

# **Using Peer Comparison in Developing Iraqi EFL Learners' Note-taking Skill**

**Asst. Instr. Heiam Abdul Ameer**

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### **Abstract**

Note taking is considered one of the basic skills in one's academic life. It seems simple and easy matter but the truth it is not! Note taking means how to write down other people thoughts, ideas and information in your own style in a way that it would be summarising the core of his message in order to save the maximum useful amount of information to reduce the pressure of memorising on your brain by having the notes in your hands.

The researcher as an instructor of EFL and his colleagues noticed that Iraqi EFL learner are having problems in note taking strategies and also this weakness is approved in local note taking previous studies. As a remedial action for this problem, the researcher has picked Peer comparison strategy to improve the note taking skill for Iraqi EFL learners.

The researcher constructed a closed yes-no questionnaire to survey a sample of advanced EFL learners' opinions and facts about note taking, peer learning and peer comparison.

The results has shown that Iraqi EFL need intensive practice of note taking strategies, they do not mind working in peers, peer comparison develop their note taking skills.

### **1.1 The Problem and Its Significance:**

"Language is a mean of communication" that is the reason why languages are invented by our insisters. We need to send and receive messages to get our needs fulfilled and failing to do that is a problem. For EFL learners, the conversation course is the application field in which the develop their communication skills and practice the target language with getting background information about the culture of the people who speak the TL . unfortunately Iraqi EFL learners are facing many problematic issues in having a conversation especially with a foreigner or an English native speaker even in an EFL class and what stands behind that is their weakness in listing- speaking skills, the lack of vocabulary as it is mentioned in as, Al-

## **Using Peer Comparison in Developing Iraqi EFL Learners' Note-taking Skill**

**Asst. Instr. Heiam Abdul Ameer**

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Bermani (2006) and Al-Azawy (2007) and Al-Mandalawi (2006) and neglecting notes taking inside the class as it is stated in Al-Qaraghooly (1996). For me as an instructor of conversation course for advanced EFL learners (first and second stages college students) I have noticed that most of the students don't have a pen or any tool they can use to write down a piece of information that might be useful in their academic or daily life and this is a disaster! they have formed a bad learning habit which is depending on buying or sharing a ready-made notes which is another disaster! most of the time the source of these notes is unknown and may be the person who made it is not an expert neither a student! Sometimes it includes symbolic information or ambiguous diagrams or charts, wrong spelling, invalid information, inaccurate translation and so on. Some of the ready-made notes are inherited from the year 2000 and it includes no updates at all!

The note taking research history showed that taking notes during the lecture and going back to review them inside the same lecture or after a period of time has a positive results with the students' learning. Students are able to recall more material of the lecture if they take notes of it (Bligh, 2000). Also the performance and the scores of the notes takers are better than the non notes takers (Kiewra et al., 1991) and (Johnstone & Su, 1994). In other words, notes taking works effectively on recalling, synthesizing and applying the new collected knowledge. But taking notes the right way isn't as easy as it sounds. It isn't simply about jotting down everything that you hear. Taking notes is about summarising core concepts as concisely as possible in your own style and words.

As an attempt to solve this problem, the researcher thought of peer comparison as strategy to be followed inside EFL courses to improve the students' note taking skills.

Peer working is highly recommended by many educationalists and researchers, it encourages the communicative learning and kill the boredom of ordinary lessons. In addition to that, you always need someone to talk to or work with in a conversation course.

### **1.2 Aim**

This study aims at investigating the effect of using peers comparison on developing Iraqi EFL learners' note taking skill.

## 1.3 Hypothesis

For the sake of conducting the study, it is hypothesized that there is no statistically significant difference between the performance of note taking skill of the Iraqi EFL learners who used peer comparison strategy and that of those who are taking notes using the ordinary method.

## 1.4 Limits

The present study is limited to the following:

- 1- first-year Iraqi EFL college students /English Departments at the Colleges of Basic Education/ morning studies.
- 2- the academic year 2018/2019.
- 3- higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy namely; analysis, synthesis and evaluation.
- 4- peers comparison as a strategy to improve note taking skill.

## 1.5 Value :

It is hoped that the present study will be beneficial for specialists at the Ministry of Education, curriculum designers, EFL teachers and even EFL learners.

## 1.6 Procedures

To fulfil the aim and verify the hypothesis, the current study adopts the following procedures:

- 1- Selecting and equalizing a representative sample.
- 2- constructing, piloting and validating a questionnaire.
- 3- Analyzing the gathered data to calculate the results using suitable statistical methods.
- 6-Drawing conclusions, stating recommendations and suggesting further studies

## 1.7 Basic Concepts:

### 1.7.1 Peer

Peer means a person with equal rank or position that could be a colleague, a friend or a partner(Simpson,1989). According to Boud(2001) peer learning is learning with and from each other is a necessary and important aspect of all courses. The role it plays varies widely and the forms it takes are very diverse, but without it students gain an impoverished education.

In peer learning, students will construct their own meaning and understanding of what they need to learn. Essentially, students will be involved in searching for, collecting, analysing, evaluating, integrating and applying information to complete an assignment or solve a problem. Thus,

## **Using Peer Comparison in Developing Iraqi EFL Learners' Note-taking Skills**

**Asst. Instr. Heiam Abdul Ameer**

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students will engage themselves intellectually, emotionally and socially in “constructive conversation” and learn by talking and questioning each other’s views and reaching consensus or dissent (Boud, 2001).

Peer learning is optimised when incorporated as an integral component of a curriculum, paying special attention to:

Creating a conducive learning environment: Students must build mutual respect for and trust and confidence in one another, so that they “feel free to express opinions, test ideas, and ask for, or offer help when it is needed” (Smith, 1983). Peer learning can be further enhanced if the “environment of mutual help...continues over time and beyond the classroom” (Boud, 2001). Thus, students are individually and collectively accountable for optimising their own learning and achievements.

Learning in small collaborative groups: Many of the key elements for effective peer learning are often incorporated in the design of small collaborative learning groups, and “research shows that students who engage in collaborative learning and group study perform better academically, persist longer, feel better about the educational experience, and have enhanced self-esteem” (Landis, 2000). Furthermore, “the peer support...is a powerful psychological ballast to critical thinking efforts” (Brookfield, 1987).

### **1.7.2 Comparison**

According to (Simpson,1989) comparison means an estimate or consideration of the dissimilarities or similarities between two people or two things. It is an action in which two things are compared to figure out the likeness issues and to find out the different. In the suggested strategy the class should be divided into fixed peers in a way that each learner should have the same partner during the whole course. Each individual should review his peer's notes and figure out the similarities and differences of their work.

### **1.7.3 Note Taking**

Note taking is defined as the process of recording information from other sources. These sources may be visual or auditory. It is a brain helping activity in which the note taker frees his mind of remembering and recalling all the detailed information captured ( Wikipedia: online). Taking notes will help you recall information that would otherwise be lost. A note-taking method will help you to prepare before the lecture and to review key concepts after a class. It will help you to stay focused during the lecture to pay attention and actively participate. It will help you to organise your notes properly so that you don't have to worry about losing the overview once you get back to them

# **Using Peer Comparison in Developing Iraqi EFL Learners' Note-taking Skills**

**Asst. Instr. Heiam Abdul Ameer**

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to prepare for an exam. In this article, we give an overview of the best note-taking methods for college students, on how to apply them and when you should or shouldn't use them (Goodnotes, online) there are many different ways of taking notes : according to the tool: paper based and high technology based , and according to the method of recording down these notes like diagrams, keywords, the outline, the Cornell method, the boxing method, the charting method ect.

## **1.8 Population and Sample of the Study**

The population of the current study is limited to the first year Iraqi EFL college students / English Departments at the Colleges of Basic Education of Al-Mustansiriyah University morning studies for the academic year 2018/2019. The total number of the main sample subjects is 88 subject.

## **1.9 Validity of the Questionnaire**

A jury of experts in ELT and English language instructors has checked the questionnaire to ensure their validity. The researcher made some modifications on the questionnaire items made an gathered by her according to the comments and directions of the experts. After this modification has been done, the jury members ensured that the questionnaire items are valid. (See appendix A).

## **1.10 Piloting the Questionnaire**

On the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of March, 2019 pilot administrations of the questionnaire was carried out. The pilot sample was 60 subjects from first year learners/ evening study / English Department/ College of Basic Education/ University of Almustansiriyah . The purposes of the pilot study were to:

1. estimate the needed time to complete the questionnaire;
- 2- check the clarity of the items;

The results of the pilot administrations show that the items of the questionnaire are clear and there is no ambiguity in them. The time it takes students to answer items fluctuates between 5 to 15 minutes.

## **1.11 Item Analysis**

The process of collecting, summarizing, and using information from the students responses to make decisions is called Item analysis. (Tang and Loshinikarasi, 2016:418).

The following steps were adopted in analyzing the items of the tests:

1. Calculating the frequencies of the subjects answers for each item in the questionnaire ,
2. Calculating the percentage of each item in the questionnaire.

## Using Peer Comparison in Developing Iraqi EFL Learners' Note-taking Skills

Asst. Instr. Heiam Abdul Ameer

### 1.12 The Final Administration of the Questionnaire

After piloting the questionnaire and ensuring its validity the questionnaire was administered on the first of April 2019 for the sample of the study which is the first stage learners morning studies. College of basic education. Almustansiriyah university. It took about 20 minutes to do all the task. The questionnaire type was a closed one with yes no answers of three parts as shown below:

Read the items below and place a checkmark under the answer that best suits you:

No.	Items	Yes	No
<b>Note taking</b>			
1.	I take notes during the lectures		
2.	I by ready-made notes for my courses		
3.	I use smart devices to record lectures		
4.	I have a separate notebook for each subject.		
5.	I copy down whatever the teacher takes the time to write on the board.		
6.	I use abbreviations where possible		
7.	I write my notes legibly enough to be able to read and understand them later.		
8.	I use visual style in writing down my notes like diagrams, charts, trees, circles etc.		
9.	I review my notes after the lecture.		
<b>Peer working</b>			
10.	I understand the term peer learning		
11.	Peer Learning is important for me in my education		
12.	I have practiced peer learning in previous stages		
13.	I discuss my learning with classmates / professional colleagues		
14.	My colleagues discuss their learning with me		
15.	I feel happy when I receive feedback from a colleague		

## Using Peer Comparison in Developing Iraqi EFL Learners' Note-taking Skills

Asst. Instr. Heiam Abdul Ameer

Peers comparison in note taking			
16	I prefer to compare my notes with a classmate/s		
17	My classmates feel ok to compare their notes with mine		
18	I take better notes if I knew that a classmate will review it after me		
19	I don't take notes if I worked with a peer but depend on his.		
20	If my colleague have notes that differ from mine I write them down		
21	If I was absent I ask a specific colleague for his notes		
22	Sharing notes with a peer increasing my scores		
23	Sharing notes with a peer decreasing my scores		

### 1.13 Presentation of the Result

As a result of analyzing the subjects answers, the null hypothesis is rejected and replaced by an alternative hypothesis which states "there is a statistically significant difference between the performance of note taking skill of the Iraqi EFL learners who used peer comparison strategy and that of those who are taking notes using the ordinary method. That is according the percentage of their answers

No.	Items	Yes	No
<b>Note taking</b>			
1.	I take notes during the lectures	39%	61%
2.	I buy ready-made notes for my courses	86%	14%
3.	I use smart devices to record full length lectures	12%	88%
4.	I have a separate notebook for each subject.	9%	91%
5.	I copy down whatever the teacher takes the time to write on the board.	88%	12%

**Using Peer Comparison in Developing Iraqi EFL Learners' Note-taking Skills**  
**Asst. Instr. Heiam Abdul Ameer**

6.	I use abbreviations where possible	13%	87%
7.	I write my notes legibly enough to be able to read and understand them later.	16%	84%
8.	I use visual style in writing down my notes like diagrams, charts, trees, circles etc.	12%	88%
9.	I review my notes after the lecture.	14%	86%
<b>Peer working</b>			
10.	I understand the term peer learning	88%	12%
11.	Peer Learning is important for me in my education	74%	26%
12.	I have practiced peer learning in previous stages	49%	51%
13.	I discuss my learning with classmates / professional colleagues	71%	29%
14.	My colleagues discuss their learning with me	70%	30%
15.	I feel happy when I receive feedback from a colleague	80%	20%
<b>Peers comparison in note taking:</b>			
16.	I prefer to compare my notes with a classmate/s	73%	27%
17.	My classmates feel ok to compare their notes with mine	63%	37%
18.	I take better notes if I knew that a classmate will review it after me	79%	21%
19.	I don't take notes if I worked with a peer but depend on his.	20%	80%
20.	If my colleague have notes that differ from mine I write them down	87%	13%
21.	If I was absent I ask a specific colleague for his notes	79%	11%
22.	Sharing notes with a peer increasing my scores	72%	28%
23.	Sharing notes with a peer decreasing my scores	70%	30%



## **Using Peer Comparison in Developing Iraqi EFL Learners' Note-taking Skills**

**Asst. Instr. Heiam Abdul Ameer**

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Here is the interpretation of the results of each item in the above questionnaire

A lot of first stage/ college students / Iraqi EFL learners:

- 1- do not take notes during the lectures.
- 2- the majority of them depend on ready-made notes.
- 3- do not use technology in note taking.
- 4- do not have separate note book for each course subject.
- 5- they do not summarise the board summary in their own ways.
- 6 – do not used abbreviations.
- 7- do not write their notes legibly.
- 8- do not use visual styles of note taking.
- 9- do not review their notes after the lecture.
- 10- understand the term peer working.
- 11- see peer learning as an important in their education.
- 12- almost practiced peer learning in their educational life.
- 13- discuss their learning with others.
- 14- discuss their learning with others.
- 15- have positive feeling toward peer learning.
- 16- prefer to compare their notes with a peer or a group.
- 17- prefer to compare their notes with a peer or a group .
- 18- take better notes if they work in peers.
- 19- do the process of note taking and do not depend on their peer's notes.
- 20- make use of their peer's notes.
- 21- make use of their peer's notes.
- 22- increase their scores if they share and compare notes with a peer.
- 23- increase their scores if they share compare notes with a peer.

### **1.14 Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this research, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- 1- Iraqi EFL college learners are in need for extensive practice of note taking strategies.
- 2- Iraqi EFL college learners are highly accepting the peer learning idea.
- 3- Using peer comparison strategy is an effective way for improving Iraqi EFL learners' note taking skill because peer comparison motivates the students to be fully aware inside the class and write good notes only by knowing that there is a partner that will check the notes!

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## Using Peer Comparison in Developing Iraqi EFL Learners' Note-taking Skills

**Asst. Instr. Heiam Abdul Ameer**

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### Appendix A Names of the Jury Members

No.	Academic Rank	Name	Field	College
1.	Professor	Darwesh, Abduljabbar, Ph.D	ELT	College of Basic Education, University of Al-Mustansiriyah
2.	Professor	Al-Qaraghooly, Duha Atallah	ELT	College of Basic Education, University of Al-Mustansiriyah
3.	Assistant Professor	Saad. Salal M.A.	ELT	College of Basic Education, University of Al-Mustansiriyah
4.	Instructor	Al-Saidy, Ridha Gh. Ph.D	ELT	College of Basic Education, University of Al-Mustansiriyah
5.	Instructor	Jassim, Habar H. M.A.	ELT	College of Basic Education, University of Al-Mustansiriyah
6.	Instructor	Al-Dulaimy, Angham T. M.A.	ELT	College of Basic Education, University of Al-Mustansiriyah
7.	Instructor	Khudhairy, Iman M.. M.A.	Literature	College of Basic Education, University of Al-Mustansiriyah
8.	Asst. Instructor	Hamoody, Assel S.	ELT	College of Basic Education, University of Al-Mustansiriyah
9.	Asst. Instructor	Muhamed, Muna D.	Linguistics	College of Basic Education, University of Al-Mustansiriyah
10.	Asst. Instructor	Jassim, Rafid R.	ELT	Ministry of Education