The Effects of Listening Comprehension on English Language Learners Writing Performance while Taking Notes

Juary de Brito
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Writing Performance while Taking Notes

by

Juary De Brito

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Thesis Presented by:
Juary De Brito

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Content and Style Approved By:

___________________________________________  __________________
Dr. Joyce Rain Anderson, Chair of Thesis Committee  Date

___________________________________________  __________________
Dr. Anne Doyle, Committee Member  Date

___________________________________________  __________________
Dr. Julia Stakhnevich, Committee Member  Date
The main goal of this investigation is to examine the effects of listening comprehension on English Language Learners’ (ELLs) writing performance while taking notes. A total of 30 ELLs were administered a questionnaire in order to find out the difficulties they face when taking notes. The results indicates that student face various difficulties when taking notes, citing speech rate and different range of accent as the main problems. It was concluded that during the note taking process students could perform better if they were exposed first to any teaching materials like a power point or a hand out to improve their understanding and to assist their note-taking. It was also recommend to teachers to encourage students to use various kind of note taking techniques such as diagrams, abbreviations, and symbols that can increase their note taking efficiency and improve their ability to record more information and to avoid incomplete or inaccurate notes.

*Keywords:* Listening, writing, note-taking, ELL
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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

On the path of mastering second language skills, students and teachers face various difficulties. Due to those difficulties, an increased emphasis has been placed on developing and modeling new teaching strategies to increase English language Learners (ELL’s) language proficiency and academic competence. As pointed out by Peregoy & Boyle (2013), besides being academically strong, students are expected to possess sufficient skills that enable them to cope with any learning situation, which include the four language cognitive tasks of writing, speaking, listening, and reading. In natural day-to-day experiences oral, and written language uses are not kept separate and isolated from one another. The relationship between listening, speaking, reading and writing during development are basically over mutual support, meaning that, any practice will contribute to the overall development of the other (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013).

However, research in the field of teaching has been mainly based on reading, writing and speaking as the skills necessary for language acquisition. This is because before the 1970’s, listening was taken only as a receptive skill in language learning (Hanna, 2012). Since its role in language learning was taken for granted, listening comprehension has received little research and pedagogical attention. But the early 70’s, increased research in the field brought attention to the role of listening as a tool for understanding and a key factor in facilitating language learning as well as the development of different listening strategies (Vandergrift, 2002).
As a comprehension skill, listening provides people with the greatest amount of input during the process of language acquisition and development (Hunsaker as cited in Gur, Dilci, Coskun, & Delican, 2013). Osada (2004) explains, listening is in fact vital for the language learning but at the same time a complex process. Due to the amount of effort to acquire to the learners to listen, which must comprehend what it been said, retain the information in memory, integrated with what is being said and continually adjust its understanding of what its heard in the light of prior knowledge and incoming information. But before we sort out what we has just heard the speech disappears, and due to the limited capacity of working memory (also known as the Short-term memory [STM] part of our memory where information which is received is stored for short periods of time while it is being analyzed and interpreted. Once the message or information in an utterance is understood the data may become part of permanent memory or (LTM) long-term memory.

Nevertheless, listening as well as note taking are areas most often reported by ELLs as being difficult (Hayati & Jalilifar, 2009). Activities involving listening carried out by learners at school are intended meant to expand students’ knowledge; such activities are based on a principle that involves storing information by using mental listening comprehension mechanisms and recalling the stored information later. As a way to prevent forgetting almost 80% of the content of a listening material, it is recommended that learners take notes while listening. In the overall sense, note-taking helps students not only in learning, but also in their writing skills development (Gur et al., 2013).

Note-taking also plays an important role in an academic life and is a key factor in being a successful learner (Carrell, Dunkel, & Mollaun, 2002). A number of studies
highlight the importance of note-taking practices in academic contexts to show the
efficacy of note-taking in a Second Language (L2) while listening to academic lectures in
class or in completing listening tests such as TOEFL and IELTS (Aminifard &
Aminifard, 2012). By revealing the positive influence of note-taking practice in listening
activities, many researchers believe that taking notes facilitates ELLs’ study and
academic life.

Taking notes is widely accepted as a useful strategy for augmenting student
attention and retention of academic discourse. Note taking is intuitively interesting to the
lecture listener and is generally viewed as a way to facilitate the process of learning and
remembering lecture material. Studies mainly from Boye (2012) have suggested that
students prefer to have access to slide handouts prior to lecture to help them with note-
taking during class. However, some teachers feel reluctant to distribute handouts, power
point presentations or lecture notes, because students might lose attention during class or
fail to develop note taking skills, while other teachers feel that such handouts allow
students to pay more attention to lecture by relieving them of the need to write as much,
and ensure that students have accurate information.

On the other hand, Stefanou & Hoffman (2008) argue that the more students
copied directly from the instructor’s PowerPoint or overhead presentation, the poorer
their performance on factual recall questions (though the more they added to these notes,
the better their performance on application questions). It is possible that relieving the
cognitive strain of taking notes while listening to the lecture may enable students to think
more deeply about the material.
As an important vehicle for disseminating content in many courses, instructors simplify and explain course-related topics through lecture. Students’ note-taking skills are essential for identifying and retaining the insights and concepts being presented. It is students’ responsibility to somehow capture the information presented in lecture (Titsworth, 2004).

Students’ lack of comprehension may contribute to their silence in oral classroom discussion. So is critical for learners to master note-taking for school, work, and life in general. Another good reason to take notes is that because one cannot re-listen to speech or a presentation it’s important to take every opportunity to record and keep information in order to use it later (Hayati & Jalilifar, 2009). A further problem that listeners often address is the rapid disappearance of the content of what they listen to. Many language learners claim that as they listen, they can follow the speakers with some ease, but when it comes to remembering the speech sometime later, they find themselves falling behind (Hayati & Jalilifar, 2009).

In most academic contexts, students are required to take notes in class. However, taking notes in an L2 is not an easy task. Students need to simultaneously comprehend the lectures in classes, as well as write and organize the format of their notes. Consequently, they have to be good at multitasking (Carrell et al., 2002). In other words, students need to acquire a set of listening strategies necessary to efficiently process academic lectures in class while simultaneously taking notes. Therefore it’s important to consider that the more students learn how to take notes, the more they will be able to become better listeners and creative writers. Taking good notes gives students
opportunities to participate more in the class as well as it improves their study skills and increase their memorization (Hayati & Jalilifar, 2009).

However, taking good notes and revising afterwards implies a good command of writing skills. According to Leki, Cumming, & Silva (2008) research in the field of second language writing is relatively young. But the continuous rising of pedagogical issues towards L2 inevitably give way to more research on writing. Through this rising researchers have become better prepared in terms of theories and methodologies, resulted in a larger understanding of learning to write in a second language.

As Leki (1992) points out, most second language writers probably have little experience with writing besides grammar exercises, writing answers to questions, and producing occasional paragraphs. Al Khasawneh (2010) reports that ELLs when carrying out a writing task “face problems in vocabulary, grammar, organization of ideas, spelling, and referencing” (p.13). Al Khairy (2013) reported that ELLs have a weak domain of writing in English because of their "erroneous use of grammar, lexical items, irregular verbs, prepositions, spellings, punctuation etc." (p. 8).

Likewise, students rely on note-taking as a way to review their notes later so that they can understand and remember the ideas that were discussed. The more complete the notes are when they review, the more likely they are to become familiarized with the information. Students often wonder how many notes should they take and whether or not certain terms, facts or information are significant enough to write down.
1.2 Statement of the problem

Despite the value of note taking in the learning process, taking good notes will require students to be proficient in using both listening and writing skills at the same time. Piolat (as cited in Gur et al., 2013) claims that note taking isn’t just an act of writing down the information in listener unique way; it’s in fact a more complex process involving listening and writing. Yet little effort is placed on helping students become better note takers. Neither is there sufficient effort in teaching students the best strategies to use when taking notes.

Regardless whether the instructor speaks with an accent or not, students might be able to follow the lecture, but if they are unable to take efficient notes and revise them afterward, they won’t be able to succeed. Therefore, learners should be encouraged to acquire note-taking skills as tool to improve learning and facilitate memorization. DeWitt (2007) explains that “note taking is an external memory aid that refers to writing a brief record of information to be remembered” (p. 46). Since this study investigates the effects of listening comprehension on ELLs writing while taking notes, I assert that ELLs should be assisted with the necessary materials and strategies to take notes.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The majority of students take notes with the intention of reviewing the notes afterward, which implies a reasonable level of proficiency in students’ listening and writing skills. Therefore the purpose of this study is to discuss the effects of listening
comprehension on ELLs’ writing while taking notes. The problem of the present study can be tackled through answering the following main questions:

1. What are the difficulties encountered by ELLs in terms of listening and writing while taking notes?
2. What kind of materials and strategies are used to improve ELL`s listening and writing skills?
3. How does listening comprehension affect ELLs` writing performances while taking notes?

1.4 Study hypotheses

1. I hypothesize that the difficulties encountered by ELLs in terms of listening and writing skills affect their performance in note taking.
2. I hypothesize that listening comprehension affects ELLs writing performance during note taking.
3. I hypothesize that the materials and strategies that have been develop to improve ELLs listening and writing skills are effective.

1.5 Definition of terms

Listening skills:

Byrnes (as cited in Osada (2004) characterizes listening as a highly complex problem solving activity that can be broken down into a set a distinct sub-skills.
Gunes (as cited in Gur et al., 2013) defines listening as the process of making meaning out of the perceived audio input via various operations, is actively done for different purposes and motives all through the life beginning with the fetus period.

Mendelsohn (as cited in Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011) defines listening as the ability to decipher the speaker’s intention, which besides the abilities of processing linguistics forms, listeners must also know how to process and judge under a particular setting the speaker’s intentions.

Rost (as cited in Vandergrift, 2002) broadly defines listening skill in, as a process of receiving what the speaker actually says; constructing and representing meaning; negotiating meaning with the speaker and responding; and, creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy. Listening is an active process of interpretation of what we are listening matched with what we already know.

**Writing skills:**

Grami (2010) highlighted that many researchers (e.g., Widdowson, 1983; Smith, 1989; White, 1987) have defined writing as a ‘complicated cognitive task’ because of the fact that it “…demands careful thought, discipline, and concentration, and it is not just a simple direct production of what the brain knows or can do at a particular moment” (p. 9).

Boardman (2002) states that writing is an ongoing process of thinking and organizing. So writing is a powerful tool to organize overwhelming events and make them manageable. Writing is really a form of thinking how to use the written word.
Applebee, Auten, & Lehr (1981) consider writing as any activity in which students used written language (including numbers) to record information or opinions for later reference by the teacher, fellow students, or themselves. Activities such as multiple-choice exercises, dictation, translation, and even math calculations are considered to involve writing, though the tasks involve supplying information more than composing coherent text.

**Note-taking:**

Rafoth, Leal, & DeFabo (1993) define note-taking as a two-step process in which the students must listen to the information and write down this information in an organized manner.

Marzano, Pickering, & Pllock (2001) state that note-taking should be considered a work in progress. Once students initially take notes, teachers should encourage them to continually add to the notes and revise them as their understanding of content increase. Without explicit instruction in note taking, however, many students simply write down words or phrases from the lecture word for word, without analysis. Yet successful note-takers summarize to arrive at a nugget of meaning, which they are much more likely to retain. Students also benefit from using their notes as a document of their learning.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 **Listening comprehension strategies**

While considerable attention has been given to the other three language skills (reading, writing and speaking), studies focusing on listening have only recently been
made. Such neglect derived from the fact that listening has been viewed as a passive skill. Even though listening is now well recognized as a critical dimension in language learning, it is still one of the least understood processes. According to Morley (as cited in Osada 2004), during the 1980`s listening was included into new instructional frameworks, the functional language and communicative approaches. Vandergrift (2002) claims that despite progress in the field, listening is still difficult to describe.

What researchers have been able to conclude is that in order to understand aural information, listeners must use effective listening strategies. Such strategies are particularly significant in second language learning; due to the lack of them, students’ listening comprehension becomes problematic, challenging, and ineffective (Mendelsohn, as cited in Hanna, 2012). As a result, since the 1980`s studies based on strategies used by effective learners have been advising teachers that the main purpose in designing a listening lesson is to “instruct students how to go about listening, i.e. how to handle information that is not 100% comprehensible” (Mendelsohn as cited in Hanna, 2012, p. 2).

While learning listening comprehension, learners might encounter several difficulties, Underwood (1989) notes: learners might be unable to control the speed of the speaker; they can’t ask for words to be repeated all the time; their limited knowledge of vocabulary makes listening comprehension difficult; they show some difficulties in recognizing discourse markers; they express difficulties in concentrating in a foreign language; they suffer from a desire to understand the meaning of every word; and they lack contextual knowledge.
Listeners can’t control the speed of the speaker. Underwood says, “many language learners believe that the greatest difficulty with listening comprehension, as opposed to reading comprehension, is that listener cannot control how quickly a speaker speaks” (p. 16). However, Hayati (2010) examines the effect of speech rate on listening comprehension by exposing students to slow speech rate and natural speech rate and notes that both can be beneficial to the listeners. But the degree of benefit learners gained in natural speech rate leads Hayati to indicate that, for now, naturalness counts more in listening comprehension, although slow speech rate did permit an improvement in listeners’ comprehension.

Listeners can’t have words repeated all the time. According to Underwood (1989) this constitutes a major problem for students. It is the teachers who decide whether or not to repeat information or if a section of recording needs to be replayed. It is “hard for the teacher to judge whether or not the students have understood any particular section of what they have heard” (p. 17). Listeners’ limited knowledge of vocabulary also makes listening comprehension difficult. When listeners encounter unknown words, they might stop to look up the meaning and therefore miss the listening information. Listeners may also have difficulty in recognizing discourse markers used by the speaker. According to Underwood (1989) discourse markers used in formal situations might be clear to listeners, but in informal situations, signals such as gestures, loudness, or change of pitch are very confusing for second language learners.

Listeners also face some difficulties in concentrating in a foreign language. Underwood (1989) explains that in listening, even a slight break in attention can interfere with comprehension. When the topic of the listening passage is interesting, it can be
easier for listeners to concentrate and follow the passage; however, listeners sometimes feel that listening is very challenging even when they are interesting in the topic because it requires a lot of effort to figure out the meaning intended by the speaker.

Learning habits emphasized in the classroom, such as a desire to understand the meaning of every word, also constitute a listening difficulty. Underwood (1989) explains that sometimes teachers require students to understand and recognize every word while listening, which might lead to student failure when they fail to recognize the meaning of a particular word. Finally, Second Language (L2) students may have a lack of contextual knowledge or background which can increase comprehension problems. Listeners with different cultural backgrounds can also misunderstand or misinterpret nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, or tone of voice differently.

Similarly, Goh (2000) identifies several real-time factors that influence listening comprehension faced by a group of English as a Second language (ESL). According to Goh (2000) five common listening comprehension problems are identified by students: they quickly forget what they heard; don’t recognize words they know; understand words but not the intended message; neglect the next part when thinking about meaning; and are unable to form a mental representation from words heard. Those factors were further divided in to five categories: test, listener, speaker, task, and environment. Under the category of listener, was believed to be one of the factors influencing the learners’ listening comprehension. Under the category of test, the factor most reported was related to insufficient time available for processing. When other tasks, such as the activity of
note-taking, were involved in the process of listening, time available for processing on incoming message might be negatively influenced as a result.

In attempting to investigate the listening problems of a group of first year English major students, Hamouda (2012), throughout questionnaires and interviews, found out that accent, pronunciation, speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary, different accent of speakers, lack of concentration, anxiety, and bad quality of recording were the major listening comprehension problems encountered. Speech rate was also found a main factor that caused difficulties in listening comprehension. Hayati (2010), examining the effect of speech rate on listening comprehension, concluded that speech rate, whether natural or slow, could improve English learners’ listening comprehension; natural speech rate could support greater improvements than slow speech rate in learners’ listening comprehension.

In order to overcome these listening comprehension problems, researchers suggest that learners need to develop techniques known as “listening strategies”. O’Malley & Chamot (1989) categorize listening strategies into two groups: cognitive and metacognitive. Cognitive strategies are problem-solving techniques used to solve learning tasks and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge or skill. Language learners use cognitive strategies to help them process, store, and recall new information (Goh, 1998). Two distinct types of cognitive strategies have been the subject of L2 listening research: bottom-up and top-down. Top-down strategies occur when the students used their prior knowledge to understand the meaning of a message. Prior knowledge can be knowledge of the topic, the listening context, the text-type or culture. On the other hand, listeners also use ’bottom-up’ processes when they use linguistic knowledge to understand the
meaning of a message. They build meaning from lower level sounds to words to grammatical relationships to lexical meanings in order to arrive at the final message (Vandergrift, 2002).

However, listening comprehension is neither top-down nor bottom-up processing, but an interactive, interpretive process where listeners use both prior knowledge and linguistic knowledge to understand the message. The frequency in which listeners use one process or the other will depend on their knowledge of the language, familiarity with the topic, or the purpose for listening. For instance, listening for gist involves primarily top-down processing, whereas listening for specific information, as in a weather broadcast, involves primarily bottom-up processing to comprehend all the desired details (Vandergrift, 2002).

O’Bryan & Hegelheimer (2009) demonstrated that a top-down listening process involves listeners’ prior knowledge of the listening context, that is, its experience and background knowledge. Once this specific knowledge is activated, the listener can better understand a text. On the other hand, bottom-up listening processes are other ways used to understand an oral text by paying close attention to specific features of the target language such as sounds, grammatical functions, and lexical meanings.

Tyler (2001) suggests that developing bottom-up processes such as phoneme discrimination training should work well for long-term mastery of a language; meanwhile, top-down training can be more beneficial for learners who aim to acquire instant knowledge of a language. In this case, ELLs who aim to fulfill their academic goals need to develop bottom-up listening process. However, Peterson (2001) emphasizes the fact that new ELLs tend to possess undeveloped bottom-up listening
strategy. Therefore, bottom-up listening strategies, which require a great amount of conscious attention to language, should be taught in class to enhance ELLs’ listening ability. Yeldham & Gruba (2014) examined the idiosyncratic development of Second Language Learners in a listening strategies course. Their results indicate that learners develop a great balance in their use of top-down and bottom-up strategies. The study suggests there is a need to teach, or at least raise learner awareness of, a variety of strategies for individuals to be able to utilize those that meet their needs.

Another type of listening strategy for second language listeners is metacognitive strategy. Rubin (as cited in Hardan, 2013) describes metacognitive strategies as techniques that can be managed by the learners to have control over their learning through planning, monitoring, evaluating, and modifying. Gho & Taib (2006) state that metacognition involves three types of knowledge: person, task, and strategy knowledge.

Person knowledge is understanding individual and universal traits which impact one’s learning. Task knowledge comprehends the purpose, the demands, and the nature of learning tasks. Finally, strategy knowledge involves how to use approaches and techniques that are likely to be effective in accomplishing a task or goal. In terms of listening in second language, the strategy knowledge plays the most important role.

According to Peterson (2001) “metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension” (p.90). However, Goh & Taib (2006) state that the effective metacognitive instruction should have four focuses: prediction, monitoring, evaluating, and solving problems. Vandergrift (as cited in Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011) claims that meta-cognitive strategy is a kind of self-regulated learning which contains the attempt to plan, check, monitor, select, revise, and evaluate.
The use of metacognitive strategies can also facilitate second language learning proficiency. Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari (2010) investigated the efficacy of metacognitive process-based listening instruction on 106 university French language learners. The students were divided into two groups: 59 students in the experimental and 47 students in the control group. The experimental group received both metacognitive and listening instructions while the control group did not receive a metacognitive instruction. The same two instructors taught both groups, and the same texts were utilized during the listening training. The result shows that metacognitive process based listening instruction was beneficial because less skilled students from the experimental group show great improvement and raised their metacognitive awareness in listening.

2.2 The impact of listening comprehension on note-taking

Some studies about listening comprehension in second language have explored its impact on note taking. Dunkel & Davy (1989) argue that even though it is important for students to acquire effective note-taking and listening skills, instruction on note-taking cannot independently occur meaning that note-taking should be taught in listening class. Yet the authors highlight the relationship between a second language listening proficiency level and the quality of notes, arguing that a good listener is capable of taking better notes.

Research conducted by Carrell (2007) and Song (2011) seems to indicate that recognition of the main ideas and detail information are the essential factors in order to comprehend the content of the lecture that is most likely difficult for ELLs. A common feeling expressed by second language listeners is the impression of being overwhelmed by the speed of lectures (Pialot & Kellogg, 2005) which can be solved by developing
high listening proficiency skills. According to Vandergrift (2004), “the speed and effectiveness at which listeners carry out these processes, however, depends on the degree to which the listener can efficiently process what is heard” (p. 4).

Song (2008) claims that the academic listening and the levels of performance required for academic success requires the ability to use the following listening skills in second language: ability to identify major themes or ideas; to identify relationships among major ideas; to identify the topic of the input; to retain information through note taking; to retrieve information from notes; to infer relationships between information; to comprehend key vocabulary; to follow the spoken mode of lecture; and to identify supportive ideas and examples.

2.3 Note-taking

Seen as a popular and operative strategy to increase students’ ability to remember, comprehend, and keep in mind the material, note-taking is also seen as a study tool. It is believed that one of the advantages of taking notes for ELLs is the ability to catch unfamiliar words, terms and ideas in text for memorization and later comprehension. Taking notes thus, is a crucial strategy used to increase learners’ attention to the lecture and support of its content. Note-taking can play a crucial role in listening comprehension. While listening, note-taking is a strategy used by learners in order to intensify their attention to what they hear and recall for later use (Zohrabi & Esfandyari, 2014).

Kiewra (cited in Zohrabi & Esfandyari, 2014) argue that note-taking is advantageous for at least two reasons. First, note-taking helps lecture learning by
activating students’ attention and engaged students’ cognitive processes of coding integrating, synthesizing, and transforming aurally received input into a personally meaningful form. Second, note-taking is useful because the notes taken serve as an external source of information that provides later revision and review to reassure remembrance of the information heard.

Cottrell (2003) explains note taking can be done for a variety of reasons and different results. In answer to the question “Why take notes?” Cottrell (2003) says that note-taking, can creates a useful record of important points for future use or where the information comes from. Note-taking helps students develop, writing with organization and planning of the ideas. Note-taking help students understanding of the content, memorization.

The main characteristics of note-taking are the following: notes should be arranged logically to be understood and used; notes should be legible and complete; and notes should be paraphrased and brief. In this sense some studies have been done in order to investigate the efficacy and the effects of note-taking while listening (e.g. Carrell et al., 2002; Aminifard & Animifard, 2012; Hayati & Jalilifar, 2009; Seward, 1910).

A study done by Carrell et al. (2002) investigated the effects of note-taking, lecture length, and topic on listening comprehension. Two hundred thirty-four students were instructed to take notes during one long and one short lecture; meanwhile, they were not allowed to take notes while listening to another set of texts. After completing the listening comprehension quizzes in relation to the content of the lectures, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their experience with note-taking. The results first revealed that note-taking had a positive effect during a short lecture; when the
participants were allowed to take notes during listening tests, they performed better than when they were not allowed to take notes.

It was also found that the students with lower proficiency showed undeveloped readiness to take notes during listening, regardless of the lecture length. In relation to topic familiarity, students outperformed when they were allowed to take notes during listening art and humanities topics, whereas there was no notable difference in the topic of physical science. As a result, the best condition for high proficient students to take notes is when the listening materials are not too long and when the topics are familiar to them. In other words, careful selection of listening text is essential in order to optimize an ELL’s note-taking performance.

Aminifard & Animifard’s (2012) study suggests that developing an effective note-taking method is crucial. It appears that taking notes in appropriate and useful method can particularly help to review notes when completing listening comprehension tests. These authors investigated the impact of note-taking strategy in the Sentence Method on listening comprehension of conversations and mini-lectures. The Sentence Method required the students to write down what they hear even in very short sentences. The participants were English language learners, divided into two groups: the experimental group and the control group. Participants in the experimental group were instructed a note-taking method; the other group was not allowed to take notes. Both groups of participants took a listening test and questionnaire. The listening materials consisted of two conversations and two mini-lectures, and the questionnaire was about perceptions of note-taking, adapted from Carrell, et al. (2002). The questionnaires show that students didn’t benefit from note-taking to complete the listening test, nor from the
Sentence Method as a note taking strategy. The authors conclude that this note-taking method was ineffective and not valuable to teach. Furthermore, it could have been difficult for the participants whose English proficiency was high-beginner to take notes because their capacity of multi-tasking and language proficiency were limited.

Hayati & Jalilifar (2009) investigated the impact of note-taking strategies on the EFL college students’ listening comprehension achievement, based on the Cornell’s note taking method. The Cornell method provides a systematic format for condensing and organizing notes, where students can divide the paper into two columns: the note-taking column (usually on the right) is twice the size of the questions/key word column (on the left). Students should leave five to seven lines, or about two inches, at the bottom of the page. Notes from a lecture or teaching are written in the note-taking column; notes usually consist of the main ideas of the text or lecture, and long ideas are paraphrased. Long sentences are avoided; symbols or abbreviations are used instead. To assist with future reviews, relevant questions (which should be recorded as soon as possible so that the lecture and questions will be fresh in the student’s mind) or key words are written in the key word column. When reviewing the material, the student can cover the note-taking (right) column while attempting to answer the questions/keywords in the key word or cue (left) column. The student is encouraged to reflect on the material and review the notes regularly.

The 60 participants in Hayati & Jalilifar’s (2009) study were randomly selected from a population of 110 undergraduate students. A TOEFL proficiency test was given which consisted of listening, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. The participants were divided into three groups of 20 participants: the non-note-takers group (NNTG), the
uninstructed note-takers group (UNTG), and the Cornell note-takers group (CNTG). The NNTG was not allowed to take notes during the listening test while UNTG were encouraged to take notes with their own note-taking strategies. The CNTG were indirectly instructed about how to take notes in the Cornell note-taking method by being handed a pamphlet of the Cornell Method, and they studied how to take notes in the Cornell Method on their own for six weeks. They also took an achievement test to check their knowledge of how to take notes in the Cornell Method before the post-test.

In this study, the participants listened to the same sample TOEFL listening comprehension twice in the post-test. After the listening comprehension test, they took a listening comprehension quiz in multiple-choices. The result showed that CNTG performed the best among the groups on the post-test. Therefore, the use of the Cornell Method as a note-taking strategy could generate benefits in learning, and it appears that the Cornell note-taking method is more beneficial than the Sentence Method. However, note-taking instruction was only indirectly and informally given in the study, and there was not attention given to the quality of notes taken by ELLs with difference proficiency levels. As in the two studies by Carrell, et al. (2002) and Aminifard and Animifard (2012), ELLs with higher language proficiency tend to benefit more from note-taking than ELLs with limited language proficiency; these researchers found that note-taking is difficult for lower proficient learners.

A study done by Song (2011) found types of note-taking patterns for higher proficient students and lower proficient students. She investigated 257 international students’ notes in terms of the relationship between note taking format and listening comprehension performance. A listening segment of the participants’ placement test for a
A graduate program in ESL was used in her study. Participants were encouraged to take notes during the listening test and their notes were assessed based on the hierarchical scoring system. The results showed that the lower the participants’ second language proficiency was, the less detailed their notes were likely to be. She emphasized that higher proficient students have better subskills to comprehend listening and record in notes in detail; for example, successful listeners tend to possess great knowledge of the topic, detail topical ideas, organization of notes, and ability to make inference. Also, they made connections between main ideas and their related supportive ideas effectively in their notes. Therefore, high proficient second language listeners were able to generate high-quality notes which resulted in a good score on the listening test.

Seward (as cited in Zohrabi & Esfandyari, 2014) discusses the assumed functions of note-taking. He argues that notes should be useful as a tool for revising but their efficacy is not their primary value. Notes should be complete, but they must include only what the mind has accepted as important. The practical value of notes that we take can make us aware, in charge, and clearheaded. When we listen to a lecture, notes also serve as a ready test of the firmness of our comprehension.

Yet, Rafoth et al. (1993) note two different functions of note taking which facilitate learning from lecture: encoding and storage function. The encoding function is related to the actual recording of note taking; it enhances students’ ability to organize and process lecture information. In addition, the encoding function facilitates learning, increases attention to material, and creates a more personal understanding of the presented information. It is measured by comparing the performance of subjects who listen to a lecture and do not take notes with the performance of those who both listen and
take notes. On the other hand, the storage function provides a review of the lecture content. Learners’ performance is facilitated by reviewing the notes stored in a written form. Studies on the external storage function of note taking typically compare the performance of subjects who record and review their notes with those who take notes but are not allowed to review their notes.

According to Boch & Piolat (2005) note-taking can help the students in the learning process and help students to learn to write. Yet they explain that the average writing speed of a student is around 0.3 to 0.4 words/second, whereas a lecturer speaks at a rate of around 2 to 3 words/second. Unless everything is said at dictation speed, or students develop exceptional shorthand skills, teachers will never speak slowly enough for students to write down everything that is said. As a result, students intuitively develop processes and methods that allow them to record the content of lessons.

Boch & Piolat (2005) point out several indicators that trigger note taking, which students intuitively recognize as important because the teacher has planned and often written it: writing on the board; dictation; a title of a section or a list or the listing of information; definitions or catch phrases and macro-textual planning indicators that organize and structure the classes.

2.4 Techniques for listening during a lecture

Effective note-taking is an important skill that many college students have not mastered. Unfortunately, high schools often do not prepare students properly for taking notes in a college classroom environment. This can be a disadvantage, as effective note-taking is just as important as learning how to write a term paper or to take an exam.
Rockler-Gladen (2007) emphasized some tips on how to listen actively and take good lecture notes.

1. Active listening

"Passive" listening is what the student does when watching a sitcom or having a casual conversation. In contrast, active listening is when the student listens carefully to make sure he understands and learns the information that is being conveyed, so that the student should: listen for the main point and major sub points; they shouldn't just write everything down; they should listen carefully and make sure that they understand what the purpose of the lecture is. As students takes down notes, they should keep the main point in mind and make sure they understand how their notes are related.

Students should also listen carefully to figure out how the ideas are organized and they will make more sense. Of course, if the professor provides an outline by writing on the board or using PowerPoint notes, take advantage of this; they should listen carefully for words and phrases that reflect the organizational structure of the lecture; they should pay close attention to the introduction, as it will probably indicate how notes should organize. If the lecture begins with, "Today I'm going to talk about three ethnic conflicts in the Middle East," then students have a good idea of what's going to follow; and finally they should listen for "signpost" words to indicate a transition for one point to the next, such as "next" and "finally" and numerical signposts like "first" or "third".
2. **Proper techniques for writing the lecture notes**

Learning to write down all the important information in an organized way is a challenge as well, so that the student should: write down the date and the topic of the lecture. This will help trigger his memory when he is studying; students should learn to write quickly or type quickly, students shouldn't worry about writing down every word, especially words like "a" and "the". The student shouldn't worry about writing perfectly, as long as they can understand the notes; write down definitions. If the instructor defines a term, he should make sure to write it down and understands what it means; don't copy outline or PowerPoint notes word for word. The student should use the notes to help him follow along; if the instructor indicates that something is important, mark it. This is a strong clue that something may be on the test; if the instructor is going too fast or is unclear, say something. There is nothing rude about asking the teacher to clarify a point.

3. **Reviewing the notes.**

This is very important, but students don't do this nearly enough, students should review their notes to make sure he understands all the information and to keep it fresh in their minds. After the class students should rewrite or type the notes as soon as possible to better retain the information; students should read over the notes before each class period to contextualize the new information; when looking over the notes, mark anything that doesn't make sense. Students could also ask instructor for clarification, or ask a fellow student to help him out; or even join someone who goes to class all the time and who takes good notes, and compare notes with each other. Even if the student listens actively and comes to class all the time, he is bound to miss a point here and there, so this can help them out.
2.5 Suggestion on teaching note-taking

Even though the techniques for understanding and writing texts are widely taught and practiced throughout a student’s school and university years, very few students are taught even basic “note taking” skills. It is noteworthy that students are expected to take extensive notes during lectures, listening and teaching as note taking is considered to be useful for storing learning, and thinking about what is being taught. Viani (as cited in Zohrabi & Esfandyari, 2014) believes that it is common for students to be introduced to note taking at the middle-school level. However, it is not clear whether students worth or recognize the importance of note taking or have even acquired the skills required to enjoy the full benefits of note-taking. According to Boon (1989), many of the studies on note taking include suggestions for lecturer style and the teaching of note-taking. The author explains that to teach students the value of note-taking, one should teach them to record what is said in class, helps them review notes periodically and perform well on tests; provide a skeletal outline their own before lectures; survey the lectures to set the purposes for listening and noting; lecture at a moderate speed, slowing down for important points or allowing a few minutes for consolidation; write important points on the board or transparencies so that they will be recorded; provide handouts when using other visual aids to convey very complex materials; collect notes periodically and confer with students to improve their note-taking abilities; and finally, emphasize the importance of regular review.
CHAPTER 3 - DISCUSSION AND DATA ANALYSIS

3.1 Method

This study aims to investigate the effects of listening comprehension on ELLs writing while taking notes. To achieve this goal, a mixed methods approach was employed, that is a qualitative and quantitative approach (Appendix A). The instrument was a survey given to the students. The quantitative approach was used in the first four questions. The first and second questions ask students to evaluate their listening and writing skills as being strong, moderate or weak. A strong evaluation of the listening skills would indicate that generally the students have a good proficiency in listening, being able to listen and interpreting incoming speech but also responding appropriately to the speaker. A moderate evaluation of the listening skill would indicate that students can follow the normal speech rate but has some difficulties in understanding the content of the message. A weak evaluation of the listening skills would indicate that students have low capacity to listening showing a lot of difficulties in listening and understanding.

A strong evaluation of the writing skill would indicate that students can produce a paragraph with well- form sentences and phrases grammatically corrected and that they are able to follow and write complete notes meaning that students are able to write down all the important information in a lecture type classroom. A moderate evaluation of writing skill would indicate that students can write simple English sentences and convey the message they want by using the simple grammatical rules but in a lecture type classroom they can’t lost most of the important information. Contrary a weak evaluation would indicate that students have a lower ability to write complete English sentences and they can’t properly take complete notes.
The third questions asks students to choose Yes or No to questions about the difficulties posed by: speech rate, limited knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar, limited knowledge of the subject in question, and different ranges of accents in a lecture.

The fourth question asks students to indicate how frequently they take notes in class. The frequencies are always, sometimes and never. Always would indicate that students have a good level of proficiency in listening and writing skills, therefore being able to take complete notes. Sometimes would indicate that students take notes only when they understand what is being said and when supportive materials like power point or handouts are provided. Never would indicate that students have difficulties with listening and writing and that they don’t use any strategy to take notes.

The qualitative approach was employed in the last three open questions. The fifth question asks students what kind of difficulties they have when taking notes. The sixth if they use any particular strategy to take notes and finally the seventh question asks students if they use any particular material or instruments to review their notes.

The data from the first four question was statistically a graphically represented and compared with was compared and related with students’ opinion in the last three questions.

3.2 Participants

A total of 30 students were recruited to participate in this study, 11 male and 19 female. The participants were all non-native speakers of English who have been living in the US. Based on the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol, 14 students were selected from ESL class at Bridgewater State University. Seven additional students were
selected at Bridgewater State University based on the non-native speakers of English criteria. And finally 9 were select from a L2 writing class at Bridgewater State University.

3.3 Procedure

The procedure to collect the data was divided in four steps. First the selected participants received an explanation of the nature of the study and their role in the study. It was explained that this study is aimed to examine the effects of listening comprehension on ELLs writing performance in a note-taking context. They were told that their participation would be helpful in identifying the difficulties that students have when they take notes and consequently what could be done to overcome these difficulties. Second, the consent form was given to the participants to read and sign. Third, the purpose of each question was explained orally to the participant(s). The fourth and last step was to give the questionnaire to the participant(s) and wait the necessary time to collect them.

3.4 Results and discussion

The first question aimed to find out how students evaluate their listening skills. As it appears in the graph (Graph 1) 63.3 percent of students evaluate their listening skills as moderate, 23.3 percent evaluate their listening skills strong and 13.3 percent say that their listening skills are weak. An interpretation of this graph might suggests that students who possess moderate listening skills can follow the normal speech rate, but have some difficulties in understanding the content of the message. Comparing this result with the results displayed in graph 3, while these 70 percent find a different range of accents as the most difficult issues to deal with, 60 percent state it is speech rate. I believe that
students’ answers could be influenced by the instructor/teacher accent and speech rate. Students’ comments on question 5 confirm difficulties with speech rate. One student commented that “when I take note I usually have problems keeping up with what the teacher is saying because they move on too quickly.” However, five students mention that they don’t have any difficulties when they take notes, suggesting that these students had probably evaluate their listening skills as being strong, therefore they are a have a better performance.

The above results could also be linked to students’ own proficiency level or learning style. The results may seem subjective, meaning that the learners’ own evaluation of themselves is influenced by their level of proficiency or even learning style. As pointed out in a study which investigates the relationship between EFL self- efficacy regarding listening comprehension and listening proficiency, Rahimi and Abendini (2009) found that listening comprehension self-efficacy was significantly related to listening proficiency, meaning that student’s level of listening proficiency will vary according to their high or low level of self-efficacy.
The second question aimed to find out how students evaluate their writing skills. Graph 2 shows that 60 percent find themselves with moderate writing skills. This suggest this students can write simple sentences by using simple grammatical rules.

However, one student mentioned in question 5 that “the only difficulty that I have is when the professor goes really fast on the material or when I don’t understand it.” Another one wrote “…if I don’t understand it I can’t write…” My understanding of these finding is that students who possess moderate writing skills could have a better performance in writing when they are taking notes, if they are able to follow and understand the listening content or when the instructor/teacher provides them any visual or written material. In this particular case one student mention “when it’s a power point the only difficulty is when the professor explain too fast and goes to the next slide before you finish, but when my teacher is talking too fast and you try to take notes it’s basically impossible”. Also I believe that students’ understanding and their background knowledge
of the subject influenced their notes. Graph 3, demonstrates that 56.6 percent 43.3 identified limited knowledge of the subject in question as an obstacle to their learning.

The third graph shows the difficulties that learners encounter upon listening that constitute an obstacle to their learning. (These problems probably not all the problems that they encounter.)

![Listening comprehension issues](image)

Graph 3 - Listening comprehension issues that constitute an obstacle to students learning

According to the data displayed in the above graph, 70 percent of the learners indicated a different range of accents as an obstacle to their learning. This suggests that these different accents may constitute an obstacle because each accent has its own special characteristics in terms of pronunciation and speech rate. One can argue that such conclusion is perfectly normal for ELLs. Since students are second language they might be more exposed to a native teacher/instructors, who doesn’t have similar accent.
Learners consider their limited knowledge of grammar and vocabulary another obstacle. In fact, 50 percent consider it an obstacle, suggesting that once the students hear an unknown word or expression they probably are unable to interpret the incoming speech, and therefore unable to take complete notes. Those that don’t consider this an obstacle may be are more proficient in English.

Still, 60 percent show that speech rate alone is an obstacle to their learning; 56.6 percent indicated that limited knowledge of the subject in question constitutes an issue to their learning; Thus, students may be unable to follow up a topic because they are not entirely familiar with the subject matter of the topic being discussed or even able to take notes.

The fourth graph indicates how frequently students take notes. Only 36.6 percent indicate that they always take notes. One possible reason for the small number is that they may not have any difficulty with listening and writing, or that they use another strategy to take notes. One student mentioned that he/she records the teacher. However, 63.3 percent sometimes take notes. This number could suggests that they don’t necessarily feel a need to take notes, or that the teacher provided them with the content, or they only take notes when they are able to follow and understand the teacher.
The fifth question asked the students what kind of difficulties they have when taking notes. The majority clearly state that the difficulty they face is when the professor is talking too fast without repeating the information. Sometimes the professor uses words that they don’t understand, and others claim that sometimes they don’t know how to separate out the essential information. On the other hand, some state that is difficult to follow when the professor speaks too fast, but if he/she uses a power point they can later make their notes more complete and they are able to follow the lesson.

Comparing students’ statements with results above, it seems that speech rate and as different range of accents are most difficult issue that students have to deal with. Another interesting aspect highlighted by some participants is organization and presentation of the lecture. Some argue that if the lesson is clear and well organized, they won’t have problems understanding the content, and they will be able to have more complete and organized notes. Yeldham & Gruba (2014) found that organized instruction
can develop various learner individual characteristics, especially confidence,
concentration, motivation and a feeling of control over one's listening. Also Titsworth
(2004), questioning the effect of teacher immediacy and clarity on students’ note taking,
concludes that students recorded more details and organizational points when listening to
lectures with prominent organization, and they also recorded more details when listening
to lectures with lower levels of immediacy.

The sixth question asked the students if they use any particular strategy to take
notes. One student wrote that the real objective is to write down the maximum
information they, can therefore they do not use any particular strategy. Others respond
that is hard to write and to pay attention at the same time, so they only write down the
bullets points or only write important words as a reminder. Still others use a tape recorder
when allowed, and some translate the important facts into their mother tongue. I believe
that this range of different responses implies that students have had little instruction on
how to take notes. Rafoth et al. (1993) explains that lack of instruction is one of the
reasons way students are poor note takers because they haven’t been taught effective note
taking strategies.

The seventh and last question asked the students if they use any particular
material or instrument when revising their notes. Two students mention that they usually
compare their notes with someone in the class to make sure they have the same material.
Another two use dictionaries, and the internet to complete their notes. Another two use a
power point when it’s provided by the teacher. However the great majority claim not to
use any material or instrument to review their notes. Rafoth et al. (1993) argue that both
teacher and students should revise the notes that students take or record during the lecture where the teacher could make comments and suggestions for improvement.
CHAPTER 4 - CONCLUSION

4.1 Limitation of Study

This study has several limitations that could contribute to the fairly few significant results to support my research questions. The first, limitation to the study is the sample size. The study was originally developed to be applied in a high school where at least 50 to 60 students were expected to participate. However, because of circumstances beyond my control, the participants were limited to only 30 students from Bridgewater State University. The results were expected to be different if the instrument had been applied to a different range of students.

A second limitation to the study was the impossibility to observe a lecture-type classroom where students could be exposed to a note taking activity and eventually compare their notes; that could have increased the validity of the data, as well as provide more substantial support to the study. Also missing is the possibility to work with the students using other instruments for example a dictation activity to test students listening skills.

A third limitation to the study was the lack of necessary time to conclude the research. More time would allow the topics to be explore more extensively, as well as allow the use of more research instruments.

The fourth limitation was the questionnaire. Some of the questions didn’t provide enough detail information. Questions about the translation of the lecture content into their first language, presentation and organization of the lesson, what kind of cues the teacher use to help them separate the critical information, could also be added to generate more data.
4.2 Conclusion

The aim of the study was to discuss the effects of listening comprehension on ELLs’ writing while taking notes. To achieve this goal, an analysis of literature was provided, mainly focused on discussion of the listening comprehension strategies, problems faced by ELLs while leaning to listen, and an overview of note taking and its relation to writing. A questionnaire was used as a measuring tool to gather students’ opinions about general issues surrounding note taking.

The study seeks to find out what difficulties ELLs face in terms of listening and writing while taking notes; it was found that speech rate and different range of accent were the main problems. The results also lead to the conclusion that there aren’t many materials and/or strategies among ELLs to improve their listening and writing. It was concluded that during the note taking process students could perform better if they were exposed first to any teaching material like a power point or a hand out to improve their understanding and to assist their notes, therefore making the organization and presentation of the lecture clear to the students. The speech rate of the presenter/teacher could be adjusted to ELLs level of understanding and comprehension, allowing the students to better follow the content.

Listening and writing skills in a lecture type classroom is very demanding for ELLs. There are many factors to consider that might interfere with their learning process. The findings of this study can serve as a reference for learners and teachers who want to diagnose the learning difficulties of students in listening or writing skills to help them overcome these difficulties effectively with respect to different language educational instruments.
In order to help students improve their listening and writing skills, especially in a note taking context, a scientific approach is essential. Attention should be paid to the learner’s listening process, in order to know how speech rate, accent and other listening skills difficulties affect their understanding of the teaching content, as well as to students’ writing strategy in the lecture type classroom.

4.3 Recommendations

Based on the results, most of the students at lest sometimes take notes. To make such task more frequent and useful to students, teachers could encourage students to use various kind of note taking techniques such as diagrams, abbreviations, and symbols that can increase their note taking efficiency and improve their ability to record more information and to avoid incomplete or inaccurate notes.

Since the majority of ELL students don’t have or don’t use particular strategy to take notes, I would recommend teachers expose students, especially second language learners, to various note taking strategies, such as the Cornell Method, according to Boye (2012), which involves creating separate columns for notes and cues/questions, with a summary at the bottom of the page.

Providing students with guided notes is another way of helping them improve their notes and note-taking skills in general. As explained by Boye (2012), if the teacher provides students with handouts or guides for their notes, it’s important to keep in mind the amount of space you provide for their actual note-taking. The amount of such space has a major impact on the actual amount of notes students will make. Teachers could also provide to the students during a lecture clear cues as way to help them determine what information is important enough to write down. It is important to make an effort to offer
transparent cues and follow a reasonable pace, so that students can follow the teacher, keeping in mind the effects of speech rate on L2 comprehension. Teachers also may consider some pauses during the lecture to allow students to discuss and rework their notes together.
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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

Dear respondents

Thank you for volunteering to respond to this 15- minute survey about The Effects of Listening Comprehension in English Language Learners` Writing Performance. Although you may not personally benefit, this study is important to science/society because instructors of ELL students will be able to develop teaching strategies to help students enhance their listening and note taking skills. There are no foreseeable risks, your responses are anonymous, and you may refuse to answer particular questions or withdraw from this survey at any time.

I am a graduate student at Bridgewater State University, pursuing my Masters in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Currently I’m conducting a study entitled The Effects of Listening Comprehension in English Language Learners` Writing Performance, which aimed to discuss the effects of listening comprehension on English Language Learners` (ELLs) writing performance while taking notes.

Juary de Brito

Please answer the following questions.

Date: _____________________

Sex:  Male_______ Female________

Grade _________

1. How do evaluate your listening skills? (please cross one)
   Strong___ Moderate____ Weak____

2. How do you evaluate your writing skills?
   Strong___ Moderate____ Weak____
3. Do the following listening comprehension issues constitute an obstacle to your learning?

   Speech rate: Yes_____ No____

   Limited knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar: Yes____ No____

   Limited knowledge of the subject in question: Yes_____ No_____ 

   Different range of accents: Yes____ No____

4. How often do you take notes in class?

   Always____ Sometimes____ Never____

5. What kind of difficulties do you have when taking notes?

   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________

6. Are there any particular strategies that you use to take notes?

   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________

7. Do you use any particular material or instrument when revising your notes?

   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________