

APPLYING NOTE-TAKING SKILLS TO ENHANCE FIRST- YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' RECEPTIVE ENGLISH SKILLS

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| <p>Received: 11/12/2024</p> <p>Revised: 27/3/2025</p> <p>Published: 28/3/2025</p> | <p>This study is aimed to identify how first-year English-majored students at a Vietnam university might use notetaking to enhance their English-language receptive skills. In order to achieve this objective, data from a focus group interview of three research participants were collected and analysed through theme-based coding methods. Three themes were based on to analyze the collected data: (i) sub-skills used to take notes of English documents, (ii) application of notetaking to progress in reading and listening English documents, and (iii) benefits gained from these applications. The findings were drawn from the data analysis including the sub-notetaking skills three participants used to improve their English language receptive skills and the ways they applied notetaking to improve those language skills. Some pedagogical implications have been made for concerned stake holders.</p> |
| <p>KEYWORDS</p> <p>Note-taking</p> <p>English-language receptive skills</p> <p>Sub-skills</p> <p>Case studies</p> <p>Theme- based coding data analysis methods</p> | |

ÁP DỤNG KHẢ NĂNG GHI CHÚ NHẪM HỖ TRỢ SINH VIÊN ĐẠI HỌC NĂM THỨ NHẤT NÂNG CAO KỸ NĂNG TIẾP NHẬN TIẾNG ANH

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| THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO | TÓM TẮT |
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| <p>Ngày nhận bài: 11/12/2024</p> <p>Ngày hoàn thiện: 27/3/2025</p> <p>Ngày đăng: 28/3/2025</p> | <p>Nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích phát hiện cách sinh viên năm thứ nhất ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh tại một trường đại học ở Việt Nam có thể sử dụng kỹ năng ghi chú để cải thiện kỹ năng nghe và đọc tiếng Anh. Để đạt được mục tiêu, nhóm nghiên cứu đã thu thập dữ liệu từ bài phỏng vấn ba sinh viên. Việc phân tích dữ liệu phỏng vấn được thực hiện dựa vào phương pháp mã hóa theo chủ đề. Ba chủ đề gồm: (i) các kỹ năng dùng để ghi chú tài liệu tiếng Anh; (ii) áp dụng kỹ năng ghi chú nhằm cải thiện khả năng đọc và viết tiếng Anh; và (iii) các lợi ích thu được từ việc áp dụng này. Kết quả phân tích dữ liệu cho thấy ba sinh viên trong nghiên cứu tình huống này đã sử dụng một số kỹ năng ghi chú nhất định nhằm nâng cao kỹ năng nghe và đọc tiếng Anh và họ đã dùng một vài cách để đạt được sự tiên bộ này. Từ kết quả nghiên cứu trên, nhóm nghiên cứu đề xuất một số gợi ý cho các nhà giáo dục, người học và các đối tượng liên quan khác.</p> |
| <p>TỪ KHÓA</p> <p>Kỹ năng ghi chú</p> <p>Kỹ năng tiếp nhận ngôn ngữ</p> <p>Kỹ năng chi tiết</p> <p>Phương pháp nghiên cứu tình huống</p> <p>Phương pháp phân tích dữ liệu dựa vào mã hóa chủ đề</p> | |

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, to catch up with swift international updates, students must learn English as it is the second most popularly used language in the world. Among a large number of ways to study English, note-taking is still an advanced technique which can be useful to support the understanding of the language, keeping the knowledge in the long-term memory, and improving their English-language receptive skills, namely reading skills and listening skills [1]. The literature on note-taking highlights its critical role in enhancing the learning and comprehension of students. Boch and Piolat [2] emphasize that note-taking is a fundamental skill for personal knowledge management, allowing students to record key information and support reflection. This process helps learners develop creativity through self-generated systems of signals and symbols to jot down important points. Additionally, note-taking supports comprehension by forcing students to actively seek primary ideas and supporting facts, which they can then compile and rearrange logically. Kotorowicz-Jasińska [3] further identified essential sub-skills for effective note-taking, such as distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information, paraphrasing, and using acronyms and symbols. These skills enable students to save time and avoid missing critical details, thereby enhancing their overall learning efficiency.

Moreover, the application of note-taking in language learning has been extensively studied. Cojean & Grand [4] described note-taking as a process of gathering information from various sources, which can be done manually or digitally. This skill is particularly beneficial for language learners, as it aids in retaining knowledge in long-term memory and improving receptive language skills, such as reading and listening [5]. Özçakmak [6] underscored the importance of background knowledge in organizing notes logically, which can significantly improve comprehension. By employing structured note-taking methods, students can systematically break down complex texts and enhance their understanding. These studies collectively suggested that tailored note-taking strategies can significantly support the academic performance and language learning outcomes of students. Besides that, according to Roessingh [7], when applying note-taking to enhance the English-language listening skills of students, students can gain numerous advantages which contribute to their task achievement [8]. Various sub-skills of note-taking, such as paraphrasing, summarization, categorization, and keyword extraction, play a crucial role in improving comprehension and retention. According to Piolat, Olive, and Kellogg [9], summarization helps students distill key ideas from complex texts, while paraphrasing allows them to restate information in their own words, reinforcing understanding. Categorization is another critical skill that enables learners to organize related concepts effectively, which improves recall and cognitive processing [2]. Keyword extraction allows learners to focus on essential terms and main ideas, making information retrieval more efficient. Effective note-taking methods, including the Cornell method, mapping, charting, and the sentence method, have been shown to aid learners in processing and recalling information more efficiently [10].

Recent studies further support the importance of effective note-taking. Boch and Piolat [2] discussed the principal functions of note-taking, including recording information and aiding reflection, which are crucial for academic success. Jin & Webb [11] provided evidence that note-taking through exposure to L2 input significantly enhances language learning, and Roessingh [7] emphasized the cognitive benefits of handwritten notes for memory retention and comprehension. Besides that, Kiewra [12] highlighted the effectiveness of providing instructor's notes to complement student note-taking, enhancing overall learning outcomes while Makany et al. [13] explored how optimizing note-taking strategies can serve as an external cognitive aid to boost learning. Meanwhile, Mueller et al. [14] demonstrated the advantages of longhand note-taking over laptops in terms of comprehension and retention. Buiet al. [15] investigated alternative note-taking strategies with computers to improve recall. In fact, Özçakmak [6] examined the impact of note-taking during reading and listening on comprehension, whereas Rahmani [17] studied the effect of

note-taking strategies instruction on the listening comprehension of EFL learners. Using another approach, Morehead et al. [16] replicated and extended previous findings on the superiority of pen over keyboard for note-taking.

Under the light of the above-mentioned literature review, in this exploratory study, an interview of three students was carried out to identify how they have used note-taking to enhance their receptive language skills. The study specifically examined how different note-taking sub-skills, such as summarization, paraphrasing, categorization, and keyword extraction, contributed to their development in reading and listening comprehension. Three research questions would be answered in the research:

1. What specific sub-skills did those three research participants use when taking notes of reading and listening texts?
2. How did they apply note-taking skills in reading and listening texts?
3. By applying those note-taking skills, how have they enhanced their ways of learning English-language receptive skills?

2. Research methodology

This research employed a case study design to comprehensively examine the behavior patterns and causes within a specific context, as defined by Yin [18]. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the data were collected through focus-group interviews of three first-year English-majored students to capture the actual effects of the experiences of the participants [19].

The research participants were selected for the case study due to their relevance to the objective of the study, which is to explore how note-taking helped first-year English-majored students improve their receptive language skills [18]. These participants, being first-year students majoring in English, provided data that is directly pertinent to the research questions. Additionally, their diverse backgrounds in note-taking offered a comprehensive view of different strategies and their effectiveness. For instance, Student A used note-taking since grade 2, providing insights into long-term benefits and techniques [2]. Student B, who started note-taking in her first year of university, offered a perspective on the immediate impact of note-taking on receptive skills [2]. Student C, who began note-taking in grade 11, allowed for an understanding of how note-taking skills developed during high school can influence university-level learning Kotorowicz-Jasińska [3]. All participants had studied English since primary school, ensuring a consistent baseline in their language proficiency, which helps isolate the impact of note-taking on their receptive skills [6]. The gender homogeneity of the participants, all being female, helps control for gender-related variables in learning and note-taking behaviors, making the findings more focused and specific [7]. Furthermore, the participants were from the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Hanoi University of Science and Technology (FOFL-HUST), providing a specific institutional context that is useful for understanding the application of note-taking strategies in a particular educational setting [18]. By selecting these participants, the study ensured a detailed and nuanced exploration of the effectiveness of note-taking strategies among first-year English-majored students, as they shared common educational backgrounds while also offering diverse experiences with note-taking.

The focus-group interview conducted for this study lasted approximately 60 minutes and included a total of 10 questions, divided among three main aspects of note-taking. For the sub-skills used in note-taking, 3 questions were asked to identify specific techniques such as using short forms, paraphrasing, and distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information. To explore the application of note-taking for language learning progress, 4 questions were posed, focusing on how participants applied their note-taking skills in reading and listening tasks, and how these applications helped them organize their notes and improve comprehension. Lastly, 3 questions addressed the benefits of note-taking for enhancing receptive skills, investigating improvements in listening and reading comprehension, the ability to recall information, and overall academic

performance. This structured approach ensured a comprehensive exploration of the experiences of the participants and insights into the effectiveness of note-taking strategies.

In terms of data analysis methods, thematic coding and discourse analysis of the interview data were used. On the one hand, the former is a highly flexible qualitative data-analyzing method that involves identifying patterns or themes within the data [22] and uncovering emerging themes without being constrained by predefined categories. In this study, the researchers could gain a comprehensive understanding of how note-taking practices impacted the receptive language skills of first-year English-majored students. On the other hand, discourse analysis focuses on understanding how the participants used the language to achieve their aims [20]. This method involves analyzing the content, structure, and context of the interview data to uncover the underlying meanings and intentions behind the words of the participants. It provided insights into how these research participants articulated their experiences with note-taking and how they perceived its benefits. In short, the combination of thematic coding and discourse analysis of focus-group interview data helps to validate the findings and ensure a robust understanding of the data from multiple perspectives.

The study addresses ethical issues in several ways. Informed consent is ensured as participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their role, participating voluntarily. Confidentiality is maintained by using pseudonyms (Student A, Student B, and Student C) to protect personal information. Data integrity is upheld through multiple validation methods, such as thematic coding and discourse analysis, ensuring reliable and valid findings. Transparency is achieved by clearly describing the research methodology, including data collection and analysis methods. These measures collectively ensure adherence to ethical standards in research [22].

3. Findings & Discussion

To address the three research questions, thematic coding was employed to analyze data from a focus-group interview with three first-year English-majored students [22]. The data were categorized into three themes: sub-skills used in note-taking, application of note-taking for language learning progress, and benefits of note-taking for enhancing receptive skills in English. Applying the thematic coding of data based on these three themes, the following key findings are made and discussed from the relevant literature.

The first finding revealed that the participants used background knowledge and identified topic-related keywords to generate main points for comprehension questions. Student A mentioned using short forms for words like numbers, dates, and names to save time during an IELTS-like listening mock test [2]. Student B shared this technique and added that she focused on key information relevant to the topic or questions, especially in reading a 1,000-word text on changing family patterns. Student C paraphrased important information from a talk show on environmental protection, following the advice of Kotorowicz-Jasińska [3] on rewording key points. Besides that, all three students could differentiate between relevant and irrelevant information, save time and prevent off-topic issues. They identified main topics of spoken and written texts and preferred using acronyms over symbols like arrows or stars. However, they struggled to incorporate information from various sources during note-taking, as guided by Kotorowicz-Jasińska [3].

The second finding showed that the interviewees applied fundamental note-taking skills differently for reading and listening texts. Student A followed three stages: pre-reading, while reading, and post-reading, noting down related vocabulary items. Student C sometimes missed key details due to oral speed but could identify core details in written texts. Student B emphasized the importance of background knowledge for organizing notes logically, aligning with advice from Özçakmak [6]. However, none of the students reviewed, revised, or reorganized their notes for easier recall during assignments.

The third finding indicates that the varied approaches to note-taking of the participants resulted in different levels of effectiveness in enhancing their English-language receptive skills. Student A

noted an increase in the quantity and frequency of her notes, particularly benefiting her listening comprehension. She also practiced paraphrasing ideas from reading texts more effectively, leading to a deeper understanding [2]. In another case, Student B expressed satisfaction with her gradual improvement in receptive skills, as she could now note down key words without panicking over missed information. She also managed to control the rhythm of listening exercises better, which contributed to improved results. This gradual progress helped her feel more confident in her note-taking abilities [6]. Meanwhile, Student C highlighted her closer analysis of body paragraphs in reading texts, which helped her stay on topic and better identify question requirements. Additionally, she found that note-taking enabled her to retell content in her own words, avoiding the previous habit of copying phrases verbatim. This skill enhanced her comprehension and retention of the material [3].

In general, the participants recognized the importance of note-taking in supporting their ability to retrieve information later for answering questions. They acknowledged that effective note-taking strategies played a crucial role in their learning process, particularly in improving their receptive skills in English [22]. Clearly, the findings from the study effectively answer the three research questions by highlighting the specific note-taking sub-skills, applications, and benefits experienced by the participants.

- **Sub-skills Used in Note-taking:** The first research question focused on the sub-skills students used when taking notes. The finding shows that the research participants employed techniques such as using short forms, paraphrasing, and differentiating between relevant and irrelevant information. These strategies helped them efficiently capture key points and main ideas from both spoken and written texts [2], [3].

- **Application of Note-taking for Language Learning Progress:** The second research question explored how students applied note-taking to achieve progress in learning language skills. The findings revealed that students used note-taking differently for reading and listening tasks. For instance, Student A followed a structured approach to reading, while Student B emphasized background knowledge, and Student C focused on analyzing body paragraphs. These varied applications helped them organize their notes logically and improve their comprehension [6]. A meta-analysis by [9] supported the effectiveness of note-taking in enhancing L2 learning through exposure to input.

- **Benefits of Note-taking for Enhancing Receptive Skills:** The third research question examined the benefits of note-taking in enhancing receptive skills in English. The findings indicated that effective note-taking strategies led to improved listening and reading comprehension. Students reported being able to recall information more easily, stay on topic, and retell content in their own words, which enhanced their overall understanding and retention of the material [22]. Additional research underscored the cognitive benefits of handwritten notes for memory retention and comprehension [7].

Overall, the study demonstrated that tailored note-taking strategies could significantly support the processes of the students and improve their receptive language skills.

4. Implications and conclusion

The research findings collectively suggest that note-taking is a multifaceted skill with a significant impact on the language learning outcomes of students. Educators should provide explicit instruction on various note-taking techniques and tailor these strategies to different types of texts and tasks. By doing so, students can develop more effective note-taking habits, leading to better comprehension, retention, and overall academic performance. Additionally, incorporating note-taking into regular classroom activities can help students see its practical benefits, thereby motivating them to use these strategies consistently. Firstly, one finding highlights the importance of specific note-taking sub-skills, such as using short forms, paraphrasing, and differentiating between relevant and irrelevant information. These skills are crucial for efficient information

processing and retention. The implication is that educators should emphasize teaching these sub-skills to students, as they can significantly enhance comprehension and recall. Secondly, another finding reveals that students apply note-taking skills differently depending on the task (reading vs. listening). This suggests that note-taking instruction should be tailored to the specific demands of different types of texts. Finally, the last finding indicates that effective note-taking strategies lead to improved receptive skills, such as listening and reading comprehension. This implies that note-taking should be an integral part of language instruction, as it supports students in processing and retaining information. Therefore, educators should encourage students to practice paraphrasing and summarizing information as part of their note-taking routine.

In other words, the case study is significant in both practice and theory. From the perspectives of the practitioners, the study highlights specific sub-skills, such as using short forms, paraphrasing, and differentiating between relevant and irrelevant information, which significantly enhance students' reading and listening comprehension. This detailed identification provides a practical framework for educators to teach and students to adopt effective note-taking strategies. In addition, the research results demonstrate that tailored note-taking strategies can lead to better organization, comprehension, and retention of information, thereby supporting academic success. Moreover, it suggests that explicit instruction on various note-taking techniques should be integrated into language learning curricula. This recommendation has significant implications for educational practices, advocating for the incorporation of note-taking as a fundamental skill to enhance the overall academic performance and language proficiency of the students.

Despite the highlighted importance of note-taking of the study in academic success, it has some limitations and calls for further research to optimize its application in language learning. Indeed, the first limitation is that its short duration of online interviews and small sample size limit the depth and generalizability of the findings. Then, the focus-group interview data of the participants may introduce bias, and the lack of longitudinal data prevents understanding the long-term impact of note-taking on receptive skills. Additionally, the study focuses on a limited range of note-taking techniques, potentially overlooking other effective methods. Besides that, the absence of diverse student backgrounds further restricts the applicability of the results to a broader population. Thus, future research should include a larger, more diverse sample and employ longitudinal studies to track note-taking skill development over time. Also, exploring additional note-taking techniques and incorporating mixed-methods approaches will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how note-taking enhances language learning.

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