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EFL Students' Business Writing Performance and Writing Anxiety

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Abstract:

A cover letter is an excellent way of establishing a conversation with a potential employer. Therefore, the letter must provide the best possible initial impression. The objectives of this study are to 1) investigate students' performance in business English writing after implementing Bhatia's genre analysis, 2) examine the relationship between students' writing achievement and their writing anxiety, and 3) explore students' attitudes toward implementing Bhatia's genre analysis. The total number of participants in this study was 27. Three research instruments were used to collect the data: pretest and posttest, writing anxiety inventory, and student attitude survey. The quantitative data were analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics and paired sample t-tests. The findings showed that the students significantly improved their business English writing after the intervention. Findings from the writing anxiety inventory revealed a negative correlation between the students' writing achievement and their writing anxiety before and after implementing Bhatia's model. Furthermore, the students in this study had positive attitudes toward the intervention. Recommendations and implications are provided in this study.

Keywords: business English writing, genre analysis, second language writing anxiety, EFL writing instruction.

英语英语学生的商务写作表现和写作焦虑

摘要:

求职信是与潜在雇主建立对话的绝佳方式。因此，这封信必须提供尽可能最好的第一印象。本研究的目的是：1) 调查学生在实施巴蒂亚体裁分析后的商务英语写作表现，2) 检查学生的写作成绩与写作焦虑之间的关系，3) 探索学生对实施巴蒂亚体裁分析的态度。这项研究的参与者总数为27人。使用三种研究工具收集数据：前测和后测、写作焦虑量表和学生态度调查。使用描述性统计和配对样本t检验对定量数据进行分析 and 解释。结果显示，干预后学生的商务英语写作水平显着提高。写作焦虑量表的结果显示，在实施巴蒂亚模型之前和之后，学生的写作成绩和写作焦虑之间呈负相关。此外，本研究中的学生对干预持积极态度。本研究提供了建议和启示。

关键词: 商务英语写作、体裁分析、第二语言写作焦虑、英语英语写作指导。

1. Introduction

A job application letter, often called a cover letter, is one of the following business writing styles frequently used in professional settings. Writing a job application letter is a part of the application process. They allow applicants to introduce themselves to a prospective employer, highlight their talents, and explain why they are a good fit for the position. A solid first impression from a well-written job application letter might increase a candidate's chances of being selected for an interview with a prospective company. Therefore, writing a cover letter is crucial because it makes the first impression on the reader or employer. According to Randazzo (2012), a cover letter and resume are valuable screening tools for employers. The letter summarizes the applicant's most important qualifications, such as work abilities, professional experiences, and personality attributes. The letter ought to leave the best possible initial impression as a consequence. The success of applications has a connection with a cover letter.

Several pieces of cover letters and CVs prepared by successful and rejected candidates were studied based on the work of Brandt and Herzberg (2020). According to the study, successful candidates frequently used articles and propositions in their cover letters. The rejected candidates, on the other hand, appeared to have added lively language, heavily used pronouns, auxiliary verbs, and conjunctions, to the letters. The study conclusions showed that a cover letter is still essential and required for both candidates and employers during the hiring process. The majority of prior research (Duangkhot, 2017; Tongpoon-Patanasorn & Thumngong, 2020; Paramasivam & Rahim, 2016; Saleem et al., 2022; Birchard, 2021) has investigated the schematic structure and linguistic aspects included in letters of application. Although business writing, including creating a cover letter, is crucial in both professional and academic settings, there is a lack of research and instruction in this field.

Most students find writing challenging, whether academic or business, even though writing requires high cognition. Writing anxiety, therefore, emerges as a significant barrier to student writing success (Torres et al., 2020; Thevasigamoney & Yunus, 2014; Tsao et al., 2017). Overall, findings from this research support the notion that students' writing skills are negatively correlated with their level of writing anxiety. Simply put, students have trouble writing successfully when their anxiety levels are high.

This study attempted to address the gap in literature on the EFL context, particularly in Thai settings. Business writing is a universal practice, and various cultural contexts may have their own writing conventions and expectations. The difficulties that people from various cultural backgrounds must overcome can be better understood by looking into the effects of cultural elements on business writing and the

anxiety that goes along with it. This can entail researching the impact of linguistic hindrances, communication methods, and cultural values on writing anxiety in a professional setting. The outcomes of this study will assist EFL writing instructors in better understanding the impact of writing anxiety on their student's ability to produce written work, especially in dealing with business English writing.

Thus, this study attempts to incorporate the genre analysis framework put forward by Bhatia (1993) to assist students in working with business English while concentrating on a cover letter. Examining the students' anxiety levels before and after the implementation is also essential. Therefore, three research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. To what extent genre analysis instruction improves students' business English writing abilities?
2. What is the relationship between EFL students' achievement in business English writing and anxiety?
3. What are EFL students' attitudes toward implementing genre analysis into business English writing?

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Teaching English for Specific Purposes in EFL Context*

English is often taught as a foreign language (EFL) worldwide, and many nations today use it as their principal educational language. However, EFL students frequently require specialized language instruction in a particular subject area to achieve their academic or professional goals (Dudley-Evans & Saint John, 1998). In circumstances like these, English for Specific Purposes (hereafter ESP) is helpful. The focus of ESP, a method of teaching language that attempts to give students the language and communication skills they need to excel in that field or subject area, is a particular field or topic area. The fundamental concepts that distinguish ESP from General English (GE) are advanced by Harding (2007). The first concerns reasons someone would want to learn a language. The language work is immediate and relevant because of the sense of purpose, which is not always the case in other ELT situations, particularly those of general English. In addition, Basturkmen (2019) suggests that ESP uses a broader range of languages. ESP frequently employs specific linguistic registers, such as English used in finance, accounting, and health care. Another characteristic that sets ESP apart from GE is its analysis of needs. Through the ESP class, English learners are prepared to use the language in a specific situation, such as an academic, professional, or workplace. Its main component is the curriculum, which is based on an analysis of the needs of the students (Basturkmen, 2010, 2019). Thus, it is clear from the traits listed above that in ESP, the aim is to learn a specific language skill

that can be applied in a target environment.

2.2. Genre Analysis

According to Swales (1990), the main goal of genre analysis is to categorize the common structures and motions of spoken and written texts. Swales (1990) states that each genre has its own movements and procedures. Understanding the standard conventions of spoken or written communication among professionals in a particular community is an essential component of genre analysis for beginners. Bhatia (1993) examines language frequently appearing in professional settings, drawing inspiration from the Swales method. Bhatia (1993) suggested the standard seven steps of a cover letter for a job.

Business letters, emails, reports, and proposals are just a few examples of several business genres that can be studied and taught using Bhatia's framework. This may include understanding those genres' appropriate grammar, vocabulary, writing conventions, and the common rhetorical strategies and speech patterns used in business communication. The fact that Bhatia's framework gives a logical and complete approach to learning and teaching specific genres can help students better comprehend and use the appropriate language and discourse aspects for each genre. Bhatia's move analysis framework is crucial for teachers and students to recognize a job application letter's generic language and structures. Several recent research (Tatsanajamsuk, 2017; Rahim & Arifin, 2014; Singh et al., 2012; Thumnong & Tongpoon-Patanasorn, 2017; De Mello et al., 2021; Warsidi, 2022; Williams & MacGregor, 2016; Park et al., 2021) have included Bhatia's methodology to evaluate structural moves and language traits frequently present in job application letters. These findings suggest that not all letters must include the seven movements. In other words, the letters most often have four or five movements depending on the situation.

2.3. Writing Anxiety

Writing is a challenging, time-consuming task. According to several studies (Horwitz et al., 1986; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015; Wahyuni et al., 2019; Jawas, 2019; Fathi et al., 2020), anxiety significantly impairs one's writing ability. To put it another way, a high level of worry influences students' low writing motivation. Whatever the form, writing might make students more anxious for various reasons. Han and Hiver (2018) investigated how middle school students' motivation changed. To monitor how psychological variables such as self-control, self-efficacy, and anxiety changed among students while writing in a second language. Using longitudinal cluster analysis, the study findings showed that students' writing suffered as their anxiety levels rose. In addition, Han and Hiver (2018) noted that lacking or low antecedent genre increases writing anxiety levels. The results also revealed that students' anxiety levels might decrease as they become more accustomed to writing in a second language.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Settings

This research was conducted at a Thai government university. Undergraduates from the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Management Science were the participants. The target students enrolled in the Business English Writing course 01355252. This course gives students the ability to compose various business letters. The course encourages the development of business vocabulary in written business communications in different corporate settings. Students will also improve their knowledge of corporate communication format, formality, and tone. Over a 15-week semester, the class meets once a week for three periods totaling around 150 min.

3.2. Research Design

The current study comprises quasi-experimental research investigating genre analysis's impact on students' business English writing performance, focusing on composing a job application letter. The primary concerns are the effects of the instruction on students' business English writing performance, students' writing anxiety, and students' attitudes toward the instruction. Bhatia's genre analysis framework was given to the experimental group. It functioned as an independent variable, while students' performances in composing business English writing, their writing anxiety, and their attitudes toward the instruction functioned as dependent variables.

3.3. Participants

Convenient sampling techniques were used to recruit the students. Participants engage in the Business English Writing course (01355252) during the second semester of the academic year 2021 to participate in this study. This course aims to teach students the language they need for business English writing, specifically how to write different kinds of letters with an emphasis on form, vocabulary, and idiomatic and conventional expressions, as well as how to create resumes and cover letters.

3.4. Research Instruments

3.4.1. Pretest and Posttest

Pretests and posttests assess students' proficiency in writing job application letters. Using pretest and posttests has two distinct goals. First, the quantitative pretest data establish a baseline for future comparisons. Second, the post-test findings measure the progress students made following the intervention. The examinations include questions about how to write a cover letter for a job application. The instructions include scenarios and job listings. Students must write a cover letter in response to the prompts. The allotted duration is 60 min.

3.4.2. Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory

The Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI) has been employed following Cheng (2004) to determine how anxious students are about writing before and after treatment. There are 22 items in the inventory.

3.4.3. Attitude Questionnaires

Close-ended questions that use a 5-point Likert scale are used for attitude surveys. The survey questions are drafted in Thai. Three experts examined the validity of the questionnaires.

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1. Pretest and Posttest

The inter-rater technique was used in this study to evaluate the tests. Two raters used identical scoring criteria to mark students' tests. Each rater assigned a score. The Business English Writing Proficiency Scales, created by Wang and Fan (2020), were used as the grading criteria in this study. The rubrics offered activities for business writing and genre understanding. Two sets of scores were computed using the Pearson inter-rater reliability to ensure the dependability of the results. The final test results were then examined further using paired sample t-test.

3.5.2. Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory. Using SPSS, the quantitative data were calculated.

3.5.3. Attitude Questionnaires

The questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics using SPSS.

Table 2. Students' business English writing across three subscales

Subscales	Total Scores (35)	Pretest		Posttest		Mean dif.	S.D	t	p
		\bar{x}	S.D	\bar{x}	S.D				
Organization	5	1.11	.42	4.11	1.28	3.00	1.37	11.36	.000
Content	20	8.26	3.78	12.04	5.86	3.78	6.25	3.14	.004
Language	10	4.06	1.42	6.22	1.71	2.17	2.11	5.34	.000

Students must demonstrate their proficiency in correctly employing appropriate business letter components, such as the heading salutation, introduction, body, closure, and signature block, so instructors can accurately assign scores for the organization of the application letter. As previously stated, a student organization could only receive a maximum score of 5. Therefore, the student's average score on the pretest for an organization was 1.11 out of 5 (S.D. = 0.42). In contrast, the posttest results show that the students' average organization score was 4.11 out of 5 (S.D. = 1.28).

The letter content is measured separately from the students' performance. According to the pretest findings, the target students scored an average of 8.26 out of 20 (S.D. = 3.78). On the other hand, as shown in Table 2, they earned a higher mean score on the posttest

4. Findings

4.1. Students' Business English Writing Abilities

Each student's essay was scored on three main criteria: structure (5 points), content (20 points), and language (10 points). Students may obtain up to 35 points for each work, the maximum possible score. Descriptive statistics (mean and SD) were used to assess the quantitative data from the pretest and posttest. Using a paired sample t-test, the student performance before and after the intervention was compared. Table 1 provides the overall evaluation of the students' business writing abilities.

Table 1. Students' overall business English writing abilities from the pretest and posttest (N = 27)

	\bar{x}	S.D.	Mean dif.	t	p
Pretest	13.43	5.24	8.94	-5.16	.000
Posttest	22.37	8.38			

A student's total business English writing for a job application letter is shown in Table 1. A paired sample t-test and descriptive statistics assessed the students' raw test scores. The pretest average score was 13.43 (SD: 5.24). According to Table 1, the students scored better on the posttest ($x = 22.37$, S.D. = 8.38). The students significantly improved in job application writing; the mean difference was 8.94 ($p = .000$). After receiving genre analysis instruction, the students improved their ability to write a job application.

4.2. Students' Business English Writing across Three Subscales

Additional quantitative data analysis from the pretest and posttest was performed on three subscales: organization, content, and language. The study findings are shown in Table 2.

($x = 12.04$ out of 20, S.D. = 5.86). The pretest and posttest results also show that the students' writing had content and organization (the mean difference was 3.78). In addition, a posttest average score showed that the students significantly improved the content of their writing ($p = .004$).

Table 2 shows that the student's average score on the pretest was 4.06 out of 10, S.D. = 1.42. The students' posttest score of 6.22 out of 10 (S.D. = 1.71) was higher than their pretest score. The study findings also revealed that students' language use skills were noticeably improved from the pretest ($p = 0.00$).

4.3. Results on Students' Writing Anxiety

The anxiety questionnaire dataset was retrieved twice. There were 22 questions on the survey. Frequency analysis and descriptive statistics were used

to examine and show the data. Table 3 shows student anxiety over writing.

Table 3. Levels of English writing anxiety before the implementation of genre analysis (Cheng, 2004)

Item	Statement	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpretation
9	I would be concerned that I would receive a low grade if my English composition were being graded.	4.15	.91	High
15	I get uncomfortable when I am unexpectedly asked to compose an English piece.	4.19	.88	High
21	I am concerned that my English compositions might receive very low marks.	4.22	.85	Very high
Total (22 items)		3.49	.45	High

The average mean score of the students' writing anxiety before instruction was 3.49, S.D. = 0.45, as shown in Table 3. The students' writing anxiety was rated as having a high average mean score. The highest mean of the 22 items was item 21 ($x = 4.22$, S.D. 0.85), marked as "very high." This demonstrates that students were concerned about obtaining low writing grades. Item 15 ($x = 4.19$, S.D. = 0.88), part of the anxiety questionnaire, had the second-highest mean score. This suggests that students felt uneasy handling unforeseen writing assignments.

Following the application of genre analysis, the students' overall English writing anxiety, as shown in

Table 4, was consistent with the mean at 3.08 (S.D. = 0.32), which is moderate. Item 20 ($x = 4.11$, S.D. = 0.80), Item 21 ($x = 4.04$, S.D. = 0.76), and Item 13 ($x = 4.00$, S.D. = 0.83) had the third-highest mean scores among the items in Table 4. The students in this study reported feeling uneasy when their English essay was chosen as a sample for discussion in class, which is relevant for Item Number 20. According to Table 4, the target students' top adverse concern was still being evaluated. Additionally, the students started getting anxious when they had a deadline for their English writing.

Table 4. Levels of English writing anxiety after the implementation of genre analysis (Cheng, 2004)

No.	Statement	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpretation
13	When I have to compose English essays quickly, I frequently feel panicky.	4.00	.83	High
20	I am worried that my English essay will be used as a sample for a class discussion.	4.11	.80	High
21	I am concerned that my English compositions might receive very low marks.	4.04	.80	High
Total (22 items)		3.08	.32	Moderate

4.4. Students' Attitudes toward the Implementation of Genre Analysis

After completing the genre analysis lessons, students were required to respond to questionnaires on their attitudes. There were 14 questions in the closed-ended

questionnaire. Each question was evaluated by the students using a 5-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were used to assess the quantitative data from the questionnaires. The findings of the student's perceptions of the instruction are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Results on the students' attitudes toward genre analysis in business English writing

Item	Statement	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpretation
1	There are numerous different exercises and activities.	4.67	.48	Very high
2	Each unit's tasks and activities can help me write better in each genre.	3.70	.61	High
3	Each unit's exercises and activities are appropriate overall.	4.67	.48	Very high
4	Each unit's exercises and activities are appropriate for my English proficiency.	3.56	.70	High
5	It is a good teaching strategy to have students study examples of written texts before having them practice writing in class, in pairs, in groups, and on their own.	4.26	.66	Very high
6	Before the independent writing stage, I study by carefully examining genre sample work.	4.26	.81	Very high
7	I can write because I comprehend and recall what we discovered in the genre analysis.	4.48	.51	Very high
8	Practicing thinking and writing skills is helpful because they enable the writer to organize his or her work and its details effectively.	4.11	.80	High
9	There are plenty of writing chances in this course.	3.63	.49	High
10	I appreciate how the teacher gives the general instruction because it allows students to develop the details they want to convey.	4.52	.51	Very high
11	Her style of instruction makes it simple for students to comprehend the lessons.	4.52	.51	Very high
12	I feel that my English writing is better.	3.81	.62	High
13	I am confident working in the business area in the future.	3.59	.50	High
14	Understanding the relationship between readers and authors is crucial because it influences our language.	4.56	.51	Very high
Total		4.17	.17	High

The level of students' attitudes regarding using Bhatia's genre analysis in business English writing, notably in job applications, is seen in Table 5. The results show that the students' opinions on the instruction were favorable. The average student attitude

determined by the questionnaire was 4.17 (S.D. = 0.17), which is high.

5. Discussion

In this study, the target group of students improved

their writing ability in writing a cover letter after receiving Bhatia's genre analysis framework. It means students can improve their business writing abilities by studying several genres. Students can learn how to write appropriately and effectively in various professional situations by exploring the norms of several genres or forms of business writing. The findings revealed that with the guidance of a genre analysis framework, business letter content could be enhanced. By analyzing the patterns and characteristics of effective business writing, students can learn how to write persuasive letters while still living up to the expectations of their audience. Numerous earlier studies have demonstrated the extent to which students' business English writing skills have improved. According to Zhang (2013), students' writing is more likely to be seen favorably when they write in business-related genres with professionalism. Similarly, Williams and MacGregor (2016) discovered that pronouns could be skillfully used to support writers in demonstrating their authority and trustworthiness in using personal pronouns in business emails. Students can learn how to build their authority and develop credibility in their writings by examining the successful use of pronouns and other rhetorical tactics.

In this current study, the students improved in choosing the appropriate letter organization. The target students in this study demonstrated significant growth in the organization of their letters. It is essential to help students understand business genres by using a variety of authentic examples and resources (Nguyen & Miller, 2012; Park et al., 2021; Shauki & Sarjit Singh, 2018). Students' lack of prior understanding of the target genre, its structure, and linguistic rules can be a crucial factor that causes their high level of writing anxiety (Han & Hiver, 2018). Although the students improved their writing ability after receiving genre analysis instruction, most study participants felt uneasy and apprehensive when asked to write instantly. Analyzing students' responses to the Second Language Writing Inventory showed that time constraints are one reason students struggle with writing. The outcomes of this study revealed that many students were concerned about not having enough time for their writing assignments. This concurs with those of Lentz (2013). According to Lentz (2013), students' difficulty in writing can result from a lack of time. The students required time for preparation, revision, and proofreading. The outcomes of this study are similar to those of Wahyuni et al. (2019), suggesting that problems with topic selection, linguistic challenges, and a lack of writing experience are other causes of students' writing anxiety.

Moreover, the study outcomes suggest that applying Bhatia's genre analysis instruction changed the students' writing anxiety levels. The target students' levels of writing anxiety decreased from high to moderate (3.08) after the intervention. The three highest average scores for students' writing anxiety at this stage were marginally different from those discovered before the

intervention. Many students in this situation experienced anxiety when their paper was selected as a sample in front of the class. Another feature was comparable to the prior outcome in that most students continued to be afraid of having their work judged.

6. Implications

Students must become familiar with thorough business models, especially those of the genre they will be writing. Engaging in the target genres is the best way to improve students' writing. This will give students insight into the structure, conventions, and style of business writing and provide motivation for their writing. Additionally, instructors should be more proficient in using these models. Teachers can give examples to the students, teaching them how to evaluate the target genres. The teachers then take on the role of facilitators, helping the students work independently on the goal genres. Successful business writing is written to meet the needs and expectations of the audience. Consider the audience when writing and adjust the tone and style as necessary. Through the variety and authenticity of exemplary texts, students can have better knowledge of what readers and writers should be able to expect. Writing feedback is essential because it enables writers to grow their abilities, pinpoint areas that need working on, and raise their levels of proficiency. Feedback gives authors a different viewpoint on their writing, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. Constructive comments could help writers spot potential improvement areas, such as structure, coherence, and clarity issues.

7. Conclusion

The main objectives of this study were: 1) to investigate the impact of Bhatia's genre analysis on teaching business English writing; 2) to determine students' writing anxiety before and after the implication of the genre analysis; 3) to explore the students' attitudes toward the instruction in genre analysis. This study employed three main research instruments: students' pretest and posttest, the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory, and attitude questionnaires. The research design of this study was quasi-experimental — pretest and posttest group designs.

The outcome of this study illustrates that the target group of students performed better in composing a job application letter in the posttest than in the pretest. Accordingly, implementing Bhatia's genre analysis in teaching and learning business English composition significantly impacted the students' business writing performance. When comparing students' business writing tasks (pretest and posttest), it was found that the students achieved the highest average score on content. The organization was the second-highest subscale that the students in this study could achieve. Among the three subscales, language was the least successful aspect the students could achieve.

After implementing Bhatia's genre analysis framework, the results from the Second Language Writing Inventory reveal that the students' writing anxiety level has somewhat changed. After the intervention, the target students' level of writing anxiety dropped from high to moderate. At this point, the three highest average scores of students' writing anxiety differed slightly from those found before the treatment. In addition, many students felt anxious when their writing was chosen as a sample in front of the class. Another aspect was similar to the previous result in that most of the students still feared having their work rated. Finally, the students in this study were not happy to write within the time constraints. Therefore, implementing Bhatia's genre analysis positively impacted the target students' writing anxiety to some extent.

The quantitative data from the attitude questionnaires indicated that the target students were highly positive toward the genre analysis instruction. The most positive attitudes found in the questionnaires were toward a wide selection of activities and exercises and suitable teaching methods. Moreover, the students thought the instruction effectively guided them to see the relationship between the audience and the writer. This influenced how they used language more appropriately. Finally, the students appreciated the process of genre analysis. They have learned the steps (moves) in the business letter by analyzing the genre. They not only understand the moves but also apply those moves to their writing.

Research on business writing and writing anxiety has contributed significantly to understanding EFL students' challenges in business English writing. This study has provided valuable insights into effective business writing practices and techniques. The study outcomes have strengthened the theoretical framework, Bhatia's genre analysis; students must comprehend different aspects of business writing, including audience analysis, clarity, conciseness, and persuasive communication. This knowledge contributes to developing guidelines and best practices for effective business communication. Additionally, numerous factors in this study, including the fear of receiving a poor grade and lacking confidence in their writing abilities, have been linked to writing anxiety in studies. This knowledge assists in the creation of focused strategies to reduce writing anxiety.

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