
Supportive Strategies in Teaching Summary Writing to Secondary Level ESL/EFL Learners

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Abstract:

The entire aim of writing this paper is to discuss and explore the effectiveness of various supporting strategies/ techniques in order to teach summary writing to secondary school students. As we know that English has gained a global position in terms of its usage therefore, the teaching methodology should also be simplified. In English language teaching, writing is considered as the toughest and hardest skill to overcome, as it is not an easy skill that could be learned without much practice and effort. Similarly, writing a summary is also a challenging task in written communication. A summary expresses an idea, feeling and opinion in writing, but in a concise form. Students are often confused as it is a hard task for them to write a summary of a given text in the class at high school level. They find teacher as an absolute and ultimate source to lead them to follow the path of summary writing. A teacher can provide them simple and easy strategies/techniques for summary writing. A teacher can introduce them different supportive, simple strategies to write a good summary e.g. 1. He may give his students a short text to read silently, 2. Teacher can explain an organizer for summarizing a text, 3. He can ask the students to make points for summary writing in their own words seeking help from the text and from the organizer, 4. Finally they can produce a summary with the help of these points. We can conclude that simple, clear and easy strategies /techniques in summary writing can help the students in improving their writing. These strategies may also prove helpful for teachers in the teaching of writing a summary effectively and efficiently.

Keywords: summary, strategies, communication, organizer.

1. Introduction

Today over seven thousand languages prevail the globe and hardly we find a language other than English that has gained the status of global lingua franca. It's only English language that has emerged as the preferred language for global communication. Importance of this language can't be undermined as it has become a common language for education too. New techniques and materials are being brought in practice to learn this global language across the globe. Various techniques and strategies are adopted to learn and adopt the language skills: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. Learners of English language encounter lots of difficulties and problems to overcome the challenges of learning this language and acquiring the proficiency in communication. They need to have authentic communication skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking to encounter the emerging global use of the global language for their diverse needs. Therefore, writing is a productive skill and it needs a lot of practice to acquire authentic communication.

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English as an International language, has developed rapidly. Currently, in Pakistan, it is being taught as one of the compulsory subjects from Primary School until bachelors' level, in public as well as private institutions. As a main and compulsory subject at school, English is expected to be mastered by students as it would continue as a compulsory subject until bachelors. Under these circumstances the foundation of English language becomes essential to overcome the English language challenges that would come across to students in the higher studies. The importance of English is recognized worldwide as English is the language of international communication in all areas, such as politics, science, media and art additionally being the language of entertainment as well as socializing. Having a good command of English helps us to have more opportunities in life, first of all, our career. That is why, English is taught and used as a second language at school and university level in Pakistan. Nonetheless, the issue of teaching methodology/approach according to its effectiveness in the classroom still remains unsettled. How to improve students' writing and speaking skills at middle and high school level? How to improve students' reading and listening skills at high school level? Such questions are yet to be addressed effectively.

It is also noteworthy that free-writing tasks are more complicated and challenging for English learners too. For many secondary school students, writing is considered as a daunting task and it needs careful planning and more information about the subject matter. The failure to write coherently and cohesively is a result of the students' inability to sequence the events chronologically and logically. It is quite impossible to have good learners gaining knowledge without offering them the sufficient opportunities of writing practice. Once they start practicing writing then they would be able to produce paragraphs, short essays and ultimately would write summaries of the texts too. As stated by Lukman (2007: 3), writing is a process of communicating concepts or opinions in words. Therefore, teaching writing is an important activity in language teaching and its aim is to enable students to write in English. A summary text is *an overview of another source*. It is shorter than the original source and only focuses on specific ideas. Writing a summary, means *giving a concise overview of a text's main points in your own words*. As far as summary writing is concerned, it is a complex as well as a difficult task in the process of writing and when it comes to secondary/high school level students it becomes more challenging. It remains provocative for teachers as well in terms of making their students able to produce a good summary at high school level. Summary writing needs controlled strategies to be followed to produce better results.

2. Summary Writing is a part of Writing Skill

2.1. Significance of Writing Skill in language

Writing is a productive skill because students are required to express their thoughts which spring from their cognizance. Secondary/High school students first need to learn the basic structure of sentence formation, leading them toward writing short paragraphs in which they are able to express their own ideas in their own words. Thereupon, *summary writing* can be taught through teaching *paragraph writing* so that students know what to include and what to exclude when they *summarize*. As per Purwanti (2013: 02), writing is one of basic skills in the language. In addition, other skills of language are listening, speaking and reading. The four skills support each other as for writing a summary a student needs to comprehend the text first. It means he should be able to read the text and understand that. Therefore, if you want to acquire a language we have to learn the four skills well. Writing is a productive skill. Teaching writing also helps the learners to have much vocabulary and understand about grammar. Dealing with writing, students are expected to be able to express ideas, feelings and opinions in writing form. At next stage, these skills of expression in English become very supportive towards writing summaries of the given texts.

It has also been noted that EFL/ESL learners at high school level hardly find writing English paragraphs and essays easy. The problem of students' such inability to produce logical and organized texts in written form has been pointed out in many past studies. High school students suffered a lot and are still suffering from the problem of expressing their ideas, opinions, thoughts and feelings in a coherent and cohesive way when they come to write any piece of writing. L.G. Alexander (1967:34)

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claimed that many students are plunged into a composition work long before they are ready for it. The teacher may decide that it is the time his/her students attempt to write a composition, so he/she sets a short narrative or descriptive piece and hopes for the best. This is a random, hit or – miss method which creates enormous remedial problem and produces disastrous results.

2.2. Writing is a paramount means of communication

Writing skill is considered as a paramount tool of communication through which individuals can express their ideas, opinions, suggestions, demands and basic needs. Writing is one of the basic tools of civilization, without it the world could not exist. Many English language learners face difficulties when writing because writing is a process that needs more information and better planning about the subject matter.

2.3. Practice and drills in Writing

Sufficient opportunities and drills of practicing writing are required to produce good learners with the power of good writing skills. According to many observations and results mentioned in the past studies, it has been concluded that learners at middle, high and upper secondary level find writing as a tedious, hard and a formidable task. In learning foreign language, it is obvious that written skills need exhaustive and extensive efforts and dedication to master it. As mentioned by Widdowson, H.G. (1995) writing is a much slower process than either speaking or reading. In writing free composition, a learner has to make up his own thoughts. That's why he needs to practice it time and again to produce his thoughts in writing.

2.4. Role of Vocabulary in Writing

Vocabulary is an essential component for English learners to resort on, specifically when they practice any type of writing skills. Vocabulary makes the learners able to think and select the proper and suitable words for the production of sentences either in paragraph writing or summary production. Role of vocabulary always remains crucial and important in terms of writing or speaking a language. A person can't write clearly and accurately unless he/she has built up a vocabulary of words to express the things. He/she feels or thinks, so having a considerable stock of words helps the learner to learn in a fast way, and write easily without any difficulties. People who don't read regularly suffer a lot whenever they speak or write. They often complain by saying that I know what I mean but I can't put it into words, they may find that some works of professional writers are too hard to understand. Their major problem in both reading and writing is because of an inadequate vocabulary.

2.5. Necessity of Mastering Grammar

Likewise vocabulary, grammar is also very much needed at the high school for the sake of producing paragraphs, shorter texts, summaries etc. They should know different models and patterns of sentences in terms of tenses and verb, noun, subject, object usage and agreement. It has been observed that grammar has always been acknowledged as one of the most significant components of the target language in writings skill. The students of secondary school/high school level are expected to exert more efforts in learning grammatical patterns and rules. English language teachers are stressed to make their students aware of the proper usage of grammar and sentence structure at this level too.

2.6. Needs controlled, cohesive and coherent activities

Writing skill can be best developed through carefully well-ordered, well organized, controlled and rated comprehension exercises. Summary writing is also a very useful technique in improving and developing students' written skills. It can be used effectively to develop students writing ability. Cohesion according to Widdowson, H.G. (1995) means the methods in which the components of the surface text are there e.g. the real words people hear or see are mutually connected within a sequence. Coherence Widdowson (1978:1) defines it as the ways in which the components of the textual words, e.g. the configuration of concepts and relations which underlie the surface text, are mutually accessible and relevant.

According to Zultia, Mira. 2013, it is described that teaching writing needs thoughtfulness, which includes the organization of ideas into a coherent piece of discourse. Coherence means the way to combine or join sentences into paragraph. In teaching writing there are several points that the teacher

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should make during the process of writing. Firstly, students should have ideas to be communicated to the readers. Secondly, students should have a clear purpose that why they are writing. Teaching writing has begun to move away from concentration on the written product to emphasis on the process of writing.

3. Summary Writing

3.1 Definition of Summary

A summary is an abridged and specific version of the provided text which outlines the main points of the lengthier version. A summary offers a complete picture of the major ideas made in the original text, and becomes shorter from the basic text. The most important point to keep in mind before writing a summary is to be precise without copying the wholesome original text, but originate simply the core ideas in your own words stated in the text.

According to another definition a summary is a shortened and precise text which outlines the main points of a longer text. It should provide a comprehensive version of the significant points made in the original text, thus saving much time for the reader. Summaries should be clear, self-contained and accurate to both: the original message and the order of information presented.

Chow (2012: 36) states that summary writing has been considered a vital feature of academic writing. However, writing summaries can be a challenging task for the majority of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The best way to demonstrate our comprehension of the information and the ideas in any piece of writing is to write an accurate and clear summary of the piece.

Leo (2007:154) states that summary is a short text that gives only the main points of something, not the details. To summarize, we have to compress the information into the least possible sentences. The summary will reflect the order in which these points are presented and the emphasis is given to them. It may include some important examples from the passage. But it will not include minor details. Principally, summary is re-writing of the content of a text by using our own words briefly. But it doesn't contain any of the writers' own opinions and conclusions because a good summary is brevity, completeness and objective.

3.2 The Objectives of Making Summary

Bauer-Ramazani (2006:1) states that the target objective of a summary is to give a reader a reduced and impartial version of the main ideas and features of a text. Usually, a summary has between one and three paragraphs or 100-300 words, depending on the length and complexity of the original text and your purpose. Sometimes, a summary is just one or two sentences. Again, it depends on your purpose. A summary of an article is a précis of ideas and information, so you cannot include every detail. The best way to prepare to write a summary is to mark a photocopied article or essay, underlining key words, numbering main ideas in a series, and making notes for yourself in the margins. Then isolate each important point including its key supporting points and make a list.

3.3 Necessities of Making Summary

Requirements to write a summary can be divided into several points. Swales and feak (2012: 189) states that a good summary has three principal requirements:

1. It should be focused on the aspects of the source text or texts that are relevant for your purpose.
2. It should represent the source material in accurate fashion.
3. It should condense the source material and be presented in your own words.

Summaries that consist of directly copied portions of the original text, rarely succeed. Such a summary may suggest that you can find potentially important information but will likely fail to reveal the extent to which you have understood it.

3.4 Measures for Making Summary

Concerning important points of making summary that guidelines for writing a summary are as the following: The guidelines for making summary in teaching writing activities are as the following:

1. Only the main points and supporting points of the original text are stated.
2. Different words can be used rather than always using the same words as in the original
3. The summary must be accurate. Make sure that the original ideas are not changed.

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4. The information should be restated briefly or it must be much briefer than the original.
5. Repetition should be avoided.
6. Quotations from texts can be avoided.
7. A summary is not an analysis.

3.5 Teaching Approaches for Making Summary

To write a good summary, the writer needs to recognize the main points of the passage and restate them in his/her own words. Here are some strategies of making summary:

1. Ask the students to read the passage once and then ask them to try stating the points of the passage in single sentences.
2. Ask the students to read the passage again and ask them if their statements about author's main assertion have made a sense.
3. Ask students to go through the passage, paragraph by paragraph. For each paragraph ask them to give the main point in a sentence or two. Ask the students to ensure that their written points don't any unbalanced or abrupt sentences.

3.6 Different Steps of Easy Technique to write Summary

According to Leo (2007: 157), the alternative steps of easy technique of summary as the following:

1. Read the text or article, at a quick pace.
2. Read the text through a second time quickly (skim reading) to find two things; the controlling idea and the subtopics (supporting ideas).
3. Decide what is essential and leave out the non- essential parts.
4. Stop reading each time you find a difficult word or phrase.
5. Guess the meaning of unknown words in context and consult their meanings in a dictionary if needed.
6. Understand every single word.
7. Understand all the details and the ideas.
8. Underline or highlight the key words or phrases.
9. Memorize every piece of detailed information.
10. Use your own words to write the summary.
11. Write a summary which is as long as the version of the original text.

3.6.1 Activities Implementing Supportive Techniques to write a Summary

1. Pre – Teaching Activities

There are several alternative activities of teaching by using reading text as pre teaching activities in the classroom. Here is an example of the same activities:

1. Prepare a text and ask the students to read it silently.
2. Do silent reading and conduct an open discussion about the main point of the text.
3. Ask the students to underline the key idea words in the text.
4. Write all the proposed ideas and points on the board.
5. Then, ask them to make an outline of the text before making a summary
6. Ask the class to expand the ideas on the board in order to form summary. During the expansion stage it is recommended to ask the students to close their books to avoid any copying attempts. Similarly more Pre – Teaching Activities can be followed.

2. During Teaching Activity

During teaching activity, the writer makes graphic organizer for the students. Graphic organizers help students see how ideas relate to each other, helping suggest which information is important, or which details to concentrate on. Graphic organizers are great tools for arranging information in preparation for writing an essay. While teaching activity, teacher asks the students to make a summary based upon the teaching activity mentioned above.

1. Prepare reading text with some questions related to the main points of the text.
2. Ask the students to read the text silently.
3. Ask the students to find the answers to the questions.

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4. Once the students finish answering all the questions, the teacher asks the students to expand the answers in order to form a summary.

The writer expanded the above graphic organizer below anchor chart to introduce this strategy to the students and to really drive home the ideas of summarizing fiction. According to Wormeli (2005: 20-21), this strategy helps students understand the various plot elements of conflict and resolution. Either during reading or after reading, students complete a chart that identifies a character, the character's goals or motivation, problems that the character faced, and how the character resolved (or failed to resolve) those problems. This strategy helps students generalize and recognize cause and effect relationships, and find main ideas.

3. Post Teaching Activity

After the students finish writing the summary, the teachers should evaluate activities as follows:

1. The teacher gives an assignment derived from the text and the summary made by students.
 2. The students work in pairs or small groups to make a summary.
 3. First, write the opening summary sentence. Next, add one or two important facts or details about the article or book. Finally, include transition words, or linking words.
 4. The students are free to use different words in making the summary, but the objective of the topic from the text may not be different.
 5. Teacher needs to encourage his students for the completion of the assigned task of summary writing from time to time.
 6. The teachers should give enough time to the students to present the result of discussion in the classroom.
 7. The teacher corrects the students' summary along with his feedback.
- Bear in mind these three strategic points while finally producing a summary:
- a. Write down main points of the original text: This restates the main points the author conveyed.
 - b. Supporting arguments: List the arguments that support the author's thesis or main idea.
 - c. Final point: Conclude your summary with the final point from the author.

4. Conclusion

Established on the former discussion, a simple conclusion can be drawn that, summary writing process may be one substitute procedure in teaching writing activity to improve students' writing skills. In teaching writing activity through summarizing reading text the students have to learn how to get particular information from reading text to make summary.

In the procedures of making summary, students should deal with some features such as ability to find main points of the passage, supporting points, and leaving out the less important details and to get the specific ideas or the important ideas from the reading text. In addition, the students should also be able to reiterate the main points of the reading text into a summary in their own words, without abolishing the inventive meaning text. In other words, making summary from reading text is one of the substitute techniques to teach writing. Through making summary, the students may have chance to practice their capability toward the comprehension of the text in order to improve their reading comprehension as well as writing skills. In this case teachers should provide enough practice of writing to his students to get perfect results in summary writing.

The prime role of the teacher in English language teaching classroom at a secondary level would pave path toward writing summaries of the shorter texts at high/secondary school level, where learners are made to follow the teacher. The current paper suggests some very useful strategies for teaching summary writing in English for high school learners. The teachers may find these strategies valuable in teaching summary writing to their students. These techniques will be beneficial in developing the language competence in (ELT) classroom in terms of summary writing. The communicative competence in writing of the learners at high school will be improved.

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