Title

The Most Difficult Areas in English Writing: A Study on Iranian and Malaysian Students' and Teachers' Perception

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Biodata

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Abstract

One effective method for conveying one's thoughts and ideas is through writing. As Leki and Carson (1994) emphasize: "ability to write well is necessary both to achieve academic success and to demonstrate that achievement" (p. 83). While writing in one's native language is a daunting task, it is simple to see why most students find writing in a foreign language to be devastating. With the growing number of Iranian students studying overseas, it is necessary to see what these students' and their teachers perceive to be the most difficult areas in English writing. 6 areas of difficulty (Jordan, 1997) were used in the present study. 70 Iranian along with 60 Malaysian higher intermediate EFL Students; and 20 Iranian and 10 Malaysian EFL teachers were asked to number the areas from most problematic to least problematic. To further probe participants' perception, an interview was held with 14 participants. A mismatch was found in the perception of the Iranian participants which shows what the students perceive to be areas of difficulty in English writing are not areas teachers emphasize in classes. The

findings revealed there are inconsistencies between the learners' needs, and what the teachers believe to be areas of difficulty in these students' English writings.

Key words: Culture, English writing, Iranian students, Iranian teachers, perception, writing difficulty

1. Introduction

In the post modern world we are living in today, having the ability to express one's ideas is becoming increasingly important and this is most effectively achieved through writing. Effective written English is an essential tool for any academic and professional career (Liu and You, 2008). As Leki and Carson (1994) emphasize: "ability to write well is necessary both to achieve academic success and to demonstrate that achievement" (p. 83). By considering the fact that writing in one's mother tongue is a very difficult task, it is understandable why writing in a foreign language becomes devastating for some students. Jalilifar (2008) states that "writing in a second language is further complicated by issues of proficiency in the target language, first language literacy, and differences in culture and rhetorical approach to the text" (p. 114). The process of academic writing is a very complex and complicated procedure for everyone and this task becomes even more daunting for ESL/EFL writers:

> Compared to students writing in their native language (L1), however, students writing in their L2 have to also acquire proficiency in the use of the language as well as writing strategies, techniques and skills. They might also have to deal with instructors and later, faculty members, who may or may not get beyond their language problems when evaluating their work (Myles, 2002, P.1).

Bereiter and Scaramalia (1983) assert that "writing a long essay is probably the most complex constructive act that human beings are ever expected to perform" (P. 20). Writing is a complex process which in turn shows the writers' communicative skills. In order to assist EFL students on their writing skills, teachers should focus on these students' major difficulties in writing.

English is one of the most common languages spoken internationally. In fact according to The Summer Institute for Linguistics (SIL) Ethnologue Survey in 2009, over 328 million people speak English worldwide (Lewis, 2009). English as a key to a modern life, has a dominant position in science, technology, medicine and computer, it is the most widely used language in business, trade, aviation, diplomacy, international organizations and companies,

in mass media and journalism, in sport and youth life, in music, in education systems and most importantly, in foreign language teaching. It is through all the means above that English has found its way into many cultures (Mugglestone, 2006).

In Iran, English is considered a foreign language which is taught from junior high school onward. Students have to deal with English language proficiency in junior high school, high school, college, and even university. As Strain (1971) reported, over 90% of Iranian students prefer to elect English as their foreign language in university; which also shows the popularity of this language among students. Vaezi (2009) and Sadighi and Maghsudi, (2000) found similar results among Iranian undergraduates. They found the Iranian students to be highly motivated to learning English. This was the case in both English major and non English major students studying at various universities in Iran.

Teachers' concepts of good writing and their students' problematic areas in writing can play a great role in how composition is taught in ESL classes. Various studies have pointed to different problems in the eyes of teachers. Casanave and Hubbard (1992) found that teachers in the social sciences and humanities believe that vocabulary use is the greatest problem in the non native students' writings. Schwartz (1984) conducted a study on a group of students in which he asked them to determine what kind of passage their professor would favor. The students had two choices: 1) a clear but lifeless passage 2) a very creative passage with mechanical errors. The results from this study reveal that the students all chose the first one which shows that according to students' perspective "grammatical errors are more powerful in effect than voice" (p. 60).

Liu and You (2008, p. 154) believe that a combination of "Cultural values, literary aesthetics, and teachers' socio-political experiences" make up the teachers' perception of good writers. Diab (2005) takes a different approach and studies the students' perspectives on what the teachers should concentrate on in writing classes. The participants were 156 EFL university students enrolled in English language courses at the American University of Beirut. She found out that most students (86%) believed that the teacher should point out errors in grammar more than anything else.

Radecki and Swales (1988) surveyed 59 ESL students' perspectives. They found that the ESL students expected their teachers to focus on correcting all their surface-level errors. They also reported that if this expectation was not met, the teacher would lose credibility in the eyes of the students.

Golshan and Karbalaei (2009) studied the writings of 120 Iranian university students majoring in English. Their study revealed that specific areas in grammar seem to be particularly problematic. They divided the participants into two groups of lower and higher English proficiency. They found that preposition, lack of concord, and article created the greatest areas of difficulty for the lower lever students while distribution of verb groups, article, preposition, and lack of concord proved to be more difficult for the higher proficiency students.

Rahimi (2010) studied 50 Iranian EFL students majoring in English at an Iranian university. He inquired about these students' ideas regarding error feedback. He found that the most important area the students concentrated on was transitional words (86%), followed by sentence structure (84%), spelling (52%), and finally prepositions with only 46%. This shows the importance of surface-level errors in the eyes of the Iranian students.

Jordan (1997) reported the most problematic areas in English writing according to the overseas postgraduate students and also their academic staff at a university in United Kingdom. The student participants were asked to comment on their own writing. They were told to choose a comment for the 6 areas of difficulty in English writing from "a number" to "a lot". The staff was asked to comment on the same areas but regarding what caused them the most difficulty when reading what the students had written. The six areas included: vocabulary, style, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and handwriting. Each area of difficulty refers to the following (p. 47): 1. Vocabulary includes "using a word correctly, own lack of vocabulary, and confusion caused by similar sounding/looking words". 2. Style is related to formal vs. informal types of writing. 3. Spelling encompasses "trying to write what is heard and confusion of similar sounding words". 4. Grammar contains verb tenses, active vs. passive form of verbs, and agreement of verb and subject. 5. Punctuation is not being aware of how to use them properly. 6. Handwriting is related to illegibility due to quick writing. Jordan's results can be summarized:

Students' Perception		*Staff's Perception*	
Vocabulary	62%	Style	92%
Style	53%	Grammar	77%
Spelling	41%	Vocabulary	70%
Grammar	38%	Handwriting	31%
Punctuation	18%	Punctuation	23%
Handwriting	12%	Spelling	23%

Jordan's (1997) results showed that while the students believed that vocabulary, style, and spelling caused the greatest problems for them, the staff asserted that style, grammar, and vocabulary predominated the areas of concern in the students' English writing.

It is important to see whether such a mismatch still exists among EFL students' and their instructors' perception of the most difficult areas in English writing in the 21st century. It is clear that a mismatch between the two sides' perception can lead to a miscommunication and bring about unsuccessful learning and teaching. Therefore the same six areas will be used for the present study on both students and teachers' perspectives on the most problematic areas of English writing. Therefore, the primary purpose of the present study is studying the Iranian EFL teachers and students' point of view regarding the most problematic areas in English writing.

2. Some Explanations for ESL/EFL Students' Difficulties in Writing

One major source of difficulty for students' writing can be related to the idea of organization; as it may differ between the students' first language and the target language they are writing in. As Kaplan (1988, as cited in Matsuda 1997, p. 48) reminds us "the fact that the student knows the conventions of his or her own writing system does not mean the student understands the conventions employed in the target language".

Another source of difficulty is the student's previous educational experience. Mohan and Lo (1985) studied the composition courses in British Columbia and in Hong Kong and they found that both the number of students in each class and also the number of hours for composition instruction differed greatly between the two places. They report that while there are 45-60 students in Hong Kong classrooms, there are only 21-30 in British Columbia. Also, while British Columbia students receive 60-80 minutes of English composition instruction weekly, their counterparts in Hong Kong only receive 40 minutes. They assert these two factors play a vital role in how well these students write.

Another factor Mohan and Lo (1985) refer to is the instructor's emphasis in each classroom regarding English composition. While the Hong Kong instructors placed more emphasis on teaching grammar, the British Columbia instructors focused on organization and style. So, while sentence structure is considered as the most important feature in writing in Hong Kong, units larger than sentences received the limelight in British Columbia and this difference in the emphasis the instructor places on writing while teaching greatly affects the students.

Grabe and Kaplan (1989) also believe in differences in learners' background. They assert that:

> Writers composing in different languages will produce rhetorically distinct texts,
> independent of other causal factors such as differences in processing, in age, in relative
> proficiency, in education, in topic, in task complexity, or in audience. (p. 264).

Shokrpour and Fallahzadeh (2007) studied reports written by Iranian EFL medical students and discovered that these students have problems in writing and language skills. They found that although the students had difficulty in both areas (language and writing skills), most of their problems stemmed from writing skills. A follow up interview revealed that the main reasons behind the writing problems are the students' lack of time to study English along with their specialized courses and also the fact that their General English course was presented in Persian and that they were not required to write in these classes.

In order to help Higher-intermediate EFL students perform better on writing tasks, understanding their perception of the most difficult areas in English writing seems to be essential. The study reported here presents an effort to understand these.

3. Material and Methods

To testify the truth or falsity of the research hypothesis, the researcher initially decided to collect and analyze data. This section gives information regarding the sampling, the instrumentation, and finally the procedure that was used in the study. The basis of the data collection was the 6 areas of difficulty used by Jordan in 1997 (As introduced in the Introduction section). SPSS software was used for the statistical analyses of the questionnaire.

3.1. Participants

70 Higher-intermediate Iranian EFL students (both males and females), 60 Higher-intermediate Malaysian EFL students (both males and females), 20 Iranian EFL teachers (both males and females), and 10 Malaysian EFL teachers (both males and females) were chosen from two renowned colleges in Mashhad, Iran and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. These students were chosen because they have learned a range of various grammatical structures and a series of vocabulary. It should also be mentioned that these EFL learners have studied English as an extra curricular activity for at least 3 years. Out of the Iranian EFL participants, 8 Iranian and 6 Malaysian participants were randomly selected to take part in a short interview on their perception of English writing.

3.1.1. Student Participants

The 130 students who participated in the present study were all university students (Bachelor/ Master/ PhD). They were majoring in foreign languages, humanities, engineering, medical and veterinary sciences, basic sciences, art, and management. Their ages ranged from 20 to 40, (Mean= 27, SD= 4.805). Overall, 39 males (Mean= 26.64, SD= 3.874) and 91 females

(Mean= 27.15, SD= 5.206) took part in this section. However, it should be mentioned that age did not play a significant role in this study. There were more females than males because there were generally more female students in each of the English classes. All the participants had studied English for at least 3 years. The mean for the number of years they had studied English was 10.07 (SD= 4.876). This was necessary in order to make sure the participants has a good command over English in order to be make good judgment regarding their English writing problems . The single stage sampling of participants was conducted based on these students' availability as "potential respondents in the population" (Creswell, 2009; p. 148).

3.1.2. Teacher Participants

A total of 20 Iranian EFL teachers (both males and females), and 10 Malaysian EFL teachers (both males and females) were selected for this study. They were invited by the researchers to take part in the present study. The teachers had a bachelors or Masters degree in English (Teaching English as a Foreign Language, English Literature) and had taught English for at least 3 years. Their ages ranged from 23 to 65, (Mean= 35.20, SD= 12.972). Overall, 13 males (Mean= 34.60, SD= 12.92) and 17 females (Mean= 35.80, SD= 13.69) took part in this section. After filling out the consent forms and the demographics section of the questionnaire, the teachers were asked to number the areas they perceived their students had the most difficulty in English writing. 6 problem areas (vocabulary, grammar, spelling, style, punctuation, and handwriting) were introduced (based on Jordan, 1997) and the teachers were asked to number these areas from 1 (most difficult) to 6 (least difficult).

3. 2. Questionnaire

For the present study, a questionnaire (See Appendix) consisting of two different parts was used for the EFL students and their teachers. Each of the Higher-intermediate EFL students as well as each EFL teacher was initially given a written consent form explaining their participation and also giving some information regarding the overall research. The first part of the questionnaire includes the demographics. In this section, demographic information such as age, gender, field of study, mother tongue, number of years allocated for English learning, etc. was obtained. The questionnaire items were prepared in English and it was given to each student. The researcher was present to make sure there was no ambiguity- involving vocabulary or comprehension difficulty in the instructions of each section of the questionnaire. The second part of the questionnaire focused on the participants' perception of the most problematic areas of English writing. In this section, the participants were asked to number the six different problems in writing (vocabulary, grammar, spelling, style, punctuation, and handwriting) from most problematic (1) to least problematic (6).

The same questionnaire consisting of the demographics and the second part of the questionnaire (perception of the most problematic areas in English writing) was distributed among 30 EFL teachers who had at least 3 years of teaching experience.

3.3. Interview

There are numerous limitations regarding the use of close-ended questionnaires in a study. Some of these limitations would include collecting data which is distant from the real context it is meant to be used in, being limited to only the designers' preferences, no room for the respondents' explanation or elaboration (Baker and Boonkit, 2004; Petric and Czarl, 2003). In order to reduce the effects of some of these shortcomings, the researchers decided to use an interview along with the students' questionnaire responses to help triangulate the responses and attain complementary data. The interviews were mainly used as a secondary source of information in order to confirm what the students had mentioned in the questionnaire. The interview was used more as "a medium for guided reflections" (Buckingham, 2008, p. 5) in this study.

8 Iranian and 6 Malaysian participants were asked to take part in a short interview. The interviewees were briefed beforehand regarding the purpose of the interview, and the interview was conducted in a semi-structured format so that the interviewer's questions would not limit the participants and they could openly air their views regarding their areas of difficulty in English writing. The students were asked to further explain what they felt were the most difficult areas in English writing. The interview was employed to aid the researcher in uncovering what the respondents perceived to be difficult when they were writing in English. The interview was tape recorded. Of these 14 participants 7 were male and 7were female students. This was done so as to ensure both genders had an equal chance at expressing their views.

4. Results and Discussion

This section provides us with a report and a discussion regarding the research findings in response to the research question concerned with perception of EFL students regarding the most difficult areas in English Writing. The overall pool of data for the present study was provided through the responses the participants gave in the survey questionnaire, and the information which was elicited from the interviews.

4.1. The Participants' Perception

As mentioned before, the six problematic areas had been reported by Jordan in 1997. The six areas mentioned were vocabulary, grammar, spelling, style, punctuation, and handwriting. The results are as follow:

4.1.1. The Students:

4.1.1.1. Iranian EFL Students

70 Higher-intermediate Iranian EFL students were asked to number the six problematic areas in English writing from 1 (most problematic) to 6 (least problematic) according to their point of view. The order of the most problematic areas selected by the Higher-intermediate Iranian EFL students (according to %) is listed below in Table 1.

Category	Percentage
Grammar	84
Vocabulary	73
Spelling	60
Punctuation	46
Style	37
Handwriting	24

Table 1. higher-intermediate Iranian EFL students' perception of the most problematic areas in English writing

As can be seen above the Iranian students perceive grammar to be the most problematic area and handwriting to be the least problematic area in English writing. The students seem to favor surface-level errors which show their concern in language accuracy difficulties. This is also what many scholars (Hedgcock and Lefkowitz 1994; Kern, 1995; Schulz, 1996; Schulz, 2001; Diab, 2005; Diab, 2006; Rahimi, 2010) have found in their studies. Diab (2006, p. 3) asserts "surface-level correction is often what students want and expect from their teachers". This shows that according to the students more time needs to be spent on learning and checking grammar before handing in a piece of writing in class. This was also what most students mentioned in the interview when they were asked about the changes they made between the drafts they wrote. One student (Interviewee 4) mentioned:

> …The grammar is more important because (eh) the structures (eh) can make
>
> difference between the meanings. If you use one structure maybe the meanings had
>
> change. If I have any mistakes it's all because I'm not that much good in grammar.

Another student (Interviewee 6) referred to the same point when he talked about his difficulty in English writing. He explains that some English grammatical structures do not exist in Persian and therefore he needs to change the structure in order to convey the same meaning. He said:

Grammar and structure in some points are different [Between Persian and English]… I (eh) can remember one situation where I had problem that our language [Persian] (eh) didn't prepare this English structure and I should change my meaning of sentence.

A third student (Interviewee 1) also referred to the changes she made in her writing. She also had a similar set of ideas which she reflected on by saying "I put my sentences grammatically or I try to sometimes I try to use collocations or I try to improve vocabulary or something like that".

4.1.1.2. Malaysian EFL Students

60 Higher-intermediate Malaysian EFL students were asked to number the six problematic areas in English writing from 1 (most problematic) to 6 (least problematic) according to their point of view. The order of the most problematic areas selected by the Higher-intermediate Iranian EFL students (according to %) is listed below in Table 2.

Category	Percentage
Grammar	87
Vocabulary	72
Spelling	62
Style	60
Handwriting	47
Punctuation	35

Table 2. higher-intermediate Malaysian EFL students' perception of the most problematic areas in English writing

As can be seen from the above table, the results for the Malaysian students resemble the ones obtained from the Iranian students. The only difference lies in the position of handwriting and punctuation in the table. As confirmed by previous studies on Malaysian students, grammar has always posed the greatest challenge for Malaysian students (Yah Awg Nik, 2010).

4.1.2. The Teachers

4.1.2.1. Iranian EFL Teachers

20 Iranian EFL teachers were also asked to participate in this section of the questionnaire. They were asked to number the areas they perceived their students had the most difficulty in English writing from 1 (most problematic) to 6 (least problematic). The order of the most problematic areas selected by the Iranian EFL teachers (according to %) is listed below in Table 3.

Problematic Area	Percentage
Style	75
Vocabulary	65
Grammar	60
Punctuation	55
Spelling	40
Handwriting	30

Table 3. Iranian teachers' perception of the most problematic areas in English writing

From the above it is clear that the teachers perceive style to be the most problematic area and handwriting to be the least problematic area in their students' English writing. This shows that according to the teachers more time needs to be allocated to the overall organization and style of the students writing. This in fact is in line with what Jordan (1997) found. According to him 92% of the teachers were worried about the style the students were using in their writing.

4.1.2.2. Malaysian EFL Teachers

10 Malaysian EFL teachers were also asked to participate in this section of the questionnaire. They were asked to number the areas they perceived their students had the most difficulty in English writing from 1 (most problematic) to 6 (least problematic). The order of the most problematic areas selected by the Iranian EFL teachers (according to %) is listed below in Table 4.

Problematic Area	Percentage
Grammar	100
Vocabulary	90
Spelling	70
Handwriting	60
Style	40
Punctuation	30

Table 4. Malaysian teachers' perception of the most problematic areas in English writing

From teachers' perception, grammar was rated as the most problematic area of writing faced by students. Grammar is rated 100% which means all ten teachers agree grammar poses the most challenge as compared to the other categories. The second highest in the ranking is vocabulary where 90% of the teachers perceived it to be problematic. Muncie (2002) stated that students with limited vocabulary are a major obstacle to students' learning to write in a foreign language. He concluded that vocabulary learning is a vital to the development of ESL writing and that ESL writing teachers need to recognize and encourage vocabulary learning to the students. The other categories include spelling, handwriting and style. The last category is the punctuation. The reason behind punctuation coming last in the table might be due to the computerized preference for students' homework.

4.2. Comparison on Students' and Teachers' Perception

4.2.1. The Iranian Participants

The results illustrated above show a mismatch between the students' and the teachers' perception of the most problematic areas associated with English writing. Whereas the students selected grammar (84%) as their greatest challenge in English writing, their teachers clearly believed style (75%) indicated the greatest concern. Both groups felt strongly about

their selection and this shows a discrepancy. It is noteworthy to mention that the students ranked style as the fifth area of difficulty which shows they do not know the importance of formal vs. informal style of writing as opposed to their teachers. According to the results it is apparent that while the students are more concerned with surface level problems such as grammar and vocabulary, their teachers are worried about the overall style the students are applying to their writings. This mismatch might be one of the reasons why students' think of English writing as a barrier in English acquisition and in thinking so still have not been able to move beyond this barrier.

However, it is interesting to know that both groups considered handwriting to be the least problematic area. One main reason for this might be the advent of typed out pieces of writing which is becoming more and more popular each day at English classes in Iran.

The results from the present study show that the Higher-intermediate Iranian EFL students and their teachers have different perceptions regarding the most problematic areas in English writing. While the students put the limelight on surface level problems such as grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, their teachers are primarily concerned with the style the students are using in their writings. This mismatch between the two sides' perception can bring about unsuccessful learning and teaching experiences. Therefore, in order to avoid such experiences and also help Higher-intermediate EFL students write more effectively, a distinction must be made between language accuracy and writing skills. Language problems are not the only problems EFL students are confronted with when trying to write; the writing problems which go beyond surface-level problems also need to be taken into account. It is the teachers' responsibility to make the students aware of these different types of problems in order for them to write closer to the standards required on international exams. These results can demonstrate one area of difficulty which can in turn contribute to the Higher-intermediate Iranian EFL students' low scores on the writing sections of international exams such as TOEFL and IELTS. Although students strive to write grammatically correct sentences on such tests, not paying attention to the overall style of their writing might be the reason for not achieving favorable scores.

The results can also aid teachers in realizing that the students are still very concerned with surface level errors. Teachers can assist students to see the bigger picture and help them to comprehend the importance of writing skills. Language accuracy, although very important cannot result in effective writing alone. Therefore, what the students need to practice more is writing skills. It is also very important for teachers to pay attention to the areas of concern

their students have and try to bridge the gap between their own and their students' perceptions and expectations (Schulz, 1996, 2001).

Shokrpour and Fallahzadeh (2007) believe that Iranian EFL teachers mainly concentrate on correcting the compositions sentence by sentence and in doing so focus the students' attention on the product rather than the process. This is the kind of behavior that needs to be toned down on the part of the teachers in order to facilitate more effective writing by students. As Truscott (1996) strongly believes that in EFL classes, the correction of surface-level errors should be abandoned completely. He believes this type of correction has some harmful effects on the students' learning experience.

One recommendation could be for teachers to dedicate a part of class time to analyzing poorly written English texts and assisting the students in realizing what is wrong with these texts and proposing ways in which they can remedy these errors. This would be a great time to even analyze some of the students written essays and have the whole class participate in the corrections. This would, of course, require more time to be allocated to writing in general and perhaps having writing classes as a separate skill. Having these classes can help students to write easier and with more accuracy (Golshan and Karbalaei, 2009).

Although the study was conducted on a limited number of students and teachers, it does nonetheless present a glimpse of the participants' perceptions. The present results can assist syllabus designers to generate some guidelines for EFL programs used for teaching Iranian students. Syllabus designers can use the results to make possible changes to the already existing syllabuses for English language textbooks taught at language institutes. They can check to see what can be added to the writing sections in these textbooks and anticipate just what kind of information to include in order to help students make the best of what resources they already have.

4.2.2. The Malaysian Participants

From the findings above, students' and teachers' believe that grammar is the most problematic areas in writing. Of the 60 participants, 52 of them and all ten teachers share the same perception on grammar. Both parties are agreeable that grammar is primarily the most difficult area to master in writing. In a study done by Saadiyah Darus and Kaladevi (2009), they have analyzed 72 written essays by Form Four students in one semi-urban secondary school. Then finding of the study indicated that students generally had problems in applying correct grammatical rules in their writing. Findings of this study imply that students have not yet mastered basic grammatical structures even though they have gone through 10 years of learning English.

Another area where both students and teachers mostly agree on is vocabulary. By having limited vocabulary, students tend to use and repeat the same vocabulary to express the ideas and to develop the content. Overall there seem to be a general agreement between students and teachers regarding the most problematic areas in English writing.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to explore Higher-intermediate Iranian and Malaysian EFL students' and their teachers' perception of the most difficult areas in English writing. The analysis of Iranian student and teacher responses revealed a discrepancy between teachers' and students' perception of the most difficult areas in English writing. While the students' perception of the main areas of concern encompassed surface level errors, their teachers believed that the overall style of writing is the main issue. However, the results obtained from the Malaysian participants show an almost perfect agreement between the students and teachers' perceptions on the most difficult areas in English writing.

The overall comparison of the results shows that the Malaysian teachers appear to be more expressive regarding what they expect from the students' writings.

According to the overall results, students should be open-minded and share the difficulties with their teachers and ask for guidance in order to progress. For teachers, with the excess, they should change their teaching strategies in order to help students.

The findings in this research have implications in the area of learning and teaching. Although the findings can not be generalized, nevertheless in a global scenario where ESL/EFL students are struggling to cope with the skill of writing, the mismatch in the Iranian participants' perception is an issue that needs to be addressed. The authors hope that this research raises the awareness of the Iranian teachers and learners as to the need to meet each other half way, that is, students to be aware of writing as more than a grammatical exercise and teachers as to the need to train students to see the bigger picture in the skill of writing in English as a global language.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Part 1: Please fill in the background information section below.

Gender: □Male   □Female   **Age**:

Field of Study: **Mother tongue**:

Languages I speak: □English   □Persian   □Turkish
                □German   □Italian □Other……………

How long have you studied English?

Have you lived abroad?   □Yes……………   □No
(If you answered yes, where and how long?)

Academic qualifications:
□Diploma   □Bachelor or Bachelor student
□Master or Master student   □PhD or PhD student

Have you had formal training in English writing (such as report writing, essay writing, formal letter writing,…)?   □Yes……………□No
(If you answered yes, where and how long?)

Part 2: Number the following from 1 (most problematic) to 6 (least problematic) according to your perception of English writing.

□Vocabulary   □Grammar   □Spelling

□Style   □Punctuation   □Handwriting