Research Article

Effect of Topic Familiarity on Summary Writing of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	One of the most typical and crucial academic writing skills for L2 learners is summary writing. It is a complex activity that requires students' deep engagement with a text through reading, understanding, paraphrasing and reorganizing and finally constructing a summary in their own words. This study intends to investigate the effect of topic familiarity on Iranian foreign language learners' summary writing. Its aim is to find out whether there was any significant effect on learners' summary writing performance with regard to topic familiarity. The participants of the study were 40 female intermediate Iranian EFL learners, who were given instructions for different processes used in summary writing. After each session of instruction, four passages with two different topics familiar and unfamiliar were given to learners in order to be summarized. Two passages had familiar topics; they were related to Iranian culture, so the learners had sufficient background knowledge about them. The two other unfamiliar passages were related to foreign culture, with no preexisting knowledge on the part of the learners. Finally, according to the statistics analysis, it was revealed that learners' summary writings were significantly affected by topic familiarity. Familiar topics by the activation of learners' schemata facilitated their understanding and helped them to outperform in summarizing familiar topics than unfamiliar ones. In other words, learners' familiarity with Iranian culture and their prior knowledge of the content facilitated learners' reading comprehension as well as their summary writing performance. The result can provide second language teachers with appropriate criteria so that they can improve learners' writing skills by providing various writing strategies according to learners' needs and being flexible in selecting teaching techniques, as adhering rigidly to a specific approach will not solve all the forthcoming problems of the learners.

1. Introduction

Summarizing is a challenging writing skill which requires learners' reprocessing of information in a written text or a listening task and expressing that information in their own words to reconstruct the meaning in a condensed form. Because of the least focus given to this skill in Iranian EFL institutes learners find it difficult to reproduce a concept in their summaries. Summary writing has been investigated from different perspectives. However, there are still unresolved issues and conflicting findings in relation to summary writing and topic familiarity. The importance of this study relates to learners' background knowledge or schema and their ability in summary writing, which has not been the main focus in most of the previous studies done upon learners' summary writing.

This study deals with the effect of topic familiarity, cultural specific, on learners' summary writing and paraphrasing of the source text information. It tries to find out whether learners' schema or background knowledge positively influences intermediate Iranian learners' summary writing by taking in to consideration the cultural differences.

The significance of this study can be considered from various points. First, because of the lack of attention to writing skill in present language institutes, by giving precise instruction, learners will become acquainted with different strategies and process of summary writing. In future especially at the university, summary writing can be an essential part of our preparation for an exam, a class discussion, or a term/research paper. In these situations, learners have to be able to focus on what is important and inevitable about the source text. Moreover, learners will be aware of foreign culture which is a significant part of learning a foreign language.

Second and the most important aspect benefit teachers as the ones who dominate the class. They can use the findings of this study to realize the significance of schema in preparing learners' cognitive knowledge to deal with different sort of topics therefore before introducing any new idea activate learners' background knowledge to make the task less entangled, furthermore this study will help teachers to train process oriented learners rather than product oriented by improving cognitive as well as metacognitive strategies. In this way learners won't be limited to some specific texts and topics and they will be able to deal with any sort of topic by relating it to their previous knowledge.

The last but not the least implication is for researchers. They can take advantage of the results presented in this study to compare summary writing with those of other cultures. It is helpful for researchers who want to study the discursive characteristics of background knowledge.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Summary writing
According to Reid (1988), summarizing is an interactive and recursive process. In summarizing a text, we go back and forth between the text, rereading, rewriting and continually reflecting on and comparing different elements of the text. "A summary is a condensation of the main ideas in an article. The length of a summary depends on the assignment, the length and complexity of the article and the audience" (Reid, 1988, p. 110). Summarizing skills are essential to academic success; learners are required to produce study summaries, to complete various types of summary assignments, and to complete tasks that call for the incorporation of source material in academic papers and presentations. The goal of a summary is to write down the gist of the piece, without tangential arguments, examples, and other departures from the main ideas. The acceptable summary recasts the main idea in the student's own words and provides proper attribution to the source itself (Hult & Huckin, 2008).

According to Mulvaney and Jolliffe (2005), the characteristics of a good summary are as follows: (1) It shortens the length of the original text; (2) It retains the main ideas, clearly indicating the stance of the original author and includes a limited amount of detail or examples; (3) It strives for objectivity; and (4) It does not offer opinion, evaluation or any additional information not contained in the original piece; rather, it simply "re-presents" the original in reduced format.

A number of researchers introduced summarizing as a writing strategy to recover the previous knowledge. According to some studies (Wenden,1991 ; Knudson,1998) summary writing incorporates both reading strategies such as inference and writing strategies such as drafting & planning in making outlines. Summarizing as an important skill involves the strategies and rules proposed by some researchers and according to Reidle (2011) it is "an evaluative tool that allows students to self-evaluate what they know and what they do not know" (p.2). We understand that summarizing is a productive task, since the textual information is restructured and reorganized in memory in a different way from the original text. It means that as readers we do not keep words active in memory as they appear in the text, but the reflecting ideas (Kintsch& Vandijk, 1978) engendered by those words in the text. Besides, the production of a summary requires comprehension abilities, such as the identification of central ideas, in a local and global level and the activation of background knowledge, so that the reader is able to construct a meaningful and coherent mental representation of the text while strategically orchestrating the information from the text with the previous information from his/her schemata. Briefly speaking, Rumelhart (1981) asserts that schemata refer to the representation of generic concepts stored in memory, which comprise all previous experiences, and is indispensable for information processing.

2.1 Schema
The term 'schema' (plural form is schemata or schemas) could be traced back to Plato who proposed the invisible ideal types of knowledge existing in the mind. Rumelhart (1980) defined schemata as data structures which represent the stored concepts in memory. Schemata were fundamental elements on which information processing depended (Rumelhart, 1975, cited in Hudson, 2007).

Devine (1998) states that the ability to create meaning from the reading passage depends on the interaction between the reader's previous knowledge (schema) and the information presented in the text. This opinion is shared by Koda (2008), who

claims that comprehension is "a meaning-construction process, involving integral interaction between text and reader" (p. 254). The text itself only has 'meaning potential' (Halliday, 1973, as cited in Cohen, 1998), that is, the interpretation of the reader may not be exactly the one envisaged by the writer, and distinct readers may have different interpretations about a same text due to their distinct background knowledge. Urquhart and Weir (1998) confirm Halliday's ideas regarding the possibility of numerous interpretations, claiming that: "Texts do not have unitary meanings potentially accessible to all, they rather allow for variety in interpretations by different readers, governed by factors such as purpose, background knowledge, and the relationship established between the reader and the writer (p. 112)." Nassaji (2007) argued that among the information that was embedded in a reading passage, only information that had relationship to the reader's background knowledge could be stored and then retrieved. In other words, if the reader possessed topic related knowledge related to the text that he was reading, the new information from the text would hang on to the already existing pegs in the reader's mind. They could then be memorized and recalled faster than the information without previous knowledge (schema) for them.

2.3 Previous works on summary writing

Behnam & Ali Akbari (2014) investigated the role of formal schemata in the development of précis writing in an EFL context. The result of the study endorsed the positive role of the formal schemata in the developmental cycle of précis writing in EFL contexts. It is concluded that writing skill with all its subskills, one of which is précis writing, can be improved and become interactive via different ways, one of which is familiarity with the text structure or the formal schematic knowledge. This kind of familiarity with the organizational structure of the texts provides the basic elements of précis writing for the subjects.

Investigating schematic theory from a different perspective, Al-Shumaimeri (2006) made a critical analysis upon the effects of content familiarity and language ability on reading comprehension performance of Saudi tertiary students studying English as a foreign language. It was indicated that content familiarity facilitated reading comprehension and it had a significant effect on the comprehension performance of students at different levels. In another study on schema, Lahuerta Martínez (2013) explored the relative effects of gender and content familiarity on English as a Foreign Language reading comprehension. The results of the study revealed that gender and content familiarity significantly affected the students' overall comprehension of the texts.

The study done by Yu (2009) aimed at studying the effects of the properties of source texts that constituted the summarizability of the texts, and to what extent the summarizability of source texts affected summarization performance and how. The significant effects of source texts on the students' summarization performance were idiosyncratic functions of various characteristics of the source texts and the summarizers. The hypothesis that the students' familiarity with the topics of the text was able to affect their summarization performance significantly was not fully supported. Pourhossein(2011) was another researcher who studied the effect of text familiarity on summary writing skill of foreign language students. The results of this study showed no relationship between 'text familiarity' and 'writing skill'. In other words, familiarity with the content of a passage did not necessarily cause better writing of that passage.

The contrasting results point to a need for more in-depth studies that clarify the effect of background knowledge on learners' summary writing. This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Does topic familiarity have a statistically significant effect on the summary writing of intermediate Iranian EFL learners?
2. Does topic familiarity affect concept paraphrasing of the original sentences in summary writing?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 40 Iranian female EFL learners at intermediate level in one of the English language center in Tabriz, Iran. These 40 students were randomly selected out of 62 senior students studying at the same educational institute. As an incentive, the students were notified that their performance would count in their class participation score. Age and gender is not considered as a variable, all the participants were L1 speakers of Azari. These students had common school backgrounds and no previous experience in summary writing since in their school curriculum there was no requirement to write summaries. The participants' English knowledge was examined according to the institute's level test. However, to be assured of the learners' homogeneity, the researcher administered an Oxford-Cambridge Quick Placement Test. The test was given to 62 participants in four intermediate level classes each consisting of approximately 15 female subjects from various age groups ranging from 15 to 25.

In order to select the 40 students for the main experiment, those who scored between 30 to 40 on the Quick Placement Test were recruited for this study. The participants of the study were distinguished in only one group, and each participant in the group had to perform on four passages.

3.2 Material

All of the subjects were homogeneous in that they had been placed at the intended level, intermediate level, by the same placement test offered by the institute. However, since the homogeneity of the subjects is a critical issue in every research project and without which findings cannot be reliable enough, in order to ensure the homogeneity and that all of the subjects had been placed in the correct level, Oxford-Cambridge Quick Placement Test was selected and administered to 62 EFL learners. The test consisted of vocabulary, grammar and comprehension questions. The main purpose of the application of this proficiency test was to show the homogeneity of the members of the study. Forty learners were selected according to their scores to participate in this study.

The other instrument which was used in this study was researcher-developed Rating Scale. This rating scale was designed based on various written summary assessment rubrics. The already made rating scales were not suitable because of some deficiencies or extra items included in them and also it could not be guaranteed that they will work well with Iranian EFL participants. Twenty items were selected as the important factors in summary writing and to ensure the validity and reliability of the items they were distributed among 7 qualified and experienced EFL teachers with university degree of MA or PhD. Teachers were asked to identify the most critical features of a typical summary. After analyzing, the more frequent features selected by the teachers, which were 10 among the 20 features, they were included in the final form of the rating scale. (see Appendix A)

Furthermore for data collection, four passages, two with familiar topics and two with unfamiliar topics(cultural specific) were provided to examine the effect of schematic knowledge on the summarizing performance.

3.3 Procedure

After analyzing the results of the placement test and finding out the homogeneity of 40 learners, they were selected as the main participants in the study. Since the method chosen for this study was experimental, there was the need for instructions to be given to the learners. As the procedure of this study, the participants were instructed for eight sessions within three weeks. Eight sessions of instructions was designed and implemented by the teacher who was the researcher of this study. The treatment was based on *Composing by Confidence: writing effective paragraphs and essays* by Alan Meyers (2003), furthermore handouts including the blueprint and the processes involved in summary writing were provided for participants to refer to them whenever needed. (see Appendix B)

Summary writing provided information about the purpose of writing summary paragraphs and described various steps in the process such as stating the main idea of the text in their own words, identifying the main points used to support the main idea by using questioning techniques and taking notes, stating the author's conclusion in one sentence, and finally putting away the original text and creating a summary paragraph using their own words. The suggested length for a summary was one-third the length of the original text. In terms of the rhetorical structure of summary paragraphs, the textbook stated specifically that students must explicitly mention the source text. It was suggested to begin the first, introduction paragraph by stating the author and the title in a topic sentence (e.g., The article, ''Innocence and Experience,'' by Jack Johnson claims that children believe that being an experienced adult will truly give them freedom).

As a practice activity, the students read several texts about different topics and asked to find main ideas and paraphrase them in pair works. They were given an outline of *innocence and experience* text that stated the topic, main idea, main points, and conclusion in note form, and were asked to use the information in the outline to write a summary paragraph without copying directly from the text or the outline. In terms of the use of source text information, the instructor provided information about how copying from source texts is considered plagiarism and also about the reasons why copying should be avoided, and tools for helping students restate the main ideas in their own words instead of copying directly from the source text. Four specific paraphrasing strategies were introduced, with two techniques related to word-level modifications (changing the part of speech or using synonyms) and two techniques for sentence-level changes (moving phrases, dividing or combining sentences). After being acquainted with paraphrasing strategies, learners were provided with some interpretation activities (e.g., select which sentence is a more effective paraphrase) and writing activities (e.g., provide a paraphrase for the underlined sentence in a short text). Throughout the treatment, underlying principles of paragraph organization, note-taking, and the use of paraphrase to report source text information were reinforced.

 Based on the hypothesis of this study there is a close relationship between the possession of previous knowledge and the development of summary writing skill in an EFL context and this awareness of the schematic knowledge of the text will result in better written production of the learners. Therefore, what is done in this research was to reject the null hypothesis which stated that there was no relationship between schematic knowledge of the learners and their summary writing ability, the rejection of which means the acceptance of the main hypothesis. The summaries written by the subjects were gathered and scored by the use of interrater method, first by the teacher (the researcher) and then by another teacher who was teaching in the same institute. To make the scoring process more reliable, the researcher had prepared a rating scale (see Appendix), so that there would be some criteria for both the researcher and the other teacher as the raters of the papers. The aim of using inter-rater method was to decrease the effect of subjectivity in scoring, so the reliability of the scoring was increased by using more than one rater. After the summaries were scored by two different raters, inter-reliability was calculated by the use of Cronbach's alpha to assure the raters' homogeneity in scoring. In the next step, scores given to summaries with familiar and unfamiliar topics were analyzed and compared by applying Paired Sample t-test, the processes of which are presented in the following section, in order to find out if there were any significant and meaningful differences between the familiarity of passages and the learners' performances in summary writing.

Finally, written summaries were compared both in the number of paraphrases and copied strings used from the original source text. The present study calculated the degree of paraphrasing by identifying an excerpt in the source text (usually a complete sentence or a series of sentences) which had been either exactly copied or paraphrased by the student. An Exact Copy was defined as an excerpt selected from the source text and reproduced in the summary, without the use of quotation marks, and with no linguistic changes made. A Paraphrase was defined as an instance in which a student selected an excerpt from the source text, made at least one word-level linguistic change to the selected excerpt, and attempted to convey the meaning of that excerpt. That is, while Paraphrases of source text excerpts could contain copied strings of language, they also contained language composed by the student, while Exact Copies were full reproductions of source text excerpts.

4. Results and Discussion

The statistical measurement used to assure the judges' ratings was Cronbach's alpha which is used to calculate inter-rater reliability for cases of judges rating learners and to analyze the intraclass correlation. The result is provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Cronbach's Alpha for Inter-rater Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on SI	N of Items
0.91	0 .91	2

As it is shown in Table 4.1 Cronbach's alpha is 0.915, which indicates a high level of internal consistency between the raters. A high degree of reliability exists among the scores given by the raters in both familiar and unfamiliar summaries.

 In order to investigate the result of topic familiarity upon summary writing Paired Sample t-test was used to find out the significant level of differences between familiar and unfamiliar topics provided by the same group. The output from this test is shown in Table 4.2

4.2 Paired Samples T-Test for Familiar and Unfamiliar topics

Paired Samples Statistics					
Variable		Mean	N	SD	Std. Error
Pair 1	Familiar	18.94	40	2.48424	.39279
	Unfamiliar	14.57	40	2.38800	.37758

Paired Samples Test

	Variable	Paired Differences	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		95% CI Upper			
Pair 1	familiar – unfamiliar	4.97658	14.538	39	.000

A paired-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether topic familiarity had an influence on learners' summary writing. The results indicate that the mean score for familiar topics (*M=18.94*, *SD* =.39) was significantly greater than the mean score for unfamiliar topics (*M*=14.57, *SD* =.37). Looking at the confidence interval, 95% CI of the mean difference between the familiar and unfamiliar topics is 4.97. As shown in Table 4.2 the significant level for topic familiarity is p=.000< .05, which means that the null hypothesis is rejected and there is a significant difference between familiar and unfamiliar topics. The result of Paired Samples t-test revealed a significant and positive effect of topic familiarity on summary writing. It can be concluded that there are significant differences between the familiar and unfamiliar texts in their perceived difficulty for both understanding and summarizing. In respect to topic familiarity, the majority of the students were acquainted with the two familiar topics as they were related to Iranian culture which was part of learners' schematic routine. However, students were not too familiar with the two unfamiliar passages as they were associated to foreign culture and made the understanding and summarizing difficult for learners. Thus, familiarity with the topics contributed to a better performance in summary writing.

To answer the second research question, the effect of topic familiarity concept paraphrasing of the original sentences in summary writing, occurrence of copied and paraphrased sentences were analyzed by the researcher. It is indicated that learners' summaries for familiar and unfamiliar topics differed in their copying and Paraphrase use. There was a meaningful difference in students' selection strategies in summarizing. The students used copied strings most frequently in summaries of unfamiliar passages, while they used paraphrased strings most often in the summaries of familiar passages. In summaries with unfamiliar topics, paragraphs were started exactly the same way as the original texts and within each summary, there were excerpts that elicited more copies than the paragraphs included in summaries with familiar topics.

It should be noted that overall, the majority of learners did not use paraphrasing strategy or even moderate revisions in their summary of unfamiliar topics because of their lack of knowledge and absence of sufficient comprehension. They have identified important sentences in the source text, but have not modified them linguistically; they have summarized the source text, primarily through a method of copy and paste.

Samples 4.1 and 4.2 are two pair of examples which demonstrate qualitative differences in summaries written by L2 students. Sample 4.1 is an example of a summary of a passage with unfamiliar topic which contains exact and near copies. Sample 4.2 represents a sample summary of a familiar topic, with two paraphrases used together in combination with minimal revisions.

[The oldest yearly parade in the world takes place in London] ***near copy***; [but since it takes place in the middle of November, at a time when there aren't too many tourists in the capital] ***exact copy***, [the "Lord Mayor's Show" is a happening that isn't very well known outside the city]. ***Near copy***

[Originally, the new Lord Mayor had to introduce himself to the Law Courts for consent by the King,] ***near copy*** [and to swear faithfulness. Today, the Show is always attended by representatives of the Crown.] ***exact copy***

[It is usually the biggest free show of the year for Londoners; and for many years,] ***exact copy*** [it has been an unusual or fabulous event.]***near copy***

 [According to the belief of ancient Persians to Zaroaster, celebrating Yalda night, the birth of Mithra is one of the most important festivals of Persians.] ***paraphrase***

[Ancient Persians believed that the domination of darkness is finished in this night.Yalda Night is also the last night of fall and the longest night of the year.] ***paraphrase***

[People stay awake all night together and eat nuts, watermelon to protect them from illness and specially pomegranate to resumption of generations.] ***minimal revision***

[As mentioned, ancient Persians believe that at the end of the first night of winter which coincides with December 21, light overcomes darkness, so they have to celebrate the whole night.] ***minimal revision***

Sample 4.1. Example of unfamiliar summary with copied strings

Sample 4.2. Example of familiar summary with paraphrases

Sample 4.1 is an unfamiliar summary that includes most of the key ideas included in the summary. The student who composed this summary made more attempts to paraphrase the selected excerpts, but it contains sentences that are not paraphrases, they are gist statements which capture the main idea of several lines of text. Furthermore, in some parts the student has used the strategy of omission to avoid fallacious paraphrasing.

 Sample 4.2 is an example of familiar summary with most of the main points in the source paragraph has been incorporated into well written sentences and expressed predominantly in the summarizers' own words. As it is illustrated the student uses no exact or near copies, but it contains some minimal revisions.

Findings revealed that topic familiarity significantly affected learners' paraphrasing strategy. It was found that participants relied critically more on copying in unfamiliar summaries than familiar ones. Their summaries for unfamiliar topics were almost stocked with exact or near copies from the source text and the use of paraphrasing was negligible than the summaries for familiar topics. However, they used fewer exact copies and also had slightly higher rates of moderate revision in summarizing passages with familiar topics. A summary like the one displayed in sample 4.2 takes a considerable amount of linguistic work on the part of the student. She must form a mental representation of the key ideas in the source text and decide how those concepts might be transformed, linguistically, so that they can become part of her own written summary (Kirkland & Saunders, 1991).

By regarding the second research question, effect of topic familiarity on concept paraphrasing, a total copy and paraphrase score was computed for each summary to provide quantitative information about how well the ideas from the source text were paraphrased. Table 4.3 displays the mean percentage of copying and paraphrase use for both familiar and unfamiliar topics.

Table 4.3: Use of copies and paraphrases

Familiarity		N	Mean	SD
Familiar	Familiarity	40	1.00	.000
	Copy	40	4.47	1.114
	Paraphrase	40	6.28	1.203
	Valid N	40		
Unfamiliar	Familiarity	40	2.00	.000

Copy	40	7.30	1.319
Paraphrase	40	3.65	1.406
Valid N	40		

As the Table 4.3 illustrates the mean percentage of the summary made up of Exact Copies was higher for unfamiliar topics than familiar topics. In the case of Paraphrases, familiar and unfamiliar topics did differ in the number used. As shown in Table 4.3, while the mean number of Paraphrases used in summaries of familiar topics was (M = 6.2), the mean number of paraphrases used in summaries of unfamiliar topics was (M=3.6). On the other hand, the mean number of exact copies was (M=4.4) in familiar topic summaries and (M=7.3) in unfamiliar ones. Therefore, it is concluded that the use of copying and paraphrases was significantly influenced by topic familiarity. The students used paraphrased strings most frequently in the topic familiar summaries, while they used copied strings most often in the unfamiliar topic summaries. Learners' background knowledge may help to explain the large mean difference between the number of paraphrases used in both familiar and unfamiliar summaries.

The aim of this paper was to explore the relative effects of topic familiarity on summary writing performance of Iranian EFL learners. In general, topic familiarity was found to significantly affect the students' overall comprehension of the texts and their performance on summary writing. Familiar topics affected students' overall comprehension and writing performance, the more familiar the text the better the comprehension and writing performance. Compared with their performance on unfamiliar passage, they tended to score higher on the familiar passage. These results appear to corroborate the ideas of Carrell (1991), Rumelhart (1980), Graham (2007) and Nassaji (2007), all of whom supported the schema theory and the crucial role of knowledge in shaping learners comprehension. As we explained above, according to the schema theory of reading, knowledge of text content can facilitate learners' comprehension during the encoding/decoding process by providing a knowledge structure to which readers can compare and fit pieces of incoming information. Thus, learners' performance to a large degree depends on the compatibility of the new information with the individuals' preexisting cognitive network.

On the other hand, the inability to fit incoming information to the existing knowledge structure not only increases the necessity to comprehend each individual idea unit, but also increases memory constraints and reduces the cognitive resources available for the reader to incorporate ideas in the passage, making comprehension demanding. The result also supports Urquhart and Weir's (1998) suggestion that the content of a text should be sufficiently familiar to permit the deployment of appropriate skills and strategies in order to understand the text. Based on data presented in the previous parts, positive effect of background knowledge on experimental students' writing products has been confirmed. The findings support the theoretical prediction about the effectiveness of schemata and findings of earlier research on writing ability. The findings for investigating the main hypothesis are consistent with the findings of, Behnam & Ali Akbari (2014), Al-Shumaimeri (2006), Lahuerta Martínez (2013) which provided evidence for the positive effect of schemata on comprehension and writing ability of learners.

The findings of the present study are also in line with Spiro (1977) who argued that among the information that was embedded in a reading passage, only information that had relationship to the reader's background knowledge could be stored and then retrieved. In other words, if the reader was equipped with some topical knowledge related to the text that he was reading, those new information from the text would hang on to the already existing pegs in the reader's mind. They could then be memorized and recalled faster than the information without previous knowledge (schema) for them.

Ausubel (1968) believes that meaningful learning is the most important factor that is achieved when new information is linked to the learners' prior knowledge. It can be concluded that when learners are given enough and necessary information about what they read, they will be more systematic and successful learners. Yet the findings do not reflect results found in the study done by Yu (2009) and Pourhossein (2011), where topic familiarity had no effect on summary writing performance. Therefore, future studies should investigate various task conditions paired with familiar and unfamiliar topics.

In an effort to move beyond the main question of whether familiarity with topic influences learners' summary writing performance, the present study examined the summarization strategies, with a focus on the number of copied and paraphrased sentences. The study described which excerpts of the source text the L2 writers selected to include in their own summaries, what rhetorical functions these excerpts fulfilled, and how these excerpts were integrated into the students' own written work. The study found that, when it comes to selecting important source text excerpts to include in their summaries,

learners show similar preferences. Most students chose to follow the sequence of source text paragraphs when writing their summaries, which suggests that learners felt that the order of ideas in the summary should mirror that of the original source.

The analysis of learners' performance on familiar and unfamiliar topics revealed that students with no prior knowledge are likely to copy more frequently than students with abundant information in a particular subject. Learners have essentially copied and pasted source text excerpts, with little linguistic modification and few, if any, self-composed sentences. According to the obtained result in their summary writing of unfamiliar topics, the majority of the students relied upon direct copy to summarize the key points of the source information. Consequently, more than half of the total number of clauses produced was duplicated from the original text. The learners' poor performance on foreign cultural topics indicated that none of the students were previously familiar with either of the unfamiliar passages as they were related to western cultural events. It is believed that lack of knowledge about these topics contributed learners to copy the exact sentences in the original source text. Learners' avoidance of paraphrasing can be the consequence of absence of comprehension which is essential and prerequisite to summary writing, therefore, they used copying as a primary summary-writing strategy.

The results of the current study suggest that students use an intermediate strategy of frequent, shorter copied strings as a way to compensate for the gaps in their linguistic knowledge that pose a barrier to more substantial modifications of source text information. However, analysis of students' performance on familiar topics proved that their awareness and previous knowledge about Iranian culture affected the number of paraphrases and copied sentences used in their summaries. The occurrences of exact copies markedly decreased in their summaries, and written texts clearly demonstrated their attempts to use their own words to create a summary from the source information. The students' conscious attention to the strategy of paraphrasing was exemplified by their use of synonyms and the attempt to differentiate the other's ideas from their own. This type of operation is especially worth noting, given that paraphrasing in the learners' own word is central to the act of re-establishing meaning in summary. The grammatical structures of source sentences were also more or less successfully altered in more effective way. In most of their written summaries, writers gave paraphrases by replacing source words with synonym-like words and changing grammatical structures of the source sentences.

One of the evaluation criterion mentioned in rating scale is the identification of main ideas. In light of the limited knowledge of the learners about unfamiliar topics, it was required more effort from the participants to identify the main points and their importance. As a result they substituted main ideas by more general concepts, subordinate and more detailed ideas. In addition, instead of going through the constructive process of integration and transformation, which is essential to successful summarization (Hidi & Anderson, 1986), the participants frequently returned to the source text merely copy sentences that approximated what they had in mind as the main points. Integration and transformation, which constituted part of the criteria specified in the provided rubric scale, were not well demonstrated in the participants' summaries of unfamiliar topics. Lack of ability in producing appropriate paraphrases and integration of ideas is due to the learners' unfamiliarity with the related topics. Learners' schemata need to be stimulated before any kind of performance upon four different language skill. According to the schema theory, knowledge of text content can facilitate comprehension during the encoding/decoding process by providing a knowledge structure to which readers can compare and fit pieces of incoming information, thus making it possible to assimilate text information without much difficulty. On the other hand, the inability to fit incoming information to the existing knowledge structure reduces the cognitive resources available for the reader to integrate and incorporate ideas in the passage, making information assimilation difficult. The results support Urquhart and Weir's (1998) suggestion that the content of a text should be sufficiently familiar to permit the deployment of appropriate skills and strategies in order to understand the text.

5. Conclusion

The significant points inferred from this study mostly are related to the importance of writing instruction in general and the importance of teaching summarizing strategies in particular. As it is revealed Iranian EFL learners are instructed by the use of product-oriented approach which has focused on grammatical and syntactical structures. This approach is primarily concerned with "correctness" and form of the final product. However, process-oriented approaches concern the process of how ideas are developed and formulated in writing. This approach focuses on how clearly and efficiently a student can express and organize his ideas, not on correctness of form.

The students had poor performance in summarizing unfamiliar passages which can be the result of both not having sufficient knowledge about the topics and not being acquainted with process of writing in school and other institutes. By considering product writing, mostly writing is regarded only as an end product and learners are expected to write according to the rules they are learning through the books and teachers. Teachers present students with a confusing response to their work and treat their writing as though it were in its final form. As it is evident from teachers' corrections and comments, they are much more interested in grammar and spelling than in the message or in how communication is attempted. In conclusion,

considering form and accuracy obstructs the mental activity necessary to generate and communicate ideas. Thus, in order to make commentaries more effective and productive, teachers can ask for specific information and offer constructive comments instead of posing questions (Ferris, 1997).

As it is suggested by researchers the writing instruction should incorporate both process and product approach in teaching writing, in other words the process approach should be used as a tool for gaining the best product. In process oriented approach, there are some interactions in learners' brain that would free them from being constrained to grammatical and lexical structures and use all different factors including prior knowledge, linguistic, situational and task context in understanding and summarizing a text. Furthermore, if learners become aware of the underlying process in their own learning and know how to apply good strategies for the task consciously, they become more involved and responsible for their learning. Thus, teachers should increase the students' confidence in activating previous knowledge by explicitly teaching them and scaffolding during the learning process in order to become independent and autonomous learners. The syllabus designers also should consider incorporating summary writing strategies in writing books as well as reading books.

6. Final remarks: limitations, suggestions for future research

Although the present study has yielded a number of significant implications, there are several limitations and new questions that can be derived from the findings. The findings of this study should not be easily generalized to other types of writing. If the students in this study had performed independent writing tasks, we might have found a stronger impact of topic familiarity on different aspects of language use (such as lexical choice and grammatical structures,) that might have made a unique contribution to their writing. In a sense, summary writing is a special type of writing in which writers inevitably use words from a source text and they heavily depend on the source text, thus limiting the learners' freedom in applying desired information and using various lexical and grammatical sphere. The limitations of this research suggest the need for future research to include evaluation criteria other than ones included in the rating scale provided by the researcher.

There are some areas of summary writing that have not been covered in this study and can be regarded for further research. Learners' writing summaries have not been analyzed with regard to participants 'age; it would be a good idea to investigate the age factor to find out whether there is any particular pattern observed in different age groups. Moreover, the participants of this study were female students at the same levels of proficiency. It would be interesting in future research to study gender differences with different level of proficiency. Future research may also include other factors to be examined simultaneously. Therefore, more studies should be done to fill the possible gaps and limitations that still exist in the vast literature of summary writing.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix A

Written Summary Assessment Rubric

Items	0	1	2	3
1. The statement of general idea by mentioning or restating the title of the passage.				
2. Main ideas are identified.				
3. All key concepts are paraphrased. (nothing copied from the original text)				
4. There is a developed introduction, body and conclusion.				
5. Organization is logical. Transitions smoothly link ideas together and the text displays cohesion.				
6. Writing is unified and it displays coherence throughout.				
7. Few or no error in spelling, punctuation and text mechanics.				
8. It displays grammatical accuracy.				
9. Flesch Kincaid Reading Ease (readability) Very easy 90-100 = 3 Easy 70-89 = 2 Standard 50-69 = 1 Difficult 0-49 = 0				
10. Flesch Kincaid level to calculate the syntactic complexity of the text.				
11. Personal ideas are not added.(adherence to the original text.)				

Appendix B

Summary Writing Handouts

Summarizing

Summarizing is an important academic skill which plays an essential role in essay examination and papers. A summary focuses only on main ideas and omits all the minor facts and details. The length of a summary depends on the length of the reading passage and the purpose of the summary.

Your summary must be accurate and **objective,** reporting only what you've read without your personal opinion. Therefore, the summary should never include the personal pronouns I and me.

The structure of a summary

A clear and complete summary identifies the reading by including the author's name(if it's given) and the title. The summary represents the central ideas and the most important supporting ideas.

BLUEPRINT for a summary
Opening sentence: identification of author and title of the reading and statement of topic idea.
Body: main ideas usually arranged in the sequence of the original
Main idea 1, with supporting information
Main idea 2, with supporting information
Main idea 3, with supporting information
Conclusion (optional): restatement of topic idea.

The process of composing a summary

Here are some of the typical steps involved in planning and composing a summary.

1. **Preview the reading**. Scan the text, look for headings that identify central ideas. Look at the opening paragraphs, the first sentences of body paragraphs, and the conclusion.

2. **Read the selection carefully**. Now read slowly, highlighting or underlining topic sentences. Reread difficult parts until you understand them.

3. **Take notes and plan**. Look over the parts you've highlighted or underlined. Then write notes in your own words. Don't imitate the style original work

4. **Organize your ideas logically**. List or outline the main points in a clear and consistent arrangement. Connect main ideas by using transitions words such as and, so, but, since, however,…

5. **Draft and revise**. Begin the summary by identifying the author and the title of the reading. Then state the summary in your own words. In revising, make sure the tense is consistent. Most summaries use the present tense, but past tense is also acceptable.

Appendix C

Familiar passage used in the study

Celebrating Yalda Night

Iranians around the world celebrate Yalda, which is one of the most ancient Persian festivals. The festival dates back to the time when a majority of Persians were followers of Zoroastrianism prior to the advent of Islam. On Yalda festival, Iranians celebrate the arrival of winter, the renewal of the sun and the victory of light over darkness.

Considered the longest night of the year, Yalda eve is the night when ancient Iranians celebrated the birth of Mithra, the goddess of light.

Yalda, which means birth, is a Syriac word imported into the Persian language. It is also referred to as Shab-e Chelleh, a celebration of winter solstice on December 21--the last night of fall and the longest night of the year.

Ancient Persians believed that evil forces were dominant on the longest night of the year and that the next day belonged to the Lord of Wisdom, Ahura Mazda.

On this night, family members get together (most often in the house of the eldest member) and stay awake all night long. Dried nuts, watermelon and pomegranate are served.

Iranians believe those who begin winter by eating summer fruits would not fall ill during the cold season. Therefore, eating watermelons is one of the most important traditions in this night. Pomegranates, placed on top of a fruit basket, are reminders of the cycle of life--the rebirth and revival of generations.

As days start lengthening, ancient Iranians believe that at the end of the first night of winter which coincides with December 21 this year, darkness is defeated by light and therefore they must celebrate the whole night

Fires would be burnt all night to ensure the defeat of the forces of evil. There would be feasts, acts of charity and prayers performed to ensure the total victory of sun--essential for the protection of winter crops. There would be prayers to Mithra (Mehr) and feasts in his honor, since Mithra is the Eyzad responsible for protecting "the light of the early morning", known as 'Havangah'. It was also assumed that Ahura Mazda would grant people's wishes, especially those desiring an offspring if all rites are performed on this occasion.

One of the other traditions of Yalda night, which has been added in recent centuries, is the recitation of the classic poetry of Hafez, the Iranian poet of 14th century AD. Each member of the family makes a wish and randomly opens the book and asks the eldest member of the family to read it aloud. What is expressed in that poem is believed to be the interpretation of the wish and whether and how it will come true. This is called Faal-e Hafez (Hafez Omen).

Coinciding with the beginning of the winter, Yalda is an occasion to celebrate the end of the crop season. It is today an event to thank the Lord for all blessings and to pray for prosperity in the next year.

Source: retrieved on June 6,2016 from http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Celebrating_Yalda_2.htm