

ENHANCING STUDENTS' NOTE-TAKING SKILLS AND STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE LECTURE RETRIEVAL

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Abstract

This paper focused on enhancing students' note-taking skills and strategies for effective lecture retrieval. Students need to retain and retrieve information from memory by using effective skills and strategies in taking notes. Effective note-taking strategies to be used by tertiary level students include Outline or Paraphrased, Cornell or 2-column and Mapping methods. Enhancing note-taking skills of students requires taking aggressive posture in preparing to take notes; getting writing materials ready beforehand and engaging in specific note-taking actions like active listening, recording main ideas of a lecture, using abbreviations, writing legibly and clearly among other things. Some of the recommendations made were organizing training seminars/workshops for teachers and students on quality note-taking and students' determination to use effective note-taking strategies that will enhance their academic performance.

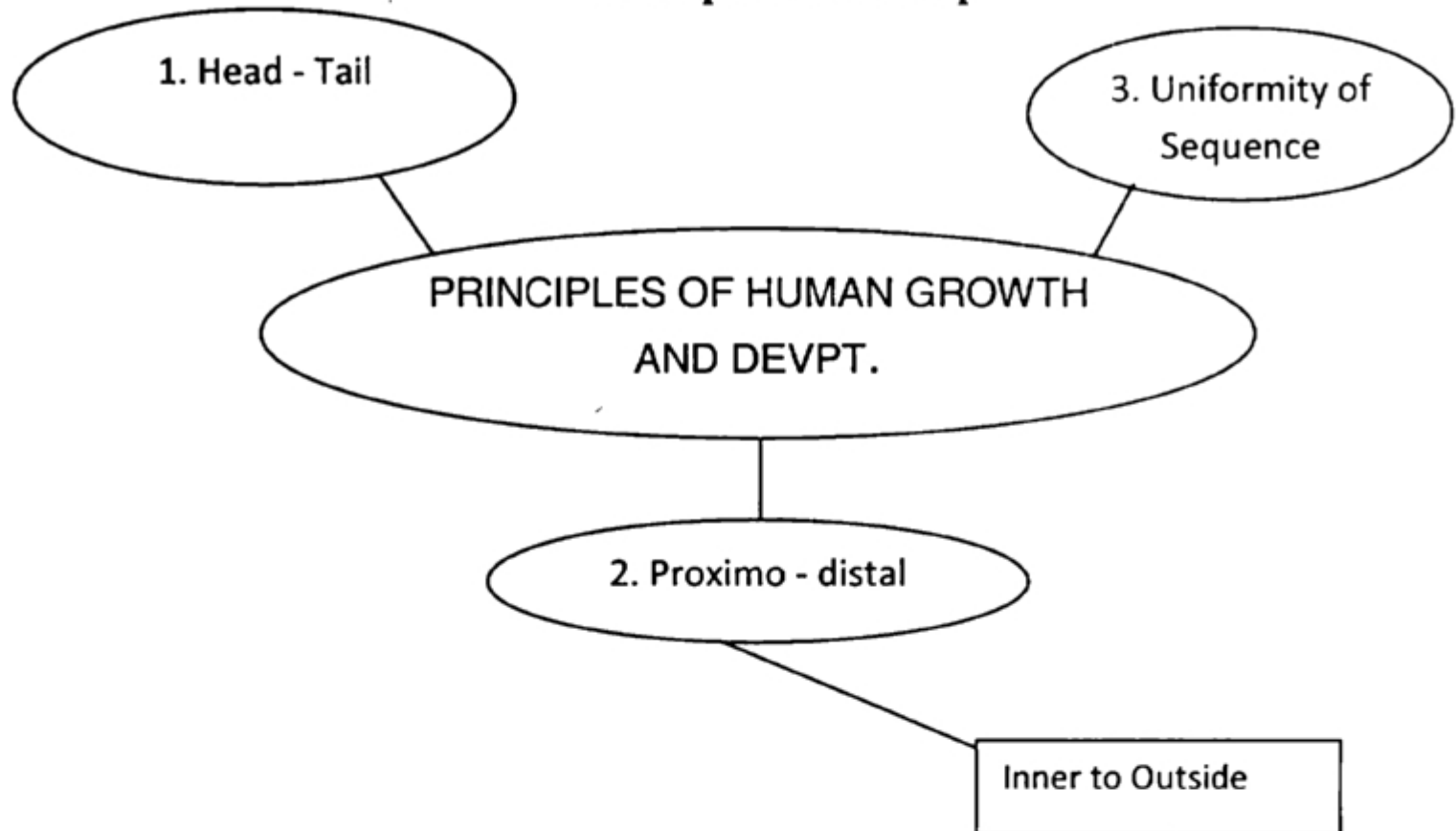
Introduction

Retrieval of information is vital to learning. Students need to retrieve learnt information from memory in order to answer test questions effectively (Wagner, 2009). Learning, at the post-secondary school level, greatly depends on retrieving information from lectures. Lecturing is a significant method used in imparting knowledge and skills to students in higher institutions of learning such as Universities, Polytechnics and colleges of Education. During lectures, Students are required to take notes to aid their future preparations for examinations (Akintunde, 2012). In spite of modern technology supporting the use of computer in learning; hand-written note-taking remains indispensable in achieving academic success (Kobayashi, 2006).

Literature affirm that note-taking serves two main functions: Encoding and external memory functions. The encoding function proposes that note-taking helps the learner to transcribe information received into meaningful concepts and to process information at deeper levels (Akintunde, 2013, Einstein, Morris and Smith, 1985; Kiewra, 1985). The external memory function proposes that note-taking provides the learner with a resource for further study by presenting lecture information for subsequent review (Henk & Stahl, 1985).

However, students in tertiary institutions are deficient in using effective note-taking skills and strategies. Students are poor note-takers in that they often capture a small portion of a lecture's main ideas (Nelson, 2006, Kiewra, 2005). Such students take terse notes leaving out important points of the lecture. Some students take detailed notes but lack the ability to differentiate "important" from "unimportant information". Such students take notes word-for-word (Kiewra, 1985). Some students do not take notes at

Example of Mindmap



Advantages

- (1) Students can usually track the lecture.
- (2) Relationships can easily be identified.
- (3) It makes editing of notes easy (e.g. can add numbers, marks etc.)
- (4) It makes review easy.
- (5) It is effectively used in taking notes from a well- organized lecture or a textbook.

Disadvantages

- i) Sometimes students may not hear changes in content from major points to facts.
- ii) It is difficult to use in a fast lecture and unorganized lecture.

Charting or Matrix method

Charting method is used for lecture format that is distinct for example, chronological lecture. Students can draw columns and label appropriate headings in a table. As the lecture goes on, they can record information in the appropriate category. It is also used when there are two or more topics for comparison.

EXAMPLE: (Chart format for a history class)

<u>PERIOD</u>	<u>IMPORTANT PEOPLE</u>	<u>EVENTS</u>	<u>SIGNIFICANCE</u>
1967-70	Ojukwu, Gowon etc	Nig. Civil war	The civil war paved way...

Advantages:-

1. It helps to track conversation (to erase confusion).
2. Amount of writing is reduced.
3. It makes review easy especially to memorize ideas or study comparison.

Disadvantages:

1. Locating appropriate categories may be difficult.
2. Students must have a thorough knowledge of the lecture to use this method.
- 3 This style cannot be used all the time.

Cornell Note-taking method

Cornell note-taking was developed by Walter Pauk, an emeritus Professor of Psychology and Education, in Cornell University. It was designed to help University students take more organized notes and so improve their test scores. Today, Cornell note-taking technique is probably the most widely used system throughout the United States. ("The Cornell Note-taking system," 2001).The Cornell system requires that main points and ideas be written down using telegraphic sentences. Each step of the note-taking system naturally prepares the way to the next step.According to Pauk (2001), the Cornell note-taking system "is more than a sheet of paper on which to take notes. It is a system that efficiently takes you through a completely natural learning cycle on the same sheet of paper" (p.238). It was designed to save time and be highly efficient.

Cornell note-taking format

Name:	Date:
Topic:	Class/Subject:
2"	6"
S U M M A R Y	MAIN NOTES COLUMN
PARAGRAPH SUMMARY	

Advantages

- (1) Cornell note-taking stimulates critical thinking.
- (2) It produces well-organized notes
- (3) It saves time (no rewriting).
- (4) It aids recall of major ideas in a lecture.
- (5) It is a simple method to use during a lecture.
- (6) It can be very useful for reviewing and studying for tests. This is possible through

the built in power of the summary column.

Disadvantage(s)

- (i) Many sheets of paper are needed to take notes.

Improving Note-taking Skills

Quality note-taking is important in learning. For note-taking to be effective, Students need to personally take notes (Shepherd, 1999). Improving note-taking or producing efficient notes requires the learner to master certain skills before, during and after the lecture. To effectively take notes, students should take the following actions:

• Sitting Position

- Sit down before the lecturer comes in; sit in a position that enables you to hear and listen to the lecturer; do not sit close to your close friend to avoid distractions. Take aggressive posture in preparation for taking notes e.g. Sit up, roll up your sleeves etc.

• Writing Materials

- Get ready your writing materials like biro, pencils, ruler, Mathematical sets and notebook with date and page numbers already inserted.

• During Lecture:

- Listen actively and carefully to the lecturer
- Write legibly and clearly
- Write the day's lecture topic
- Take notes using effective note-taking strategies like Cornell, Outline, Mind-map etc.
- Do not take verbatim notes. As much as possible, use your own words to take notes without changing the meaning. However, quotations and formulas can be taken down verbatim.
- Select and put down the main ideas of the lecture.
- Identify main ideas or relevant parts of the lecture by noting clues or signal words used by the lecturer to indicate something important is to follow such as:
 - "A major development,..."
 - "Therefore,..."
 - "There are four factors,..."

- "Now this is important,..."
- "Further more,..."
- "For example,..."
- "On the contrary,..."
- "Finally,..."
- Include illustrations and examples by the speaker to help clarify issues during review.
- Use abbreviations and symbols that you can remember easily such as:

Abbreviations:

- | | | | |
|---|-------|---|-------------|
| ○ | cos | - | because |
| ○ | bf | - | before |
| ○ | E.g. | - | for example |
| ○ | Eng. | - | English |
| ○ | Maths | - | Mathematics |
| ○ | d | - | the |
| ○ | Govt | - | Government |
| ○ | Natn | - | Nation |
| ○ | Dept | - | Department |

Symbols:

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|----------------|
| ○ | < | - | less than |
| ○ | > | - | greater than |
| ○ | = | - | equal to |
| ○ | + | - | plus |
| ○ | X | - | multiplication |
| ○ | & | - | and |
| ○ | f | - | frequency |

- Do not use every space in your page. Leave room for later addition, points, explanations or filling in of missed information.
- Don't give up in a very fast lecture. Take down something.

• **Follow-up**

- Information missed should be filled in immediately after the lecture or not too long after the lecture.

Recommendations

The following are recommended:

- Tertiary level students should take effective notes in all lectures by following the guidelines proposed in this paper.
- Students should discard the use of ineffective note-taking strategies and determine to use effective ones as already discussed.
- Lecturers should promote good note-taking by encouraging students to take notes during introduction of the day's lecture. Few minutes before the lecture can also be used to train students in note-taking skills that will enhance their performance.

- Lecturers should teach for retention. They should use signal words that will help students to recognize main ideas of the lecture.
- Training workshops, seminars and conferences focusing on effective note-taking skills and strategies should be organized for teachers/lecturers and students.
- Counsellors and Educational Psychologists should use the proposed note-taking skills and strategies to counsel students on effective study skills.

Conclusion

The significance of taking good notes cannot be over-emphasized. The note-taking skills and strategies employed by the learner will greatly influence retrieval. Students need to acquire effective note-taking skills and use note-taking strategies that will facilitate retrieval of lecture information and so enhance their academic performance.

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