
Analysis Of Language And Structure In English Business Letters: A Study Of English Language Education Students

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Istilah

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji tata bahasa, kosakata, dan struktur yang digunakan dalam surat bisnis berbahasa Inggris yang ditulis oleh mahasiswa pada semester keempat Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris. Korespondensi bisnis menuntut penggunaan bahasa yang formal, kejelasan, dan penyusunan yang tepat, sehingga menjadikannya sebagai keterampilan penting dalam komunikasi profesional. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan menganalisis berbagai surat bisnis yang dibuat oleh para mahasiswa. Penelaahan ini berfokus pada tiga unsur: tata bahasa, kosakata, dan organisasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memiliki pemahaman dasar mengenai struktur surat bisnis; namun, mereka sering melakukan kesalahan tata bahasa, terutama terkait penggunaan tense dan pembentukan kalimat. Mengenai kosakata, mahasiswa sering menggunakan frasa yang terbatas dan lebih kasual. Selain itu, ketidaksesuaian dalam konsep penataan dan penggunaan format konvensional juga teridentifikasi. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan pengajaran yang lebih terarah untuk meningkatkan kemampuan mahasiswa dalam menulis surat bisnis.

Keywords :

Format; Professional
Correspondence; Syntax;
Terminology

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the grammar, vocabulary, and structure utilized in English business letters composed by students in their fourth semester of the English Education Study Program. Business correspondence demands formal language, clarity, and appropriate organization, establishing them as a crucial skill in professional communication. This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach by examining various business letters created by the students. The examination centers on three elements: grammar, vocabulary, and organization. The results indicate that students possess a fundamental grasp of the structure of business letters; however, they often commit

grammatical mistakes, especially regarding tense usage and sentence formation. Regarding vocabulary, students often utilize restricted and more casual phrases. Moreover, discrepancies in structuring concepts and using conventional formats are also recognized. As a result, more targeted teaching is required to enhance students' abilities in writing business letters.



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INTRODUCTION

Writing is an essential ability in language acquisition, particularly in Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching. It serves not just as a means of communication but also as an essential instrument for arranging, forming, and articulating thoughts in a coherent, logical, and well organized manner. By writing, students can show their grasp of language, communicate ideas, and articulate arguments successfully. In both academic and professional settings, writing is essential for conveying messages accurately, suitably, and convincingly. In contrast to speaking, writing demands greater planning, revision, and focus on detail, which makes it one of the most intricate and challenging language skills to learn.

Additionally, writing is frequently regarded as a productive skill that combines various elements of language proficiency at the same time. Students should not only create concepts but also convert those concepts into organized sentences and logical paragraphs. This process necessitates management of linguistic components alongside cognitive techniques, including critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making. Consequently, writing serves as an indication of linguistic skill and cognitive capability. In academic environments, students' writing abilities are often seen as a measure of their overall language proficiency.

As per Harmer (2004), writing is a multifaceted and iterative process that encompasses various elements, such as grammar, vocabulary, structure, and the development of content. This shows that students must not only grasp linguistic rules but also utilize them efficiently to create meaningful and cohesive texts. Writing is not a straightforward process; instead, it encompasses phases like planning, drafting, revising, editing, and rewriting. All of these phases demand varying skills and degrees of focus. For example, in the planning phase, students must create and arrange ideas, whereas in the revising phase, they should assess the clarity and impact of their writing.

In this regard, Nunan (2003) highlights that writing is an activity involving both cognition and language. It includes cognitive functions like creating ideas, arranging thoughts, and converting them into written form with suitable structures and phrases. This indicates that effective writing relies not just on language proficiency but also on the writer's capacity for critical and systematic thinking. Furthermore, composition necessitates consideration of audience and intent, impacting the selection of language,

tone, and format. In the absence of this awareness, the message might not be successfully conveyed to the reader.

A significant form of writing in professional communication is business letter composition. Business letters serve as a formal method of communication utilized in different professional environments to fulfill particular objectives, including making requests, providing information, posing inquiries, addressing complaints, verifying transactions, or sustaining professional relationships. In the current globalized and digital era, the skill to compose effective business letters in English is extremely important, since English is commonly used as a universal language for business, trade, and communication. Despite the increase in emails and instant messaging, the fundamentals of writing business letters continue to be important as they demonstrate professionalism and clear communication.

Bovee and Thill (2018) state that business letters should be clear, brief, and polite. Clarity guarantees that the message is comprehensible without confusion, conciseness prevents superfluous details that might perplex the reader, and courtesy demonstrates professionalism and regard for the recipient. Moreover, successful business writing demands precision, thoroughness, and appropriateness. A properly crafted business letter not only communicates information but also fosters trust, sustains relationships, and boosts the credibility of the writer or organization.

According to Swales (1990), Genre Analysis posits that each text type serves a distinct communicative purpose and possesses a conventional structure that sets it apart from other text types. Business letters, as a format, adhere to recognized conventions that encompass components like heading, date, inside address, greeting, main text, closing, and signature. Every one of these elements has a distinct role in conveying the message efficiently. For instance, the introductory paragraph usually presents the letter's intent, the main content offers specific details, and the concluding paragraph recaps the message or indicates the desired response. Grasping these conventions is crucial for students to create writing that fulfills professional and academic criteria.

Grammar is a crucial element in writing. As stated by Azar (1999), grammar offers essential guidelines for forming accurate sentences, essential for clear and effective communication. In the realm of business correspondence, grammatical precision is crucial as mistakes can result in confusion, ambiguity, and even misreading of the communication. In addition, recurring grammatical errors can diminish the writer's credibility and professionalism. Consequently, students must cultivate robust grammatical skills to guarantee that their writing is precise and trustworthy.

Along side grammar, vocabulary significantly influences the tone, clarity, and effectiveness of written communication. Business writing demands a formal, exact, and context appropriate lexicon to guarantee that the message is communicated accurately and professionally. Nation (2001) asserts that understanding vocabulary is crucial for successful communication as it directly impacts how meaning is conveyed

and comprehended. A restricted vocabulary can hinder students from articulating their thoughts effectively, whereas poor word selection might cause misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Consequently, acquiring vocabulary is an essential component of enhancing writing skills.

An additional key element of writing is organization, which pertains to the arrangement and connection of ideas within a text. Effective organization enables readers to grasp the author's concepts effortlessly and comprehend the message without struggle. In business correspondence, organization is intimately connected to coherence and cohesion. Coherence pertains to the orderly progression of concepts, whereas cohesion encompasses the utilization of connecting words and grammatical tools to join sentences and paragraphs. Lacking proper organization, even sentences that are grammatically correct might not convey their message effectively.

In spite of the significance of these elements, numerous English Education students continue to struggle with composing business letters. Frequent issues encompass grammatical mistakes, restricted vocabulary, unsuitable word selection, absence of coherence, and disorganized or improperly arranged ideas. Furthermore, students frequently find it challenging to adhere to the traditional format of business letters, leading to unclear or unproductive communication. These challenges might arise from multiple reasons, including inadequate practice, restricted access to real materials, and insufficient guidance from teachers.

Additionally, numerous students often prioritize finishing writing assignments over enhancing the quality of their work. They might not completely grasp the significance of precision, clarity, and structure in professional communication. Consequently, their writing might have mistakes that could have been prevented with increased focus and practice. This scenario emphasizes the necessity for improved teaching methods that focus on both the process and the outcome of writing.

Consequently, examining students' writing is a crucial process for recognizing their strengths and weaknesses. By conducting thorough analysis, educators can understand the particular challenges encountered by students, including frequent grammatical mistakes, unsuitable vocabulary choices, and deficiencies in text structure. This analysis can subsequently inform the creation of more focused and effective teaching methods. Moreover, it can assist students in recognizing their own writing issues and motivate them to enhance their abilities.

Additionally, this research is significant as it aids in advancing improved teaching methods in English Language Teaching, especially concerning writing instruction. By recognizing the typical challenges encountered by students, educators can offer tailored support, suitable resources, and helpful critiques. This will ultimately aid students in enhancing their writing abilities more efficiently and ready them for academic and professional correspondence.

Considering these factors, this research intends to examine the grammar, vocabulary, and format used in English business letters authored by students of English Education. The research aims to pinpoint frequent mistakes, assess students'

writing skills, and offer suggestions for enhancing writing teaching methods. The results of this research are anticipated to offer significant perspectives for teachers and students in improving the quality of business writing and fostering the growth of effective English communication skills.

METHODS

This research utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the grammar, vocabulary, and structure used in english business letters composed by students. A qualitative descriptive approach is selected due to its emphasis on describing and interpreting linguistic phenomena as they appear in natural written data. Creswell (2014) states that qualitative research aims to investigate and comprehend the significance that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human issue. Consequently, this research seeks to thoroughly explain students' writing abilities instead of quantifying them through statistics.

The participants in this research are students in their fourth semester of the english education study program at stain mandailing natal. The dataset includes multiple english business letters composed by students for their academic tasks. These documents act as the main source of information in this study since they represent the students' real writing skills in a formal academic setting.

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the grammar, vocabulary, and structure found in english business letters written by students. A qualitative descriptive method is chosen for its focus on depicting and understanding linguistic occurrences as they manifest in authentic written information. Creswell (2014) indicates that qualitative research seeks to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups assign to a social or human concern. As a result, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' writing skills rather than measuring them with statistics.

The subjects of this study are students in their fourth semester enrolled in the english education study program at stain mandailing natal. The dataset contains various english business letters written by students for their school assignments. These documents serve as the primary source of information in this research as they reflect the actual writing abilities of students in a formal academic context.

The method for gathering data employed in this study is analysis of documents. Document analysis is a methodical approach for examining and assessing written content to derive meaning, enhance comprehension, and build empirical knowledge. In this research, the investigator gathers students' business letters and analyzes them thoroughly without applying any treatment or intervention to the subjects. This is due to the research solely concentrating on examining existing written data as it is naturally generated.

The analysis of data is performed in multiple stages. Initially, the researcher carefully examines all the gathered business letters to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the information. Next, the data is categorized into three primary

elements: grammar, vocabulary, and structure. Third, the researcher recognizes frequent mistakes, trends, and inclinations within each category. Ultimately, the results are qualitatively analyzed and presented to offer a clear and comprehensive insight into students' skills in composing English business letters.

To guarantee the accuracy of the data, the researcher employs thorough and consistent analysis grounded in established criteria. Employing systematic classification and repeated reading supports the reliability and precision of the results. The findings are subsequently provided in a descriptive format to clarify the overall results of the research in a coherent and structured way.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Finding

This part outlines the results of the research derived from analyzing English business letters composed by fourth-semester students in the English Education Study Program (TBI) at STAIN Mandailing Natal. The results are divided into three primary areas: grammar, vocabulary, and structure. Every aspect is examined not just descriptively but also analytically to emphasize the root causes of students' challenges and their effects on writing skills.

Grammatical rules

The examination indicates that there are several errors in the students' application of grammar in writing business letters. These consist of improper tense usage, errors in subject-verb agreement, misuse of articles (a, an, the), incorrect prepositions, and clumsy or ineffective sentence structures. In many instances, students created run-on sentences or sentence fragments, impairing the clarity and coherence of the text. Moreover, certain students demonstrated a lack of consistency in tense usage, especially when transitioning between present, past, and future forms without appropriate contextual reasoning.

Another significant concern noted is the inclination of students to create sentences that are grammatically correct at a fundamental level but unsuitable for formal written correspondence. For example, excessively basic sentence constructions or literal translations from Indonesian frequently lead to awkward phrases in English. This suggests that students are struggling not just with grammatical precision but also with attaining grammatical suitability within a particular genre.

These results indicate that students continue to possess restricted control over grammar during formal writing. While they might grasp grammatical rules separately, they frequently find it challenging to use these rules reliably and correctly in longer writing assignments. This indicates a disparity between declarative knowledge (understanding the rules) and procedural knowledge (applying the rules in practice).

This result aligns with Harmer (2004), who contends that writing is a complex and recursive process that demands robust grammatical control for clarity and effectiveness. He stresses that grammatical precision is especially important in formal

writing, as even minor mistakes can influence meaning and professionalism. In business correspondence, grammatical mistakes can result in both confusion and unfavorable perceptions of the writer's abilities.

In a similar vein, Nunan (2003) emphasizes that writing encompasses both cognitive and linguistic requirements. Students need to concurrently create concepts and express them in proper linguistic structures. When cognitive load is elevated, like when students concentrate on concepts or information, their grammatical precision may diminish. This occurrence is clear in this research, where students frequently focus on conveying messages rather than on grammatical accuracy.

Furthermore, interference from the first language seems to contribute to students' grammatical mistakes. Numerous sentence structures mirror Indonesian patterns instead of conventional English syntax, suggesting that students depend on translation methods instead of processing thoughts directly in English. This may impede the progress of genuine and precise writing.

From an educational standpoint, these results indicate that teaching grammar ought to transcend standalone activities and emphasize contextualized application. Learners require chances to utilize grammar in significant writing activities, obtain corrective feedback, and participate in revision processes. Highlighting editing abilities and self-correction techniques can also aid students in recognizing their grammatical mistakes more effectively.

Vocabulary

The results indicate that students generally employ basic, repetitive, and constrained vocabulary in their business letter composition. Numerous students depend on common high-frequency words and exhibit restricted use of particular or specialized terminology connected to business communication. This leads to writing that is devoid of diversity, accuracy, and refinement.

Moreover, many phrases employed by students are unsuitable for formal or professional settings. Commonly encountered are informal phrases, literal translations, and ambiguous expressions, which diminish the overall clarity and impact of the communication. For instance, rather than employing polite and formal language, students occasionally utilize direct and less respectful expressions, which may be viewed as unsuitable in professional environments.

A further problem is the insufficient recognition of lexical collocations and established phrases frequently utilized in business writing. Business correspondence frequently utilizes common expressions like "We wish to notify you...", "We await your reply," or "Feel free to reach out to us." Nevertheless, numerous students struggle to apply these expressions accurately or consistently, suggesting insufficient familiarity with genuine business materials.

These constraints indicate that students' vocabulary comprehension remains inadequate for facilitating proficient formal writing. Their limited vocabulary constrains their capability to articulate thoughts clearly, accurately, and

professionally. Consequently, their writing might seem excessively simplistic, less convincing, and at times unclear.

This discovery supports Nation (2001), who stresses that vocabulary understanding is an essential part of communicative competence. He contends that comprehending a word entails not just grasping its definition but also its structure, application, collocation, and degree of formality. Limited vocabulary knowledge can thus greatly impede communication, especially in formal settings like business writing.

Additionally, the results indicate that students might not be effectively enhancing their vocabulary via reading or interaction with genuine materials. Without enough exposure, it is challenging for learners to obtain new vocabulary and grasp how it is applied in actual situations.

From an educational standpoint, teaching vocabulary ought to be more organized and contextually based. Instructors ought to familiarize learners with typical business phrases, promote the use of synonyms and diverse vocabulary, and offer exercises that emphasize collocation and phrase application. Combining reading and writing tasks can also assist students in cultivating a more abundant and practical vocabulary.

Structure

The assessment shows that students typically possess a fundamental grasp of the general format of business letters, which includes the opening, body, and closing parts. This shows that they have been familiarized with the typical structure of this genre. Nonetheless, their capacity to implement this framework effectively and reliably is still constrained.

A significant issue noted is the absence of coherence and cohesion in the text. Although students can recognize the key components of a business letter, they frequently have difficulty arranging their ideas coherently within each section. Paragraphs might miss explicit topic sentences, relevant details, or coherent flow, leading to chaotic and occasionally perplexing writings.

Furthermore, the connections between thoughts are frequently weak or missing, which impacts the text's coherence. Cohesive elements like linking words (e.g., however, therefore, additionally) are infrequently utilized or misused. This hinders readers from tracking the author's thought process.

Another issue is the lack of consistency in using standard business letter formatting. Certain students neglect essential components like appropriate greetings, closing phrases, or alignment standards. Some combine various formats, showing a lack of proper understanding of formal writing rules.

These results indicate that students' understanding of structure remains surface-level and has not been fully internalized. They might identify the elements of a business letter but cannot completely combine them into a cohesive and impactful document.

This aligns with Swales (1990), who contends that mastering a genre requires comprehension of its communicative intent and its structural norms. Based on Genre Analysis, successful writing necessitates the skill to utilize these conventions suitably in actual communication contexts. The students in this research seem to be in an initial phase of genre mastery, recognizing the structure but not yet skilled in its application.

From an educational viewpoint, these results emphasize the significance of instructing writing as a process that encompasses planning, structuring, drafting, and revising. Instructors ought to present examples of properly formatted business letters, assist learners in examining these examples, and offer them chances to practice arranging their own thoughts. Feedback should concentrate on language precision as well as coherence and structure.

Discussion

The findings of this study clearly indicate that students face multiple and interconnected challenges in writing English business letters. These challenges are not isolated but rather reflect broader issues in language learning, particularly in integrating grammar, vocabulary, and structure into effective written communication.

One important insight from this study is that students' difficulties are not merely technical but also cognitive and strategic. Writing requires the simultaneous management of multiple components, including idea generation, language selection, and text organization. For many students, this cognitive load can be overwhelming, leading to errors and inconsistencies.

In terms of grammar, the findings suggest that students have not yet achieved sufficient automaticity in using grammatical structures. This lack of fluency results in frequent errors that affect clarity and professionalism. It also indicates that grammar instruction may need to be more communicative and integrated into writing practice rather than taught in isolation.

In terms of vocabulary, the limited range and inappropriate use of words highlight the need for more extensive language exposure and practice. Vocabulary development should not be seen as a separate skill but as an integral part of writing competence. Students need to learn not only individual words but also how to use them effectively in context.

In terms of structure, the findings reveal that students need more support in organizing their ideas and applying genre conventions. Understanding the structure of a text is essential for effective communication, especially in professional contexts where clarity and organization are highly valued.

Overall, the results indicate that students' writing ability is still at a developing level. While they have basic knowledge of business letter writing, they have not yet fully mastered the integration of grammar, vocabulary, and structure. This suggests that writing instruction should be more comprehensive, focusing on both linguistic accuracy and communicative effectiveness.

Furthermore, the findings have important implications for teaching practice. Teachers should adopt a more process-oriented approach to writing, provide clear models and examples, and offer continuous and constructive feedback. Collaborative writing activities, peer review, and revision exercises can also help students improve their skills.

In conclusion, improving students' ability to write English business letters requires a holistic approach that addresses grammar, vocabulary, and structure simultaneously. With appropriate instruction, practice, and support, students can gradually develop the skills needed to produce clear, accurate, and professional written communication.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that the fourth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at STAIN Mandailing Natal demonstrate a basic understanding of English business letter writing, particularly in recognizing its general structure and communicative purpose. They are generally able to identify and apply the main components of a business letter, such as the opening, body, and closing. However, this understanding is still largely superficial, as their overall writing ability remains at a developing level. The students have not yet been able to consistently integrate grammatical accuracy, appropriate vocabulary use, and coherent organization into a well-structured and professional piece of writing.

In terms of grammar, the findings reveal that students frequently make errors in tense usage, subject-verb agreement, sentence construction, and the use of articles and prepositions. These grammatical inaccuracies significantly affect the clarity, precision, and effectiveness of the messages conveyed in their business letters. In several cases, errors lead to ambiguity and reduce the readability of the text. This indicates that students' grammatical competence is still limited, particularly in terms of applying rules consistently and automatically in formal writing contexts. It also suggests that students may possess theoretical knowledge of grammar but lack the procedural ability to use it accurately in real writing situations. Therefore, grammatical competence remains a critical area that requires further development.

Regarding vocabulary, the findings show that students tend to rely on limited, simple, and repetitive word choices. Their use of vocabulary lacks variation, precision, and appropriateness for formal communication. In many cases, students use general or informal expressions that do not align with the conventions of professional business writing. This limitation reduces the effectiveness, politeness, and professionalism of their letters. Furthermore, the lack of familiarity with standard business expressions and collocations indicates that students have not been sufficiently exposed to authentic models of business communication. As a result, their lexical competence is not yet adequate to support clear, accurate, and context-appropriate expression of ideas.

In terms of structure, although students demonstrate a general awareness of the format of business letters, they often fail to organize their ideas in a coherent and logical manner. Problems such as weak paragraph development, lack of clear topic sentences, insufficient supporting details, and poor transitions between ideas are still evident. In addition, inconsistencies in applying standard formatting conventions such as salutation, alignment, and closing further reduce the effectiveness of their writing. This indicates that students' understanding of text organization and genre conventions is still limited and requires more practical reinforcement.

Taken together, these findings suggest that students' difficulties in writing English business letters are multidimensional and interconnected. Their challenges are not only related to individual components of language, such as grammar or vocabulary, but also to the ability to integrate these components into a coherent and purposeful text. Writing, particularly in a formal and professional context, demands a high level of linguistic competence, cognitive processing, and awareness of audience and purpose. The students in this study appear to still be in the process of developing these competencies.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study highlights the need for more effective and comprehensive approaches to teaching writing. Writing instruction should not be limited to teaching language rules in isolation but should focus on helping students apply these rules in meaningful and authentic contexts. Lecturers are encouraged to adopt a process-oriented approach to writing, which includes stages such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Through this approach, students can gradually improve both the accuracy and quality of their writing.

In addition, greater emphasis should be placed on providing students with exposure to authentic business texts, which can serve as models for appropriate language use, structure, and formatting. Activities such as guided writing, collaborative writing, and peer review can help students develop their writing skills more effectively. Constructive and continuous feedback from lecturers is also essential in helping students identify their errors and improve their performance over time.

Moreover, this study also implies that vocabulary development and grammatical competence should be integrated into writing instruction rather than taught separately. Students need to practice using grammar and vocabulary in context, particularly in tasks that simulate real-life communication situations. This will help them develop not only linguistic accuracy but also communicative effectiveness.

In a broader sense, the findings of this study contribute to the understanding of students' writing difficulties in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in professional writing genres such as business letters. The study highlights the gap between students' theoretical knowledge and their practical ability to apply that knowledge in real writing tasks. Addressing this gap is essential for improving the quality of English language teaching and preparing students for academic and professional communication.

Finally, it is important to note that this study has certain limitations, such as the focus on a specific group of students and a limited scope of analysis. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore a larger sample size, include different levels of students, or investigate other aspects of writing, such as coherence, cohesion, and writing strategies. Further studies could also examine the effectiveness of specific teaching interventions in improving students' business writing skills.

In conclusion, improving students' ability in writing English business letters requires a comprehensive and sustained effort that addresses grammar, vocabulary, and structure simultaneously. With appropriate instructional strategies, sufficient practice, and continuous support, students are expected to gradually develop the competence needed to produce clear, accurate, and professional business letters that meet both academic and workplace demands.

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