

IMPROVING STUDENTS' PROFICIENCY IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION: THE ROLE OF NOTE-TAKING STUDY SKILLS

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Abstract

The study investigated the effect of note-taking study skills on Upper Basic two students' achievement in listening comprehension in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State. The purpose of the study was to determine the relative effectiveness of linear and non-linear note-taking skills in enhancing male and female students' achievement in listening comprehension. The study was guided by three research questions where three null hypotheses was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The quasi-experimental research design of pre-test, post-test of non-equivalent group was adopted. A sample of 81 Upper Basic two students was sampled from two secondary schools using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The schools were assigned to linear and non-linear note-taking skills in two intact classes to avoid students' interaction during listening instruction lesson. Data were collected using Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT). Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that there was no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of students taught listening comprehension using linear and non-linear note-taking strategy. Results of the findings also indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of male and female students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy. It was also revealed in another finding that there was no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of male and female students taught listening comprehension using non-linear note-taking. It was recommended that language teachers should incorporate linear and non linear note-taking activities into the listening comprehension scheme of secondary school students. In this vein, teachers of English language would learn to adopt these strategies in teaching and improving students' listening comprehension skills.

Key words: Proficiency, Listening comprehension, Note-taking

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Introduction

Listening is the foundation of all the other language skills. There is a need therefore to give priority attention to the subject of English teaching and improvement especially in the skill of listening. This is because; there is a close connection between language listening competence and students' academic achievement (Oyetunde, 2013). This means that students who gain proficiency in the skill of listening comprehension may greatly learn and make sense of the school activities generally.

Rost (2006) posits that listening skill is vital to growth and success in a second language learning. This means that the skill of listening comprehension should be taught actively in all language class. This is because the skill of listening comprehension is a fundamental tool and behaviour students must possess in order to do well at school and later in life. (Sholes, 2008). In corroborating this Oyetunde (2013) notes that listening skill is the soul and survival of any academic success.

Azikiwe (2007) asserts that listening skill is an art of hearing with understanding. This means that listening does not take place if one does not understand the aural effect of utterances. In this vein, Abidin (2011) opines that listening is a process that involves hearing, processing, comprehending, responding and ability to retain or recall what is perceived aurally. These activities involve in the art of listening show that listening skill is a process driven and sustained activity that requires active meaning construction from aural effects or utterances.

In spite of the crucial role of listening skills in the success of students' academic performance, the language skill tends not to receive the deserved instructional attention in school. It is often taken for granted that children will learn to listen automatically. Therefore, the skill of listening is passively taught or sometimes not taught at all in schools (Oyetunde, 2013). This perception has posed worries to language experts and researchers who are aware that helping students to become active listeners using research proven best practices is a gate-way to their academic success and achievement in English language and other school subjects (Maduekwe, 2007; Oyetunde, 2013; Okoye, 2009).

Over the years, students' performance in English language has been poor (West African Examination Council (WAEC) Chief Examiner's Report 2014). This is not unconnected to the low attention being paid to the teaching and learning of listening skills. According to Oyetunde (2013), one big challenge facing education in Nigeria today is that of helping learners acquire proficiency in English language especially in the skill of listening. Oyetunde further maintains that to discriminate basic sounds, produce sounds, follow instructions, answer comprehension questions, recall story and its main elements like characters, events, places, ideas, dates and therefore listening to differentiate main ideas from details and drilling learners to do complex activities like sequencing ideas and listening to make productions. This is where note-taking strategies like linear and non-linear activities are brought to bear in this study.

Researchers like Klein (2009) and Ukume (2017) among others posit that lack of adequate listening skills affect the general performance of students in language study and other school subjects. Besides, teachers' negative passive attitude towards listening instruction could enhance higher performance listening comprehension. Obiweluzo and Omotasho (2012) believe that listening is essentially important for effective teaching and learning in school. Therefore, teaching students listening comprehension skills using individualised and learners-based strategies like note-taking strategy or activities could improve male and female students' achievement in listening, summary writing and

narrative essay. This study therefore focuses on teaching and improving students' listening comprehension skills using linear and non-linear note-taking strategies.

According to Cornell (2004), note-taking strategy is a designed and research-proven technique that allows learners to form notes from spoken texts during classes or lectures. Su (2008) affirms that note-taking is a teaching and learning process in which learners take notes or build ideas from a spoken text. This therefore means that instruction requires students to employ the conventions of writing and all the human senses to bring a subject to life. This way, students actively listen to spoken text and constructively make meaning out of what is listened to.

Note-taking strategy is a teaching and learning activity that fosters students listening and summary writing competence and constructive selection of contents (Neo & Neo, 2009). This means that note-taking strategy offers ample opportunities to students to control learning promote group discussion, enhance elaboration of ideas and concepts (Su, 2008). It also develops the skills of turn taking in conversation or discourse for effective comprehension (Davies, 2002).

Adopting note-taking strategy in listening comprehension classroom required learners to have basic listening, writing and collaborative learning skills (Rusbutt, 2007). This is because during language instruction, the teacher first introduces the content, encourages good verbal exchange and guides the students on how and what to write down in a sequential order (Neo & Neo, 2009). Jacobs (2008) observes that people take note to enhance long term knowledge retention, documentation, and comprehension and perception ability. This means that critical and elaborative learning is encouraged by note-taking strategy (Bohay, Blakely, Tomplin & Raduamsky, 2011). This study therefore sees note-taking strategy as a teaching and learning process that involves making construction out of spoken text using linear and non-linear documentation approach to enhance easily re-visitation, elaboration and retention of a content exposed to.

Note-taking in a typical English language classroom may be linear or non-linear model or style of meaning construction from spoken text (Bohay, Blakely, Tomplin & Raduamsky, 2011). The linear style of note-taking strategy is similar to the conventional outlining method of writing salient points of a content on paper (Bohay, Blakely, Tomplin & Raduamsky, 2011). Piolat (2001) asserts that linear note-taking strategy is the more commonly used style by students. Piolat adds that the linear note-taking strategy is also known as the sequential strategy. Therefore, adopting the linear note-taking models means that notes are to be taken from spoken texts in form of an outline in a logical and sequential order.

The non-linear note-taking strategy is known to be a graphical representation of spoken ideas on a paper using concept mapping model that allows learners to organise the contents of their notes in an unconventional and systematic patterning fashion that may be difficult for others to understand easily (Piolat, 2001). However, whatever style the learner chooses to adopt, does not reduce the cognitive effort required for note-taking and content, elaboration and sequencing (Neo & Neo, 2009). Olive and Kallegy (2005) argue that non-linear note-taking activities are more effective than the linear model. This is because non-linear model facilitates the process of making connections between ideas and this enhances effective learning through deep processing and long term retention of contents.

Note-taking strategies have been proven to be effective in teaching and improving male and female students' achievement in learning. Jacobs (2008) reported that students taught using note-taking strategies showed a higher level achievement in learning.

Hayati and Jalilifar (2009) affirmed that there is a clear positive link between note-taking strategy and listening comprehension. AL-Ashkar (2014) reaffirms that there is a positive effect of note-taking strategy on students' academic achievement in English language. Sharifi, Rahmati and Saber (2013) found out that note-taking strategy motivated students' active learning and increases their learning achievement and skills. The earlier finding of Fakeye (2006) proved that note-taking strategy was an effective language strategy that empowers students to listen to spoken text in order to produce accurate and sequential information in paraphrases using mnemonic or outlining devices (skills).

Improving male and female students' achievement in learning requires some note-taking skills. Aborisada (2002) identifies these skills to include: using abbreviation in order to save time, ability to recognise what is important before writing, ability to reduce the important points into note form and the ability to express how important points are linked. To be able to do this, one must follow the steps advanced by Holmstorm and Gitendinning (n.d.). First, read text before the lesson. This process provides advance organisers for the new information. While reading, watch out for signal that indicates important information and write down such ideas selectively with some examples or details and provide blanks, prompts to indicate what you have missed. Review your notes as soon as possible after the lesson for elaboration.

Gender is an important variable in learning a second language. Therefore, the ability to be a male or female by sex may influence students' learning outcome of the studies that have similar finding on the variable of gender. These studies revealed that the variable of gender may not be considered as a significant factor that affect learning outcome of students when process and learners-based research proven methods are used in language instruction. This means that male and female students have homogeneous cognitive skills and they learn at the same level if effectively taught. However, Nnechi (2007) reported that female students had edge over male students in linguistic aptitude. Ukume (2017) found out that there was no significant effect on male and female students' achievement in listening comprehension when exposed to storytelling strategy. This study therefore focuses on investigating the relative effectiveness of linear and non-linear note-taking strategies on male and female students' achievement in listening comprehension.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study:

1. What would be the difference in the Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) mean scores of students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy and those taught using the non-linear note-taking strategy in LCAT?
2. How would linear note-taking strategy affect male and female students' achievement in listening comprehension?
3. How would non-linear note-taking strategy affect male and female students' achievement in listening comprehension?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean scores of students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy and those taught using the non-linear note-taking strategy in Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT).

2. There would be no significant difference in the effect of linear note-taking strategy on male and female students' scores in Listening Comprehension Achievement (LCAT).
3. There is no significant difference in the effect of non-linear note-taking strategy on male and female students' scores in Listening Comprehension Achievement (LCAT)..

Research Method

The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design of pre-test, post-test of non randomized and un-equivalent group type. This was because intact classes were assigned to the different instructional groups to avoid students' interact during the treatment. The study was carried out in Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State among Upper Basic two students. The population of the study consisted of 3,225 Upper Basic two students in all the 57 secondary schools in the area of study. The choice of Upper Basic two students was because the students were at a verge where their English language proficiency in spelling, writing and listening skills could be improved upon before they undertake the compulsory Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE).

The sample of the study comprised 81 Upper Basic two students from two selected co-educational secondary schools in Otukpo Local Government Area using purposive random sampling techniques. The choice of purposive sampling technique was because of gender as a moderator variable in the study. The instruments developed for data collection for the study, a researcher-made Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT). The LCAT consisted of ten multiple choice listening comprehension questions based on literal, inferential and critical levels of assessment in line with the current junior secondary school English language curriculum. The format of the LCAT was adopted from Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). The contents of the LCAT for pre-test, post-test were the same except that the questions and options of the pre-test and post-test were reshuffled.

The researcher prepared three lesson plans, each for the two experimental and instructional groups. The plans were such that learners in each group (intact class) were exposed to linear or non-linear note-taking strategy based on listening comprehension instruction. The treatment lasted for two weeks. In order to ensure the appropriateness and relevance of the items they were subjected to face and content validity. The instruments were given to experts from the Department of Curriculum and Teaching (English Language Education and Measurement and Evaluation) Benue State University, Makurdi to correct where necessary. The suitability of the instruments were ascertained. The content of the instrument were tape recorded for students to listen.

The regular classroom English teachers of the selected schools were trained as research assistants on how to teach listening comprehension using note-taking strategies. Afterwards, a pre-test was administered on both experimental groups to establish homogeneity of the learners before the treatment. After the pre-test, the two instructional groups were taught for two weeks. The first group was exposed to the linear note-taking strategy while the second experimental group was treated to the linear strategy. The post-test was exposed to the two groups to ascertain the effects of the treatments (linear and non-linear note-taking strategies).

Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis and interpretation of the study were based on three research questions and three null hypotheses. The decision rule is that if the p-value is less than the specified alpha level of 0.05, it is therefore rejected but if proven otherwise, it is accepted.

Research Question 1

What will be the difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy and those taught using the non-linear note-taking strategy?

Table 1: Mean Achievement Scores of Students Taught Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) using Linear Note-taking Strategy and Those Taught Not Using Linear Note-taking Strategy.

Strategy	N	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Mean Gain
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
Linear Note-Taking	41	8.56	1.184	13.22	2.613	4.66
Non-Linear Note-Taking	40	9.38	1.497	13.08	2.712	3.7
Mean Difference		0.82		0.12		0.96

Table 1 shows a cognitive homogeneity between the two groups before the treatment using the pre-test mean scores. Students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy had a post-test mean of 13.22 while those taught using non-linear note-taking strategy have a post-test mean of 13.8. This gives a mean difference of 0.12 in favour of the linear note-taking strategy.

Research Question 2

What will be the difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of male and female students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy and those taught using the linear note-taking strategy?

Table 2: Mean Achievement Scores of Male and Female Students Taught Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) using Linear Note-taking Strategy and those taught using Non-Linear Note-taking Strategy

Group	N	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Mean Gain
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
Male	26	8.54	1.174	13.27	2.613	4.66
Female	15	8.60	1.242	13.13	2.712	3.7
Mean Difference		0.06		0.14		0.96

Table 2 shows that there was homogeneity between male and female students before the treatment. Male students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy have a post-test mean of 13.27 while female students taught using the same strategy have a post-test mean of 13.13. This gives a mean difference of 0.14 in favour of male students.

Research Question 3

What would be the difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of male and female students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy?

Table 3: Mean Achievement Scores of Male and Female Students Taught Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) Taught Listening Comprehension using Non-Linear Note-taking Strategy.

Group	N	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Mean Gain
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
Male	24	9.88	1.597	13.08	3.049	3.2
Female	16	8.63	0.597	13.06	2.205	4.43
Mean Difference		1.25		0.12		1.23

Table 3 shows that before the treatment, there was cognitive homogeneity between male and female students using pre-test mean scores. After the treatment, male students taught listening comprehension using the non-linear strategy have a post-test mean of 13.08 while female students taught using the strategy had a mean of 13.06. This gives a mean difference of 0.02 in favour of male students.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy and those taught using the non-linear note-taking strategy.

Table 4: ANCOVA Report for the Significant Difference between the Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sign	Partial Eta Square
Corrected Model	.585	2	.293	0.41	.960	.001
Intercept	288.021	1	288.021	40.143	.000	.340
Pre	.162	1	.162	.023	.881	.000
Group	.547	1	.547	0.076	.783	.001
Error	559.637	78	7.175			
Total	14563.000	81				
Corrected Total	560.222	80				

Table 4 shows that $F(1,81) = 0.076$ and $P = 0.783$. Since P is greater than 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This mean that there is no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy and those taught using the non-linear note-taking strategy.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of male and female students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy.

Table 5: ANCOVA Report for Significant Difference between Male and Female Students Exposed to Linear Strategy

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sign	Partial Eta Square
Corrected Model	23.254	2	11.627	1.769	.184	.085
Intercept	261.078	1	261.701	39.815	.000	.512
Pre	23.078	1	23.078	3.511	.069	.085
Group	.088	1	.088	.013	.908	.000
Error	240.771	38	6.573			
Total	7438.000	41				
Corrected Total	273.023	40				

Table 5 shows $F(1.141) = 0.013$ and $P = 0.908$. Since P is greater than 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of male and Female students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of male and female students taught listening comprehension using non-linear note-taking strategy.

Table 6: ANCOVA Report for the Significant Difference between Male and Female Students Exposed to Non-Linear Strategy.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	f	Sign	Partial Eta Square
Corrected Model	22.807	2	11.404	1.958	.216	.080
Intercept	51.078	1	51.402	7.205	.011	.163
Pre	23.078	1	22.803	3.196	.082	.080
Group	3.686	1	3.686		.477	.014
Error	263.968	37	7.134			
Total	7125.000	40				
Corrected Total	286.775	39				

Table 6 shows that $F(1.140) = 0.517$ and $P = 0.477$. Since P is greater than the specified alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of male and female students taught listening comprehension using non-linear note taking strategy.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion was based on ascertaining the relative effectiveness of linear and non-linear note-taking strategies on male and female students' achievement in listening comprehension. The finding revealed that there was no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy and those taught using the non-linear note-taking strategy. This is because both strategies enabled students to construct meaning from spoken text in an abridged form. This agrees with the earlier findings of Jacobs (2008); Hayati and Jalilifar (2009) that there was no significant difference in the effects of Cornell method of note-taking and guided note-taking strategy on students' achievement in English language. This implies that note-taking strategies are effective research proven best practices for improving students' achievement in English language skills especially listening comprehension.

The result of the finding also revealed that there was no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of male and female students taught listening comprehension using linear note-taking strategy. This was because linear note-taking strategy gave equal opportunities to both male and female students to acquire the skills of sequencing ideas from spoken text for early retention, documentation, and retrieval. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Sharifi, Rahimati and Saber (2013) that note-taking strategy motivated male and female students homogenously and increased their achievement in learning. Fakeye (2006) also affirmed that both male and female students exposed to note-taking treatment produced easy outline, accurate information and better paraphrases using mnemonics devices. This implies that note-taking strategy (Linear) among other language teaching strategies is an effective model for improving students' achievement in English language with any gender disparity.

Similarly, it was also revealed that there was no significant difference in the mean Listening Comprehension Achievement Test (LCAT) scores of male and female students taught listening comprehension using non-linear note-taking strategy. This justifies the earlier findings of Ukume (2017) that gender was not a significant variable when students were exposed to storytelling in listening comprehension test. This implies that non-linear note-taking strategy is also a proven effective practice for improving male and female students' learning outcome without any gender disparity in listening comprehension.

The Educational and instructional implication of these findings are that improving listening comprehension requires the skills of note-taking skills for meaningful construction of spoken text. The way, comprehension, elaboration, retention and remembering are ensured.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It was concluded based on the findings that listening comprehension skills are fundamental to the success of other English language skills. As such, effective and research proven best practices like note-taking strategies that empower both male and female students listening skills to construct meaning from spoken text in sequence or personalised form for comprehension and retention are to be encouraged.

Based on the conclusion of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. Teacher education programmes should be redesigned or repositioned to incorporate note-taking strategies of linear and non-linear activities into the programme of

- activities of prospective English language teacher to help them acquire the skills of enhancing listening comprehension instruction.
2. Workshops and seminars should be organised by schools and relevant education stakeholders like Ministries of Education on the importance of note-taking strategies in improving students' achievement in listening comprehension skills.
 3. Curriculum planners and designers should work in collaboration with English language textbooks designers and writers to incorporate note-taking strategies and activities into students' listening comprehension programme for secondary schools.

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