Integration of Smart Boards in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

The current study described the uses of smart boards in English as foreign language (EFL) classrooms. This study also investigated the role of smart boards in promoting student engagement, the benefits of smart boards for teachers, using smart boards for improving motivation, and smart boards in the service of linguistic and cultural elements. The review of previous studies revealed that smart boards are very innovative and powerful support for language acquisition. Moreover, they increased learning process.

Keywords: smart board, EFL classroom, motivation, language learning, technology

1. Introduction

Today, technology plays key roles in the world of education. It is almost in everywhere the teachers are accessible to technology. One of the important uses of technology is in teaching and learning a great number of subjects, including languages (Ishtaiwa & Shana, 2011). Teachers need to integrate technology in order to increase their professional development and to contact positively with their students on a regular basis. Hence, the rapid improvement in different approaches in technology has led to some opportunities that can be used in language classrooms by changing the traditional nature of the classroom. Numerous studies have indicated that the use of technology in schools has developed new ways of teaching and learning. To Mishra and Koehler (2006), digital computers, computer software, artifacts and mechanisms have become widely used in educational settings. Ilter (2009) refers to educational technology as having a big role in EFL classrooms. Kim, et al., (2013) believe that technology, as an international phenomenon, is an important part of our everyday lives which can increase teaching and learning. With the advent of technology, the tradition of English teaching has been changed. It makes teaching interesting and more productive (Shyamlee, 2012). Learning can be fun by the help of technologies that place control over learning in the hands of students (Wartinbee, 2009).

Among the numerous approaches of technology to be integrated into EFL classrooms, computer technology is the most familiar one (Sadeghi & Dousti, 2013). One recent popular computer-based technology that has been integrated into language classrooms is smart board. The integration of smart boards in language classrooms has attracted the attention of many researchers all over the world. In this way, the literature supports that integration of smart board in educational settings is beneficial (BECTA, 2003). One of the benefits of smart boards is related to their contributions to the improvement of language learning in the classroom. Using smart boards can make the learning and teaching atmosphere more enjoyable, creative, and interesting (Elaziz, 2008). Bacon (2011) believes that smart whiteboards can influence learning in different ways. It can increase the level of students' engagement in a classroom, motivates the learners and promotes enthusiasm for learning. In fact, smart whiteboards can support learning and are able to be used in a variety of learning environments (Chapell, 2003).

It seems that different countries in the world have different experiences with using smart boards in language classrooms. Studies conducted in the UK have indicated that the direct interaction with smart whiteboard, whether physically or visually, is beneficial to students. To Beeland (2002), and Cunningham et al. (2003) whiteboards have multiple uses for learners.ard for learners. The outcome of the research in United States shows that smart whiteboards

contribute to the multisensory learning needs of a wide array of students. This technology can also promote genuine interaction and discussion in many different classrooms and can help teachers with the presentation of new cultural and linguistic materials. Moreover, it can make the lessons more inclusive, collaborative and engaging. The smart whiteboards can also make the learning enjoyable, and entice students to learn. Reardon (2002) asserts that "with the use of whiteboards, teachers can develop many creative ways to capture students' attention and imagination".(P.26) American researchers have observed smart boards bring "true excitement to the classroom" (Gerard and Widener, 1999) and motivate students to engage with the technology. Bell (1998) also refers to smart boards that help the students to be more involved, attentive, and motivated when lessons are offered using the smart boards . Similar improvements in student motivation are considered by Lee and Boyle (2003) in Australia. They found that "when one can sit and listen to five-year-old children in kindergarten express what is distinct about whiteboard-focused learning … and how it assists them to learn more, faster and in a more enjoyable and interesting way, ... one senses something rather special is happening."(P.48) Australian researchers also investigated smart whiteboards and found an increased potential for interactive engagement in classrooms (Kent, 2003) and showed that teaching with interactive whiteboards is "more fun, more engaging, more exciting and [is] impacting on the enjoyment, speed and depth of learning" (Lee & Boyle, 2003).

The Smart board supports and enhances a wide range of ESL activities: brainstorming sessions, error analysis, editing drafts with highlighters or pens in different colours to analyse grammatical, syntactical or vocabulary features, planning, editing and proofreading drafts of written genres with the whole class, word order analysis, note making, grammar practice and many others. To Gerald and Widener (1999), the SMART Board interactive whiteboard supports interaction and conversation in the classroom; it helps with the presentation of new cultural and linguistic elements. They also assert that smart boards can create enthusiasm for learning on the part of the students as evidenced in remarks made during the lessons presented using the smart board.

Some studies have shown the correlation between using a smart board in the classroom and increased motivation. According to Breazeale (2000), smart boards can motivate the students. For example, they can motivate the students to demonstrate their knowledge in front of their peers. Richardson (2002), offers that "children are always enthusiastic and show heightened motivation when [an interactive whiteboard] is used in the classroom and … it causes greater attention and enthusiasm to participate and respond" (p.203). To Salintri, Smith and Clovis (2002), sustained motivation is key to improve the learning.

2. The Role of Smart Boards in Promoting Student Engagement

One of the principles of the social learning is to reinforce the beliefs and understanding of the people by asking others questions, thereby making learning a social activity. Some current education theories consider the social learner and position student engagement as an essential component of knowledge construction. Three learning theories are: whole-class teaching, constructivism, and active learning. A common issue among these three learning theories is the student engagement which is crucial to learning. The findings of some previous research proved that smart boards can increase the student engagement (Allen 2010; Bacon 2011; Beel 2002). According to Al-Saleem (2013), "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" (p.130). Smart boards seem to promote interactions among the students, the teacher and the materials. To Reed (2001), smart boards can also enrich ICT by increasing a large work space for hands-on work with multimedia resources. A Smart board can act as a means for the interaction between a teacher and a student at the front of the class. In fact, the combination of smart boards with software allow for the development of classroom activities that are engaging for the students. Thus, smart boards are able to encourage participation and interaction and the improvement of student learning.

3. Smart Boards in the EFL Classrooms

The teaching process of foreign languages can be supported via using smart boards in three main ways. First, they can support interaction and conversation in the classroom. Second, they are able to contribute to the presentation of new cultural and linguistic elements. Third, it can promote the oral skills (Al-Saleem, 2013).

By using the smart boards, the students can navigate from the board. The teacher spends time on the learning process instead on focusing on the technology. According to Al-Saleem (2013), smart boards are crucial to be used by the teachers in the foreign language classrooms. A relaxed conversation with the students in the target language is very difficult. To this end, smart boards can facilitate some types of conversations in a way that all students in the classroom may focus on the same item at the same time and conversation can spring from that.

One of the strong points of using smart boards is that it can enhance the conversation. When the teacher navigates from point to point, he/she can interact with the class. Instead of focusing on technical issues, the teacher can concentrate on the students' language production. Smart boards are also able to support communication when they are using in combination of other wireless keyboards. The teacher sits besides the students and starts reading text with them or tries to have a conversation with the students. When the students face with a word that they don't know its meaning, the teacher enters the new word into the keyboard, then it will appear on the board. Through using the smart boards, the students don't need to stand up, go to the board and write the new word on the board. They just type the new word onto the board, the conversation will progress smoothly (Al-Saleem, 2013). In this way, the students do not need to write the word immediately. In the end, the vocabulary is reinforced by the teacher through underlining, highlighting, or circling.

4. The Benefits of Smart Boards for Teachers

Smart boards provide many opportunities for teachers in the classrooms. According to Walker (2005), smart boards can work in conjunction with some other technologies. Thus, their use lets teachers reach a number of resources in the shortest time. Levy (2002) refers to smart boards that provide teachers with the means to integrate multimedia resources such as written text, video clips, soundtracks and diagrams into their classes. In this case, smart boards can bring variety into the class. Hence, they can contribute teachers to arrange the classes based on the needs of students with different learning styles such as visual, auditory and kinesthetic (Miller & Glover, 2010).

Smart boards also help teachers to save the notes they have written on the board during class time. Therefore, smart boards allow the materials to be re-used, and thus it will be a time-saver for teachers (Walker, 2005). Moreover, the saved materials can help teachers by removing the need to write the same information on the board (Miller & Glover, 2010). Instead of preparing the same material over and over, teachers revise or add new things to save notes based on their reflection or students' feedback

Smart boards have different advantages for teachers. First, smart boards provide opportunity for more effective whole-class teaching (Miller & Glover, 2010). Second, they also allow teachers to manipulate documents from the board (Gerard, Widener & Greene, 1999). Therefore, the smart boards increase the conversation in the classroom since the teacher interacts with the students (Gerard et al., 1999). Third, the touch sensitive screen can help both teachers and students to interact with the board physically.

5. Using Smart Boards for Improving Motivation

A large body of research refers to the value of smart boards in enhancing students' motivation. Levy (2002), reported results from research in secondary schools, concluding that both teachers and learners perceived smart boards as having significant role in motivating students, focusing their attention and improving whole-class learning. In addition, a study conducted by Warwick, Mercer,Kershner, and Starmann (2010) concluded that the smart board can provide both the tool and environment which can encourage the criterion of a shared dialogue space. Additionally, Kitson, Kearney, and Fletcher (2005) linked motivation and task engagement associated with smart board to the effect of multimedia and multi-sensory presentation. Apparently, the positive impact of smart board on classrooms depends primarily on the way it's utilized. When implemented wisely, smart boards can enhance learning and teaching; on the other hand, when implemented poorly, there will be very little change, which include wasting of money and having unhappy, and frustrated teachers (Betcher & Lee, 2009).

6. Smart Boards in the Service of Linguistic and Cultural Elements

It seems that one of the important uses of smart boards is in presentation of linguistic and cultural elements. A lesson can be prepared in a Notebook file or Word Document by a teacher. The teacher can take advantage of smart boards to overwrite, underline, highlight or circle elements. According to Al-Saleem (2013), smart boards have some features which make a big difference when presenting authentic documents such as web sites. Exploring the documents at length instead of staying at a simple presentation level is one of the capacities of the smart boards. In their studies, Bacon (2011) and Allen (2010) refer to the positive influence of the authentic documents on language learning. In this way, the teacher can both project a website, and emphasize specific linguistic and cultural elements. Thus, smart boards can facilitate classroom activities.

7. Conclusion

The review of the previous studies reveals that the integration of smart boards in the foreign language classrooms has caused an impression that the smart boards are an innovative and powerful support for language acquisition. They provide a bridge that let the learners use the features of computers without breaking communication and they support it. Moreover, the smart boards may increase new kinds of learning process. The body of research also revealed the positive effect smart boards have on student engagement, motivation, learning styles, and the capability of enhancing the students' understanding. The findings of the previous studies also indicated that smart boards are helpful to be used in the EFL classrooms. Thus, smart board is recommended to be integrated into the EFL curriculum by means of a careful adaptation of the materials and a systematic training in how to use this type of technology in language classrooms.

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