



EFFECT OF EXPLICIT READING INSTRUCTION FOR NOVICE EFL WRITERS: L1 SUMMARY WRITING PERFORMANCE AND SELF-PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract:

This study investigated how explicit reading instruction, including a title-based approach, affects the summarization performance of novice English as a foreign language (EFL) writers. Conducted over 11 weeks, the study involved 95 Japanese undergraduate students who were new to summarizing. Participants completed a first-language (L1) summarization task based on an English expository text before and after instruction. Quantitative results from pre- and post-tests showed significant improvement in overall summarization performance, particularly in covering main ideas, while textual integration improved less substantially. Qualitative data from student questionnaires further indicated increased engagement, with learners reflecting on both their progress and ongoing challenges. Namely, the identification of important information improved, but comprehension of main ideas remained underdeveloped and integration skills were weak. Students' self-monitoring revealed the spontaneous adoption of strategies such as reinforcing lexical and grammatical knowledge. The simplicity of explicit reading instruction, supported by teacher-student interaction, thus serves as an effective initial approach for developing summarization skills.

Keywords: summarization skills, reading instruction, novice EFL writers, title-based approach, self-reflection, improvement and challenge in summarization

1. Introduction

Summarizing English texts is widely recognized as an important skill for academic success across different cultures and educational levels (Keck, 2006). However, many EFL students, particularly those with lower levels of English proficiency or in Asian contexts, struggle with summarizing. Although previous studies have examined combined reading-writing instruction, they have not consistently improved the summarization

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performance of lower proficiency learners (Chen & Su, 2012; Choy & Lee, 2012). Relatively few studies have developed concrete summarization instruction or appropriate methods to evaluate summarization performance in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context (Kato, 2024). One potential reason is the assumption that effective summarization requires more than a high-intermediate level of English proficiency (Kirkland & Saunders, 1991), which may have limited research targeting less proficient learners. Hua (2024) suggested that EFL students not only need writing instruction but also explicit reading support, as reading in English remains challenging for them. Consequently, effective summarization instruction for less experienced learners is in high demand in Asia (Cho & Brutt-Griffler, 2015; Hua, 1991).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Summarization

Kato (2018) stated that summarization skills included text comprehension, identification of main ideas, and integration of source ideas in the writer's own words. As all summarization processes begin with understanding the text, comprehension is central (Li, 2014a). Therefore, an explicit reading approach may provide useful guidance for teachers working with struggling EFL summary writers.

2.2 Explicit Reading Instruction

Rosenshine and Stevens (1995) described explicit reading instruction as active teacher-student interaction, involving direct explanation, modeling, and guided practice. Rupley et al. (2009) emphasized that such instruction should be scaffolded to support students' learning strategies. They proposed the following steps:

- Review and provide feedback on students' prior work,
- Introduce a new skill or cognitive strategy related to prior work, explaining its relevance to reading,
- Model the strategy using talk- or think-aloud techniques, explicitly explaining how and why it is applied,
- Provide guided practice, gradually reducing teacher support to encourage independent, critical engagement with texts.

2.3 Identification of Main Ideas in Summary Reading

Although many scholars recognize the role of reading in summarization (e.g. Li, 2014a), few studies have explicitly examined how reading instruction supports students who struggle with summarizing. These learners often have difficulty identifying main ideas and may produce verbatim copies of inappropriate text portions (Choy & Lee, 2012). Identifying topic sentences is therefore essential. For Vietnamese writers, Hua (2024) recommended a title method among several instructional approaches; a title directly presents the thematic information and key words of the whole text. Reading the title before the text can activate background knowledge (Grabe, 1991). As Lyu et al. (2024)

observed, early reader engagement strongly affects comprehension. The key words in titles can help learners locate corresponding topic sentences in each paragraph. When taught explicitly, this simple strategy may support struggling summary writers in identifying the main ideas of texts.

To test this, this study designed a summarization training module combining Hua's (2024) title-focused approach and Rupley et al.'s (2009) explicit reading instruction for Japanese undergraduate students. The study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) Does explicit reading instruction affect lower-proficiency EFL students' first-language (L1) summarization performance of English expository text?
- 2) How does explicit reading instruction affect students' perception of their summarization performance after the training?

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative research design. Students' summarization performance was compared before and after explicit instruction, alongside their perceptions of their own performance. The study was conducted at University A in Japan, during the 2024–2025 academic year for a period of 11 weeks. Students completed a summarization task before and after explicit instruction was provided, between weeks two and ten. L1 was set as the language for producing summaries to assess the participants' comprehension and overall summarization performance without being affected by potential English language errors. On completing the summarization tasks, students were asked to assess their performance through an open-ended question. They answered in free-text form, as the study aimed to collect students' honest and spontaneous reflections without leading them toward any particular response. The participants' information and the classroom instruction are described below.

3.2 Participants and Their Language Abilities

The participants were 95 Japanese undergraduate students majoring in biological sciences, enrolled in a mandatory weekly English class. The study was conducted within this class. Students provided written informed consent for voluntary participation, were guaranteed anonymity, and had the option to withdraw at any time. Most of the students had limited experience producing summaries in their L1 or in English. Their English proficiency was generally low, corresponding to the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, based on Test of English for International Communication scores (mean = 359 on a 0–999 scale).

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the ethics committee of the author's affiliated institution (blinded for peer review).

3.3 Classroom Instruction

Week 1: Pre-Training Performance

Students were asked to produce an L1 summary of an English text from the textbook *Science for Fun!*, designed for university-level readers with low English proficiency. The text was a scientific expository article on prosocial behavior in animals, approximately 250 words in length, with Japanese glossaries. The author provided the following instructions for the summarization task: *“Read the text; write an L1 summary within 200 Japanese characters, condensing the text to approximately one-third of its length; ensure that a reader who has not read the article can understand its content; and avoid directly translating the source sentences”* (Kato, 2024). Students were given 30 minutes to complete the task.

Week 2: Review and Feedback

The teacher provided individual feedback on students' summaries from the previous week. The feedback encouraged students to check whether their written summaries included the main topic of the passage. The teacher showed a basic template of a completed summary that should include the topic and main ideas of each paragraph, while excluding trivial details. The teacher instructed the students to identify important information missing from their summaries and unimportant elements they contained. Subsequently, the students reread the text and identified the main ideas in the text.

Week 3: Introducing the Title-Focused Approach

The aim of the third week was to introduce the title-focused reading strategy and its usefulness for readers. The students were given another text featuring taste cells in mice's noses. The teacher utilized read- and think-aloud techniques to show how the title contained the key words of the text. The instructions included how these key words could be related to the topic ideas in each paragraph. The teacher explained that the key words in the title could guide the students while reading the passage. When they could not identify the main idea, they could review the title and try to find ideas similar to the key words.

Weeks 4 to 6: Modeling and Guided Practice

The aim of weeks four to six was to demonstrate identification of the main ideas in each paragraph and encourage students to practice the strategy through teacher–student interaction. In the fourth week, using talk- and think-aloud techniques, the teacher and students read another text about the singing sands of a desert. The teacher gave the following instructions: *“Read the title before reading the text and refer to it whenever you cannot identify topic sentences in each paragraph. This is because the main topic was stated in the first or second paragraph, which usually included almost all the key words in the title.”* The teacher demonstrated how the main ideas in the subsequent paragraphs developed the main topic or the title. The class read aloud interactively and identified the main ideas in each paragraph.

In the fifth and sixth weeks, the teacher briefly provided the instructions mentioned in week 4, adding that the key words included in the title evoke readers' prior knowledge. These key words were useful for inferring content meanings. Students read two different texts each week, featuring Christmas tree farming and blooming from ancient seeds, respectively, using read- and think-aloud techniques. After picking up the key words and main ideas from each paragraph, they shared their findings through teacher-student interactions. They identified how the topic developed along with the main ideas in each paragraph. At the end of the class, the teacher wrote a sample summary on the whiteboard to visually demonstrate how the summary included the key words and main ideas found while reading.

Weeks 7 to 9: Practicing with Peer Scaffolding

During these weeks, students practiced identifying main ideas with peer scaffolding support. The teacher's role shifted from guide to facilitator depending on individual performance, and feedback was provided on previous performance in identifying main ideas. The teacher asked students to read a new text each week and produce oral summaries in pairs. The texts covered useful enzymes for digesting seaweed, self-driving cars, and the relationship between musical likeness and brain function. Students worked in pairs to identify main ideas and practice speaking their summaries aloud. This gave them experience in explaining text content to a partner as if the partner had not read it. Additionally, listening to peer summaries helped them identify missing main ideas or irrelevant information in their own summaries. Teacher guidance was minimal, and students largely worked independently.

Week 10: Practicing Independently and Feedback

In the tenth week, instructions were provided to encourage near-independent L1 summarization. Students read a scientific expository text on natural selection in birds and wrote summaries. After completion, the teacher extracted key words and main ideas on the whiteboard, which students matched with their own summaries. They then discussed their performance in pairs. The teacher collected all summaries and provided feedback on how successfully main ideas had been captured and what was missing.

Week 11: Post-Training Performance

The teacher restated the summarization goal: identifying main ideas, integrating them, and reproducing them in the students' own words. Students produced L1 written summaries under the same conditions as week 1, using another English scientific expository text.

3.4 Data Analysis

The author processed the students' summarization performances anonymously. These were evaluated by two raters, including the author and an English-teaching colleague. The average scores of each student's performances from the two raters were regarded as

quantitative data. Pearson's correlation coefficient of interrater reliability was high ($r = 0.79$ for pre-training, $r = 0.77$ for post-training). The rating was based on a modified version of Kato's (2024) scoring rubric (adapted from Li, 2014a). The students' summarization performance was evaluated across four factors: main idea coverage (MIC), integration (INT), language use (LU), and source use (SU):

- MIC examines the proportion of the main ideas of the source text included in a summary, excluding trivial information.
- INT assesses the logical coherence of a summary.
- LU evaluates linguistic accuracy, including grammatical and lexical use of Japanese.
- SU rates the proportion of students' own words used in a summary without copying from the text.

Each source text contained five main ideas. Therefore, a maximum of five points was awarded for MIC. Meanwhile, INT, LU, and SU were scored from zero to three. Afterward, these statistical data were compared using paired-sample t-tests. Students' pre- and post-training perspectives on their summarization performance were qualitatively processed. The students' comments were largely classified into "satisfactory," "challenging," and "other." Some comments, anonymously represented using symbols such as S1, were fully quoted to complement the statistical data.

3.5 Abbreviated Terms Used in the Study

EFL: English as a foreign language,

L1: First language,

M: Means,

MIC: Main Idea Coverage,

INT: Integration,

LU: Language Use,

SD: Standard Deviations,

SU: Source Use.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Does Explicit Reading Instruction Affect Lower-proficiency Efl Students' L1 Summarization Performance of English Expository Text?

The study conducted paired-samples t-tests on the students' pre- and post-training summarization performance. The results showed a significant improvement in students' total performance across the four summarization components. As shown in Table 1, the mean overall score significantly rose from 8.23 to 10.86 ($t(95) = -7.87$, $p = 2.97E-12$). The effect size of Cohen's d ($d = 0.98$) implies that the explicit reading instruction had a moderate effect on students' total performance (Cohen, 1988; Plonsky & Oswald, 2014). The instruction also had a small-to-medium effect on students' performance for MIC, LU, and SU ($d = 0.90, 0.79, 0.78$, respectively). Only INT showed a very small effect from the

instruction ($d = 0.38$). According to these results, the instruction had a substantial impact on MIC, followed by LU and SU; INT had a lesser impact.

Table 1: Mean scores of pre- and post-instruction summarization performances

	Mean		SD		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post		
Main Idea Coverage (5.00)	2.73	3.84	1.29	1.19	-7.32	0.90***
Integration (3.00)	1.71	1.92	0.58	0.54	-2.88	0.38**
Language Use (3.00)	1.98	2.57	0.79	0.69	-6.27	0.79***
Source Use (3.00)	1.82	2.54	0.85	0.71	-6.65	0.78***
Overall (14.00)	8.23	10.86	2.90	2.43	-7.87	0.98***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

In line with the findings of previous studies (Hua, 2024), students in the pre-training phase of this study struggled with identifying main ideas (Mean = 2.73 out of 5.00). Students' performance for MIC may have significantly increased post-training due to instructions focused on identifying the main ideas in each paragraph and using key words from the title. This may be because the reading instructions, which prioritize developing students' reading skills, were simple enough for beginner students to use as soon as they had learned it. Previous studies, however, found that less experienced summary writers did not enhance their summarization performance through a combined approach of reading and writing skills (Cho et al., 2015). Once students enhanced their MICs, instruction for precise comprehension and paraphrasing of main ideas was provided in subsequent stages.

In terms of INT, students had difficulty in logically recomposing the main ideas of each paragraph even post-training. Although the students could extract main ideas more successfully, they did not fully understand the relationship between paragraphs and how the main ideas developed across the text. This corresponds to a previous study that found that the rate of coverage of main ideas did not always reflect successful integration (Kato, 2024). Thus, this finding may suggest that instructions on grasping main ideas were not enough for novice students; they should also include from-paragraph-to-paragraph topic development using key words.

4.2 How Does Explicit Reading Instruction Affect Students' Perception of Their Summarization Performance After the Training?

To answer the second research question, the study qualitatively analyzed the students' comments collected through questionnaires. Table 2 presents the students' perceptions of their pre- and post-training summarization performances. All the students spontaneously answered an open-ended question at both time points. Their comments were divided into three parts: perceiving their summarization performance as satisfactory, perceiving it as challenging, and other comments. During pre-training, only seven per cent of all comments expressed satisfaction, whereas over 90 per cent referred

to being “challenged.” Post-training, more than half of the comments implied feeling “improved,” and only 40 per cent of the comments referred to being “challenged.”

Table 2: Raw frequencies and percentages of students’
pre- and post-training comments on summarization performance

Comments	Satisfactory (%)	Challenging (%)	Others (%)	Total (%)
Pre-training	7 (5.34)	119 (90.84)	5 (3.82)	131 (100)
Post-training	89 (53.61)	66 (39.76)	11 (6.63)	166 (100)

Notably, pre-training students’ comments referred to either satisfaction or challenges; many post-training comments overlapped in terms of improvement and difficulties. Students often recognized their improvement in overall reading comprehension and MIC, yet implied that their lack of grammatical and lexical knowledge hindered their precise comprehension. S6 mentioned the following (translated by the author):

“I read more fluently than I had done before. I more successfully grasped important ideas paragraph by paragraph. However, I couldn’t fully understand each sentence because it included unfamiliar words. I often infer sentence meanings from the context, but it took time, leading to incorrect comprehension in the end.”

S7 also described improvement in reading and challenges in syntactical knowledge:

“I read and understood the text more smoothly and began writing a summary as soon as possible. I could identify the important portions of the text, which I carefully read. However, it was a pity that I misunderstood the content and nuance because of my lack of syntactical knowledge, although all the words in the sentences were familiar to me.”

These comments imply that the explicit reading instruction provided in this study encouraged students to identify the important part of the passage. However, the instruction could not prevent them from making incorrect inferences because of their deficiency in English language vocabulary and grammar. These findings support the quantitative data where MIC significantly increased while INT increased less significantly. Therefore, these student comments imply that they did not comprehend the source text enough to successfully integrate the main ideas in this study.

Although the students still had difficulty with summarization, they learned self-monitoring through the training. Furthermore, they suggested strategies to improve their performance. For example, S51 mentioned:

“I comprehended the text much better, including details. Therefore, I included trivial information in my summary. I should have understood the whole meaning of the text and should have chosen the most important information.”

Recognizing one's own difficulties with text information is an essential monitoring skill for independent readers (Grabe, 1991). Hence, the explicit reading instruction could help students analyze their performance and identify how they should improve further. This may be the first step to becoming an independent learner, as S75 stated:

"I can improve my summarization skills through the training. I will continue to train myself with the method I learned through the training."

5. Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations for Future Practice

Using the findings of this study, we propose an instruction model for novice summary writers, with the aim of developing integration skills and completing second-language (L2) summarization.

5.1.1 Clarifying Purpose

The focus of the instruction model is promoting students' comprehension. As purposeful reading enhances readers' comprehension (Grabe, 1991), students must first be instructed to establish the aim of reading: to produce a summary that is easy and comprehensible to a person who has not read the original text, and is one third the length of the original text.

5.1.2 Identifying Main Idea

Identifying the main idea of a source text is essential to produce a summary. At this stage, the instructor may explain and demonstrate how to find main ideas using explicit reading and title-focused approaches.

5.1.3 Reinforcing Comprehension

Identifying main ideas does not always equal comprehending the text. Students must also be able to infer how the topic idea develops from paragraph to paragraph. Instructors can use expository text for this lesson as it has a clear paragraph structure and each paragraph has a role (Li, 2014b). Teacher-students interaction in L1 should confirm the content comprehension of the whole class at the end of the lesson.

5.1.4 Developing Integration

Once the students develop their comprehension, they can begin expressing ideas in L2 (in this case, English). The teacher can write down English key words from each paragraph on the whiteboard. Teacher-student interactions should encourage students to create English sentences with the key words. Introducing verbs and nouns between key phrases can help make simple English sentences.

5.1.5 Paraphrasing

Once the students are used to creating simple English sentences with key words, the instructor can encourage them to paraphrase as many words as possible. These steps between comprehension and paraphrasing could help students shift from L1 comprehension to L2 summary production with less difficulty. Vocabulary building is also encouraged at this stage.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

The study has three limitations. First, the findings related to LU and SU may reflect L1 bias when compared with L2 summarization research. Second, the broad, open-ended questionnaire may have limited the specificity of students' perceptions of satisfaction and challenges. Qualitative data from more concrete questions could help clarify students' perception on summarization performance in the future. Third, some students struggled to integrate main ideas logically and achieve precise comprehension. The skill of identifying main ideas of the source text is not enough to complete summarization tasks, though it is essential at the initial stage of the summarization process. Therefore, the explicit reading approach should be regarded as suitable for the initial stage of summarization instruction, rather than a comprehensive method.

5.2 Implications

The study offers theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical contributions. Theoretically, it shows that only 11 weeks of explicit reading instruction can significantly improve summarization performance without explicit vocabulary or grammar training. While prior studies have emphasized longer-term training (for example, 12 months) and vocabulary development (Chen et al., 2012), the title-focused approach enhanced summarization performance within a shorter period. Moreover, contrary to the prevailing notion that effective summarization requires upper-intermediate English proficiency, this study demonstrates that even students with limited English proficiency can improve their summarization skills through explicit reading instruction. Focusing on main ideas enables these students to identify and organize important information, promoting educational equity for learners who have struggled because of their limited comprehension in previous summarization studies.

Empirically, the findings reaffirm the importance of reading instruction for EFL summary writers. While some literature emphasizes writing competency over reading ability (e.g. Li, 2014a), this study recognized the significance of reading-focused instruction. Explicit reading instruction, originally developed for L1 reading and later applied to L2 contexts, is effective even for academic-level EFL students learning to summarize.

Pedagogically, the study highlights the value of simplicity in instruction, that is, teaching one strategy at a time. This may explain why prior combined reading–writing instruction was less effective for beginner writers. The study provides a concrete model of explicit reading instruction, including step-by-step guidance and efficient teacher–

student interaction, which instructors and researchers can adopt to further explore reading and summarization practices. Furthermore, integration of main idea is one of the biggest challenges for novice students. The findings in this study suggests that teaching integration of source information should be prioritized to further develop summarization skills.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that explicit reading instruction focusing on identifying main ideas can improve EFL students' L1 summarization of English expository texts. Although students initially struggled with summarization, the reading instruction enhanced students' performance across four summarization components, particularly MIC. The qualitative analysis also revealed that less skilled EFL writers had difficulty in integrating main ideas even after the training, which resulted in underdeveloped comprehension. However, students' reflections suggested awareness of their summarization processes, highlighting improvements and challenges. Thus, a series of explicit reading instruction can effectively develop novice summary writers' independent engagement with texts.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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