Building a Bridge to Connect Varied Learning Experiences: The Impact of SMART Learning Suite on Language Acquisition

A SMART Customer story with Brianna Owens, 4th Grade Teacher

Motivation: Build Vocabulary and Spelling Skills

Espoo International School in Finland is a uniform, international English language comprehensive school with more than 500 pupils in grades 1 - 9. It offers international education in the English language for international and Finnish families living in Espoo. The school is composed of students from diverse backgrounds and languages, each with varying degrees of English speaking, listening, and comprehension skills.

Brianna Owens worked with students who often did not have a common first language, making teaching her students English vocabulary a struggle — especially in light of high academic expectations. After analyzing the failing trends in her students’ assessment results, despite her focus on various non-tech teaching methodologies, Brianna chose to integrate a technology solution that would help her address her students’ struggle with vocabulary development.

Brianna’s goal was to increase English vocabulary understanding and word retention using SMART Learning Suite for students in her 4th grade class who were learning English as a second or third language. She wanted to help students apply and utilize new words at an active level as they progressed with English language acquisition, and demonstrate mastery of vocabulary and academic language beyond recall and spelling.

Teachers and School
Brianna Owens, 4th Grade Teacher
Espoo International School, Finland

Challenge
Students were struggling to retain and apply spelling and academic language, despite various attempts and strategies at teaching words using paper and pencil.

SMART Solution
SMART Board and SMART Projector
SMART Learning Suite

Result
Students demonstrated a 14% increase on their vocabulary test scores, from the baseline to the end of study, on their weekly assessment in SMART response 2.
Improved Language Acquisition

To remain genuine to the Finnish National Curriculum’s primary goal to integrate technology with traditional teaching methods, various student learning styles had to be addressed simultaneously. By integrating SMART Learning Suite into Brianna’s lessons, her students had the opportunity to work through various activity types, adapted for different learning styles, which encouraged them to actively use their new vocabulary.

She leveraged SMART Learning Suite throughout her weekly vocabulary units to build a bridge with each of her students. With SMART Learning Suite, Brianna was able to teach them new content, and overcome varied learning experiences using different schemas. She used:

- **SMART Notebook**: To visually enhance direct instruction with pictures and videos when introducing new vocabulary words, making content accessible to all students, regardless of language ability.
- **SMART lab**: To engage students in the application and practice of vocabulary words through guided practice.
- **SMART amp**: To create collaborative academic writing activities, where students could apply weekly vocabulary in meaningful context alongside their classmates.
- **SMART response 2**: To conduct formative assessments, and determine if students were correctly spelling and applying new words by the end of each week.

**Outcome: Understanding and the Application of New Words**

Before integrating SMART Learning Suite, Brianna’s students were learning words through direct instruction, with definitions explained, and print worksheets. At the end of each week, students were expected to turn in practice homework using those new words and take a spelling test. Over a seven-week period using this process, the class average on assessments was only 72%.

After integrating SMART Learning Suite, Brianna noticed her students were much more engaged and interactive during lessons. Misunderstandings in word meaning decreased as students were better able to correctly connect new content to prior learning schemas due to enhanced visual learning and various media forms. The class average on the vocabulary and spelling assessments increased to 86%.

“The SMART Learning Suite gave me a bridge to my students, allowing me to engage with each individual regardless of differences. Being able to rely on SMART Learning Suite has given me new ways to teach when language wasn’t quite enough.”

**About SMART**

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