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SOME IDEAS FOR DEVELOPING NOTE- TAKING SKILLS OF EFL STUDENTS

Abstract: Note-taking is an increasingly important strategy that can be used for listening and reading which enhances comprehension. According to Oxford (1990) and Peterson (2001), there are different learning strategies or activities that learners perform to help them learn easier, faster, and more practically. The strategy of note-taking is among the ones that help learners make the information that comes to them more tangible and help them sort and organize the incoming information in the target language. In this article, I will share some ideas for developing note taking skills of EFL students so that they will listen to extended speech and take notes while attending academic lectures or work place presentations and meetings in their future work.

Key words: note-taking, listening, listening comprehension, underlining, highlighting, main points, supporting information.

Language: English

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Introduction

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It is known that note-taking is an effective method in listening comprehension. According to Boch & Piolat (2005) note taking is a very important strategy that can be used for listening and reading, but unfortunately students do not have enough knowledge about it or ability on how to do it, or if they have any information, they are not taught to practice it, although it can activate working memory and help problem solving. Many researches show that while listening note taking has advantages both for helping better and active comprehension and for future recall. Majid Hayati and Jalilifar (2009) conducted a study about the effect of note taking and found that note-takers had better achievements than non note-takers. They believe that note taking causes enhanced comprehension. According to Ellis (2003), listening and taking notes simultaneously is a 'dual-task' which may be very difficult and challenging for many L2 learners. Arslan (2006) defines note taking as an external version of memory store. While taking notes, students are actively engaged in the task. Studies show

that note taking helps the learner to store and comprehend the message better through concentration boost and increased attention than when there is mere listening or reading. And Hasswell and Lee (2013) mention, when learners are allowed to take notes, they feel more comfortable and they have better performance in answering the post listening questions. Hartley and Marshall (1974) mention three reasons for taking notes: (a) to help later recall, (b) to be able to review the ideas when needed, (c) to have higher concentration while listening.

Materials and methods

John Hughes provides ten ideas in his "ETpedia 1000 ideas for English language teachers" (2014) to develop note taking skills while listening.

1. Noting the main ideas

If you are using a recording of a lecture or presentation, play to play it twice. On the first listening, ask the students to listen for and write down the main points only. Note that effective speakers and experienced presenters will often list the main points at the beginning and repeat them at the end, so tell the

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students to pay particular attention to these parts. (J. Hughes, 2014)

2. Supporting information

Following on from the previous activity, play the recorded lecture or presentation again and ask the students to note down supporting information for the main points. (Note that in a real or live situation, the students would have to note the main points and supporting information at the same time, but in the classroom context the aim is to work towards the time when they can handle both.) (J. Hughes, 2014)

3. Guided listening to the main points and supporting points

If you think your students will have difficulty in noting the main points and supporting points in 1 and 2, you could begin by setting some more guided activities. For example, write 10 points from the lecture on the board which are both main points and supporting points. Ask the students to listen and write M next to the items which they think are the main points and S next to those which are supporting the main points. (J. Hughes, 2014)

4. Underlining and highlighting

After the students have written the main points and supporting points (or completed the guided activity in 3), ask them to underline or highlight key words or phrases. This is a useful note taking skill which reminds the person of the key information. Although this does not involve listening as such, you might point out to the students that the underlined or highlighted information is the information that the speaker probably stressed. One option is to play the listening a third time so that the students listen and check their notes and underline or highlight the words that the speaker stresses. (J. Hughes, 2014)

5. Layout of notes

One key sub-skill of note-taking is the ability to organize the notes based on what has been heard. You could probably start by giving the students written extracts from a listening and ask them which words they could leave out or change into note-form. For example, here is a sentence from an economics lecture: The first reason for a shortage in housing is the lack of new building. The students practice rewriting the sentence in note form with headings and numbering:

Housing shortage

1 lack of new building

Students will find it easier to work like this from the written transcript in presentation for listening to such a lecture. Alternatively, give the students the transcript after listening so that they can check and improve their notes. (J. Hughes, 2014)

6. Teach symbols

Following on from 5, layout is sometimes helped by using symbols and shortened forms. For example, you could teach the students to use bullets or numbers

for listening supporting points. Also pre-teach some obvious symbols used in note-taking such as: = (the same as); ≠ (not the same as); +(also, and in addition to); ± (leads to, results in); Students can develop their own system of symbols to help with their note-taking. (J. Hughes, 2014)

7. Listen for data

Many work related or technical presentations include data and statistics which require the students to note them down with accompanying information. One way to help is to write some statistics or any key words relating to data from the listening randomly on the board. Students listen and note down what each piece of data on the board refers to. (J. Hughes, 2014)

8. Provide a model version

It is often helpful for students to see a new model version of a set of notes so that they know what you are expecting. Write a set of accompany a listening and let the students study them. They could either do this while listening or they could compare the model version afterwards with their own notes. Another way to use a model version is to prepare the notes but include some gaps by deleting key words and phrases or numbers. When the students listen, they have to compare the notes with missing information. (J. Hughes, 2014)

9. Compare answers

If you have asked your students to listen and write notes, put them into groups afterwards to compare what they have written to find out if they agree on what the main points were. (J. Hughes, 2014)

10. Compare the style of the notes.

Following on from 9, as well as comparing the information what they have written, students can also usefully spend time comparing how they have written their notes. Some students may have used lots of highlighting and underlining, and others may have used bullets or symbols. Some students might also have their own style with lots of space between information, or perhaps they use lines and diagrams. Spend some time comparing style and get the students to say if their classmates have used any techniques that they think are effective. (J. Hughes, 2014).

Conclusion

To conclude briefly, in most researches, the role of note taking on learners' listening comprehension has been emphasized. Studies show that note taking is an effective method in listening comprehension and note taking is effective in both higher achievement and recall as well. Any of these listening techniques could be useful for material developers to create necessary tasks and exercises, as well as teachers to choose the most appropriate strategies for improving their students' listening comprehension in EFL classes according to special contexts, needs of the students, types of activities, and time.

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