

---

***An Analysis of the Strategies used by ESL Students during Summary Writing***

***Imali Bogamuwa***  
***The Open University of Sri Lanka***

---

**ABSTRACT**

*The ability to summarize information is an essential skill at tertiary level since students frequently have to condense information from various texts in order to complete their assignments and assessments. Thus, it is very important for students to learn summarizing strategies which will help them to produce effective summaries efficiently.*

*The current study examines the summary writing skills of 36 Sri Lankan upper intermediate ESL university students focusing specially on their use of summarizing strategies. 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 summarizing strategies used in the pre-and post-test summaries were analyzed under three categories: copying verbatim, generalization of information in a single sentence, and combination of two main ideas in a single sentence. In addition to the basic analysis of the summarizing strategies used in the pre-and post-test summaries, the impact of instruction on summarizing strategies was also examined by comparing the scores of the pre-and the post-test summaries. The results showed that out of the application of summarizing strategies, the 'copying verbatim' strategy was employed least, while the '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 limiting the usage of the 'copying verbatim' strategy in the post-test. Hence, there is an improvement in the application of appropriate summarizing strategies after students were provided summarizing instruction. Consequently, a marked improvement was noticed in the post-test summary performance in the utilization of all three summarizing strategies considered for the current study. Therefore, these results highlight the need for proper instruction in improving ESL learners' use of summarizing strategies in their summary writing performance<sup>1</sup>.*

**Key Words: Summarizing, ESL, University Students**

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper forms part of the thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the MA in Teaching English as a Second Language at the Post Graduate Institute of English, Open University of Sri Lanka, Nawala, 2011.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bharuthram (2006) explains that "summarization is an important strategy that is essential in higher education as students are often expected to consult a variety of texts in order to complete assignments, supplement their lecture notes, or when studying for an examination" (p. 105). Further, she extends her opinion saying that when students lack efficient summary strategy, they tend to select some sentences to copy or paraphrase, while leaving out certain sentences which they do not understand. Then it becomes a process of selection rather than the synthesis of information.

Garner (1982) claims that "inclusions and omissions in summaries also tell us something about summarization skills" (p. 275), as what is included and what is omitted in a written summary of a student may reflect what has been understood and how far that student could remember the original text. It is a known fact that the ability to condense information correctly and efficiently is essential in other genres such as analytical and technical writing. Thus, Frey, Fisher, and Hernandez (2003) explain the purpose of a summary as being "to convey correct information in an efficient manner so that the reader learns the main idea and essential details through a piece that is much shorter than the original" (p. 43). Further, they point out that when students do not know proper summarizing strategies, they focus on minor details and may include their own opinion and experience, or copy entire sentences from the text. Therefore, it is clear that summarizing is an essential exercise for secondary and college students' as well as for university students "where it is seen as both a means for assessing student learning as well as a way to increase understanding of complex topics" (Frey et al., 2003, p. 43).

In general students are expected to know how to summarize as it has become one of the essential skills required to perform successfully in an academic environment. On the other hand, teachers may not like to instruct on summarization since they also may feel that it is boring to teach and find it tedious to assess the written summaries (Hill, 1991; Karbalaei & Rajyashree, 2010). Then again, many of the teachers may not be aware of the advantages of summarization for students or of effective methods of teaching summarization strategies. Consequently, many students may not receive proper instruction on summarization. Therefore, these investigators found that not only junior level students, but secondary, as well as tertiary level students need to be taught summarization strategy in order to enable them to write effective summaries (Karbalaei & Rajyashree, 2010).

The objective of this study is to provide further information on upper intermediate level university ESL students' summary writing performance in applying summarizing strategies, and on the impact of instruction on application of summarizing strategies in summary writing.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 *Theory on macro-processing and macro-rules: The key to producing the gist of a discourse***

Kintsch and van Dijk (1978) and van Dijk (1977) claim that during the process of comprehending, summarizing, and remembering source texts, we apply the following summarization rules which are referred to as macro-rules: *deletion* of unnecessary information; *generalization* of information; *integration* of information; and *construction* of information or summarization of a sequence of actions or events. Subsequently, Brown and Day (1983) expanded Kintsch and van Dijk's (1978) model of summarization rules by adding the invention rule where summary writers invent the topic sentence when it is not provided in the source text by the author.

With regard to theory on summarization strategies, it can be predicted that reading comprehension can be achieved by applying summarization strategies named macro-rules: deleting irrelevant information, combining related information and replacing sequences of information with higher level information, i.e., macro-propositions. At the same time, a summary can be produced by applying these macro-rules repeatedly. Therefore, the macro processing model provides guidelines for evaluating summary writing, while supporting understanding of the summarizing process. On the other hand, the theoretical framework of the model helps to understand the way a reader structures and comprehends the micro-structure as well as the macro-structure of a text.

Kintsch and van Dijk's (1978) summarization rules and Brown and Day's (1983) extended summarization rules were considered the base for most L1, as well as L2, summarization research in the field. In addition, many researchers have applied more comprehensive approaches in the analysis of sample summaries while considering the macro-rules as the theoretical background (Sarig, 1993; Palmer & Uso, 1998; Johns & Mayes, 1990; Frey et al., 2003; Garner, 1982, 1984; Taylor, 1982) Especially, Palmer and Uso's (1998) study based on a comparative product analysis utilized a multifaceted approach which considered more global aspects in summarization than in the classical approach. In that context, it provides the theoretical base for the current study as well.

The current study follows Kintsch and van Dijk's (1978) and Brown and Day's (1983) models of summarization rules as the theoretical background. Three basic summarizing strategies adapted from the study by Palmer and Uso (1998) were considered for the analysis of the sample summaries of the pre-and post-test. These three summarizing strategies are:

- copying verbatim
- generalization
- combination

## *2.2 Instruction in summarizing strategies*

Summary writing requires both reading as well as writing skills since reading comprehension is essential to identify important points in a text while good academic writing proficiency is needed to produce a concise, accurate summary of information. Consequently, summary writing may be more complex than it appears. Therefore, some researchers suggest that it is important to provide explicit teaching of summary writing since direct instruction helps to improve summary writing of students with learning difficulties (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Frey et al., 2003; Hare & Borchardt, 1984; Hill, 1991; Karbalaei & Rajyashree, 2010; Scott & Windsor, 2000; Wittrock, 1982).

Some researchers claim that summarization is a strategy which can be taught successfully to learners who experience difficulties with reading, although summarization is a complex, recursive reading-writing task (Alverman & Qian, 1994; Bharuthram, 2006; Cohen, 1993; Frey et al., 2003; Friend, 2001; Karbalaei & Rajyashree, 2001; Kirkland & Saunders, 1991; Palmer & Uso, 1998). Further, Kissner (2006) suggests that "the time spent on teaching summarizing strategies will only help our students to become more efficient, more effective learners" (p.3).

Alvermann and Phelps (1994) believe that summary writing is not an easy task, and that it should therefore be taught and that students should also be given long-term and continual practice till it becomes a reading strategy that can be used readily. Thus, it is obvious that summarizing is one of the hardest as well as most time consuming strategies for teachers to teach and for students to grasp.

It was observed that generally learners are asked to summarize the text but they are not given sufficient instruction to produce effective summaries (Cohen, 1993; Karbalaei & Rajyashree, 2010; Taylor, 1983). Karbalaei and Rajyashree (2010) point out that most of the research studies done on teaching summarization are based on the model of text comprehension developed by Brown and Day (1983) and Kintsch and van Dijk (1978). Further, they explain that "according to this model, the students are taught how and why to summarize and to understand that the component skills are essential comprehension operations" (Karbalaei & Rajyashree, 2010, p. 42). Moreover, Karbalaei and Rajyashree (2010) recommend that, "it is speculated that ESL readers need explicit instruction on global strategies to help them become effective readers" (p. 41).

The National Reading Panel (2002) recognizes summarization as a tool for improving reading comprehension. This view is supported by some other researchers (Brown et al., 1981; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Graham & Harris, 2005; Pressley & Block, 2002; Taylor, 1986) as well. Furthermore, the National Reading Panel (2002) explains that

*"instruction of summarization succeeds in that readers improve on the quality of their summaries of text, mainly identifying the main idea but also in leaving out detail, including ideas related to the main idea, generalizing, and removing redundancy. This indicates that summarizing is a good method of integrating ideas and generalizing from the text information" (p. 46).*

Accordingly, the effect of instruction on summarization is another area that researchers have focused on in their studies. In that context, some researchers have investigated the differences in the application of summarization rules and summary writing performance of students who were instructed and those who were not.

### **3. THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

Two major research questions: 'What are the strategies used by upper intermediate ESL students in L2 summary writing?' and 'To what extent does instruction affect summarizing strategies used by upper intermediate ESL students?' are addressed in this study. The hypotheses formulated were based on one general hypothesis: 'There is no significant difference between the means for the pre-test and the post-test groups'. Further, this research is concerned with null hypotheses and other possible outcomes in the form of alternative hypotheses.

### **4. METHODOLOGY**

The sample consisted of 36 first year diploma in English students from the open university of Sri Lanka. These students learn English as a second language (ESL) and their English proficiency level is upper intermediate. The participants completed a pre-test summary task before they were taught summary writing. This was followed by a post-test summary using the same source text after providing summarizing instruction. The test was based on Benchmark level 5 and these Benchmarks were designed to establish standards and uniformity of evaluation in English language competencies across the Sri Lankan university system. During the study, three teaching sessions with a duration of 03 hours were conducted by the regular teacher and were monitored and observed by the researcher. The researcher discussed with the teacher about the instruction on summary writing to be given in the reading class prior to the commencement of the teaching sessions. The

instructions were adapted from the list used by Palmer and Uso (1998) and these instructions were used throughout the teaching sessions according to their suitability.

The pre-and post-test summaries were analyzed in terms of summarizing strategies used: copying verbatim, generalization of information in a single sentence, and combination of two main ideas in a single sentence. In addition to the textual analysis of the summaries, the impact of instruction on summary writing was also examined by comparing the performance of the pre-and the post-test summaries. The marking criteria to evaluate the pre-and post-test summaries were designed by adopting the marking key used in the Improvement of Relevance and Quality of University Education (IRQUE) Project-Test of English Language Proficiency-2009. Two independent markers, including the researcher were involved in marking the pilot pre-and post-test scripts and the final marking of the scripts was done by the researcher herself while consulting the other marker who had more experience as an ESL practitioner. Both the markers had been trained to mark the summaries, i.e., the same summary at the conference marking sessions conducted by the Post Graduate Institute of English, OUSL under the IRQUE Project previously.

The data obtained were scrutinized quantitatively. *T test* was applied as the main technique in the inferential statistics analysis while utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for the data processing. A *Paired t-test* was applied to obtain *paired samples statistics* and *paired samples test*.

Basic summarizing strategies used by the students were categorized into three types: copying verbatim; generalization of information in a single sentence; and combination of two main ideas in a single sentence. Copying verbatim was tested against the use of own words or the competency of rewording. It was considered as copying verbatim when students had copied complete sentences from the source text. Frey et al. (2003) point out that as a result of an inability to convey precise information; students incorporate their own opinions, experiences, and minor details in summary writing while recopying entire sentences from the text. Kintsch and van Dijk (1978) describe 'generalization' as substitution of a super-ordinate term or an event for a list of actions or items. Accordingly, how students had applied 'generalization' as a strategy in their summaries was examined. When two main ideas were joined to produce one sentence it was considered as 'combination' strategy.

## **5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Firstly, the results will be presented based on descriptive statistics and secondly, on inferential statistics. Under descriptive statistical analysis, the results will be discussed specially in relation to research question one: What are the strategies used by upper

intermediate ESL students in L2 summary writing? Subsequently, under inferential statistical analysis, the results related to the hypotheses testing will be presented with special reference to research question two: To what extent does instruction affect summarizing strategies used by upper intermediate ESL students?

**5.1 What are the strategies used by upper intermediate ESL students in L2 summary writing?**

Three main strategies such as copying verbatim; combination of two main points and; generalization were considered as the summarizing strategies. In order to examine how students had utilized summarizing strategies, the number of times that the students had used the above strategies was counted.

a). Summarizing Strategies Used in the Pre-test Summaries

The following table shows the total number of usage of the summarizing strategies and their averages in the pre-test summaries.

Table 1: Use of Summarizing Strategies in the Pre-test Summaries

Summarizing Strategy	Total Usage	Average Usage
Copying verbatim	5	0.14
Combination	39	1.08
Generalization	20	0.56

According to table 1 students had employed the 'combination strategy' 39 (1.08) times as a strategy in their pre-test summaries. Only five (0.14) times had they used the 'copying verbatim strategy', whereas 20 (0.56) times 'generalization strategy' was employed. Thus, the highest average was reported from the 'combination strategy' in the pre-test summaries.

Next, table 2 presents the frequencies of usage of summarizing strategies and their percentages in the pre-test summaries.

Table 2: Frequencies of Use of Summarizing Strategies in the Pre-test Summaries

No. of Times Used	Frequency of Summarizing Strategy		
	Copying verbatim	Combination	Generalization
None	32 (88.9)	5 (13.9)	17 (47.2)
One	3 (8.3)	23 (63.9)	18 (50.0)
Two	1 (2.8)	8 (22.2)	1 (2.8)

Note: (%) percentages of frequencies of use of summarizing strategies are presented

As illustrated in table 2, 88.9% of the use of the 'copying verbatim strategy', comes under 'non use of copying verbatim' category. That is, most of the students had not employed 'copying verbatim' as a summarizing strategy in their pre-test summaries at all. On the other hand, the 'one combination' category has the highest frequency being 63.9%. In other words, more than 63% of the students had made use of at least 'one combination' as a summarizing strategy to present main points in their pre-test summaries. In the meantime, the 'two combination' category accounts for 22.2% of the overall usage of the combination strategy. Fifty percent of the use of the 'generalization strategy' stands for the 'one generalization' category, whereas 2.8% appears under the 'two generalization' category.

b) Summarizing Strategies Used in the Post-test Summaries

The following table shows the total usage of the summarizing strategies and the averages in the post-test.

Table 3: Use of Summarizing Strategies in the Post-test Summaries

Summarizing Strategy	Total Usage	Average Usage
Copying verbatim	1	0.03
Combination	50	1.39
Generalization	29	0.81

As depicted in table 3, the highest usage of summarizing strategies represents 'combination' (50), whereas the lowest represents 'copying verbatim' (1). Thus, 'combination' claims the highest average of 1.39, while average for 'copying verbatim' is 0.03. In the meantime, 'generalization strategy' was employed 29 times and its average value is 0.81.

Next, table 4 presents the frequencies of usage of summarizing strategies and their percentages in the post-test summaries.

Table 4: Frequencies of Use of Summarizing Strategies in the Post-test Summaries

No. of Times Used	Frequency of Summarizing Strategy		
	Copying verbatim	Combination	Generalization
None	35 (97.2)	2(5.6)	11 (30.6)
One	1(2.8)	19 (52.8)	21 (58.3)
Two	00 (0.0)	14 (38.9)	4 (11.1)

Note: (%) percentages of frequencies of use of summarizing strategies



Considering the outcome of the 'copying verbatim' strategy, 31 out of 36, that is 97.2% of the students had not utilized 'copying verbatim' at all as a strategy to present their main points in the post-test summaries. However, 2.8% of them had employed 'one copying verbatim' in their summaries. On the other hand, 52.8% and 38.9% had employed the 'one combination' and 'two combination' categories respectively in their post-test summaries. Only 2 (5.6%) students had not exploited 'combination' as a strategy in their post-test summaries. Moreover, 58.3% and 11.1% had used the 'one generalization' and 'two generalization' categories respectively in their post-test summaries. Nevertheless, 30.6% of the students had not exploited 'generalization' as a strategy in their post-test summaries.

### **5.2** *To what extent does instruction affect summarizing strategies used by upper intermediate ESL students?*

In this question, whether students had improved the use of two summarizing strategies: combination, and generalization while reducing the utilization of the copying verbatim strategy after they were provided instructions was investigated. The Means of each of these strategies will be compared as used in the pre-and the post-test summaries. Since three summarizing strategies were examined; there are three sub hypotheses which appear under the main hypothesis shown below:

#### *Main Hypotheses:*

- H<sub>0</sub> - There is no significant difference between the means for the use of summarizing strategies in the pre-test and post-test groups.
- H<sub>1</sub> - The mean for the use of summarizing strategies in the post-test group is significantly different from that of the pre-test group.

#### *Sub Hypotheses I:*

- H<sub>0</sub>- There is no significant difference between the means for the use of the copying verbatim strategy in the pre-test and post-test groups.
- H<sub>1</sub> - The mean for the use of the copying verbatim strategy in the post-test group is significantly different from that of the pre-test group.

**Sub Hypotheses II:**

H<sub>0</sub> - There is no significant difference between the means for the use of the combination strategy in the pre-test and post-test groups.

H<sub>1</sub> - The mean for the use of the combination strategy in the post-test group is significantly different from that of the pre-test group.

**Sub Hypotheses III:**

H<sub>0</sub> - There is no significant difference between the means for the use of the generalization strategy in the pre-test and post-test groups.

H<sub>1</sub> - The mean for the use of the generalization strategy in the post-test group is significantly different from that of the pre-test group.

Figure 1 displays how participants had employed the 'copying verbatim' strategy in their summaries. The majority of the students had not utilized the 'copying verbatim' strategy in their pre-test, as well as in post-test summaries. However, on 2.8% of the occasions the 'copying verbatim' was employed twice, whereas none of the students had utilized this strategy twice in their post-test summaries. Moreover, on 8.3% of the occasions the 'copying verbatim' was employed once in the pre-test, whereas it is seen only 2.8% in the post-test. Thus, it shows that there were more frequencies of the use of the 'copying verbatim' strategy in the pre-test, than in the post-test summaries.

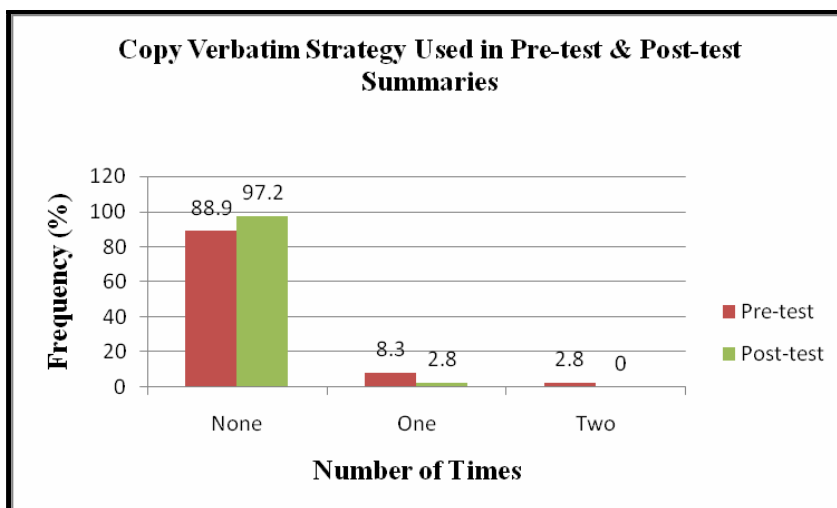


Figure 1: The Copying verbatim Strategy Used in the Pre-and Post-test Summaries

Next, tables 5 and 6 illustrate the *means* as well as the *paired differences* of the use of the 'copying verbatim' strategy in the pre-and post-test summaries.

As depicted in the paired sample statistics Table 5, the mean for the use of the 'copying verbatim' strategy in the post-test is lower than in the pre-test. That is, the students had employed the copying verbatim strategy more in the pre-test summaries (.14) than in the post-test summaries (.03).

Table 5: Paired Samples Statistics of Copying verbatim Used in the Pre-and Post-test Summaries

Copying verbatim Used	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	.14	36	.424	.071
Post-test	.03	36	.167	.028

The standard deviation and error means of the pre-test and the post-test as demonstrated in table 6, also predicts that the distribution of the use of the copying verbatim in the pre-test is relatively heterogeneous. On the other hand, the mean difference is not very significant since it is very small (.111).

Table 6: Paired Samples Test of Copying verbatim Used in the Pre-and Post-test Summaries

Paired Differences	Mean	.111
	Std. Deviation	.465
	Std. Error Mean	.077
95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower	-.046
	Upper	.268
T		1.435
Df		35
Sig. (2-tailed)		.160

However, the *p-value* is  $.160 > .05$  ( $\alpha$ ). That is, the *p value* is greater than the level of error ( $\alpha$ ). Thus, the *p-value* is not small enough to reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) of sub hypothesis I. Consequently, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) of sub hypothesis I is not rejected.

Figure 2 illustrates how students employed 'combination' strategy in their pre-and post-test summaries.

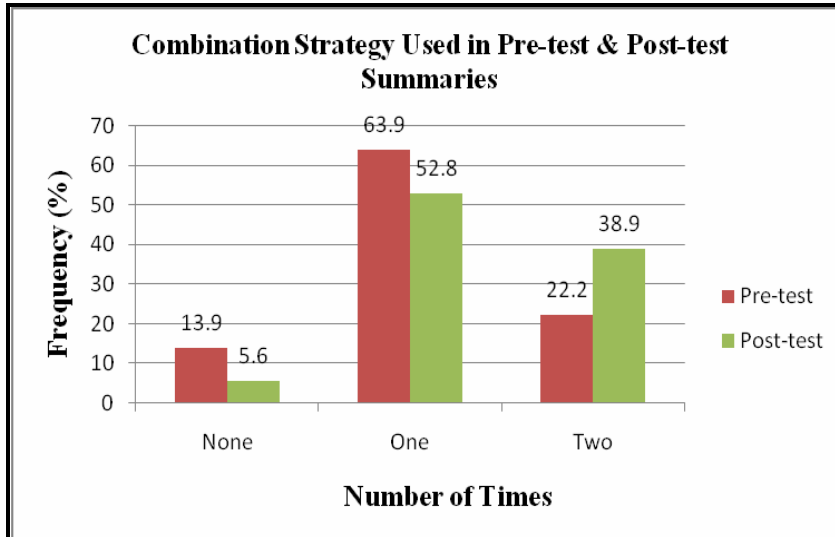


Figure 2: The Combination Strategy Used in the Pre-and Post-test Summaries

The highest frequency of application of the 'combination' strategy is represented by 'one combination' category in the pre-test as well as in the post-test summaries, i.e., 63.9% and 52.8% respectively. This implies that application of the 'two combination' strategy in the post-test represents 38.9%, whereas it represents only 22.2% in the pre-test. That is, application of the 'two combination' strategy has a higher frequency in the post-test than in the pre-test. Moreover, there is a higher frequency of 'non' use of the 'combination' strategy in the pre-test than in the post-test. That is, there were more students who had not employed the 'combination' strategy in their pre-test summaries at all than in their post-test summaries. Finally, it is deduced that students had improved application of the 'combination' strategy when they produced post-test summaries.

Table 7 shows the paired samples statistics while table 5 depicts the paired differences of the combination strategy used in the pre-and post-test summaries.

Table 7: Paired Samples Statistics of the Combination Strategy Used in the Pre-and Post-test Summaries

Combination Strategy Used	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	1.08	36	.604	.101
Post-test	1.39	36	.645	.107

According to Table 7, the *mean value* of the use of the 'combination' strategy in the pre-test is 1.08, while it is 1.39 in the post-test. However, the *standard deviation* of the post-test (.645) and *standard error mean* (.107) are higher than in the pre-test (.101 and .107). That is, the data distribution in the post-test is relatively heterogeneous than in the pre-test.

As Table 8 depicts, the *p-value* of the paired samples test of the 'combination' strategy used in the pre-and post-test summaries is  $.014 < .05$  ( $\alpha$ ). The null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) of sub hypothesis II can, therefore, be rejected.

Table 8: Paired Samples Test of the Combination Strategy Used in the Pre-and Post-test Summaries

Paired Differences	Mean	-.306
	Std. Deviation	.710
	Std. Error Mean	.118
	95% Confidence Interval of Lower the Difference	-.546
	Upper	-.065
T		-2.582
Df		35
Sig. (2-tailed)		.014

Figure 3, shows the highest frequency of application of the 'generalization' strategy represented by the 'one generalization' category in the pre-test, as well as in the post-test summaries, i.e., 50% and 58.3% respectively. However, there are more students who did not employ the 'generalization' strategy in their pre-test summaries than in their post-test summaries. Furthermore, 11.1% represents the 'two generalization' category in the post-test, whereas only 2.8% represents the pre-test. Therefore, the inference is that, the application of the 'generalization' strategy in the post-test summaries had increased.

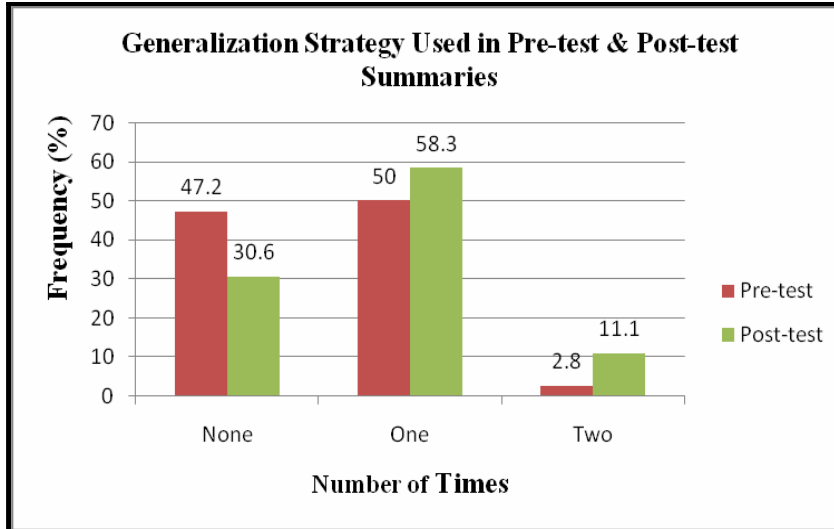


Figure 3: The Generalization Strategy Used in the Pre-and Post-test Summaries

Next, Table 9 and Table 10 illustrate paired samples statistics data and the paired differences of the 'generalization' strategy used in the pre-and post-test summaries.

Table 9: Paired Samples Statistics of the Generalization Strategy Used in the Pre-and Post-test Summaries

Generalization	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	.56	36	.558	.093
Post-test	.81	36	.624	.104

Table 10: Paired Samples Test of the Generalization Strategy Used in the Pre-and Post-test Summaries

Paired Differences	Mean	-2.250
	Std. Deviation	.732
	Std. Error Mean	.122
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower: -.498 Upper: -.002
T		-2.049
Df		35
Sig. (2-tailed)		.048

As depicted in table 9, the mean value of the use of the generalization strategy in the post-test (.81) is higher than in the pre-test (.56). On the other hand, the standard deviation of post-test (.624) is also higher than in the pre-test (.558). That is, the data distribution in the post-test is relatively more heterogeneous than in the pre-test. Moreover, the *p-value* is  $.048 < .05$  ( $\alpha$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) of sub Hypothesis III can also be rejected. Consequently, the results suggest that the null hypothesis of the main hypothesis can also be rejected

## 6. CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicated that instruction had a positive impact on the use of all three summarizing strategies. Thus, the number of students who used the 'copying verbatim' strategy was reduced when they produced their post-test summaries which showed the positive impact of instruction. Therefore, the inference is that the application of the 'generalization' and 'combination' strategies had improved while reducing the application of the 'copying verbatim' strategy up to a certain extent when students produced their post-test summaries.

These findings support Ratwatte's (2006) study on 'summary writing', where she found that Sri Lankan secondary level ESL students had difficulties in application of the 'combination' strategy as well as the 'generalization' strategy. She stressed the requirement of providing explicit instruction in improving the application of these strategies. Furthermore, the outcome of the application of the summarizing strategies in the current study also shows a developmental continuum of summarization strategies as found by Brown and Day (1983) and Winograd (1984) in their studies. The students performed better in application of the 'combination' strategy than the 'generalization' strategy in the pre-and post-test summaries. However, there was an improvement in the exploitation of both these two strategies in the post-test summaries showing that 'generalization' is a strategy used by learners when they become more experienced summary writers. Brown, Day and Jones (1983) also found that more mature writers were more skillful in selecting more important information and using combinations of information from the source text than less mature writers.

Considering the results of the Paired Samples Statistics on the use of the summarizing strategies, the *mean* of the use of the 'copying verbatim' strategy in the pre-test is 0.14 against 0.03 in the post-test. In fact, the majority of the students had not copied the full sentences from the source text when they produced their pre-test, as well as post-test summaries. Furthermore, none of the students had employed the 'copying verbatim' twice in the post-test summaries, whereas they had utilized this strategy five times in the pre-test summaries. Thus, it can be noticed that the usage of the 'copying verbatim' had been

reduced to some extent when students performed the post-test after they were provided instruction on summary writing. Conversely, students had exploited the 'combination' strategy in both pre-and post-test summaries. The mean for the application of the 'combination' strategy in the post-test (1.39) is higher than in the pre-test (1.08). That is, there were more occasions where students had joined two main ideas to produce one sentence in the post-test summaries, although statistically, the differences are not so significant. The results of Palmer and Uso's (1998) study showed that the students who received instruction on summarization had made the effort to use their own words while generalizing information and utilizing the 'combination' strategy in order to create shorter, more concise texts, despite their lower L2 proficiency level. Moreover, the majority of the students had used 'generalization' as a summarizing strategy in their pre-test, as well as post-test summaries. Nevertheless, the *mean* for the use of 'generalization' strategy in the post-test (0.81) was higher than it was in the pre-test (0.56). Consequently, it confirms once again that the students had improved the application of the 'generalization' strategy in their post-test up to some degree after they received summarizing instructions.

When considering the overall results of the current study, the summarizing strategies used by the ESL students, the 'copying verbatim' strategy was employed least, while the 'combination' strategy was utilized greatly. Then, the 'generalization' strategy was also employed in the pre-test, as well as in the post-test summaries. Moreover, usage of the 'combination' and 'generalization' strategies, the number of times these strategies were utilized increased in the post-test than in the pre-test, while the usage of 'copying verbatim' strategy decreased in the post-test. Hence, some of these strategies must be more cognitively demanding than others. Hidi and Anderson (1986) claim that, specially 'generalization' and 'combination' strategies require more cognitive power in the process of summarization. According to the results of the summarizing strategies used, it is observed that, it is possible to improve the utilization of summarizing strategies by providing instruction to ESL students.

The results of the current study provide information on upper intermediate ESL students' summarizing performance in terms of summarizing strategies. Thus, the outcome of this study facilitates the understanding of the nature of upper intermediate ESL students' performance of summary writing and the application of summarizing strategies. Furthermore, these results help ESL practitioners to gain a better understanding of the difficulties ESL students face when they apply summarizing strategies in their summary writing. Consequently, ESL teachers can adapt their teaching methods according to the necessity of the students in providing summarization instruction. Since summarization is one of the essential skills that involve both reading and writing, ESL practitioners can become more aware of the difficulties faced by the students in summary writing. Accordingly, it may help to develop students' reading and writing skills both through



proper application of summarizing strategies in summarization.

Furthermore, this study provides future researchers a means of analyzing ESL students' summary writing performance in terms of using summarizing strategies and use of language. Additionally, the current study points out that the major aspects of summary writing can be improved by providing summarizing instruction to ESL students. Moreover, since there is a lack of research on summary writing in Sri Lanka, the outcome of this study may help Sri Lankan ESL practitioners to adapt their teaching techniques and evaluation criteria more effectively and efficiently.

## REFERENCES

- Alvermann, D., & Phelps, S. F. (1994). *Content reading and literacy. Succeeding in today's diverse classroom* (2nd Ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Alvermann, D., & Qian, G. (1994). Perspectives on secondary school reading: Implications for instruction. *Reading and Writing Quarterly: Overcoming learning difficulties*, 10(2), 21-38.
- Bharuthram, S. (2006). Developing reading strategies in higher education through the use of integrated reading/writing activities: A study at a University of Technology in South Africa. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kwazulu-Natal, 2006).
- Brown, A. L., & Day, J. D. (1983). Macrorules for summarizing texts: The development of expertise. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behaviour*, 22(1), 1-4.
- Brown, A. L., Day, J. D., & Jones, R. S. (1983). The development of plans for summarizing texts. *Child Development*, 54(4), 968-979.
- Cohen, A. D. (1993). The role of instruction in testing summary ability. In D. Douglas, & C. Chapelle (Eds.), *A new decade of language testing: Collaboration and cooperation* (pp. 132-160). Alexandria, VA: TESOL.
- Dole, J. A., Duffy, G.G., Roehler, L. R., & Pearson, P. D. (1991). Moving from the old to the new: Research on reading comprehension instruction. *Review of Educational Research*, 61, 239-264.
- Duke, N. K., & Pearson, D. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In A. E. Farstrup, & J. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp. 205-242). Delaware: IRA.
- Frey, N., Fisher, D., & Hernandez, T. (2003). What is the gist? Summary writing for struggling adolescent writers. *Voices from the Middle*, 11(2), 43-49.
- Friend, R. (2001). Effects of strategy instruction on summary writing of college students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 26(1), 3-24.
- Garner, R. (1982). Efficient text summarization: Costs and benefits. *Journal of Educational Research*, 75(5), 275-279.
- Garner, R. (1984). Rules for summarizing texts: Is classroom instruction being provided? *Journal of Educational Research*, 77(5), 305-308.
- Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2005). Improving the writing performance of young struggling writers: Theoretical and programmatic research from the centre on accelerating student learning. *The Journal of Special Education*, 39(1), 19-33.
- Hare, V. C., & Borchardt, K. M. (1984). Direct instruction of summarization skills. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 21(1), 62-78.
- Hill, M. (1991). Writing summaries promotes thinking and learning across the curriculum-but why are they so difficult to write? *Journal of Reading*, 34, 536-539.

- Johns, A. M., & Mayes, P. (1990). An analysis of summary protocols of university ESL students. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 253-271.
- Karbalaei, A., & Rajyashree, K. S. (2010). The impact of summarization strategy on university ESL learners' reading comprehension. *The International Journal of Language Society and Culture*, 30, 41-53.
- Kintsch, W., & Van Dijk, T. A. (1978, September). Toward a model of text comprehension and production. *Psychological Review*, 85(5): 363-394.
- Kirkland, M. R., & Saunders, M. A. P. (1991). Maximizing student performance in summary writing: Managing the cognitive load. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(1), 105-121.
- Kissner, E. (2006). *Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Retelling: Skills for Better Reading, Writing, and Test Taking*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- National Reading Panel. (2002). Chapter 4: Comprehension. In Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read. An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: Report of the sub groups. (pp. 4-1-4-133) Bethesda, MD: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.
- Palmer, J. C., & Uso, E. (1998). A product-focused approach to text summarization. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 4(1). Retrieved August 21, 2009, from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Juan-TextSummary.html>
- Pressley, M., & Block, C. C. (2002). Summing up: What comprehension instruction could be. In C. C. Block, & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Comprehension instruction: Research-based best practices* (pp. 383-392). New York: Guilford.
- Ratwatte, H. V. (2006, September). *Summary writing-What teachers teach and learners learn*. Presented at the SLELTA Academic Presentation, Colombo, Methodist College.
- Sarig, G. (1993). Composing a study-summary: A reading-writing encounter. In J. G. Carson, & I. Leki (Eds.), *Reading in the composition classroom: Second language perspectives*. (pp. 161-182) Massachusetts: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Scott, C. M., & Windsor, J. (2000). General language proficiency measures in spoken and written narrative and expository discourse of school-age children with language learning disabilities. *Journal of speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 43, 324-339.
- Taylor, B. M. (1982). A summarizing strategy to improve middle grade students' reading and writing skills. *Reading Teacher*, 36(2), 202-205.
- Van Dijk, T. A., & Kintsch, W. (1983). *Strategies of Discourse Comprehension*. New York: Academic Press.
- Winograd, P. N. (1984). Strategic difficulties in summarizing texts. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 19(4), 404-425.
- Wittrock, M. C. (1982). Three studies of generative reading comprehension. In J. A. Nile, & L. A. Harris (Eds.), *New Inquiries in Reading Research and Instruction. Thirty-first Yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 85-88). Virginia: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.