Note-taking as a Motivating pedagogical Strategy to Improve Learners' Writing Competence
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Resumé

L'écriture en langue Anglaise autant que langue étrangère se présente toujours comme un défi non seulement aux apprenants, mais aussi aux enseignants. A travers l'entrainement et la manipulation de quelques stratégies motivantes liés à quelques outils pédagogiques, de bons résultats seront atteints soit immédiatement ou ultérieurement.

Cet article discute l'utilité de prise de notes comme outil d'apprentissage et les recommandations psychopédagogiques qui interviennent pendant l'implication des apprenants dans un apprentissage bien déterminé en termes d'objectifs et de compétences.

Abstract

Writing in a foreign language is a very challenging task not only for learners but also for teachers. However, the integration of certain strategic motivating learning devices and having learners well trained on them in terms of manipulation may lead learners to better achievements, whether immediately or after some training sessions. The following paper discusses the utility of taking notes while listening, or watching and the psycho pedagogical implications that would come into play while foreign language learners are involved in task –based classroom learning

Key words:_note-taking, psycho pedagogical implications_

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Introduction

It is so obvious that the main competences targeted in EFL at higher education are oral and written competences . Any subject is supposed to provide   selected appropriate topics and tasks to promote learners ' fluency , abilities for academic writing , critical and analytical thinking. Such academic goals would be so fruitful in case they meet the requirements of selective strategic tasks that are meant both for teaching and learning processes.

It is evident that training students   on   taking notes   while listening or watching short video shots and later develop and expand them   into written pieces that meet the requirements of academic writing   as an ultimate objective for any   student   that would undergraduate, is not a very attainable goal. Yet it is always an enjoyable learning to provide learners with certain strategies that would not only help them learn efficiently but also motivate them to be autonomous learners   later on.

As a learning sub skill, note- taking   has been discussed differently according to the learning skill as it is integrated within . But, what purposes are intended behind its integration; yet, there is an ample evidence that as a learning device it will affect and effect learners' achievements. A thorough appraisal of the topic will   highlight   the concepts that are to be discussed below.

1. Note – Taking

Note-taking involves putting into paper the data perceived through our senses. The data considered here constitute figures, letters, phrases or complete sentences. Taking notes is very essential while we

perceive knowledge while listening, observing, discussing, or thinking, so that we will be able to build up a full account of all what we perceive. Since it is obvious that we are unable to remember totally all that we perceive, the best course to be is to have notes taken at the moment things are going on.

Note-taking can be approached from different perspectives. It is a complex activity which combines reading and listening with selecting, summarizing and writing. (Fajarado.1996). Relating facts to what had been said, the students are involved in a learning atmosphere where language skills are integrated and where learners are supposed to move gradually from the stage of reception- comprehension to the stage of production. Note –taking is not "verbatim transcript" - writing fully every word when we are listening. Nwokorezee (1990) believes it is during note-taking that students reach the highest level of comprehension.

Language educators who have approached note-taking agree that the process combines different skills where essential information is paramount and later on would be used as a supporting data for doing communicative tasks whether in spoken or written form. When teaching such a skill, teachers are advised to approach the skill gradually. Elementary –level learners or students who have never been introduced to the skill would be supplied with a skeleton – a plan through which they have to note down , in a way they are directed and trained for selecting purposes. However, advanced or experienced students can listen to or read long passages and take notes on the spot or after a while.

There are no restrictions on the way notes are taken, but a relative attention should be paid to the information perceived, the note-taker's abilities, and the complexity of the task and what objectives are set afterwards.

2 . The Usefulness of Note-taking

In our relative experience with learners, we have noticed that many of them are conformist learners. They feel so comfortable in the classroom when it is directed and organized by their teachers. In order to help them break such passivity and benefit from such conformism, so that they would be able to take responsibility and become little autonomous-learners – why not to train them on such device? On the one hand, they would develop more analytic capacities through time in classroom –oriented tasks and on the other (one); they would use the structured plans in real life.

However, we have to bear in mind, that sometimes when students lack the structure which may help them to achieve what they want, they might be frustrated and may be pushed to evasion rather than immersion. (Sckehan .281. 1998). The rest of the students show greater traits to be convergent. Once they are trained on the skill, they are likely to get more confidence to approach any task whether among mates or alone. The problem is that they may lack the corresponding enthusiasm to engage in communication. It may be very useful to train them on how to make benefits from their reception abilities and guide them to interact effectively to develop linguistic abilities especially in writing and social skills later on.

Whatever, the composition of our classes is, we have to be very practical with learners so that their learning will be so realistic. If, (at the pre-activity phase) we brief our students on the skill of note taking, the goals and the plan, they are more likely to make benefit from. Therefore, their attention would be directed .The students would switch along the flow of information and select what is relevant and essential only. If we assume that all things are going the way we have formerly explained,

then we might say that our learners have really grasped the usefulness of the device; Henceforth, we can predict that they would accordingly use their notes when invited to communicate.

3 . How to take better and effective notes.

Note-taking is a very complex skill, but if we wish to take faster , good and effective notes , the first thing to do is to possess a good sense of prediction and anticipate the type of information we are going to receive and be ready to take down   what is new and very essential. While we listen, discuss, observe, or read, we need to have   a clear purpose and a good sense of organization of the notes to be taken. The third requirement is that individuals should move forward to make note-taking as an individual creative work, where every student would develop his own set of abbreviations or symbols, and must have a reason for taking them down.

There are various types of follow-up activities that the teachers can construct and which demand using notes in a meaningful way -- but also they have to be alert to all non-verbal communication cues, rise in intonation or pitch which point out significant information. These strategies pave the way for clearer note-taking.

Nwokorezee, (41:1990) agrees that positive note-taking starts before the lesson goes on. The teacher should encourage the students to anticipate so that the information will not be very 'cold', and this results through the preparation of the pre-class outline to note down information. If ever the topic is unknown by the students they can just use arrows to show interrelations with the topic and subtopics. There is no single way to do this, but the students carefree to use their own strategies to carry out the process.

Nwokorozee also, suggests the method of "Heading and Statement". He argues that "when we listen or read we do not quote, but we condense the message into a brief and meaningful way », and in this way we are likely to understand what is communicated.
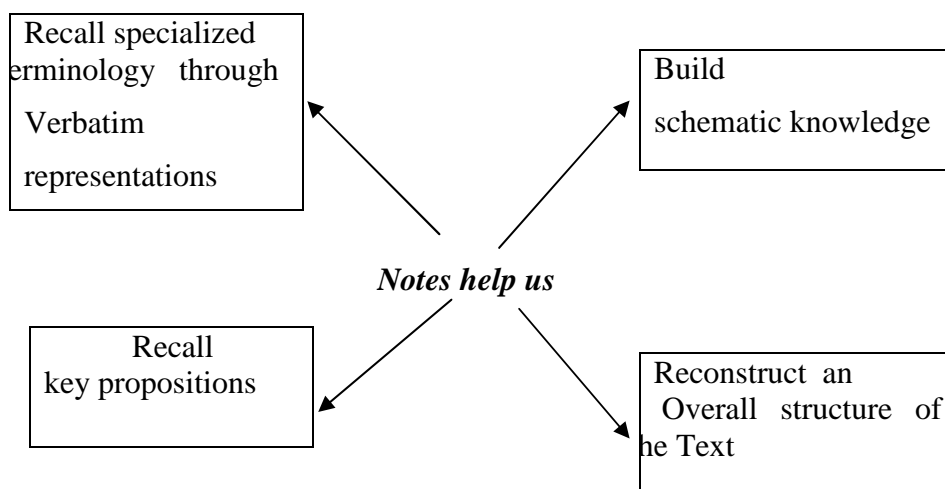
4. Notes as a memory aid

Few people realize how difficult to listen to someone speaking. We can never retain and remember everything that we had listened to or read. On the spot, we think that we can, but very soon after, if the discussion had come to an end or the written papers had been left away, much of what we had come across will be lost. Studies have shown that people may forget 50% of the perceived information within 24 hours, 80% in two weeks, and 95 % within one month if they do not take notes.

In order to improve our recall, "we need some external factors link to access these codes in our long term-memory". When we take notes during a lesson we are artificially lengthening the span of our working memory. We are , " in effect depositing a cache of information but we will later try to use the tap over representation of the text. "(Rost.1994)

When we have follow-up activities which direct our attention when we read or listen, note-taking will help us very much. For instance, when there is a list of questions on historical facts , or causes and consequences , we can direct our attention to record the salient points and ideas in a way they would help us remember since there is a supporting device for reconstructing a relative map of what we had been exposed to.

Most note-takers think that notes help them to recall the macro-structure of the data, and without the presence of the notes, they would recall a few of the most interesting points or ideas.

Recall specialized erminology through Verbatim representations		Build schematic knowledge

Notes help us

Recall key propositions		Reconstruct an Overall structure of he Text

We can perform all the processes without using notes; however, notes amplify the effectiveness of the processes. (Rost. 73.1994).

5 . Notes as an aid to concentration.

Even the most motivated learner can switch off or become distracted when listening or reading negative thoughts that commonly accompany boredom or apathy. Taking notes make us actively involved with what is being said, makes us try to understand and extract meaning as we go along . If the skill takes all of our attention; leaving no space for the desire to doing nothing else , and we are aware, then we are really concentrating.

Other requisites for reaching peak performance while we perceive knowledge and taking notes are ; being able to control   a task , having goals , and being challenged by the task itself .If there is no challenge within the task   then learners simply will feel boredom and total disinterest.

Performance is also as high as there is commitment to the goals -- the ability to fulfill them, and sufficient autonomy. Being completely involved   and   having   the   enjoyment   requires   continual   growth.

(Schneider.2001). Taking notes helps us retain and retrieve information, as the physical act of writing, which helps us embed information into our memory.

6 . Note- taking and motivational considerations

In his **Attribution Theory** , **Weiner (** 755-765.**1984**) , posited the extent of future expectancy to succeed depending on what individuals attribute their past success and failures, whether to, a stable factor such as ability or less stable ones like efforts, luck , or task difficulty.

Our students, generally, show a critical underachievement in written communication and their expectancy to do well at written tasks, especially in composition writing fade gradually. Being so closer to the learners and considering classroom observations, most of them relate their failure to achieve to the efforts they always put in the task and their ability to achieve, and being deprived of the skill, or lacking the tools that may provide them with linguistic competence, so that they would communicate.

Expectancy of success in **Weiner's attribution Theory** is similar to **Bandura   (1986)** -- **Concept of Self-efficacy**-- - the self-judgment of one's ability to perform a specific act. He considers self-efficacy and expectancy of success as analogous with the qualifications of "outcome expectations "…*the beliefs that certain actions are necessary to produce an outcome… Thus we can suppose the greater one's self-efficacy to do a task the greater will be the motivation to do it*. (Ryan and & Deci 54-67 .2000) People are generally motivated to do only what they think is possible for them to do.

If learners are trained in a conscious way to the extent they judge themselves positively perceive   and note down essential points and

later use them in a written follow-up activity , then we can suppose them to achieve such task .

Achievement in a task requires both the ability to do the task and the desire to do it. An acceptable performance in written communication partially dependent on the notes taken along receptive skills would never occur unless requisites for motivational achievement and valuing an activity do exist, as shown below:
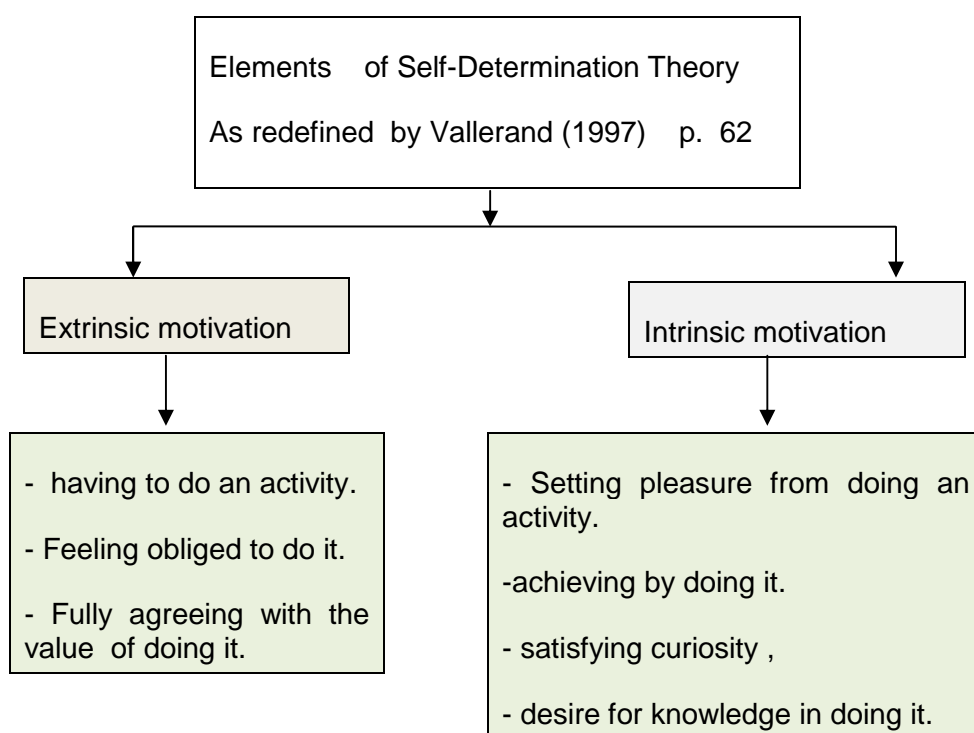
- Have an interest in it.
- To be involved in it.
- To enjoy it.
- Want to do well in it.
- Like doing it.
- Find it useful.

In their studies related to the dichotomy (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation) within the frame of "Self –Determination Theory " (Deci and Ryan 2000) posited that for an activity to be intrinsically rewarding , it must fulfill human needs for experiencing competence , relatedness and autonomy. People feel competence in repeatedly succeeding in an activity, relatedness in doing activities with others, and autonomy in making choices about activities with others, and autonomy in making choices about activities and personal control over them. *« ... satisfying any of these three needs increases intrinsic motivation, but competence and relatedness to do so if only accompanied by some form of autonomy. »* (Deci and Ryan 2000)

This autonomy is regarded as learner's authority. Such authority is to choose one's own actions. Such autonomy is motivating and correlated with doing well; i.e. correlated with having increased conceptual learning- better long-term memory - greater creativity-

feeling positive motions - enjoyment and satisfaction – being self-initiating and responsible - having interest in learning- valuing learning - having confidence and being able to learn .

The best way to encounter the possible demotivating effects of external control on the performance of learning would be through checking whether the results have been of value for learners or not. Indeed, most tasks are begun for externally motivated reasons, only over time do people find themselves interested in and enjoying such tasks. Nakamura (1989). Meanwhile, Vallerand (1997) redefined the elements of self-determination theory into a hierarchy for doing an activity in ascending order of effectiveness; four elements for intrinsic motivation and three others for extrinsic motivation.

Elements   of Self-Determination Theory

As redefined by Vallerand (1997)   p. 62

Extrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation

- having to do an activity.

- Feeling obliged to do it.

- Fully agreeing with the value of doing it.

- Setting pleasure from doing an activity.

-achieving by doing it.

- satisfying curiosity ,

- desire for knowledge in doing it.

To come with a concluding statement, this device would never be assimilated by learners if they feel that there's no need or no usefulness from experiencing it. In case they are trained for a relative period of time

and have a wider view of its value , when written communication activities are assigned for them , we are sure that they would find a certain pleasure in doing activities , since the ultimate objective for learning -- is apprehending language. However, if learners are disinterested in learning, or learning English as a foreign language , be it the strategy or the device suggested , we would have a nil outcome.

7. Using note-taking in class

7 . 1. Listening and Note-Taking

Listening is an essential learning tool; however, humans are poor listeners. Research has shown that individuals can only retain 50% of what they hear and 20 –30 is incorrect. In order to make of listening an effective skill, we have to integrate it within task-oriented exercises to engage the students' interests and engage them learn.

Listening exercises are most effective when they are constructed round a task; that is to say ,students are required to do something in response to what they hear that will demonstrate their understanding . Among the variety of tasks that can be integrated within listening is note –taking. This could be considered as an act of storing information until there is time to learn it or use it in a follow-up activity or for a written or spoken communicative task-based.

The following three steps for making and using notes combine the best methods which will save the learner's notes better, if regularly he/she completes each stage. This system involves preparing ahead for the listening comprehension session, whenever it is possible, developing a strategy for taking notes, and working the notes as soon as possible.

- The first step in using good notes is to prepare oneself before class .So that you can listen effectively during class. Listening is always easier when the teacher is discussing familiar concepts;

therefore, it is worth too   that students should read something to prepare for the class. Doing homework makes listening and note taking easier.

- The second step is actual note-taking. To begin the second step, students must set up their notes from the start so that they would save them for study later. They must divide their papers in a way they can record the main ideas, the topic, the language exponents, they judge very useful, or connectors which will help them to combine the ideas later on in a coherent way. They may also have a little space where to write their own reflections. We can by no means restrict the student's choice of the way to do the task. It is much better to let them create their own ways of mapping information.

- Teachers usually present an idea and then develop it. Students should record the main ideas as well as all the facts, examples or supporting information used to develop that idea. Teachers use a variety of signals to alert students for the importance of key information. The most frequently used indicators are verbal cues. The instructor literally identifies the nature of the information being presented with statements such as; "the main elements are ……..", or "there are – steps…", or "let me illustrate with an example. In addition, the information surrounding heavy pauses and anything that is repeated or presented on the blackboard. Students should be careful to include examples, diagrams, or charts. These important elements are probably left out of students' notes more often than any other features.

- Learners should pay attention to terms and definitions. Teachers use a lot of terminology that they want their students to be

familiar with and use. Researchers have found that high achieving students take more notes than their peers. Their notes include more detailed critical terms and examples. However, students should avoid putting everything they hear in their own words. The most effective notes are those which are a blend of the students' and the teacher's words, with heavier emphasis on the latter as language.

- The third step for effective notes is making sure that the students' notes are useful for their study. Capturing the speaker's ideas is not an easy task, and even the best notes can usually benefit from some revision once you've had chance to think about class and what you had written down. This process of reviewing and making changes on the notes would ensure that our notes are complete and understandable or not.

7.2. Watching and note-taking

One way of approaching a new video shot is to break it into manageable chunks and to try to assimilate things later on and bit by bit. There is a close correlation here between perception and our note-taking and this feeds directly into our writing. The trouble is that, in class , we perceive what we have to perceive and then we are supposed to end up with these notes and we don't know how to incorporate them in a written piece .

This is the familiar cry of students. One reason for this is that they do not really know "why " or more importantly « how » they are perceiving and this is reflected through their notes. But to tackle this problem?

Video shots suggested for use in the class are selected under thematic, topical and cultural criteria . By the time we go through the

whole shot , the students would have enough notes that would summarize what they had been exposed to and this would give us an overall picture of what they have been seeing and listening to .

We have to bear in mind that it is not an easy task. It is often very hard to pick out the key ideas but such tasks do help students vis- à -vis the selection of themes and topics which they are exposed to in learning English at university especially in American civilization.

University syllabi are designed in a way under thematic and topical criteria . Going through the topics where all skills are integrated within an ultimate objective is to reach an acceptable communicative competence where the language from wider dimensions would be reflected. From the very moment of starting a theme, the students can anticipate and apprehend the main lexical, syntactic, or cultural cues and they are, beforehand, supposed to come up with a relative written piece to reflect their involvement. And no students can ever come with such performance relying solely on memory. He /she would take the notes that may generate certain sparks on his long-term memory so that he/she would have access to the schematic knowledge

. Conclusion

Taking notes while involved in learning situation is quite important and useful especially while learning EFL, but what is more important is to use such notes in writing tasks criteria that learners have formerly been exposed to. The ultimate objective of any learning task is to help learners better achieve and motivate them to maximize their learning potential.

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