




Research Article

Examining University Students' Business English Writing Performance: Frequent Errors and Pitfalls

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31963/rial.v2i2.4446>

Received: 24/09/2023

Revised: 20/07/2024

Accepted: 21/07/2024

ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the common writing errors made by college students in business English writing and investigate the contributing factors. The study employed a mixed-method approach to comprehensively analyze writing errors in the business English context. The research population comprised college students enrolled in Writing for Business Communication courses at Universitas Sulawesi Barat, with a sample of 100 students majoring in English education. The findings highlighted content errors, organization challenges, vocabulary issues, language use discrepancies, and mechanics errors in their writing. The most common errors encompassed grammatical errors in language use (48%), errors in conveying business messages in content (45%), and document structural errors in organization (38%). Moreover, the study identified several significant factors contributing to these writing errors, including a lack of practice, a limited understanding of business concepts, resource limitations, inadequate feedback, and time constraints. This study underscores the importance of addressing these specific writing challenges in business English education, offering insights for educators to develop targeted strategies and materials. It also contributes to the broader field by highlighting the unique errors within business English writing and emphasizing the need for specialized instruction. Ultimately, this research informs both pedagogical approaches and students' preparation for future careers in the globalized business environment.

Keywords: *Business English, EFL Students, Error Analysis, ESP, Writing Skill*

To cite this article: Isma, A., Putri, A. M. J., Sardi, Ahmed (2024). *Examining University Students' Business English Writing Performance: Frequent Errors and Pitfalls*. Research and Innovation in Applied Linguistics [RIAL], Vol 2 (2), 79-94. <https://doi.org/10.31963/rial.v2i2.4446>

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INTRODUCTION

The realm of business communication is marked by its reliance on effective written communication as a cornerstone of professional success (Chan, 2006; Isma, Rasmin, Hutauruk, et al., 2023; Klimova et al., 2019). In the globalized world of today, proficiency in Business English writing is a vital skill that college students must acquire to prepare themselves for the challenges of the corporate landscape (AlAfnan et al., 2024; Isma, Hermansyah, et al., 2023; Zhang, 2013). The ability to convey ideas, negotiate, and make a lasting impression through well-structured and error-free written documents is an essential competency for future business leaders and professionals.

Business English, often referred to as "the language of commerce," is a specialized form of English tailored to meet the demands of the corporate world (Chibi, 2018; Nickerson & Planken, 2016; Para, 2015). It encompasses a wide range of written communication, including advertisements, CVs, emails, business reports, application letters, etc. (Tenieshvili, 2023; Yingying, 2020). Each of these documents serves a distinct purpose in the professional arena, from marketing products and services to securing employment opportunities and conveying critical information within organizations. The ability to craft these documents effectively is pivotal for individuals seeking success in their careers.

"Professionalism in business English writing lies on how careful and detailed we are in mitigating common errors"

However, the process of mastering Business English writing can be arduous for college students (Liu et al., 2022; Sun & Fan, 2022; Tsai, 2021; Zhonggen & Guifang, 2016), many of whom are non-native English speakers. Even native speakers may struggle when adapting their general writing skills to meet the demands of a business context. As a result, a multitude of writing errors often plague these documents, ranging from issues with content and organization to vocabulary selection, language use, and mechanical errors (Cahya et al., 2023; Isma, 2018; Isma, Basri, et al., 2024; Isma, Lestari, et al., 2024; Isma, Rasmin, & Samsudin, 2023). These errors not only hinder effective communication but also reflect negatively on the professionalism of the individuals and organizations involved (Isma & Baharuddin, 2022).

Despite the evident importance of Business English writing skills, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding an in-depth analysis of the common errors made by college students in this domain (Tsai, 2021). While various studies have explored writing errors in general English contexts (e.g., Almusharraf & Alotaibi, 2023; Dobrić et al., 2021; Jawad & Mansour, 2021; Özkayran & Yılmaz, 2020; Yang, 2019), there is a limited focus on the specific challenges posed by Business English writing, especially in the Indonesian EFL context. This study seeks to address these gaps by providing a meticulous examination of the errors encountered in various forms of Business English writing, shedding light on their origins, and proposing avenues for improvement.

The primary objective of this study is to delve deep into the realm of Business English writing by conducting a meticulous analysis of common errors made by college students. To guide our exploration of Business English writing errors, this study addresses the following questions: (1) What are the common errors made by college students in Business English writing? (2) What factors contribute to these writing errors among college students studying Business English? Specifically, this study aims to: (1) Identify the common errors made by college students in Business English writing, and (2) Investigate the factors that contribute to these writing errors.

This study contributes to the field of English language teaching in several ways. First, it adds a substantial body of knowledge to the relatively understudied area of Business English writing errors. By categorizing and analyzing these errors, the paper offers a comprehensive overview that can serve as a foundation for the development of targeted teaching materials and pedagogical approaches. English language educators can use these resources to design more effective curricula that specifically address the needs of students preparing for careers in the business world.

Moreover, understanding the underlying factors contributing to these mistakes is crucial for educators. It enables them to not only correct errors but also prevent them by addressing the root causes. This preventative approach can lead to more sustainable improvements in students' Business English writing skills. In addition, the findings of this study have the potential to inform the development of automated writing evaluation tools tailored for Business English. These tools can provide immediate feedback to students, helping them identify and rectify errors in real time, further enhancing the efficiency of English language teaching in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Business English Writing

Business English writing is a specialized form of written communication tailored to meet the demands of the corporate and professional world (Liu et al., 2022; Nickerson, 2022; Sun & Fan, 2022; Tsai, 2021). It encompasses a wide array of written documents used for various purposes, such as conveying information, making persuasive arguments, and fostering effective communication within and outside organizations (Bazerman, 2020; Chibi, 2018; Isma & Baharuddin, 2022; Klimova et al., 2019; Uccelli et al., 2012). Business English writing is characterized by its precision, clarity, and conciseness (Yingying, 2020). It serves as a critical tool for professionals across industries, including marketing, finance, human resources, and management, allowing them to communicate effectively with clients, colleagues, superiors, and other stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2020; Hargie et al., 2004; Klimova et al., 2019).

Business English writing includes a diverse range of documents (Nickerson & Planken, 2016; Tenieshvili, 2023; Yingying, 2020; Zhang, 2013), such as:

1. Advertisements: Used to promote products, services, or events, advertisements require concise and persuasive language to attract customers and convey key information effectively.
2. Curriculum Vitae (CVs) and Resumes: These documents are essential for job seekers, serving as a professional snapshot of one's qualifications, experiences, and skills. Effective CVs and resumes can significantly impact the chances of securing employment opportunities.
3. Emails: Business emails are ubiquitous communication within organizations and with external partners. They demand clarity, professionalism, and brevity to ensure efficient communication.
4. Business Reports: Reports are vital for presenting data, findings, and recommendations within organizations. They require careful organization, data analysis, and clear communication of insights.
5. Application Letters: Application letters are often used to apply for jobs or internships. They should effectively express the applicant's interest, qualifications, and suitability for the position.
6. Memorandums (Memos): Memos are used for internal communication within an organization. They are typically concise and provide essential information or instructions to employees.
7. Business Proposals: Proposals are crucial in the context of business negotiations and partnerships. They need to be persuasive, well-structured, and detail-oriented.

Related Literature on Writing Errors and Business English

Here are some related studies on writing errors and business English:

First, a study by Almusharraf & Alotaibi (2023) investigated the effectiveness of Grammarly, an automated essay scoring (AES) system, compared to human raters in evaluating 197 essays written by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. By applying Corder's error analysis method, the study quantitatively assesses writing errors. The analysis reveals a moderate correlation between human raters and AES regarding total scores and error detection. Notably, AES identifies more errors than human raters and tends to assign lower scores. These findings suggest the potential value of AES systems for EFL writing assessment, highlighting their role in supporting teachers in evaluating students' work more consistently and objectively.

Second, Ngarsou (2022) conducted an experiment involving ten randomly selected students divided into control and treatment groups. Both groups were tasked with writing compositions on the same topic, and their results were compared. The control group showed that the most prevalent errors among learners were spelling (24.24%), word choice (15.15%), and adjective-related errors (12.12%). Overall, the study suggests that even with appropriate instruction, learners of English as a foreign language still make writing errors, highlighting the challenges in achieving error-free writing proficiency.

Third, Antonio & Briones (2022) examined students' business writing skills, stressing the importance of clarity and conciseness to prevent miscommunication. Focusing on student-leaders in a college of education, it identifies common letter types, analyzes linguistic errors in mechanics, morphology, lexicon, and syntax, and assesses competency in business writing format and content. Despite self-perceived competency, students make errors in punctuation, sentence structure, and word choice. The study aims to create innovative instructional materials based on findings to enhance future student-leaders' skills. Further research will evaluate the practicality of these materials, ensuring their usefulness for present and future students.

Furthermore, the study by Omar & Barzani (2022) aimed to analyze writing errors made by third-year Kurdish EFL students at Cihan University in Duhok, Iraq. The research involved 37 participants who took a poetry midterm exam, with their responses serving as data. Eight types of errors were identified: spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization, prepositions, verb misuse, and pronoun misuse. Punctuation and capitalization errors were the most common among the Kurdish learners. These findings are valuable for EFL teachers, highlighting the need to address these specific errors and use them as pedagogical insights when designing instructional activities to enhance writing skills.

Moreover, Dobrić et al. (2021) delved into the intricacies of task difficulty in Applied Linguistics, an area with limited empirical research. It explores various methods for defining task difficulty, with a focus on objective measures like performance ratings and error counts as indicators. The study analyzes errors using the scope-substance error taxonomy in writing assessments from the Slovene General Matura examination in English. Findings reveal that most errors occur at the word and phrase level, and error frequency tends to decrease with improved writing proficiency. However, punctuation errors increase in prominence at higher proficiency levels. These results have implications for assessment, rating scale development, rater training, and effective teaching strategies, offering insights into task difficulty factors across various tasks.

In addition, a study by Jawad & Mansour (2021) investigated grammatical errors in written English by Libyan EFL students, particularly those influenced by Arabic as their first language. Grammatical errors significantly impact EFL writing, with previous studies highlighting the role of L1 interference. This study delves into EFL learners' error patterns and assesses if time spent learning and using English in daily life correlates with reduced errors. Data from 30 participants at Kufrah-Benghazi University reveals 205 errors in areas like articles, word/verb forms, and prepositions. Errors are more common among learners with less exposure to English and suggest direct translation from Arabic. The study recommends teaching strategies to mitigate such errors.

These studies collectively emphasize the significance of addressing writing errors in EFL contexts, whether in general writing or specialized fields like Business English. They also underscore the potential of technology, like AES systems, in aiding assessment and the ongoing challenges students face in achieving error-free writing proficiency. The proposed

study aims to contribute to this area of research by focusing on specific Business English writing challenges in an Indonesian EFL context.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method approach within the descriptive study design (Creswell & Clark, 2018). It combines quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively analyze common writing errors in Business English among college students. The quantitative aspect involves the systematic examination of written documents to identify errors quantitatively. The qualitative component delves into the underlying causes of these errors through interviews to gain deeper insights into the challenges faced by students in the business writing context.

Participants

The study's population comprises college students enrolled in Writing for Business Communication courses at Universitas Sulawesi Barat. The research sample consists of 100 college students majoring in English Education.

Research Instrument

Research instruments used document analysis and interviews. To quantify writing errors, a standardized rubric was developed to assess various types of errors. The rubric was designed based on five key areas of writing assessment: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Each area was evaluated on a 4-point scale (1-4), with specific descriptors for each level. A score of 1 indicates significant errors or inadequacies, while a score of 4 represents excellent performance with minimal to no errors. A random selection of written documents, including essays, reports, and emails, was evaluated using this rubric.

Data Analysis

The analysis focused on content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics errors. Furthermore, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of participants to explore the underlying reasons for writing errors and gather qualitative insights into their experiences and perceptions. Data analysis used both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Quantitative data from the document was analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to quantify the types and frequencies of writing errors. Meanwhile, qualitative data from interviews was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Emerging themes related to the underlying causes of writing errors and students' perceptions of these challenges were identified.

FINDINGS

Overview of Writing Errors in Business English Writing

The following table summarizes the research findings:

Table 1.

Writing errors in business English writing

Category	Errors	Percentage	Explanation
Content	Conveying Business Messages	45%	Many students struggle to formulate clear and concise business messages, leading to ambiguity in their writing. Common issues include vague language, lack of definition for key terms, and omission of crucial details. These errors impact the document's persuasiveness and effectiveness.
	Conveying Accurate Information	30%	Inaccuracies in information presentation are prevalent, often stemming from inadequate research or misinterpretation of data. Factual errors, such as incorrect statistics or outdated information, affect the document's credibility in a business context.
Organization	Document Structure	38%	Many students struggle with document structure, resulting in inconsistent formatting, inappropriate sectioning, or unclear organization. This affects the document's readability and efficiency in conveying information.
	Logical Flow of Ideas	27%	Errors in the logical flow of ideas are common, leading to a lack of coherence and cohesion in writing. Students often struggle to connect ideas, resulting in disjointed content that hinders the reader's understanding and engagement.
Vocabulary	Vocabulary Choice	22%	Vocabulary choice errors are frequent, with students sometimes using inappropriate or unfamiliar words or phrases. This can lead to misunderstandings and affect the professionalism of the document.
Language Use	Grammatical	48%	Grammatical errors are widespread, including issues with verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure. These errors hinder the clarity and coherence of the writing.
	Style and Tone	18%	Style and tone errors are observed, with students occasionally using an overly formal or informal tone. These errors can impact the document's appropriateness for the intended audience and context.
Mechanics	Spelling and Punctuation	25%	Spelling and punctuation errors are common, affecting the overall readability and professionalism of the writing. These errors may lead to misunderstandings and distract the reader.

The research findings reveal several significant patterns of common errors in Business English writing among college students. Firstly, within the category of content errors, two predominant types stand out. Errors in Conveying Business Messages, constituting 45% of the total findings, signify that students often grapple with the task of articulating clear and concise business messages, leading to ambiguity in their written communication. Furthermore, Errors in Conveying Accurate Information, accounting for 30%, often arise due to inadequate research or misinterpretation of data, resulting in factual inaccuracies that can

undermine the credibility of the documents. In terms of organization errors, it becomes evident that students encounter notable challenges. Errors in Document Structure, found in 38% of the instances, reflect difficulties in achieving consistent formatting and clear document organization, potentially hindering readability and the effective conveyance of information. Concurrently, Errors in the Logical Flow of Ideas, constituting 27%, indicate that students struggle to create coherent and cohesive narratives, leading to disjointed content that may perplex readers.

Additionally, vocabulary errors are present in 22% of the cases, with students sometimes employing inappropriate or unfamiliar words or phrases, thereby jeopardizing the clarity and professionalism of their documents. In the realm of language use errors, grammatical errors dominate, comprising 48% of the total findings. These errors encompass issues related to verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure, collectively undermining the overall coherence and clarity of the writing. Furthermore, 18% of the findings pertain to Errors in Style and Tone, where students occasionally adopt overly formal or informal tones, potentially impacting the appropriateness of their documents for the intended audience and context. Finally, mechanics errors in the form of spelling and punctuation errors, accounting for 25%, have the potential to disrupt the overall readability and professionalism of the writing, potentially leading to misunderstandings and distractions for the reader.

Factors Influencing Writing Errors

Lack of Writing Skill Practice

The majority of students acknowledged that a lack of practice in English business writing skills is a primary factor leading to writing errors. They often do not have sufficient opportunities to practice writing in a business context, which is confusing when they need to produce quality business documents. For example, students explained:

"We only have one business writing course during our program, and that is not enough."

"The lack of business writing skill practice is a big issue for us. During our program, there is only one business writing course, and even that is not very intensive. I find it challenging to produce good business documents."

Limited Understanding of Business Concepts

Some students identified a lack of in-depth understanding of business concepts as a significant factor contributing to writing errors. They struggle to communicate ideas clearly because they do not fully grasp the language and jargon used in the business world. One student commented:

"I feel confused by some of the words and phrases commonly used in business. It makes it difficult for me to write correctly."

Resource and Teaching Material Limitations

Some students stated that limited access to relevant resources and teaching materials is a significant factor in their writing errors. They lamented the lack of access to up-to-date

textbooks and learning materials that support the development of their writing skills. Students remarked:

"We need more books and materials that help us understand how to write in English for business correctly."

"We need more resources and teaching materials that support learning business writing. The textbooks we have sometimes aren't informative enough, and we need more relevant materials."

Lack of Constructive Feedback

Students also highlighted the importance of constructive feedback from their instructors. Some complained that they rarely receive in-depth and helpful feedback regarding their writing errors. One student conveyed:

"We need more specific feedback about our errors so that we can improve."

Time Constraints

Some students noted that time constraints in completing writing assignments can lead to errors. The pressure to finish tasks within a short timeframe can result in grammatical mistakes and a lack of thorough editing. For instance, students said:

"Sometimes I have to write quickly, and that makes me prone to making mistakes."

"I often feel that time constraints lead to mistakes in my writing. When there are many assignments to complete in a short time, I tend to skip the editing process."

These findings illustrate several key factors contributing to writing errors among Business English students. The lack of practice, limited understanding of business concepts, resource limitations, inadequate feedback, and time constraints are some of the major factors influencing the quality of their writing.

DISCUSSION

The research findings shed light on the prevalent writing errors in business English among college students. Content errors emerged as a significant category, with two primary subtypes: errors in conveying business messages and errors in conveying accurate information. Students struggled to articulate clear and concise business messages, often resulting in ambiguity in their written communication. Additionally, inaccuracies stemming from inadequate research or data misinterpretation posed a credibility challenge for their documents. These findings align with prior research (Lin et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2018), emphasizing the recurring issue of content-related errors in business writing. In terms of organization errors, both errors in document structure and errors in the logical flow of ideas were notable. These organization errors affected document formatting and coherence. Students encountered difficulties in maintaining consistent formatting and presenting information cohesively. This also aligns with a study by Lin et al. (Lin et al., 2018), highlighting the significance of structural and organizational challenges in business writing.

Vocabulary errors, while comprising 22% of the findings, were less prevalent but still noteworthy. Students occasionally used inappropriate or unfamiliar terminology, impacting

document clarity and professionalism. This finding is consistent with the studies (Kherrous & Belmekki, 2021; Ramadhani et al., 2020), which also noted vocabulary-related issues in business writing. Language use errors were a prominent category, predominantly consisting of grammatical errors (48%) and stylistic issues (18%). These errors affected overall coherence, clarity, and tone. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies (Mustafa et al., 2023; Zinkevich & Ledeneva, 2021), underscoring the persistent challenge of grammatical and stylistic inaccuracies in business writing. Mechanics errors, including spelling and punctuation errors, were identified in 25% of the instances. These errors, although less frequent, could significantly impact readability and professionalism. The presence of mechanics errors is in line with the studies (Antonio & Briones, 2022; Samuels et al., 2023) and highlights the importance of mechanics errors in business writing.

The factors influencing writing errors underscore the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by students in business English writing. Lack of practice emerged as the first factor, aligning with prior research (Lin et al., 2018). Limited opportunities for practical application and insufficient exposure to business writing scenarios hindered students' ability to develop their skills adequately. Second, a limited understanding of business concepts was another significant factor, as Cendra & Sulindra (2022) explained that students must be able to verbally and abstractly explain the concepts they have memorized as well as depict them in their own words. Inadequate comprehension of business terminology and concepts hindered students' ability to convey ideas effectively in their writing.

Third, resource limitations, including access to relevant materials, echoed the concerns raised by Wang & Fan (2020). Limited access to up-to-date textbooks and learning resources restricted students' ability to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. Next, inadequate feedback from instructors, and constructive feedback is essential for students to identify and rectify their writing errors effectively (Bader et al., 2019). The lack of such feedback hindered their progress. Lastly, time constraints, as also identified in the previous study (Wang & Fan, 2020), were a contributing factor. The pressure to complete assignments within tight deadlines led to rushed writing and editing processes, increasing the likelihood of errors.

This study's findings corroborate and expand upon prior research in the field of business English writing. The identified writing errors align with existing literature, highlighting the persistent challenges students face in content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Additionally, the factors influencing these errors resonate with prior studies, emphasizing the need for increased practice opportunities, enhanced understanding of business concepts, improved access to resources, more constructive feedback, and mitigation of time constraints to foster better business English writing skills among college students.

CONCLUSION

This research paper has provided valuable insights into the common errors found in Business English writing among college students. The findings highlight the prevalence of content errors, organization challenges, vocabulary issues, language use discrepancies, and mechanics errors in their writing. These errors mirror patterns identified in previous studies, underscoring the persistent nature of these challenges in the field of Business English writing. Moreover, the study has identified several significant factors contributing to these writing errors, including a lack of practice, limited understanding of business concepts, resource limitations, inadequate feedback, and time constraints. Recognizing these factors is crucial for developing effective strategies to improve the writing proficiency of college students studying Business English.

For further research, it is recommended to explore the effectiveness of interventions aimed at addressing these identified issues. Investigating the impact of enhanced practice opportunities, targeted instructional materials, and feedback mechanisms on students' writing proficiency could offer valuable insights. Additionally, future studies could delve deeper into the specific challenges faced by students in different stages of their Business English education and evaluate the long-term impact of interventions on their writing skills. This study contributes to our understanding of common writing errors in Business English and the factors that influence them. By addressing these issues, educators and institutions can better prepare students for effective written communication in the business world, ultimately enhancing their professional prospects.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest reported by the authors

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