



THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE THEORY AND THE PRACTICE IN WRITING BUSINESS LETTERS AT THE MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT OF THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS, UTP PALEMBANG

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to measure the students' ability in writing business letters at the management Department, Faculty of Economics, UTP Palembang and the correlation between the direct and indirect persuasive business letter-writing. Writing English business letters is an important skill for managers. Acquiring this skill, however, requires a great effort. Learners whose native language is not English are often confronted with the problems of writing on sorts of sentences and other factors in persuasive business letters. In an attempt to gain insights into Management students' proficiency in writing business, the study investigated the students' ability in writing business letters. Two research questions were put forward to direct the investigation: (1) How well do students write effective persuasive business letters? (2) Is there a correlation between the theory of letter—writing and the business-letter writing skill? This study was descriptive in the sense that it aimed at describing students' knowledge of letter—writing and the letter—writing skill of Management students in persuasive business letters. The two kinds of data were correlated by using the Spearman Rank Order Formula. The subjects of this study were 45 sample students selected from the Management students who attended Business English II at Faculty of Economics, Tridianti University Palembang. The data consist of 45 persuasive business letters obtained from an essay test and the rest on objective test. Each of the two tests was given to the UTP raters and they were asked to rate the letters by using a primary trait scoring scale. The results of essay test indicated that the subjects who obtained scores 4 were 6.66% and those who got scores 3 were 9.20% and 46.66% of the subjects got scores 2 or the Passing grades. Therefore, the percentage of the subjects who got above the cut off was 72.66%. Next, the results of the objective test showed that the subjects who got 4 were 13.33% and those obtaining 3s were 24.44%, and 42.22% of the subjects got 2 which were exactly at the cut off. Consequently, the percentage of the subjects obtaining scores above the cut off was 79.33%. The overall results showed that the subjects had lower scores on subjective test than on objective test. In response to the second research question, there was a positive correlation between the students' theory or knowledge of letter—writing and the business letter—writing skill. In other words, it seems the mastery of the subjects on the knowledge of letter—writing was highly correlated with their ability in writing persuasive.

Keywords : Letter-Writing, Persuasive Business Letter-Writing, Management.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching business writing skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes is one of the many language teaching and tests which is more complicated than that of other language skill especially in terms of scoring procedures. This is due to the fact that speaking ability involves many aspects, such as structure, vocabulary, punctuation and mechanism.

Writing English business letter is an important skill for bankers. Acquiring this skill, however, is an intricate effort of learners whose native language is not English. And some of the students are



often confronted with the problem in writing some kinds of sentences in a persuasive business letter. The purpose of this study was to describe the students' ability in writing business letter at Banking Departments Faculty of Economics, Unanti Palembang and the relationship between the direct and indirect measures. Two research questions were put forward to direct the investigation:

(1) How well do the students write a business letter? (2) Is there a relationship between the knowledge and the skill in writing a persuasive business letter? This study is descriptive in the sense that it aims at describing knowledge and skill of banking students in a persuasiveness. The two kinds of data were correlated by applying the Spearman Rank Order Coefficient. The subjects of this study were 45 sample students selected from the banking students who attended English correspondence II at Faculty of Economics Tridinanti University. The general results indicate that the majority of the subjects were good at writing business letter. And it was also found that there is a positive relationship between the students' letter knowledge and their performance in writing business letter ($r=0,891$). It implies that an increase in the students' letter knowledge score is accompanied by a corresponding increase in their performance in writing business letter. In general the subjects' letters were good. However, the subjects' difficulties seemed to lie on writing a certain factor of an effective business letter, such as tone and content. The finding reveals that of the 10 points of analysis encountered in the students' letter, problem in terms of content and tone occurred the highest (45 %), problem in you—attitude, diction occurred the second highest (40 %) and problem in sympathy, gratitude occurred the third highest (30 %).

English proficiency plays an important role in every sector for the development of Indonesia. Not only is it important for education but also for businesses. Therefore, writing English business letter is an important skill for the students

I According to the syllabus of Banking Department of FE UTP (Tndinanti University) Palembang, students should have a good ability in business letters. In Addition, writing letters was one of the compulsory s. Thus, the banking graduates should be well-prepared to communicate through business letters. In spite of its importance, acquiring this requires a great effort.

Furthermore, in line with our national policy, this problem is relevant to the aim of teaching and learning English in Indonesia. The Minister of Education underlines the importance of English to speed up the development of our country and nation (maximum development of human and economic resources) and to have our students obtain a working knowledge of English. Institutionally, this thesis contributes itself to the improvement of the teaching and learning business letter-writing for the students of FE, banking department, UTP Palembang in particular and the lecturers of EAP in business letter-writing in general. In addition, it is also a good source for bankers and other bank employees who deal with banking correspondence. Therefore, business letter- writing is very important. First, writing a business letter is crucial in a bank, because a bank is concerned with checks, bills of exchange, bills of lading, letters of credit (L/C), collection letter besides accounting and finance. In addition, banks are concerned with accepting and holding deposits, and granting advances in the form of loans and overdrafts. Thus, students of banking and finance should have the skill of writing effective business letters (King, 1981 ;Cree, 1986). Second, business correspondence is essential in the banking system because without it a bank cannot function (Murphy, 1984; Warwiick, 1995). Particularly in this global world, international banking is crucial. Therefore, the ability in writing business correspondence cannot be neglected by bankers, otherwise they are not able to develop their banking activities effectively (Murphy, 1 984,Bonner, 1980).



Third, letters are written long before beginning ones careers. They are required in many fields, for examples, a student may write for research data or to learn about certain schools or jobs and may write to apply to colleges, to compete for scholarships or foreign study programs, or to join campus organizations. Another reason is that as a consumer, one might have complaints about defective items or disappointing service. Finally, as a job applicant, letter-writing may be a key to success. A number of studies have been done on business letter- writing overseas. This study discovered that students main problem in writing persuasive business letters is in the language. There is no problem with factual knowledge, such as lay out, address, date, salutation, complimentary close and signature (Scharer, 1984:205),

However, according to several investigations done in Indonesia., particularly on a persuasive business letter for secretarial students and the analytic scoring scale was used in scoring the direct measurement. The study was related to the sentence grammar, tone, figures. facts, attitudes, punctuation, spelling, content, organization. In general, the results of this study indicated that the subjects' letter was good but there were some weaknesses on grammar and spelling (Tedjo, 1992).

Unlike those studies which investigated almost all aspects of business and official letters, this study only focused on a certain aspect, namely the content dealing with notion/function as well as the theory concerning a persuasive business letter. While those studies investigated a persuasive business letter by using an analytic scoring scale, this study focused on persuasiveness, and therefore. a primary trait scoring scale was used in scoring. However, this study focused itself in the investigation of sentences, such as refusals, advice, gratitude, and sympathy.

Formulation of Problems :

1. How well do students at the Banking Department of FE UTP Palembang write effective business letters?
2. Is there a correlation between students' theory of letter-writing and business letter-writing skill?

Objectives of the Study

In line with the research questions, this study aims at describing the level of students' ability in writing English business letters. Specifically this study described the ability of the banking students in writing persuasive business letters with direct and indirect measures and described whether there was a correlation between the knowledge and the skill of banking students of FE UTP Palembang in writing business letters.

skill tend to increase too.

METHOD

This study basically aims at describing the levels of the students in writing business letter at Banking Department. FE UTP Palembang. The quantitative descriptive design was used. This study is descriptive in the sense that it aims at describing knowledge and skill of the students in a persuasiveness. The two kinds of data were correlated by applying the Spearman Rank Order Coefficient.

The accessible population of this study was the banking students who were taking business letter- in the second semester of the first year in 1995 There were 90 in 6 groups. The sample, 45 students, or half of the accessible population was selected on a random basis by drawing a lot, and cluster



sampling was used because the class or the group had the same mixture of characteristics. The heterogeneity was balanced.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This unit presents the research findings as the product of the data analysis. These findings were intended to answer the two research questions. The students' ability in writing business letters was presented to answer the first question. The second research question was to determine whether there was a relationship between the direct, namely the content of a business letter and the indirect measurements, that is the knowledge of function and the theory of the effective business letter.

Research question 1 is How well do students at the Banking Department, FE, UTP Palembang write an effective business letter? The students' ability was presented in terms of the quality of the effective business letter, especially persuasive business letters.

The Subjects Ability on Objective and Essay Tests

The result showed that the subjects who obtained scores 4 were 6,66% and those who got scores 3 were 9,20% and 46,66% of the subjects got scores 2 or the passing grades. Therefore, the percentage of the subjects who got above the cut off was 72,66%. Next, the results of the objective test showed that the subjects who got 4's were 13,33% and those obtaining 3's were 24,44%, and 42,22% of the subjects got 2's which were exactly at the cut off. Consequently, the percentage of the subjects obtaining scores above the cut off was 79,33%. The over all results showed that the subjects had lower scores on subjects test than on objective test.

Table I reveals that of the 10 points of analysis encountered in the subjects letter, problem in terms of content and tone occurred the first highest (40%), problem in you-attitude. diction, tone occurred the second highest (35%) and problem in sympathy, gratitude occurred the third highest (25%).

The Answer to Research Question 2

The two sets of scores were correlated and it was done by comparing the test scores of essay test and the knowledge of letter-writing. Computation using the Spearman Rank Order Formula revealed that $\rho_{xy} = 0,891$ ($p < .05(0,297)$), the correlation of the knowledge of letter-writing and the letter skill was significant. The quotient of ρ_{xy} 0,89 shows that the mastery of the subjects on the knowledge of letter- writing seems to follow their ability in writing business letters. In other words, the essay test was highly correlated with the objective one. As shown by the correlation coefficient of 0,891. It means that there is a positive correlation between the knowledge of letter- writing and the letter-writing skill. It implies that an increase in the students' letter knowledge scores is accompanied by a corresponding increase in their performance in writing business letter.

The findings were interpreted in relation to the order of question (s) or hypothesis.

Research Question 1

It was also found that there is a positive relationship between the students' letter knowledge and their performance in writing business letter ($r=0,891$). It implies that an increase in the students' letter knowledge scores is accompanied by a corresponding increase in their performance in writing business letter.

The results of this study were consistent with Tedjo's finding (1992), concerning the students' ability in using the appropriate language of business letters, Tedjo's finding indicated that the students'



problem was on the grammar. Whereas the results of this study are the content or the language and the tone of the letter. The general results showed that the majority of the students obtained scores above the passing grades, but some types of errors that occurred frequently were tone and diction, content and you-attitude. In addition, the present study did not find many errors regarding requests. For the smallest number of errors in syntax and request showed that the majority of the students focused on the mastery of commonly used sentences in business letter. To pass the criteria of writing an effective business letter is difficult for the students, it was expected that each of the letters would fulfill the requirements, such as using the appropriate diction with a right register and using a conversational tone or a friendly tone. Furthermore, the informal language level refers to the language of business letters and other business communication (Murphy, 1984:48). With respect to diction, 15,5% of the subjects failed. This is probably because the practice on diction was scarcely done and was shared with the practice on appearance and letter format of the letter.

With regard to the tone, some of the subjects' letters were not in the right tone, because they wrote without thinking to the readers any more, in relation to the findings of the present study, some of the errors in tone involve the use of formal expressions which are not appropriate to the commonly informal and conversational tone of English business letters. When the letter is to achieve its purpose, its tone must be right or adjusted to the purpose (Gartside, 1979).

In terms of you-attitude, the results showed that the subjects focused on we-attitude instead of you-attitude, whereas they did not focus on the appropriate attitude, i.e the you, the bank or the company (Himstreet, 1981).

The finding indicated that the subjects did not include some parts of the basic structure for the content of the business letters, such as the body of letter written by the subjects having no appropriate action structure. In addition, sometimes the subjects did not include attention part in the opening section of the body of the letter. In fact, the basic structure for persuasive letters usually has four parts, commonly known as the AIDA formula (Gartside, 1983; Eckersly, 1970).

Style did not connect their sentences and ideas well, while the appropriate coherence, refers to the sense for wholeness of interconnection among sentences. And ideas within a paragraph or among the paragraphs within any piece of writing. Coherence quality, therefore, could be analyzed by examining how ideas are linked and carried forward from one sentence to the next within any piece of writing. (Himstreet, 1981). In relation to the notion/functionality, the fact showed that several subjects had some difficulties to lie on this factor, some of the subjects' sentences were not polite and unclear, this is probably caused by the subjects who did not pay attention to the C qualities and it may be the subjects' violation of the Grice's theory of the maxims on pragmatics, especially the maxim of manner, i.e be short, be polite, be clear and be relevant.

The ability to write persuasive collection letters is sufficient, since several subjects obtained scores above the cut off. However, it is not as well as the ability of the theory of persuasive business letters, possibly due to three factors. First, writing a good persuasive collection letter or the business letter in general needs the students' ability in mastering not only the theoretical knowledge but also the useful or commonly used sentences in business letters. Second, the mastery of the tone, you-attitude, some sentences. such as refusal, gratitude and the like are required. Finally, instruction gave less exercises of writing business letters.

To conclude, in evaluating the subjects' letters, other factors, such as content, tone, notion and function should be considered. Based on the results of this study, among the ten components of an effective business letter, the tone and diction contributed the least. This indicated that the subjects,



when they wrote, were more concerned with development of ideas, coherence and some sentences related to notion and function with less attention to tone. With respect to the knowledge of letter-writing and the letter-writing skill, both appear to have strong and weak points. Anyway, the subjects' scores on the knowledge of letter-writing was a little bit higher than the letter-writing skill.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In response to the first research question, the results of essay test indicate that the subjects who obtained scores 4 were 6,66% and those who got scores 3 were 9,20% and 46,66% of the subjects' got scores 2 or the passing grades. Therefore, the percentage of the subjects who got above the cut off was 72,66%. Next, the results of the objective test showed that the subjects who got 4's were 13,33% and those obtaining 3's were 24,44%, and 42,22% of the subjects got 2's which were exactly at the cut off. Consequently, the percentage of the subjects obtaining scores above the cut off was 79,33%. The overall results showed that the subjects had lower scores on subjective test than on objective test. In answer to the second question, there was a positive correlation between students knowledge of letter-writing and the business-letter writing skill. In other words, it seems the mastery of the subjects on the knowledge of letter-writing was highly correlated with their ability in writing business letters.

The curriculum designers, the material designers and syllabus writers could give more stress on notional and functional syllabus into the banking syllabus design and consider the information of the weak points, such as content, tone and you-attitude from this study, because it describes the students' ability in writing persuasive business letter for maintaining, modifying and/or revising curriculum as well as materials by knowing the correlation between students' knowledge of letter-writing and their ability to write business letters.

To the business letter-writing instructor at the banking Department, FE, UTP Palembang, the method and technique of teaching letter- writing being employed should take into account and emphasize both the theory and the exercise of writing business letters.

The business letter-writing teachers could use primary trait scoring method for scoring business letters, which may be appropriate, practical and simple for evaluating the effective business letters. Letter-writing theory, such as you-attitude, tone and sentences related to notion and function can not be overlooked in training the students to produce the business letters.

To the banking students, the primary focus should be on the weak points, such as tone, you-attitude, and content, in a persuasive business letter.

To the book writers, this study could give information about the primary stress on the mastery of the writing theory and the writing skill for revising, modifying and/or maintaining the prescribed books and students handbook,

To the researchers, other similar studies or replication involving the explanation of the students ability in writing a persuasive business letter are recommended at other institution. For instance, by knowing the sources of the content and you-attitude and tone it will be possible to redesign business letter-writing syllabus design which deals mostly with content, you-attitude and tone, It would be good to investigate the students' ability in terms of mechanics and appearance of the persuasive business letter. Furthermore, future research probably designed as a quasy experimental study on the effect of a theoretical knowledge to the main gain score of the students. Alternatively, the experiment can be set up involving two different groups given different kinds of treatments.



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