

**SUMMARY WRITING PERFORMANCE
AND THE IMPACT OF INSTRUCTION:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY USING UPPER
INTERMEDIATE ESL STUDENTS**

BY

IMALI N. J. BOGAMUWA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the summary writing skills of 36 Sri Lankan upper intermediate ESL university students. The participants completed a pre-test summary task before they were taught summary writing in the Advanced Reading class of the Diploma in English Programme in the Open University of Sri Lanka. This was followed by a post-test summary after providing summarizing instruction. The pre-and post-test summaries were analyzed in terms of 1) quality of the summary: the number of main ideas presented in each summary and the appropriate length; 2) summarizing strategies used: copy verbatim, generalization of information in a single sentence, and combination of two main ideas in a single sentence; 3) the role of extra-textual information; and 4) the rhetorical structure followed by the students. In addition to this textual analysis of the summaries, the impact of instruction on summary writing was also examined by comparing the scores of the pre-and the post-test summaries. In the pre-test summary students had identified at least three main points, using approximately 69 words as an average number of words, and the level of quality was 0.046. In contrast, in their post-test summaries students had identified an average of 4 main points, utilizing an average of 65 words, and the level of quality of post-test summary had increased to 0.066. Thus, the majority of the students were able to depict higher number of main points in a fairly moderate number of words when they produced the post-test summaries. Although students had performed better in the post-test summaries than in the pre-test summaries, students had not fully developed their skills to identify all the main points included in the source text. Considering the application of summarizing strategies, the 'copy verbatim' strategy was employed least, while 'combination' strategy was utilized greatly. The 'generalization' strategy was also employed in the pre-test, as well as in the post-test. Students exploited more 'combination' and 'generalization' strategies while decreasing the usage of 'copy verbatim' strategy in the post-test. Hence, there is an improvement in the application of appropriate summarizing strategies after students were provided summarizing instruction. Most of the participants had not incorporated 'extra-

textual information' in their pre-test, as well as in their post-test summaries. Furthermore, none of the students had included 'extra-textual information' to 'a great extent' in their post-test summaries although a few of them utilized it in their pre-test summaries. There was a significant divergence between the 'rhetorical structure' followed by the students in their pre-test and post-test summaries. The majority of students had not followed the original structure of the source text in the pre-test summaries, whereas a majority of them had complied with the source text order in their post-test summaries. Consequently, a marked improvement was noticed in the post-test summary performance in all four major aspects considered for the current study. Therefore, these results stress the need for proper instruction in improving ESL learners' summary writing performance.