

ENHANCING LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH DICTATION-BASED
ACTIVITIES

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Annotation

This article examines the role of dictation-based activities in improving language skills among English language learners. The study highlights how dictation can develop listening, writing, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and pronunciation skills. Different types of dictation activities, including running dictation and peer dictation, encourage active participation and increase student motivation. The research also emphasizes the importance of interactive and collaborative tasks in language-focused learning. The findings show that dictation-based activities positively influence learners' language proficiency and classroom engagement. The article concludes that dictation can be an effective and practical method for enhancing integrated language skills in modern language teaching.

Keywords: *dictation, language-focused learning, listening skills, vocabulary development, interactive activities, language teaching, writing skills, esl/efl learners*

Introduction

Learning a new language is a challenging path. Most students today face difficulties in improving listening comprehension, spelling and accuracy in writing. One of the main problems for students is knowing the grammar but not being able to use it effectively in writing. In many cases learners also emphasize their struggle with spelling and punctuation. This leads teachers to look for new methods to help students improve language skills in a more engaging way.

One of the methods that has a significant role in ELT classes is dictation. While the dictation method is often considered boring, teacher-centered or old-fashioned in modern approaches, it can improve several skills of students if used correctly (Amy Lightfoot, British Council, India). Dictation requires students' full focus on the material, on the sounds, sentence structure and spelling at the same time. According to Nation and Newton, language-focused learning emphasizes specific attention to punctuation, spelling and pronunciation, and dictation is one of the most effective methods to support the process. Therefore, there are various ways of using dictation (running dictation, peer dictation, partial dictation) so that it can be both effective and engaging at the same time.

The goal of the article is to provide an analysis of effect of dictation on foreign language learning and to show how various dictation activities develop listening, vocabulary, writing, and communicative skills.

Literature review

Modern language learning methods require balanced skill development. Nation shows that language-focused learning includes balanced attention on skills such as pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. The main purpose of language-focused learning is to be a fluent language user, and the short-term aim is to learn the language itself.

Research also explains that active participation in language learning process is significant. Meaning-focused input and output activities help learners to receive and share information through listening, reading, speaking and writing. In meaning-focused input and output students' focus should be on gaining knowledge, not specifically learning the language items.

Another significant part of language learning is repetition. Nation and Newton show that repetitive language usage and involvement improve fluency and retention. Naturally, dictation activities involve repetition because students hear and write down the words repeatedly.

Dictation as a language teaching technique

In its simplest form, dictation involves a person, a teacher reading a passage aloud so that the students hear and write down the words. The traditional aim for students is to write down what they hear and check it later to correct and learn more from mistakes. This technique has existed for so many decades and still is considered significantly useful in modern language teaching. As Nation states dictation may 'go in and out of fashion', but still provide improvement to language

learning. A dictation material is text that suits the level of the learners and contains a material with useful and preferably known vocabulary for the course. One of the goals of the text should be making the students focus, hold the words in short-term memory, and repeat while writing. Through this spelling both new and known words and collocations become easy and natural.

Problems

Boredom is one of the main negative parts of dictation that needs to be addressed. Even if the dictation material is thoroughly chosen to be entertaining, some students lose focus easily during the activity. It is important for teachers to make sure students see the activity as an interesting learning opportunity rather than just copying the text (Amy Lightfoot, British Council, India). This can be arranged when teachers vary the way of dictation and tell the students to pay attention to the meaning and accuracy at the same time. All in all, the way teachers use the method matters the most in students' participation in the activity.

The next common problem is struggle in finding mistakes. After finishing the dictation learners check their texts to correct the mistakes and many of them skip some errors unintentionally. If students exchange their papers with each other, they can spot the incorrect words immediately. Because, their eyes and mind immediately get used to their own papers and handwriting, but with other students' work they explore and find more.

Variations of dictation

Dictation can be arranged in many ways to be more entertaining for learners.

Running dictation

The text should be posted on a wall, preferably outside of the classroom. If students are working in pairs, one would be the writer and the other is runner, The rule is that the runner goes to the wall, reads and remembers a sentence from the text to tell the writer. The writer also tries to write what he hears correctly. When the students are working in groups, students stay to hear and repeat the sentence to the next student. The first student goes to the text and reads one sentence from it and tells it to the second one, and then to the third and it goes on until the sentence reaches the writer. This activity has many goals, one of them being increasing teamwork as well as encouraging learners to improve their listening skills and memory.

Peer dictation

Peer dictation is solely based on idea of making the activity fully student-centered. Classes can work in groups, one of them reads the text and the others write it, they can also take turns in reading if possible. If worked in pairs this might be turned into competition. Pairs would have limited time, one reads and the other writes, when one of the pairs finish writing they shout 'Stop!' and the rest of the pairs should stop writng. So, the first finished pair would be the winner.

Completion dictation

Students get several copies of the text, in the first paper some words are missing, in the next more words are missing and it goes on in this order. The teacher reads the text while learners fill the gaps in the first copy, and then the text is read again for students to complete the next paper and so on. This continues until students write the whole dictation text. The previous filled papers must be folded before starting the next ones so that learners do not copy.

Discussion

This analysis shows that dictation remains one of the effective methods in language learning process. Since it combines several language skills at the same time it provides significant improvements for students. Learners actively pay attention to the read text, listen, process the information, repeat the words and write, they do not just memorize words.

Repetition and learner concentration are also important. In dictation activities students become more attentive to mostly pronunciation, punctuation and spelling. This states that dictation reveals students' gaps in their knowledge or language skills, while comparing their text to the original. Interactively adapted dictation activities set entertaining and effective classroom environment. Activities such as running dictation, peer dictation or completion dictation appear more motivating to the student and increasing cooperation skills and movement. Since students are working together and not focusing only on mistakes, they get less anxiety.

Previously mentioned findings stated that dictation also supports communicative language teaching. While dictation is also associated with traditional teaching methods, modern

approach to the activity increases cooperative activity skills and communication among students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, dictation remains an important part of foreign language learning, as it improves listening comprehension, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary acquisition and grammar awareness. Additionally, the modern approaches help to increase student motivation, as well as active participation. All in all, dictation cannot be avoided completely in the learning process. Instead, teachers should use the method in more interactive and balanced way to create an interesting learning environment in class. Moreover, various creative ways of dictation increase teamwork and focus during lessons.

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