

Utility of Interactive White Board and Digital English Language Laboratory to enhance Communication Skills of Engineering Students

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Abstract:

English language competence is proved to be a significant aspect of a student's academic life and prospect career. English language and communication skills play an important role in academic life and career of engineering students. One requires to have good English language and communication competence to study engineering and technological subjects. For **Communication Skills**, it is very useful to have a variety of teaching-learning methods and approaches to meet the diverse learning needs of the engineering students. Pedagogical process of 21st century has various methods and approaches for better learning e.g. lectures, discussion, peer review, study notes, assignment, webinar, online learning, e-discussion forum, language lab, educational softwares, etc. Students had to come together to learn and share knowledge at the same time and place for many years but in 21st century education, computer and networking technologies have eliminated that requirement. Now anybody can learn anything anywhere at any time through educational softwares or computer assisted language learning (CALL) based materials.

I tried to integrate ICT tools like SMART Interactive White Board (IWB) and Digital English Language Laboratory in teaching communication skills to engineering students. It is found that if students are taught by using interactive ICT tools, students are likely to enhance English language skills.

1. Introduction

This research was carried out to prove the significance of educational technologies in teaching of Communication Skills at engineering and technical campus and to examine the advantages and disadvantages of the two chosen forms of presentation. By this I mean two main forms that teachers can use – the first form is teaching in a Digital English Language Lab and the second one is teaching in a common classroom equipped with a projector, a computer and an Interactive White Board (IWB). I chose the SMART - Interactive White Board because I think most of its functions can improve lesson quality a lot. In the frame of this research I taught four lessons in two different classes. One lesson in each class took place in a language lab, one lesson in a common classroom with the Interactive White Board and

one lesson was dedicated to evaluation. The average age of engineering students in the first target group was seventeen and in the second one it was eighteen. Hot Potatoes exercises based on the elements of communication skills, verbal and non-verbal communication, basic grammar and reading skills were used as content of the lessons.

2. Research instruments

The following investigative instruments were chosen as being the most suitable for this research: tests, discussion and a simple questionnaire.

A Tests

A paper-pencil test was taken after every units. The tests were archived so it was not difficult to find out the average percentage of correct answers in so far written tests concerned. Before every test the unit was revised. This time the revision was made by means of above mentioned Information Communication Technology (ICT) tools. The results of this particular test were simply compared with the previous results.

B Discussion

Discussion was a useful device since the students are mature enough to make their opinions and explain them clearly. Moreover they have known their teacher for a long time so they are not shy at all.

C Questionnaire

A very simple questionnaire was used and two sets of questions were asked. First set of questions focused on students' feelings and opinions. The responses should have confirmed or disconfirmed the results from the tests and discussion. The second set of questions was focused on students' access to the internet.

3. Research Results

3.1. ICT in Communication Skills

3.1.1. Tests

The tests proved that the revision done by means of ICT tools was more successful than the traditional revision. The average percentage of correct answers in group one had been 62 % and this time it was 71 %, in group two it had been 67 % respectively 74 %. The results are not enormous but still encouraging.

3.1.2. Discussion

Feedback from students indicates that most of them would appreciate using ICT tools in education. They were able to express their preferences – the most popular types of exercises were **JMatch** with pictures and especially being done on the Interactive White Board. Students would also welcome some videos and sounds. **JCross** was another highly appreciated type of exercise although students usually searched for a hidden word or sentence which was not there and which is common in newspaper or magazine crosswords. **JQuiz** seemed to work quite well too and it could be very useful for cross-cultural quizzes which are the most popular among students. **JCloze** worked best only with short texts, longer ones were a bit discouraging. **JMix** exercises were effective mainly in combination with the Interactive White Board as drag-and-drop exercises. Generally, I am convinced that most of the students were more enthusiastic and motivated during these lessons than usually. On the other hand it was their first experience with ICT learning so the effect of ‘curiosity’ could influence the impression a bit.

3.1.3. Questionnaire

Responses revealed that most students liked the lessons and would welcome using ICT in the future – only 8 % of them considered using ICT useless. 18 % of them have already used some learning programmes at home. The most surprising is the fact that 78 % of them have the internet at home and can use it for homeworks and remaining 22 % can use internet at college campus for free. This piece of information was very important because homeworks from the websites should not be problematic.

3.2. Two main Forms of Presentation

3.2.1. Interactive White Board (IWB)

Students and teachers like using this tool very much. They can interactively work with the board and the items on it by touching with fingertips. Teachers have to know, of course, how

to use the interactive white board to avoid possible technical problems. These problems can easily ruin even a well planned lesson. I have to admit that one of my lessons had to be postponed due to some technical problems and it was a little embarrassing. The best way to learn it is by 'hands on' experience. It is also good to know from skilled technician who can explain it and demonstrate it, and then by going through the various steps yourself a number of times. To follow an instruction manual alone would be extremely time-consuming. Using an interactive white board has several advantages:

- Students are more focused on their learning when teacher uses interactive white board.
- The use of an interactive white board limited opportunities for distraction by focusing students' attention on lessons.
- This device is very useful for teaching-learning process, particularly for review work, for repetition of work, for storing the class teacher's work in the board as well as the direct use of internet etc.
- The utility of interactive whiteboard helps teachers to reap the rewards of the technology and ensure innovative and effective use in the classrooms.
- Activities or tasks can be easily turned into game or competition – that can increase motivation.
- It supports students' motivation by allowing them to come to the front of the class and demonstrating their knowledge to other students by completing a diagram, a sentence, a picture etc.

3.2.2. Digital English Language Lab

Teaching in a language laboratory is a bit different. It is not usually a whole-class activity as the previous one, it is mostly individual work. A well-equipped lab is necessary. Digital English language lab is proved to be very effective and efficient in teaching English language skills. The language laboratory has been designed newly with latest technology and

constantly reconstructed by the language lab professionals. It consists of many head phones, the use of spaced pauses for student responses, and the facility of individual recording and playback by students. Digital English language lab is an essential resource for students in order to equip the students with the necessary communication skills to take on the highly competitive world around them. Language lab suits the need of present learners of English and brings the world of English to learners. It provides an ample opportunity to learn with an ease and to interact with the world with competence and confidence. There are many benefits in using such language laboratory because it offers the students, the chance to work by themselves on language drills, monitored by the teacher from time to time.

4. Conclusion

Using ICT in ELT can be undoubtedly very rewarding. It can never replace classical teaching styles and techniques but it can be really useful and suitable supplement. Teachers cannot neglect increasing possibilities in educational technologies and should use it effectively. Using ICT should become a part of their professional life. Attending an ICT 4 ELT Course at *Centre for English Language and Training* is first necessary step that teachers have to do.

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