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Good Quality Reading and Note Taking in the Classroom

Extended summary

The goal of this experimental research was to examine whether the quality of the research subjects' (experimental group) reading and note-taking skills can be improved by using specific learning strategies. Current teaching practice is mostly based on teachers' lectures, students' efforts to memorize the lesson content as much as possible by resorting to mechanical learning, followed by teachers' endeavours to determine how much their students have learnt and their final assessment of the students' knowledge. The direction of such communication in the classroom and the viability of this type of learning do not provide for students' real needs. Students are faced with their teachers' excessive requirements, they are under pressure by their parents, and they do not know how to apply more productive and economical learning techniques that would guarantee that the acquired knowledge is long lasting and functional. For this reason, the authors of the paper have tested experimentally whether it is possible to improve the reading skills and note-taking in everyday teaching. In this research, the experimental group (with parallel groups) worked on the lesson content using the strategies and techniques of successful learning. The classes were held in the form of workshops and pupils were using: mental images, cognitive mapping, distinguishing relevant facts from the irrelevant ones, and the associative technique. The usual, mostly traditional, teaching was carried out in the control group. By means of the experimental programme, the authors of the paper influenced the implementation of the learning strategies and pupils' active involvement in the

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class processes and dynamics. The results of the initial and final measurements, as well as the conclusions drawn from the obtained findings, are presented in the paper, and some questions for further discussion in the future research are also suggested. The authors look at two key questions formulated as hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that the subjects in the experimental group will be more successful in note taking than the subjects in the control group after the experimental programme has been implemented. The second hypothesis is that the subjects in the experimental group will demonstrate a statistically significant progress in terms of improved reading skills under the influence of the experimental programme. The research sample consisted of the primary school fifth-graders, more precisely, two classes of fifth-graders from two different primary schools. Ninety respondents participated in the initial research. The initial research was conducted at the beginning of the second term, while the final research was conducted at the end of the second term. The SUS – scaler learning strategy (in Suzić, 2005) was used as the research instrument. The authors selected only two subtests, while the scaler consists of five subtests with a total of 55 statements. Given that learning how to learn begins with good quality reading skills, followed by note-taking, the authors rightly focused on the findings obtained for these two segments of successful learning. The experimental programme provided significant findings from which we can conclude that it is possible to train and teach students to read better and to take notes. The two hypotheses (that the subjects in the experimental group will be more successful in note taking than the subjects in the control group after the experimental programme has been implemented, and the second hypothesis that the subjects in the experimental group will demonstrate a statistically significant progress in terms of improved reading skills under the influence of the experimental programme) have been confirmed. The important issues of developing students' competencies and of teacher-student relationship have also been raised and require further consideration. Another issue that needs to be tackled is how to teach students to “handle” information, which is certainly better than letting them memorize the content without understanding it. The findings show that it is important to know where the information is and how to get it, as well as how to “handle several pieces of information simultaneously”. Good reading skills, note taking, and identifying relevant information belong to the initial phase of any learning. Our students can master these skills easily, build entire learning strategies based on these skills, and, consequently, be more successful, while reaching all academic goals as well.

Keywords: learning how to learn, learning strategies, note taking, good quality reading.

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