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**Interactive Whiteboard Technology in
English Language Teaching Classrooms in India**

Archana Sharma, M.Phil.

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Abstract

As English has become the connecting language in India and teaching English is an important sector in the education field, English teachers are facing various challenges either from existing technology or from students or from pedagogy etc. To face existing challenges, new methodology has been evolved to overcome the problem but success is not guaranteed. Educationists are not lacking behind in incorporating the technology in teaching English.

This paper will discuss one of the latest technical equipment, the Interactive Whiteboard (hereafter IWB), which is speedily being adopted in schools and institutions. It will also look at some possible advantages and disadvantages of using IWB.

Key words: Interactive Whiteboard, teaching, language, English.

Introduction

Language teachers try to incorporate various techniques, methods and electronic devices for audio-visual assistance. This time educators recommend Interactive Whiteboard

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technology for language teaching. Miller, Averis and Door, in their research on IWB in 2005, highlighted a number of specific features of this technology. They suggest that teachers find them quite easy to use; whilst they take longer to prepare material, there is a greater reward in terms of student interest. Materials can easily be adapted and re-used; visual and kinaesthetic learning styles are supported; retention/recall and sequential explanations are aided; improved planning, presentation, and revisiting; better motivation and attention on the part of students, particularly slower learners; interactivity is supported through questioning, software features and multimedia. (Miller et al, 2005)

The incorporation of IWBs into English for academic purposes was investigated by E. Cutrim Schmid in 2006. She researched how the IWB came to be used as part of a hands on approach using whole class interaction to collaboratively learn about English academic literary practices (Schmid, 2006). During a deep research on IWB one commentator noted,

‘in the hands of a teacher who is interested in developing the independent, creative, thinking skills of their students, (the IWB) will be used to further these purposes. . . . It’s not what you use it’s how you use it’ (Virtual Learning 2003b, p. 4).

IWB

Walter McKenzie said "A new age demands a new paradigm!" and IWB is the demand of the age. IWB is technical equipment with many attachments (peripherals). This equipment is a giant whiteboard which is placed suitably to the wall or on the movable stand, depending upon the facilities available in the institution. The position of the board is such that everybody can see the content on the board. One thing should be remembered before placing the whiteboard in the class that suitable arrangement should be done so that every student can reach to the length and breath of the board to do activity on it. This white board is not passive. Its screen becomes live when it is hooked up with computer and a projector. The projector is generally fixed on the ceiling. The desktop of the attached computer becomes giant and interactive when projector projected the image (which is on the desktop) on the whiteboard. This equipment works on touch screen technology and various softwares help running different programmes, required for teaching. These softwares bring interactivity and interest factor in the class. Audio visual devices are also attached to give completeness to this interactive whiteboard. Speakers are placed in the corners and the possibility of echo is kept in mind.

IWB in India

The entry of Interactive Whiteboard in education sector is very new in India. It is in the infant stage in India and has become popular especially in metro and other large cities where people are very much aware of this latest technology and its impact in teaching and learning language. There are lots of opportunities for IWB in India.

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“India's Education sector is likely to step up its IT spending to about USD 704 million in 2012, reflecting in a CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 19 percent during 2007-2012 says the Springboard research report. Traditional education system has undergone a vast change moving out of the era of the blackboard, classroom and conventional methods of teaching to a more intelligent, digitised and smarter way of imparting knowledge. One of the major tools emerged in this changed education system is interactive whiteboard. According to Future Source Consulting, an independent global research company that tracks interactive whiteboard sales, about 7,500 (Rs. 75 Crore in value terms) IWBs were sold in India in 2009. The agency projects this to touch 28,000 units (Rs280 Crore) this year and 70,000 (Rs. 700 Crore) in the next. The various studies” (Pragya Gupta, 2010)

Smart Classrooms

Private institutions and English medium schools (private and self-financed) and colleges are changing the traditional classrooms into smart classrooms. The concept of smart class emerged with the realization of the fact that traditional blackboard classrooms are unable to hold the attention of the students of this tech-age. Though research has proved that the interactive whiteboard is indeed an interactive, innovative and effective tool in language learning, the use of IWB technology in language teaching in India is in experimental phase and research in various fields are going on to find its utility, potentiality, effectiveness, motivation ratio, its impact on teachers and students.

Reasons for the Increasing Use of IWB in Classrooms

There are mainly four reasons for the transformation of traditional blackboard classrooms in to IWB equipped smart rooms in language teaching.

1. Students relate English with the latest things, so they want every new technology in their language class.
2. Teachers are interested in bringing novelty to their teaching methodology in language teaching.
3. The present scenario of the tech-based education system encourages the country's decision makers to bring the latest technology to enable Indian students perform just as the students of other developed countries.
4. Versatile features of IWB enable language teachers to use well-planned lessons in the language class with all innovative ideas and novelty.

Now I will discuss these factors in detail.

Students

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Now-a-days students do not want the same dull, monotonous, teacher-centered, ineffective language classes. They want that their teacher must attract their attention in the class first and then start teaching the core elements. Teaching language should not be a bore and a burdensome exercise. It should be full of fun and interesting too. Half of the intended task is done well if the starting of the task is done well. Teacher must know the psychology of the students. Students want a methodology which fulfills their requirements and also want that they should be aware of the aims of each activity they do in the language class (where they will use a particular exercise in their practical life). Very often they require interesting topics and tasks which lead to the solutions of the problems they face. They need to manipulate things, examine them, and work with them, which means that teachers should provide students with resources that invite innovation in their ideas and exploration.

Below are given several preferences of the today's students:

- Want up to date knowledge content related to their course and other related external elements also.
- General awareness. What is going on in the world related to the subject?
- Want entertainment and fun.
- Need games based exercises.
- Need to know that the knowledge they achieve will be useful for their future life.
- Need changes.
- Want to try new techniques, machines and everything which is offered in the market.
- Expect to be taught how to learn

IWB may offer almost everything which is mentioned in the list above. In an Interactive way pupils either individually or in groups or teams practice all the skills and their motivation for learning a language might increase. As pointed out in the report of BECTA that it

".....encourages more varied, creative and seamless use of teaching materials; increases students' engagement, enjoyment, and motivation to a greater extent than conventional whole-class teaching; and facilitates students' participation through the ability to interact with materials on the board" (BECTA, 2003, p. 1).

Teacher

"With the help of technology, teachers will be leaders in the transformation of education around the world". (Barrett, Craig R. Intel)

Teachers are the pivot of any class. Technology, methods and electronic and technical equipments are only for the assistance of the teacher. Whatever technology or method is applied, the success of all these are in the hand of teachers. Teachers who are innovative
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and who believe in whole life-learning always try novelty in their classrooms. Today's teacher is not playing a role of dictator or only a lecturer or speaker in the class. He/she wants their students take part in discussion in the class. He or she knows that involvement in any activity leaves a deep and lasting impact on students. "Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I'll remember. Involve me and I'll understand," so stated Confucius.

A teacher wants or should desire

- interaction among students
- group performance with individual performance
- innovative method to present things
- save time which is spent in writing on the board
- want to face the class most of the time
- speaks less and listen more from students
- to leave a positive impact on students
- a device which can help in presenting difficult topic in an much easier way

Helpful IWBs

Teachers love to use IWB in their English teaching class as it helps them in various ways.

- Present digital resources
- Graphics can be used for the exercise of data interpretation
- Reading comprehension text can be presented in one click
- Story writing exercise beautiful pictures or drawings can be projected at once
- Now a days many companies offer readymade curricular materials
- Students' works can be shared and discussed
- Videos and audios can help in listening and dialogue formation. It is really fun.
- Maps, encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc., can be used on the spot through Internet access.
- Movies and cartoons may help in listening and in comprehension.
- Grammar based games impact a lot rather than simple exercises in the book.
- Real situations like TV reports, live telecast of contemporary issue will make them good competent.
- It encourages participation of students in a learning activity.
- It increases peer activity.
- It engages students.
- It fascinates students so grab their attention and bring their attention in the class.
- With its peripherals it allows watching a video and playing with it. It may be paused many times for stressing on a topic and then re-played again.
- Contents for reading can be presented on one click, so it saves time.
- It can remove the content in another click.

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- It offers the facility of saving the data used in a particular lecture or recording a lesson which can be used for further classes or absent students.
- It is a great tool for visual learners because of the large screen.
- It is very easy to use either with a special pen or fingers.
- Stress on all the skill of language like reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Challenges to IWB Technology

Though much has been said about the positive impact of the IWB in English teaching, it is also found that some language teachers have identified the negative impact as well. They found that the readymade content is not sufficient and preparing new content for the class is very much time-consuming. Most of the teachers in India, even in cities, are not very much tech-savvy. So they found it a tough job to operate the various features of IWB. Some teachers declare that these tools are nothing but costly accessories to decorate the classroom. They strongly believe that teachers should be the center of the classroom.

“Though smart classrooms were the need of the hour, they could never replace teaching by talking.” (Eduadmin, 2011)

Sometimes the problem arises with regard to the operation of the IWB such as technical problems with the board, internet problems, etc. which make it difficult to keep the equipments intact for the lecture. If in the midst of use the IWB breaks down, attention of the class is totally distracted. If any intervention exists then concentration is disturbed. Training the teachers in the use of the boards and maintaining their motivation also pose challenge in implementing the IWB in language classes. Not only the high cost but its maintenance cost is also a great challenge to the administrators.

Conclusion

No doubt that the teacher is the central and most important part of a classroom but with the help of positive attitude and innovative ideas and with a tool like IWB in their hands, they can perform in a much better way.

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