

The Impact of Using Note Taking's Techniques on the Students' Learning

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Abstract

It is often said that the worst pen is better than the best memory and regardless of how good the students' memory might be, they need to take notes during the lesson or lecture because it is impossible to remember all the details later on. This is so easy to use technique which requires a brief record of important information can help students not only recall what has been said in the class, but also to achieve their learning goals and provide a useful summary of the material to be revised especially before the test.

Unfortunately, it is noticed that most of the students, especially at the secondary stage, neglect this important skill. Most of them don't often write notes unless they are told to do so by the teacher or depend only on the textbooks forgetting that not all the material mentioned during the lesson found in them as some are explanations to the complex and abstract ones and others are related to the teacher's experience in the subject matter.

In fact, note taking skill is part of the learning process and to be useful, students need to learn how to do it effectively and what to record because not all what is said is important. This requires acquiring more than one skill on the part of the learners and more effort on the part of the teacher to teach them how to do it properly. For the above reasons, more light will be shed in this research on this topic followed by an experiment and a test to evaluate its effectiveness in learning.

Key words: note taking, record of information, techniques.

الخلاصة

دائماً ما يقال ان اسوا قلم هو افضل من اي ذاكرة وبصرف النظر عن ما تكون عليه ذاكرة الطلبة فإنهم يحتاجون الى تدوين الملاحظات اثناء الدرس او المحاضرة لان من المستحيل عليهم ان يتذكروا كل التفاصيل فيما بعد. تستطيع هذه التقنية البسيطة الاستخدام والتي تتطلب تدويناً مختصراً لأهم المعلومات ان تساعد الطلبة ليس فقط على تذكر ما قد قيل في الصف وإنما ايضا على تحقيق اهدافهم المعرفية وتوفير خلاصة نافعة للمادة يمكنهم الاستفادة منها بشكل خاص قبل الامتحان.

لقد لوحظ لسوء الحظ ان اغلب الطلبة يهملون هذه المهارة المهمة خاصة في المرحلة الثانوية حتى انهم لا يقومون بكتابة الملاحظات إلا ان يطلب منهم ذلك من قبل المدرس او يعتمدون فقط على الكتب المنهجية متناسين حقيقة ان ليس كل ما يذكر من معلومات داخل الصف قد يتوفر فيها حيث ان بعضها يعد شرحاً لمادة معقدة او مجردة والأخر له علاقة بخبرة المدرس في ذلك المجال.

تعتبر مهارة تدوين الملاحظات في الحقيقة جزءاً من عملية التعلم ولكي تكون مفيدة يحتاج الطلبة الى معرفة كيف يمكنهم القيام بذلك بفاعلية والمادة التي تحتاج الى تدوين لان ليس كل ما يقال ذو اهمية . يتطلب ذلك اكتساب اكثر من مهارة من جانب المتعلمين وبذل المزيد من الجهد لتعليمهم كيف يقومون بذلك بشكل صحيح من جانب المدرس. يسلط هذا البحث الضوء بشكل اكثر على هذا الموضوع للأسباب المذكورة سابقاً متبوعاً بتجربة واختبار لتقييم فاعليته في التعلم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تدوين الملاحظات ، سجل للمعلومات، تقنيات.

2. Note Taking Skill

2.1 Definition

Notes are said to be short condensations of material that can be produced by writing, listening, studying, or observing (Kiewra & Frank, 1988: 143–148). Such practice is usually referred to as *note taking* as it requires capturing information from a transient source like an oral presentation from a lecture or discussion, or written one like a book. In such a way, the writer or a student, can free his mind from recalling everything and concentrating only on what is recorded (Wikipedia, 2016:1).

This seemingly easy to use practice is, in fact, a complex one involving not only a series of underlying mental processes, but also acquiring a number of skills. The person who takes notes needs to listen attentively, comprehends the incoming sources and filters them from unnecessary or repeated information, organizes them and restructures existing knowledge structures, and finally writes down the actual important material or his interpretation of the information to be revised when required (Ibid.).

In this respect, Daniel (2014:16) distinguishes between passive and active note taking. Active note taking is considered a more effective and meaningful way for gathering information as its taker is expected to have prior background knowledge of the subject matter. He usually thinks about its content, writes notes using his own words or the exact ones only when it is important to have them, and looks for answers to the questions he has about it. Passive note taking, on the other hand, is said to be a more exhausting and time wasting way as its taker is not usually aware of what is being discussed. He just copies sentences from the text, underlines words, and writes notes on everything he hears or reads without any analysis. Nevertheless, Students' notes are an important tool for learning and have a range of important functions

2.2 Functions

The function of notes is not only to provide a record of information. By taking as many notes as possible in a short period of time, without being distracted from the listening and observation, the students are indirectly engaged in the learning process and, thus ensured that the time spent by them in class is both productive and useful. According to Seward (1910:4), taking notes in class has two major functions: (a) it keeps the students alert and attentive as they listen. In this way, they do not only listen to what the teacher say, but understand and learn the information being conveyed, and (b) by writing them, the notes themselves become an external storage of the information said in class that can be used later for studying and reviewing, particularly before the tests, as they produce better recalling that can enhance the students' performance on exams.

By taking notes, the students actually do not only write down the information on paper, but also encode or write them on the brain. Foos, Mora & Tkacz (1994:570) show that students better recall materials that they have generated themselves than those generated by others, and that students start learning and memorizing them throughout the note taking process.

In addition to the above mentioned functions, Aleman (2016:1) mentions that by being able to select important material and leave unnecessary ones during the process of taking notes, comprehension can be facilitated and students can learn origination and creativity skills which enable them to connect materials to each other and make inferences. Moreover, The notes contain information that cannot be available in textbooks as they are related to the teacher who shares experience and makes connections and could , therefore be a source of valuable clues for what information the teacher thinks most important and might show up on the test.

3. Note Taking Techniques

There is a number of different formats from which a student can choose to organize his notes, one of these is what is called **Cornell method**.

The Cornell Method provides a systematic format for condensing and organizing notes. The note-taking page is usually divided into three sections; notes and cues, arranged in two different sized columns above, and a summary section set at the bottom of the page. The notes which are usually written in the large right column should be in the simplest possible form possible, using keywords and abbreviations to minimize writing. Spaces should also be left between ideas in order not to be mixed together.

Such notes are supposed to be taken during the lesson or lecture and after the class, they should be reviewed as soon as possible. Questions, key words, dates, names and headings for important ideas based on the information recorded in notes are written in the left column and lines are drawn to connect related topics in the right column to key words or headings. After that, a brief summary of the information presented in the class is written at the bottom of the page .

When studying, the student can cover the right note-taking column with a sheet of paper and try to answer the questions or keywords in the left cue column. In this way, the student is encouraged to reflect on the material and has a regular review of the notes as well (Wong, 2014:288).

Like the Cornell Method but without the summary section, the page is divided into two halves by drawing a vertical line in **the Split Page Method**, where the class notes are written on the left side and the details or description from the textbook on the other one, thus integrating them both and making the process of recalling more efficient. A third column might also be added for the student's questions to promote comprehension (Reynolds, 2016:1).

If the lecture is presented in outline organization which might be either deductive (from major to minor points or details) or inductive (when minor points start building a major one) and when there is enough time in the lecture to think and make accurate organization, then **the Outlining Method** is a suitable technique a student can use to arrange his notes (Stewart, 2007:1).

This method involves organizing the material into main topics, sub-topics, and supporting details. These can be separated by indenting the text, putting numbers to lines, or just using bullet point or a dash. By such, both the content and the relationships can be recorded which can be used, in turn, as a guide for studying or preparing for an exam (Ibid.).

The student can also use a graphic representation or a diagram to organize the information he gets. In this way, which is called **the Mind Mapping Method**, a keyword or a concept is written in the centre of a page, then ideas such as images or words are associated to it using lines. Main ideas are linked directly to the central keyword or concept, and these can then be elaborated into other ideas or sub-branches, thus creating a web of relationships. Colours and curves added to this web can help to activate the creative part of the brain, whereas note taking practice employs the analytical part of it which can enhance learning and retention as well (Nerino, 2010:1).

Students may review and rewrite notes using **the Charting Method**. This technique works best if students are able to recognize categories, such as similarities/differences, date/event/impact, etc. and able to draw a table and label it before the lesson starts. This minimizes the amount of writing because only the most relevant information are going to be written (Stewart, 2007:1).

With **the Sentence Method**, the student simply write everything he hears; putting each new concept, fact, or topic on a separate line, and if possible, numbering the information as he progresses to distinguish the different concepts. Shortest sentences and abbreviations are preferred to be used in order to save time and be able to capture more information while taking notes. This method is often used when the lecture lacks organization and when the information is covered by the instructor so quickly. This makes the student unable to determine immediately major from minor points. That's why a quick review and editing is required to make the information well organized and easy to study later on (Ibid.).

4. Note Taker' Learning Considerations

In addition to adapting one of the previously mentioned formats to organize their notes, there are other techniques or procedures students need to take into consideration before, during, and after the class to improve the note taking process, and thus, enhance learning.

Before the class, the student needs to read over the material he will go over in class. Being familiar with the material helps to understand what the lecture is about and recognizes the important points, and so gives the student the time to take notes during the lecture by concentrating on the new ones and making connections with the information he already knows (Frederick, 2016:2).

The student does not need to read every word of the material, but he needs to read effectively, looking only at the main ideas and write questions, make signs, highlight, or underline the things that he does not understand to bring up during the lecture.

The student also needs to prepare to take notes before going to class, coming to it with all the things he needs to take good notes, such as books, pencils, and paper required to write his notes on (Ibid.).

During the class, the student has to date and title every page of his notes to keep them well organized and easy to be revised later one. In addition, he should try to be a good listener by sitting in front of the class to avoid distraction (McKay, 2012:4).

The student does not have to write everything he hears, wasting his time on things he already knows or information that won't be tested on. Rather, he should listen attentively and pay attention to cues the teacher gives off either directly or indirectly. Such cues include:

- Anything the teacher writes on the board, draws such as a graph to help illustrate a point, or includes in a PowerPoint slide.
- Anything the teacher repeats slowly so that it can be written literally.
- Anything the teacher starts talking about loudly or with emphasis.
- Any signal statement that shows the importance of what the teacher says, such as, "You need to know this" or "Remember that".
- Any numbered lists and linking phrases that shows relationships between ideas, such as first, then, however, because, therefore, etc.
- Any questions asked by the teacher or classmates and his responses to them. They might be covered on the test.
- Any examples, hypotheticals (potential or past exam questions), or definitions the teacher gives or stresses as important.
- The summary at the end of class and the review at the beginning of the next class as they include the main points (Ibid.).

Since the rate at which the teacher speaks is much faster than that at which the student writes, the student needs to keep his notes simple and short using his own style of shorthand, symbols, and abbreviations to increase the speed of his writing and be able to easily recognize them when he rereads and rewrites them after class.

In this respect, Hampton (2015:2) presents two techniques a student can use for abbreviations; the first one is to only write the first letters of the word that are enough to be remembered later on, for example, *info* for *information* and *imp* for *important*, and the second one is to write the key consonants of the word and remove all or most of the vowels from it, for example, *dvpt* for *development* and *mkt* for *market*. Some other common abbreviations and symbols that might be of use when taking notes are shown in Table (1) below, and these can be developed and expanded by the student's own ones:

Table (1) Common Abbreviations and Symbols in Note Taking

Abbreviations		Symbols	
w/	with	#	number
w/o	without	-	minus
ff	following	+	plus
c/o	care of	<	less than
b4	before		greater than
p.	page	=	equal
vs	versus	^	increasing
Q	question	%	percent
ect.	and so forth	2	to, too, two
ie	that is	∴	therefore

(Frederick, 2016:4)

To save time, it is also not necessary for the student to write grammatically correct sentences. Instead, he can concentrate on the most important words that keep their meanings and leave spaces or a blank page for the things he missed or doesn't understand to be filled or reinforced by additional information later on, but it is necessary to keep taking notes until the end of the lesson so as not to miss any important information that might be revealed by the teacher in the last minutes (Ibid.:3).

In addition to the previously motioned considerations, the student needs to keep his writings neat and legible so that he can read them easily. He should also try to write in his own words and ask the questions he already recorded before and during the lesson. This will not only reinforce comprehension of the material and strengthen his memory, but also make him active rather than passive learner (Ibid.).

After the class, it is important for the student to review his notes as soon as possible as the material is fresh in his mind. By doing that he can actually move it from short term to long term memory and save a lot of review time later in the course. He can start doing that by reading his notes to make sure he can understand them and fix words that are illegible (Ellis, 2013:151). If he cannot understand something, he should try to clarify it by going over the material in the book which can be of help also to fill in black spaces left during the lecture with information and add others the student finds important and was not covered in the class (Frederick, 2016:4).

This process is, in fact, uneasy as it requires reading carefully both the notes and the actual material in the textbook to figure out the main points and how they are related, to be arranged then in a way that makes sense (McKay, 2012:4).

To make notes more interesting and easier to retain, some students tend to add visuals, use various coloured pens for different parts of their notes, and highlight key words and definitions with a highlighter pen, thus, stimulating the creative side of the brain (Purdy, 2013:1). Moreover, they can summarize the content of their notes into few lines and allocate time to review them regularly during the course committing them by that to memory.

The note taking process might need more time from the part of the student recording and reviewing his notes, but the results of this work will be paid off at studying and testing times. He can learn and enhance his grades as well especially if he does it in the right way, and here comes the role of the teacher.

5. The Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher is not only to motivate students to take notes, but how effectively do that. Unless they are guided and helped to practise, most of the students cannot make advantage of this important skill.

The teacher can start doing that by defining note taking process and its benefits. It is good to remind them that taking notes is only one step and they need to be active listener and participants and transcribe what they understand in an organized way to make use of its benefits. Then, he teaches them the different styles by which they can do that (See section 3 above). He can reinforce this by showing them a prepared model of his own to let them see what good note taking looks like and what parts of the lecture should be concentrated on and included in their notes (Perles, 2016:1).

To ease the process of taking notes on his students, the teacher needs to organize his explanations and notes on the board, whether by using lists or definitions, and help them make use of the transition statements and the cues he makes during the lecture, such as, "Pay attention" or "This point is particularly important". He can then ask questions to brainstorm his students and use visual aids to enhance learning.

Moreover, the teacher should teach his students how to use abbreviations that make sense later on and encourage them to think about the notes they write and paraphrase them using their own words. They can be helped to do that by letting them work in pairs and compare their notes with their classmates to see what important information they included or missed and need to be added (Ibid.).

To teach the needed skills to take notes, Sunderland (2013:2-3) suggests that the teacher reads the material aloud first to let students listen, then asks them of what they think the main points or important facts might be, taking time to discuss their responses. After that, he has them underline the important words or phrases with a highlighter pen and reread theirs to see if important facts are included or not. After practising for several lessons, the students can be guided to use a suitable method for them to have their notes well arranged.

From his own part, Cortez (2010:54) thinks that note taking practice doesn't always need to be part of formal lesson activity. Instead, the teacher can ask students to read their notes immediately after presenting new information, monitoring by thus their comprehension, and so can identify aspects that need more explanation.

Whether practising note taking as an activity, giving instructions, or using the notes to provide feedback, all can help not only to improve the students' note taking skill, but their learning as well.

6. The Experiment

To see if handling note taking techniques has an influence on the students' learning or not, two groups have been selected, one as an experimental group and the other as a control one. The research has been carried out with (40) subjects for each group. Those subjects are at their sixth year preparatory stage from Tolaitela Preparatory School for Girls, Babylon Governorate. It is also worth mentioning that this experiment has been applied during the academic year 2016.

While the control group has been given lectures regularly without taking effective notes on the part of the subjects, the experimental group has been taught the note taking techniques by the researcher herself. The procedure has begun by giving them a lecture of the note taking process, its importance, and requirements to be effective. Then, the methods by which they can organize their notes have been introduced and examples have been clarified on the board. The subjects have been given a chance to ask questions concerning this process and explanation has been given by the researcher to reinforce their understanding and help them choose the method most suitable to their needs.

The subjects have been instructed to take notes in all varied material given by the researcher to be accustomed with this important skill. The way by which the subjects have been taking notes has been watched carefully to see if they have been doing that in the right way. In addition, their notes have been collected to be checked out from time to time.

At first, it has been noticed that some of the subjects have been trying to underline everything related to the material and write the exact researcher's words, so they have been reminded to write only the main points and encouraged to use their own words. They have been directed over and over to listen and pay attention well to the teacher's cues mentioned earlier (See section 4).

Name of Group	No. of Item	No. of Correct Items	%	No. of Incorrect Items	%
Experimental	1	23	57.5	17	42.5
	2	20	50	20	50
	3	5	12.5	35	87.5
	4	34	85	6	15
	5	35	87.5	5	12.5
Total		117	58.5	83	41.5
Control	1	20	50	20	50
	2	21	52.5	19	47.5
	3	4	10	36	90
	4	29	72.5	11	27.5
	5	7	17.5	33	82.5
Total		81	40.5	119	59.5

After several weeks, a test has been given to both groups to see if the subjects' learning has been improved by taking notes. The material allocated for this test was the first part of the literature spot, *the Swing* by Mohammad Khudiar. The material has been taught for both groups and the same notes have been given by the researcher to both.

The test consists of three questions with five items each (See Appendix I). The first question is a multiple choice one related directly to the material found in the

textbook, the second one is a true/false one and has indirect relation to the material and measures the subjects' comprehension of it, while the third is a completion one and has to do with the researcher's explanations of the material and is not found in the textbook.

The following results for question (1) have been revealed after correcting the papers and analyzing the subjects' performance in each item for both groups:

Table (2) The Experimental and Control Group's Performance on Question (1)

Generally, the experimental group's performance on question (1), which is directly related to the material found in the textbook, is better than the control one as the percentage of the correct answers for the experimental group is (58.5%), whereas that of the correct ones for the control group is (40.5%).

The lowest percentage of the correct responses for both groups goes to item 3 (12.5% and 10% respectively). The frequent mentioning of the word *smoke* throughout the story have made the subjects choose it, as the researcher thinks, without reading the item carefully.

While the subjects in the control group, however did not make use of the remarks mentioned during the lecture, the subjects in the experimental one seemingly did so as the highest percentage of the correct responses goes to item 5 (87.5%) against (17.5%) for the control one.

To measure the subjects' comprehension on the lecture given and to see if they can make inferences, they have let to decide whether the statements in question (2), which are designed to have indirect relation to the material found in the textbook as mentioned earlier, are true or false.

Table (3) below clarifies the results of the subjects' performance on question (2) for both the experimental and control one:

Table (3) The Experimental and Control Group's Performance on Question (2)

Name of Group	No. of Item	No. of Correct Items	%	No. of Incorrect Items	%
Experimental	1	23	57.5	17	42.5
	2	20	50	20	50
	3	16	40	24	60
	4	13	32.5	27	67
	5	31	77.5	9	22.5
Total		103	51.5	97	48.5
Control	1	12	30	28	70
	2	21	52.5	19	47
	3	15	37.5	25	62.5
	4	15	37.5	25	62.5
	5	29	72.5	11	27.5
Total		92	46	108	54

Though the percentage of the correct answers for the experimental group is somehow higher than that of the control one (51.5% against 46%), the experimental group's performance on question (2) is less than that of question (1) as the percentage

of the correct responses for question (2) is (51.5%), whereas that of question (1) is (58.5%).

As far as the notes and explanations related to the teacher herself are concerned, question (3) is a completion one and allocated to assess the subjects' ability to record and retain the illustrations made by the teacher and not found in the textbook.

The experimental group's ability to take notes has been reflected on the results of this question as its subjects' performance is significantly better than that of the control one, as shown in Table (4) below:

Table (4) The Experimental and Control Group's Performance on Question (3)

Name of Group	No. of Item	No. of Correct Items	%	No. of Incorrect Items	%
Experimental	1	22	55	18	45
	2	29	72.5	11	27.5
	3	32	80	8	20
	4	32	80	8	20
	5	34	85	6	15
Total		149	74.5	51	25.5
Control	1	10	25	30	75
	2	20	50	20	50
	3	15	37.5	25	62.5
	4	4	10	36	90
	5	19	47.5	21	52.5
Total		68	34	132	66

The results presented in Table (4) demonstrate that (74.5%) of the responses are correct for the experimental group, whereas only (34%) of them are correct for the control one.

The following table, however, sums up the experimental and control group's performance on the whole test:

Table (5) The Experimental and Control Group's Performance on the Whole Test

Name of Group	No. of Question	No. of Correct Items	%	No. of Incorrect Items	%
Experimental	1	117	58.5	83	41.5
	2	103	51.5	97	48.5
	3	149	74.5	51	25.5
Total		369	61.5	231	38.5
Control	1	81	40.5	119	59.5
	2	92	46	108	54
	3	68	34	132	66
Total		241	40.17	359	59.83

The results showed in Table (5) reveals that adapting note taking techniques can enhance the learners' performance and have an effect on their scores as the percentage

of the correct responses for experimental performance on the whole test is good (61.5%) as compared with that of the control one (40.17%).

7. Conclusion

Note taking is a very important skill that if it is done well, it will not only provide a written record of the information mentioned in class and might not be found in the textbook, but also turns the student to be an active participant who involves directly in the process of learning. It encourages him to listen attentively and concentrate on the teacher's explanations, stimulates his capacity to retain, and helps him to be well organized. Thus provides a good study device and eventually improves his grades.

The researcher believes that the students do not make use of this skill or follow good note taking techniques and depend primarily on teacher's ready-made notes, so becoming dependent rather than successful learners. Therefore, an experiment of two groups has been made to show the impact of adapting good note techniques on their learning.

The results of the test followed have proven that as the percentage of correct responses of the experimental group, who has been trained and directed to use this technique, is (61.5%), whereas that of the control one is (40.17%). It is believed that by allocating some time to give practice on this skill on the part of teacher and continuing preparing, taking, and studying notes on the part of the students can enhance learning and get the most out of time and effort spend in the class.

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Appendix I/The Test

Q1. Circle the correct answer from the given choices:

1. Mohammed Khudhair was educated in : a. Basra b. Diwaniyya and Nassiriyya c. all of the above "Melodies on the String of Rubaaba" was published in: a. 1962 b. 1967 c. 1968
3. Haleema can see her father if she pretends to be : a. smoke b. dead c. mute
4. "The Swing" promotes: a. war destruction b. writer's feelings c. family values
5. The name of the mayor's son is: a. Sattar b. Ali c. not mentioned in the story.

Q2. State whether the following statements are true or false:

1. Mohammed Khudhair achieved fame in the Middle East after publishing his first short stories in Beirut Art magazine.
2. When he wrote 'The Swing', Mohammed Khudhair had crude experience on the conditions of story writing.
3. His friend's leaving honourably doesn't help the visitor to convey the message of his death to his family.
4. To fill the gap of her father's absence, Sattar began to sway Haleema.
5. Mohammed Khudhair's condemnation of war was reflected in his short story.

Q3. Complete the following with information related to the short story, 'The Swing':

1. The title of the story, "The Swing" refers to -----.
2. The visitor's eyes have turned red because -----.
3. Sattar used the word 'smoke' to simplify the death of his friend because -----.
4. Dividing the loaf of bread between Sattar and Haleema means -----.
5. Sattar used the word ----- to refer to the tomb.