



Challenges in Academic Writing: Libyan Undergraduate EFL Students' Summarizing and Paraphrasing of English Source Texts

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تحديات الكتابة الأكاديمية: صعوبات طلاب المرحلة الجامعية من دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية
كلغة أجنبية في التلخيص وإعادة الصياغة للنصوص الأكاديمية

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the primary challenges that EFL students encounter in paraphrasing and summarizing any academic English texts, as well as their perspectives on strategies to overcome these challenges. a quantitative research design was employed, using a questionnaire as the main instrument. The participants consisted of 69 fourth-semester EFL students from the Faculty of Education, Misurata University. The findings revealed that students face several difficulties in paraphrasing and summarization including 1) unknowing how to restructure the sentence in new style, 2) inappropriate use of synonyms, 3) making plagiarism, 4) poor grammatical competence, 5) weak reading comprehension, 6) difficulty understanding unfamiliar terms, and 7) the tendency to translate lengthy texts into Arabic. The study concluded with practical recommendations for both teachers and students to address these challenges.

Keywords: Academic Writing challenges, EFL Libyan Students, Paraphrasing, Summary Writing, English source texts.

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف الصعوبات الرئيسية التي يواجهها طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في إعادة صياغة وتلخيص أي نصوص أكاديمية باللغة الانجليزية، ووجهة نظر الطلاب حول كيفية التغلب على الصعوبات. استخدمت هذه الدراسة منهجاً كمياً. واستخدمت أداة واحدة لجمع البيانات، وهي الاستبيان. وكان المشاركون 69 طالباً من طلاب الفصل الدراسي الرابع بكلية التربية قسم اللغة الانجليزية، جامعة مصراته. كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن الطلاب يواجهون صعوبة في إعادة الصياغة والتلخيص لأسباب عديدة، مثل: (1) عدم معرفة كيفية إعادة هيكلة الجملة بأسلوب جديد، (2) استخدام مرادفات غير مناسبة، (3) الانتحال، (4) ضعف المعرفة النحوية، (5) ضعف فهم القراءة، (6) صعوبة فهم المصطلحات غير المألوفة، (7) ترجمة النصوص الطويلة إلى اللغة العربية. واختتمت الدراسة ببعض التوصيات للمعلمين والمتعلمين (الطلاب).

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحديات الكتابة الأكاديمية، الطلاب الليبيون الدارسين للغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية، إعادة الصياغة، التلخيص، نصوص المصدر.

Introduction

One of the skills in majoring English Language is writing. Ramadani (2013) stated that writing is the other forms of spoken language that represented graphically or symbolically. Writing is a sequence of letters, words, or symbols marked on a surface. When writing something, people must have their purpose. Writing has long been established as a powerful means of communication in professional and educational settings. Despite the increasing effect of oral and visual technology on shaping our use of language, writing remains an efficient and a necessary tool for communicating and storing ideas and exchanging knowledge. Writing is a central skill to learn across all educational levels as it is the main means through which learners can exhibit their knowledge and understanding of various subjects.

One of the writing purposes is for academic interests or more often called academic writing that usually done by the students of schools or colleges. Lecturers often give academic writing in colleges or universities. Swarni (2016) said that academic writing is a particular genre of writing that prescribes its own set of rules and practices. Academic writing is a specific style used in formal essays and other assessments for the course. Undoubtedly, higher education students are required to develop a certain level of academic writing skills. Among these skills, summarizing and paraphrasing are considered the most important. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to discover the major difficulties in summarizing and paraphrasing that EFL students in the Faculty of Education, Misurata University struggle with.

Statement of the Problem

Writing academically is a challenge for most of the EFL students due to their low proficiency of the target language. Grammar, punctuation and spelling errors are most suitable linking words and phrases which are necessary for linking one idea to another. Certain teaching techniques and focuses should be improved for students to acquire skills at a different level to help them write with less difficulty. Despite of its big importance, there are no enough researches on the same field. In fact, there is big gap in this field. Thus, this study is conducted to shed a light on the struggles the students at Misurata University – the Faculty of Education- English Department face in summarizing and paraphrasing.

Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the major challenges that EFL students encounter in paraphrasing and summarizing Academic English texts?
2. What are the students' perspectives regarding strategies to overcome the common challenges they commonly face in academic writing?

Significance of the Study

For theoretical significance, this study may serve as a valuable reference for future research in the field. From a practical perspective, identifying the difficulties that students encounter in paraphrasing and summarizing enables teachers to develop appropriate strategies and provide more effective guidance to enhance students' academic writing skills. For the students, this study can provide them with insights into their proficiency in paraphrasing and summarizing, encouraging them to further develop these skills to avoid plagiarism in research as well as other forms of academic writing.

Limitations of the Study

The study is only conducted on 69 fourth semester students who study academic writing participants. The researcher encountered some obstacles while conducting this study such as the difficulty in getting information from some resources like specific books. Electricity outage and lack of internet service made researchers time even more limited.

Definition of the Terms

- **EFL** is an English as a Foreign Language. Meaning it is not their first language nor their second.
- **Paraphrasing** involves simply restating ideas using different words. It can be applied to individual statement, multiple statements, or an entire passage.
- **Summarizing** is a summary, therefore, it involves producing a condensed version of an original text, highlighting its main ideas and essential details while maintaining the original text's structure and sequence.

Literature Review

Theoretical review

The Concept of Academic Writing

Writing is one of the four basic skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Writing and speaking are productive skills. There are many researchers defined a term of "writing"; for example Spratt et al. assumed that writing entails communicating a message through the use of symbols on a page. We need a message and someone to communicate with in order to compose. We must also be able to construct letters and words, as well as put them together to produce phrases, sentences, or a series of sentences that transmit the message (2005, p. 26).

Academic writing is essentially a cognitive activity, shaped by intellectual effort. The common portrayal of solitary work in a quiet environment has reinforced its perception as a predominantly mental process. There are many researchers defined a term of “academic writing”; as Valdes (2019), any formal written work produced within an educational context is referred to as academic writing. It is commonly employed by students, instructors, and researchers to fulfill scholarly purposes through essays, arguments, and various forms of written discourse.

Key characteristics of academic writing include evidence-based reasoning, precise language, coherent organization, and an objective, impersonal tone. According to Brodhacker, “academic writing is different from informal writing because of the design of the paper, otherwise how we utilize words and phrases to convey what we wish to speak. Specific situations necessitate specific and precise ways of putting words and phrases in conjunction with one another. Formal and informal communication serve various objectives; how we write within an academic and scientific setting will significantly deviate from how we would correspond to a friend or loved one” (2016, p. 90).

Johnson also stated about academic writing is a type of creative writing that takes on many various shapes and functions. Similar to other forms of writing, academic writing is designed to communicate ideas from the author to the reader. Its fundamental objective, like that of technical writing and most sorts of professional papers, is to communicate information. Academic writing used to write academic reports, inquiries, and essays in educational settings (2016). Two aspects of academic writing are paraphrasing, and summarizing will be discussed in following sections.

Paraphrasing

In academic writing, students must develop the ability to paraphrase effectively, as it enables them to incorporate ideas and research findings of others in support of their own arguments. Paraphrasing is expressing someone else's ideas to become his/her own words as Leonhard (2002) defined paraphrasing as expressing someone else's idea or to restating a passage precisely in students own words and phrasing in order to clarify the meaning. The restatement must include careful word choices that fit with the context and tone of the original passage. Similarly, Badiozaman (2014) stated that paraphrasing is one of the activity that restating the pieces of information and ideas which is expressed by someone and presenting it in a new form.

Additionally, Bailey (2010) confirmed that paraphrasing involves re-writing a text so that language is substantially different while the content stays the same. Hirvela & Du (2013) indicate that the act of paraphrasing one's views by utilizing alternative language, providing citations, and performing the passage in a different kind of written form is known as paraphrasing. As a result, paraphrasing is one of the methods that students must master in order to perform acceptable writing employing those ideas.

Summarizing

The process of summarizing and rewriting a large amount of material into a brief, concise summary is known as summarization. A summary method should provide the reader with the majority of the information in the original document while also ensuring that no information is lost during the condensation process. Badiozaman (2014) emphasized that the summarization systems serves abroad spectrum of purposes. They facilitate readers in rapidly understanding articles, assist analysts and researchers in gathering information more efficiently, minimize the volume of written text that students are required to read and comprehend within educational contexts, and enhance efficiency and productivity within professional business settings.

According to Wichadee (2010, p. 11), “summarizing is considered as a process of taking information from a comparatively longer chapter, theory, or write-up and creating a smaller version of it that covers all the facts and main points of the original version. An example of summarizing is to write a three to four sentence description that covers all the main points of a story or poem”.

Challenges in Paraphrasing and Summarizing: Causes and Contributing Factors

Challenges in Paraphrasing

According to Choy and Lee (2012, p. 88), “the main problems faced by the students of English as a second language (EFL) in paraphrasing English text is their inability to paraphrase passages. This is because of culture, limit vocabulary and feels difficulty in changing the words in order to present the same meaning with the original text”. On the other hand, Dung (2010) stated that change the original sentence structure; cite the source in the right form, unawareness of the value of this skill, and lack of drive to improve their paraphrase skill are the challenges in paraphrasing English text. Moreover, Khairunnisa et al. (2014) indicated that the challenges encountered by students in paraphrasing English texts include a limited understanding of the criteria effective paraphrasing, insufficient knowledge of appropriate procedures such as citation and grammar, and a restricted vocabulary range.

Challenges in Summarizing

According to Hill (1991, p. 77), “the difficulties on writing summary of English text are caused by language aspect. The students faced the difficulties in summarizing the text because of the problems

in vocabulary and grammar. The problems and grammar and vocabulary makes them difficult to understand the content of the source text". Kim (2001) mentioned that students struggle with aspects of the summary writing process, such as reading the material, determining the main concept, utilizing their own words, and constructing sentences. Actually, the students are having trouble understanding the text. As a result, summarizing the text was challenging for them. The majority of students spend more time understanding the source text. They require more than two readings to fully absorb the content.

Furthermore, Winograd (1984) argued that students' problems in summarizing are largely attributed to procedural shortcomings, particularly their inadequate knowledge of necessary steps involved in writing a coherent summary. These steps include reading the original text to identify its main purpose, rereading it to gain deeper understanding, underlining sentences that convey the central ideas, searching unfamiliar vocabulary, and recognizing that each paragraph is typically organized around a single topic.

Solutions to Overcome Paraphrasing and Summarizing Challenges

Schuemann, Bryd, and Reid (2006) suggest seven strategies to ease the students in paraphrasing texts. They claim that to have an effective paraphrasing, students are expected to employ a variety of paraphrasing strategies, such as transforming words from one part of speech to another, utilizing synonyms, expressing numerical data and percentages in alternative forms, changing words order, applying varied definitional structures, using different attributive signals, restructuring sentences, and incorporating diverse connecting devices.

Similarly, Sun (2009) identified quotation, thorough rewriting, reordering words and phrases, using synonym, inserting words and phrases, deleting words and phrases, syntactic changing, combining sentences and verbatim, and copying verbatim as the effective strategies for students when the need to paraphrases information. Dung (2010) and Injai (2015) determined some strategies used by the students in paraphrasing information. They classify the strategies in paraphrasing based on the types of paraphrasing usually done by the students found in their studies. The first is syntax paraphrases (changing structure and grammar) which can be done by 1) transforming active constructions into passive forms, 2) converting affirmative sentences into negative ones, 3) simplifying lengthy sentences into shorter forms, 4) expanding phrases to enhance clarity and precision. Secondly, the students also may change word order, change parts of speech, use synonyms, antonyms, and definitions, and change percentage and numbers as the strategies to conduct semantic paraphrases. Lastly, the students may also employ the strategy changing structure ideas as part of organization paraphrase.

Related Studies

Azis et. al (2019) conducted a descriptive study about Students' difficulties to write paraphrasing text and summarizing text. The study was conducted to the fifth semester of English Education Study Program students who have been taking resume writing subject. For gaining the data, the writers used documentation, questionnaire, and interview. After gaining the data, the results showed that students identified four major areas of concern: 1) insufficient proficiency in English, 2) weak reading comprehension skills, 3) limited vocabulary and 4) inadequate or ineffective documentation skills. Findings provide a basis for proposing pedagogical interventions and classroom strategies aimed to addressing difficulties reported students.

Along with that, Alaofi (2020) examined also the complications of summarizing and paraphrasing among EFL Saudi Graduate Students' Perspectives. This study explored the principle challenges commonly graduate students encounter when engaging in summarizing and paraphrasing academic texts. Using a quantitative approach, nine Saudi graduate students from various disciplines were interviewed. The findings indicated that limited English proficiency, weak writing styles, and poor reading comprehension are the main obstacles. In addition, students' fear of committing plagiarism further intensifies their struggles. These results highlighted a deeper understanding of the significant difficulties that academic writing, particularly paraphrasing and summarization, presented for graduate students.

Regarding the problems of summary writing encountered by English major students, there was a study by Chuenchaichon (2022) that aimed to assess the quality of summarizing, identifying common problems encountered by Thai EFL English learners, and explore their perspectives on these issues. Data were collected from 67 summaries produced by fourth year English major students enrolled in a research report writing course during the first semester of the 2021academic year at Naresuan University were collected and analyzed. It was found that the quality of summary writing produced by these EFL writers was viewed as "fair", and there were no significant differences among all dimensions. The findings revealed that students encountered difficulties in identifying the main ideas of texts, which often resulted in a loss of focus. They also reported challenges in selecting appropriate vocabulary to

replace original wording during paraphrasing, as well as limited time available for version. These issues were identified as the primary obstacles affecting the students' summary writing performance.

Methodology

Research design

The research design focused on selecting an appropriate method of data collection to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the study. A descriptive quantitative approach was employed to address the research questions. Descriptive research, as a quantitative method, enables the collection of measurable data for statistical analysis of the target population. It is widely used in educational and social studies as it provides a systematic means of describing and analyzing demographic and behavioral characteristics of a given sample.

Participants

The study sample included 69 female students majoring in English, all in their fourth semester and enrolled in an Academic Writing course at the Faculty of Education during the 2025 academic year. Participants were selected randomly, and their ages ranged approximately between 20-22 years old.

Questionnaire

This study employed a questionnaire to identify the principle difficulties and challenges students encounter when paraphrasing and summarizing academic texts. The instrument comprised two distinct sections: the first included nine statements on specific difficulties, and the second included six statements on proposed solutions to overcome these challenges (*see appendix A*). participants indicated their frequency of experiencing each issue on a four-point scale (Always, Sometimes, Rarely, Never). The dataset was subsequently subjected to analysis through descriptive statistical methods, with a primary focus on percentages-based calculations.

Data Analysis Method

The data analysis aimed to interpret and present the results of the study clearly. Following data collection, the questionnaire responses were tabulated and analyzed using descriptive statistic, namely "percentages"; in which the frequency of the responses is multiplied to 100 and divided by the total number of participants. The results were presented using statistical tables to ease understanding. This process allowed the identification of the most difficulties students experienced in paraphrasing and summarizing.

Table (1): Students' difficulties in paraphrasing and summarizing.

No.	Statement	Always	sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I encounter difficulties in paraphrasing and summarizing because I confuse how to restructure the sentence in new style.	70%	30%	0%	0%
2	I struggle to paraphrasing and summarizing because I substitute inappropriate synonyms.	80%	20%	0%	0%
3	I experience challenges in alerting the wording and shortening source materials, because I fear of making plagiarism.	60%	25%	15%	0%
4	I do not mention the author when I paraphrase and summarize any academic English texts.	90%	10%	0%	0%
5	If the text is long and complicated, I often find it difficult to paraphrase and summarize written materials.	65%	35%	0%	0%
6	I encounter problems in transforming English source text through paraphrasing and summarization, because I translate it into Arabic.	55%	35%	10%	0%
7	I struggle with rephrasing and condensing academic English text because of my poor grammatical knowledge.	85%	15%	0%	0%
8	I face limitations in paraphrasing and summarizing skills, because of my low reading comprehension.	25%	75%	0%	0%
9	I find it challenging to restate ideas and reduce texts into concise summaries, because it is difficult to understand unfamiliar term.	80%	20%	0%	0%

As illustrated in table 1, a large proportion of participants consistently reported persistent difficulties in paraphrasing and summarizing. Specifically, 70% struggled with restructuring sentences, while 80% faced challenges due to the use of inappropriate synonyms. Fear of plagiarism was cited by more than

half of participants 60%, and nearly all of them 90% admitted they often neglect to mention the teacher when summarizing academic texts. In addition, 65% indicated difficulties when dealing with long or complex texts, and over half of participants 55% reported challenges arising from translating texts into Arabic. Poor grammatical knowledge was identified by a considerable proportion of participants 85% as a major barrier, whereas 75% noted occasional difficulties due to weak reading comprehension skills. Finally, the majority of participants 80% highlighted that unfamiliar vocabulary significantly hinders their ability to paraphrase and summarize effectively.

Table (2): The solutions to overcome the difficulties in paraphrasing and summarizing.

No.	Statement	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
10	Teacher role is efficient in my learning how to summarize and paraphrase Academic English. texts	100 %	0%	0%	0%
11	New strategies that used by my teacher helps me learn how to summarize and paraphrase Academic English.	85%	15%	0%	0%
12	Efficient syllabus that used by my teacher helps me learn how to summarize and paraphrase Academic English.	55%	45%	0%	0%
13	Teacher should teach me how to change the structure and grammar in paraphrasing and summarizing English texts. I	85%	15%	0%	0%
14	I have to read the text carefully before I start paraphrasing or summarizing.	100 %	0%	0%	0%
15	Paraphrasing and summarizing require an accurate understanding of the sentence meaning beforehand.	100 %	0%	0%	0%

As presented in *table 2*, all participants 100% reported that the teacher's role is highly effective in supporting their learning of how to summarize and paraphrase academic English texts. Furthermore, 85% of the participants indicated that the new strategies introduced by the teacher significantly contribute to their ability to summarize and paraphrase effectively. More than half of the participants 55% emphasized that the well- structured syllabus provided by the teacher also facilitates their learning in this area. In addition, 85% agreed that teachers should consistently provide instruction on how to modify sentence structure and grammar when paraphrasing and summarizing academic texts. Finally, all participants 100% stated that it is essential to read the text carefully before beginning the processes of paraphrasing and summarizing.

Results and Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the major challenges encountered by EFL students at the Faculty of Education, Misurata University, in summarizing and paraphrasing, as well as the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. A quantitative approach was adopted through a questionnaire, the results revealed that students struggle mainly with restricting sentences, selecting appropriate synonyms, limited grammatical knowledge, poor reading comprehension, difficulty in understanding unfamiliar terms, and the influence of L1, in addition to fear of plagiarism. These findings are consistent with Azis et al. (2019) and Alaofi (2020) who identified lack of English proficiency, poor reading comprehension, limited vocabulary, and weak documentation skills as major obstacles. They also align with Chuenchaichon (2022), who emphasized that students' writing styles, poor reading comprehension, and fear of plagiarism significantly hinder their ability to paraphrase and summarize effectively.

On the other hand, the outcomes of students' point of views employed some attentions to be considered to overcome these challenges: 1) teachers' role is effective in learning summarizing and paraphrasing, 2) new strategies introduced by the teacher improve their skills, 3) well-structured syllabus helps in paraphrasing and summarizing, 4) teachers should teach how to change structure and grammar, and 5) careful reading of the text is essential before paraphrasing or summarizing.

Conclusion: Challenges and Recommendations

Challenges

- Difficulty restructuring sentences into new forms.
- Use of inappropriate synonyms.
- Fear of plagiarism.
- Long and complex texts > tendency to translate into Arabic.

- Poor grammar knowledge.
- Weak reading comprehension.
- Difficulty understanding unfamiliar terms.

Recommendations

- For the English Teacher

Academic Writing instructors in the English Department of the Faculty of Education should train students in writing, with a particular emphasis on summarization and paraphrasing of English texts. The aim is to deepen comprehension, support information synthesis, and able the identification of central ideas within texts. Furthermore, teachers should devote time to developing students' academic writing abilities, as these skills are widely regarded as a key indicator of their research competence.

- For the students

Students themselves should recognize that summarization and paraphrasing is a critical writing skill. Before composing, learners should identify and comprehend the main ideas of the source text and engage in ample practice paraphrasing, interpreting these ideas in their own words. Through repeated paraphrasing of texts or passages, students are expected to improve their ability to convey ideas accurately and coherently in academic register.

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