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# ANALYSIS ON ERRORS IN APPLICATION LETTERS OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN DAVAO DEL NORTE

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## ABSTRACT

*This qualitative-corpora analysis aimed to analyze and understand the different errors committed by students in writing application letters from selected higher education institutions in Davao del Norte. Also, it aimed to determine the types and frequency of errors they committed. The study utilized the linguistic framework of Ferris's (2005) Category of Errors. Results show that all four categories of errors are found in the application letters of the students. Specifically, lexical errors are the most common category of errors committed by the students, followed by mechanical errors and morphological errors, while syntactical errors are the least committed error. The study recommended that students should engage more in business writing activities, specifically the appropriate word usage, vocabulary, and certain grammatical concepts. Consequently, students should also focus on the mechanical aspects of business writing, as these aspects are crucial for readability and coherence of ideas. Although morphological and syntactical errors are less seen in the application letters of students, it is still essential to re-educate and equip students with word formation and sentence construction skills to master these concepts and further minimize the likelihood of committing these errors. With this, students can primarily improve their business writing skills and be better prepared for their professional careers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Business Writing, Error Analysis, Application Letters, Higher Education Institutions, Davao Del Norte*

## INTRODUCTION

Business writing is pivotal in today's industry since internal and external communication demands rely on written correspondence (Shruthi et al., 2024). However, a broad possibility of committing errors may occur during the writing process due to its highly formal and technical nature, insufficient knowledge, and other innate factors (Corder, 1987, as cited in Gomez, 2022). Studies by Karnedi (2025), Patarapongsanti et al. (2022), and Kaur and Singh (2013) reported students in higher education institutions committing errors in writing letters and business-related paragraphs.

In the Philippines, university students committed errors in verb tenses and subject-verb agreement irrespective of the type of correspondence written whether it is a letter of inquiry, a follow-up letter, or a letter of order (Flora & De Vera, 2019). Consequently, Gomez (2022) also revealed that most students at the University of Mindanao committed errors in punctuation marks, diction, subject-verb agreement, spelling, capitalization, and contraction in writing their business letters.

There is an urgency to conduct the study to analyze and understand the errors committed by students in higher education institutions in writing application letters. This could help students improve their business writing skills and produce quality application letters for better professional opportunities. This research work has enormous social significance, since by examining the errors present in the application letters of the students, it could provide valuable insights to educators and policymakers, enabling them to enhance writing instruction and support the advancement of students' business writing abilities in higher education settings.

### Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study employed error analysis to analyze and understand the different errors committed by students and determine the common types of errors, alongside their frequency in writing application letters of students from selected higher education institutions in Davao del Norte.

### Research Questions

1. What are the common types of errors found in application letters written by students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)?
2. What is the frequency of errors observed in the application letters written by students in HEIs?

### Theoretical Lens

This study was seen through the lens of Ferris's (2005) Category of Errors, offering a systematic foundation for categorizing various errors made by students from higher education institutions as depicted on their application letters. Ferris's (2005) error classification is classified into four error domains: morphological, syntactic, lexical, and mechanical error, each comprising particular sub-categories.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative, specifically using error analysis. Qualitative research is a naturalistic form of inquiry that focuses on information that is not numerical, aiming to comprehend and explore the ideas and experiences of participants which can be gathered through observations, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and written documents (Nassaji, 2020; Tiwari, 2022). Using error analysis, the study focused on analyzing and understanding the errors found in the written application letters of students in higher education institutions in Davao del Norte. This error analysis aimed to analyze the student's errors in

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language learning and classify these errors, revealing what works in the system (Corder, 1981, as cited in Uka et al., 2023).

**Research Material**

The corpora of the study were the 100 written application letters from the three selected higher education institutions in Davao del Norte. The number of application letters conforms with Braun and Clarke (2013), who stated that a study should have between 10 and 100 corpora to yield significant results. Hence, 100 application letters are deemed sufficient and are already a substantial amount of data that can accommodate the necessary data that the researcher needs for the study.

In selecting the research materials for this study, the following inclusion criteria were adhered to: a) must have application letters only as corpora of the study; b) must be written by first-year students enrolled under the Purposive Communication subject; c) must be written inside the classroom setting as monitored by the Purposive Communication instructor and the researcher; and d) must be written twice or in two phases: the pre-writing and writing phase and the post-writing phase.

**Data Analysis**

This study followed James's data analysis process (2013, as cited in Agustinasari et al., 2022), which involves detecting, locating, describing, and classifying errors to gather data, extract meaning, and form implications based on the results. In analyzing the errors found in the application letters of the students, Ferris's (2005) Category of Errors was utilized. Ferris's error framework consists of four major categories, which include morphological, syntactical, lexical, and mechanical errors. Morphological errors comprise errors in verbs, nouns, articles, and determiners. Syntactical errors include errors in word order, run-on sentences, fragments, and comma splices. Lexical errors entail errors in word choice, prepositions, and pronouns. Mechanical errors pertain to errors in punctuation marks, capitalization, and spelling.

## RESULTS

### Common Types of Errors Found in Business Letters Written by Students in Higher Education Institutions

**Lexical Errors**

Lexical errors typically involve issues related to word usage, particularly word choice, prepositions, and pronoun errors. This is the most common error observed and manifested in the application letters of the students, with word choice as the highest frequency, which signifies that most of the students had difficulty in using appropriate and formal words. For instance, the use of the phrase "fresh graduate", instead of "recent graduate," "your" instead of "you are", and the word contraction "I'm" instead of "I am" affect the accuracy, tone, and objectivity of the business letter. Consequently, preposition error ranked as the second common error, followed by pronoun error, characterized by students having faulty, missing, or unnecessary prepositions and incorrect pronoun-antecedents in the sentence. These errors affect the letter's tone and objectivity, hampering comprehension.

**Mechanical Errors**

Mechanical errors include errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, as depicted in the application letters of the students. This is the second most common error, with punctuation errors being the most frequent error in this category. Punctuation errors involve the omission of punctuation marks, the addition of unnecessary punctuation marks, and the incorrect use of punctuation marks, which often involve commas and periods. For example, the address "Prk. 4E Apokon Tagum City" which lacks a comma for each distinct element, omission of comma before the direct address "Greetings to you Sir Jeffrey," and omission of comma before each introductory phrase "If you hire me I will do my best to improve and provide happiness to my future students." Meanwhile, the second common error in this category is the punctuation error, followed by the capitalization error. These mechanical errors affect the readability and coherence of ideas in the sentences.

**Morphological Errors**

Morphological errors refer to errors in the formation of the word, which is considered the third most common error in the application letters of students. These errors occur when students fail to utilize the correct verb tense, verb form, articles/determiners, affecting the general intended message. Of these subcategories, verb errors ranked first, followed by article/determiners and noun errors, respectively. In this study, students mostly committed unnecessary, missing, or incorrect verbs in their application letters. Examples include "I am graduated," "I hope this letter find you well," and "I heard that your institution are" exhibit verb errors since the first sample, has an unnecessary linking verb "am." In contrast, the second and third samples exhibit incorrect subject-verb agreement. Addressing these errors results in a more logical, comprehensive, and saleable application letter.

**Syntactical Errors**

Syntactical errors typically occur due to students having difficulty with the structure of the sentence. It consists of word order, run-ons, comma splices, and fragments. Of these four subcategories, the most manifested errors are word order errors, characterized by the incorrect or awkward arrangement of the words in the sentence, affecting its organization. For instance, "if do you have," "freind teacher," and "I graduated with Latin honors recently." The first sample shows word order error since indirect questions introduced by if follow a subject-verb order, not the question form, while the second and third samples are due to the incorrect placement of the descriptor "friend" and the incorrect placement of the adverb "recently," which should be placed before the verb "graduated. These word order errors change the overall meaning of the sentence, which confuses the readers.

### Frequency of Errors Observed in the Application Letters Written by Students in HEIs

A thorough analysis of application letters of students in higher education institutions identified 1,1992 total errors for the four categories. Lexical errors were the most common (468 instances), indicating challenges in choosing appropriate and formal words to uphold objectivity and support the standard tone in writing application letters. Mechanical errors were also

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prevalent (296 instances), indicating instances where students failed to use punctuation marks, capitalization, and spelling correctly. Morphological errors (283 instances), though fewer, showed a tendency where students used incorrect verb tenses, verb forms, and unnecessary/incorrect articles/determiners, and nouns, impacting overall comprehension of the intended message. Syntactical errors (145), though least frequent, emphasized the significance of logical arrangement and placement of words in the sentence for maintaining logical flow. These findings emphasize the necessity of aligning instruction to the needs and weaknesses of the students in their writing skills, highlighting both grammatical rules and relevance in the real-world context. Further research could explore targeted classroom interventions to address these difficulties and improve students' confidence and writing skills in writing quality application letters.

## DISCUSSIONS

### Common Types of Errors Found in Business Letters Written by Students in Higher Education Institutions

#### Lexical Errors

The analysis of lexical errors found in the application letters of the students revealed that they have difficulty in using appropriate words in context, considering the formal nature and standard of business writing. Specifically, word choice errors are the most frequent errors in this category, as also noted in Amnuai's (2020) study, which emphasizes that students inappropriately employed correct or suitable words in their written outputs. This difficulty stems from students' insufficient vocabulary foundation, usage of words with loaded language, jargon, or technical terms, as well as contractions and language unsuitable for business letter writing, resulting in incorrect word meanings, redundancy, awkward phrasing, and wordiness that affect sentence expression and clarity (Nila, 2017). Similarly, the findings of Murillo and Talili (2016) and Caudilla (2019) also revealed that lexical errors occur due to the students' inappropriate use of words in the content that gives meaning, rooted in the students' poor foundation of vocabulary in the second language.

#### Mechanical Errors

The analysis of mechanical errors shows the difficulties that students in higher education institutions face in using appropriate punctuation marks, capitalization, and spelling in writing application letters. Mechanical errors likely occurred because students are often more concerned with content rather than form and technicalities (Antonio & Briones, 2022). Specifically, in this study, punctuation errors are the most prevalent, followed by capitalization and spelling errors, characterized by the misuse, omission, and incorrect use of commas and periods, similar to the findings of Patarapongsanti et al. (2022) and Gomez (2022). Moreover, mechanical errors are likely to occur due to the student's insufficient knowledge of punctuation, ignorance of capitalization rules, as well as limited vocabulary, resulting in misspelling of words (Mertosono & Erniwati, 2023). Further, due to the limited vocabulary of the students, spelling complex or unfamiliar words results in students incorrectly spelling the words in the sentence (Caudilla, 2019).

#### Morphological Errors

The analysis reveals the prevalence of morphological errors where students committed errors in the formation of the word and its flawed components characterized by the omission of unnecessary and incorrect verb tenses, verb forms, articles/determiners, and nouns in the sentences. Abie and Asefa (2019) revealed that morphological errors are the most common errors committed by students in their paragraph writing, with verb errors as the most frequent, as students failed to maintain correct subject-verb agreement, affecting the overall meaning of the sentence. Munder (2024) affirmed that verb errors are one of the most common errors committed by 100 ESL students in their written work, emphasizing the challenge students face in using appropriate verbs in the sentence, which stems from insufficient knowledge of English grammatical rules. Addressing this, students should be educated on the rules of subject-verb agreement for correct word formation, for correct sentence construction, and to avoid confusion (Caudilla, 2019).

#### Syntactical Errors

The error analysis shows syntactical errors among students in higher education institutions, where sentence structure is problematic, resulting in awkward phrasing, confusing expressions, and incorrect sentence constructions. Results from the study revealed that the most frequent errors were word order errors, followed by run-on sentences, fragments, and comma splices. This finding is consistent with Abie and Asefa (2019), highlighting word errors or incorrect placement of words in the sentence as the most manifested errors in the written works of the students, thereby recommending them to be re-educated with the appropriate sentence pattern for correct and grammatical sentence construction. Similarly, Febrianti and Said (2022) asserted that students had severe difficulty in the correct order and placement of words in a sentence to convey a meaningful message. Addressing this, students should be taught explicitly the rules for the correct use of words following English syntax for sentence clarity, coherence, and comprehensiveness (Mazur, 2023).

### Implications for Teaching Practice

Based on the analysis of common writing errors in students' application letters, devising interventions, creating foundational content, and improving teaching methodologies are crucial to enhancing their business writing skills. This process begins with diagnostic assessments to identify areas for improvement, followed by tailored interventions to address these issues. This approach is crucial in nurturing enhanced business writing proficiency among students in higher education institutions.

The findings in this study serve as an avenue for higher education institution teachers to assess the progress of students' business writing skills, as well as identify their weaknesses or problems in writing business letters. Through this, teachers can devise targeted writing instruction, create effective error-correction strategies, and incorporate relevant teaching-learning strategies tailored to the students' needs and the demands of the business industry, thereby enhancing their business writing skills for both academic and professional purposes.

This study could also greatly benefit students at higher education institutions, as it will provide comprehensive insights into their business writing challenges, which could boost their

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confidence in their business writing and communication skills, leading to greater career opportunities after completing their academic journey. Likewise, to further support and improve the students' business writing skills, they are encouraged to maintain writing journals or personal blogs, providing a regular platform for learning from their writing errors, practicing, and applying their newly acquired language skills.

The results of this study could also benefit other stakeholders, including school administrators and policymakers, since this could help them gain an understanding of the students' business writing skills and utilize the data from this study for curriculum development, focusing on academic programs that address critical gaps in writing effective business letters. Further, they could also spearhead efforts to enhance business writing instruction and support the advancement of students' business writing skills in higher education. In this way, it could help in producing graduates better equipped for professional communication.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

It is recommended that this study be conducted with a larger number of participants across various programs in multiple institutions. It is also suggested to incorporate and use a different methodology. Future researchers can utilize qualitative discourse analysis to conduct an in-depth and comprehensive examination of errors. Significantly, future researchers should also include an analysis of the causes and sources of errors committed by students of higher education institutions in their business writing, considering different types of business correspondence. Future studies should look beyond errors identified in Ferris's framework since language use is dynamic and context-dependent; hence, errors may vary from the existing framework. Finally, it is recommended that future researchers also incorporate a contextualized intervention plan after errors have been determined for students to minimize committing such writing errors and further improve their writing skills. Therefore, dedicating resources to this endeavor significantly enhances educational outcomes and promotes the holistic development of students' business writing skills.

**Concluding Remarks**

All the participants committed errors in their written application letters. It encompasses the belief that errors in English language learning, particularly in business letter writing, are inevitable due to its highly formal and technical nature, insufficient knowledge, and other innate factors. With lexical errors as the most common errors, this highlights the critical need for targeted instruction on appropriate word usage, supplemental vocabulary instruction, and correct grammatical concepts. Also, mechanical errors, classified as the second most common errors, imply that form should be considered as it affects the readability and coherence of ideas in the sentences. Moreover, the third most common errors are morphological errors, consisting of verbs, articles/determiners, and noun errors. In contrast, the least frequent, Moreover, although morphological and syntactical errors are less frequent in the application letters of the students, it is still essential to re-educate and equip students with word formation, specifically verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and sentence construction, to master these concepts and further minimize committing these errors. By implementing these instructional strategies and targeted instructions, instructors in higher education institutions can assist students in developing their business writing competence and English proficiency, enabling them to communicate effectively in written form and increasing their employment chances in the future. Generally, the errors committed by the students prove that there is a need to enhance their business writing skills further to cope with today's academic and industry demands.

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