Improving Students' Grammar in Writing Through Self-Monitoring Technique

Umi Khoeriyah, Gunarso Susilohadi, Muhammad Asrori

English Education Department
Teacher Training and Education Faculty
Sebelas Maret University of Surakarta

E-mail: umikhoeriyah@student.uns.ac.id

Abstract: This article discusses how self-monitoring technique can be implemented effectively in improving the students' grammar in their writing and to what extent the improvement can be attained. It departs from the issue of Corrective Feedback (CF) i. e. the controversy of the effectiveness of CF and the type of CF that is effective. The self-monitoring technique is promoted to cope both. A Classroom Action Research had been conducted to a group of senior high school students in Indonesia. Observation and interview were employed to collect the qualitative data while test was used to obtain the quantitative data. The findings suggest that: (1) self-monitoring technique could be implemented effectively due to the presence of the students' autonomy and it must work together with sufficient teacher's scaffolding (2) it could improve the students' grammar in writing viewed from the improvement of the students' score and from the types of the mistakes. As the finding of this research has not yet investigated the effect on acquisition, further researches might be in a longer period are highly recommended.

Keywords: corrective feedback, grammar in writing, self-monitoring

INTRODUCTION

This study commences from the issue of corrective feedback in writing that has been a controversial since Truscott revealed his argument against error correction in 1996. Truscott's article "The Case against Grammar Correction in L2 Writing Classes" opens up a long run discussion towards grammar correction in writing. The first criticism was led by Ferris who is the proponent of error correction. It continued as a controversial debate and remains inconclusive until the current days. Both still faithfully and firmly hold their view on error correction. Although the conclusion is barely clear, Rod Ellis in 2009 proposed such a breakthrough through identifying the typology of corrective feedback determining whether or not corrective feedback is effective and what kind is the most effective.

Truscott in 1996 argued that grammar correction should be abandoned for some reasons, those are: 1. It is ineffective according to the finding of some researches. 2. It can be ineffective for theoretical and practical. 3. It is even harmful. It was then rebutted by Ferris in 1996 and the debate continued since Truscott also responded her in 1999.

Table 1 shows the claims of Ferris (1999) as her criticism toward Truscott (1996) and also Truscott's (1999) response toward Ferris' (1999).

Table 1. Truscott and Ferris' Debate on Corrective Feedback.

Ferris (1999)	Truscott (1999)
There is research evidence for the effectiveness of correction.	There is no meaningful support for this claim
There is definition of "error" correction.	The term did not exist.
Problems of the evidences or research finding that is the variability that cannot support any generalization	That was based on relevant and irrelevant work.
There is overstatement of evidence against correction.	Only unconvincing example is offered in this claim
Truscott illicitly dismissed evidences against his thesis.	This claim is unsubstantiated
It is the students who want the correction.	Teacher taught them to do so
Content course instruction does not solve the grammar error, thus correction is effective.	This assumption is unjustified.
Correction can develop self-editing ability.	Self-editing combines grammar correction and strategy training.

Instead of continuing debate on correction, Ferris conducted more researches regarding with correction that have been reviewed by Truscott. She conducted other researches in 2001 with Roberts, also in 2002, 2003, and 2004 all concerns with correction. Later on, both Ferris and Truscott are still on their own opposite view on correction (See Ferris (2007) and Truscott (2007)).

Move from the issue of whether or not corrective feedback contributes positively to the students' writing, the issue comes to address Rod Ellis' study (2009) in investigating typology of corrective feedback in which it finally suggests that identifying the options in systematic way is important in determining whether or not corrective feedback is effective and what kind is the most effective. Through his study, he investigated some findings dealing some types of corrective feedback and its effect that had been studied by other researchers. He cited those works that also concern on the students' response toward corrective feedback. However this study also ends with suggestion of adjusting any type of feedback based on the students' developmental stage.

That corrective feedback is a situated phenomenon; there is no "one right way" of corrective feedback. It will be different in every case.

Since the issue of corrective feedback takes a great concern of grammar, and it naturally addresses to grammar, another consideration is linked to teaching grammar. Grammar is still a main concern in CLT syllabus that some label it as functional (Thornbury, 1999). The final issue is not to consider whether or not we should teach grammar (Richards & Willy, 2002) but how to teach it in order the communicative competence is still the main goal but at the same time the accuracy of grammar is possible to deal with. Focus on form or grammar manifested by conscious attention toward form is major aspect since 1970 (Doughty and Williams, 1998) no matter how many people against this belief.

To bridge the gap in the issue of corrective feedback and linked with the issue of teaching grammar from more general view, self-monitoring is promoted as one of the solutions. Self-monitoring was firstly promoted by Maggie Charles in 1990. This is a technique, as Charles stated, that requires

the integrated work of students and teacher in the writing process. The integrated work is manifested in the students' demand in writing annotation, in which they articulate the problem face in writing, to which teacher gives feedback. While Cresswell (2000) defined self-monitoring as a technique in which the students write annotation in the margin of their text about their problem for the teacher to respond.

The students' annotation has a crucial role in self-monitoring technique. It is the formulation of the students' problem they have that is manifested in a marginal comment or question toward particular part in their composition to which the feedback is willingly addressed. This is beneficial for some reasons.

First, it provokes the students to think critically in figuring out their own problem and finally promote the students' autonomy. Second, it can be a possible prevention or even solution for negative psychological impact that can bear that fears Trusscott (see Truscott, 1996). It is because by the presence of the students' annotation the feedback will be suitable with the students' developmental readiness and therefore, will not bring any negative psychological impact. Third, in writing the annotation, the students consider both the accuracy of form and the appropriateness to the context. Thus teacher's corrective feedback confirms both the appropriateness and the accuracy of the students' grammar in their writing. Thus it accommodates the nature of writing as one of devices to address the linguistic problem in context. Finally, the writer proposed self-monitoring technique to improve her students' grammar in writing and conducted a research.

The research attempts to address some problems arose in corrective feedback and teaching grammar in the implementation of self-monitoring technique by considering

two questions, those are: (1) How can self-monitoring technique be implemented effectively in improving the students' grammar in writing? (2) To what extent can self-monitoring technique improve the students' grammar in writing?

RESEARCH METHODS

This is a Classroom Action Research conducted at SMA Negeri 3 Surakarta. There were 30 students of the second grade involved as the subject of this research. It was initiated by pre-research activity to get an initial reflection based on the classroom situation and the students' writing competence. The pre-research data were collected through observation, pre-test and interview with three students. The observation was conducted to identify the classroom situation. The pre-test was aimed at knowing the students' writing problem, while the interview was conducted to ensure the problem faced by the students based on the students' perspective.

Getting done with the initial reflection, the research was set up. The self-monitoring technique was implemented in two cycles. Each cycle went through planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. Each cycle was carried out in four meetings. Observation and test were employed as the method of data collection. The observation was conducted to know the classroom situation, identifying the factor needed for the implementation of self-monitoring technique to be effective. There was a post-test in the end of each cycle to know the impact of the the technique on the students' grammar in writing.

Hence, there were two types of data i.e. qualitative data and quantitative data. The qualitative data from the observation and interview were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's Interactive Model, which includes data reduction, data display, and

conclusion drawing or verifying. While the quantitative data were analyzed using Descriptive Statistics.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research went through a pre-research activity and two cycles for the implementation of self-monitoring technique. Some changing of procedure or work in cycle I and cycle II were conducted in finding the best way of implementing the technique. The findings of this study indicate that there were some improvements of the students' performance during the instructional process and it, therefore, impacts on the students' written production especially in the grammar aspect. The students' autonomy and the teacher's scaffolding appear to be the key factor of the effectiveness of the implementation of self-monitoring technique.

The implementation of self-monitoring technique in the first and the second cycle was basically through similar activities. Before the writing process, the exposures of the text that was going to deal with were exploited. The activity of observing the exposures was aimed at introducing the social function, language structure, language feature, and the organization of the text.

After having understood the social function and the characteristics of the text, the students tried to make their own text. They wrote a text and then made annotation. Out of the class hour, the researcher read the annotation and put written corrective feedback on the students' text. In the other meeting her feedback was read by the students. Besides giving written feedback, the researcher also gave oral feedback. There was verification stage when the students were provoked to confirm the feedback. This verification stage was also used know deeply what the students' problems are and to confirm the students' intention and the researcher's interpretation. Getting done reading and learning the feedback, they were required to make another text with the same topic. The previous texts with the researcher's feedback were taken back. It means, there was no editing stage. The students only had to notice the corrective feedback, their mistakes, and find out what the correct correction was, without editing it.

Basically, through the implementation of this technique, the students and the researcher's indirect interaction was enhanced since the students' annotation could be used at investigating the students' main concern. By giving feedback based on what they students mainly concerned with bore positive interaction between the students and the researcher. Through the annotation, the students were feeling free to consult their problem. Thus, indirect interaction between the students and the researcher was born by the mean of the students' annotation and the researcher's corrective feedback. However, it did not necessarily bear a good classroom interaction like what happened in cycle I. However it could be improved in cycle II.

What makes the classroom situation and the students' performance different in cycle I and the cycle II was mainly because the different treatment toward the students' mistakes. In cycle I, the concept of self-monitoring technique was strictly applied in which the researcher only provided feedback for the students' annotation and no written feedback for the unnoticed mistake. In fact many students' mistakes were left out without any annotation. This was conducted to prevent negative psychological impact. Teacher mainly gave direct feedback for the students' mistake. Those treatments results in the blockage of the students' development because there was no motivational reason to

do something more. It seemed from the lack of the students' activeness to verify the feedback or in attempting to figure out their own problem.

The students' proficiency level was also taken into account as a factor causing the students unaware of their own mistake. When the feedback was restricted to the students' annotation, no potential development can be achieved since the students only worked on their independent level of development. Those it needs other scaffolding to help the students go beyond their independent developmental zone toward higher potential level. Thus, Vigotsky's theory of scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal development was taken into account.

In the second cycle, the teacher provided more scaffolding by not restricting the feedback to the students' annotation. However, the feedback given for the unnoticed mistake was mainly in indirect form (including commentary feedback and other form of feedback which does not provide the correct form of the mistakes). It was aimed at arousing the students' curiosity and critical thinking to deal with their own problem. When the students were aware with their own problem, the feedback would be meaningful.

It was apparent in the second cycle that the students' activeness in verifying the feedback improved. They could think more critically in figuring out their own problems. Even the students did not only concern on the form but also on the context because they were triggered to formulate their idea through meaningful grammar. Thus, it accommodates the process of addressing linguistic problem in context, as a nature of writing is aimed. Such situation could then potentially direct the students to the acquisition process. Therefore their autonomy plays as an important role for the self-monitoring to be implemented effectively. Yet, it needs the teacher's role too to support their development.

It had been already found that the key aspect in implementing self-monitoring technique is the presence of the students' autonomy. The students' autonomy is activated when the students are motivated in learning. Jeremy Harmer (1991) defined motivation as a kind of internal arousal that provokes someone to do things to achieve something. He suggested areas where the teacher can influence the students' motivation one of which is the learning environment. The students will be motivated when the class is attractive which can be realized by providing them visual material, music, or even the immovability of furniture, however, he argued that the most crucial source of motivation is the emotional atmosphere that the teacher can create which requires teacher to be careful about the way teacher gives respond, or feedback, or correction to the students' performance.

It implies, and so the finding of this research suggests, that there must be an adjustment of the implementation of self-monitoring technique to the students' ability and interest in order they are motivated. In particular, in the way of giving corrective feedback, which agrees to Ellis' previous investigation in typology of feedback in 2009. Therefore, the students' autonomy during the lesson will take place. As the students' autonomy takes place and it works together with the teacher's sufficient scaffolding, the self-monitoring technique will find its way to be effective in improving the students' grammar in writing.

Through the effective implementation of this technique, the students' grammar in writing could be improved. The improvement could be seen from the students' grammar mean score presented in the table 2.

Table 2. The Students' Grammar Mean Score during the Research

Pre-test	Post-test I	Post-test II
12.43	16.32	16.75

According to Brown and Bailey's writing analytical scoring (scale 1-20), which is employed in this research, the students' writing performance is represented through five categories. Range of 5-1 represents non-college level work, range of 11-6 represents unnaceptable work, range of 14-12 represents adequate to fair work, range of 17-15 represents good to adequate work, and the highest range of 20-18 represents excellent to good work.

Thus, the score improvement shows that the students' writing performance improved from adequate to good work. In the pre-tests, generally, the students' text are classified as adequate work which implies that grammar problems are apparent and have negative impact on communication. In the post-test I and II the students' text are classified as good work in general which implies that the grammar problems do not influence communication; even there is only fiew mistakes found in the students' works in both post-tests.

While the students' individual score of grammar aspect in their writing and the improvement is depicted in chart 1.
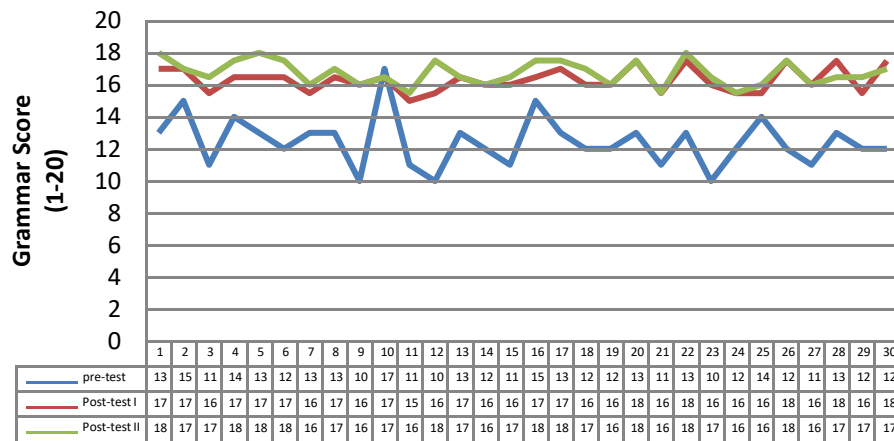
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
pre-test	13	15	11	14	13	12	13	13	10	17	11	10	13	12	11	15	13	12	12	13	11	13	10	12	14	12	11	13	12	12
Post-test I	17	17	16	17	17	17	16	17	16	17	15	16	17	16	16	17	17	16	16	18	16	18	16	16	16	18	16	18	16	18
Post-test II	18	17	17	18	18	18	16	17	16	17	16	18	17	16	17	18	18	17	16	18	16	18	17	16	16	18	16	17	17	17

Chart 1. Students' Grammar Scores

Table 3. The Students' Writing Mean Score during the Research

Pre-test	Post-test I	Post-test II
69.97	80.03	81.55

The improvement of the students' grammar impacts on the whole writing score which is described in their writing mean score provided in table 3 above.

Based on the students' score, to what extent the improvement of the students' performance can be described through the numerical data. It is clear that the students' mean scores in all aspect, mainly in grammar are improved which than impact on the students' writing score as a whole. However, the students' score is not the most important. The more important, actually, is the students' improvement seen from the types of their mistakes which are classified based on the cause of the mistakes.

Julian Edge in Jeremy Harmer (1991) classified three types of mistake which are mainly caused by L1 interference and the developmental errors. Those mistakes are classified into **slips**, **error**, and **attempts**. **Slips** refer to mistakes which students can correct themselves once they are pointed out, **errors** are indicated with the inability of the students to correct mistakes even though there is an explanation, and **attempts** are mistakes in the form of the students' trial to say something but they do not yet know the correct way to say that.

According to the analysis of the students' type of mistakes, which are identified by the process of verification, in the first cycle it was found that there were still found many *errors* which were indicated that they did not know their mistakes were actually mistakes. While in the second text, based on the verification, it was found that their mistakes were mainly *slips* according to their admittance. Some *attempts* were barely found in the students' texts both in the first

and the second texts because they were prone to use the language that they had exactly familiar with or to formulate simple clauses.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

According to the findings of this research it can be concluded that self monitoring technique can be implemented effectively by activating the students' autonomy. When the students' autonomy takes place, at the same time, the teacher's sufficient scaffolding must work together with it. The students' grammar in writing improved and as a consequence their whole writing also improved. The improvement is seen from both the students' score and the type of their mistakes. The classification of mistakes adopted in this study was the Julian Edge's classification of mistakes which encompasses *slips*, *errors*, and *attempts*. In cycle I students made many *errors*. The errors decreased in cycle II, their mistakes were mostly *slips*.

Finally, although in this study, there was no editing stage and the students were demanded to create a new text, it does not imply two things that people may generally think. First, the absence of revision stage does not necessarily imply that the students did not learn the feedback. That is what actually the verification stage was for. Second, despite the demand of creating new texts as the post-test, it does not necessarily can be used to investigate the actual effect in acquisition. It is because the new texts that the students made might still be influenced with the previous text they made, the new texts were in the same topic as the previous one. Moreover, they were written after immediately after the treatment. This is

unfortunately the fact, due to the time constraint. Therefore, further researches to investigate whether this technique has an actual effect in acquisition are highly recommended.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Charles, Maggie. (1990). Responding to problems in written english using a student self-monitoring technique. *ELT Journal*, 44 (4): 286-293. doi: 10.1093/elt/44.4.286

Cresswell, Andy. (2000). Self-monitoring in student writing: developing learner responsibility. *ELT Journal*, 54(3), 235-244

Doughty, C., & William, J. (1998). *Focus on Form in Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Ellis, Rod. (2009). A typology of written corrective feedback types. *ELT Journal*, 63(2), 97-107. doi:10.1093/elt/ccn023 97

Ellis, Rod. (2009). Corrective feedback and teacher development. *L2 Journal*, 1(1), 3-18

Ferris, D. (1999). The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes: A response to Truscott (1996). *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(1), 1-11.

Ferris, D. (2002). *Treatment of Error in Second Language Student Writing*. Ann Arbor, USA: Michigan University Press.

Ferris, D. (2004). The "grammar correction" debate in L2 writing: Where are we, and where do we go from here? (and what do we do in the meantime….? Journal *of Second Language Writing*, 13,49-62.133

Ferris, D. (2007). Preparing teachers to respond to student writing. *Journal of Second Langauge Writing*, 16, 165-193

Ferris, D et. al.. (2013). Written corrective feedback for individual L2 writers. *Journal of Second Langauge Writing*, 22, 307-329

Richards, Jack C., and Renandya, Willy A. (2002). *Methodology in Language Teaching: Am Anthology of Current Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press

Thornbury, Scott. (1999). *How to Teach Grammar*. London: Longman

Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. *Language Learning*, 46(2), 327-369.

Truscott, J.. (1999). The case for "the case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes": a response to Ferris. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(2), 111-122.

Truscott, J.. (2007). The effect of error correction on learners' ability to write accurately. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16, 255-272.