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The Effects of Teacher versus Guided Self-Correction on the Grammatical Accuracy of Student-Written Text: University EFL Students in Focus

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Abstract

The main aim of this study was to determine the effects of teacher versus guided self-correction on the grammatical accuracy of students writing. In this study, a quasi-experimental design was employed. To collect data, pretest and posttest were used. The subjects of the study were purposely selected 41 second year English majoring undergraduate students. The course "Advanced Writing Skills" was used in conducting the experiment. The subjects were assigned in two experimental and one control group based on their pretest scores, making the groups homogenous in their academic achievement. To analyze the data, an independent sample t-test and paired sample t-test were used. Accordingly, independent t-test comparison indicated a significant difference between teacher correction and guided self-correction group. In other words, the students involved in guided self-correction treatment showed significant improvements on their grammatical accuracy compared to teacher's direct correction treatment group. Thus, it was found that guided self-correction had greater effect in improving grammatical accuracy than direct teacher correction. On the other hand, paired sample t-test comparison showed that two of the error correction methods had a significant effect on students' grammatical accuracy. The students participated in experimental groups showed significant improvements on their grammatical accuracy compared to the control group.

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Keywords

Teacher correction, guided self-correction, corrective feedback, grammatical accuracy, student-written text

Introduction

Background of the study

Writing in English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) is a complex skill that requires teachers' exhaustive efforts in order to assist their students to improve writing skills. It is a challenging skill because it does not only involve a representation of words, but also the development and organization of thoughts in a structured way (Maryam and Hamid, 2012). Consequently, teaching writing has been given a great concern by ESL and EFL teachers and researchers in language education. The paradigm shift in language education from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered approach that is mainly concerned with communicative language teaching (CLT) is one of the significant innovations.

The introduction of CLT in ESL/EFL context has brought a shift in the focus of teaching writing from product oriented to process oriented teaching approach.

In accordance with this, Haregwoin (2008, p. 2) states, "students' achievement is higher when the teaching approach emphasizes writing as a process" in teaching writing. In view of this, she further claims that the focus of writing instruction should be on the overall writing processes, and teachers should encourage students to use grammar in the writing process to enhance their grammatical accuracy. This asserts that students' grammatical accuracy in writing could be enhanced when teachers oversee the overall writing process.

In writing instruction, particularly in process approach, responding to students' writing has become one of the valuable strategies teachers use in teaching writing to help their students improve writing skills (Ferris, 2003). Such response has been described as feedback, which comes from different sources, and it plays a significant role in enhancing students' writing ability, and also it has a place in most theories of second and foreign language learning, language pedagogy and language acquisition (Krashen, 1985; Long, 2000). From the perspectives of both structural and communicative approaches to language teaching, feedback is seen as a means of fostering learners' motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy. In view of this, it has been asserted that providing corrective feedback on students' written work is a central element for the enhancement of writing accuracy (Ferris, 2003; Naidu, 2007; Truscott, 2007).

The corrective feedback is the teacher's response on students' writing. It can be categorized as written versus oral, focused versus unfocused, positive versus negative, direct versus indirect, and its aim can be enhancing lexical, stylistic, grammatical and content accuracy of writing (Ellis, 2009). Teacher correction can occur in direct or indirect forms. According to Ferris (2002, p.19), direct correction occurs "when an instructor provides the correct linguistic form for students"; on the other hand, indirect correction occurs "when the teacher indicates that an error has been made but leaves it to the student writer to solve the problem and correct the error". Similarly, it is explained that teacher correction can occur in explicit form in which the teacher provides the correct form of the target language, and implicit form in which the teacher indicates that an error has been committed, encouraging student self-correction (Ellis, et al, 2006; Hyland and Hyland, 2006). For the current study, therefore, the written corrective feedback (explicit teacher-correction and guided student-self-correction followed by teacher's indication of the error) are focus of the investigation.

Statement of the problem

Responding to student writing is a crucial component of teaching writing skills in ESL/EFL contexts, and particularly error correction is highly valuable for students' revision and improvement of writing performances (Ferris, 2003; Bitchener, 2008). There have been debates among writing scholars about error correction concerning its value and role in improving students' writing skills. Despite the debates still going on, the importance of error correction has largely been documented by a considerable body of researches in the contexts of ESL and EFL writing. In English language teaching contexts, especially in classrooms where the teaching of writing is process oriented, teachers and students have acknowledged the crucial value of the error correction (Harmer, 2001; Bitchener, 2008; Mesfin 2011). This reveals that in EFL/ESL contexts, error correction is seen as particularly important, and it is beneficial to students' development in writing; however, the effects of such feedback from different sources on students' grammatical accuracy, particularly in student-written text, is still inconclusive.

Error correction, indeed, can play a great role in improving EFL students' writing proficiency and shaping the writing process in general, and it can have a constructive role in enhancing the grammatical accuracy in particular. In this sense, it is obvious that theoretically error correction is a necessary pedagogical requirement in the writing process (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Chandler, 2003; Bitchener, 2008); however, who should necessarily correct errors; which method of error correction is worth helpful for improving writing skills and its effect on grammatical accuracy is still undetermined. Therefore, error correction from different sources and different error correction methods should be investigated to examine its effect on students' writing from different perspectives. In this regard, how errors in written text should be corrected is the central issue of concern that could determine the varied effects of error correction. Thus, the current study investigated the effects of teacher correction and guided self-correction methods on the grammatical accuracy of student-written text.

Moreover, the role of error correction cannot be ignored in countries like Ethiopia where English is taught as a foreign language, and students face a great deal of problems in their writing especially frequent grammatical errors. Furthermore, the researcher's experience of teaching writing courses in public

university reveals that grammatical inaccuracy is mostly a recurring problem in students' writing. In this regard, different studies conducted in Ethiopian universities report that most students fail to meet the standards of grammatical accuracy in their writing required of them (Geremew, 1999; Italo, 1999; Mesfin, 2004). Likewise, it is claimed that students joining university have serious problems of English grammar particularly in their writing (Haregwoin, 2008). This indicates that grammatical accuracy needs due concern in teaching writing skills. Therefore, in response to the observed problem, this study is an attempt of investigating whether different error correction methods could help students to improve their grammatical accuracy in writing, and to explore which of the error correction methods has greater effect in improving grammatical accuracy.

Objective of the study

The general aim of the study was to assess the effects of teacher versus guided self-correction on the grammatical accuracy of students writing.

Specifically, the study examined if there is any significant difference between the effects of teacher correction and guided self-correction of errors on the grammatical accuracy of student-written text.

Hypotheses

H_1: There will be a significant difference in the grammatical accuracy in student-written text between teacher correction and guided self-correction groups.
H_0: There will be no significant difference in the grammatical accuracy in student-written text between teacher correction and guided self-correction groups.

Materials and Methods

Research design

The research design employed in this study is a quasi-experimental design. A repeated measures in which the experimental units are measured under different treatment conditions or at different times (Tamhane, 2009), was utilized in this study. The participants' grammatical accuracy in written text in pretest and posttest results was compared. The independent variables of this study were the implementation of teacher correction and guided self-correction of errors in student-written text whereas the dependent variable was the students' grammatical accuracy that is based on the number of grammatical errors in student-written text. The indicators of grammatical accuracy in writing were tested through students' attempt of composing paragraph and essay for the pretest and posttest sessions.

Subjects of the Study

The study was conducted in Wolaita Sodo University, focusing on English major undergraduates. Accordingly, all of the second year English major undergraduate students (41 in number) enrolled in 2019 academic year were participated in the study.

Sampling procedures

The English major students were selected purposely for they take a number of writing courses concerned with paragraph and essay level writing. Likewise, the second year students were selected for the purpose that the advanced level writing courses, which are concerned with a number of paragraph and essay writing activities at different stages, are offered in the second year in undergraduate programme of English language and literature.

Comprehensive sampling technique was used to select the participants. Thus, all of the second year English major students were taken as subjects of the study because they were the available participants that fulfill the needs of the study. In connection to this, Dornyei (2007, p. 100) recommended that "in comparative and experimental procedures - at least 15 participants in each group" could be used.

Data collection tools

An experiment was conducted in order to investigate whether or not teacher versus guided self-correction of errors could enhance students' grammatical accuracy in written text. In conducting the experiment, two experimental groups were given two different treatments. The first group was given teacher's correction of every grammatical error in the text and revised the text applying the corrections given. The second group received only error identification to make correction by themselves. In this group, students were required to make self-correction of errors and revise the text making necessary correction by themselves. To conduct the experiment, three different paragraph and essay writing tasks and guidelines for marking the pre and post-tests were prepared.

Testing was used to collect data from the experiment and to test the hypotheses of the research. The pretest and posttest are the tests used in this study to gather necessary information about the effects of teacher versus guided self-correction of errors on students' grammatical accuracy in written text. The results of tests were correlated and compared to check whether correcting grammatical errors by the teacher and student writer in teaching writing skills bring significant difference in students' grammatical accuracy or not.

The pre-test

The pretest was administered at the beginning of the experiment. A three partite paragraph and essay writing pre-test was prepared and administered. The first part is concerned with controlled writing in which the students are provided with incomplete sentences in a text and asked to complete with the correct forms of the verbs placed in brackets. The second part is on guided writing in which students are provided with information to write a text in accordance with the information, and the third part is on free writing in which the students are given a topic to write a paragraph and essay of their own. The main purpose of administering pretest before the experiment was to find out if there is any significant difference in grammatical accuracy between the groups in their writing abilities. The treatment was given after the pretest.

The post-test

At the end of the intervention, posttest was administered to participants in different groups. The participant students were required to write a text after the intervention. Its main purpose was to check whether there is an improvement in grammatical accuracy in student-written text after the intervention in different groups.

Guidelines for marking and inter-rater reliability

In marking a composition, different methods can be used. According to Heaton (1990), there are three major methods of marking composition: the error-count method, the analytic method and the impression or multiple marking methods. In this study, therefore, for the purpose of marking pretest and posttest papers, error-count method was used. Hence, students' grammar errors in the written text both in pretest and posttest papers were counted and appropriate scores were given.

In order to rate the pretest and posttest papers, two independent raters (rater 1 - the researcher and rater 2 - a colleague from the research site) were used. In order to check the reliability of marking, mark/re-mark reliability was employed to assess the degree to which the different raters gave consistent scores of the same test. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was computed in order to determine the inter-rater reliability. Accordingly, the average scores of the raters were used for further statistical analysis.

Ensuring reliability and validity

In order to ensure validity and reliability of tests and instruments, different activities were undertaken. Accordingly, to check reliability of tests, the test-retest reliability check was undertaken. To achieve this, the tests were administered at two different sessions to the same group of students. Accordingly, the scores obtained from two test sessions, which was conducted at a week interval, were accompanied by correlating the scores of the test given in the first time (Time 1) with the retest scores of second time (Time 2). The Pearson correlation method was used to compute the coefficient of correlation between the test-retest scores.

An attempt was also made to observe validity. The jury was given the pretest and posttest to determine the face and content validity. The jury members examined the tests and expressed their comments concerning the clarity, adequacy, difficulty level and familiarity of the tasks and topics of the tests. Moreover, they commented on the relevance of the tests. In light of this, the comments provided by the jury were incorporated in the tests. Accordingly, the testes were made to incorporate three different tasks and topics in three different writing phases (controlled, guided and free writing phases).

Data collection procedures

The experiment was conducted for eight weeks on second year English major undergraduate students during the second semester of 2019 academic year. The participants in the three groups (two experimental and one control) were taught the course "Advanced Writing Skills" for eight weeks and different treatments (direct teacher correction and guided self-correction) were provided to the experimental groups in three writing phases. In the treatment provision process, the participants produced different texts at different levels with respective revisions considering the treatments. The

control group was also involved in the writing and rewriting processes, but no treatment was provided.

In conducting the experiment, lecturing and independent learning were employed as classroom teaching methodology. During the experiment, students were taught in one class period and completed different writing tasks in other class period in a week. In the other week, the students were made to rewrite their texts after providing the treatments. This process was continued for eight weeks during the experiment. Students were taught selected grammar items in the context of writing, and different writing exercises were presented by following the principles of process writing.

Method of data analysis

The results of the pretest and posttest were analyzed quantitatively. The data collected through the pretest and posttest was analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results of the tests were compared using independent sample t-test to determine if there is any significant difference on grammatical accuracy between different treatment groups. Likewise, paired sample t-test was computed to determine if there is any significant improvement in grammatical accuracy in student-written text after the treatments.

Results and Discussion

Independent samples t-test comparison between groups

In order to determine the significant differences between groups, an independent sample t-test comparison was employed. Accordingly, comparison was carried out between guided self-correction treatment (experimental group1) with direct teacher correction treatment (experimental group2). The results of the statistical analysis of the independent sample t-test are discussed hereunder.

As indicated in table 1, the pretest, conducted before the intervention and the posttest, conducted after the intervention between two experimental groups (guided self-correction treatment group and direct teacher correction treatment group) were compared using independent sample t-test to determine if there is any significant difference between groups. To this end, the independent sample t-test comparison shows that the mean scores of the first experimental group (guided self-correction treatment) of 14 students and the second experimental group (direct teacher correction treatment) of 14 students are 43.8571 and 43.7143 respectively for the pretest. In the same way, the standard deviations of the two experimental groups are computed as 10.0545 and 11.9481 respectively for the pretest. Besides, the t-value is 0.034, and the p-value is 0.973. From this statistical analysis of independent sample t-test comparison of the pretest in two groups, it was found that the difference between the two scores was statistically insignificant indicating that the guided self-correction treatment group made no significant difference over its pre-test compared to that of the direct teacher correction treatment group.

Similarly, the independent sample t-test comparison was also conducted on the posttest. As shown in the same table 1, the mean scores of the guided self-correction treatment group of 14 and direct teacher correction treatment group of 14 students are 68.8571and 56.3571respectively for the posttest. Likewise, the standard deviations of the two groups in the posttest are computed as 13.5808 and 11.7398 respectively. Moreover, as shown in the table, the t-value is 2.605 and the p-value is 0.015 for the posttest between the two groups. The difference between the two scores was found to be statistically significant indicating that the guided self-correction treatment group made a significant improvement over its posttest compared to that of the direct teacher correction treatment group. This finding of the independent sample t-test comparison of the posttest seems to indicate that the guided self-correction intervention could have a greater significant effect in improving students' grammatical accuracy in their written text compared to the direct teacher correction.

As indicated in table 2, the pretest and posttest of the guided self-correction treatment (first experimental group) and no treatment (control group) were compared using independent sample t-test to determine if there is any significant difference between groups. To this end, the independent sample t-test comparison shows that the mean scores of the guided self-correction treatment of 14 students and the control group of 13 students are 43.8571 and 43.7692 respectively for the pretest. In the same way, the standard deviations of the guided self-correction group and control group are computed as 10.0545 and 13.0154 respectively for the pretest. Concerning the t-value and the p-value, the t-value is 0.020, and the p-value is 0.984. From this statistical analysis of independent sample t-test comparison, it was found that the difference between the two scores was statistically insignificant indicating that the guided self-correction

treatment group made no significant difference over its pretest compared to that of the control group.

Similarly, the independent sample t-test comparison was also conducted on the posttest. As shown in the same table 2, the mean scores of the guided self-correction treatment group of 14 and control group of 13 students are 68.857 and 44.9615 respectively for the posttest. Likewise, the standard deviations of the two groups in the posttest are computed as 13.5808 and 10.9038 respectively. Moreover, as shown in the table, the t-value is 5.016 and the p-value is 0.000 for the posttest between the two groups. The difference between the two scores was found to be statistically significant indicating that the guided self-correction treatment group made a significant improvement over its posttest compared to the control group. Therefore, the finding of the independent sample t-test comparison of the posttest seems to indicate that the guided self-correction intervention could have a significant contribution in improving students' grammatical accuracy in their written text.

As indicated in table 3, the pretest and posttest of the direct teacher treatment (second experimental group) and no treatment (control group) were compared using independent sample t-test to determine if there is any significant difference between groups in pretest and posttest. To this end, the independent sample t-test comparison shows that the mean scores of the direct teacher correction treatment of 14 students and the control group of 13 students are 43.7143 and 43.7692 respectively for the pretest. Similarly, the standard deviations of the direct teacher correction group and control group are computed as 11.9481and 13.0154 respectively for the pretest. Concerning the t-value and the p-value, the t-value is 0.011, and the p-value is 0.991. From this statistical analysis of independent sample t-test comparison of the pretest, it was found that the difference between the two scores was statistically insignificant indicating that the direct teacher correction treatment group made no significant difference over its pretest compared to that of the control group.

Similarly, the independent sample t-test comparison was also conducted on the posttest. As shown in the same table 3, the mean scores of the direct teacher correction treatment group of 14 and control group of 13 students are 56.3571and 44.9615 respectively for the posttest. Likewise, the standard deviations of the two groups in the posttest are computed as 11.7398 and 10.9038 respectively. Moreover, as shown in the table, the t-value is 2.608 and the p-value is 0.015 for the posttest between the two groups. The difference between the two scores was found to be statistically significant indicating that the direct teacher correction treatment group made a significant improvement over its posttest compared to the control group. Therefore, the finding of the independent sample t-test comparison of the posttest seems to indicate that the direct teacher correction intervention could have a significant contribution in improving students' grammatical accuracy in their written text.

Paired samples t-test comparison before and after interventions

In order to find out the effects of two different error correction methods (guided self-correction and direct teacher correction) on the grammatical accuracy of student written text, a paired sample t-test was run correlating the pretest and posttest results of each group. Accordingly, the results of the statistical analysis of the paired sample t-test computation are presented hereunder.

As indicated in table 4, the paired sample t-test was run to compare the pretest and posttest scores of the guided self-correction experimental group. Hence, the mean scores of the experimental group of 14 students are 43.8571 and 68.8571 for the pretest and posttest respectively. In addition, the standard deviation of the group is 68.8571 and 13.5808 respectively for the pretest and posttest. The paired difference of mean is 25.000 and the standard deviation is 11.2694. Moreover, the t-value is -8.300 and the p-value is 0.000. The difference between the above two scores was found to be statistically significant indicating that the posttest mean scores of the group showed a significant difference over its pretest results. Thus, the students in this experimental group after they were given guided self-correction intervention improved their grammatical accuracy in their written text.

As indicated in table 5, the paired sample t-test was run to compare the pretest and posttest scores of the guided self-correction experimental group. The analysis indicates that the mean scores of the experimental group of 14 students are 43.7143 and 56.3571 for the pretest and posttest respectively. Similarly, the standard deviation of the group is 11.9481 and 11.7398 for the pretest and posttest respectively. Besides, the paired mean difference between two tests 12.6428 and the standard deviation is 5.5380. In this paired sample t-test comparison, the t-value is -8.542 and the p-value is 0.000. Therefore, the result of the paired sample t-test

indicated that direct teacher correction of errors helped students in improving their grammatical accuracy in written text. Hence, it was found that teacher's direct correction of errors has a significant effect on the grammatical accuracy of student-written text.

As indicated in table 6, the paired sample t-test was run to compare the pretest and posttest scores of the control group that was not given any error correction intervention. The analysis indicates that the mean scores of the control group of 13 students are 43.7692 and 44.9615 for the pretest and posttest respectively. Similarly, the standard deviation of the group is 13.0154 and 10.9038 for the pretest and posttest respectively. Besides, the paired mean difference between two tests is 1.1923 and the standard deviation is 3.3262. In this paired sample t-test comparison, the t-value is -1.292 and the p-value is 0.221. Therefore, the result of the paired sample t-test indicated that without any error correction intervention, students' grammatical accuracy in their written text did not improve from pretest to posttest. Hence, the control group, which was not provided with any error correction treatment, showed statistically insignificant difference in the comparison of pretest and posttest.

Table.1 Results of the independent sample t-test of the experimental groups

Test	Experimental Group1			Experimental Group2			df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D			
Pretest	14	43.8571	10.0545	14	43.7143	11.9481	26	0.034	0.973
Posttest	14	68.8571	13.5808	14	56.3571	11.7398	26	2.605	0.015

Table.2 Results of the independent t-test of experimental group1 and control group

Test	Experimental Group1			Control Group			Df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D			
Pretest	14	43.8571	10.0545	13	43.7692	13.0154	25	0.020	0.984
Posttest	14	68.8571	13.5808	13	44.9615	10.9038	25	5.016	0.000

Table.3 Results of the independent t-test of experimental group2 and control group

Test	Experimental Group2			Control Group			df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
	N	Mean	S.D	N	Mean	S.D			
Pretest	14	43.7143	11.9481	13	43.7692	13.0154	25	0.011	0.991
Posttest	14	56.3571	11.7398	13	44.9615	10.9038	25	2.608	0.015

Table.4 Results of the paired sample t-test of guided self-correction treatment

Test	Descriptive Statistics			Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	N	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			
Pretest	14	43.8571	68.8571	25.0000	11.2694	-8.300	13	0.000
Posttest	14	68.8571	13.5808					

Table.5 Results of paired sample t-test of direct teacher correction treatment

Test	Descriptive Statistics			Paired Differences		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	N	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			
Pretest	14	43.7143	11.9481	12.6428	5.5380	-8.542	13	0.000
Posttest	14	56.3571	11.7398					

Table.6 Results of paired sample t-test of control group

Test	Descriptive Statistics			Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	N	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			
Pretest	13	43.7692	13.0154	1.1923	3.3262	-1.292	12	0.221
Posttest	13	44.9615	10.9038					

Conclusion and recommendations

This study investigated the effects of two error correction methods (direct teacher correction and guided self-correction) on the grammatical accuracy of student-written text. Specifically, it tried to determine if there was a significant difference between providing direct error correction treatment by the teacher and providing guided correction for self-correction. Moreover, it was meant to determine the error correction method, which is more helpful for students' improvement in grammatical accuracy.

In order to determine if there was a significant difference between scores, an independent sample t-test comparison was conducted on posttest scores of teacher correction and guided self-correction groups. Accordingly, the difference between the two scores was found to be statistically significant indicating that the guided self-correction treatment group made a significant improvement over its posttest compared to that of the direct teacher correction treatment group. This finding of the independent sample t-test comparison of the posttest seems to indicate that the guided self-correction intervention could have a greater significant effect in improving students' grammatical accuracy in written text compared to the direct teacher correction.

Additionally, a paired sample t-test was conducted to determine the effects of error correction methods. Accordingly, it was found that teacher's direct correction of errors had a significant effect on the grammatical accuracy of student-written text. Similarly, it was also found that guiding students by indicating their errors for self-correction had a significant effect on the grammatical accuracy of student-written text. In other words, the students participated in both teacher correction and guided self-correction treatment groups showed a significant improvement on their grammatical accuracy compared to the control group. Generally, in this study, it was discovered that guided self-correction was more helpful for students improvement in grammatical accuracy compared to direct teacher's correction.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following implications are recommended:

1. ESL/EFL teachers should utilize varied ways of corrective feedback provision strategies and combine selective direct correction of errors with guided correction encouraging self-correction and giving opportunities for independent learning by indicating the location and type of errors.
2. ESL/EFL teachers should oversee students' composing attempts throughout the overall writing process with corrective feedback provision, and reconsider the method of teaching writing skills.
3. In corrective feedback provision, students should be given wider opportunities to revise their drafts, act on the feedback engaging themselves and self-correct errors themselves.
4. Students' grammatical accuracy is improved significantly through guided self-correction; therefore, rather than providing the correct target form, teachers should help students discover their own independent learning via feedback provision.
5. Error correction should be undertaken with care and attention to individual differences and learning outcomes, i.e., the nature of the learning process, awareness of students needs and the objectives of the lesson.
6. Further researches on error correction should focus on teachers and students perspectives.

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