Two modes of assessment: the case of academicians' writing

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Abstract

This study attempted to investigate writing problems and the relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment of writing problems. Participants were thirty four non-English faculty members of Tehran and Guilan universities. The instruments were writing an essay on the topic "What teaching strategies do you use in your classes?" in twenty five lines and filling the questionnaire of writing problems including fourteen items (word choice, verb form, missing subject, verb tense, preposition, word order, article, plural "s", spelling, subject-verb agreement, missing verb, passive voice, conditional sentences, and capitalization).The researcher investigated these fourteen areas both in their essays and their questionnaires of self-assessment. The data analysis showed there was no positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment and the participants underestimated themselves in the questionnaire. Furthermore, the writing problems based on expert-assessment were: verb form, word choice, article, preposition, plural "s", capitalization, spelling, subject-verb agreement, word order, passive voice, verb tense, missing subject, missing verb, and conditional sentences. The findings revealed the main factors causing these problems are L1 interference, lack of grammar knowledge, vocabulary weakness, and poor spelling. The participants can write accurately if they learn basic grammar, increase vocabulary, ways of error correction, and awareness of L1 interference.

Key terms: writing skill, linguistic problems, error, self-assessment, expert-assessment

Introduction

Richards and Renandya (2002) state that the difficulties of writing are related to generating ideas and organizing them and then translating these ideas into readable text. Furthermore, writing involves complex skills and L2 learners need to pay attention to the skills of higher level such as planning and organizing and the skills of lower level such as punctuation, spelling, word choice, etc.

Tan (2008) states second language writing is a complex skill for EFL learners and needs a long time effort. It needs to be analyzed cognitively and to be synthesized linguistically. According to Gabrielatos (2002) and Yazdanmehr (2009), its development needs learners to use grammar accurately, to know a wide range of vocabulary, and to devote sufficient time for practicing. Moreover, Ziahosseiny (2009) states learners need to learn writing as a basic skill in second language learning and teaching and consider it as a fundamental goal in ESL classrooms. Additionally, Tan (2008) points out that in the communicative world it is necessary to write effectively in English and try to improve this ability because communication via language is essential.

Kim (2003) states that second language learners in order to decrease their problems in writing need to have a higher language proficiency. Additionally, Tan (2008) claims that the ability of writing effectively in English is very important as communication through language becomes more essential. Besides, writing is a significant tool for second language learners if they want to keep contact or to communicate with native or nonnative speakers of that language. Celce-Murcia (2001) states that writing as a communicative process needs to be motivated and developed during the language study and helps individuals communicate different kinds of messages to their friends and known or unknown readers.

According to Celce-Murcia (2001), writing as an act of communication is an interactive process between the writer and reader through the text. It is a skill which enables the learner to plan and think about the communication process and provides an opportunity for the learner to emphasize both on linguistic accuracy and the organization of content. Therefore, it is necessary for second language learners to write in L2 if they want to communicate with native or non-native speakers of that language. Similarly, Chastain (1988) argues that it is also essential for second language learners to improve writing to contact with people of other societies and writing at the communicative level facilitates speaking at the communicative level.

Regarding the importance of writing, Hughey et al. (1983) claim that there are four purposes in writing for second language learners. They believe that learning to write is necessary for people, because they engage in writing for different purposes during their lives. Writing is useful and essential for language learners as it can

provide an opportunity to deal with what they have learned about the linguistic system of the target language-their knowledge of structure, vocabulary, and expressions of that language. It creates a reason to use language, to evaluate their linguistic knowledge, and to make learners express their thoughts and ideas. Besides, writing is necessary for life if L2 learners want to communicate with native or non-native speakers of that language.

Besides, Coombe (2010) states that writing assessment is a difficult task and is one of the most difficult parts of second language teaching process. According to her, it becomes more important even after higher education. Therefore, good teachers devote a lot of time to writing to be sure that their practices of writing assessment are valid and reliable. She also adds that writing assessment plays an important role in measuring learners' ability to communicate via written mode that is based on production of their written texts. Furthermore, it progresses and guides learning. Moreover, Good, Birchfield, and Osborne (2011) point out that writing assessment is complex, but it improve teaching and learning, and influences perceptions of writing.

However, second language learners usually face problems when they want to write in L2. Only few people write effortlessly (Chen, 2002). Some of the problems originate from insufficient preparation for the writing assignment. Even many learners at the advanced levels may not be able to find related ideas or spend a long time to find related ideas to continue their writing and as a result, their writing does not indicate their linguistic ability. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the problems that university non-English major faculty members encounter in writing in English through self-assessment and expert-assessment. In this study, writing problems are used instead of writing errors because according to Richards (1971), error analysis limits itself to grammar and does not give much attention to communicative aspects.

Statement of the problem

In the study of second language, writing is a way by which individual's language proficiency is evaluated, but writing effectively and professionally in English involves difficulties. These difficulties are related to the system of education, instruction, and also to the fact that EFL writing is not developed automatically and overnight .Almost, all EFL learners face difficulties during their learning and their problems include: grammar, use of articles, spelling, punctuation, writing composition, lack of competence in English academic writing, etc. Rimka (2004) argues that some of the writing difficulties are related to lack of basic writing skills. Some writers feel unable to write or they do not trust their own thoughts. Therefore, they rely on others' knowledge and scientific language.

According to Celce-Murcia (2001), writing a text is a complex task and needs control of a number of language systems simultaneously and an ability to consider the ways in which discourse is to be shaped and produced for specific readers and for specific purposes. Hedge (2005) states that writing is a difficult task because the writer can not use the devices that are available for the speaker such as body movement, facial expression, gesture, stress, pitch, tone of voice, and pause. Furthermore, effective writing needs organization of information, ideas, and a wide range of accuracy to make meaning clear to the reader. It also needs a choice of correct vocabulary, grammatical patterns and sentence structure. In addition, assessing writing is a difficult task and Calfee and Miller (2005) state it needs careful consideration of learners' knowledge and abilities. Moreover, Good, Birchfield, and Osborne (2011) claim writing and assessing writing are equally complex, but it can be a means to improve learning and can also be used for different purposes such as helping learners, identifying appropriate courses for learners, and certifying proficiency. Therefore, these issues necessitate a study on problems that faculty members of non-English majors face while writing in English. Since these groups of scholars are constantly teaching, doing scientific works, searching for different articles, and writing scientific articles, the researcher intends to investigate the nature of writing problems these scholars encounter and to scrutinize the source of these problems. Also, little research has been conducted regarding the difference between self-assessment and expert-assessment of faculty members' writing ability, an area which is the focus of the current study. Self-assessment and expert –assessment may yield different outcomes which can have important implications for theory and practice.

Significance of the study

According to Tan (2008), writing is a complex process which requires to be analyzed cognitively and to be synthesized linguistically. It is difficult to learn to write in a foreign language, and it takes a long time and needs a lot of effort to become a skillful writer. Instruction of English writing thus needs a greater level of attention in foreign language education. Besides, Jun (2008) in his study about L2 writing states that second language

(L2) writing has always been a difficult area for second language learners and an interesting topic for second language researchers.

Therefore, regarding the importance of writing, the purpose of the study is to discover underlying problems for university faculty members of non-English majors in Tehran and Guilan universities. There are many factors affecting university faculty members' English writing process and products, such as cultural, linguistic, and affective constraints. Thus, the researcher intends to scrutinize, analyze, and interpret the problems that faculty members face when writing in English. In addition, the findings of this study can be useful as a database for university faculty members to pay much attention to the main aspects of writing problems that influence their L2 writing

and the result of their self-assessment and expert-assessment can help them know their strengths and weaknesses in writing, know their linguistic ability, and try to improve their writing. The findings can also be useful for EFL/ ESL teachers to investigate the problems of L2 writing in order to use effective methods in writing to solve these problems.

Research questions

1- Is there any relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment of university
   non- English major faculty members' writing problems?
2- What are the writing problems university non-English major faculty members face in
   writing in English?

Writing assessment

Coombe (2010) points out that writing assessment is a difficult area in language testing because even after higher education there are many that face problems in writing. For this reason, good teachers devote a lot of time to be sure that their practices of writing assessment are reliable and valid. Besides, writing assessment evaluates students' knowledge and abilities in the communication with them through written mode which is based on their production of written texts. She adds that writing assessment is not a simple task because assessing learners' writing ability needs to be clear in criterion and objective.

Regarding the difficulty of writing assessment, Miller (2003) argues that writing can not be improved by using only examples or directions. It needs practice and receiving criticism that is an inseparable part of its learning. Furthermore, it measures both writer's language ability and his/her ability to combine and analyze information and is also a time-consuming job.

According to White (1994), the purposes of writing assessment are "supporting the gathering of reliable data, realizing the complexity of writing and its teaching, and exploring different kinds of practices to improve writing"(p.18). He states in writing assessment teachers experience to help students learn and write accurately and effectively and institutions to be more efficient and more objective.

Considering writing assessment, Brown (2004) states that writing performance consists of four categories including imitative, intensive, responsive, and extensive. According to him, in imitative category learner must gain skills in the tasks of writing words, punctuation, letters, and also short sentences. In this category, the writer also should be able to spell correctly and to perceive phonemes and form is more important than context and meaning. In contrast, in intensive category the writer should be able

to produce appropriate vocabulary in a context, collocations, idioms, and correct grammatical features. At this stage, meaning and context are important in determining correctness and appropriateness, but assessment task is more focused on form. While at responsive stage, learners should be able to perform at discourse level and by connecting sentences into paragraph they must create a sequence of two or three paragraphs. At this stage, the learner has also learned grammar of sentence level and focuses on discourse conventions that will achieve the objectives of the written text. Finally, extensive stage refers to succeeding in all strategies and processes of writing for all purposes. The writer tries to organize, develop ideas, and achieve his/her purpose. The writer also uses details in order to support and expand ideas.

Research into writing assessment

Tamjid and Birjandi (2011) studied learners' autonomy through self- and peer-assessment. The participants were 59 TEFL students at intermediate level and were divided into control and experimental groups. The result

of their study revealed that improving students' autonomy in writing classes is related to the role of incorporation of self- and peer-assessment.

Moreover, Yang, Ko, and Chung (2005) in a study about development and evaluation of web-based writing environment at elementary school employed expert-assessment, self-assessment, and peer-assessment as three assessment mechanisms to encourage students to criticize other writers' essays and also to be able to review and investigate their own essays to find their strengths and weaknesses. The results indicated that students can improve their writing if they write many essays, review other essays, and participate in writing classes. The results also revealed that the difference between expert-assessment and peer-assessment was not significant.

In a study carried out by Huang and Chen (2006), three types of writing assessment (multiple-choice test, guided writing, and free writing) were compared. The participants of the study were eighty two students and six teachers from two vocational high school in southern Taiwan. The participants were asked to complete three types of tasks in writing assessment including a free writing, a guided writing, and twenty multiple –choice questions. The results showed that students performed best on multiple-choice test and worst on the free writing task. Additionally, most of the students considered free writing as the best task to assess their writing ability, although they felt confident in multiple-choice test.

Participants

Thirty four Iranian faculty members of non-English majors including 16 from Tehran university and 18 from Guilan university voluntarily took part in this study. They were both males and females (9 females and 25 males) and were between ages of 35 and 60. Their native language was Persian and had majored in different fields.

Instrumentations

In order to conduct this study and collect the required data the following instruments were used:
● Essay writing
● Questionnaire

The researcher asked the faculty members to write an essay on the topic "What teaching strategies do you use in your classes?" in twenty five lines in English to gain first hand information about the problems they encountered when writing in English. The researcher also gave them a questionnaire in order to investigate their writing problems. According to Colosi (2006), questionnaire is the method that is used most commonly for collecting information from participants to evaluate educational and research studies. In this study, the researcher used questionnaire to evaluate self-assessment. The items of the questionnaire were taken from Tan's (2008) research and consisted of 14 items including *word choice, verb form, missing subject, verb tense, preposition, word order, article, plural "s", spelling, subject-verb agreement, missing verb, passive voice, conditional sentences, and capitalization problems*. The items were arranged from word choice to capitalization and consisted of five response options including *always, usually, sometimes, seldom, and never*.

Validity and reliability of the questionnaire

To make sure of the validity of the questionnaire, a pilot study was used before the research began. The researcher asked a group of seven experts in language teaching in Rasht, who were not included in the sample, to validate the questionnaire in terms of face and content criteria in order to modify, suggest, and give their opinions about the items and response options of the questionnaire. The researcher wanted to know how much this questionnaire indicates the purpose of the study. For this reason, validation was used to reveal the clarity, simplicity, and comprehensibility of the questionnaire. The result of validation showed no revision to the instrument (questionnaire) was needed because both the items and options were clear and comprehensible and the participants (university non-English major faculty members) faced no problems in understanding the items and response options of the questionnaire.

Therefore, some experts evaluated the questionnaire in terms of face and content criteria for simplicity and comprehensibility in order to investigate and remove the items that might have been problematic and ambiguous for the participants and made difficulty for understanding the items and response options of the questionnaire.

Meanwhile, the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated by Cronbach formula in SPSS. 17 and was 0.71. Therefore, the reliability of the questionnaire was ensured.

Procedure

To gather the information based on essay writing and questionnaire, the researcher himself went to faculties of Guilan university and tried to gather information, but for Tehran university the researcher mailed the topic to faculty members and also asked his friends and colleagues to gather information at this university. On the other hand, because it was impossible for the faculty members simultaneously to take part in the study, they were asked separately to write an essay about the topic "What teaching strategies do you use in your classes?" in twenty five lines. The participants wrote about the given topic, but they did not know what the researcher wanted to do or they were not aware of the aims of the research. After that, the researcher himself and via his colleagues gave them the questionnaire of writing problems. They filled this questionnaire that included the main problems such as word choice, verb form, missing subject, verb tense, preposition, word order, article, plural "s", spelling, subject-verb agreement, missing verb, passive voice, conditional sentences, and capitalization problems during 10 minutes. For data analysis, the following values (Likert Sacale) were assigned to the questionnaire: Always = 5, usually = 4, sometimes = 3, seldom = 2, and never = 1. According to Colosi (2006), using Likert Scales makes coding and reporting the data easy. The aim of both questionnaire and essay was to investigate what the participants stated by filling the questionnaire as self-assessment and identify problems they encountered by analyzing their essays on the topic "what teaching strategies do you use in your classes?" as expert-assessment to obtain a comprehensive picture and in fact to make a comparison between self assessment and expert assessment.

The researcher studied carefully what they had written in their essays in order to analyze their writing problems in terms of "verb form, word choice, missing subject, verb tense, preposition, word order, article, plural *s,* spelling, subject-verb agreement, missing verb, passive voice, conditional sentences, and capitalization problems". After the researcher, another English teacher who was experienced and whose degree was MA recorrected the essays to be sure that they were corrected carefully. At the end, the essays were checked by some experts in language teaching. The researcher also put a number for each faculty member's essay and evaluated them anonymously and tried to identify the major problems.

Therefore, the researcher (1) reviewed all the faculty members' essays to determine the problems in their writing; (2) categorized the errors (problems) by type; and (3) the frequency of problems occurred was determined by category**.**

Introduction

This study was an attempt to investigate writing assessment and writing problems of university non-English major faculty members. Therefore, this chapter presents the data analysis, interpretation, results, and discussion. In this study, data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), whereby the research hypotheses were tested empirically.

Restating the research questions

This study tries to investigate the following questions:

RQ1: Is there any relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment of university non-English major faculty members' writing problems?

RQ2: What are the writing problems university non-English major faculty members face in writing in English?

Investigation of the first question

To answer the first research question and test the respective hypotheses, Pearson correlations were computed. Table 4.1 presents the results. As p-value (0.766) is higher than significance level (0.05) this hypothesis is confirmed and we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self assessment in assessing writing problems.

Table 4.1 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing writing problems

		Self-assessment
Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.766
	N	34

Testing the hypotheses

In addition to the main research hypothesis, the subsidiary hypotheses were also tested as follows:

4.2.1. *Hypothesis 1: Expert -assessment in assessing word choice problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing word choice problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.1 presents the results. As p-value (0.696) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing word choice problems.

Table 4.2.1 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing word choice problems

		Word choice Self-assessment
Word choice Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	-.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.696
	N	34

4.2.2. *Hypothesis 2: Expert-assessment in assessing verb form problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing verb form problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.2 presents the results. As p-value (0.768) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing verb form problems.

Table 4.2.2 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing verb form problems

		Verb form Self-assessment
Verb form Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	-.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.768
	N	34

4.2.3. *Hypothesis.3: Expert-assessment in assessing missing subject problems has no significant positive relationship with self- assessment in assessing missing subject problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.3 presents the results. As p-value (0.534) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing missing subject problems.

Table 4.2.3 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing missing subject problems

		Missing subject Self-assessment
Missing subject Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.534
	N	34

4.2.4. *Hypothesis 4: Expert-assessment in assessing verb tense problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing verb tense problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.4 presents the results. As p-value (0.394) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing verb tense problems.

Table 4.2.4 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing verb tense problems

		Verb tense Self-assessment
Verb tense Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	-.151
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.394
	N	34

4.2.5. *Hypothesis 5: Expert-assessment in assessing Preposition problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing preposition problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.5 presents the results. As p-value (0.590) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing preposition problems.

Table 4.2.5 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing preposition problems

		Preposition Self-assessment
Preposition Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	.096
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.590
	N	34

4.2.6. *Hypothesis 6: Expert-assessment in assessing word order problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing word order problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.6 presents the results. As p-value (0.432) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing word order problems.

Table 4.2.6 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing word order problems

		Word order Self-assessment
Word order Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	.139
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.432
	N	34

4.2.7. *Hypothesis 7: Expert-assessment in assessing article problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing article problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.7 presents the results. As p-value (0.407) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing article problems.

Table 4.2.7 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing article problems

		Article Self-assessment
Article Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	-.147
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.407
	N	34

4.2.8. *Hypothesis 8:* Expert-assessment *in assessing plural "s" problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing plural "s" problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.8 presents the results. As p-value (0. 575) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing plural "s" problems.

Table 4.2.8 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing plural "s" problems

		Plural "s" Self-assessment
Plural "s" Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	.100
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.575
	N	34

4.2.9. *Hypothesis 9:* Expert-assessment *in assessing spelling problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing spelling problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.9 presents the results. As p-value (0.631) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing spelling problems.

Table 4.2.9 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing spelling problems

		Spelling Self-assessment
Spelling Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	-.085
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.631
	N	34

4.2.10. Hypothesis 10: Expert-assessment *in assessing subject-verb agreement problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing subject-verb agreement problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.10 presents the results. As p-value (0.119) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing subject-verb agreement problems.

Table 4.2.10 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing subject-verb agreement problems

		Subject-verb agreement Self-assessment
Subject-verb agreement Teacher-assessment	Pearson Correlation	-.273
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.119
	N	34

4. 2.11. *Hypothesis 11:* Expert-assessment *in assessing missing verb problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing missing verb problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.11 presents the results. As p-value (0.403) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing missing verb problems.

Table 4.2.11 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing Missing verb problems

		Missing verb Self-assessment
Missing verb Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	.148
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.403
	N	34

4.2.12. Hypothesis 12: *Expert-assessment in assessing passive voice problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing passive voice problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.12 presents the results. As p-value (0.653) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing passive voice problems.

Table 4.2.12 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing passive voice problems

		Passive voice Self-assessment
Passive voice Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	.080
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.653
	N	34

4. 2.13. *Hypothesis 13:* Expert-assessment *in assessing conditional sentence problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing conditional sentence problems.*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.13 presents the results. As p-value (0.963) is higher than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is confirmed. Therefore, we can conclude that there is no significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment in assessing conditional sentence problems.

Table 4.2.13 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing conditional sentence problems

		Conditional sentence Self-assessment
Conditional sentence Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	.008
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.963
	N	34

4.2.14. Hypothesis 14: Expert-assessment *in assessing capitalization problems has no significant positive relationship with self-assessment in assessing capitalization problems*

Pearson correlations were computed in order to test this research hypothesis. Table 4.2.14 presents the results. As p-value (0.024) is lower than significance level (0.05), this hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, we can

conclude there is a significant positive relationship between expert- assessment and self-assessment in assessing capitalization problems. The correlation coefficient is 0.386.

Table 4.2.14 Correlation between expert- and self-assessment in assessing capitalization problems

		Capitalization problems Self-assessment
Capitalization problems Expert-assessment	Pearson Correlation	.386*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.024
	N	34

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Therefore, as data analysis showed it can be stated that among the fourteen items of writing problems, only in one item (capitalization) the relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment was positive and the relationship among the other items was negative and therefore the first hypothesis was confirmed.

Investigation of the second question

To answer this question the mean scores and percentages of expert-assessment and self- assessment were used in assessing writing problems. Tables 4.15 – 4.17 show the results. As tables show the major writing problems from the view of university faculty members were: preposition , passive voice, spelling, conditional sentences, word choice, verb form, article, verb tense, word order, missing verb, subject-verb agreement, capitalization, missing subject and plural "s" , while from the view of the expert, verb form, word choice, article, preposition, plural "s", capitalization, spelling, subject-verb agreement, word order, passive voice, verb tense, missing subject, missing verb, and conditional sentences were the major problems respectively.

Table 4.15 Descriptive Statistics of expert- and self-assessment in assessing writing problems

problem	assessment	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Word choice problems	Expert-assessment	8.91	2.800	34
	Self-assessment	2.71	.760	34
Verb form problems	Expert-assessment	9.12	4.584	34
	Self-assessment	2.68	.843	34
Missing subject problems	Expert-assessment	.71	1.605	34
	Self-assessment	1.79	.845	34
Verb tense problems	Expert-assessment	.94	1.179	34
	Self-assessment	2.47	.861	34
Preposition problems	Expert-assessment	4.82	2.588	34
	Self-assessment	2.91	.668	34
Word order problems	Expert-assessment	1.26	1.238	34
	Self-assessment	2.15	.821	34
Article problems	Expert-assessment	6.24	2.147	34
	Self-assessment	2.50	.961	34
Plural "s" problems	Expert-assessment	3.82	2.492	34
	Self-assessment	1.71	.760	34
Spelling problems	Expert-assessment	3.65	2.385	34
	Self-assessment	2.85	.857	34
Subject-verb agreement problems	Expert-assessment	3.44	1.926	34
	Self-assessment	1.94	.814	34
Missing verb problems	Expert-assessment	.50	.788	34
	Self-assessment	2.00	.778	34
Passive voice problems	Expert-assessment	1.06	1.099	34
	Self-assessment	2.88	.769	34
Conditional sentence problems	Expert-assessment	.44	.927	

	Expert-assessment	2.85	.821	34
Capitalization problems	Expert-assessment	3.74	2.734	34
	Self-assessment	1.91	.753	34

Table 4.16 major writing problems from view of university faculty members

rank	writing problem	mean
1	Preposition problems	2.91
2	Passive voice problems	2.88
3	Spelling problems	2.85
4	Conditional sentence problems	2.85
5	Word choice problems	2.71
6	Verb form problems	2.68
7	Article problems	2.5
8	Verb tense problems	2.47
9	Word order problems	2.15
10	Missing verb problems	2
11	Subject-verb agreement problems	1.94
12	Capitalization problems	1.91
13	Missing subject problems	1.79
14	Plural "s" problems	1.71

Table 4.17 major writing problems from the view of expert

rank	writing problems	mean	percentage
1	Verb form problems	9.12	18.74
2	Word choice problems	8.91	18.31
3	Article problems	6.24	12.81
4	Preposition problems	4.82	9.91
5	Plural "s" problems	3.82	7.85
6	Capitalization problems	3.74	7.67
7	Spelling problems	3.65	7.49
8	Subject-verb agreement problems	3.44	7.07
9	Word order problems	1.26	2.59
10	Passive voice problems	1.06	2.17
11	Verb tense problems	0.94	1.93
12	Missing subject problems	0.71	1.45
13	Missing verb problems	0.5	1.02
14	Conditional sentence problems	0.44	0.90

Discussion

This study reports the results of a study that investigated the relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment of university non-English major faculty members' writing problems and also the major writing problems of these faculty members. According to Briggs and Ellis (n.d.), the aim of expert-assessment is to analyze and to make judgments about students' learning. They want to know whether students are learning what they intend them to learn. On the other hand, self-assessment (Briggs & Ellis) means to involve students in an assessment process which can indicate students' strengths and weaknesses.

The literature reviewed in this study revealed that there are studies that investigated writing problems of L2 learners in different levels, but there are few studies to investigate university non-English major faculty members' writing problems. The data analysis showed the relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment was negative except in one domain (i.e., capitalization problems). The reason for this negative relationship is that although self-assessment has advantages in that students observe their work, develop their responsibility, develop critical awareness (Chan, 2010) get involved in the assessment process, learn to criticize, evaluate their work during the process (Amo and Jareno, 2011), it has some disadvantages in that students may give everything or everyone the same mark, overevaluate their own performance, may not be sincere, and may not maintain fairness (Chan, 2010). On the other hand, Moskowitz (1986) claims that bias influences self-assessment and John and Robin (1994, as cited in McDonald, 2008) argue that students or individuals do not respond in a desirable manner because they like to show themselves in a certain way.

The findings of this study corroborate claims by researchers like Siyyari (2011) who argues that in self-assessment proficient learners underestimate themselves. Similarly, the findings support Ross's (2006) observation that in self-assessment students may not believe in their ability to assess themselves and if (Boud and Falchikov, 1989, as cited in Ross, 2006) self-assessment affects students' grade in their course, they overestimate themselves and if not, they underestimate themselves. Additionally, Jafarpur and Yamini (1995) found that the level of language proficiency can have a great impact on self assessment.

Verb form was the first major problems of the participants with the mean of 9.12 (18.74%). Most of verb problems as Wee et al. (2010) stated were:

(1) omission, for example, omission of -*ed* marker in the verbs of simple past tense, and omission of -s/-es/ -ies markers in the verbs when the subject is third person singular noun or pronouns (e. g, Communication **make* the relationship between the student and the teacher friendly and **cause* …..).

(2) Addition, for example, addition of –*s* marker or –*ed*, and -*ing* where they are not needed. For example, "*we *likes, they didn't *helped, or they should *changing their teaching.*"

(3) Misformation, which refers to using incorrect form of verb, for example, *"what kind of strategy *are available to the learners".*

(4) Ordering, which occurs when the sequence of correct elements is wrong, for example, "I *called up him.*" instead of "I *called him up.*"

Word choice problem was the second problem in this study. According to Garcia (2007), L2 writers usually encounter problems related to both competence (e.g., problems with lexical knowledge) and performance (e.g., problems with lexical retrieval and enhancement). Garcia also claims that lexical errors are considered to be more disruptive and a potential problem in L2 writing. This study also supports Tan's (2006) contention that in many cases when participants faced lexical problems and could not find appropriate lexical items, they resorted to L1, for example, *geological phenomenon is more attractive and* ...مـانـدگـارتـر). Therefore, when lexical knowledge is low and EFL learners can not find and remember proper items in English, they resort to L1. Additionally, Llach (2005) states that lexical problems deform written communication and cause readers to misunderstand the text and also have poor impact on the quality of written essays.

The third domain of writing problems of the participants was articles. Findings showed that most of article problems (*a, an,* and *the*) were related to the omission of *"the",* because according to Farahani et al. (2008), there is no equivalent for this article in Persian, for example, *"Creativity plays an important role in* class."* Besides, participants sometimes faced problems using *a* or *an*, because in Persian یک *(yek a)* is used for every singular and countable noun and even Persian speakers don not use *(yek a)* before singular noun, for example (او اسـتاد هسـت) *He is professor).* Therefore, in these kinds of sentences transfer occurs, for example, *I as *university teacher* among the participants' essays confirms L1 interference, but in English the application of *a* or *an* is different. The article *a* is used with singular nouns beginning with a consonant, for example, *a book,* but the article *an* is used with singular nouns beginning with a vowel, for example, *an exam.* Master (1990)

argues that articles seldom make hearers misunderstand when they are used wrongly in speaking. But only when second language learners want to write, they become aware that choosing correct articles is necessary.

Additionally, Bataineh (2005) states English articles *a*, *an*, *the* and *zero* are difficult for second language learners to be acquired. They are the source of problems for both learners and teachers especially for those whose native languages do not have articles or have articles that their rules differ from English. Therefore, it can be claimed that interference is the result of article problem.

The forth major writing problem in this study from the view of expert-assessment was the use of prepositions. This study also supports Tahaineh (2010), Grubic (2004), and Darus and Ching's (2009) studies in which they claimed that prepositional problems consist of three categories: (1) substitution or wrong use of preposition, for example, using *"from"* instead of *"of"*, or *"in"* instead of *"at"* (e.g., *sometimes students become tired *from the class*) ; (2) omission of necessary prepositions, (e.g., *I saw him ^ the morning*) ; (3) addition or using unnecessary preposition, (e.g., *I enjoy *from teaching* or *Students need motivation* in during studying*). Problems of omission and addition can be the result of L1 interference. For example, Persian speakers say من از تدریس لذت میبرم (man az tadris lezat mibaram) and translate this sentence with the preposition "*from*" into English *"I enjoy from teaching"*, or من صبح او را دیدم (man sobh ?o ra didam). Persian speakers use no preposition in this sentence. Therefore, they say "*I saw him* the morning."*

Furthermore, Darus and Ching (2009) claim that the main reason for prepositional problems is interference from learners' mother tongue. When students encounter more than one English preposition that corresponds to a single preposition in their mother tongue, they can not choose the correct preposition and finally they make an error, for example, most of the participants used *in* instead of *at* for the word *university* because in Persian there is only one preposition for *in* and *at* (i.e. در *dar*). Besides, omission of prepositions occurs when students doubt which preposition to choose or when they can not find a substitution for English preposition in their mother tongue.

Problems of plural "s" in this study showed that patterns of L1 affect learning second language. In Persian, for example, speakers say (پنج کتاب Panj ketab) the number before noun indicates that the book is more than one and no plural mark is added to the end of the noun, but in English after number plural "s" is also added to the end of the noun except those nouns that are irregular and reject plural "s", for example, fish. Therefore, the study showed that participants still face problems in using plural "*s*". They may not know, ignore, or are not aware of L1 interference in using plural mark "*s*" in English because this grammatical rule does not exist in Persian and errors of plural "s" occur easily, for example, *my students don't have any *problem* among the participants' essays indicates that L1 interference has occurred in the omission of plural "s" in the word *problem* and they transferred L1 structure into L2.

The wrong use of capital letters as the sixth problem was one of the major writing problems in this study. Participants sometimes used small letters at the beginning of sentences and paragraphs, but sometimes they used capital letters in the middle of sentences. Msanjila (2005) claims that the source of capitalization problem is not originated from mother tongue and interference of L1 into L2, but it is a pedagogical problem that teachers can help learners reduce or even remove this problem. He states that the wrong use of capital letters may result in misinterpretation of information.

The seventh writing problem in this study from the view of expert-assessment was spelling problem. According to Bovil (2010), the spelling system of English alphabet is the most irregular system among the languages in the world. Moreover, Cook (1999) argues that the spelling problems go back to the fact that in English teaching spelling is not thought to be as essential and basic as other aspects of language such as grammar and vocabulary. In addition, the difficulty of English spelling also is related to the lack of direct relationship between sounds and letters.

The findings of this study indicate that spelling problems as Cook (1999) states occur because of four reasons: (1) omission, which is deleting the letters; (2) consonants and vowel substitutions, that is replacing letters with incorrect letters; (3) errors based on sounds, that occur due to lack of correct identifying sounds; and (4) transposition, related to the position of letters. In contrast, Phenix (2001) believes that spelling problems ae related to both linguistic problems that depend on the nature of language and personal problems that refer to the stages of development the learners are. Besides, Shokouhi and Zadeh-Dabagh (2007) declare that spelling problems are due to the fact that there are a complex relationship between sounds that are spoken and the graphemes that represent those sounds in writing and also existence of silent letters, for example *e* at the end of words that frequently occurs.

Additionally, Solati et al. (n.d.) divides spelling problems into five categories:

● Written unpronounced letters that are written but not pronounced in orthography, for example, clim**b**, lea**v**e , hi**g**h, wa**l**k, lis**t**en, desi**g**n.

● Homophone confusion, for example, **write** for right, **sea** for see, **ship** for sheep.

● Letters with different sounds in English, for example, **noize** ….noise - **akcident** …… accident – **meny** …..many.

● Sounds that exist in L2 but are absent in L1. The sounds /w/ , /ð/, and /θ/ are the main problems for Persian English learners. Therefore, Persian English learners use L1 sounds and patterns instead of L2 sounds and patterns. They use Persian sounds /s/, /t/, and /d/ instead of English sounds [th] and [v] for [w]. For example, **t**ree for three, **s**ing for thing, **d**ay for they, **v**ak for walk.

● Sounds that are present in L2 but are absent in L1. There are sound distinctions in English between sounds /I/ and /I:/, but there are not such sound distinctions in Persian. For example, *bit …. beat, fit ….. feat, slip…..sleep*.

The eighth writing problems observed in this study was subject-verb agreement. Participants forgot the connection between subject and its main verb. According to Broukal and Woods (1991), this kind of problem occurs because there are three kinds of subjects: "(1) subjects which take a singular verb; (2) subjects which take plural verb; and (3) subjects which may take either a singular verb or a plural verb" (pp. 122-124). In contrast, Keshavarz (2003) argues that researchers (e.g., Leech and Svartvil, 1983, Sharpe, 1991 as cited in Keshavarz, 2003, p. 49) believe that there are four main types of error in subject-verb agreement: (1) Intervening elements, they refer to phrases and clauses that appear between subject and verb in the sentence; (2) Collective nouns, they are considered singular or plural; (3) Plural nouns that take singular verbs, there are some nouns or some common words ending -*s* seem plural in form but in the meaning are singular such as news, economics, physics, mathematics, etc; and (4) Pronouns that take singular verbs, indefinite pronouns such as anyone, anybody, no one, everything, etc. are singular and take singular verb. Therefore, regarding the previous studies, most of the problems of subject-verb agreement in this study were intervening elements, for example, *using different strategies in the class *are necessary and useful* or *Class activity during the term *cause ....*

Expert-assessment carried out in this study found word order problem as the ninth problem of the participants. EFL learners do not usually think English word order to be a main problem for them while writing in English, but EFL teachers are usually aware that wrong use of word order makes problems for them. Feili and Ghassem-Sani (2004) claim that Persian is a language in which the word order is SOV (subject-object-verb) and somewhat word order is free, for example, adverb can came at the beginning or in the middle of the sentence and this does not change the meaning of sentence. In contrast, English has a strict SVO (subject-verb-object) form. Therefore, Persian learners of English use their relatively free word order when wring in English and in fact they transfer their L1 patterns into L2.

Problems of passive voice from the view of expert-assessment was the tenth major writing problems. For example, the sentence " *This strategy should used in the classroom"* among the participants' essays indicates that this kind of grammatical problem occurs because of the differences between the structure of languages. They may also occur when the participants forget or don not practice them. In English the structure of passive voice in tenses is made in different forms and this may be difficult for EFL learners. For this reason, they face problems while writing in English.

Therefore, the results indicated that the participants in this study faced writing problems because as Yan (2010) states writing is a productive process, learners need to apply all the means such as lexical, syntax, discourse, and rhetorical knowledge in order to achieve the objectives of writing. Furthermore, he (2010) argues that EFL learners face problems in writing because: (1) in comparison to other skills (listening, speaking, and reading) writing has received little attention from EFL learners and teachers; (2) writing is usually ignored and learners do not receive enough education during writing; (3) writing problems may be related to the system of education; (4) lack of self-motivation is another problem in writing; and (5) many learners prefer to use English for face to face communication rather than writing for people they do not see or know. Because there is immediate feedback in face to face communication, but there is not immediate feedback in writing. In contrast, Shaw and Liu (1998) believe that L2 writing problems are often related to first language (L1) interference.

To improve writing, as Shokrpour and Fallahzadeh (2007) state, it is necessary to increase knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, to provide opportunity to practice writing, to facilitate the stages of planning and production in writing for adult learners of English by teacher, and to teach writing by developing approaches such as top-down and student-centered.

Similarly, Tan (2008) suggests that students will be able to write completely accurately if they: (1) have motivation to write; (2) are instructed in the field of L1 interference, grammar, class participation, and error correction; (3) develop their knowledge of vocabulary and vocabulary size and also to use words frequently; and (4) enhance their reading regularly.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed lack of a significant relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment of university non-English major faculty members' writing problems. Among the fourteen items (word choice, verb form, missing subject, verb tense, preposition, word order, article, plural "s", spelling, subject-verb agreement, missing verb, passive voice, conditional sentences, and capitalization) only in one item (capitalization) there was a significant positive relationship between expert-assessment and self-assessment.

The study showed that self-assessment can not always provide exact criteria for assessment because as Chan (2010) states in self-assessment students may give everything the same mark, overestimate their own performance, may not be sincere, or may not maintain fairness. Furthermore, Moskowitz (1986) and Shrauger and Osberg (1981) state that bias may influence self-assessment. Similarly, Boud & Falchilkov (1989, as cited in Ross, 2006) argue that if self-assessment affects students' grade in a course, they overestimate themselves and if not, they underestimate themselves.

Additionally, Shrauger and Osberg point out that self-assessment may not be valid because people like to present themselves to others in a way that is socially desirable. Therefore, the absence of agreement between expert-assessment and self-assessment in this study support the above mentioned studies, although Sundstrom (2005) points out that self-assessment is considered as an important and valuable learning activity even if there is no significant relationship between teacher and student and can provide feedback for students in the fields of learning and persuade them toward professional and educational standards.

The findings revealed that the participants knew their weaknesses in writing, but because they thought their responses in self-assessment were recorded and considered as a basis for educational action, and because of their personalities and prestige they evaluated themselves based on bias, their own tendency and not based on what they actually believed. Therefore, university non-English major faculty members need help to assess their own problems in writing sincerely, fairly, and accurately. Of course, accurate self-assessment requires instruction that plays an important role to improve students' abilities toward self-assessment.

On the other hand, university non-English major faculty members should be involved in writing assessment in educational environment so that they can assess their own writing accurately. Additionally, the university must provide instructional classes because these kinds of classes can train them to improve and assess the quality of their writing.

This study also showed that verb form, word choice, article, preposition, plural "s", capitalization, spelling, subject-verb agreement, word order, and passive voice with the mean scores of higher than 1 are the main writing problems that Tehran and Guilan university non-English major faculty members committed. The findings revealed that L1 interference, lack of grammar knowledge, vocabulary weakness, and poor spelling are the main factors that cause writing problems. According to Tan (2008), students can improve their vocabulary knowledge with learning and frequent use of words. Furthermore, they can reduce their writing problems and write sentences completely accurately if they learn basic grammar, ways of error correction, and awareness of L1 interference. Besides, a lot of writing problems are related to pedagogy and will be reduced if experienced or skillful language teachers teach students.

Additionally, findings showed that writing is a difficult job and students need a lot of time and instructional strategies to achieve writing proficiency. Moreover, Shokrpour and Fallahzadeh (2007) state students require hours of writing classes and need enough practice to analyze the text in order to write accurately. Therefore, because grammatical features of two languages (Persian and English) are different, EFL students will encounter problems while writing in English and can minimize their problems through practice, instruction, classes, and different strategies.

In conclusion, it is necessary for the university to provide and develop writing classes and to motivate non-English major faculty members to take part these classes to improve their writing. It is also necessary for faculty members to emphasize that grammatical features of two languages (Persian and English) are different and these differences cause EFL learners to face problems while writing in English.

Pedagogical implications

The findings of the present study can have implications both for teachers and students. The implication of the findings of the study is that triangulation in assessment is needed to make sure whether different types of assessment match. Also the findings show that self-assessment should not be the only source of assessment because Tamjid and Birjandi (2011) claim that students face some difficulties when assessing themselves in both spoken and written form. They do not trust themselves or they feel that they are unable in productive process. Therefore, assessing L2 writing is not an easy job.

Moreover, the findings revealed that although university non-English major faculty members are constantly studying, doing scientific works, writing articles, and using internet, they face problems while writing in English and need a lot of EFL writing classes, practice, developing grammatical and vocabulary knowledge in order to reduce or minimize their writing problems.

Many English sentences are mixed with Persian grammatical rules, for example, word order and also many grammatical elements are not found in Persian, for example, articles. Therefore, non-English faculty members need to know the differences of two languages (Persian and English) and try through instruction and practice to produce accurate sentences and study different vocabulary books and English to English and bilingual dictionaries to improve their lexical knowledge and try to minimize their problems in word choice. Additionally, it is the role and responsibility of university developers to develop the writing of non-English faculty members via pedagogy and to devote some hours every week to writing classes.

Suggestions for further research

The results of the present study are significant and in doing it several new questions were raised. Therefore, those who are interested in doing research in the field of writing problems and writing assessment are suggested to:

(1) Replicate this study to reveal that whether the same results would be obtained or not.

(2) Investigate writing problems of university non-English faculty members of other universities of Iran except Tehran and Guilan universities.

(3) Investigate writing problems of university non-English faculty members across the gender.

(4) Analyze other language features, for example, punctuation, pronouns, part of speech, missing object in addition to what were investigated in this study.

(5) Investigate writing problems of faculty members in specific courses.

(6) Compare writing problems and self assessment of faculty members of technical courses, faculty members of medical courses, and faculty members at the faculty of humanities.

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