whiteboards and student–teacher engagement. Ball (2003) details the increased potential for teachers to concentrate on student responses during lessons where an Interactive WhiteBoard is used, and Cunningham (2003) points to the benefits of the fast-paced, engaging Interactive WhiteBoard classroom. Edwards (2002) highlights the in-class opportunities that the flexibility of Interactive WhiteBoards allows students and teachers.

Latham's (2002) teacher-focused research finds "two-thirds of the teachers felt that the Interactive WhiteBoard offered strategies for teachers to develop interactive teaching. One-third stated that pupils from all ability groups were now more willing to take part in lessons."

(Kent,2003) indicated that teaching with Interactive WhiteBoards is "more fun, more engaging, more exciting and is impacting on the enjoyment, speed and depth of learning" (Lee and Boyle, 2003).

1. What is an Interactive WhiteBoard?

An Interactive White Board is a touch-sensitive screen that works in conjunction with a computer and a projector. It is a presentation device that interfaces with a computer. The computer images are displayed on the board by a digital projector, where they can be seen and manipulated. Users can control software both from the computer and from the board. Participants can add notations, and emphasize by using a pen and or highlighter tool. By using his/her finger as a mouse, the teacher or student can run applications directly from the board. Another user at the computer can also have input. Any notes or drawings can then be saved or printed out and distributed to group members.

2. Features of Interactive WhiteBoards

An Interactive WhiteBoard is an interactive electronic white board which can be used for different purposes. It is connected to a computer and to a projector which displays the image seen on the computer screen. First the software (and hardware) must be engaged, and then the board must be oriented. Once the computer screen has been projected onto the Interactive Whiteboard , the user can control all Windows' applications with the touch of a finger. The user's finger becomes, in effect, the mouse. The user needs only to press the board's surface to open and close files, explore web sites on the internet, or operate software.

As with any regular white board, the user can take notes on the Interactive WhiteBoard. But unlike notes that are taken on a regular white board, these notes can then be printed or saved like any other document.Those are the two main features of the Interactive WhiteBoard.

3. How can an Interactive WhiteBoard be used in a learning environment?

Interactive WhiteBoards are an effective way to interact with digital content and multimedia in a multi-person learning environment. Learning activities with an interactive whiteboard may include, but are not limited to the following:

• Manipulating text and images

• Making notes in digital ink

• Saving notes for later review by using e-mail, the Web or print

• Viewing websites as a group

• Demonstrating or using software at the front of a room without being tied to a computer

• Creating digital lesson activities with templates, images and multimedia

• Writing notes over educational video clips

• Using presentation tools that are included with the white boarding software to enhance learning materials

• Showcasing student presentations.

4. How can Interactive WhiteBoards promote student engagement?

In social Learning most people need to reinforce their beliefs and understandings by asking others questions, thereby making learning an inherently social activity. Current education theories are grounded in the notion of the social learner and position student engagement as a key component of knowledge construction**. First, Whole-class teaching** brings the entire class together, focuses their attention and provides structured, teacher-focused group interaction. **Second, Constructivism** relies on the learner to select and transform information, build hypotheses in order to make decisions and ultimately construct meaning. **Third, Active learning** learners actively engage in the learning process through reading, writing, discussion, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, rather than passively absorbing instruction (e.g., lecture model of instruction).

A common thread between these three learning theories is the understanding that student engagement is crucial to learning and, as a growing collection of international research proves, Interactive WhiteBoards promote student engagement (Beeland2002,Allen2010,Bacon2011). Educators can use digital resources while maintaining dynamic interaction with the entire class, provide computer-based learning without isolating students and encourage a higher level of student interaction in both teacher-directed and group-based exchanges. Interactive WhiteBoards promote interaction among the students, the learning materials and the teacher, and enrich ICT by providing a large work space for hands-on work with multimedia resources(Reed,2001). Having a display surface large enough for everyone to see encourages a high level of student interaction. A teacher and a student can interact with the Interactive WhiteBoard at the front of the class and the rest of the students remain involved. As research indicates, the functionality of the Interactive WhiteBoard and its accompanying software allows for the development of classroom activities that are engaging for students, so they encourage greater focus, participation and interaction, and improve student learning outcomes as a result.

5. Interactive WhiteBoard activities in the EFL classroom

An Interactive WhiteBoard supports the teaching process of foreign languages in three main ways: it supports interaction and conversation in the classroom; it helps with the presentation of new cultural and linguistic elements; and it promotes the oral skills.

5.1.Activities which support interaction and conversation with students

A projection onto an Interactive Whiteboard is very different from a classic projection of what is found on a computer screen. With an Interactive WhiteBoard the user is able to navigate from the board. He does not need to continually go back to the computer and, as a consequence, turn his back to the class. The teacher can spend his time concentrating on the learning process of the student instead of the technology. This is very important when using Interactive WhiteBoards to teach and is crucial in the foreign language classroom. All foreign language teachers know how difficult it can be to have a relaxed conversation with the students in the target language. The Interactive WhiteBoard can facilitate certain types of conversations in that all members of the classroom may concentrate on the same item at the same time and conversation may then spring from that.

The merit of the Interactive WhiteBoard is that it enhances conversation. When the teacher is navigating from point to point, he/she faces and interacts with the class. The teacher is able to focus on the student's language production instead of technical issues. It also supports communication when used in combination with a wireless keyboard. The teacher can sit with the students, reading a text or having a conversation. When new vocabulary is needed or appears, the teacher can enter the new word into the keyboard, and it will then appear on the board. The awkward situation of having to stand up, go to the board, and write the new word on the board does not occur. By simply typing the new word onto the board, the conversation may progress smoothly. The students do not have to write the word immediately. At the end of the activity, the teacher can reinforce the vocabulary by underlining, highlighting or circling. If desired, it can be printed for the student and saved for the teacher.

5.2.Activities which support the presentation of new linguistic and cultural elements

An important use of the Interactive WhiteBoard is its aid in presentation of new linguistic and cultural elements. The teacher can prepare a lesson as usual in a Notebook file or Word Document, and is then able to use the features of the Interactive WhiteBoard to his advantage. The instructor can use the Interactive WhiteBoard to overwrite, underline, highlight or circle the elements that he wants to emphasize. Because the document is typed, it is very readable, and it – along with changes and new emphases – can be saved and displayed again at any time.

The features of the Interactive WhiteBoard can also make a big difference when presenting authentic documents such as web sites. They enable the teacher to explore the document at length rather than staying at a simple presentation level.

Bacon (2011) and Allen(2010) suggested in their studies the positive influence of authentic documents in language learning. With Interactive WhiteBoard the instructor can not only simply project a website; he/she can also overwrite it to emphasize specific linguistic and cultural elements. The Interactive WhiteBoard also facilitates navigation of the site because it is finger driven on the board. This, too, facilitates classroom activities.

5.3.Activities which support oral skills

Pennington (1996) noticed "that the computer can sometimes encourage a form of 'anti-social' behavior that amounts to working in isolation from others". This is a common criticism of computer use and is especially relevant to the foreign language teacher, who is supposed to interact with the class as much as possible. The introduction of the projector associated with the Interactive WhiteBoard brings the problem into a new perspective. When presented to the whole class, a web document can enhance oral interaction within the whole class. Opinions and ideas can be exchanged. It is possible to extend this operation of the Interactive WhiteBoard in order to let the student, instead of the teacher, navigate the board. The other students may guide him by giving directions in the target language. As suggested for group activities using the computer (Abraham and Liou 1991; Chapelle,2003), the Interactive WhiteBoard brings people together and encourages communication.

It is also possible for students to present projects on the Interactive WhiteBoard. This enables them to speak without having to worry about the mouse.Pictures and text are shown without delay with the simple touch of a finger. This places the oral production in the target language in the foreground.

6. Conclusion

This analysis of the Interactive WhiteBoard in the foreign language classroom has led to an impression that the Interactive WhiteBoard is a very innovative and powerful support for language acquisition. First of all, it provides a bridge that allows using the features of computers without breaking communication – it even supports it. Secondly, it may enhance new kinds of learning processes, for instance when working with two windows

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