
Common Errors in Writing English Business Emails by English Education Students: An Error Analysis Study and Its Pedagogical Implications

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Abstrak

Saat ini banyak mahasiswa masih kesulitan menulis surel yang dapat diterima secara pragmatis, relevan secara leksikal, benar secara tata bahasa, dan tersusun dengan baik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi kesalahan umum yang dilakukan mahasiswa saat mengirim surel bisnis, menganalisis penyebabnya, serta menyarankan solusinya. Pendekatan analisis kesalahan digunakan dalam desain deskriptif kualitatif. Sebanyak dua puluh lima mahasiswa tahun kedua berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini dan mengerjakan tugas menulis surel bisnis. Data dikumpulkan melalui penilaian tulisan, analisis dokumen, dan wawancara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa interferensi bahasa pertama, keterbatasan kosakata, dan kurangnya paparan terhadap komunikasi bisnis di dunia nyata merupakan penyebab utama kesalahan tata bahasa dan pragmatis. Selain itu, pemahaman mahasiswa mengenai norma-norma surel termasuk nada dan struktur penyampaian masih kurang memadai. Untuk membantu mahasiswa meningkatkan kemampuan menulis mereka, penelitian ini menyarankan penggunaan sistem umpan balik digital, teks model, dan pelatihan secara eksplisit.

Keywords :

Error Analysis, Business
Email Writing, EFL
Students, Grammatical
Errors, Pragmatic
Competence, Writing
Instruction

Abstract

A lot of students still struggle to write emails that are pragmatically acceptable, lexically relevant, grammatically correct, and well-structured. The purpose of this study is to pinpoint typical mistakes made by students while sending business emails, examine the reasons behind them, and suggest solutions. An error analysis approach was used in a qualitative descriptive design. Twenty-five second-year students participated in the study and performed writing assignments for business emails. Writing assessments, document analysis, and interviews were used to gather data. According to the results, first language interference,

a small vocabulary, and a lack of exposure to real-world business communication are the main causes of grammatical and pragmatic errors. Additionally, students' comprehension of email norms including tone and organization was lacking. To help students become better writers, the study suggests using digital feedback systems, model texts, and explicit training.



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INTRODUCTION

Written communication is essential for fostering connection across institutional and cultural barriers in modern academic and professional settings. Because of its effectiveness, accessibility, and formal style, business email has become one of the most popular and extensively used modes of written communication. Writing business emails in English is both a professional and academic prerequisite for students enrolled in English education programs, especially in the context of international communication. However, writing business emails is not an easy process. It necessitates the integration of several skills, including as pragmatic awareness, textual organization, lexical appropriateness, and grammatical accuracy. Effective written communication is influenced not only by linguistic expertise but also by the writer's comprehension of the social context in which the communication takes place, as observed by Hyland (2016). This suggests that students need to be able to modify their language use based on the audience, goal, and degree of formality needed in work environments.

Writing is still one of the most difficult skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, despite its significance, according to multiple studies. According to Ferris (2014), students frequently have trouble with coherence in writing, vocabulary constraints, and grammatical frameworks. In a similar vein, Ellis (1997) highlights that language learners' mistakes are systematic and represent their interlanguage growth, which makes them an important source of understanding the learning process. According to this viewpoint, error analysis is an essential methodological tool for analyzing kids' writing challenges. Corder (1974) laid the theoretical groundwork for error analysis by arguing that mistakes should be seen as proof of learning progress rather than just as flaws. Building on this paradigm, Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) provided a thorough framework for evaluating language performance by classifying learner errors into grammatical, lexical, discourse, and pragmatic kinds. These categories are especially important when sending business emails because the genre demands both linguistic accuracy and proper communication.

Pragmatic competence, or the capacity to use language effectively in a particular social context, is one of the most important components of composing business emails. In order to maintain good communication, particularly in formal and professional contacts, Brown and Levinson (1987) emphasize the significance of politeness

methods. Communication breakdowns may arise from a lack of pragmatic competence since grammatically acceptable messages may nonetheless be interpreted as rude or unsuitable. Additionally, prior research has shown that EFL students frequently rely significantly on their native tongue when writing English texts, which causes interference that impacts lexical choice and grammatical structure. Limited exposure to real language input, especially in specialized genres like business communication, exacerbates this issue even more. Students frequently lack the necessary instruction to understand the structure, tone, and style of business email writing. Technological developments have created new chances to enhance writing teaching in recent years.

By offering instant feedback and streamlining the revision process, digital tools like grammar-checking software and collaborative platforms have been demonstrated to improve students' writing skills (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2017). However, without appropriate pedagogical guidance, these tools may not adequately enhance students' pragmatic ability, even while they are successful in resolving surface-level problems. Even though a large amount of research has looked at writing mistakes made by EFL students, there aren't many studies that specifically address business email writing, especially when it comes to Indonesian higher education. This disparity emphasizes the need for more targeted studies that look at the kinds of mistakes students make as well as their root causes and potential fixes. Thus, the purpose of this study is to perform a thorough error analysis of business email writing by English education students. This study specifically aims to: (1) identify the kinds of errors that students make; (2) examine the root causes of these errors; and (3) suggest pedagogical recommendations for enhancing students' proficiency in writing business emails in English.

METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive research design which utilized an error analysis framework to examine types of errors and their causes in business email writing by students. As we mentioned, the qualitative approach was chosen because it enables a in-depth exploration of students linguistic performances within a natural learning context without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2014). This type of design is well suited to studying complicated phenomena like language mistakes that arise from both cognitive and contextual information. The study was during an English Education program at a postsecondary education institution. The sample included 25 students who were in their second year of study and taking a writing course. Purposive sampling was employed to select these participants who had experience in writing emails in English, however they reported minimal exposure to business email instruction. This sampling strategy ensured that the population was relevant to and able to provide informative data pertaining to the objectives of this study. Data was gathered employing three different techniques: writing tasks, document analysis and semi structured interviews.

In the first phase, students wrote business emails that were based on real-life scenarios (e.g. requesting information, responding to complaints and applying for internships). The purpose of these tasks was to mimic real-life communication and to elicit students' spontaneous writing performance. Second, we have collected and analyzed the written emails of students (personal data). The analysis examined the nature of errors across varying dimensions of linguistic and communicative function. The emails underwent close scrutiny to find repetitive mistakes common in grammar, vocabulary, structure and pragmatics. Third, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a reconstructed sample of study participants to understand their difficulties in writing. The interviews mentioned student understanding of business email, knowledge of conventions, and writing process challenges. This qualitative data gave useful background information that added to an understanding of the document analysis results.

Data analysis was conducted following the standard errors analytical framework as advocated by Ellis (1997). The initial stage was finding mistakes in students' written works. The second stage consisted of categorizing these errors under grammatical, lexical, structural and pragmatic types. Stage 3: Calculate the number of times each error type occurs to pinpoint the top error patterns. Phase 3 Interpreting of these errors influenced by theoretics, and interviews. Various strategies were used to maintain the credibility of the study. The data triangulation approach was used to establish credibility by comparing the findings obtained from writing tasks, document analysis, and interviews. Dependability was assured through a detailed and systematic description of the research processes. Confirmability was ensured through objective and transparent analysis of data and transferability was facilitated by providing contextual descriptions within the research content.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that students made a variety of mistakes when composing business emails, which may be divided into four primary categories: grammatical, lexical, structural, and pragmatic errors. These results imply that pupils experience deeper communicative hurdles in addition to superficial language problems. The most common kind of error was discovered to be grammatical. Article usage, subject-verb agreement, and improper tense usage were the main causes of these mistakes. For example, a lot of students used the wrong verb forms, such "I am send this email" instead of "I am sending this email." This result is in line with earlier research that found grammar to be a significant challenge for EFL students (Ferris, 2014). Both learners' inadequate comprehension of grammatical norms and interference from their native tongue might be blamed for these mistakes (Ellis, 1997).

Lexical errors were also common, in addition to grammatical faults. Because they were translating directly from their original language, students frequently utilized poor word choices. For instance, rather than using more acceptable terms like "I would like to request your assistance," expressions like "I want to ask your help" were

frequently employed. This suggests that the formal vocabulary employed in professional communication is not well understood by the pupils. Lexical choice is a key factor in determining the degree of formality and professionalism in writing, as suggested by Hyland (2016).

Students' emails were also found to contain structural flaws. Many students neglected to adhere to the standard format of business emails, which includes missing subject lines, using incorrect salutations, and making ambiguous closing remarks. Emails were occasionally written in a single, disorganized paragraph. This lack of structural awareness indicates that pupils have not received enough exposure to business email writing conventions.

The existence of pragmatic errors is perhaps the study's most important finding. Students frequently used language that was too casual, direct, or unsuitable for professional settings. For example, rather than using more courteous and indirect terms, demands like "Send me the file immediately" were employed. The lack of pragmatic ability, which is necessary for successful communication in formal situations, is highlighted by this research. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), civility techniques are essential for preserving good interpersonal relationships, especially in professional communication. There are a number of reasons why these mistakes occur. First, pupils' writing is greatly influenced by first language interference, which might result in grammatical and vocabulary mistakes. Second, a little vocabulary limits pupils' capacity to articulate concepts clearly. Third, pupils are unable to become familiar with the genre due to a lack of practice and exposure to real business emails. Lastly, students' capacity to recognize and fix mistakes is hampered by inadequate feedback on their work.

These results have significant educational ramifications. They propose that writing teaching should cover vocabulary development, structural awareness, and pragmatic competence in addition to grammar. Additionally, by giving students quick feedback and real-world examples, the utilization of digital tools and authentic materials can improve their educational experience.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that composing business emails presents substantial difficulties for English education students, especially when it comes to grammatical correctness and pragmatic appropriateness. The results emphasize the necessity of a thorough method of teaching writing that incorporates communication and linguistic skills. Teachers can better prepare students to participate in professional communication by addressing these challenges. It is advised that instructors give clear education on business email practices, such as structure, formal language, and politeness techniques, in light of the findings. To improve students' comprehension of professional communication, authentic exemplar texts should be incorporated. Peer review and group writing exercises can also assist students in recognizing and fixing mistakes. To enhance writing correctness and facilitate editing, the incorporation of

digital tools is also recommended. Lastly, ongoing and thorough criticism should be given, emphasizing vocabulary, organization, pragmatic appropriateness, and grammar.

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