

iTILT and SmartVET: 2 EU Projects to Promote Effective Interactive Whiteboard Use in Language and Vocational Education

Ton Koenraad¹, Shona Whyte², and Euline Cutrim Schmid³

Abstract. Although the interactive whiteboard (IWB) is becoming increasingly prevalent in classrooms throughout the more affluent parts of the world and research has shown how this tool can increase the effectiveness of teaching and even transform pedagogy (Kennewell & Beauchamp, 2007), research literature overviews (Higgins, Beauchamp, & Miller, 2007; Koenraad, 2008) also identify obstacles to the realisation of added value and to the uptake of this technology by teachers in some educational contexts and in language education in particular (Cutrim Schmid & Whyte, 2012; Thomas & Cutrim Schmid, 2010). One such obstacle is the lack of pedagogical quality and sustained support in teacher development. A desire to meet this need has motivated a number of European projects. This paper focuses on two such projects, iTILT and SmartVET, funded via the Lifelong Learning Programme, which address teacher education and professional development with the IWB. Both based their approach on findings from IWB specific and general professional development research and on needs analysis, using related research instruments.

Keywords: interactive whiteboard, IWB, classroom technologies, EU project, professional development, SmartVET, iTILT.

1. TELLConsult, Vleuten, The Netherlands; ton.koenraad@gmail.com

2. Université Nice Sophia Antipolis, Nice, France

3. University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd, Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany

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1. Introduction

Interactive whiteboards are subject to general principles of effective use of information and communication technology (ICT). If teachers have digital learning materials that are of practical use and if they have been trained in using the technology and are aware of its pedagogical possibilities an IWB can be beneficial for teaching and learning (Kennisnet, 2012). Both the iTILT and the SmartVET projects aim to address these issues by providing teachers with several instruments/tools that help them to exploit the potential of the IWB. Below, we briefly describe the individual projects and their results and summarise some research findings.

2. The iTILT project (2011-2013)

The overall aim of the European project, iTILT (Interactive Technologies in Language Teaching) is to promote effective interactive whiteboard use in communicative language teaching. Following the design of a training module and examples of good practice materials, language teachers from six European countries were trained in accordance with the principles of the communicative approach, and video-based illustrations of teachers using the IWB in classroom practice were collected.

The publicly accessible version of the project website www.itilt.eu was officially launched in January 2013, three months before the end of the project. It hosts the key deliverables of the project that can be consulted and/or downloaded for free. These include IWB video resources, a training manual, electronic teaching materials, video tutorials, a library, a community of teachers, research and publications, and Comenius courses.

2.1. IWB video resources

The video resources offer examples of classroom practice showing teachers using IWBs in classes of English, French, Spanish, Dutch, Welsh and Turkish as a second/foreign language in a variety of educational contexts (primary, secondary, university and vocational education). These IWB practice reports consist of (a) video clips of classroom interactions with IWBs, (b) comments from learners, teachers and trainers reflecting on good IWB-practice and (c) related resources such as lesson plans, IWB materials, etc. They are designed to function as learning objects which encourage reflection on IWB use in modern language education.

2.2. A training manual

The iTILT training manual⁴ was developed for pre- and in-service training with the main goal of supporting teachers in exploiting the potential of the IWB and helping them to teach in accordance with communicative and task-based approaches to foreign language teaching. The manual contains technical as well as pedagogical information on IWB use, with many examples of activities based on the four skills and chapters on teaching grammar and vocabulary. The examples are based on a set of criteria for task design for IWB materials listed in the manual.

2.3. Electronic teaching materials

The electronic teaching materials⁵ for language teachers are based on a communicative and task-based pedagogical framework. They provide classroom-ready teaching resources, but also include explanatory information for teachers describing each activity, its aims, how it was designed and how the IWB provides potential added value.

Available in 6 language versions and for different types of IWB software, they include explanations of the aim, activity, design and potential of each task. Furthermore, each resource provides descriptions of the target context and learning objectives.

2.4. Video tutorials

In order to help users make optimal use of the iTILT website, nine video tutorials⁶ were developed, for example on how to conduct advanced searches or use the site for teacher training.

2.5. The library

A library⁷ offers over 200 annotated links to additional resources in the field of IWB and Language Education including related research, relevant collections of IWB (training) materials and related communities.

4. <http://www.itilt.eu/itilt-training-handbook>

5. <http://www.itilt.eu/teaching-materials>

6. <http://www.itilt.eu/tutorials>

7. <http://www.itilt.eu/Library>

2.6. A community of teachers

The development of a community of teachers, experts and educators interested in exchanging ideas and best practice related to interactive technologies and language teaching has also been encouraged. In addition to the possibilities offered on site (www.itilt.eu/forum/) to exchange ideas, opinions and IWB files, other social media have been exploited for dissemination and community building purposes (iTILT-Facebook, iTILT-Twitter, iTILT-LinkedIn, iTILT-Scoop.it); see [Whyte \(2012\)](#) for further discussion of social media.

2.7. Research and publications

Several conference and research papers have been published, including the following topics:

- The challenges and opportunities associated with developing an open educational resource (OER) such as the iTILT website ([Whyte, Cutrim Schmid, van Hazebroeck Thompson, & Oberhofer, 2013](#)).
- Analysis of iTILT data partners' baseline data in relation to [Beauchamp's \(2004\)](#) transitional framework ([Hillier, Beauchamp, & Whyte, 2013](#)).
- Researching iTILT data partners' actual IWB use for particular language learning objectives and teaching methods and related both primary teachers' and learners' perceptions on effectiveness ([Whyte, Beauchamp, & Hillier, 2012](#)).

2.8. Comenius courses

During the project's lifetime the iTILT website and expertise gained have been exploited in 23 courses taught by the partners, reaching nearly 1,000 students. Partners will continue exploiting iTILT results in future courses, including EU Comenius courses⁸.

3. The SmartVET project (2011-2013)

The EU project 'Supporting Continuous Professional Development of VET teachers in the use of Interactive Whiteboards' (SmartVET) is a Leonardo

8. <http://www.itilt.eu/courses>

transfer of innovation project funded under the Lifelong Learning Programme of the EU. The project's (2011-2013) main focus is on supporting the continuous professional development of vocational teachers in the use of interactive technology for teaching and learning. Based on findings in the literature and reported experiences it was decided to adopt a train-the-trainer approach in this project. To initiate and guide this process a number of IWB 'Champions' were identified. These early adopters across the VET sector have been trained through their participation in the project to organise professional development events for their peers. The ambition is to also develop a Community of Practice which will enable VET teachers across Europe to exchange their ideas and experience, to share new and innovative lessons and to have access to a wide variety of professional development materials. More information on the SmartVET project and its results is available on the website www.smartvetproject.eu. A brief description of the various project results is provided below.

3.1. Needs analysis report

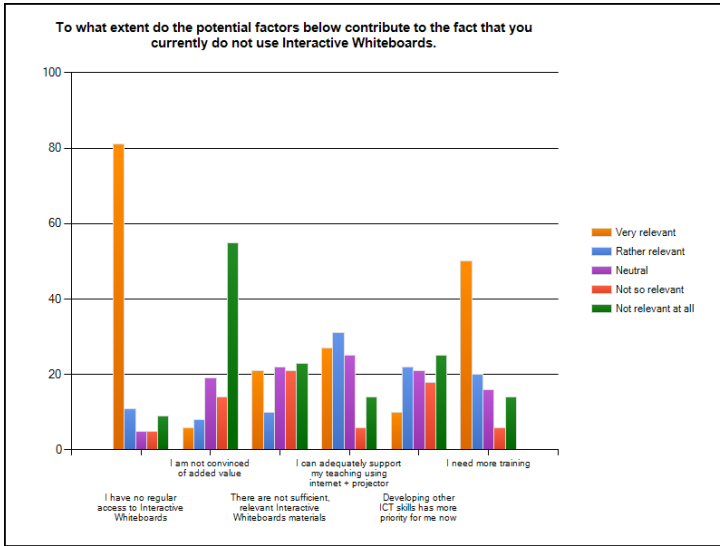
To provide research-based input for the design of materials for and delivery of the professional development programme a needs analysis was carried out as a first project activity. Key questions were: to what extent and in what ways are IWBs being used in the Irish vocational education sector?, and what should be the content and delivery mode of a training programme to provide teachers/tutors in the Irish vocational education sector with the necessary competences?

Data from 200 respondents on the topics A. Personal Profile, B. Using the Interactive Whiteboard and C. General use of ICT, was collected with the help of an online questionnaire. A majority of the SmartVET respondents reported not to use the IWB although they were available in most schools. The main reasons for non-use appeared to be (a) lack of regular access to IWBs, (b) insufficient (subject specific) training and (c) no need: Internet + data projector are seen as adequate support for current teaching.

Analysis of all data (Figure 1) led to the conclusion that the rationale for the SmartVET project could be said to be borne out by the fact that the majority of the respondents indicate that they (a) do not use the IWB, (b) are interested in using it in their teaching and (c) would welcome training in the use of IWBs. The needs analysis also resulted in defining a number of recommendations for the design of a training programme and related materials, such as the development of a set of generic modules covering the basic IWB functionalities and those that support general cognitive activities such as ordering, categorising, comparing, etc., that

are applicable in all subject areas (Koenraad, 2012, p. 35). For more information, the full report may be consulted on the project website www.smartvetproject.eu.

Figure 1. Needs analysis report



3.2. Training programme

The training programme (and related learning resources) are based on the needs analysis of VET teachers in county Wicklow VEC, as well as the knowledge and expertise of the project partnership, in particular on experience gathered with the EU Project Smarteatch⁹. The training programme is not only about the technical features of the IWB and their use, but also on the experimentation of IWBs as a teaching tool for everyday activities, in order to promote the progression from technology to pedagogical and methodological innovation using an action research approach.

3.3. Learning manual

A learning manual has been developed to assist IWB Champions and teachers participating in the programme and to guide them step by step on how to implement IWB teaching resources in the classroom environment. The main focus of this

9. <http://www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=4213#.UeF13UG9nh8>

manual is to introduce teachers to Interactive Whiteboards, their technical aspects, main features as well as different approaches to training.

3.4. Professional development materials

The continuing professional development (CPD) materials respond to the objective of training the technological skills, especially those that have been identified and explored in the needs analysis survey. They include short tutorials that show how to use the IWB features on Smartboard and Promethean IWBs in practice.

3.5. Online community of practice

The SmartVET Community of Practice is part of the eTuition Community of Practice site, an online network for teaching and supporting teaching staff in VET in Ireland and UK. The virtual community¹⁰ enables EU teachers to exchange their ideas and experience, to share new and innovative lessons and give them access to a wide variety of professional development materials.

3.6. Model on interactive whiteboards training implementation (Irish context)

The Model on Interactive Whiteboards training implementation (Irish Context) will present the whole process of IWB training development, an overview of identifying and implementing the best practice in terms of IWB training and their use in the classroom.

This document will present the development and adoption of IWB training in an Irish context and will act as a model for training and will be of interest to VET organisations that are planning to implement Interactive Whiteboards.

4. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the following results of both iTILT and SmartVET projects, i.e. the outcomes of and recommendations based on needs analysis, the design and content of the training models and materials, the available final and interim web-based resources, and reflections on the project-related processes and research results. It also discusses the process of developing quality OERs and how they can best be exploited in language teacher education (Whyte et al., 2013). For instance,

¹⁰<http://etuitionnetwork.ning.com/group/smart-vet>

the iTILT project focuses on foreign language teaching in four educational sectors in six languages and seven European countries and has produced an open educational resource (OER) at <http://itilt.eu> including over 250 video examples of classroom activities with teacher and learner commentary, as well as a training manual and sample teaching/training materials, plus a resource library. SmartVET, on the other hand, addresses issues related to the IWB competence levels of (Irish) teachers in the vocational education and training (VET) sector. More specifically, the project is developing materials to support a train-the-trainers approach based on the results of local needs analysis research and good practice as identified in international IWB training contexts and initiatives.

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