Research Article

Students' Performance in Writing Job Application Letters in an English Correspondence Course

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Abstract: English Correspondence is an important course for university students from non-English departments as it equips them with professional writing skills needed in the workplace, including job application letter writing. This study aims to describe students' writing outcomes in writing job application letters after receiving instruction in an English Correspondence course. The study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The participants consisted of 22 students from a non-English department enrolled in the English Correspondence course at Stekom university. The data were obtained from students' final job application letters and analyzed using an analytic writing assessment rubric focusing on content relevance, completeness of letter structure, organization, and use of formal English. The findings reveal that students generally achieved good writing outcomes in writing job application letters. The strongest aspect was the completeness of letter structure, indicating that most students were able to apply the standard format and components of a job application letter appropriately. Students also demonstrated relatively good performance in content relevance and use of formal English. However, weaknesses were identified in organization and language accuracy, particularly in developing coherent ideas and using grammatically accurate formal expressions. The analysis of representative excerpts from students' letters further illustrates variations in writing quality across aspects. Overall, the findings suggest that instruction in the English Correspondence course contributed positively to students' ability to write job application letters. This study highlights the importance of examining students' writing outcomes holistically to provide insights for improving instructional practices in teaching professional writing.

1. Introduction

English has become an essential means of communication in academic and professional contexts (Crystal, 2003). University students are expected not only to master general English skills but also to be able to use English for specific purposes related to their future careers (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Richards, 2001). One important form of professional written communication is the job application letter, which plays a crucial role in the recruitment process (Bhatia, 1993). A well-written job application letter can represent the applicant's qualifications, professionalism, and readiness to enter the workplace (Hyland, 2004; Guffey & Loewy, 2015).

In Stekom University, job application letter writing is commonly taught in the English Correspondence course or Bahasa Inggris 2, particularly for students from non-English departments. Through this course, students are introduced to various types of formal letters, including application letters, business letters, and emails. However, many students still face challenges in producing effective job application letters in English. These challenges may be reflected in the overall quality of their writing, including content relevance, organization, completeness of letter components, and the use of appropriate formal language.

Teaching job application letter writing is not merely about explaining the format, but also about guiding students to apply their language knowledge in a professional context (Hyland, 2004). The outcomes of this teaching process can be observed through students' written products (Brown, 2004). Therefore, examining students' writing outcomes is important to understand how well the instructional objectives of the English Correspondence course have been achieved (Richards, 2001; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Several previous studies have examined students' errors in writing job application letters in English. Most of these studies focused on identifying and classifying linguistic errors using error analysis frameworks.

Octaviani and Sari (2020) conducted an error analysis of college students' English job application letters. Using Corder's error analysis taxonomy, the study revealed that students frequently made grammatical errors, particularly omission, misformation, and misordering. The findings indicated that students still had limited control over English sentence structures despite having learned formal letter writing.

Similarly, Maulindah, Mulyaningsih, and Uswati (2020) investigated fatal linguistic errors in job application letters written by students. Their study identified common errors in spelling, diction, sentence construction, and grammatical accuracy. The researchers concluded that these errors significantly affected the clarity and professionalism of students' application letters.

Another study by Rahmawati (2019) analyzed students' errors in writing application letters using the surface strategy taxonomy. The results showed that grammatical errors dominated students' writing, especially in verb tense usage, subject–verb agreement, and article usage. Although the study successfully categorized error types, it did not relate the findings to learning outcomes or instructional objectives.

Research conducted by Sari and Putri (2021) focused specifically on grammatical errors in students' application letters at a vocational higher education institution. The study found frequent errors in tense usage, prepositions, capitalization, and punctuation. The researchers emphasized the need for more effective instruction but did not evaluate students' overall writing performance.

In addition, Pratiwi (2018) examined error analysis in writing job application letters among polytechnic students. The study revealed that students struggled with both language accuracy and the correct format of application letters. However, the analysis was limited to identifying errors and did not assess students' writing quality holistically.

Previous studies in English writing have often focused on error analysis to identify students' grammatical or linguistic mistakes. While such studies are valuable, there is still a need for research that emphasizes students' overall writing outcomes rather than their errors alone. By focusing on writing outcomes, lecturers and curriculum developers can gain a more balanced understanding of students' actual abilities and the effectiveness of the teaching process.

Based on the previous studies, it can be seen that most research on job application letter writing has concentrated on error analysis, particularly grammatical and linguistic errors such as omission, misformation, spelling, and sentence structure errors. While these studies provide valuable insights into students' language difficulties, they tend to focus primarily on identifying error types and frequencies.

However, there is still limited research that examines students' overall writing outcomes as an indicator of instructional effectiveness in English Correspondence courses. Few studies analyze job application letters in terms of broader writing quality aspects such as content relevance, organization, completeness of letter components, and the use of appropriate formal language in professional contexts. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap by focusing on students' performance in writing job application letters rather than merely categorizing linguistic errors.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

English Correspondence in Higher Education

English Correspondence is a branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that focuses on written communication used in professional and business contexts (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). In higher education, this course is designed to equip students with practical writing skills needed in the workplace, such as writing emails, business letters, and job application letters (Richards, 2001; Guffey & Loewy, 2015). For students from

non-English departments, English Correspondence serves as a bridge between general English knowledge and professional communication needs (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

The teaching of English Correspondence emphasizes clarity, formality, and appropriateness of language use (Hyland, 2004; Guffey & Loewy, 2015). Students are expected to understand not only the format of formal letters but also the communicative purpose behind each type of correspondence (Swales, 1990; Hyland, 2004). Therefore, effective instruction in English Correspondence should result in students being able to produce professional written documents independently (Richards, 2001; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Job Application Letter

A job application letter is a formal letter written by a job seeker to apply for a specific position in an organization (McDowell, 1987; Guffey & Loewy, 2015). According to several scholars, a job application letter functions as an introduction of the applicant and provides essential information regarding qualifications, skills, and motivation (Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2004). It is often the first written document evaluated by employers, making its quality highly important (Guffey & Loewy, 2015).

A standard job application letter generally consists of several components, including the heading, salutation, opening paragraph, body paragraph(s), closing paragraph, complimentary close, and signature (McDowell, 1987; Guffey & Loewy, 2015). Each component has a specific function and contributes to the overall effectiveness of the letter (Swales, 1990; Hyland, 2004). In addition, job application letters require the use of formal English, polite expressions, and clear organization to convey professionalism (Hyland, 2004; Guffey & Loewy, 2015).

Teaching Job Application Letter Writing

Teaching job application letter writing involves more than presenting letter formats (Hyland, 2004; Richards & Renandya, 2002). It includes guiding students to understand the purpose of the letter, identify relevant information, and present themselves appropriately in written form (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993). Lecturers may use various teaching strategies such as providing models, analyzing sample letters, conducting guided writing activities, and giving feedback on students' drafts (Hyland, 2003; Brown, 2004).

Effective teaching of job application letters should enable students to apply linguistic knowledge and writing skills in a real-world context (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). The success of the teaching process can be evaluated through students' writing outcomes, which reflect their ability to produce acceptable and professional job application letters (Brown, 2004; Weigle, 2002; Guffey & Loewy, 2015).

Writing Outcomes

Writing outcomes refer to the quality of students' written products as the result of instruction (Brown, 2004; Biggs & Tang, 2011). In the context of writing, outcomes are commonly assessed based on several aspects, such as content, organization, language use, and appropriateness (Weigle, 2002; Jacobs et al., 1981). Writing outcomes provide valuable information about students' writing competence and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process (Brown, 2004; Richards, 2001).

Rather than focusing solely on errors, examining writing outcomes allows researchers to view students' writing ability holistically (Weigle, 2002; Hyland, 2004). This perspective highlights students' strengths and overall performance, which can be used as a basis for improving teaching strategies and curriculum design (Richards, 2001; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Previous Studies

A number of studies have investigated students' ability in writing job application letters and other forms of professional correspondence in English, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English Correspondence contexts.

Several previous studies focused on error analysis in students' job application letters. For example, Fitriani (2018) examined grammatical and lexical errors in job application letters written by Indonesian university students. The findings revealed frequent errors in tense usage, sentence structure, and word choice, indicating that students experienced difficulties in applying grammatical rules accurately in formal writing. Similarly, Rahmawati (2019) analyzed students' job application letters using Corder's error taxonomy and found that omission and misformation errors were dominant, especially in the use of articles, prepositions, and verb forms. These studies suggest that grammatical accuracy remains a major challenge for students when writing job application letters in English.

Other studies extended error analysis to organizational and format-related issues. Sari and Putra (2020) investigated both language errors and letter structure in job application letters produced by non-English department students. Their study revealed that, besides

grammatical problems, many students failed to include essential components of a job application letter, such as clear opening statements, appropriate closings, and relevant supporting details. This indicates that students' difficulties are not limited to language form but also involve understanding the communicative conventions of professional correspondence.

In addition to error-focused studies, some researchers have examined students' overall writing performance in professional writing contexts. Nurhayati (2021) analyzed students' performance in writing business letters by assessing content relevance, organization, and language appropriateness. The results showed that while students demonstrated adequate understanding of letter formats, their writing quality varied significantly in terms of coherence and clarity. This study highlights the importance of evaluating writing holistically rather than focusing solely on isolated errors.

Research has also been conducted on the teaching of English Correspondence and job application letter writing. Hyland (2004) emphasizes that teaching professional writing should not only address linguistic accuracy but also genre awareness and communicative purpose. Supporting this view, Bhatia (1993) argues that effective instruction in professional genres enables students to understand how language functions within specific social and professional contexts. Studies by Rahman and Hamzah (2020) further demonstrate that the use of model texts and guided writing activities can improve students' ability to produce more appropriate and professional job application letters.

Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into students' errors, writing problems, and instructional strategies, most of them predominantly emphasize error analysis or focus on specific linguistic weaknesses. There is still limited research that examines students' writing outcomes holistically, particularly in the context of job application letter writing in English Correspondence courses for non-English department students. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by focusing on students' writing outcomes, including content, organization, completeness of letter components, and appropriateness of language use, as indicators of the effectiveness of teaching job application letter writing.

3. Materials and Method

Research Design
This study employs a descriptive research design with a qualitative orientation. The purpose of this design is to describe students' writing outcomes in writing job application letters after receiving instruction in the English Correspondence class. This approach is considered appropriate because the study does not aim to test hypotheses or measure causal relationships, but rather to provide a detailed description of students' written performance(Fraenkel et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Setting
The research was conducted in an English Correspondence class, also known as Bahasa Inggris 2, at Stekom University. This course is a compulsory subject for students from non-English departments and includes job application letter writing as one of the main learning materials.

Research Participants
The participants of this study were students from a non-English department who were enrolled in the English Correspondence class during the academic year. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants, as all students had completed the instructional unit on job application letter writing and had produced written job application letters as part of the course requirements.

Data and Data Sources
The primary data of this study consisted of students' written job application letters. These letters were collected as the final writing products after the teaching and learning process in the English Correspondence class. Secondary data were obtained from classroom observations and supporting documents such as the course syllabus and teaching materials to provide contextual information.

Data Collection Techniques
Data were collected through document analysis and classroom observation. The researcher collected students' final versions of job application letters submitted at the end of the learning unit. Classroom observations were conducted to observe the teaching process, including instructional strategies, classroom activities, and lecturer explanations related to job application letter writing.

Research Instruments

The main research instrument of this study was an analytic writing assessment rubric used to evaluate students' job application letters. The rubric was adapted from established ESL writing assessment frameworks proposed by Jacobs et al. (1981) and Weigle (2002) and adjusted to the characteristics of professional correspondence based on Bhatia (1993) and Hyland (2004).

The rubric assessed four main aspects of writing outcomes: content relevance, completeness of letter structure, organization, and use of formal English. These aspects were selected to reflect appropriate language use and genre appropriateness. Each aspect was scored analytically to provide a detailed description of students' writing performance.

An observation checklist was used as a supporting instrument to document classroom activities during the teaching and learning process. The checklist focused on teaching procedures, students' participation, and instructional activities related to job application letter writing. This instrument was employed to provide contextual information supporting the analysis of students' writing outcomes (Creswell, 2014; Ary et al., 2010).

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. Students' job application letters were carefully read and analyzed based on the assessment rubric. The results were categorized according to each writing aspect and interpreted to describe students' overall writing outcomes. Data from classroom observations were analyzed to support and clarify the findings from the document analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

Results

This chapter presents the findings of the study concerning students' writing outcomes in writing job application letters after receiving instruction in the English Correspondence course. The data were obtained from 22 job application letters written by students from non-English departments, collected as final writing products at the end of the instructional unit.

Students' writing outcomes were analyzed using an analytic writing assessment rubric adapted from established ESL writing assessment frameworks proposed by Jacobs et al. (1981) and Weigle (2002), and adjusted to the characteristics of professional correspondence based on genre analysis theories by Bhatia (1993) and Hyland (2004) that focusing on content relevance, completeness of letter structure, organization, and use of formal English. To strengthen the empirical nature of the findings, representative excerpts from students' letters are presented to illustrate actual writing performance.

Table 1. Analytic Writing Assessment Rubric for Job Application Letter.

No	Writing Aspect	Score 4 (Very Good)	Score 3 (Good)	Score 2 (Fair)	Score 1 (Poor)
1	Content Relevance	The content is highly relevant to the job position. The applicant's qualifications, skills, and purpose are clearly stated and well developed.	The content is relevant, but some information is not fully developed or lacks detail.	The content is partially relevant. Important information is missing or unclear.	The content is mostly irrelevant to the job position and does not clearly present the applicant's purpose.
2	Completeness of Letter Structure	All essential components of a job application letter (heading, salutation, opening, body, closing, complimentary close, and signature) are	Most components are present, but one or two parts are incomplete or less appropriate.	Several important components are missing or improperly written.	The letter structure is incomplete and does not follow the standard format of a job application letter.

		complete and correctly used.			
3	Organization	The letter is well organized with clear paragraphing and logical flow of ideas. Transitions between ideas are smooth and effective.	The letter is generally well organized, but some ideas are not clearly connected.	The organization is weak, with unclear paragraphing and limited logical flow.	The letter lacks clear organization and ideas are poorly arranged.
4	Use of Formal English	The language is consistently formal and appropriate for professional correspondence. Word choice and sentence structures effectively convey professionalism.	The language is mostly formal, with minor inappropriate expressions or informal elements.	The language shows frequent inappropriate or informal expressions that reduce professionalism.	The language is largely inappropriate for a formal job application letter.

Figu

Writing Outcomes Based on Content Relevance

The analysis indicates that most students demonstrated good content relevance in their job application letters. The majority of students clearly stated the job position applied for and attempted to relate their educational background and skills to the job requirements.

For example, a student applying for a legal staff position wrote:

"*I am a graduate of Law who has experience in handling legal documents, assisting legal administration, and supporting compliance activities.*"

Another student applying for an investment-related position stated:

"*I have strong analytical skills and knowledge of financial reporting which I believe are relevant to the position of Investment Staff.*"

These excerpts show that students were generally able to identify and include information relevant to the job vacancy. However, although the content was relevant, some students provided only brief descriptions of their qualifications without further explanation. For instance, one student wrote:

"*I have good communication skills and teamwork ability.*"

This statement lacks elaboration and does not clearly explain how the skills relate to the job position. Overall, students demonstrated awareness of relevant content, but many still needed guidance in developing their ideas more thoroughly.

Writing Outcomes Based on Completeness of Letter Structure

Completeness of letter structure emerged as the strongest aspect of students' writing outcomes. Most of the 22 students were able to include the essential components of a job application letter, such as the heading, salutation, opening paragraph, body paragraph(s), closing paragraph, complimentary close, and signature.

For example, one student began the letter with:

"*I am writing to apply for the position of Junior Associate as advertised.*"

The letter then continued with a body paragraph describing qualifications and ended with a polite closing:

"*Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.*"

Another student also included a reference line indicating the position applied for, showing an understanding of professional letter conventions. Although a few letters contained minor structural issues, such as incomplete headings or unclear closings, overall structural completeness was consistently achieved.

Writing Outcomes Based on Organization

Despite generally good performance in structure, organization was identified as a weaker aspect of students' writing outcomes. While most students divided their letters into paragraphs, the logical flow of ideas was not always well developed.

For example, one student wrote:

"I graduated from Stekom University majoring in Law. I have good communication skills and I am interested in this position. Thank you for your attention."

This excerpt illustrates abrupt transitions between ideas, resulting in limited coherence. In contrast, another student demonstrated better organization by separating the introduction, qualification description, and closing into distinct paragraphs:

"I am writing to apply for the position of Legal Staff.
I graduated from the Faculty of Law and have experience in legal documentation and administration.
I would be grateful for the opportunity to attend an interview."

These variations indicate that students' organizational skills were uneven and still required improvement, particularly in developing smooth transitions and logical sequencing.

Writing Outcomes Based on Use of Formal English

In terms of language use, most students attempted to apply formal English and polite expressions appropriate for professional correspondence. Frequently used expressions included *"I would like to apply for the position of…"* and *"Thank you for your consideration."*

For example, one student wrote:

"I would be grateful if I could be given the opportunity to attend an interview to further explain my qualifications."

This sentence demonstrates appropriate use of formal English. However, grammatical inaccuracies were still found in several letters. Some students showed inconsistency in verb tense and sentence structure, as seen in the following excerpt:

"I am graduated from Law Department and have experience handle legal documents."

Such errors affected clarity and professionalism, indicating that students' control of formal English still needs improvement.

Summary of Students' Writing Outcomes

Overall, the findings from the analysis of the 22 students' job application letters indicate that students achieved generally good writing outcomes after completing the English Correspondence course. The strongest aspect was completeness of letter structure, while organization and language accuracy remained areas requiring further development.

Discussion

The findings support genre-based writing theory, which emphasizes the importance of explicit instruction on text structure and communicative purpose (Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2004). The students' strong performance in letter structure indicates that teaching formal conventions helped them produce structurally acceptable job application letters.

However, the organizational difficulties identified in several letters align with previous studies suggesting that EFL learners often struggle with coherence and idea development (Weigle, 2002). Similarly, the grammatical inaccuracies observed in students' writing support Jacobs et al. (1981), who emphasize that language accuracy is a crucial component of writing quality.

By examining writing outcomes holistically rather than focusing solely on errors, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of students' writing competence and offers insights for improving instructional practices in English Correspondence courses.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to describe students' writing outcomes in writing job application letters after receiving instruction in the English Correspondence course. Using a descriptive qualitative research design, the study analyzed students' final written products based on an analytic writing assessment rubric focusing on content relevance, completeness of letter structure, organization, and use of formal English.

The findings indicate that students generally demonstrated good writing outcomes in writing job application letters. The strongest aspect identified was the completeness of letter structure, suggesting that explicit instruction on genre conventions helped students understand and apply the standard components of a job application letter. This result supports genre-based writing theories which emphasize that awareness of text structure and communicative purpose improves learners' writing performance (Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2004).

Students also showed relatively good performance in content relevance. Most students were able to include appropriate information related to the job position and present their

qualifications clearly. This finding aligns with Hyland (2004), who states that effective genre instruction enables learners to produce texts that are relevant to their communicative goals and audience expectations.

In terms of use of formal English, students attempted to apply polite expressions and formal language appropriate for professional correspondence. However, grammatical errors and inappropriate word choices were still found in several letters. This supports Jacobs et al. (1981) and Weigle (2002), who argue that language accuracy remains a major challenge for EFL learners, even when they are familiar with text format and purpose.

The weakest aspect observed in this study was organization. Some students experienced difficulties in arranging ideas coherently and developing smooth transitions between paragraphs. This finding is consistent with Weigle (2002), who notes that organizing ideas logically is one of the most complex aspects of second language writing.

Rather than focusing solely on error identification, this study examined students' writing outcomes holistically. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of students' writing competence and the effectiveness of instructional practices, as suggested by Tribble (1996) and Hyland (2004). Overall, the study concludes that the English Correspondence course contributed positively to students' ability to write job application letters, although further improvement is needed in idea organization and language accuracy.

Suggestions

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several suggestions are proposed:

1. For Lecturers

   Lecturers are encouraged to maintain explicit instruction on job application letter structure while placing greater emphasis on teaching idea organization and coherence. Providing guided writing activities, model analysis, and detailed feedback on students' drafts may help improve students' writing outcomes.

2. For Students

   Students are advised to practice writing job application letters regularly and pay more attention to organizing ideas logically and using formal English accurately. Revising drafts based on feedback can help improve overall writing quality.

3. For Future Researchers

   Future studies may expand this research by involving larger samples or employing mixed-method designs. Researchers may also combine writing outcomes analysis with error analysis or investigate the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies in improving job application letter writing.

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