Quality of written summary texts: 
An analysis in the context of gender and school variables

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Abstract

Writing a summary text, some textual actions are fulfilled such as, defining/forming the main idea, defining/forming the sub-ideas that are connected to the main idea, erasing the redundant and trivia sentences, generalizing or restructuring some sentences. In this context, the question ‘do the summary texts that were created by the students have the characteristics of a summary text’ becomes a question that should be answered. The aim of the study is to look for an answer to this question. As a conclusion, the students, during the process of transforming a source text into a summary text, seem to lack knowledge and skill about what to do.

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1. Introduction

Act of creating a summary as written or verbal, primarily requires taking a text as source text. Individuals, in the direction of source text’s directions which can be written or verbal, transform the source text into a new text in shorter form by benefiting from the background information they have. This procedure is called summarization and the new text that emerges from this procedure is called summary text.

In the process of transforming a source text into summary text, some textual actions are fulfilled such as, defining/forming the main idea of the source text, defining/forming the sub-ideas that are connected to the main idea, erasing the redundant and trivia sentences, generalizing or restructuring some sentences (Nelson et al. 1992; Trabasso, Bouchard, 2002; Akyol, 2006).

These textual actions while being a reference to the characteristics that a qualitative summary text should have, at the same time, be a reference to the absolute and correct interpretation of the source text. In this context, to be able to transform a source text into a summary qualitative and shorter text, interpretation of the text by doing micro and macro processing in the reading process is compulsory (van Dick and Kintsch, 1983).

Hence, summary text is the transformed form of the source text at the primary main idea after erasing, generalizing and structuring cognitive processes. Therefore, the textual processes, that should be fulfilled to reach the macro structure, are at the same time reference for the characteristics that a summary text should have.

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2. Method

Summary texts, which were created by the students in the level of the 8th grade of primary education, 3rd grade of secondary education and 3rd grade of higher education, will be evaluated with content analysis method on the basis of criterion-based and scaled evaluation instrument that will be prepared by the researcher to find the answer to this question. This process of analysis will be carried out under the guidance of following questions.

1. How are the characteristics of the written summary texts created by the students?
2. What is the distribution of the characteristics of the written summary texts created by the students according to gender?
3. What is the distribution of the characteristics of the written summary texts created by the students according to schools?

2.1. Validity

For this kind of a research, the concept of validity cited to the researcher search the fact in its own form and observe it as unbiased as possible (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). In this context, explanations and categorizations regarding this subject were searched by doing literature search, firstly, to provide its being categorized and determined the characteristics that summary text created by the students should have. After that, on the basis of those questions, a chart of analysis was created. Later, by looking at related theoretical explanations on the literature search, some criteria were created. The created chart, on that sense, is qualified enough to make the fact be searched as unbiased and in its own form. So, it is thought to have the validity that can be used in the research.

2.2. Reliability

In such a research, the strategy of employing a different researcher and making the results be confirmed in the analysis of the acquired data could be used to provide reliability (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). In this context, according to created evaluation chart, every student text was evaluated by the researcher and later was approved after the second researcher had evaluated the evaluation results. This situation points out the reliability of the evaluation.

3. Results (Findings)

In the context of first research question, qualitative characteristics of summary texts of 78 students participated in the research from three different schools, is presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUMMARIZING RULES</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>Acceptable</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary text includes a restructured heading.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>It does not reflect the text absolutely and directly.</td>
<td>It is qualified to reflect the text, but it includes overgeneralization.</td>
<td>It reflects the text adequately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78/70</td>
<td>78/0</td>
<td>78/6</td>
<td>78/2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%90</td>
<td>%0</td>
<td>%7,5</td>
<td>%2,5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>It is away from the primary main idea of the text.</td>
<td>It is close to the primary main idea of the text.</td>
<td>It reflects the primary main idea.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the context of second research question, qualitative characteristics of summary texts of 78 students participated in the research from three different schools, is presented according to gender in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUMMARYRULES</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>Acceptable</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary text includes a restructured heading.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>It does not reflect the text absolutely and directly.</td>
<td>It is qualified to reflect the text; but it includes overgeneralization.</td>
<td>It reflects the text adequately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Boy</td>
<td>38/37</td>
<td>40/0</td>
<td>38/0</td>
<td>40/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%97 %82,5</td>
<td>%0</td>
<td>%0</td>
<td>%0</td>
<td>%0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary text includes main idea of the source text.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>It is away from the primary main idea of the text.</td>
<td>It is close to the primary main idea of the text.</td>
<td>It reflects the primary main idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Boy</td>
<td>38/0</td>
<td>40/0</td>
<td>38/0</td>
<td>40/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%0 %0</td>
<td>%24</td>
<td>%40</td>
<td>%24</td>
<td>%40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary text includes the sub-idea(s) of the source text.</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>It is away from the sub-idea(s) of the text.</td>
<td>It is close to the sub-idea(s) of the text.</td>
<td>It reflects the sub-idea(s) of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Boy</td>
<td>38/0</td>
<td>40/0</td>
<td>38/0</td>
<td>40/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%0 %0</td>
<td>%52</td>
<td>%52,5</td>
<td>%52</td>
<td>%52,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Aspect of summarization skills relating gender variable.
In the context of third research question, qualitative characteristics of summary texts of 78 students participated in the research from three different schools, is presented according to schools in Table 3.

Table 3. Aspect of summarization skills relating school variable.
4. Discussion

Heading of a text is used to point out the text’s highest phase of macro structure. With this aspect, it is related to the summarizing skills. However, 90% of the students have inadequacy on this subject matter. When looked at distribution of this inadequacy according to gender and school variables, we see that the situation is in favor of the boys and the students of primary education.

Defining the main idea is a textual action that forms the spine of a written text, defines the board and in this context provides the written text to be integrated. On the other hand, it is a very important sign regarding if the text
has been understood or not. In this context, it appears to be an important and primary textual action from the point of summary writing that requires on one side comprehension of source text on the other side producing a shorter written text which has been transformed consistently. In spite of the situation, only 15.5% of the students were able to perform this textual action adequately. This situation is a reference to the possibility of deficiency in two aspects. First is deficiency in comprehension of the main idea of the source text, second is deficiency in restructuring summary text in the context of main idea. This finding relating to textual action, matches up with the finding of Winograd (1984). From his point of view, students have difficulty in finding the main idea of explanatory text. This has a negative effect on creation of summary text.

Sub-ideas are necessary as main idea both to comprehend the source text absolutely and to produce a qualified written summary text. But this aspect relating to textual action is worse than the aspect relating to main idea. Only 9% of the students, at “adequate” level, were able to use sub-ideas of the source text in the summary text they produced. Higher education students were able to do this largely. However, girls, in this aspect, seem to be more successful than boys.

To transform a source text into a new text in shorter form, students should create the summary text by restructuring with original sentences. But 13% of the students at “adequate” level were able to create the summary text in their own words by citing slightly from the source text. Like Friend (2001) and Hare and Borchard (1984) who emphasized the importance, in teaching summarization skills students should be presented cognitive oriented clues such as generalization and restructuring and it is crucial to inform them about how they can reach the macro structure of the text. Only 13% of the students being ‘adequately’ able to perform the textual actions confirm this opinion.

When we look at the performers of this textual action in terms of variables, it seems that girls and higher education students are more successful. However, researches show that only 50% of the university students are able to produce original sentences in the process of summarization (see Friend, 2001).
For a qualified summary text, “the whole important information in the source text should be in summary text”, on the other hand “redundant and trivia data should not be placed in”. This judgment is supported by the study of Winograd (1984). In his opinion, being able to choose the important information from the source text is closely related to summarization act. Hence, realization of textual action will increase the quality of summary text and “the qualification of representation of source text”. Among those three textual action regarding summarization, students seem to be more successful in not using “redundant and trivia data in summary text”. However, realization rate of this textual action “adequately” seems to be only 26%. Realization rate of the other two textual actions “adequately” is 9%. In terms of variables, aspect is that; in those three textual actions, higher education students seem to be more successful. In terms of gender variable, boys seem to be more successful, only, in performing the textual action of not using “redundant and trivia data in summary text” within those three textual action.

In the context of school variable, when looked at the application of summarization rules, what draws the attention is that higher education students are more successful than primary and secondary education students in whole summarization rules. This case in one aspect can be explained with that higher education students are selected and placed to those higher education institutions. In another aspect, it can be said that age variable is effective in emergence of this kind of situation. Studies conducted by Brown et al. (1983) and Williams et al. (1984) support the opinion by putting forth that with aging summarization skills develop.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This research was carried out with the aim of answering the question that was do the summary texts created by the students have the characteristics that a summary text should have? On the basis of the research findings, the most general result is that the students, during the process of transforming a source text into a summary text, seem to lack knowledge and skill about what to do. In no textual action that forms the category of analysis chart, the students were not able to reach the “adequate” level. On the aspect relating the variables, girls and higher education students were seemed to be more successful. But their level is not “adequate”.

To eliminate the negative aspect, it can be useful to do the following processes:
1. This study would be applied to a larger sample to determine students’ summarizing problems they face with.
2. In the light of this determination, a program would be prepared to make students skillful at summarizing.
3. In a similar way, teachers’ knowledge and skill cases on becoming skillful at summarizing would be determined.
4. In the light of this determination, a program would be prepared for teachers about how to teach summarizing skills.

References

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