

Self-monitoring in Non-academic EFL Learners' Composition Writing

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of using the technique of self-monitoring on non-academic EFL learners' composition writing. Fifty female students studying English at Navid English Institute in Shiraz, Iran were chosen based on the results of a proficiency test. They were all 16-20 years old and were intermediate learners of English who were divided into two control and experimental groups and took a writing pre-test. The experimental group (EG) received a training program on the effective use of the technique of self-monitoring proposed by Charles (1990). That is, they learned to add annotations expressing doubts and queries on various parts of their five composition drafts. The students in CG wrote their drafts without annotations. At the end of the twenty-second session course, both groups took a writing posttest. The results indicated that the learners in EG performed significantly better and the global features of organization and content in their writing were enhanced. Surveying the students' views on self-monitoring, through a questionnaire, revealed their interest in taking charge of their writing task. Findings point to the efficacy of the self-monitoring technique in promoting learners' writing proficiency and autonomy in handling writing tasks.

Keywords: Writing, Self-monitoring, Local and Global Aspects of Writing

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1. Introduction

Writing is one of the four skills, apart from listening, speaking and reading, which English as foreign language (EFL) students are supposed to master. Writing, as a skill which requires mass communicative practice, develops not only language itself but also thinking and creativity. When it comes to writing in EFL classes, learners are afraid of putting their ideas into words in written form due to lack of effective training, attention, and practice while teachers dread the large amount of time that should be spent for the evaluation of a large number of compositions (Chastain, 1988).

Probably, using a process-oriented writing approach through which students become familiar with processes, steps, stages and even strategies needed to materialize a piece of writing would be helpful to solve some of the problems which language learners encounter in writing. Nevertheless, implementing the process approach is time consuming. To eliminate the problem of time, the teacher may just correct the final product of writing. Under such circumstances the issue which remains is the effect of feedback on students' final piece of writing because the task of writing is already over (Muncie, 2000).

To get the learners involved in the process of writing, they seem to need mid-draft feedback, and this doubles the responsibility of teachers. Furthermore, the teacher is faced with various ways of evaluating students' essays and providing them with feedback. For instance, he may choose the fastest and easiest way which is directly correcting all the errors, or he may locate the errors by simply underlining, circling, or highlighting them and make students accountable for correcting them (Chandler, 2003). Another way is resorting to peer feedback. It should be mentioned that asking students to give feedback on each other's works without training may not meet students' needs.

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Normally, peer review training is welcomed by language learners because of its methodological, linguistic, cognitive, and psychological benefits (Min, 2005).

Research has shown that sometimes neither teacher's comments nor peer feedback is helpful (Chaudron, 1984). Teachers' feedback may be vague because of misunderstanding students' intentions (Zamel, 1985). Peer feedback may not be useful either because student writers are not knowledgeable enough to find and correct all errors, or they may avoid providing their peers with critical comments not to harm their friendship (Mi-mi, 2009).

Using the technique of self-monitoring, which forces student writers to write drafts before ending up with the final product, can be an effective solution to make students follow a process approach and simultaneously control the mid-draft feedback they receive on their writing. Self-monitoring is a sub-process of self-regulation which is argued to be effective because it is believed that the frequency and accuracy of target behaviors or performance increase through reflecting on one's performance consciously (Vanderveen, 2006). Self-monitoring, as the name reveals, refers to overseeing, watching, or supervising oneself. Therefore, employing this technique causes learner writers to achieve autonomy (Cresswell, 2000; Mei-yi, n.d). The problem of time is somehow solved through applying self-monitoring as well because responding to a self-monitored text seems to save time (Charles, 1990).

With respect to the above argument, the present study examines the impact of writing self-monitored drafts on an institutional context. To this end, EFL learners are instructed to employ self-monitoring technique to control the feedback they receive and achieve some level of autonomy. The following research questions are formulated accordingly:

1. Does self-monitoring improve intermediate EFL learners' composition with respect to both local and global aspects of writing?

2. Do annotations specify writers' intentions?
3. How do the Iranian EFL learners perceive the technique of self-monitoring?

2. Background to the Study

2.1. Revision and Feedback

In process-oriented approach, writers experience different stages of which being revision whereby the first drafts are reviewed based on the feedback presented to the writers. Johnston (1996) asserts that revision is an indispensable stage involved in the process of writing during which writers use effective strategies to evaluate their own and peers' essays vis-à-vis form and content, and they also take the reader and his/her expectations into account. To highlight the significance of revision, Sengupta (2000) explored the effects of teaching revision strategies to teenagers in Hong Kong and the result was positive.

The successful completion of revision stage depends on the feedback offered to the writers. Feedback on EFL students' compositions can come from different sources and can be of various types (Hyland, 2000). Chandler (2003) explored the effects of different types of feedback on learners' written drafts. He found that direct correction and simple underlining of errors were superior to describing the type of error. Although teacher feedback may be effective, Kim and Kim (2005) claim that mere teacher feedback on the task of writing makes students write for the teacher rather than themselves and consider the teacher as their only audience. Research has revealed the positive effects of written corrective feedback on migrant and international writing on the use of the articles '*a*' and '*the*' (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008), and that correction with

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corresponding explicit explanations is more helpful for students' long-term progress in writing accuracy (Binglan & Jia, 2010).

Peer reviewing is both a good idea and a practical solution, but student writers are not experienced enough to generate constructive feedback on their peers' work (Cho & Cho, 2007). A solution to this problem is to instruct learner writers to learn how to provide their peers' composition with feedback. Research findings have demonstrated the positive effects of trained peer review on EFL students' revision types and writing quality. Moreover, analysis of the data collected over the course of one semester indicated that the participants benefited from peer feedback, had positive experiences with the writing consultants, and the two types of comments served different positive functions for students but generally the participants were cautious towards comments made by their peers (Chen, 2001).

2.2. Self-monitoring

Applying self-monitoring as a sub-process of self-regulation in writing tasks means that learners write annotations about their problems in developing their compositions and teachers respond to them in writing (Cresswell, 2000). Writing annotation is a metacognitive skill which helps language learners with learning and a tool that aids readers with comprehension (Liu, 2006). Through using this skill learner writers add marginal notes to what they write. In fact, they should underline, circle, highlight, or put a question mark on the words and expressions or structures they are not sure about, or draw an arrow and write their feelings and remarks, opinions, and doubts about their writing on the margin (Diyanni, 2002 as cited in Liu, 2006). They should write whether they feel something should be added, deleted, moved, or replaced. Cresswell notes that self-monitoring makes learners autonomous in writing and gives

them control over the feedback they receive from the teacher and makes teacher feedback more effective.

Self-monitoring needs instruction without which learners cannot describe their doubts and queries or locate their problems, and they may just raise general questions instead of being more specific about their problems (Mi-mi, 2009). Cresswell also asserts that without teaching self-monitoring, learners may only concentrate on grammatical problems, vocabulary, and spelling and forget about global aspects of writing. Research has revealed that after instruction, learners will take both global and local aspects of writing into account in their annotations (Mi-mi, 2009).

For the first time, Charles (1990) taught the technique of self-monitoring to some graduate and postgraduate students and claimed that it enabled the teacher to understand the students' problems and intentions better and allowed the students to control the feedback they received from their teacher. Cresswell (2000) also taught self-monitoring to 14 Italians with a near to native proficiency level and discovered they paid more attention to improving the global content and organization of their essays. Xiang (2004) also taught the technique of self-monitoring to Chinese students majoring in English during a twelve-week course of writing. The results showed that students can be trained to use self-monitoring in their writing successfully and it helps them improve the organization of their compositions, and the technique is especially helpful to high achievers. Cho and Cho (2007) also investigated the use of the technique of self-monitoring by graduate and undergraduate students in three US universities and found that those who developed good monitoring skills improved their writing abilities.

The above-mentioned researchers introduced and taught self-monitoring to language learners and focused on graduate and undergraduate students or

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English majors in giving instruction on self-monitoring. However, almost all have overlooked the impact of such training on non-academic intermediate language learners. Cresswell admitted that further research would be needed to determine whether self-monitoring could be used at earlier stages. Xiang also conceded the need for further research with a large number of subjects at various levels.

Against this background, in the present study self-monitoring is taught to intermediate non-academic language learners to apply it in their own writing and manage the feedback they receive. In fact, the learners are instructed to annotate their compositions with their doubts and queries to see specifically if the self-monitoring helps intermediate EFL learners improve their composition and pay attention to both local and global aspects of writing. Through writing annotations, a two-way interaction between the teacher and the student clears up misunderstandings and misinterpretations and the teacher can address individual needs and specific problems of each student. Writing classes in EFL environments including Iranian context are usually teacher-fronted. The findings of this study may contribute to the development of an interaction-oriented instruction in writing classes which enables learners to gain autonomy over their writing ability and feel more confident in expressing their mind in written form.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were chosen from among language learners studying English at Navid English Institute in Shiraz. Two classes of intermediate learners of English were selected based on the results of a proficiency test (*Oxford Placement Test, 1982*) administered to 100 students.

Then, 50 of them within a score range of 65-80 were selected. Each class consisted of 25 students within the age range of 16-20. One class was assigned as the experimental group (EG) and received instructions on self-monitoring and the other as the control group (CG) with no instructions. Intermediate learners were chosen because Xiang (2004) suggests that the technique should be taught to the subjects at various levels to confirm the findings of the research on self-monitoring. The reason behind selecting institute language learners for this study is that such L2 users in Iran are often neglected in ELT research while they make up a large number of language learners in Iran and are also more motivated than English majors and school students (Talebinezhad & Sadeghi Beniss, 2005).

3.2. Research Design

A mixed method research design was implemented in this study. In the first phase of the data collection, we followed an experimental control group design as the two groups took the same pretest and posttest but only the experimental group received treatment on self-monitoring technique between the tests. However, a qualitative research design was also used to explore the participants' perceptions about the self-monitoring technique.

3.3. Instrumentation

Different instruments were used in this study including a proficiency test, two writing tasks, one as the pre-test and the other as the post-test and five other compositions as experimental tasks. Taking the writing tasks, the participants were asked to develop a 300 word essay. The topics (see Appendix A) for all the compositions, including pre-test and post-test, came from the book *Top Notch 3* (Saslow & Ascher, 2006) which participants studied during one

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semester of language learning, covering twenty-second learning sessions. As for the level of language difficulty, students were expected to develop the structural complexity and lexical density of their compositions to the level which met the criteria set by the instructional textbook. Two raters scored the tests in two different ways: first holistically, then, analytically in terms of different aspects such as mechanics, content, etc. The reliability of both pretest and posttest was estimated through inter-rater reliability approach. Finally, the students were required to complete a seven item questionnaire in Persian to inspect their attitudes towards the technique of self-monitoring and then their answers were reported in English (see Appendix B).

3.4. Procedures

Prior to the training sessions, the students took writing pre-test so that its results could later be compared with those of the post-test to find out the effectiveness of the self-monitoring technique. Following the pre-test, the experimental group (EG) received a training program which took place in five sessions of 40 minutes. In this program, they were trained how to use the technique of self-monitoring proposed by Charles (1990) in their writing. The student needs training in skillful use of self-monitoring, or they may not be able to describe their problems in their annotations (Cresswell, 2000; Mi-mi, 2009; Xiang, 2004). During the training program, self-monitoring and its use plus local and global aspects of writing were defined and described to the students in the EG through exemplification. Language learners at this level were most probably familiar with local aspects of writing because most of the teachers at Navid institute grade compositions traditionally correcting all grammatical, misspelling, and punctuation mistakes and errors; therefore, local aspects were reviewed superficially. As global aspects are hardly ever given feedback on,

they were identified, defined, and exemplified by the teacher, so learners got a clear idea of how to treat global aspects in a piece of writing.

Later, the students annotated their own pre-test. They were given a copy of their pre-test after the original copy had been collected and rated. Then, the learners were divided into sub-groups of four or five and asked to select one of their compositions, discuss it, and then annotate it on the points they disagreed on. After that, the teacher picked up one group's essay and put the annotations on the board to check them regarding the clarity of meaning, the writer's intentions and attention to the content, organization and the essay format. During this process the students were taught to revise and clarify their annotations specially the unclear ones. (See Appendix C).

Finally, the students were required to re-annotate their compositions individually, exchange them with their classmates and respond to each other's annotations. They were allowed to ask each other for the clarification of their annotations and feedback. If the feedback did not respond to the writer's intended problem, they had to discuss why it happened and revise their annotations. The procedures of writing annotations under the direct control of the teacher were repeated twice. Having got the hang of using self-monitoring through writing two training compositions, the learners wrote other sample compositions in the class and annotated them. The students' doubts and queries were responded and returned to them the next session. Lastly, they had to write the last version in class.

During the course, all the students were required to write three compositions the students in the EG wrote and annotated at least two drafts on each composition, while the students in the Control group wrote drafts without annotations which were corrected by the teacher, providing the necessary feedback. Near the end of the course, the questionnaire was administered to

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investigate students' attitudes towards the usefulness of this technique. At the end of the twenty-one session course, both groups took a posttest writing essay.

3.5. Data Analysis

The annotations made by student writers were collected and classified into three categories of content, organization and form of the language by three experienced teachers. For each annotation, agreement had to be reached between at least two teachers. Two experienced teachers graded both the pre-test and the post-test essays and inter-rater reliability was computed. Essays were scored following the analytic method proposed by Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, and Hughey (1981, as cited in Hughes, 2003) focusing on five characters including content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics (see Appendix D). Pre-test and posttest scores of EG and CG groups were compared to find out the effects of self-monitoring.

4. Results

The results of the study including the analysis of reliability of the instrument, the results of pre-test, and posttest and annotation analysis are presented in the following sections.

4.1. Reliability Analysis Instruments

In the first step taken after data collection, two experienced teachers scored the pre-test and post-test compositions. Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to obtain the reliability of the essay ratings for the two raters. The inter-rater reliability for the pre-tests was .74 for the experimental group (EG)

and .93 for the control group (CG). For the post test, it was .77 for the EG and .84 for the CG.

4.2. Results of the Independent Samples T-test

The independent samples t-tests run on the two groups' pre-test scores showed that the EG and CG were not significantly different either in the total score or the scores on any of the five aspects of the composition (See Table 1).

Table 1. Independent Sample T-test of Pre-test Scores between the Two Groups

		Mean	SD	T	Sig.
Total score	EG	72.12	4.58	-.26	.79
	CG	72.52	5.84		
Score on content	EG	21.18	2.12	-.09	.92
	CG	21.24	1.78		
Score on organization	EG	14.58	1.13	-.76	.44
	CG	14.85	1.29		
Score on grammar	EG	18.35	1.74	.35	.72
	CG	18.16	1.89		
Score on vocabulary	EG	14.83	.93	-.62	.53
	CG	15.06	1.52		
Score on mechanics	EG	3.33	.63	-.13	.89
	CG	3.35	.45		

P<.05

The results from independent samples t-test for the post-test scores between the two groups revealed that the EG was significantly different from the CG in the total score (See Table 2). The EG also obtained significantly higher scores on content and organization. The between group difference in terms of the scores on other aspects (form of language, vocabulary, and mechanics) were insignificant.

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Table 2. Independent-Sample T-test of Post-test Scores between the Two Groups

		Mean	SD	T	Sig.
Total score	EG	77.97	4.97	2.50	.01
	CG	74.45	4.74		
Score on content	EG	23.37	2.19	2.64	.01
	CG	21.91	1.56		
Score on organization	EG	16.25	1.17	3.43	.001
	CG	15.08	1.18		
Score on grammar	EG	18.79	1.57	.12	.90
	CG	18.72	1.89		
Score on vocabulary	EG	16.00	.97	1.69	.09
	CG	15.45	1.22		
Score on Mechanics	EG	3.54	.58	1.67	.10
	CG	3.31	.32		

P<.05

4.3. Results of Paired Samples T-test

The results from the paired samples t-test of the pre-test and post-test scores of the CG indicated improvement on the total score (See Table 3) while no improvement was observed on the five aspects of writing.

Table 3. Paired Samples T-test of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of the Control Group

		Mean	SD	T	Sig.
Total score	Pre	72.52	5.84	-2.10	.04
	Post	74.45	4.74		
Score on content	Pre	21.91	1.56	1.75	.09
	Post	21.25	1.81		
Score on organization	Pre	14.85	1.29	-.77	.44
	Post	15.08	1.18		
Score on grammar	Pre	18.16	1.89	-1.53	.14
	Post	18.72	1.89		
Score on vocabulary	Pre	15.06	1.52	-1.49	.14
	Post	15.45	1.22		
Score on mechanics	Pre	3.35	.45	.37	.71
	Post	3.31	.32		

P<.05

The results of paired t-test between pre-test and post-test scores of the EG showed that the total score improved. It was also shown that the students in the EG made progress on the aspect of vocabulary besides content and organization (See Table 4).

Table 4. Paired Samples T-Test of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of the Experimental Group

		Mean	SD	T	Sig.
Total score	Pre	72.12	4.58	-6.77	.000
	Post	77.97	4.97		
Score on content	Pre	21.18	2.12	-5.69	.000
	post	23.37	2.19		
Score on organization	Pre	14.58	1.13	-6.32	.000
	post	16.25	1.17		
Score on grammar	Pre	17.94	1.93	-1.78	.08
	Post	18.74	1.56		
Score on Vocabulary	Pre	14.83	.96	-5.06	.000
	Post	16.00	.97		
Score on Mechanics	Pre	3.35	.63	-1.18	.25
	post	3.54	.58		

$P < .05$

As Table 4 shows, students in the EG made significant improvement in post-test in the total score ($t=6.77$, $p=.000$), content ($t=-5.69$, $p=.000$), organization ($t=-6.32$, $p=.000$), and vocabulary ($t=-5.06$, $p=.000$).

4.4. Percentage of Annotations

The analysis of annotations gathered during the semester indicated that in general the participants attended to both local and global aspects of writing. (See table five).

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Table 5. The Percentage of Annotations Made by Students in the Compositions

	Con	Lan use	Voc	Mec	Org	Tra	Gen	Total
Number	144	244	114	36	135	23	31	727
Percentage	19.80	33.56	15.68	4.95	18.56	3.16	4.26	100

Key: Con: content, Lan use: language use, Voc: vocabulary, Mec: mechanics, Org: organization, Tra: translation, Gen: general.

As shown in table five, the participants expressed their queries about content and organization to a similar extent (cont: 19.80; org: 18.5). They also made the most annotation on language use which accounted for 33.56 of the total scores. This may indicate that the students did not limit their annotation to language usage. The analysis of the annotations suggested that students learned how to express the problems they faced through the process of writing. Only 1.65% of all the annotations turned to be vague which could not be responded in the first draft.

4.5. Participants' Perceptions of Self monitoring

Near the end of the term, the students' attitudes towards self-monitoring were explored via questionnaire. They were asked to take the questionnaires home and complete it without pressure or fear. Twenty-two students attempted all items and returned them to the researcher. The participants' written responses were carefully read and analyzed in details.

The following themes were extracted from the responses:

1. Almost all participants argued that self-monitoring is helpful to them.
2. Nineteen percent of comments revealed that self-monitoring helped students with improving the grammar, utilizing appropriate vocabulary items, promoting the content of their writing, locating their mistakes, and removing the mechanical problems of their writing.

3. Thirty-two percent of responses suggested that self-monitoring caused them to experience autonomy and enjoy writing. About 6% claimed that even their speaking improved as they could have a dialog with their teacher over their writing.
4. Concerning the possible causes of the negative effects of this technique, one student wrote that it was time-consuming and the other believed that waiting for the teacher to answer her doubts and queries made her dependent on the teacher.
5. Seventy-seven percent of students thought that writing at least two drafts annotated with one's doubts and queries was enough.
6. Finally, 81% of the students thought that the technique should be introduced to language learners at lower levels while 18% of them believed they should be introduced to the self-monitoring technique at their current level.

5. Discussion

This study was conducted to explore the impact of utilizing the technique of self-monitoring on improving intermediate EFL learners' composition writing. The results revealed that learner writers in the EG who received instruction on applying self-monitoring improved their writing. Actually, their total score increased and the global features of organization and content were fostered in their writing. EG students' annotations were examined in terms of details and specification. Totally, they were not all as specific and detailed as they were expected to be. They were almost all understood by the teacher and also responded to, though. Near the end of the term, the students' attitudes towards the technique of self-monitoring were studied and the results proved positive.

5.1. Self-monitoring and Its Positive Effects on Content and Organization

All participants in both groups produced seven pieces of writing. The EG students' writing was fostered at the end; not only their total grades but also the grades on content and organization increased and indicated improvement. All this may prove that applying self-monitoring aided EG students to organize their writing sophisticatedly, elaborate on the content, and add necessary details to it; of course, their improvement was not perfect or flawless, yet satisfactory based on their proficiency level.

Responding to the questionnaire, learner writers themselves conceded that self-monitoring helped them with organizing their compositions and dealing with the content more seriously. Thus, the observable findings and the participants' claims about the benefit of self-monitoring in helping them with promoting global aspects of their writing are in harmony. Learners' responses are revealing in that the participants themselves were aware of how and in what aspects of writing self-monitoring helped them.

Similar to the results Xiang (2004) achieved in his study, the findings of this study revealed a positive relationship between the improvement of writing and the number and percentage of annotations. Although the number of annotations on form was higher than the ones on content and organization, the students made progress on latter ones.

EG students' global aspects of writing improved despite the fact that they wrote more annotations on language form; This could be justified by the remarks made by Xiang (2004) who notes that the annotations on form are on 'discrete points' while the annotations on content and organization are on 'holistic points' and it explains why global aspects were enhanced and fostered while local aspects such as language use were attended to more by EG

participants. To elaborate, each annotation on language form was on a single and separate point. For instance, some annotations regard the correct form of a verb, others the correct form of a noun, adjective, or an adverb, and the right order of words in a sentence. Thus, even though students made more annotations on language form which were responded to by the teacher and corrected by students themselves, they made no significant improvement on this aspect comparing their grades on form in pre- and post-test compositions. On the other hand, the annotations on content and organization targeted the whole paragraph or even the whole composition; this made the compositions more meaningful. Therefore, the students made improvement on the latter ones despite writing fewer doubts, queries, or questions on these aspects. The learners could improve these aspects more after receiving responses from the teacher on these aspects in six compositions. Supporting the improvement on global aspects such as content and organization, Xiang (2004) argues that while local aspects were taken into account by EG participants more, they may have been able to deal with global aspects better via analogy. This means that as EG students wrote more and more compositions, they compared one composition with the previous one, took their teacher's comments into account and eventually could improve the most important aspects of their writing.

Writing questions on language form, receiving relevant response, and finally making correction is similar to receiving teacher feedback on the aspect of form that is believed to be useless according to some researchers; for instance, Truscott (1996) analyzed other researchers' studies such as Kepner (1991), Semke (1984), and Sheppard (1992) and concluded that grammar correction should be abandoned because it is theoretically and practically ineffective and it can be harmful because it wastes the time and energy that should be spent on improving other aspects of writing. Truscott's (1996) belief

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was controversial and many researchers wrote against him, but Bitchener et al. (2008) findings may justify Truscott's claims. They noted that while language learners are in the process of learning new linguistic forms, they use them accurately once but may fail to do so on other similar occasions later. Based on the results of this study, it could be suggested that as the grammatical mistakes made by EG students were corrected once they learned the rule theoretically but not practically; therefore, they applied that point once correctly but failed to do so at other times. Holding this position, the feature of language form was not reformed extensively.

However, the results of the paired samples t-test indicated that EG participants made improvement on the local aspect of vocabulary. As they wrote more compositions they utilized better and more appropriate vocabulary items. As words carry content and meaning, they are related to the category of content indirectly. It is also compatible with what the participants' responses which indicated that using self-monitoring, helped them use better and more appropriate vocabulary items. Cresswell (2000) also claims that students do not stop writing even when they do not know the appropriate word; instead, they resort to their teacher or do their best to get their meaning across to their readers. Learner writers in both EG and CG appreciated their teacher's help and advice regarding vocabulary items; EG students obtained better grades on this aspect though. This may be attributed to the fact that EG students received feedback on their queries while CG students received the conventional feedback. Receiving feedback in response to their annotations might have caused EG students to take writing and its aspects such as vocabulary more seriously.

The results from the paired t-test run on the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group showed that they also made progress on the overall grade

while no improvement was observed on other aspects of their writing. Rahimi (2009) also found that all the students improved the complexity of their writing regardless of receiving feedback or not, but practically the feedback group made more improvement. Therefore, his findings regarding this item are in line with what was discovered in this study. He (2009) notes that improvement in writing whereby learner writers receive no feedback but still their writing is enhanced is attributed to practice with writing which should not be neglected.

5.2. Writers Annotations and the Clarity of Their Intentions

Using the technique of self-monitoring by language learners can surely have some problems. Cresswell (2000) prognosticates possible problems of applying the technique of self-monitoring and writing annotations as learners' disability to completely express their worries and concerns or focus on content and organization rather than language form. He recommends the solution of this problem as making students aware of the difference between process and product, showing and teaching them how to write annotations on problem areas, estimating their annotations to ensure they are clear, making them aware of the importance of global areas of writing and warn them against concentrating just on local problems, providing them with teacher supervision to be specific in articulating their intentions, and making them write two training compositions.

All the tips suggested by Cresswell (2000) were observed in teaching this technique to the participants in this study. After collecting all the annotations, they were investigated for their specificity and clarity. The results revealed that only 12 (1.65%) out of 727 annotations could not be understood and responded to in the first draft. Examples below illustrate this point:

Please explain this sentence.

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I don't believe in what I write, do you?

Thirty-one (4.26%) out of 727 annotations were general and the students gave the responsibility of finding mistakes and errors to the teacher herself.

Some examples are given below:

Does my composition have any problem?

Is there any mistake in my composition?

How is my composition?

Other annotations were not as detailed as they were expected to be, but at least it was clear what kind of help they exactly needed and all could be understood and answered by the teacher. See the following examples:

Is this word good and appropriate for this sentence?

Is the beginning of my composition organized?

Moreover, there were some other annotations which were more specific and detailed. Examples below illustrate this point:

Did I write enough about touristy places or how about encouraging tourists to Iran to visit Shiraz?

Is this word clear? I want to say that a chiropractor should have some information about the illness and his/her patient and treat her/him completely.

Categorizing annotations into classes of form, content, and organization also revealed that most of annotations were on language form rather than other aspects and analyzing all showed that they were not as specific as they were supposed to be (see Appendix E). Cresswell (2000) argues that the reasons why participants in his study wrote less specifically and more on form rather than content are time limit, students' tiredness, and their reliance on their teacher. In his study specific annotations amounts to 23% while others were related to translation or learners passed the responsibility to the teacher and more were on form rather than content and organization. Participants in the present study

stayed in class longer than usual and they wrote the annotations almost at the end of class time while they seemed to be tired. Moreover, it is assumed that the class physical condition in the summer intervened with the students' writing detailed annotations. All this may suggest why the annotations were less specific.

Writing less specific and detailed annotations can also be attributed to other factors such as passing the responsibility of reviewing to the teacher rather as mentioned by Xiang (2004). In fact, the participants in this study have been used to getting their compositions corrected traditionally by the teacher; thus, they are accustomed to giving the responsibility of their composition correction to their teacher.

5.3. Questionnaire

Responding to the items of the questionnaire, the participants contended that using this technique helped them learn correct rules of composition writing, find new and more appropriate vocabulary items, pay attention to local aspects such as punctuation, verb tense, capitalization, spelling and word order and learn to think in English while developing their composition. They conceded that they became aware of their mistakes, came to like writing, improved their speaking, wrote more comfortably and used English expressions as a result of using self-monitoring. Regarding other benefits of applying self-monitoring, the participants referred to dealing with the meaning, content, and the subject of composition better, controlling their composition to be meaningful, and developing the topic.

The learners in this study found self-monitoring beneficial as they felt using this technique moved them toward independence, which is in line with what Cresswell (2000) found in his study. The participants in his study claimed that

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they gained autonomy and recognized its great value. Therefore, besides being used to improve students' writing in general and its aspects in particular, asking students to write feedback on their own writing makes teacher not initiate writing feedback on learner' writing, turns students' passive roles into active ones, and helps learner writers reach autonomy (Cresswell, 2000).

The experimental group also pointed out that the technique made them have a dialog with the teacher over their writing and it is what Charles (1990) mentioned as one of the positive effects of using self-monitoring. The participants further added that they found self-monitoring promising as it caused them to be more interested in writing task, pay more attention to the neglected skill of writing, write better, faster, and more. The fourth question which asks for the participants' comment on negative effects of self-monitoring received only two negative remarks from two participants. One believed it was time-consuming to add annotations to her composition while evolving or finishing with it and the other thought waiting for the teacher to respond to her doubts and queries made her dependent on the teacher rather than herself.

Concerning the adequacy of the sessions dealt with teaching self-monitoring and the number of drafts required to be written, more than 70% of them thought it was enough. Noticing the time limit and the fact that the skill of writing is not very popular, this response from the majority of participants is justifiable. Commenting on the appropriate level to introduce the technique of self-monitoring, 81% of learners thought it should have practiced self-monitoring at lower levels. This suggests that the technique can be introduced to language learners at lower levels so that when they reach higher levels they would be skillful at utilizing it.

5.4. Conclusion

The students who participated in this research study showed positive attitudes towards applying self-monitoring. These positive attitudes and views were realized through the enhancement they made on the features of content, organization, and vocabulary and were also evident in their responses to questionnaire items. Overall, the findings revealed that the learners' writing proficiency enhanced, their interest in writing increased, they become more active composition writers, they experienced taking responsibility of their own writing, and controlled the feedback they really required on their compositions. All these were observed in similar studies and highlighted the usefulness of self-monitoring technique and its impact on more important features of writing, namely, global ones. The findings of this study may contribute to the development of an interaction-oriented instruction in EFL writing classes in Iran, which in turn may enable learners to gain autonomy over their writing ability and feel more confident in expressing their minds in written form.

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Appendix A

Composition Topics

1. Look at the flyer for an international language school. Choose a place to study English and give at least three reasons for this choice. (pre-test)
2. Write a composition to help a visitor be culturally literate about your country.
3. Write about at least three popular attractions in your city to encourage the tourists to Iran to visit them.
4. Write about the medical treatments that are available in Iran and the health care you use. Provide reasons for your choice.
5. What kinds of services are difficult to find in your neighborhood? Write about the services you would like to have there. Describe the quality of the service and the workmanship you'd like them to have.
6. Write about at least three regrets in your life. (post-test)

Appendix B

Questionnaire

1. In general, do you think self-monitoring is helpful to you?
2. If self-monitoring is helpful, in what aspects of writing does it help you?
3. If self-monitoring is helpful, what do you think are the possible causes of the positive effects of this technique?
4. If self-monitoring is useless, what do you think are the possible causes of the negative effects of this technique?
5. Were five sessions of training enough for learning how to use the technique of self-monitoring?
6. Was writing at least two drafts annotated with your doubts and queries enough for you to learn this technique?
7. Do you think that the technique should be introduced to language learners at lower/ your/ higher level of language learning?

(۱) به طور کلی آیا فکر میکنید تکنیک نظارت بر خود برای شما مفید بوده است؟

(۲) اگر فکر می کنید تکنیک نظارت بر خود مفید بوده است، در کدام جنبه های انشا نویسی به شما کمک کرده است؟

(۳) اگر فکر می کنید تکنیک نظارت بر خود مفید بوده است، دلایل احتمالی تاثیرات مثبت این تکنیک چیست؟

(۴) اگر فکر می کنید تکنیک نظارت بر خود بی فایده بوده است، دلایل احتمالی تاثیرات منفی این تکنیک چیست؟

- ۵) آیا تعداد جلسات آموزشی برای یادگیری تکنیک نظارت بر خود کافی بود؟
۶) آیا نوشتن دو پیش نویس برای یادگیری تکنیک نظارت بر خود کافی بود؟
۷) آیا فکر می کنید تکنیک نظارت بر خود باید در چه سطحی به زبان آموزان معرفی و آموزش شود؟ سطوح پایین تر از سطح شما؟ سطح شما؟ یا سطوح بالاتر از سطح شما؟

Appendix C

Examples of using the technique of Self-monitoring

Do you know the importance of cultural literacy? It is really 1 important because when you go to 2 other country, the people of that country expect you to follow and respect their customs and culture. Now, do you know anything about Iranian culture and customs? If you want to visit Iran, you had better 3 learning about greeting, addressing, and eating customs, and even the topics that they use for small talk. 4, 5

- 1- I don't feel good about the adjective "important" because I wrote "importance" in the first question at the beginning of the introduction. I'd like to use another adjective that has the same meaning.

Response: You are right. You'd better avoid repetition. You can use the adjective "crucial".

- 2- I'm not sure if "other" is grammatically correct or "another"?

Response: another is correct because after "other", you need a plural noun.

- 3- I don't know what kind of verb I can use after "had better". Can I add "s", "ed", or "ing" or should I use base form of the verb?

Response: "Had better" is an auxiliary verb. So, you should use base form of verb after that.

- 4- Is my introduction good? In mean if I introduced the subject of composition clearly or not? Does a foreign reader understand I'm going to write about the culture and customs of Iran in this composition?

Response: That's ok and clear to a reader. However, you can add the proverb "when in Rome, do as the Romans do" after the second sentence.

- 5- Is my introduction well-organized? Is the last statement in its own place? Is it narrowed enough? Is it a good and clear topic?

Response: yes, it is. You started with a question to attract attention, and finally you introduced the subject of conversation.

Appendix D

Jacobs et al.'s (1981) Scoring Profile Content

- 30-27 Excellent to very good: knowledgeable, substantive, thorough development of thesis, relevant to assigned to topic
- 26-22 Good to average: some knowledge of subject, adequate range, limited development of thesis, mostly relevant to topic, but lacks detail
- 21-17 Fair to poor: limited knowledge of subject, little substance, inadequate development of topic
- 16-13 Very poor: does not show knowledge of subject, non-substantive, non pertinent, or not enough to evaluate

Organization

- 20-18 Excellent to very good: fluent expression, ideas clearly stated/supported, succinct, well-organized, logical sequencing, cohesive
- 17-14 Good to average: somewhat choppy, loosely organized but main ideas stand out, limited support, logical but incomplete sequencing,
- 13-10 Fair to poor: non-fluent, ideas confused or disconnected, lacks logical sequencing and development
- 9-7 Very poor: does not communicate, no organization, or not enough to evaluate

Vocabulary

- 20-18 Excellent to very good: sophisticated range, effective word/idiom choice and usage, word form mastery, appropriate register
- 17-14 Good to average: adequate range, occasional errors of word/idiom form, choice, usage but meaning not obscured,
- 13-10 Fair to poor: limited range, frequent errors of word/idiom form, choice, meaning confused or obscured
- 9-7 Very poor: essentially translation, little knowledge of English vocabulary, idioms, word form, or not enough to evaluate

Language Use

- 25-22 Excellent to very good: effective complex construction, few errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions

- 21-18 Good to average: effective but simple constructions, minor problems in complex constructions, several errors of agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions but meaning seldom obscured
- 17-11 Fair to poor: major problems in simple/complex constructions, frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, number, word order/function, articles, pronouns, prepositions and/or fragments, run-ons, deletions, meaning confused or obscured
- 10-5 Very poor: virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules, dominated by errors, does not communicate, or not enough to evaluate

Mechanics

- 5 Excellent to very good: demonstrates mastery of conventions, few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing,
- 4 Good to average: Occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing but meaning not obscured
- 3 Fair to very poor: frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, poor handwriting, meaning confused or obscured
- 2 Very poor: no mastery of conventions, dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, handwriting illegible, or not enough to evaluate.

Appendix E

Samples of Students' Annotations

C: content, tra: translation, o: organization, mec: mechanics, f: form, voc: vocabulary, gen: general

1. Is this word good and appropriate for this sentence? voc
2. Is the beginning of my composition organize? o
3. Is it enough? c
4. I need a comma here? mec
5. Is "proper" ok or I should use another word in this meaning? voc
6. I don't know what verb can I use here with this meaning? voc
7. I don't feel good about the verb do you agree with me? voc
8. I don't feel good about the time that I used what do you think? Do you agree with me? f
9. Are there enough reasons about choosing a good country and university or I need giving more reasons? c