EFFECT OF BLENDED LEARNING USING GOOGLE CLASSROOM ON WRITING ABILITY OF EFL STUDENTS ACROSS AUTONOMY LEVELS

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Abstract

A lot of studies have shown that the integration of the Internet in the teaching process in the classroom, or commonly called 'blended learning,' improves EFL students' writing ability. Nonetheless, the effect of blended learning using Google Classroom on EFL students' writing ability by considering autonomy levels has not been conducted yet. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the effect of blended learning using Google Classroom on writing ability of EFL students across autonomy levels. This study involved 53 third semester students taking Essay Writing course in two classes at Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia. One of the classes received blended learning using Google Classroom and the other was taught in a conventional way. Pre-test and post-test were given to students in the two groups to know their writing ability before and after the treatment. The students in the experimental group were also given a questionnaire to know their autonomy levels. The results of the study showed that the writing ability of the EFL students taught by using blended learning using Google Classroom was better than that of the other group. Besides, the high autonomous EFL students outperformed the low autonomous EFL students in their writing ability.

Keywords: Autonomy levels; blended learning; EFL students; Google Classroom; writing ability

1. Introduction

Many studies revealed students' difficulties in second/foreign language writing (e.g. Ahmed, 2010; Abdulkareem, 2013; Shukri, 2014). The difficulties in writing include how to write a thesis statement, formulate topic sentences, develop ideas, establish cohesion and coherence, utilize proper vocabulary, and apply correct grammatical rules. These difficulties cannot be overcome easily within a limited period of time in writing classes. Due to the fact that the time allotment of writing classes in university level is limited, it is high time to optimize the use of

information and communication technology (ICT) to conduct blended learning to help the students improve their writing ability.

Blended learning is an instruction combining the advantages of both face-to-face teaching in the classroom and online sessions (Challob, Bakar & Latif, 2016). It means that the teaching and learning activities happen both in the classroom and in the online contexts. The online sessions are regarded as an extension of the face-to-face teaching interaction. Therefore, the materials the students learn with in the online sessions supplement the materials they use in the classroom (Staker & Horn, 2012). Hence, for the online sessions, teachers typically give the students additional materials and exercises related to the topics being discussed in face-to-face classroom and send the materials through online platforms. The online platforms will serve as virtual classrooms.

To date, several studies had examined the effect of blended learning on students' writing skills (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Purnawarman, Susilawati & Sundayana, 2016; Sulisworo, Rahayu & Akhsan, 2016). Although those studies used different online platforms like *Moodle*, *Edmodo*, and *Facebook*, the results exposed that blended learning was able to increase the students' skills in using suitable topic sentences, shaping and organizing ideas, developing more coherent paragraphs, and utilizing appropriate grammar and mechanics as well as engaging them to actively participate in the classroom learning. However, in implementing blended learning, many teachers have used common online platforms such as *Moodle* (e.g. Adas & Bakir, 2013; Ginosyan & Tuzlukova, 2015; Lien, 2015), *Edmodo* (e.g. Shams-Abadi, Ahmadi & Mehrdad, 2015; Charoenwet & Christensen, 2016; Purnawarman, Susilawati & Sundayana, 2016), and *Facebook* (e.g. Barrot, 2016; Rodliyah, 2016; Sulisworo et al., 2016) as their virtual classrooms.

Studies on blended learning carried out by means of other online platforms are still rare, especially in English Language Teaching context. Agustina and Cahyono (2017) reported EFL teachers and students' perceptions in using *Quipper School* as an online platform for extended EFL learning. Teachers and students in their study thought that *Quipper School* was good not only for coping with the limited time for learning at school, but the platform also contributed to the improvement of the students' EFL learning. Another online platform which is rarely used is *Google Classroom*. Pappas (2015) outlined the pros and cons of the use of *Google Classroom* as an online learning platform, yet the efficacy of the platform had not been widely known. In fact, *Google Classroom* can be accessed from not only computers or laptops but also tablets or smartphones. The application is available for both iOs and Android, so it can be accessed easily anywhere at any time. Furthermore, it can facilitate teachers to create, share, and grade tasks

easily. As a part of G Suite for Education package, it is automatically integrated with some Google applications, such as *Gmail*, *Drive*, *Docs*, *Sheets*, *Slides*, *YouTube*, and *Calendar* (SeymourEducate, 2014). As an online platform for blended learning, *Google Classroom* supports the students in communication and collaboration with others, offers instant feedback from the teacher and provides them with a personalized learning setting (Pappas, 2015).

In blended learning context, learner autonomy is assumed to play an important role in the success of online learning (Lynch & Dembo, 2004). Holec (1981) defines learning autonomy as a capacity to take control of one's own learning. Students with high autonomy levels are likely to have the ability to continue learning no matter what the circumstances are and assumed to have high proficiency level as well. In writing context, the findings of the research done by Masita (2016) and Masoumzadeh (2016) showed that there was a significant and positive relationship between learner autonomy and writing proficiency. Accordingly, it can be assumed that when the students have high autonomy level, they are likely to have high writing proficiency level as well.

2. The study

2.1. The aim of the research

Since there has been highly limited research investigating the effect of blended learning on writing ability taking into account autonomy levels of EFL students, this study aimed to look into whether the EFL students with different autonomy levels engaged in blended learning using *Google Classroom* attained different impacts on their writing ability. It attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Do the EFL students engaged in blended learning using *Google Classroom* attain better writing ability than those taught in a conventional way?
2. Is there any significant difference in writing ability between the high and low autonomous EFL students engaged in blended learning using *Google Classroom*?

2.2. Method

This quasi-experimental research aimed to examine the effect of blended learning using *Google Classroom* on writing ability of EFL students across autonomy levels. It involved two classes of third semester students of English Department of Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia, who attended the *Essay Writing* course. The first class which consisted of 28 students was determined as the control group, while the other class which consisted of 25 students was

determined as the experimental group. The students in the experimental group were divided into two categories, namely high and low autonomous EFL students. They were divided by using a questionnaire measuring their autonomy levels.

This research used two kinds of instruments, namely writing tests and a learner autonomy questionnaire. The writing tests consisting of pre-test and post-test were administered to the experimental and control groups to know their writing ability before and after the treatment. The writing prompts were validated by an expert in English Language Teaching and Assessment, a Professor in the English Department of Universitas Negeri Malang. In the writing tests, the students were required to choose one of three topics and to write an essay in 90 minutes. The topics given in the pre-test were Types of Bags, Types of Transportation, and Types of Internet Users; while the topics given in the post-test were Types of Clothes, Types of Education, and Types of Social Media.

The learner autonomy questionnaire was used to measure the autonomy levels of EFL students in the experimental group and to classify them into high and low autonomous EFL students. The questionnaire was adapted from an English translated questionnaire used by Arias (2015) adapted from a five-point Likert scale questionnaire ranging from strongly agree (5 points) to strongly disagree (1 point) designed by Xu, Wu, and Peng (2004). We made the statements more specific to writing context, by elaborating them further into examples. However, in the modified version, we only used four-point Likert-scale ranging from strongly agree (4 points), agree (3 points), disagree (2 points), and strongly disagree (1 point) to categorize the students into two tendencies: high and low autonomy levels. The Learner Autonomy Questionnaire used in this study is shown in Appendix 1. As evidenced by a pilot study using the questionnaire, the obtained Alpha coefficient was .899, meaning that the instrument had very high reliability.

The research was conducted in eight meetings including the pre-test and post-test sessions. Nonetheless, only the experimental group received a treatment of blended learning using *Google Classroom*. While the experimental group had inside and outside class activities, the control group only had inside class activity. The outside class activities for the experimental group comprised filling out learning log to monitor students' self-learning, having online discussion and consultation with peers and the teacher (the first author of this article), doing online writing assignments, and giving and receiving online feedback. The schedule of treatment for the two groups is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Schedule for treatment

Meeting	The Experimental Group (Blended Learning using Google Classroom)	The Control Group (The Conventional Teaching)
1	• Pre-test	• Pre-test
2	***Inside class activities*** ● Familiarization with *Google Classroom* ● Training to fill out learning log ● Discussion and exercises ● Outline making ***Outside class activities*** ● Materials, exercises, and discussion ● Learning log fulfillment ● Outline submission ● Teacher feedback	• Final draft submission ● Discussion and exercises ● Outline making
3-6	***Inside class activities*** ● Discussion of materials, exercises, and feedback given online ● Essay writing ***Outside class activities*** ● Materials, exercises, and discussion ● Learning log fulfillment ● Essay submission ● Teacher feedback ● Peer feedback (in the sixth meeting) ● Essay revision	● Materials and exercises ● Essay writing ● Essay submission ● Teacher feedback ● Essay revision
7	***Inside class activities*** • Presentation of results of peer feedback • Whole class discussion • Whole draft revision ***Outside class activities***	● Peer feedback ● Presentation of results of peer feedback ● Whole class discussion ● Whole draft revision
8	• Post-test	• Post-test

The results of the pre-test and post-test were assessed by two raters using scoring rubric adapted from EFL Composition Profile by Jacobs, Zingraf, Wormuth, Hartfield and Hughey (1981). The essays were graded on content (30 points), organization (20 points), vocabulary (20 points), language use (25 points), and mechanics (5 points). The scores obtained from both raters were combined and the average scores were recorded as the final scores. In the pre-test, the obtained Pearson coefficients of both the experimental group and the control group were .611 and .618, respectively. In the post-test, the obtained Pearson coefficients of both the experimental group and the control group were .791 and .627, respectively. Moreover, in the pre-test, the obtained Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of both the experimental group and the control group were .863 and .676, respectively. In the post-test, the obtained Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of both the experimental group and the control group were .603 and .743, respectively. It meant that all the scores obtained from the two raters had high inter-rater reliability.

2.3. Results and findings

The data taken from the pre-test and post-test were tested in terms of homogeneity and normality by means of SPSS 23.0. The results of the homogeneity testing displayed that the observed significance levels for Levene's test of both the experimental group and the control group in the pre-test and the post-test were .916 and .092, respectively. Those were higher than .05 meaning that the data was homogeneous. Additionally, the results of the normality testing depicted that the observed significance levels for Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of both the experimental group and the control group in the pre-test and the post-test were all .200. This was higher than .05 meaning that the data was normally distributed. As a result, the data could be analyzed using parametric statistics in the form of *t*-test for independent sample.

2.3.1. Comparison of the results of the pre-test of the experimental and control groups

The descriptive statistics of the pre-test scores of both the experimental and control groups were shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups

Group	Sample (N)	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Experimental	25	62	78	70.36	3.88
Control	28	64	79	71.88	3.81

Table 2 showed that the means of the experimental group and the control group were 70.36 and 71.88. In sum, the mean of the control group was higher than the experimental group by 1.52. To find out whether the difference was significant or not, t-test for independent sample was conducted by means of SPSS 23.0. The result is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Statistical comparison of the means of the pre-test

Variable	Group	N	Mean	T	df	Sig.	Description
Writing Ability	Experimental	25	70.36	-1.434	51	.158	No significant difference
	Control	28	71.88				

Table 3 showed that the obtained significance level of the pre-test scores of both the experimental group and the control group was .158, which was higher than .05 (.158 > .05). It meant that there was no significant difference in the means of the pre-test in writing a classification essay between the experimental group and the control group.

2.3.2. Comparison of the results of the post-test of the experimental and control groups

The post-test scores of both the experimental group and the control group were shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups

Group	Sample (N)	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Experimental	25	78	91	84.36	4.23
Control	28	75	90	80.61	3.27

Table 4 showed that the means of the experimental group and the control group were 84.36 and 80.61. In brief, the mean of the experimental group was higher than the mean of the control group by 3.75. Accordingly, t-test for independent sample was done again because the result of the pre-test revealed no difference between the two groups. The result of the statistical comparison is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Statistical comparison of the means of the post-test

Variable	Group	N	Mean	T	df	Sig.	Description
Writing Ability	Experimental	25	84.36	3.633	51	.001	Significant difference
	Control	28	80.61				

Table 5 showed that the obtained significance level of the post-test scores of the experimental group and the control group was .001 which was lower than .05. It meant that the mean score of the experimental group was significantly higher than the control group. In other words, it was proved that the EFL students taught by using blended learning using *Google Classroom* had better writing ability than those taught without using blended learning.

2.3.3. Comparison of the results of the post-test of the experimental group across autonomy levels

Since it was found that blended learning using *Google Classroom* was effective in improving the writing ability of the EFL students, their autonomy levels were also investigated to know whether different autonomy levels had different impacts on the students' writing ability. The descriptive statistics of the post-test scores of the experimental group across autonomy levels were shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the post-test scores of the experimental group across autonomy levels

Group	Sample (N)	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
High	12	80	91	86.21	3.91
Low	13	78	91	82.66	3.91

Table 6 showed that the means of the high autonomous EFL students was higher than the low autonomous EFL students by 3.55. It was evident that the high autonomous EFL students engaged in blended learning using *Google Classroom* had better writing ability than the low autonomous EFL students engaged in blended learning using *Google Classroom*. To know whether the difference was significant or not, t-test for independent sample was carried out again. The result was shown in Table 7.

Table 7. The result of t-test for independent sample in the post-test of the experimental group across autonomy levels

Variable	Group	N	Mean	T	df	Sig.	Description
Writing Ability	High	12	86.21	2.272	23	.033	Significant difference
	Low	13	82.66				

Table 7 showed that the obtained significant level of the post-test scores of the experimental group across autonomy levels was .033 which was lower than .05. It meant that the mean of the high autonomous EFL students taught by using blended learning using *Google Classroom* was significantly higher than the low autonomous EFL students taught by the same strategy. In other words, it was demonstrated that blended learning using *Google Classroom* works better for the high autonomous EFL students than the low autonomous EFL students in improving their writing ability.

3. Discussion

This section discusses the results of the research examining the effect of blended learning using *Google Classroom* on writing ability of EFL students across autonomy levels. The discussion is based on the two research questions.

3.1. The effect of blended learning using *Google Classroom* on writing ability of EFL students

The result of the present study proved that blended learning using *Google Classroom* was effective in improving the writing ability of the EFL students. This result supported the

previous research on the effect of blended learning on writing ability. For example, the result was in line with the previous application of *Google* Classroom (i.e., Fallon, 2016) and the findings of other research studies (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Geta & Olango, 2016; Liu, 2013; Stapa, Ibrahim & Yusoff, 2015). While many of the results of the previous research studies were based on the application of *Edmodo* (Purnawarman, Susilawati, & Sundayana, 2016), *Facebook* (e.g. Sulisworo, Rahayu, & Akhsan, 2016; Shih, 2011), and *Moodle* (e.g., Ginosyan & Tuzlukoza, 2015) as the virtual classrooms, the research studies reported similar findings in that the application of blended learning helped increase the writing ability of EFL students. The components of writing ability improved by the application of blended learning include content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. In addition, the application of blended learning also encouraged the EFL students to participate more in the teaching and learning process both inside and outside the classroom, as well as improved their interaction with classmates and the teacher.

Since the students in the experimental group were supplied with materials and exercises online in addition to what they had inside the class, they could get more exposure to the target language. They were able to open the materials, complete the exercises, and do the activities anywhere and anytime through computers, laptops, tablets or smartphones as long as they had the internet connection. As a result, more exposure to online materials and exercises resulted in better writing ability (Adas & Bakir, 2013).

As the outside class activities, the students had online discussions and online peer feedback. The online discussions made the students interact and collaborate more with their peers and the teacher, especially the shy students and low achievers (Geta & Olango, 2016). In the classroom, many students also participated more in the review of the materials given online. It made them engaged more in the teaching and learning process conducted in the classroom (Banditvilai, 2016). On top of that, the online peer feedback was conducted through *Google Docs* by providing feedback to each other in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. They could receive writing assistance from their classmates and the teacher in the form of comments and suggestions (Challob, Bakar, & Latif, 2016). They could also have an online consultation with the teacher if they had any questions regarding the feedback given online. In the end, the interaction and collaboration between the teacher and students as well as students and students could be increased (DiCicco, 2016).

3.2. The effect of blended learning using *Google Classroom* on writing ability of EFL students across autonomy levels

The result of the analysis showed that the implementation of blended learning using *Google Classroom* improved the writing ability of the high autonomous EFL students better than the low autonomous EFL students. This was in accordance with the prior research studies related to learner autonomy, blended learning, and writing ability. The result of this study was in line with the result of the research studies conducted by Lynch and Dembo (2004), Yao (2017), and Yen and Liu (2009), showing that learner autonomy was an essential factor in affecting success of blended learning due to students' improvement of learning achievement. It was also in favor of the result of the study conducted by Bazrafkan and Bagheri (2014), Masita (2016), and Masoumzadeh (2016) proving that there was a positive relationship between learner autonomy and writing ability.

Holec (1981) argued that high autonomous students tend to establish their own learning objectives, select learning materials, choose strategies to be implemented, monitor their progress and evaluate materials they have learned with. In the present study, all of the students were required to fill out student learning log after studying the materials given in *Google Classroom* to monitor their self-learning. However, not all the students submitted the learning log on time. Overdue submission might reflect that they possessed poor time management skills and low autonomy levels as high autonomous students were usually able to organize their time efficiently and were aware of the deadline. Lynch and Dembo (2004) mentioned that students who managed their time well tended to perform better than students who did not have good time management skills.

In addition, the high autonomous students tended to seek for materials other than those given in *Google Classroom*. As argued by Geta and Olango (2016), the active learners look for information on their own without relying on the teacher to feed them with information. The active learners connect the information obtained from the given materials with the information acquired from their browsed materials to make them understand more about the topic. Since they learn from various sources, they can actively participate in the online sessions and classroom discussion to share their knowledge to others. During the discussion or online consultation with the teacher, they do not hesitate to ask questions to others when there is something that they do not understand (Ismail, 2015).

Besides, the fulfillment of the learning log helped the students to monitor their progress. This made them more conscious of their progress and helped them to decide what they had to do and learn afterwards (Lazar, 2013). As a result, high autonomous students were able to give

suggestions about what they want to do and learn in the next meeting, so the teacher could take those suggestions into account to address their needs and help them excel at learning.

Moreover, as the students uploaded their essays online, they could read their classmates' contributions anytime and anywhere. They could compare and contrast their essays with those of their classmates. By doing this, they could identify their strengths and weaknesses compared to their classmates. As said by Cakici (2017), high autonomous students are able to recognize their strengths and weaknesses. After knowing those, they can reflect on what needed to be improved to make their writing better.

Furthermore, the high autonomy students were capable of determining their own writing goals, opting the best strategy and taking notice of the learning process (Masita, 2016). They could find suitable strategies to improve their ability, whether it was brainstorming, clustering or outlining. Consequently, they knew what strategy facilitated their essay writing more. On top of that, they practiced writing not only in the classroom but also outside it, be it by themselves or with others. They used available learning sources to write a blog, make a writing journal and do peer reviewing with others. They could find opportunities to practice their writing (Hu, 2014), which, in turn, enhanced their writing ability.

Despite the fact that the high autonomous EFL students outperformed the low autonomous ones in terms of writing ability in a blended learning environment, it did not mean that teachers could not teach the low autonomous EFL students by using this strategy. In this sense, many studies argue that the implementation of blended learning could increase autonomy levels as it encourages students to be independent and self-regulated learners (e.g. Banditvilai, 2016; Farivar & Rahimi, 2015; Luke, 2006; Snodin, 2013). The teachers might modify the implementation of blended learning to address the low autonomous students. In this case, they could lower the proportion of activities performed online compared to those done in the classroom to make them get used to it first and increase its percentage bit by bit as time goes by. Additionally, they might conduct more online collaborative learning activities to promote learner autonomy (Feri & Erlinda, 2014). Those activities could be in the form of online group discussion, online collaborative writing or online peer feedback.

4. Conclusions

The findings of the current study supported the previous research that blended learning positively affects the writing ability of EFL students, especially when mediated by *Google Classroom*. In addition, while enriching their writing ability, this strategy worked better for the high autonomous EFL students than the low autonomous EFL students. However, it did not

mean that this strategy could not be used to teach the low autonomous EFL students at all as some studies suggested using it to increase learner autonomy. In this sense, teachers might modify its implementation to adjust to the autonomy levels of the students.

On the basis of the study, some pedagogical recommendations can be made for English teachers and future researchers. English teachers are encouraged to implement blended learning using *Google Classroom* to enhance the writing ability of the EFL students and take account into their autonomy levels while deciding on the proportion and types of activities done both online and in the classroom. As regards future researchers, it is recommended that they delve further into the effect of blended learning using other online platforms across other intervening variables.

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Appendix 1

LEARNER AUTONOMY QUESTIONNAIRE

Direction: **For each statement**, please put a tick (✓) in the column showing your attitude towards the statement. The meaning of the options are as follows: **SA** (**Strongly Agree**), **A** (**Agree**), **D** (**Disagree**) and **SD** (**Strongly Disagree**)

A. **Evaluation of English teacher's aims**

No	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
1.	I clearly understand the teacher's aims in teaching writing.				
2.	It is easy for me to make the teacher's goals in teaching writing into my own goals.				
3.	I clearly understand the importance of making the teacher's goals in teaching writing into my own goals as well as studying hard to achieve those goals.				
4.	I clearly understand the teacher's intention during the teaching and learning activities in writing.				
5.	In class, it is easy for me to keep up with the teacher's pace during the teaching and learning activities in writing.				

B. **Evaluation of establishing study goals**

No	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
6.	When learning writing, I establish practical goals for myself based on my true English level.				
7.	I am good at establishing study goals in learning writing based on the requirements outlined by the teacher.				

C. **Evaluation of establishing study plans**

No	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
8.	Outside of assignments given by the teacher, I have a clear plan for studying on my own to improve my writing ability.				
9.	I am good at adjusting my study plans in learning writing based on my progress.				
10.	I am good at creating a practical study schedule in learning writing for myself.				

D. **Evaluation of learning strategies' implementation**

No	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
11.	I understand the learning strategies to improve my writing ability.				
12.	I can consciously employ brainstorming to improve my writing ability.				
13.	I can consciously employ clustering to improve my writing ability.				
14.	I can consciously employ outlining to improve my writing ability.				

E. **Evaluation of ability to monitor the usage of learning strategies**

No	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
15.	I can consciously monitor the use of brainstorming during writing.				
16.	I can consciously monitor the use of clustering during writing.				
17.	I can consciously monitor the use of outlining during writing.				
18.	I am able to find and solve problems in my method of study to improve my writing ability.				
19.	I am conscious of whether or not my method of study to improve my writing ability is practical.				
20.	If I realize that my method of study to improve my writing ability is impractical, I quickly find a more suitable one.				

F. **Evaluation of English learning process**

No	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
21.	Outside of class, I practice my writing by writing a blog.				
22.	Outside of class, I practice my writing by making a writing journal.				
23.	I make an effort to overcome my anxiety that may hinder my writing improvement.				

24.	I make an effort to overcome my laziness that may hinder my writing improvement.				
25.	I use library to improve my writing ability.				
26.	I use internet to improve my writing ability.				
27.	I use dictionary to improve my writing ability.				
28.	I often learn writing with other people by practicing writing with classmates.				
29.	I often learn writing with other people by practicing peer reviewing with classmates.				
30.	It is easy for me to put newly learned vocabularies into my writing.				
31.	While practicing writing, I am able to realize my own mistakes.				
32.	While practicing writing, I am able to correct my own mistakes.				
33.	When I discover my mistakes in writing, I understand the underlying reason for making them is because of interference from my mother tongue.				
34.	When I discover my mistakes in writing, I understand the underlying reason for making them is because of a lack of familiarity with grammar rules.				
35.	I select effective method to improve my writing ability by keeping a writing journal.				
36.	I select effective method to improve my writing ability by updating a writing blog.				
37.	During the process of completing a certain writing task, I keep in line with my predetermined plan.				
38.	During the process of completing a certain writing task, I often check and correct my comprehension of previously studied material.				