

Improving EFL Students' Academic Writing through Scaffolding, Self-Correction, and Peer Review

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Abstract: This paper aims at reporting the undergraduate EFL students' academic writing at Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia. The objectives of this research are to find out the contributions of: (1) grammar scaffolding to the improvement of students' academic English writing at Study Program of English, Universitas Brawijaya, (2) self-correction to the improvement of students' academic English writing at Study Program of English, Universitas Brawijaya, and (3) the contribution of peer review to the improvement of students' academic English writing at Study Program of English, Universitas Brawijaya. The data in this study were the first chapters of the research proposals written by eighteen students of Research Proposal Writing class at Study Program of English, Universitas Brawijaya after being introduced to three strategies namely scaffolding, self-correction, and peer review. The results showed that despite the students' ability to identify a number of mistakes during self-correction and peer review activities, some corrections and suggestions are found inaccurate. Thus, the scaffolding given by the lecturer plays a prominent role in dealing with the situation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The motivation behind this research is the fact that writing an academic English has never been an easy task for undergraduate students. This situation has been noticeable during the process of writing an undergraduate thesis by students of Study Program of English, Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Brawijaya. Most supervisors reported for having student writers who struggled with English grammar aspects during the supervision process. Even during the proposal seminar and result seminar, the supervisor and/or the examiner always put some comments on grammatical mistakes/errors that are frequently found in the students' thesis manuscript.

Despite the fact that undergraduate students of Study Program of English do some courses in English structure, incorporating the theories into the practice of writing good academic English might be difficult due to the sophisticated requirements and style of academic English writing. Unfortunately, sufficient research showing this condition which can be used as a source of recommendation for improving the students' writing has not yet been available at the Study Program of English, Universitas Brawijaya.

This notion is in accordance with Faraj's statement (2015) that most of EFL learners struggle

in producing a good piece of English writing which is caused by their limited preliminary knowledge for writing including grammar. Moreover, Faraj (2015, p. 141) claims that with scaffolding "...students, who previously struggled to write, now have a growing awareness of how to gather information and use it in their writing confidently" and application of scaffolding techniques is considered to be more effective compared to more traditional method of merely giving materials to learn and instruction to accomplish.

This research aims to find out a potential technique for improving students' academic English writing by minimizing or even eliminating grammatical errors at both word and sentence levels in their English writing. In details, this research is intended to find out (1) the corrections that are made by the students using self-correction technique, (2) the corrections that are made by the students using peer review technique, and (3) how scaffolding helps students in correcting and thus improving their English academic writing.

Therefore, the researchers are interested in conducting a study on improving the students' academic English writing in terms of appropriateness of style and acceptability according to the proper rules of English grammar. The scope of this research is limited to the investigation of the students' ability

to recognize and correct the grammatical errors in their English academic writings.

The participants of the study are one group of eighteen undergraduate students of Study Program of English who undertake Research Proposal Writing. The main objective in this course is the students have ability in writing a proper research proposal in English that can be used as their undergraduate thesis proposal in the following semester.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Scaffolding in Teaching and Learning of EFL Writing

Scaffolding, a technique in which students who are learning certain knowledge or skills are provided with assistance and/or guidance from the teachers/instructors who progressively lead the students to be independent and have the intended abilities and/or competences (Bodrova and Leong, 1998), might be chosen as a solution in improving EFL learners' academic writing.

According to Faraj (2015) most of EFL learners struggle in producing a good piece of English writing which is caused by their limited preliminary knowledge for writing including grammar. However, with scaffolding, Faraj (2015, p. 141) claims that "Students, who previously struggled to write, now have a growing awareness of how to gather information and use it in their writing confidently" and application of scaffolding techniques is considered to be more effective compared to more traditional method of merely giving materials to learn and instruction to accomplish.

2.2 Self-Correction and Peer Review in EFL Students' Writing Activity

Based on Ganji's article (2009), several studies previously conducted have proven that self-correction and revision upon receiving feedback from either the teacher or peers can significantly improve an EFL student's writing performance. Moreover, self-correction and revision play a more prominent role in improving EFL students' writing than receiving teachers' feedback with no further self-checking follow up (Ganji, 2009).

In addition to self-correction, peer review has become a strategy adopted by teachers in their writing classes. Liu & Hansen (2002) as cited in Kunwongse (2013, p. 278) define peer review as:

The use of learners as sources of information, and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher, tutor or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing.

In composing a piece of writing the ventures of overlooking any unintended mistakes and/or errors are potentials, and peer review might offer a solution for fixing the overlooked problems that include grammar improvement (Regoniel, 2013). In addition, a significant finding of a research conducted by Lundstrom and Baker (2009) shows that peer review in writing composition benefits not only the students who were given peer-reviews but also, substantially, to those who gave reviews or conducted the peer-review.

Considering the literatures and the results of previous studies conducted in investigating the impact of scaffolded self-correction and peer review, this research is conducted in order to reveal the potential impacts of self-correction and peer review in the quality of undergraduate students' academic writing at the Study Program of English, Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Brawijaya.

3 METHODS

The research conducted was designed as a case study. The research is quantitative one regarding that the findings are presented in figures i.e. the number of errors being identified and corrected by the students through self-correction and peer review activities. The research procedures involve the followings: (1) preliminary studies, (2) literature review, planning, designing materials and instruments, (3) data collection, (4) data analysis, and (5) discussion.

The data of this research are the results of grammatical errors identification and correction done by 18 student participants. The data collection was conducted in 6 weeks with the following details:

1. Week 1: Presenting the teaching material to the students in their class. The handout of teaching material on grammar and style for English academic writing had been prepared in advance.
2. Week 2: Assigning the students to write Chapter I of their research proposal and asking them to consider the grammar and style aspects presented in the teaching materials.
3. Week 3: After having Chapter I ready, the students were asked to do self-correction by

putting notes on their first draft under the researcher's supervision.

4. Week 4: Asking the students to make the first revision based on their self-correction.
5. Week 5: Asking the students to work in pair doing peer review activity by putting notes on each other's second draft under the researcher's supervision.
6. Week 6: Asking the students to make the second revision based on the notes given during peer review activity.
7. Week 6: Distributing questionnaire to the students regarding the scaffolded self-correction and peer review activities.

After collecting the data, the researchers analysed them using the following steps:

1. Identifying the corrections made by the students through the self-correction activity and finding the trend.
2. Identifying the corrections made by the students through the peer review activity and finding the trend.
3. Recapitulating the students' responses upon the distributed questionnaire.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

The findings show that the students made some efforts in improving the quality of their academic writing in English by identifying and correcting some grammatical errors found in it. The research participants made 97 correction using self-correction technique and 84 corrections upon doing peer review activity. However, among the 97 self-corrections, 82 corrections are appropriate while the 15 remaining corrections are found to be inaccurate. Similar condition occurs in the corrections done by peer review technique i.e. 60 out of 84 corrections are accurate, while the other 24 corrections are inaccurate.

4.1.1 The Corrections Made by the Students Using Self-Correction Technique

After finishing self-correction activity, the students identified 18 kinds of problems that deal with grammatical aspects in their writing and made 82 corrections. The number of corrected mistakes is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The distribution of problems identified and corrected in self-correction activity.

No.	Problems	Number of Cases
1	Word form	17
2	Spelling	11
3	Reducing wordiness	8
4	Article	8
5	Word choice	6
6	SV Agreement	5
7	Preposition	4
8	Relative clause	4
9	Passive form	3
10	Punctuation mark	3
11	Reference	3
12	Tenses	3
13	Participial phrase	2
14	Coordinator	1
15	Double verb	1
16	Word addition	1
17	Parallel structure	1
18	Subordinator	1

4.1.2 The Corrections Made by the Students Using Peer Review Technique

After being checked using self-correction activity, the students' writing were reviewed further by peer students. The peer review activity contributed to 60 more corrections that fall under 18 problems dealing with grammatical aspects of writing.

Similar to the finding in self-correction activity, the highest number of corrected problems was the word form and the second one was spelling with 12 and 7 corrections respectively. Table 2 shows the detailed number of the correction made under peer review activity.

Table 2: The distribution of problems identified and corrected in peer review activity.

No.	Problems	Number of Cases
1	Word form	12
2	Spelling	7
3	Preposition	5
4	Article	5
5	Punctuation mark	4
6	Sentence variation	4
7	Double verbs	3
8	Passive form	3
9	Reducing wordiness	3
10	Coordinator	2
11	Missing word	2
12	SV agreement	2
13	Tenses	2

14	Word choice	2
15	Different focus	1
16	Reference	1
17	Run on sentence	1
18	Word order	1

4.1.3 Inaccuracies in the Students' Correction

The finding suggests there are 15 inaccuracies in either identifying errors or making corrections in self-correction activity and 24 inaccuracies in peer-review activity. This became the situation when scaffolding given by the teacher was necessary to help the students in recognizing the errors and the better/best way to correct them.

Table 3: Inaccuracies in doing corrections.

No.	Problems	Number of Cases
A. Self-correction		
1	Word form	7
2	Article	3
3	Tenses	1
4	Double verbs	1
5	Preposition	1
6	Similar expression	1
7	Spelling	1
TOTAL		15
B. Peer review		
1	Word form	8
2	SV agreement	4
3	Article	3
4	Participial phrase	2
5	Spelling: British vs. American	2
No.	Problems	Number of Cases
6	Clause	1
7	Preposition	1
8	Punctuation mark	1
9	Sentence combining	1
10	Wordiness	1
TOTAL		24

4.1.4 How Scaffolding Helps Students in Correcting and Improving their English Academic Writing

The scaffoldings given by the teacher both directly through face-to-face and class discussion and indirectly through the handout prepared for the students are found to be helpful for the students in improving their English academic writing. This is due

to the fact that in addition to accurate corrections made by the students in self-correction and peer review activity, some inaccuracies in making corrections also took place.

The scaffolding was done after the teacher checked the students' corrections and when there were questions asked by the students. The teacher would firstly asked the students to find the explanation and examples on similar problem in the handout. If the students could not figure out the inaccuracies by themselves after consulting their module, the teacher would explain the problems to the students.

The following Table 4 and Table 5 show the examples of some common mistakes made by the students in their writings:

Table 3: Examples of mistakes found and corrected by the Students.

Aspects	Students' Work	
	Original Version	Corrected Version
Article	an information	information
word form	communicate	communication
parallel structure	not only	not only ... but also...
Preposition	According	according to
academic word choice	Chooses	Selects
active vs. passive form	...mostly done	...are mostly done
modal + verb1	we can found	we can find
punctuation mark	etc,	etc.
Reference	the language	the languages
quantifier + noun	every people	everyone
Aspects	Students' Work	
	Original Version	Corrected Version
Determiner	to achieve goals	to achieve their goals
Wordiness	the researcher can conclude	the researcher conclude
Spelling	Wit	With
dependent clause	Foreign language is used at...	Foreign language used at...
coordinator vs. subordinator	But,	However,

Table 4: Examples of inaccurate correction.

Aspects	Students' Work	
	Original Version	Corrected Version
count vs. non-count noun	research	Researches
possessive –s	to convey one is intention	to convey one intention
Article	to get information	to get an information
Tense	politeness occur	politeness occurred
modal + v1	It could assisst	It could assists
verb form	The researcher used	The researcher use
relative clause	...to avoid misunderstanding happens in interaction	...to avoid misunderstanding that happen in interaction
singular vs. plural expression	every question	every questions
word form	And ambiguity meaning	An ambiguity meaning
Gerund	by uttering	by utter

The overall results of this study show that the strategies of self-correction and peer review are beneficial in improving the EFL students' writing. The learning effect is also expected to retain better and longer because the students find and correct the mistakes by themselves.

Moreover, some inaccuracies occurring during the self-correction and peer review activities should not be considered as significant drawbacks. Instead, the lecturer can use this situation as the basis for strengthening the students' understanding of several concepts incorrectly perceived by the students.

4.2 Discussion

Based on the data and the analysis applied to them, the improvement on students' academic writing in English is noticeable. The self-correction activity gives the higher contribution in finding the errors and how to fix them. Although some inaccuracies take place, the number is lower than the inaccuracies occurs in peer-review activity. The role of peer review in improving the students' writing should not be neglected considering that after being self-corrected, more errors are successfully identified during peer review activity. Therefore, these two activities might be considered as mutual complements.

However, when the students are let to work by themselves, the chances for inaccuracies in identifying errors and/or suggesting corrections may emerge. Some potential problems that lead to this situation are the students' lack of experience in doing self-correction and/or peer review and their limitation in understanding several rules in composing academic writing in English. This way, the role of scaffolding given by the teacher is very prominent both in helping the students improve their skills and knowledge in English as well as in helping them improve the quality of their writings.

The findings of this research confirm the results of the previous studies by Regoniel (2013) and Lundstrom and Baker (2009) that peer-review is useful in refining the students' writing by finding more errors which were unidentified during the self-correction process. Also, it was not only the students' being reviewed who got the benefits of the activities, but also those who did the peer-review.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Writing an academic piece in English might be a difficult task for the students learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, we need to put more effort in dealing with this matter. Self-correction and peer review activity have long been believed to be among the strategies implemented in order to improve the students' skills in producing a good piece of writing. However, leaving this all to the students should not be considered wise enough considering that some obstacles might come up on the way of their learning. Therefore designing scaffolded self-correction and peer review must yield better results compared to having the students work by themselves. Through the scaffolding, the teachers can give adequate support to the students in their learning process.

In most Department of English at Indonesian universities, the sixth semester students have normally passed all English Structure/Grammar and Writing courses. However, when they are required to produce a piece of academic writing in English, some of them cannot apply their previous knowledge due to lack of understanding or confusion. Thus, reintroducing the student to the rules in English structure and academic writing should be considered helpful. Assigning the students to do self-correction and peer-review is definitely stimulate them to be more autonomous. Although some inaccuracies may occur during these procedures, the sufficient

scaffolding given by the lecturer would significantly help the EFL students' improve their writings.

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