

IMPROVING STUDENTS' GRAMMAR USING DICTOGLOSS

By
Eva Muthia Dewi¹

Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh

ABSTRACT

This Classroom Action Research (CAR) study was intended to describe how the Dictogloss technique was implemented and how this technique can improve students' grammar through collaborative writing. This paper also describes the students' participation and their responses to the use of Dictogloss. This research was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle consisted of three meetings which were used for the planning of the action, implementing the action and observing and reflecting. The sample was the second grade high school students in class XI, IPA 4 at SMAN 1, Ingin Jaya, Aceh Besar. The data for this research consisted of the observation checklists, the tests, a questionnaire and field notes. The results from the research are based on the four objectives; first, the researcher was successful in implementing all the stages of the Dictogloss technique. Second, the students' scores in the post-test were higher than in the pre-tests. On the first pre-test the students' mean score was 11.2 which became 19.5 in the final post-test. So, there was a significant improvement in the students' grammar competence after implementing the Dictogloss technique. Third, the students give good responses to learning grammar using the Dictogloss technique. All of them were engaged and participated actively in all stages of the Dictogloss technique. Moreover, the results from the questionnaire showed that 81% of the students were interested and had a positive attitude towards the use of the Dictogloss technique for learning grammar. The results showed the students were interested, motivated and enthusiastic in learning grammar using the Dictogloss technique.

Keywords: *Grammar, Narrative text, Dictogloss technique.*

¹ Corresponding author: aurora_fad@yahoo.co.id

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Teaching-learning grammar is an important component of learning EFL and occupies a major place in it. Learning grammar is also essential to master communicative skills in English. This statement is supported by Cross (2002) who has stated that teachers need to lead students for grammatical competencies. In addition, Harmer (1991) has declared that grammatical knowledge is very important for learners who want to have communicative competence. With English grammar competency, learners can avoid using incorrect structures. This condition is challenging for teachers so they should have the ability to define the correct forms of grammar orally and in written form.

Dealing with grammar, many students in the eleventh grade of XI IPA 4, SMAN 1 Ingin Jaya faced some difficulties in learning grammar especially the past tense and the verbs ending in -ed which are commonly used in narrative texts. Hence, teaching grammar is often integrated with writing, and as a result students need to understand and practice their grammar before they can produce sentences or write paragraphs using correct grammar.

The National Curriculum Standard (KTSP 2006) for second grade high school students expects that they will be able to write some grammatical and structural items acceptably and correctly, i.e. past tense, past simple continuous, adjectives, pronouns and active-passive sentences in various types of texts. For instance, the teacher used to teach them grammar separately from the texts, and then give them a lot of grammar tests. As a result they often got bored as the classes seemed to be monotonous. Second, they had some difficulties comprehending the past tense and the form of the verb "-ed". For example, the teacher had already taught them about past tense, and then she gave them an assessment about the simple past. She thought that the students had become acquainted with the patterns, but what she found in their post-test was: "last week I dranked a glass of milk" instead of "last week I drank a glass of milk". This showed that they were unable to understand how to use correct grammar in English, especially how to use regular and irregular verbs in the simple past. This became a real problem in teaching grammar.

Based on some preliminary research, the writer found many problems when teaching grammar in several genre such as recount and narrative texts. The texts contained some linguistic features where the

students often had a lot of difficulties. The researcher found that in her classroom the teaching-learning process was monotonous and teacher-centered. The students got bored with the rules and with only working on grammar exercises. The students' lack of interest was strengthened by the results from their final paper where their scores were mostly below 60; most did not reach the minimum score or standard criteria for the school – which was 70.

Related to these problems, there are many types of strategies and methods that could be applied for teaching grammar based on narrative texts. Narrative texts mainly contain verbs in the past form with the verb form '–ed'. It is a type of text that retells experiences from the past (Anderson & Anderson, 1997).

This research focussed on using the Dictogloss technique as one form of co-operative learning. Wajnryb (1990) has argued that Dictogloss is a task-based activity that encourages students to work together actively in small groups to reconstruct new versions of a narrative text. This technique is believed to improve their grammatical competence and to develop more precise understanding of how to use English grammar. Dictogloss activities have four stages: the first is preparation or introduction of the text; the second is dictation by asking the learners to listen without writing anything; the third is to reconstruct the dictated text and each group of students has to capture as much as possible of the content of the original information accurately and in acceptable linguistic form and the fourth stage is analysis and correction.

Many research studies have shown that Dictogloss is assumed to be effective to teach students about the use of vocabulary and associated aspects of grammar. Wajnryb (1990, p. 7) has stated that Dictogloss is designed to draw the learners' attention to the form of language. Dictogloss mostly relies on matters of form, such as grammar and spelling. It aims to upgrade and refine the learners' use of the language through a comprehensive analysis of language options in the corrections to the learners' initial approximate texts.

Based on the records from the last two years, the students' achievements in English proficiency especially with narrative texts were still low, 50% of the students got scores below 60 while the minimum passing standard (KKM) criteria at the school for English is 70. These problems happened partly because the students did not have good grammatical competency especially with narrative texts. The above condition needed to be changed and it inspired the researcher to

conduct research teaching narrative texts using the Dictogloss technique.

Research Questions

1. Can the implementation of the Dictogloss technique assist the teaching of grammar with narrative texts to eleventh year students from SMAN 1 Ingin Jaya?
2. Can teaching-learning using the Dictogloss technique improve the competency in grammar of eleventh year students from SMAN 1 Ingin Jaya?
3. Will the students participate actively during the teaching-learning process studying grammar in narrative texts using the Dictogloss technique?
4. What will be the students' responses to the implementation of the Dictogloss technique for teaching grammar?

Research Objectives

1. To describe the way in which the Dictogloss technique was used for teaching-learning grammar with narrative texts to eleventh year students from SMAN 1 Ingin Jaya.
2. To determine whether the Dictogloss technique can improve comprehension of past forms and use of verbs with '-ed' with eleventh year students from SMAN 1 Ingin Jaya.
3. To find out how the students will participate during the teaching-learning processes for learning grammar with narrative texts using the Dictogloss technique.
4. To find out the responses of the students towards the implementation of the Dictogloss technique.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grammar in an EFL Classroom

Different definitions have been given for grammar. Wilcox and Karen (2004, p. 23) have stated that grammar is a system of rules which allows the user of the language in question to create meaning, by using meaningful words and by constructing larger sentences. However, grammar is often associated with the traditional forms of instruction in which knowledge is transmitted in a one-way process from a dominant teacher to a class of silent, obedient learners. As for the learners, their role is to memorize the rules and apply them in various exercises given

by the teacher. Beebe (1988) recalls that grammar is about form and one way to teach form is to give students rules.

On the other hand, Celce-Murina (2001, p. 252) has stated that grammatical structures not only have morphosyntactic form but they are also used to express meaning (semantics) in context-appropriate use (pragmatics). There have been some investigations and research conducted on grammar which showed that ESL learners' grammar acquisition processes benefited when grammar was taught explicitly as well as when there was focus on form in the teaching.

According to Celce-Murina (2001, p. 256), teaching grammar means enabling students to use linguistic forms accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. In other words, the teaching of grammar in EFL classes must be focused on form, meaning and the use of language, and a different focus would result in a different learning activity.

Focus on Form

Mayo (2002), on the other hand, has said that focus on form is a form approach that addresses the students' need to attend to form; the term 'form' itself is often used to refer exclusively to 'grammar'. Long and Robinson (1998) have said that focus on form often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features by the teacher and/or one or more students triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production.

Focus on Meaning

Ellis (1997, p. 36) has noted that the term '*focus on meaning*' is somewhat ambiguous. He added that it is necessary to distinguish two different senses of focus on meaning: the first one refers to the idea of semantic meaning (i.e. the meaning of lexical items or of a specific grammatical structure); and the second one relates to pragmatic meaning (i.e. the highly contextualized meaning that arises in an act of communication).

Focus on Use

Celce-Murcia (2001, p. 260) has stated that working on use will involve students' learning that there are options to be exercised and that they must choose from among them the one that best suits a given context. When use is the challenge, it is because students have shown

that they are having a hard time selecting the right structure or form for a particular situation/context.

The Role of Noticing

Hinkel and Fotos (2001) has defined noticing as a complex cognitive process, which involves intake of both meaning and form. In addition, noticing is basically the idea that if learners pay attention to the form and meaning of certain language structures in input, this will contribute to the internalization of the rule. Under the assumption that “if you have an awareness of them, then ultimately your pattern detector might function a bit more efficiently” (Ryan, 2001, p. 2). However, learners who acquire through a natural approach often experience fossilization, i.e., certain errors do not get better despite a significant amount of experience with the target language.

Narrative Texts

Woodson (1999) has stated that narrating is when you tell a story and you describe actual or fictional events arranged in a chronological order or sequence. It can be said that sequencing the events in narration is one of the important elements because narration is concerned with a sequence of events in time. In addition, narrations deal with problematic events, which lead to a crisis or turning point of some kind, which in turn finds a resolution. It can be concluded that a narrative text is a text telling a past story or event, either actual or fictional, by using time sequence or chronological order. Moreover, the story in a narrative text sets up one or more problems, which need to be resolved. A narrative is a kind of story genre that can be imaginary or factual and has many types. There are fairy stories, mysteries, science fiction, romances, horror stories, true and fictional adventure stories, fables, myths, legends, historical narratives, ballads, modern scientific developments etc.

According to Anderson and Anderson (1997), a narrative text consists of *an orientation* in which the narrator tells the audience about ‘who’ is in the story, ‘when’ the story is taking place, ‘what’ is happening and ‘where’ the action is happening, *a complication* that sets off a chain of events that influences what will happen in the story, *a sequence of events* where the characters react to the complication, *a resolution* in which the characters solve the problem created in the complication, and *a coda* that provides a moral based on what has been learned from the story (optional).

Siahaan and Shinoda (2008, pp. 73-74) have stated that the structure of a narrative text is (i) an *orientation* (setting the scene, introducing the participants and the plight), (ii) an *evaluation* (a stepping back to evaluate the plight), (iii) a *complication* (a crisis arises), (iv) a *resolution* (the crises is resolved, for better or for worse), and (v) a *reorientation* (optional). From the explanation above, it can be stated that the main structures in narrative text are:

- a. Orientation. This is about the opening paragraphs that tells or introduces about 'who' (characters or participants), 'when' (time), 'where' (place) of the story and 'what' they are doing.
- b. Complication. Complication explores the conflict in the story. This part shows and describes the problems or the rising crises which the participants or characters of the story have to deal with.
- c. Resolution. In this part, the crises or the problems in the story are resolved and end for better or worse, happily or unhappily.

There are some typical language features in a narrative text – i.e. (a) nouns that identify the specific characters and places in the story, (b) adjectives that provide accurate descriptions of the characters and settings, (c) time words that connect events to tell when they occur, e.g. *first, then, next, while, afterward, finally, after, during, before*, etc., (d) verbs past and past tense that show actions that occurred in the story. In addition, Siahaan and Shinoda (2008, p. 74) have stated that the linguistic features of a narrative focus on specific and usually individualized participants, use of material processes (behavioral and verbal processes), use of mental processes, use of temporal conjunctions and temporal circumstances, and use of the past tense.

Dictogloss

Dictogloss was formulated by Wajnryb in 1990 to emphasize grammar, it involves students in listening to a short text read at normal speed then reconstructing as well as paraphrasing or interpreting (the 'gloss'-part) the text. According to Wajnryb (1990), the task focuses not only on learning in a whole class setting (on learner output) but also on learner interaction. In implementing the Dictogloss technique, teachers easily fit the stages of Dictogloss tasks creatively into students' needs. In the different stages of Dictogloss, learners may be involved in listening, remembering and/or writing. In this research the writer explores the reconstructing stages of the task.

Wajnryb (1990) has stated that Dictogloss is a recent technique in language teaching which takes a little step after the dictation technique

(hence part of its name), which consists of asking learners to reconstruct a dictated text and to capture as much as possible of the information content accurately and in an acceptable linguistic form. Wajnryb (1990) has added that with this technique students get more precise understanding of the grammar items than in any other technique and compared to other traditional approaches, this technique uses both the negotiation of meaning and form. There are co-operative strategies in the technique that lead the learners to stay active and engaged in the learning processes. Small (2003, p. 57) define Dictogloss as an activity in which short pieces of language are read out at normal speed to students. Similarly, Cross (2002, p. 17) has declared that Dictogloss is known as grammar dictation or as a task-based, communicative teaching procedure.

Swain and Lapkin (1998) in extensive research on learning outcomes in a French immersion program found that Dictogloss was effective in helping students internalize their linguistic knowledge by making them aware of language form and function. As others have said, Dictogloss encourages beneficial interaction during collaborative tasks by providing explicit information about grammatical forms before learners carry out the tasks, training learners to notice and repair their language errors, and modeling how learners interact with each other.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Dictogloss

Advantages of Dictogloss

Vasiljevic (2010, p. 5) has noted that the Dictogloss model offers various potential advantages over other models of teaching text types. First, the Dictogloss method is an effective way of combining individual and group activities. Students listen and take notes individually and then work together to reconstruct the text. The reconstruction task gives students a focus and a clear objective, which is a pre-condition for effective group work. Students are actively involved in the learning process and there are multiple opportunities for peer learning and peer teaching.

Second, the Dictogloss procedure as noted by Karen (2012) facilitates the development of the learners' communicative competence. Students' speaking time is significantly longer than in a traditional teacher-centered classroom. At the same time, the pressure to reconstruct the text within the time limit also means that the students are more likely to use time effectively. Mackenzie (2011) has also explained that the collaborative reconstruction task gives learners

opportunities to practice and use all modes of language and to become engaged in authentic communication. There is more turn-taking and students are more likely to use confirmation and clarification strategies. This variety of interaction was found to be more productive in terms of language development than the actual linguistic forms used (Willis & Willis, 1996).

Third, the reconstruction stage helps students try out their hypotheses and subsequently identify their strengths and weaknesses. A reconstruction task encourages students to consider the input more closely. Noticing is known to be one of the crucial elements of the language learning process (Ellis, 1997). Mackenzie (2011) has reported that the Dictogloss procedure uses principles of language learning from both the effective and the cognitive domains. The positive group interaction and interdependence can have an impact on student attitudes towards working together to reach a common goal. Students gain insights into their linguistic shortcomings and also develop strategies for solving the problems they encounter.

Another advantage of the Dictogloss method is that the reconstruction tasks can raise students' awareness of rhetorical patterns in the target language (Kaplan, 1996). Reconstruction tasks facilitate students' ability to understand and manipulate patterns of textual organization and make the students more sensitive to discourse markers and other cohesive ties in the language they are learning to acquire.

Disadvantages of Dictogloss

Apart from the advantages found in the application of the Dictogloss technique, there are some disadvantages that appear during the learning process. Vasiljevic (2010, p. 7) has said that the Dictogloss technique is not effective for lower level learners and some subjects may not interest all learners. Sometimes, the topics selected and provided by the teacher may not suit the needs or interests of the students since the teacher's focus is usually on form, not on the subject matter.

Additionally, Small (2003, p. 5) have said that dominant learners may prevent others from participating fully especially during the reconstruction stage as they tend to dominate the opportunities for completing the task rather than sharing them with the other learners. Moreover, some learners may be reluctant to discuss or correct the text with the others in their group. This can happen because they prevent themselves from being corrected because of the mistakes they have

made. Furthermore, Vasiljevic (2010, p. 7) has noted that learners unfamiliar with this teaching-learning approach may want to write down every word dictated. So, teachers must train the students more regularly in order to get them more familiar with the Dictogloss approach because much time is needed for planning and applying the Dictogloss technique.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In doing this research, the writer used a collaborative classroom action research study on the application of the Dictogloss technique to try to improve the ability of year 11 students at SMA Negeri 1 Ingin Jaya, Aceh Besar to comprehend grammar in narrative texts. The writer applied the Kemmis and McTaggart model (1988, p. 1) since it is a simple and efficient model. The researcher took class XI IPA 4 as the sample for her research. There were 22 students in the class, 17 girls and 5 boys. This class was chosen because they had mixed proficiency in English and they were more compatible with joining in the writing test.

The writer used an achievement test. The achievement test was obtained and directly related to language courses, the purpose being to establish how successful the individual students, groups of students or the courses themselves are. For Dictogloss the target form was *past tense* and *verb -ed*. Moreover, the writer examined the students' note taking on the linguistic components and grammatical structures by focusing on certain grammar items, accuracy and meaning. Note taking or composition was scored by using a marking system from a well-known examining body in Britain (Heaton, 1975). Scorers may also award marks for what a student or group of students have written.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The data was collected from the tests, an observation sheet and a questionnaire. Two tests were given to the students, a pre-test and a post-test. The objective of the tests was to investigate the students' listening achievements before and after the implementation of the Dictogloss technique. It was found that the students' score in the post-test (77) was significantly higher than that in the pre-test (57). In addition, the use of Dictogloss for the teaching-learning of listening

was positively responded to by the students. The students agreed that Dictogloss helped them and motivated them to comprehend better. Moreover, the results from the analysis of the data from the questionnaires indicated that almost all the students (93%) responded positively to the application of the Dictogloss technique for teaching-learning listening comprehension and grammar.

Discussion

Based on the findings from the students' writing tests and the teacher-observer observation sheets in the first cycle, the results from the pre-test before the first meeting started, showed that the score of the class was still low. Three groups failed to complete the writing of their narrative text. The highest score was Pass, this meant that their score was 56-65, which was still below 70. The writer found that the students made a lot of errors in grammar in their writing, especially in using the past-tense and in verbs ending -ed. According to the observer, the students participated well and paid good attention to all stages of Dictogloss. Based on the observer's field notes, in the first stage the class became teacher centered and the students were confused and did not know what they must do after the dictation. The teachers observation sheet showed that the teaching process was poor. The students found it difficult to follow the teacher's instructions for running the Dictogloss technique. After checking the students' pre-tests, the teacher and the collaborator reflected and found that the majority of steps for the implementation of the Dictogloss technique were not followed well by the teacher nor by the students. The teacher still needed to master the way in which to implement the Dictogloss technique for teaching grammar with narrative texts. So, she needed to do a second cycle for her research to improve her students' grammar in writing a narrative text.

On the second cycle the result of the post-test was higher than in the pre-test. Based on the analysis of the narrative text from a classical story, the writer found that in this second cycle, the students had a rapid improvement in their grammar especially with the past tense and the verbs ending -ed. Compared with the pre-test result in cycle 1 when their mean score was 9, in cycle 2 their score increased to 11.2. However, they still made a lot of mistakes in vocabulary and mechanics. The teacher stayed focused on the objective of the lesson plan and explained more about the use of language features for narrative texts. In the reconstruction stages, some of the students were

quite serious and were actively asking about their writing and worked enthusiastically in negotiating within their group. From the reflection and discussion with the collaborator, the teacher had done well with the Dictogloss technique which helped her students improve their grammar and their ability to write a narrative.

From the teachers' and the students' observation sheets in the third cycle, it can be seen that the use of the Dictogloss technique in teaching grammar through writing is an effective and useful way to improve the students' grammar. The Dictogloss technique made a good impact on both the teacher and her students. The results showed that the mean score of the class improved to 19.5. Two groups' scores were higher than the third group. Based on the results from the test scores in Cycle III the Dictogloss technique was effective in improving the grammar of the students for writing a narrative text. In the third cycle, the researcher asked the students to arrange and write a text for a fable to further improve their grammar, mastery of punctuation and mechanics. She gave feedback on the students' writing by correcting incorrect punctuation and mechanics. This helped her students to improve their mastery of punctuation and mechanics. The results showed a significant improvement from Cycle 1 to 2 to 3 that happened when using the Dictogloss technique to do their writing tasks.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

All the data indicated that the use of the Dictogloss technique for teaching grammar was successful. Based on the data from the observers' observation sheets and the field notes the teacher eventually performed well all the steps of the Dictogloss technique. From the teacher's observation checklists the results showed that the teacher got 72% score for implementing the technique at first which kept on increasing up to 81% in cycle three. This meant that the researcher implemented the technique successfully and clearly.

Through collaborative writing Dictogloss can improve students competence in grammar. As seen after the second cycle the mean score was 11.55 and it keeps rising in the next cycle to reach 18.90. This meant that the students score in the post-test was significantly higher than in the pre-test. The participation of the students in this technique at the second cycle or the second time of using the Dictogloss technique was good. The data from the students' observation sheets showed that

their participation was 82%, which was very good. This can also be seen from the researcher's and the observer's field-notes, the students were involved actively in all stages of the Dictogloss procedures i.e. the students were asking a lot of question and became more active and enthusiastic in all stages of the Dictogloss technique.

The students' gave good responses to learning grammar by using Dictogloss. The questionnaire results showed that the Dictogloss technique helped the students to understand the past tense and verbs ending -ed. The results from the questionnaire showed that 81% of the students strongly agreed that learning grammar using the Dictogloss technique was very interesting. It showed that the students had responded positively to the implementation of the Dictogloss technique.

Suggestions

Based on the results above, the use of the Dictogloss technique has been proven to help improve grammar and the ability to write narrative texts. It also promoted the students to learn actively and collaboratively. This technique helps integrate skills to promote writing (the reconstruction stage), listening (to the teacher in the dictation stage), speaking (to group-mates during the reconstructing process) and reading and grammar (note taking in the listening stage and after the dictation stage). In addition this integrated teaching provided another benefit to the researcher such as to teach and test the grammar in the writing task. This integrated teaching technique is useful for other teachers who need to combine the Dictogloss technique with other skills.

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