

ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH JOB APPLICATION LETTER WRITING SKILLS AMONG ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Writing competence is one of the most essential skills that English Education students must master to support both academic and professional communication. Among various forms of professional writing, job application letters play a significant role in helping graduates present their qualifications effectively to potential employers. This study aims to analyze the English job application letter writing skills of English Education students. The research employed a descriptive qualitative design involving 30 students from an English Education Study Program. Data were collected through documentation of students' job application letters and analyzed based on letter structure, grammar, vocabulary, and language formality. The findings reveal that although most students were able to construct the general structure of a job application letter appropriately, many still experienced difficulties in grammatical accuracy, formal vocabulary selection, and the maintenance of professional tone. Several students used informal expressions and inappropriate sentence structures that reduced the effectiveness of their letters. Nevertheless, some participants demonstrated adequate ability in presenting information clearly and persuasively. The study concludes that students' job application letter writing skills require further improvement, particularly in linguistic accuracy and professional correspondence conventions.

Introduction

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex language skills because it requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, critical thinking, organization, and communicative competence. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), writing becomes even more challenging because students must express ideas accurately while simultaneously applying grammatical rules, vocabulary choices, and discourse conventions. As globalization and technological advancement continue to influence workplace communication, the ability to produce professional written documents has become increasingly important for university graduates.

Among various forms of professional writing, the job application letter occupies a strategic position because it often serves as the first written interaction between applicants and employers. A well-written application letter enables candidates to introduce themselves, demonstrate qualifications, and persuade employers to consider them for employment opportunities. Consequently, proficiency in writing job application letters is not merely an academic requirement but also a practical skill that influences graduates' employability and career prospects.

For students enrolled in English Education programs, mastery of professional writing is particularly important. These students are expected to possess advanced English language competence and to serve as future educators who can model effective communication practices. Therefore, their ability

to write professional correspondence such as job application letters should reflect adequate linguistic accuracy, organization, and awareness of formal communication conventions.

Writing instruction has received substantial attention from scholars in language education. According to Hyland, effective writing involves both linguistic competence and the ability to understand the social context in which communication occurs. Writers must consider audience expectations, communicative purposes, and genre-specific conventions to produce meaningful texts. Similarly, Harmer argues that successful writing instruction should encourage learners to develop both language accuracy and communicative effectiveness through continuous practice and feedback.

Recent studies have reported persistent difficulties among EFL learners in professional writing contexts. Many students struggle with grammatical accuracy, sentence construction, lexical appropriateness, and rhetorical organization. These challenges frequently appear in formal documents such as business letters, application letters, and professional emails. As a result, students often fail to communicate their qualifications effectively despite possessing relevant academic achievements.

The challenges associated with job application letter writing are particularly evident among university students in non-native English-speaking environments. Many learners have limited exposure to authentic professional correspondence and therefore rely heavily on informal communication patterns acquired through daily interactions or social media platforms. Such habits often influence their writing style, leading to the use of inappropriate expressions, informal vocabulary, and weak organizational structures.

Another issue concerns grammatical competence. Many students continue to experience difficulties with sentence construction, verb forms, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, and article usage. These grammatical weaknesses may reduce the credibility and professionalism of application letters. Furthermore, limited vocabulary knowledge often prevents students from expressing qualifications and experiences persuasively. Consequently, application letters may appear repetitive, vague, or insufficiently formal.

Professional correspondence also requires awareness of genre conventions. A job application letter generally consists of several essential components, including the heading, salutation, opening paragraph, body paragraph, closing paragraph, and signature. Each section serves a specific communicative function and contributes to the overall effectiveness of the letter. Students who lack understanding of these conventions may produce letters that appear incomplete or poorly organized.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in genre-based writing theory and communicative competence theory. Genre-based theory emphasizes that effective writing depends on understanding the communicative purposes and structural characteristics of specific text types. Job application letters represent a professional genre with distinct rhetorical patterns and linguistic features. Meanwhile, communicative competence theory highlights the importance of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence in achieving successful communication. These theoretical perspectives provide a useful framework for examining students' strengths and weaknesses in job application letter writing.

Although numerous studies have investigated EFL writing skills, relatively few have focused specifically on English Education students' ability to write job application letters within the context of professional correspondence. Existing studies often emphasize general essay writing, academic writing, or paragraph development. Consequently, limited attention has been directed toward

examining how students apply their English language knowledge in professional communication contexts.

This gap is important because job application letters require unique writing competencies that differ from those required in academic essays. Students must not only demonstrate linguistic accuracy but also present themselves professionally and persuasively. Therefore, an investigation of students' job application letter writing skills can provide valuable insights for curriculum development and writing instruction.

Based on these considerations, this study seeks to analyze the English job application letter writing skills of English Education students. The analysis focuses on four primary aspects: letter structure, grammar, vocabulary, and language formality.

The research question guiding this study is:

How do English Education students demonstrate their writing skills in English job application letters in terms of structure, grammar, vocabulary, and formality?

The objective of this study is to identify students' strengths and weaknesses in writing English job application letters and to provide recommendations for improving professional writing instruction in English Education programs.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. Qualitative research was selected because it enables researchers to explore and describe language phenomena in depth through detailed analysis of written texts. The study focused on understanding the characteristics of students' job application letters rather than measuring achievement statistically.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling, as they met specific criteria established by the researcher. They were students enrolled in an English Education Study Program, had completed writing-related courses, possessed basic knowledge of English writing conventions, and represented prospective graduates who were expected to use professional correspondence skills in their future careers. These students had previously completed writing-related courses and were expected to possess foundational knowledge of English writing conventions. The participants were selected because they represented prospective graduates who would likely encounter professional correspondence requirements in future employment contexts.

The participants consisted of 30 students enrolled in the English Education Study Program. They were selected using purposive sampling because they had completed writing-related courses and were expected to possess foundational knowledge of English writing conventions. The participants were chosen as prospective graduates who would likely encounter professional correspondence requirements in their future employment contexts. These documents served as authentic representations of students' professional writing abilities. Documentation was employed as the data collection technique because it allowed researchers to examine naturally produced texts without influencing participants' writing processes.

The collected documents were analyzed using four assessment criteria. The first criterion was letter structure, including the organization of opening, body, and closing sections. The second criterion focused on grammatical accuracy, particularly sentence structure, verb usage, and agreement patterns.

The third criterion examined vocabulary selection and lexical appropriateness. The final criterion evaluated the degree of language formality and adherence to professional communication conventions.

Data analysis followed three stages. First, data reduction was conducted by identifying relevant linguistic features and recurring writing patterns. Second, data display was performed through the presentation of representative examples and categorized findings. Third, conclusions were drawn based on recurring themes and observed tendencies across the collected documents.

To enhance trustworthiness, the analysis was conducted systematically using predetermined criteria derived from professional writing principles and job application letter conventions. Representative examples were selected to illustrate common strengths and weaknesses identified in the students' writing.

Findings and Discussions

The analysis revealed that the overall writing skills of English Education students in composing job application letters can be categorized as moderate. Most students demonstrated a basic understanding of the purpose and general structure of job application letters. However, significant weaknesses were identified in grammar, vocabulary selection, and language formality.

Letter Structure

In terms of structure, many students successfully included the essential components of a job application letter. Most letters contained an opening statement expressing interest in a position, a body section presenting qualifications, and a closing statement expressing hope for further communication.

Nevertheless, some students demonstrated difficulties in organizing information systematically. Several letters lacked smooth transitions between paragraphs, while others presented personal information in an unstructured manner. These organizational weaknesses occasionally reduced coherence and affected the overall readability of the letters.

Despite these issues, structural errors were generally less frequent than linguistic errors. This finding suggests that students possess basic knowledge of the generic structure of job application letters but require further guidance in organizing information more effectively.

Grammar

Grammar emerged as one of the most problematic aspects of students' writing. Various grammatical errors were identified, including incorrect verb forms, missing auxiliary verbs, inappropriate prepositions, and faulty sentence structures.

Data 1:

"I want to apply this job because I very interested with your company."

This sentence contains several grammatical inaccuracies. The phrase "apply this job" should be replaced with "apply for this position." In addition, the sentence lacks the auxiliary verb "am" before "very interested," and the preposition "with" should be replaced by "in."

Revised Version:

"I would like to apply for this position as I am very interested in your company."

The revised sentence demonstrates greater grammatical accuracy and professionalism.

The findings indicate that many students still struggle with constructing grammatically accurate sentences in professional contexts. Such errors may negatively influence employers' perceptions of applicants' language competence.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary-related problems were also frequently observed. Some students used repetitive expressions and limited lexical variation when describing their qualifications and experiences. Others selected words that were grammatically acceptable but contextually inappropriate for professional correspondence.

For example, several letters repeatedly employed common expressions such as "good," "nice," and "happy" instead of more professional alternatives such as "qualified," "competent," "motivated," or "enthusiastic." The limited use of professional vocabulary reduced the persuasive quality of the letters.

However, a number of students demonstrated satisfactory lexical competence by employing formal and occupation-specific vocabulary. These students produced more convincing and professional application letters.

Language Formality

Another significant finding concerned language formality. Several students incorporated informal expressions that are inappropriate in professional correspondence.

Data 2:

"Hi sir, I wanna join your company."

The greeting and expression used in this sentence reflect informal spoken language rather than professional written communication.

Revised Version:

"Dear Sir/Madam, I am interested in joining your company."

The revised version demonstrates a more appropriate level of formality and professionalism.

The occurrence of informal language suggests that some students have not fully developed awareness of professional writing conventions. Informal expressions may reduce the credibility of application letters and create negative impressions among potential employers.

Overall, the results indicate that students' major challenges involve grammar, vocabulary, and formality rather than structural organization.

Discussion

The findings indicate that English Education students possess a basic understanding of job application letter structure but continue to experience difficulties in producing linguistically accurate and professionally appropriate texts. These findings support the view that professional writing competence extends beyond knowledge of organizational patterns and requires mastery of language use within specific communicative contexts.

The relatively successful performance in structural organization suggests that students have been exposed to genre-based instruction. According to genre theory, writers learn to organize texts effectively when they understand the communicative purposes and rhetorical structures associated with particular genres. The presence of opening, body, and closing sections in most letters demonstrates students' awareness of these structural conventions.

However, grammatical weaknesses remained prevalent throughout the analyzed documents. These findings support the argument that grammatical competence continues to be a major challenge for EFL learners. The observed errors in verb forms, auxiliary usage, and prepositions indicate incomplete mastery of English grammatical systems. Such weaknesses may interfere with communication and reduce the professional quality of written documents.

Vocabulary limitations also emerged as a significant issue. Professional correspondence requires precise and persuasive language that effectively communicates qualifications and achievements. Students who relied on repetitive or overly general vocabulary produced less convincing letters. In contrast, those who employed formal and contextually appropriate vocabulary created stronger professional impressions. This finding highlights the importance of expanding learners' professional lexical repertoire.

The frequent occurrence of informal language further emphasizes the need for explicit instruction in professional communication. Modern students regularly engage in informal digital communication through social media platforms, messaging applications, and online communities. These communication habits may inadvertently influence formal writing tasks. Consequently, educators should provide opportunities for students to distinguish between informal and professional language use.

From the perspective of communicative competence theory, the findings indicate that students possess varying levels of linguistic and sociolinguistic competence. While many participants could communicate basic information, some struggled to adapt language appropriately to professional contexts. Effective job application letters require not only grammatical accuracy but also awareness of audience expectations and workplace communication norms.

The findings also suggest that writing instruction should integrate authentic professional writing tasks. Students may benefit from analyzing real-world job application letters, participating in peer-review activities, and receiving targeted feedback on professional correspondence. Such instructional approaches can help bridge the gap between classroom writing activities and workplace communication demands.

Furthermore, educators should emphasize the persuasive function of job application letters. Many students focused primarily on presenting personal information rather than strategically highlighting

qualifications and experiences. Future instruction should encourage learners to view application letters as persuasive texts designed to create positive impressions among employers.

Overall, the study demonstrates that professional writing competence involves a complex interaction of structural knowledge, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary mastery, and sociolinguistic awareness. Improving students' performance therefore requires comprehensive instructional strategies that address all of these dimensions simultaneously.

Conclusion

This study examined the English job application letter writing skills of English Education students through a qualitative analysis of written documents. The findings revealed that most students demonstrated adequate understanding of the general structure of job application letters. However, substantial difficulties remained in grammar, vocabulary selection, and language formality.

This study has several limitations. First, it involved only students from one English Education Study Program, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to students from other universities or academic disciplines. Second, the analysis focused solely on students' written job application letters without examining the writing process, participants' perspectives, or the factors influencing their writing performance. Third, the study employed a qualitative document analysis approach, so the findings describe students' writing abilities but do not measure the effectiveness of specific instructional methods or interventions. Future research is recommended to include participants from different institutions, adopt mixed-methods or experimental designs, and investigate additional factors that contribute to the development of professional writing skills.

Grammatical errors involving verb forms, sentence construction, and preposition usage were frequently identified. Vocabulary limitations reduced the persuasive quality of several letters, while the use of informal expressions indicated insufficient awareness of professional communication conventions. Despite these challenges, some students successfully produced clear, organized, and communicative letters that reflected satisfactory professional writing competence.

The study concludes that English Education students require further support in developing professional correspondence skills. Writing instruction should place greater emphasis on grammatical accuracy, formal vocabulary, persuasive communication, and workplace writing conventions. Through systematic practice and targeted feedback, students can improve their ability to produce effective job application letters and enhance their readiness for professional environments.

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