Investigating the Strategies and Problems of Iranian EFL Learners While Writing Summaries in Academic Contexts

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Abstract

The present study intended to investigate the summary writing strategy use and writing quality of 57 Iranian EFL learners in an academic setting. As for collecting the required data, the students (1) completed an expository essay (as a measure of their writing competence), (2) summarized the literature review section of a research paper (as a measure of summary writing quality), and (3) responded to the items of a summary writing strategy questionnaire (exploring the extent of planning, discourse synthesis, source use, and evaluation strategy use). The results of this study indicated that the participants produced better texts in terms of content compared to the form (cohesion and coherence) and language use. In producing their texts, they made the most use of evaluation strategies in comparison to the other summary writing strategies. There was also a moderate relationship between writing competence, summary writing quality, and strategy use. Moreover, MANOVA results revealed significant differences among high-skilled, moderately-skilled, and low-skilled student writers in summary writing quality and strategy use. Subsequently, the main problems encountered by these students while summarizing the passages were identified by soliciting their own views and analyzing the content of the texts they produced. Finally, it was suggested that in order to improve the quality of students' summary writing, writing courses must be complemented with explicit instruction of the conventions governing this academic genre, teach the summarization strategies through adequate modeling and scaffolding and give the students opportunities to practice and use the strategies while working on real pedagogical tasks.

Introduction

Summary writing is a valuable skill that is required in almost all levels of education. It is especially important for college students since they are required in their academic courses to

write assignments that need the use and incorporation of information and ideas from different and multiple sources into their writing (Plakans, 2008, 2015; Yamanishi et al., 2019). Summary writing is seen as a procedure for condensing the information and representing the essence and key ideas of the discourse (Hidi & Anderson, 1986). In terms of mental processes involved, summary writing is considered an integrated reading-writing-task involving a set of intricate, complex, and recursive processes like comprehension, condensation, and composition and might impose some cognitive constraints on the students' minds (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978; Kirkland & Saunders, 1991). According to Halliday (1996), it is the competence to present the initial meaning different from the original form and content (i.e., re-meaning ability) rather than mere ability in rewording that is required for instantiating this genre of writing.

As for the connections between reading and writing in summarizing, Fitzgerald and Shanahan (2000) propose three views: (1) rhetorically: reading and writing are communicative acts for encoding and decoding information; (2) reciprocally: reading and writing involve rather similar sets of underlying knowledge and processes, and (3) functionally: reading and writing overlap and facilitate each other's development. Grabe and Zhang (2016) also maintain that reading and writing are literacy skills that "have bidirectional development paths … that mutually support each other" (p. 341). Summary writing also involves some subsidiary skills such as textual borrowing and paraphrasing, but due to insufficient practice and instruction on these sub-skills, student writers mostly engage in copying the source materials or patchwriting by changing only some of the words and grammar, which is considered a type of plagiarism and a serious act of academic dishonesty (Marshall & Varnon, 2017).

Zhu et al. (2021) maintain that summarization, in which writing is integrated and deployed in conjunction with other skills, is regarded as one of the key competencies that the students must master while studying and performing in various academic discourse communities. In the same vein, since the present study is targeting an ecologically valid classroom endeavor that most students engage in their academic studies, a distinction must be made between summarization and discourse synthesis tasks as integrated reading and writing tasks. Summarizing involves representing the main ideas of one text in a logical and structured way while synthesizing implies integrating information from multiple sources into a coherent text. The students have received instruction on both genres and they have been required to submit some assignments targeting the aspects and conventions of both. Even though the task used for conducting the present study has only focused on summarization, the general intention has been to retrospectively explore the learners' views in terms of the strategies they use for writing such integrated tasks or the problems they might have encountered in this regard. Because of the higher-order processes required, the multidimensional nature of these genres, and the complexities involved in synthesizing the new task, student writers mostly face difficulties and might not come up with an adequate representation of the source in terms of content, form (i.e., cohesion and coherence) and language use. In addition, despite being a highly essential skill in academic contexts, this skill is misrepresented, especially in EFL contexts. This is mostly due to the limited number of appropriate teaching materials, insufficient explicit instruction on the conventions of source-text use and strategies of summary writing and a lack of constructive feedback on the texts students

produce. This situation has led to the fact that many EFL students might engage in a kind of self-taught and trial and error practice to master the conventions of this genre and, consequently, encounter many problems while summarizing the texts for their academic requirements like writing class reports and research papers. In the same regard, since previous research studies have indicated that summary writing is a rather complex and challenging task and, at the same time, a highly valuable skill for foreign language learners (Abasi, 2012; Kozminsky & Graetz, 1986; McDonough et al., 2014), the present study intended to examine some Iranian EFL learners' summary writing ability, the extent of use of summary writing strategies and the possible difficulties and problems they encounter while writing summaries in English.

Literature Review
Theoretical Background
Summarization is "a whole-text, super-macro-level skill (that) entails distinguishing between main and subordinate ideas" (Bensoussan & Kreindler, 1990, p. 57); it is conceptualized as an important literacy skill and an effective learning strategy for students to improve their reading comprehension and to learn how to synthesize information from source texts (Davis & Hult, 1997; Friend, 2001). Summary writing is considered an integrated task; the rationale for which is grounded in the authenticity argument that claims that academic writing depends strongly on information from other sources (Grabe & Zhang, 2013; Plakans, 2009; Plakans & Gebril, 2017; Weigle & Parker, 2012) and such tasks are designed to assist the learners in composing a better passage while compensating for the deficiencies in their background knowledge of a particular academic topic and their previous life experiences (Read, 1990; Weigle, 2004). Since summarizing reflects the act of writing in real life, to build their representation of meaning, readers/writers must engage in a set of constructive processes; they need to carefully read the passages, analyze the content, identify the key ideas, and synthesize information from multiple relevant sources (Yang, 2014). In addition, engaging in summary writing requires integration of writing with other skills and this task necessitates using interdependent processes and strategies in both reading comprehension (e.g., word recognition; identification of text organization in terms of discourse cues and patterns; monitoring; connecting schematic knowledge with information supplied in the texts) and writing (e.g., engaging in the recursive processes of planning, executing and monitoring). However, these abilities are the minimum requirements for completing integrated writing tasks and the students need to understand the contexts and objectives for each task, manipulate the original materials and compose a refined and unified passage (Yang, 2009, p. 25).

In order to contemplate the nature of summarizing tasks and to understand the interactions and complexities involved in this literacy practice, some researchers have examined the composing processes and strategies students use. It is widely acknowledged that although the ability to select and use information from multiple sources is a crucial skill in academic settings, many students face challenges and difficulties while writing summaries on their disciplinary texts and mostly embark on verbatim copying which is mostly due to problems in comprehending and restructuring of ideas during summary writing (Chen & Su, 2012; Choy &

Lee, 2012; Wichadee, 2010). Most of these inadequacies can be traced to their linguistic backgrounds and socio-cultural issues that influence "their emerging identities as academic writers and members of a disciplinary community" (Wette, 2010, p. 158). These students need to have mastered "specific norms, expectations, and conventions concerning writing when being acculturated into the discourse community of the discipline" (Bhatia, 2002, p. 37). Being equipped with the knowledge of rules and conventions of summary writing is highly essential for learners since a high percentage of university assignments demands summarization of content.

Related Studies on L2 Summary Writing

There has been a growing body of research on summarization in academic settings. Most of these studies have explored issues such as the effects of task conditions on the summarization process and products (e.g., Allison et al., 1995), the influence of text features (e.g., text length, genre, register, discourse, vocabulary and lexis, sentence patterns and structures, level of abstractness, familiarity of ideas, and manner and efficiency of organization) on various dimensions of this complex reading/writing activity (Hidi & Anderson, 1986; Homayounzadeh et al., 2019; Kobyashi, 2002), the effects of student writers' characteristics like their cultural background, language proficiency level and engagement in literary practices of their disciplines on the process and product of summarization (Cummings, 1989; Moore, 1997; Rivard, 2001), the textual borrowing and referencing practices, i.e., source-text use of summary writers (Shi, 2004; Uludag et al, 2019), discourse synthesis processes of selecting, connecting and organizing (Nelson & King, 2022; Plakans, 2009; Yang & Plakans, 2012), the level of cognitive process and engagement the task demands (Oded & Walters, 2001), critical selection and evaluation of source information (Raymond & Parks, 2002) and so on.

Some studies have explored the composing processes and strategies readers/writers use while engaged in the act of summarizing writing tasks. Flower et al. (1990) identified seven different patterns of organization in an integrated reading-writing task: interpretation, isolation of main points, frame, free response, summary, synthesis, and review/comment. Moreover, Esmaeili (2002), examining a group of adult ESL students' writing strategies, found the frequent use of evaluating, monitoring, selecting, and word borrowing strategies. Asencion (2004) applied the think-aloud protocol technique to unveil the nature of cognitive processes used while responding to summary tasks and found that the participants used monitoring and planning strategies more frequently than organizing, selecting and connecting ideas. Golparvar and Khafi (2021) investigated the contribution and predictive power of L2 writing self-efficacy in summary writing strategies used in a reading-to-write task. They indicated that the three aspects of writing self-efficacy (namely, linguistic, self-regulatory, and performance self-efficacy) could significantly predict summary writing performance. Summarization (together with other skills such as planning, evaluating, organizing, selecting, and connecting) has also been considered as a key skill affecting the students' overall integrated writing performance in discourse synthesis tasks that require the integration of information from various sources (see, e.g., Plakans, 2009; Plakans et al., 2019; Yang, 2014; Yang & Plakans, 2012; Zhu et al., 2021). Previous research has also revealed the effective use of various source borrowing strategies, including paraphrasing, quoting, patchwriting (copy-and-revise techniques), synonym substitution and restructuring of

words or phrases of source texts, can influence the quality of the summaries students write in integrated tasks (Keck, 2006; Li, 2021; Pecorari, 2003; Shi, 2004, Tran & Nguyen, 2022). It is also maintained that the effective application of various discourse synthesis strategies such as organizing, selecting, and connecting to multiple sources can lead to the production of "discourses that function as new texts in new contexts" (Nelson & King, 2022, p. 1).

Acknowledging the complexities involved in the act of summarization, some L2 writing researchers have attempted to investigate the challenges and difficulties students encounter while engaged in such tasks. For instance, Johns and Mayes (1990) compared the summarization process of writers with different levels of language proficiencies. They found that both high and low English proficiency students encountered problems in generating main ideas and presenting them in a condensed manner based on the information in the source text and they generally used the original words and structures of the original text rather than embarking on the act of paraphrasing. The same finding was found by Keck (2006), which confirms the significant role that language proficiency has in influencing the quality of writers' summaries. Johns (1985) also indicated that students mainly focus on sentence-level information and occasionally add their comments in summaries which distorted the ideas of the source text. Basham and Rounds (1984) found that writers cannot maintain and present the original tone and essence of the key sources they summarize. Kim (2001) also found that students have problems generalizing and reorganizing the information to come up with a good representation of the source text. Moreover, Yang and Shi (2003), exploring how a group of MBA students attended a disciplinary summary task that required the reading and critical examination of a business case, highlighted the importance and influence of students' previous learning experiences (that is, relevant background knowledge in the subject and content area and their previous writing experience in the related disciplinary-specific genres) on their summarization performance and their confidence and skill in completing the task. Baba (2009) and McDonough et al. (2014) also referred to problems such as the students' difficulty in identifying main ideas in the source texts, insufficient vocabulary knowledge and incompetency in defining words and manipulating synonyms, problems in restructuring source text sentences and engaging in textual appropriation techniques such as making word-level changes instead of performing more global modifications. By taking into account the challenges and difficulties that college students experience while summarization, some researchers have explored the effects of instructional practices and the potential of teaching strategies on improving the quality of student writers' summaries and textual appropriation strategies they use (see e.g., Choy & Lee, 2012; Friend, 2001; Wette, 2010). Ahangari et al. (2014) also confirmed the positive influence of scaffolding learning and mediation on the content retention and quality of summary writing and subsequent independent performance of EFL secondary students. In addition, instruction on the use of strategies like planning, note-taking while summarizing, synthesizing, and enhancing metacognitive knowledge on the organization and chronological sequence of summary writing is proved to be useful in improving the quality of summary writing (Abrams & Byrd, 2016; Jansen et al., 2017; Olive & Barbier, 2017).

On the whole, it is generally accepted that the acquisition and development of summarization skills are highly essential for those interested in learning foreign languages in academic contexts.

Nevertheless, despite the surge of research on summarization in second language studies, there are no adequate understanding of what (EFL) students do-while summarizing an L2 text (Abasi, 2012; Kim, 2001). The textbooks designed for teaching academic writing have somehow ignored the importance of this skill and have treated it as a technique/strategy for integrating and synthesizing source information, along with paraphrasing and quoting, generally ignoring information or explicit instruction about its rhetorical structure or strategies which can be used by the student writers to write an effective summary text. Few studies have examined whether summary writing instruction can improve the quality of output or not, and insufficient attention has been directed towards the main types of summarization tasks and assignments that students are required to complete in their studies. Since previous research studies have indicated that summary writing is a highly challenging and intricate task for foreign language learners (Abasi, 2012; Kozminsky & Graetz, 1986), the present study intends to examine some Iranian EFL learners' summary writing ability, the extent of use of summary writing strategies and the possible difficulties and problems they encounter while writing summaries in English. This study aims to come up with a local understanding of what Iranian EFL learners do while working on real tasks in real classroom contexts with real pedagogical significance for them. More specifically, the study intends to respond to the following research questions:

RQ₁: What is the overall quality of written summaries produced by Iranian EFL learners in terms of content, form (i.e., cohesion and coherence), and language use?

RQ₂: What are the most dominant strategies Iranian EFL learners use while writing summaries?

RQ₃: Are there any significant relationships between writing competence, strategies used for summarizing the texts and summarization competence of Iranian EFL university students?

RQ₄: Which category of strategies (i.e., discourse synthesis strategies, source use strategies and metacognitive strategies) can best predict the summarizing writing ability of the learners?

RQ₅: Are there any significant differences among high, mid and low writing proficiency level students in the strategies used for summarizing texts and the quality of texts produced?

RQ₆: What are the main problems encountered by Iranian EFL learners while writing summaries?

Method

Setting and Participants

The present study was conducted at a State University in Iran and a convenient sample of 57 (10 males and 47 females) B.A. level junior students of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in two writing classes participated in the study. All the students were native speakers of Persian, albeit from various ethnic and educational backgrounds, and their ages ranged from 20 to 23. In terms of language proficiency level, they were from intermediate to advance. In fact, the usual wide-ranging proficiency levels of undergraduate students studying English in Iranian universities make establishing homogeneity among the students difficult. These students had already passed the paragraph writing and essay writing courses and were familiar with the principles of academic writing in terms of different techniques and methods of paragraph development (such as description, exemplification, process analysis, definition, classification and

division, cause and effect and comparison and contrast) and various genres of essay writing (such as narration, exposition, and argumentation) in English. In addition, in their essay writing course, they have been taught the rhetorical structure and conventions of summary writing in English as one of the main requirements for their academic studies. A point worth mentioning is that after receiving instruction on summarization, paraphrasing, and principles of accurate source use and documentation for two 2-hour sessions, the students were required to find two scholarly-published articles published in the peer-reviewed journals of applied linguistics, summarize them based on the principles taught and submit the summarized text to their instructor. In the third session, they have been required to compose an expository passage (as a measure of their L2 writing ability), to write a summary of a literature review section of an applied linguistics paper (as a measure of their summarization capability), and to respond to the summary writing strategy inventory that focused on both their in-time and immediate actions while summarizing the given passage at the session specified for this regard and also retrospectively inspect the strategies they have used while summarizing the two personally-selected and summarized papers.

Instruments

In order to collect the required data, the following instruments were used:

Expository Essay Text: In order to assess the overall writing ability of the students and classify them as less-skilled, moderately-skilled and high-skilled student writers, their scores on an expository essay writing task were used. In fact, the students were given a task to write an expository essay of about 300 words on the following prompt: *What are some of the key qualities of a good and successful parent? Use specific details and examples to support your ideas.* In addition, in order to comprehensively assess the overall writing ability of the students as well as different aspects of their written drafts (organization, development, cohesion, vocabulary, structure, mechanics and punctuation), an essay scoring rubric developed by Paulus (1999) was used. The main reason for choosing this scoring guide was its capability to provide an analytical assessment of different aspects of the students' writings and a holistic final assessment score.

The maximum score for writing based on this scale was 60 and based on the researcher's own logic and understanding of the students' level of competence in writing, those students getting the scores of 50 and above, 30 up to 49, and less than 30 were considered high, mid and low proficiency student writers, respectively. Among these 57 students, 14 students were categorized as highly-skilled (M=24.6), 29 students were moderately-skilled (M=50.9) and 14 students (M=24.6) were considered as low-skilled student writers.

Summarization Task: In a classroom session dedicated to collecting the required data, the students were given a five-page literature review section of an academic paper which had investigated the role of individual difference variables in EFL writing. This literature review was divided into two main sections: (1) the theoretical framework and (2) the role of individual differences (cognitive and motivational variables) in second language writing, which was further divided into subsections describing the relationship between aptitude, working memory, self-regulation strategy use and self-efficacy beliefs and L2 writing (for accessing the original draft see Mallahi et al. 2016). In fact, it presented a thorough review of previously-published related literature and a synthesis of existing research on the topic, and the students were supposed to

read it carefully, evaluate the content, identify the key ideas in each section, and paraphrase, connect and synthesize them into a single unified text based on their knowledge and competence. As was previously mentioned, before completing this summarization task, the students were also required to find and summarize two scholarly papers published in applied linguistic journals and submit the output as an outside-class-assignment to their instructor. As for ensuring the suitability and difficulty level of this summarization task which was completed in the classroom, care was taken to select a text that made no excessive demands on the content and structural knowledge of the participants and in case they encountered any questions or difficulties with regard to the content of the passage, they could ask from the instructor (i.e., the researcher of the current study). However, no unjustified assistance was offered that might jeopardize the reliability of the assessment and the students were also familiar with the concept of individual differences in learning and were familiar with the structure and features of literature reviews in research papers. They were given a separate sheet of paper to write a 300-to-500-word summary of the original text in at most 90 minutes.

The Summarization Strategy Inventory: In order to investigate the extent of strategy use for summarization, the students, after completing the summarization task, were required to respond to the items of the summarization strategy inventory developed by Yang (2014). This inventory had 26 items on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from never (0) to always (5) targeting the learners' performance on three main sections of summary writing: before, while, and after finishing the summary draft. More specifically, this instrument investigated a set of cognitive strategies: discourse synthesis strategies (further incorporating selecting, organizing, and connecting techniques), source use strategies (including paraphrasing and patchwriting), and metacognitive strategies of planning and evaluating. The justification for selecting this instrument that also contained a number of items assessing the students' capability in synthesis and multiple source use was that before summarizing the given task, the students were required to (based on their interest in the research topics) find two papers published on the same topic in the scholarly and peer-reviewed journals and write a 1000-word synthesis of the ideas presented. In fact, the summary writing questionnaire also intended to make them ponder retrospectively on their previous summarization experiences besides focusing on the strategies they have used for the current summarization task. In addition, the original literature review section had five separate but related subsections, and the students were required to connect and synthesize the information from various parts into a single unified passage. The reliability index for this instrument was estimated to be .78 Cronbach's alpha, which is quite satisfactory for the purpose of the present study. At the end of this inventory, there was also an open-ended question that required the examinees to recall and report the problems and difficulties they had possibly encountered while writing the summaries in both the assessment context and their previous summarization experience. In fact, the students' responses to this question and the qualitative analyses of their written texts were used to gain insights into their dominant problems while engaged in the act of summarizing.

Summary Writing Scoring Rubric: An analytical summary writing scoring rubric developed by Yang (2014) has been used to assess the quality of summarization texts written by the learners.

This instrument has been adapted based on TOEFL iBT Test Integrated Writing Rubrics (Cumming et al., 2005) to operationalize and represent the construct of integrated summary writing proficiency and addresses the following five criteria: 1) precise identification and presentation of key ideas; 2) efficient connections of the key points from the original source; 3) appropriate observation of coherence and cohesion in the written passage; 4) effective and judicious use of vocabulary and grammatical structure, and 5) lack of verbatim copying of information from the source texts. More specifically, the adaptation focuses on evaluating the students' performance in three aspects of summary writing: Content, Form (cohesion and coherence), and Language use. It should be mentioned that the original rubric contains elements that assess the tasks in terms of how the information from two source texts is integrated into the student's text, but in the current study, the students summarized a single passage. Nevertheless, since the present literature review passage included five distinct but related subsections that needed to be integrated, the students were told to consider each section as separate reading (because of presenting information about various variables used in the study) whose key information needs to be evaluated, selected, paraphrased, connected and synthesized into a single unified passage.

Procedure

The necessary data were collected in the winter semester of the 2020 academic year, and the students of two writing classes, after receiving instruction on summary writing, were requested to complete the tasks and inventories of the current study. More specifically, they received instruction on the conventions and principles of summary writing in two sessions and were required to write a summary of two papers published on the same topic in applied linguistics journals (as a synthesis task). The third session, which was specified for collecting the required data for the study, was divided into two separate sections. In the first section, which lasted one hour, the students wrote the expository essay on the assigned topic, and in the second section, which lasted two hours, they wrote the summarization text and responded to summary writing strategy inventory items and the open-ended question which intended to find the issues/challenges they have possibly encountered.

After collecting the written drafts, the students' summarization and expository texts were analyzed and scored based on the above-mentioned rubrics. A worth-mentioning point here is that in order to evaluate both the students' expository essay and summarization task performances, two experienced EFL instructors (the present researcher and his colleague) scored the students' written outputs. Before analyzing the texts, these raters attended a session and reviewed the aspects targeted in the rubrics (namely, essay scoring and summary writing scoring rubrics) and agreed upon the guidelines for scoring the completed tasks. In order to ensure the reliability of scoring, the final score dedicated for each completed task was an average of the two scores assigned by the two raters of the written samples. As for analyzing the quantitative data, a set of statistical procedures such as descriptive statistics, correlation, multiple regression, and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were used. In fact, a standard multiple regression was run to examine how much of the variance in the quality of written summaries could be attributed to various summarization strategies: planning, discourse synthesis, source use, and

evaluation strategies. MANOVA was used in order to compare the performance of the three groups of student writers (high-skilled, moderately-skilled, and low-skilled) in two dependent variables: summary writing quality and summarization strategy use.

In order to identify the dominant problems Iranian EFL learners have possibly encountered during the summarization process, their answers to the open-ended question and the qualitative content analyses of the written summaries were used. Content analysis is the technique for analyzing the information in the original documents in order to identify the key concepts and, subsequently, present the essential content in a short and manageable text (Mayring, 2004). More specifically, the open-ended question asked the learners to reflect upon their experiences while writing summaries and explain the issues and difficulties they encountered while performing the task that they wrote in the class and the summary of two academic papers they have completed as an outside-class assignments. These comments were scrutinized to identify the common key problems. Besides soliciting the students' own ideas, the procedure for identifying the problems was supplemented by the analysis of the texts they have written. Here the texts were considered as 'systems of forms' (Hyland, 2016) focusing on the content, structure, and patterns of writing to find irregularities and errors in the students' summarization practices. The identified problems were also discussed by the two assessors of the written samples and the most important ones (in the form of data-coding for the problem areas) were selected to be presented as a result of the qualitative part.

Results

The first research question intended to investigate the overall quality of written summaries produced by a group of Iranian EFL learners in terms of content, form (i.e., cohesion and coherence), and language use. As it is observed in Table 1, among these three subcategories, the students have written better texts in terms of content (*M=3.19, SD=1.14*) which refers to the clear presentation of principal information or meaning from the main passage which was a literature review section further subdivided into five subsections. In fact, they have been able to identify the key ideas from the original passage and paraphrase and synthesize them into a new text, though to varying degrees of success.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Quality of Written Summaries

Variables	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Content	3.19	1.14	1	5
Form	3.10	1.12	1	5
Language Use	3.05	1.17	1	5

The second research question explored the summary writing strategies (namely, planning, discourse synthesis, source use, and evaluation strategies) adopted by Iranian EFL learners while summarizing the passages in English. As the results in Table 2 indicate, the learners have mostly used evaluation strategies (*M=25.28, SD=5.68*) while composing their written summaries.

Evaluation strategy encompasses further seven measured variables related to the examination of grammar, language use, mechanics of writing, and reviewing the appropriacy of content, organization, essay flow, and other requirements (Yang, 2014).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Summary Writing Strategies Used by EFL Learners

Strategies	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Planning strategies	19.17	4.64	10	27
Discourse Synthesis	18.07	4.32	7	24
Source Use	15.96	4.03	5	23
Evaluation	25.28	5.68	11	38

The third research question explored the possible relationships between the students' writing competence, the overall quality of written summaries, and the extent of summary writing strategies applied by these student writers. The results presented in Table 3 illustrate that there were statistically significant relationships between the writing competence of the learners, as measured by their performance on an expository essay, and the overall quality of their written summaries ($r=.56, p<.01$) and the extent of their summary writing strategy use ($r=.48, p<.01$). This positive relationship points to the fact that students' higher competency in writing enables them to produce higher quality summaries and since summarizing strategies are naturally related to normal strategies student writers use in planning, execution, and monitoring stages of writing, the relationship between these two constructs can be justified. There was also a moderate positive relationship between the summary writing strategies used by the student writers and the overall quality of written summaries ($r=.34, p<.01$). This means that those students who are familiar with and use summarizing strategies are able to produce texts which have higher quality in terms of content, form (cohesion & coherence), and language use.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix

Variables	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)
Writing Competence (1)	37.38	11.59	1	.563[**]	.481[**]
Summary Writing Quality (2)	9.31	3.34	.563[**]	1	.340[**]
Summary Writing Strategy Use (3)	78.49	15.13	.481[**]	.340[**]	1

[**]. Correlation is significant at 0.01 level of significance (2 tailed).

Subsequently, in order to know how much summarization strategies contributed to the prediction of summary writing quality and indicate which subcategory of these strategies (namely, planning, discourse synthesis, source use, and evaluation strategies) could best predict the summary writing competence of the student writers, the multiple regression procedure was run. As is seen in Table 4, none of the subcategories of summarization strategies had a unique and significant predictive power to account for the summary writing quality of the learners; nevertheless, planning strategies ($B=.239, Beta=.331, t=1.722, p=.09>.05$) had a better

condition in this regard. In fact, since planning strategies in summarizing are concerned with the careful reading of the original passage in order to get an understanding of the organization of information and to find the key ideas and the way to present them, they are almost attended by all the student writers as the prerequisite condition for embarking on the act of paraphrasing the content.

Table 4

Coefficients of Multiple Regressions

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	*t*	*Sig*
(Constant)	3.725	2.248		1.657	.104
Discourse Synthesis	-.049	.138	-.063	-.353	.726
Evaluation	-.059	.095	-.101	-.622	.537
Source use	.213	.130	.256	1.637	.108
Planning	.239	.139	.331	1.722	.091

a. Dependent Variable: Summary Writing Quality

In order to see what proportion of the variance in the summary writing quality can be explained by the model of summarization strategies, the R Square (multiplied by 100) in the model summary table was estimated. According to Table 5, only 18.2% of the variance in total reported summary writing quality could be explained by the independent variables, which is rather negligible and proves the complexity of summary writing tasks for the learners.

Table 5

Model Summary of the Standard Multiple Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.426	.182	.119	3.14429

As for the fifth research question, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used in order to compare high-skilled, moderately-skilled, and low-skilled student writers' summary writing quality and strategy use. Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics for this analysis. As for the quality of summarized texts produced, the high writing group has the highest mean score (*N=14, M=11.35, SD=2.46),* next comes the mid writing group (*N=29, M=9.65, SD=2.81)* and the lowest mean score refers to the low writing group (*N=14, M=6.57, SD=3.50).* In the summarization strategies employed, the mid writing group has the highest mean score (*N=29, M=86.41, SD=9.40)* and the low writing group has the lowest mean score in the deployment of strategies (*N=14, M=59.42, SD=14.48*).

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Three Different Writing Groups' Summarization Strategy Use and Quality

	Writing Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Summarization Quality	High	11.35	2.46	14
	Mid	9.65	2.81	29
	Low	6.57	3.50	14
	Total	9.31	3.34	57
Summarization Strategy Use	High	81.14	6.89	14
	Mid	86.41	9.40	29
	Low	59.42	14.48	14
	Total	78.49	15.13	57

In order to see whether there are statistically significant differences among different writing groups on the linear combination of the dependent variables (i.e., summary writing quality and strategy use), the multivariate tests of significance were inspected (see Table 7).

Table 7

Multivariate (MANOVA) Tests for Different Writing Groups

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	*Sig.*	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.983	1516.315[b]	2.000	53.000	.000	.983
	Wilks' Lambda	.017	1516.315[b]	2.000	53.000	.000	.983
Writing group	Pillai's Trace	.678	13.852	4.000	108.000	.000	.339
	Wilks' Lambda	.376	16.720[b]	4.000	106.000	.000	.387

a. Design: Intercept + Writing group

b. Exact statistic

c. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.

The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the High, Mid, and Low writing groups on the combined dependent variables, *F (2, 53) =2.45, p=.00<.05; Wilks' Lambda=.37; Partial Eta Squared=.38*. Moreover, Tests of Between-Subjects Effects were examined to see whether there are any significant differences among the groups for each dependent variable separately. According to the statistics presented in Table 8, the learners with different writing scores were significantly different from each other in terms of their summary writing quality (*F (2, 54) =9.78, p=.000<0.05, partial Eta Squared=.26*) and summarization strategy use (*F (2, 54) =32.47, p=.000<0.05, partial Eta Squared=.54*).

Table 8

Tests of Between-subjects Effects for Different Writing Groups

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	Summary quality	167.121[a]	2	83.561	9.784	.000	.266
	Strategy use	7006.068[b]	2	3503.034	32.479	.000	.546
Intercept	Summary quality	4290.421	1	4290.421	502.354	.000	.903
	Strategy use	290528.473	1	290528.473	2693.692	.000	.980
Writing group	Summary quality	167.121	2	83.561	9.784	.000	.266
	Strategy use	7006.068	2	3503.034	32.479	.000	.546
Error	Summary quality	461.195	54	8.541			
	Strategy use	5824.177	54	107.855			
Total	Summary quality	5575.000	57				
	Strategy use	364000.000	57				

a. R Squared = .266 (Adjusted R Squared = .239)

b. R Squared = .546 (Adjusted R Squared = .529)

Moreover, the inspection of mean differences in the Estimated Marginal Means, as depicted in Table 9, indicated that the High writing group had a higher mean score (*M=11.35*) in their summary writing quality compared to the Mid (*M=9.65*) and Low (*M=6.57*) writing groups; in addition, Mid writing group had a higher mean score (M=86.14) in summary writing strategy use and next come High (*M=81.14*) and Low (*M=59.42*) groups in this regard. Since we have an independent variable with three levels, it is required to conduct a follow-up univariate analysis to specify where the exact significant differences exist.

Table 9

Estimated Marginal Means for Different Writing Groups

Dependent Variable	Writing group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Summary Quality	High	11.357	.781	9.791	12.923
	Mid	9.655	.543	8.567	10.743
	Low	6.571	.781	5.006	8.137
Strategy Use	High	81.143	2.776	75.578	86.708
	Mid	86.414	1.929	82.547	90.280
	Low	59.429	2.776	53.864	64.993

In order to check where the actual differences between the groups lie, Tukey posthoc test was run (see Table 10). The multiple comparisons between the groups indicated that for summary writing quality, there were significant mean differences (i.e., *4.58*) between high and low groups (*p=.000<0.05*) and significant mean differences (i.e., *3.08*) between mid and low groups (*p=006<0.05*). As for summary writing strategy use, there were similar significant mean

differences between high and low (i.e., *21.71*) and mid and low (i.e., *26.98*) groups at .000<0.05 level.

Table 10

The Results of Tukey Post-hoc Test for Multiple Comparisons of Summary Writing Quality and Strategy Use by High, Mid and Low Writing Groups

Dependent variable	(I) Writing Group	(J) Writing Group	Mean Difference (IJ)	Std. Error	*Sig.*	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Summary Writing Quality	High	Mid	1.7020	.951	.183	-.5901	3.9941
		Low	4.7857*	1.104	.000	2.1237	7.4477
	Mid	High	-1.7020	.951	.183	-3.9941	.5901
		Low	3.0837	.951	.006	.7917	5.3758
Summary Strategy Use	High	Mid	-5.2709	3.379	.272	-13.4162	2.8743
		Low	21.7143*	3.925	.000	12.2544	31.1742
	Mid	High	5.2709	3.379	.272	-2.8743	13.4162
		Low	26.9852*	3.379	.000	18.8399	35.1305

The final research question intended to find the problems encountered by the student writers while summarizing the original passage by analyzing the written samples produced and their responses to an open-ended question soliciting their own views with regard to the difficulties they have faced while writing. The identified problems are categorized based on the three key dimensions of summary writing: content, form, and language use (see Table 11).

Table 11

The Main Problems Encountered by Learners in Summary Writing

Aspects of Summarization Writing	Key Problems
	Inadequate understanding of the passage content due to limited reading comprehension competence, inadequate technical knowledge of subject matter, and unfamiliarity with the genre/discourse structure of the original text
Content	Inability in finding the most important/key ideas and paraphrasing trivial or detailed points resulting in divergence of summary text from the original passages due to change in meaning
	Verbatim copying of words and structures from the original passage without any

	paraphrasing or making only some surface changes in the structure of sentences by supplying synonyms
Form (Cohesion & Coherence)	Addressing and presenting ideas that may be insignificant, repetitive, irrelevant, or misrepresented (i.e., lack of unity and coherence)
	Limited use of referential ties and conjunctions to show the connection between ideas (in some cases inappropriate or inaccurate)
	Lack of organization since connections, relevancy and progression of ideas are not well-handled
Language Use	Grammatical problems while paraphrasing and restructuring the information that obliterate and obscure meaning (i.e., a limited command of the morphosyntactic system of L2)
	Unfamiliarity with norms and conventions of citations and excessive use of direct quotations
	Problems in mechanics of writing and use of punctuation marks
Strategy Use	Inadequate knowledge and use of planning, discourse synthesis, borrowing, source use, and evaluation strategies while summarizing the passage

As is observed in the above table, Iranian EFL students have encountered many problems while summarizing the passage. In fact, EFL writing is a multi-facet construct composed of a cognitive set of activities affected by the existing linguistic and contextual factors and other instructional, psychological, socio-cultural, and even ideological issues (Ahmed, 2011). Consequently, it is natural to see many problems in the summarized texts produced by Iranian EFL learners who are rather deprived of enough authentic exposure and practice in this genre of writing.

As for the content, the key problem encountered by the students (reported by about 60% of the participants and identified based on the analyses and comparison of the written samples) has been the learners' inability in digesting and making a full understanding of the materials in the original passage. The following ideas from some of the students also confirm this assertion:

Zahra: *Understanding the passage was difficult. I had to read it several times in order to understand it. And when I wrote my summary, I wasn't sure whether I got the passage right or wrong. It was a technical passage and paraphrasing the information was also difficult.*

Mina: *I sometimes had difficulty focusing on the content to find the key ideas as I have a short attention span and I find it very difficult to focus on one thing for too long. Because of this, I had to reread the text several times to ensure I hadn't missed anything important and that I have understood everything, so the reading part usually hogs up more time than the summarizing part. Sometimes I had problems with connecting ideas and writing them down as one coherent text or coherent set of sentences.*

Hamid: *Separating the main idea from the detailed information and reducing the length of the passage without leaving out the essential ideas was challenging for me.*

Some other students had embarked on the verbatim copying of words and structures from the original passage without any paraphrasing or making only some surface changes in the structure of sentences by supplying synonyms. In fact, this issue has been highly challenging for the students:

Yasaman: *Paraphrasing is a hard affair because you should rewrite the original text while you shouldn't change its meaning. You must use correct vocabulary and sentence structures without distorting the original. This made the task of summarization quite challenging for me.*

Regarding the form (i.e., cohesion and coherence), there were limited (in some cases inappropriate or inaccurate) use of referential ties and conjunctions to show the connection between the ideas and most of the summarized texts lacked any organization since connections, relevancy, and progression of ideas were not well-handled. In terms of language, the examination of students' written passages indicated that they have encountered many grammatical problems and mistakes while paraphrasing and restructuring the information that obliterate and obscure meaning, which is the result of their limited command of the morphosyntactic system of L2 and inadequate practice in writing.

Another dominant problem in the students' summarized texts was their unfamiliarity with norms and conventions of citations and excessive use of direct quotations. This problem has also affected the other aspects of students' writing as the following comment from one of the students aptly points to the same issue:

Ayda: *When I started reading the text, I got confused because of the many citations. I didn't know where to start and how to use these citations, so I preferred to use my own words and understandings to paraphrase the text. This made the text highly vague and complex for me.*

Finally, it can be asserted that most of the problems that Iranian EFL learners have encountered in the act of summarization can be attributed to their lack of strategic competence (i.e., use of cognitive, metacognitive and affective strategies in writing). In fact, these students had a limited command of planning, discourse synthesis, source use, and evaluation strategies while summarizing the passage, and this inadequacy is reflected in the summarized texts they have written.

Discussion

Summary Writing is considered an important literacy skill and an effective learning strategy for students to improve their reading and writing competence and to learn how to synthesize information from source texts. Accordingly, the present study explored summary writing quality and strategy use among Iranian EFL learners. It was initially found that the learners produced better-summarized passages in terms of content compared to form (cohesion and coherence) and language use. Content, as representing the gist and message of any text, is the main manifestation of an attempt to engage in a communicative interaction or transaction of information. In fact, the significance of content in summary writing can be attributed to the rationale for such tasks, which is conveying adequate and accurate information in an efficiently-condensed manner so that the readers can understand the main idea and key details through a passage that is shorter than the original text. In other words, "the ability to write a tight, concise, accurate summary of information is an essential entry point to other writing genres, especially analytical and technical writing" (Frey et al., 2003, p. 43). Summary writings are integrated tasks that are designed based on authenticity argument and intertextuality principles to provide content and resources for completing other academic tasks (Plakans, 2009; Weigle & Parker, 2012). The emphasis on

content (especially, in the form of content-based instruction) has also been reported to improve thinking, exploring, synthesizing, and writing skills in ESP contexts (Shih, 1986). However, it should be born in mind that the content or meaning which is conveyed in a summary text is not a one-dimensional process; rather, it is a metafunctional construct incorporating notions of ideational meaning, interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning (Halliday, 1996) that make the transfer of content a challenging task compared to mere verbatim copying the source materials or patchwriting by changing only some of the words and grammar (Marshall & Varnon, 2017) and requires the use of interdependent processes and strategies to successfully render a true representation of the original text.

The result of the second research question also indicated that the students have used evaluation strategies more than the other types of strategies. These strategies are related to the monitoring aspect of writing whereby the student writers have attempted to manage the accurate identification of key ideas, use of accurate and appropriate vocabulary and sentences while paraphrasing and presenting the ideas, and, finally, have embarked on revising and editing the whole passage. Similar to the finding of Asención (2004) who used the think-aloud protocol technique to unveil the nature of cognitive processes used while responding to summary tasks, it was found that the participants used monitoring and planning strategies more frequently than organizing, selecting, and connecting ideas. Moreover, evaluation strategies are directly related to metacognitive skills which involve reflecting and applying a set of monitoring strategies to control and regulate thinking and actions in the process of writing to produce higher quality texts (Golparvar & Khafi, 2021; Olivier, 2019). Metacognition is considered a key aspect of agency and as a factor that assists the learners in reaching self-regulation and transfer of knowledge and skills across various genres and contextual situations (Negretti, 2012). Writing in academic contexts requires the application of various metacognitive knowledge and strategies for effective monitoring and regulation of the whole writing process (Hacker et al., 2009; Karlen, 2017). Hosseinpur and Kazemi (2022) considered the awareness and employment of metacognitive strategies as the key distinguishing factor between skillful and less successful student writers. Metacognitive mechanisms with their executive functions can assist the student writers in the effective management of their time and concentration of their efforts, establishment and fulfilment of their goals, effective processing of available information and finally rendering an efficient summarized passage as the final output (Yang, 2014). These strategies also entail self-assessment and problem-solving skills which are related to the writers' practice in setting goals, identifying the obstacles in their way to solving problems and reaching those goals, and doing actions such as planning, analyzing, monitoring, employing required strategies, evaluating and revising in the recursive process of writing (Olivier, 2019). Generally, writing is regarded as a cognitive process that entails the higher-order mental process of problem-solving. In the same regard, Berkenkotter (1982, p. 33) maintains that "[a] writer is a problem solver of a particular kind" and that their "solutions will be determined by how they frame their problems, the goals they set for themselves, and the means or plans they adopt for achieving those goals". Being engaged in the writing also demands "some form of cognitive responsibility through which the

learner will self-monitor the learning process, assess outcomes, and develop new strategies to achieve intended outcomes" (Garrison, 1997, p. 25).

Based on the results of the third research question, there was a moderate relationship between writing competence, summary writing quality, and strategy use. These relationships support previous ideas regarding the influence of students' background knowledge, proficiency level, and strategy use on their summarization performance. For instance, Yang and Shi (2003) highlighted the importance and influence of the student's previous learning experiences (that is, background knowledge and previous experience in reading the content area and writing about discipline-specific topics) on their summarization performance and their confidence and skill in completing the task. Zhu et al. (2021) confirmed the decisive role of discourse synthesis abilities (i.e., quoting and connecting) and students' overall integrated writing performance and competence in both L1 and L2 integrated writing assessment contexts. A point worth mentioning is that the correlation index for these constructs is not that high which can point to the inadequacies in Iranian instructional contexts for teaching summary writing principles and strategy use. In addition, appropriate writing strategy use can be influenced by a variety of socio-cultural, cognitive, and affective factors such as the learners' various educational and cultural backgrounds and experiences, content knowledge and task familiarity, previous learning experiences and practice, different levels of language proficiency and writing abilities, and their aptitude, anxiety, or even age (Amini Farsani et al., 2019; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Mallahi, 2020).

The result of multiple regression analysis also indicated the significance of planning strategies in accounting for the summary writing competence of the learners. Considerable research evidence supports the importance of planning by attributing and connecting good writing behavior with the employment of strategies to support activities like goal setting, idea generation, and organization (Limpo & Alves, 2018). As for the importance of planning strategies, Manchon and Roca de Larios (2007) indicated that more-skilled L2 writers tend to devote "more time to constructing their pragmatic, textual and ideational representations before putting pen to paper than less skilled writers and they were also more capable of activating and incorporating them into the text" (p. 579). Consequently, providing training on genre-specific planning strategies is among the most effective procedures to promote the quality of students' writing (e.g., Harris et al., 2006). However, it should be considered that planning is not a panacea capable of solving all the difficulties encountered by writers (Kellogg, 1994) and the students must attend to other critical and important aspects of text production in the recursive process (translation, execution, and monitoring) of writing, try to enhance the level of their cognitive effort and expertise by becoming familiar with the genre-specific features and demands of each writing task, be equipped with appropriate and effective strategies to compensate for their deficiencies in order to render a higher quality written output.

In addition, it was found that the model of summarization strategy use could only account for a small proportion of variance in the students' writing competence, which confirms the complexity of writing. In fact, writing is a multidimensional construct and a variety of factors can influence the students' performance while engaged in the act of writing, in general, and

summary writing, in particular. In fact, in the present study, the newness and complexity level of the summarization task might have imposed some limitations on the students' performance since they have been required to write in a rather new and challenging academic genre (i.e., summarizing a literature review). In the same regard, Robinson's (2011) Cognition Hypothesis and Skehan's (2014) Limited Attention Model propose that task design characteristics can impact the level of students' learning by exerting various extents of demands on learners' cognitive and mental resources such as their attention to specific dimensions of language use, production, and learning. Previous studies have also found that the complexity of writing tasks, by exerting cognitive burden and loads on the students' experiences and their attentional resources during task performance, can influence the accuracy, fluency, syntactic complexity, and content quality of written outputs produced by the student writers (Frear & Bitchener, 2015; Rahimi & Zhang, 2017).

Moreover, the results of the fifth research question revealed significant differences among high-skilled, moderately-skilled, and low-skilled student writers in summary writing quality and strategy use. The existence of variations in the writing performance and strategy use of learners with different individual characteristics has been well-documented in the previous studies. The research literature has demonstrated that skilled writers perfectly understand the features of high-quality compositions, are knowledgeable about the higher-order cognitive processes and mechanisms involved in the act of writing, and make effective use of writing strategies (Cindy Lin et al., 2007; McCutchen, 2006). In fact, it is believed that more-skilled student writers use better and more frequent strategies compared to their less-skilled counterparts, which can significantly affect and improve their writing performance (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Hosseinpur & Kazemi, 2022; Lei, 2016; Sasaki, 2000). Plakans (2009) also highlighted significant differences in the performance of skilled and less skilled L2 writers' discourse synthesis processes in completing reading-to-write test tasks: more competent writers have used further discourse synthesis processes (namely, organizing, selecting, and connecting); whereas, less competent student writers have struggled with the rather simple act of vocabulary comprehension and production. Saddler and Graham (2007) also maintain that skilled writers have a more sophisticated understanding and conceptualization of writing, better understand the attributes and structure of different text-organization patterns and genres and can identify and deploy efficient writing strategies better than less-competent writers. A point worth mentioning is that in the present study the moderately-skilled student writers had been reported to use summarization strategies more than their high- or low-level student writer counterparts; this points to the fact that it is not the knowledge of strategies that counts, but their use while being engaged in pedagogical and real-world tasks is important. In fact, it is argued that "there are no good or bad strategies but it is how the strategies are executed that counts" (Anderson, 2005, p. 762). For strategy training to be effective, it should not only focus on enhancing the knowledge of cognitive strategies or mental operations but should teach the learners effective use of such strategies through careful programs of scaffolding, mediation, modeling, and practice (see, e.g., Mallahi & Saadat, 2018; Ng & Cheung, 2018). Besides the use of cognitive strategies for planning, synthesizing, and evaluating in the writing process, learners must be equipped with the

knowledge and ability to use metacognitive and sociocultural strategies (e.g., use the resources from the Internet, corpus, software, and other literary works and linguistic concepts in the community) to strategically media their mind while engaged in the writing process (Lei, 2016; Yang, 2014) and, thus, enhance the quality of their performance while working on genre-specific tasks such as summarizing technical or disciplinary-specific passages that besides the learners' linguistic, discourse, genre and content knowledge demand their strategic decision-making and problem-solving endeavors. Forbes (2018), exploring the role of a set of individual difference variables in learning and transfer of writing strategies across languages, concluded that a rather complex and dynamic range of factors like the students' language proficiency levels, their attitudes, and beliefs about writing, their level of cognitive and metacognitive engagement with the task, and their strategic use of other linguistic resources in their repertoire can influence the students' strategic behavior.

As for the final research question, the qualitative analyses of the summarized texts produced by the learners and their own responses to the open-ended survey revealed the main problems in the students' written outputs in terms of content, form, and language use. The key problem has been the students' inability in understanding the content and digesting the materials which can be due to their limited reading comprehension competence, inadequate technical knowledge of subject matter and unfamiliarity with the genre/discourse structure of the original text, or even not being familiar with the demands and conventions of summary writing. The same set of internal and external constraints that affect students' summary writing are presented by Kirkland and Saunders (1991, as cited in Du, 2014): linguistic proficiency level of the student writers, required knowledge and expertise about the specific content of the original passages, cognitive and metacognitive skills to make distinctions between important information and trivial details and to control their engagement in the actual processes of summary writing, the types and complexity levels of materials and texts being summarized, the nature and objectives of the assigned tasks, the allocated time, the resources for writing (paper and pencil or computer) and also the target readers and audience of the summaries. McDonough et al. (2014) also referred to problems such as the students' difficulty in finding main ideas in the source texts, inadequate grammar and vocabulary knowledge and incompetency in defining words and manipulating synonyms, problems restructuring source text sentences, and engaging in textual appropriation strategies like verbatim copying or surface word-level changes rather than making more global conceptual modifications as the main barriers of students' success in creating a good representation of the original passage.

The second key problem has been related to the verbatim copying of words and structures from the original passage without any paraphrasing. Similarly, Johns and Mayes (1990) indicated that students with various levels of language proficiency had difficulties in writing key ideas in a condensed manner based on the information in the text and they generally relied on the original word and structure of the text instead of paraphrasing. It is believed that if the student writers are competent enough in paraphrasing skills, they can develop an understanding of the proper use of source information by acknowledging the main authors' work and avoiding plagiarism which can enhance the quality of their academic writing performance and the credibility of ideas they

provide (Tran & Nguyen, 2022). Johns (1985) also reported that students mainly focus on sentence-level information and occasionally add their own personal comments in summaries which might even distort the ideas of source texts. Some scholars have attributed this verbatim/exact copying or textual misappropriation to conceptual challenges, disciplinary variation, low reading comprehension skills and limited vocabulary knowledge while writing summaries, expository and argumentative essays, literature reviews, and research papers (see e.g., Baba, 2009; Esmaeili, 2002; McDonough et al., 2014; Plakans, 2009; Polio & Shi, 2012; Shaw & Pecorari, 2013). Consequently, the student writers must further engage in text-based writing experiences in their disciplines to master the conventions governing each genre and compensate for the shortcomings in their L2 academic proficiency regarding the inefficient use of reading and writing strategies, sentence and discourse level structural and lexical resources and their undeveloped disciplinary and topic-specific knowledge.

In terms of form (cohesion and coherence), most of the texts produced lacked proper organization since connections, relevancy, and progression of ideas were not well-handled. Kim (2001) also found that students have problems reorganizing and connecting the information to come up with a good representation of the source text. Mallahi and Saadat (2018), analyzing a group of Iranian EFL learners' problems in paragraph writing, also faced the same deficiencies and referred to them as a lack of discourse competence: problems in the rhetorical organization, cohesion, and coherence of the texts produced. They suggested that Iranian EFL learners must be explicitly taught the cross-linguistic differences in organizing their texts, practice writing correct and various sentence types, and use appropriate connectors/conjunctive adverbs to connect their ideas.

Regarding language use, the students have encountered many grammatical problems while paraphrasing and restructuring the information that even sometimes obliterate and obscure meaning. The root of this problem can be traced to the ineffective teaching of grammar in EFL classrooms and the fact that most EFL students learn grammar as a set of rules to be memorized rather than for communicative purposes, that is, their use for speaking and writing (Mallahi & Saadat, 2018). Lack of writing practice has also negatively influenced the operationalization and correct use of the linguistic aspects of writing. It is believed that the contextualized teaching of writing in which grammar, vocabulary, and cohesive ties are taught for meaningful and communicative purposes and providing opportunities for practice of some form of writing under guidance and encouragement can help learners remove some of the problems they face in writing and, thus, enhance FL/L2 writing quality (Hammad, 2014; Mourtaga, 2010; Scholes & Comley, 1989).

Another dominant issue has been the students' unfamiliarity with the norms and conventions of proper citation and documentation of source materials, which has led to the excessive use of direct quotations. In the same vein, it should be considered that summary writing largely depends on textual borrowing and paraphrasing, but due to insufficient practice and instruction on how to deal with these issues, student writers mostly engage in copying the source materials or patchwriting by changing only some of the words and grammar, which is considered a type of plagiarism and a serious act of academic dishonesty (Marshall & Varnon, 2017). Plagiarism is

seen as "a failure to document…verbatim material, paraphrased material… and ideas specific to an author" (Russikoff et al., 2003, p. 130). In order to avoid such academic offense, EFL learners must receive explicit instruction on the appropriate ways of source text use (e.g., summarizing, paraphrasing, and citation) and be given opportunities to use these features and be given some feedback regarding the appropriateness and accuracy of their work in this regard (Li, 2021).

Finally, it was concluded that most problems that the students have encountered in the summary writing process can be attributed to their insufficient knowledge and use of writing strategies. The influence of effective strategy instruction on the students' summarization is well-supported in the literature. For example, Yang and Plakans (2012) indicated that the proper application of discourse synthesis strategies can help improve students' performance on various aspects of writing such as content, organization, and language use components of writing and can reduce their use of verbatim exact phrases and structures from source texts. However, due to a variety of pedagogical and contextual factors, strategy training is nonexistent or very limited in most EFL contexts (Lei, 2016; Riazi et al., 2018). The dominant approach to teaching writing in Iran is also product-oriented and the processes and strategies that the learners must engage in for planning, generating ideas, drafting and organizing ideas, and revising them are not explicitly attended and taught in the classrooms (Mallahi & Saadat, 2018). Consequently, if the instructors intend to teach a new genre of writing to the students (e.g., summary writing), besides teaching the points related to the surface structure and organization of ideas in the passages, they must teach them effective strategies for planning, executing and monitoring their performance while engaged in such activities. This strategy instruction must also be supplemented with adequate modeling and scaffolding (Ng & Cheung, 2018) of these strategic behaviors on the part of instructors, and providing opportunities for effective practice and application of the acquired knowledge, skills, and strategies while working on new genres.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the summary writing performance and strategy use of a group of Iranian EFL learners. The results of the study demonstrated a significant and moderate relationship between writing competence and summary writing quality and strategy use of the student writers. There were also significant differences among the less-skilled, moderately-skilled, and high-skilled student writers in summarization quality and strategy use. The content analyses of students' responses to an open-ended question and their summarized texts revealed that the students have encountered many problems in various aspects of summarized texts (i.e., content, form, and language use) and had a rather limited command of summarization strategies. In fact, despite being a highly essential skill in academic contexts and working as a foundation for writing many tasks such as writing scientific reports, academic essays, literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, and research papers, which are highly dependent upon the relevant and previously-published scholarships on a topic, summarization is misrepresented especially in EFL contexts. This inefficiency is mostly due to the limited number of appropriate teaching materials, insufficient explicit instruction on the conventions of source-text use and strategies of summary writing and a lack of constructive feedback on the texts students produce.

Therefore, in order to compensate for these deficiencies, the student writers must be familiar with and master the conventions of this academic genre and discoursal features of this complex skill, increase their knowledge of the literary practices of their disciplines characterized by specific intertextual use of language (Badenhorst, 2017; Harwood & Hadley, 2004; Hyland, 2004; Pecorari, 2006), further engage in text-based disciplinary-specific writing experiences (Pecorari, 2003, 2006; Shi, 2010), compensate for their inadequate level of L2 academic proficiency especially their reading and writing competence and strategy use and other sentence level structural and lexical resources (Howard et al., 2010) as well as their genre-specific disciplinary knowledge, increase their awareness of academic task requirements (Weigle, 2005) and enhance their level of self-efficacy and confidence both as L2 writers and as members of a specific academic discourse community (Abasi & Akbari, 2008) in order to communicate an effective authorial identity and voice with regard to the text they are composing and the context in which they are performing (Hyland, 2002; Ivanic & Camps, 2001).

More specifically, due to the importance of this genre in academic contexts, writing instructors must use materials that cover the conventions of this skill and explicitly teach the rules and regulations associated with this genre, provide scaffolding and models of successful summarization practice, teach the learners effective strategies for planning the content, organizing the ideas, synthesizing information, paraphrasing the words and sentences and apply evaluation strategies to monitor various aspects of summarizing act. The instructor must also teach, assist and empower the students to edit and revise their written output by rechecking the appropriateness of content in terms of covering the key ideas and fulfillment of task requirements, accurate use of vocabulary and sentence structures, handling effective connections among the ideas, and proper integration of the main source information.

Finally, despite attempting to shed some light on the summarization, source-based writing practice, strategy use, and problems encountered by EFL university students in this genre of writing, the present study has only provided a rather limited picture of the summarization practice of Iranian EFL learners. The main limitation can be attributed to the use of summarization task and instruments used for both scoring the written samples and identifying the strategies the students have used for summarization. Drawing conclusions on the students' competency based on their performance on a single summarization task can overshadow the reliability, validity and, thus, the generalizability of the findings. The instruments used for scoring the drafts and identifying the strategies students use for summarization have been originally designed for examining the students' performance in summarizing information from multiple sources and not a single passage containing various subsections. Consequently, future studies must use further tasks and synthesis of information from more than one source for assessing the students' summarization practice to make the findings more valid. Further studies must also be conducted to experimentally investigate the effects of summarization strategy instruction on the quality of students' written outputs and use more rigorous techniques such as think-aloud protocols or retrospective in-depth interviews to see how the student writers employ such strategies in real pedagogical situations and how they attempt to resolve their problems to come up with a refined summarized passage.

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No, there are no conflicting interests.
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