

## DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES IN BUSINESS WRITING OF THE MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The face of business communication has transformed drastically for the last few years. The present paper attempts to trace out the problems and challenges of written business communication to the management students who are from different professional colleges in Telangana region of India. The students, who are enrolled in master's program and studying second year. The paper explores the students' attitude towards writing and their priorities in learning business writing. The data were collected by administering the questionnaires to the management students from various professional management colleges for the investigation of learners' views, opinions and experiences about business writing. In order to find out their problems and difficulties faced during business writing, a descriptive test was also conducted for 10 management students. Later, the data was analyzed using the quantitative method approach. With the analysis of data, it was found that writing skills of students were totally neglected throughout their academics and it was also discovered that writing was used for various purposes such as to complete assignments, writing exams and to take part in other classroom writing activities. It is observed that the students' writing skills were found to be poor in business communication especially in business writing. It was also found that most of the classroom instruction was teacher-centric where the students' role was limited and they were passive most of the time in the classroom. Usually, the writing activities were conducted individually, ignoring the pair and the group activities. However, the learners treated writing as an activity for accomplishing assigned tasks and submit them in time for the teacher's evaluation. In the end, the study is also suggested that teachers should create teaching writing context/activities more interestingly. So, that all the learners do take part in all the classroom activities/tasks enthusiastically, enhance their business writing skills and produce effective writing skills in their day to day lives.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Writing Skills, Business Writing, Business Written Communication, Writing Problems*

### **INTRODUCTION**

New technologies have been flooding constantly, evolving and developing in the areas of language teaching that means the change in the way of communication. With the evaluation of technology, the face of business communication has transformed drastically for the last decade. The students use advanced gadgets for writing before they enter into the college/workplace. Communication is the key to success in any business context. Good business writing adds to the credibility of the students and reflects in their writing. It is perceived that people who cannot communicate well in writing are not considered for employment, promotion or higher positions. The most common forms of communication in business are spoken and written, these regarded as productive language skills.

Mastering the skill of business writing is essential for the learners for better career opportunities and higher studies. Developing business writing skill requires a lot of efforts as well as a lot of time for grading and evaluation of management students' writing. Teaching business writing to the management students has a different experience that involves many challenges and difficulties for writing in various business purposes. For students, mastering business writing is an essential and difficult skill because it demands the use of business vocabulary, style and specific format in its writing. It also involves the major transformations from academic writing to business writing i.e. day-to-day style to the expected high standard style accurately and effectively.

Business writing is one form of communication where it is used for completing everyday transactions in the work places such as writing emails, letters, reports, memos so on so forth (Gale, 2014). However, it is regarded as the main form of communication at the higher level, and it is very vital for the students' success in their professional lives and for the retention of communication (Boyd & Fukazawa, 2008). Although academic writing, especially at higher level, is a challenging task, it plays an important role in the socialization of the students (Gasper & Shepherd, 2009). Quible (2006) stated that not only business employees have difficulties but also college graduates have serious problems in writing. Now-a-days, the professional students lack effective writing skills, this presents the problem for corporate executives in professional writing (Middleton, 2011). It is a complex skill that can be learned and mastered with enormous efforts and lots of practice. Harvard Business Review author, Bryan Garner (2013) guides to better business writing examined that effective writing can be refined and enhanced through practice.

In this paper, the researcher primarily concentrated on identifying the learners' problems that were encountered while writing different text types such as assignments, business letters, reports, proposals and writing in various examinations. The management students may come across many difficulties and challenges while performing writing tasks/activities because the teachers adopt inappropriate methods and selecting improper strategies of teaching writing. It also focused on investigating students' perceptions of learning business writing.

### **Aim**

The aim of the present paper is to probe the writing challenges and difficulties faced by the management students while writing different text types in business writing and to present students' views about learning business writing in the ESL classrooms.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- The objectives of the present study are the following:
- To find out various challenges and difficulties faced by management students.
- To discover management students' views and opinions about learning business writing skills.

### **Research Questions**

The present study attempts to explore answers to the following key research questions:

- What are the difficulties and challenges faced by management students in business writing?
- Do these challenges and difficulties affect students' business writing skills?
- How do these problems of students impact the written performance of the learners?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a brief description of business writing and some of the studies on teaching business writing, writing difficulties and challenges as well as reasons for writing difficulties.

Writing is regarded as a difficult skill to be mastered or taught. Writing is not a simple cognitive activity, it is believed to be a complex mental activity that needs ‘a careful thought, discipline and concentration’ (Grami, 2010, p. 9). Hedge (1988) claims that one has to write with a high degree of organization, well-selected choice of vocabulary and using complex grammatical devices to make one’s writing effective (p. 5).

The word, problem is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as a situation, person, or thing that needs to pay attention and needs to be dealt with or solved or resolved.

Business writing is also popular as business communication and professional writing. According to Nordquist (2018, June 17), business writing is informative, instructive, persuasive and transactional. The purpose of business writing is to transfer, convey information to assist in problem solving and decision making. Business writing has a unique trait that differentiates it from other types of writing. It is an essential skill for success in any organization, institution or company. It may need to convince others, but the context and style are unlike those of an argumentative essay.

Many scholars have carried out research in ESL writing. Sometimes, writing in one’s first language is painful for most of the students, but writing in a second language makes students’ pain more worsen (Gilmore, 2009).

In Beason (2001) study, it was revealed that the researcher identified five common grammatical errors such as misspellings, word-ending errors, fused sentences and punctuation mark errors in 14 business professionals’ writing skills. These problems hindered in developing their writing skills. In another study by Jones (2011), it was found that the participants’ writings exhibited the problems in the areas of organizing sentences and writing paragraphs.

In a study by Hind Al Fadda (2012), it was found that the ESL learners faced many difficulties in their academic writing such as differencing between spoken and written English and ways of writing styles.

Abu Rass Ruwaida (2015)’s study explored various problems of the Arab students studying as an EFL. The learners had faced problems especially in writing a good topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence using discourse markers properly. At last the students’ written performance was improved at large and visible.

In another study, Sabit Alnoor (2016) found that the students’ performance in all the activities were weak, they found difficulties in using punctuation marks and they also had problems in using appropriate grammatical structures and the shortage of vocabulary in their writing.

## METHODOLOGY/DATA COLLECTION

This section depicts the sample, procedure and data analysis of the study. The study was conducted in five different management colleges in and around Hyderabad, Telangana, India. Two research tools – a student questionnaire and a descriptive test were part of the study for the collection of data.

### **Sample**

The sample comprises 50 students, among them 18 female and 32 male. They are from rural as well as urban background and they have completed their education through the vernacular medium. Their age group was in between 21 and 24 years and belonged to different areas of specializations at the graduation level.

The students' questionnaires were administered for the elicitation of the data to the fifty MBA second-year students who were studying in five different professional colleges that are affiliated to JNT University, Hyderabad. A descriptive test was also conducted to the 10 management students for exploring their problems in business writing.

### **Procedure**

At the outset, the students' questionnaires were administered among 10 students of each from five different professional colleges to find out their views, opinions and problems in business writing, altogether 50 students were filled in the questionnaires for the collection of data. Later, a descriptive test was conducted among 10 students who are from one of these five professional colleges for exploring the students' difficulties and challenges in business writing. The data were collected during the second semester of their program in the months of March and April 2018.

The student's questionnaire was categorized into three parts for a better understanding of the students' views and opinions. They included the following parts – background information, the use of writing and difficulties and challenges faced during business writing. The descriptive test consisted of two questions that were focusing on writing a composition of 100–150 words each, about 'their college and about the role of business writing in professionals' life' for finding out the students' writing skills in the academic context as well as challenges and difficulties encountered in writing. Later, the descriptive test was evaluated by the researcher and identified different writing problems/challenges/difficulties.

### **DATA ANALYSIS/RESULTS**

The mixed method approach was adopted for the data analysis. The collected data from the questionnaires were analyzed for exploring the findings in order to answer the research questions. The data were analyzed in three sections that were cited in the questionnaire. Ten descriptive scripts were also evaluated by the researcher to find out diverse difficulties and challenges faced by the management students while writing different business text types.

#### **Background Information**

With the analysis of data, it was found that majority of the students i.e. 60% have got studied in the vernacular medium till high school level whereas a few students (8%) studied in regional medium till intermediate level. It was found that most of the students' medium of instruction changed from the regional medium at the high school to English medium at the intermediate level. Even though their medium of instruction at secondary and higher secondary level was vernacular. All the students have eight years of exposure to the English language.

It was revealed that majority of the students i.e. 65% have a habit of reading any one of the English language newspapers whereas 35% of them did not have a habit of reading any newspaper. It is conveyed that the majority of the students have exposure to the English language outside the ESL classroom instruction. It was found that majority of the students (i.e. 72%) often watch English news channels/programmes on television whereas 28% of them do not watch any

English programmes. Hence, it was proved that the majority of the students watch a variety of programmes in the English language on television for pleasure/information.

It was stated that 25% of the students use the English language for the communicative purpose whereas the remaining students stated that they did not use English for communicating with their members of family and friends. A very few students (i.e. 18%) used English for expressing their feelings and emotions whereas 82% of them did not use the English language for expressing their feelings and emotions. It is confirmed that the analysis of the data that a few students used English for expressing their feelings and emotions in the day to day life. Majority of the management students (i.e. 85%) stated that they use English for the correspondence as part of their course for getting a good job or for pursuing higher education whereas a few students (i.e. 15%) did not write in any context. It is proved that the students have inadequate knowledge of writing skill.

**The Use of Writing**

The second part of the questionnaire offered the use of writing skill by the management students in/during their course. In the analysis of study, it was found that majority of the students (i.e. 79% of them) used English for writing a paragraph as part of the assignment and examination purpose whereas a few students (i.e. 21%) mentioned that they did not use the English language for writing a paragraph.

English is used in the following purposes of writing:

The data on the figure 1 shows that writing purpose with its significance in daily lives in the following manner.

Majority of the learners (82% of them) stated that they use English for writing essays in their academic writing such as writing assignments and writing examinations.

- 75% of the students use English for writing e-correspondence.
- 85% of them use the English language for writing memos as part of their course.
- 69% of them write business letters in English.
- 86% of them used the English language for writing reports and proposals in the academic context.

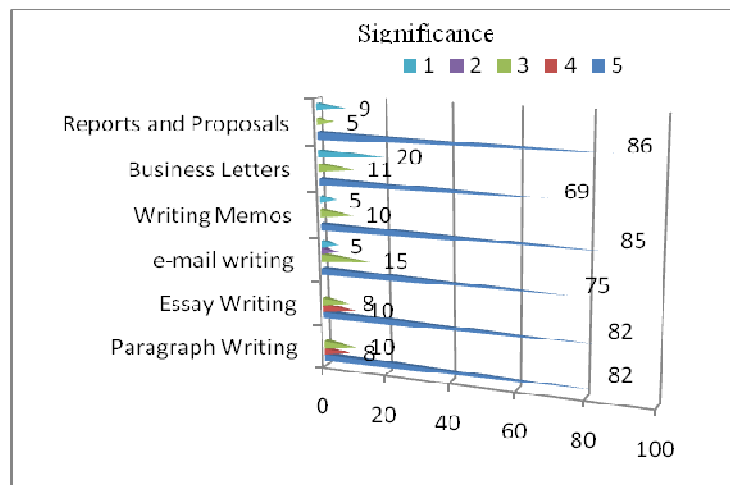
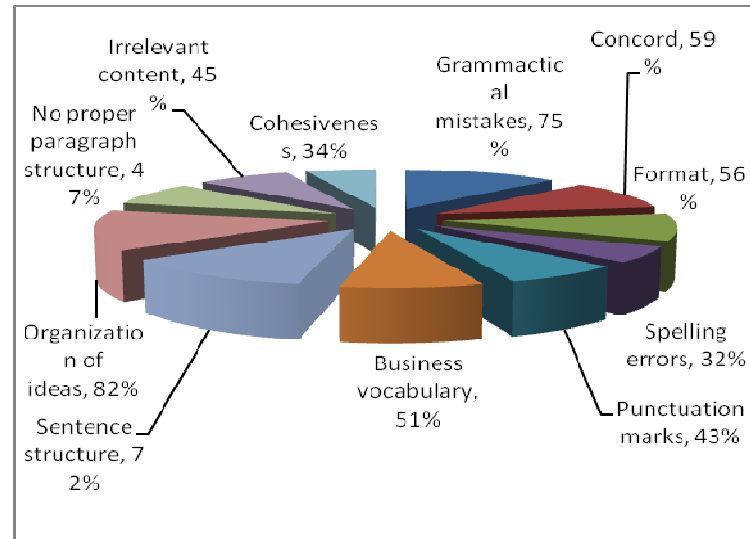


Figure 1: Significant of Writing with Its Purpose.



**Figure 2: Difficulties and Challenges Faced by the Management Students.**

It was revealed that most of the students write academic assignments, exams, e-correspondence, business letters, business reports and proposals in their course.

Difficulties and challenges faced in/during the writing

The analysis and interpretation of part III of the questionnaire revealed that majority of the students had faced many difficulties and challenges while writing various business text types.

The data on the figure 2 shows that the different problems and challenges faced by the management students while writing various types of texts. It was also found that most of the mistakes made by students were in the following areas.

- 82% of the students mentioned that they had faced difficulties in the organization of ideas in a proper manner.
- 75% of them mentioned that they had come across problems in using correct grammatical sentences.
- 72% of them had found problems in the use of correct sentence structure i.e. subject-verb agreement.

The students also found mistakes in the format, spelling errors, incorrect use of punctuation marks, wrong use of business vocabulary and irrelevant content. The data was also found that the lack of cohesion in their writing. It was revealed that several students viewed the correct use of grammatical sentences in their writing as a challenging and difficult activity to master.

In addition to that, the majority of the students failed to produce appropriate write-ups due to unaware of the proper format and organization of ideas. Majority of the management students were unaware of various genres and their format in writing. Hence, it led them to draft a wrong format while conveying business communication.

Further, the majority of the students (i.e. 89%) expressed that they had faced problems in various areas of business writing such as grammatical errors, spellings mistakes, use of general vocabulary (instead of business vocabulary), wrong use of punctuation marks, difficulty with sentence structure, word order and paragraph structure.

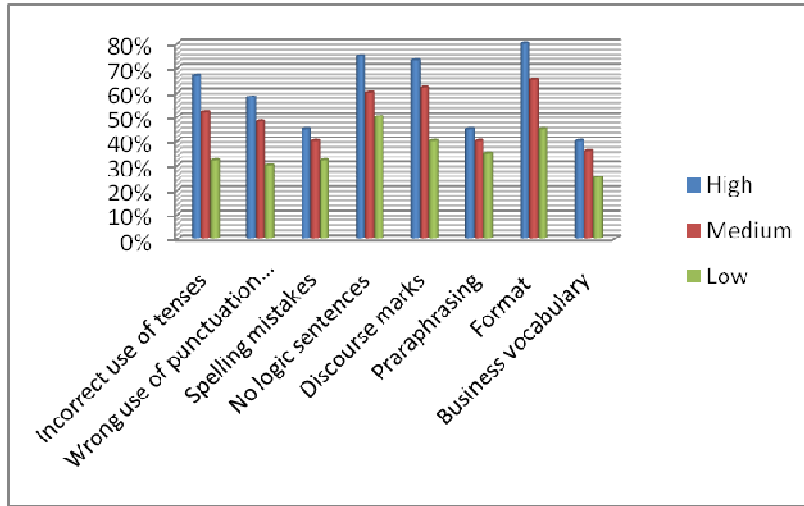


Figure 3: Problems in using Various Elements of Students' Descriptive Scripts.

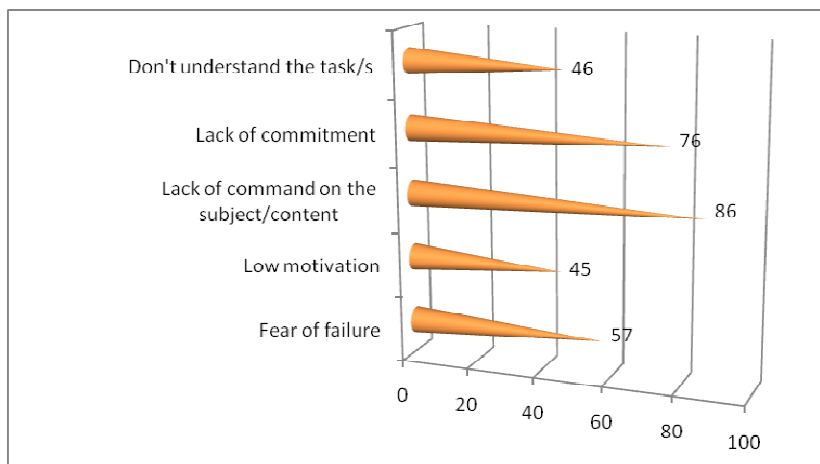


Figure 4: Students' Attitudinal Problems In Writing.

Majority of the students committed errors in the above-stated areas unconsciously in their writing. The students' reactions to the mistakes in their writing were not positive, they unknowingly used mistakes and errors in their write-ups.

The data on figure 3 shows that the students found mistakes in their descriptive scripts and categorized them as high, medium and low. It was found that majority of the students (i.e. 80%) found problems in using the format whereas 75% of them had difficulty in the area of organization of ideas in their writing. Seventy three percent of the students had faced problems in using discourse markers in writing. It was also revealed that the students' descriptive tests were full of spelling mistakes, inappropriate use of business vocabulary, wrong paraphrasing and wrong use of punctuation marks. It is confirmed that the students had faced problems and challenges in business writing in their professional settings.

Majority of the students stated that they received oral corrective feedback from their teacher by dictating the correct form in the class after the completion of the activity in their writing class whereas a few students mentioned that they did receive feedback personally when they approached their teachers. The teachers provided feedback by explaining

where they were wrong and dictating the correct form. Thus, it is confirmed that students received a variety of responses from their teacher for rectifying their mistakes in writing.

It is difficult for students to write effective texts as part of their curriculum for fulfilling their future needs. The students have limited exposure to business writing and different genres in a professional context in the language classroom. The learners did not have adequate reading habits so that they failed to produce effective write-ups. The language teaching was restricted to two hours of instruction per week whereas management subjects were given more hours of classroom instruction. Allotment of time is also an important feature for the development of business writing. Interestingly, the students also paid more attention to the core/professional subjects than providing the least significance to the language.

The figure 4 shows that the students' attitudinal problems in writing were stated below.

- 57% of the students expressed that they had not written well because of fear of failure.
- 45% of them had low motivation levels so they did not performed well in writing.
- 86% of them expressed that they lack command on the subject/content, so they failed to write well.
- 76% of them lack of commitment towards writing.
- 46% of them did not understand the writing task/s clearly.

The above analysis presented that most of the students had various attitudinal problems while writing such as fear of failure, low motivation, lack of command on the content/subject, lack of commitment and don't understand the writing tasks clearly. This inhibits students to produce a good piece of writing.

## CONCLUSIONS

The current paper presented the difficulties and challenges faced by the management students in business writing and how it affected and impacted on their overall performance. It was found that there were many factors played a major role in overcoming various students' problems in developing effective business writing skills. In order to improve learners' writing skills, the appropriate teaching strategy may be adopted in the language learning context. The teachers should provide more practice to the students in the classroom for language development. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) claimed that writing does not occur naturally but it is attained through a continuous effort and much practice (p. 6).

On the basis of the interpretation of the data, it was found that many students were unaware of the appropriate use of sentence structures in their writing. Hence, the majority of the students commit mistakes in the areas such as subject-verb agreement, organizational skills, unable to utilize time properly and inadequate content. The identified difficulties and challenges may affect students' business writing skills drastically while drafting assignments, letter writing, memo and report writing. It also affected the students' overall business writing performance in various text types by repeating various difficulties and challenges continuously. The students should ready to learn and incorporate diverse writing strategies in the teaching-learning context in order to develop their business writing skills in professional settings.

The teachers should provide an amicable learning environment to the students by providing a variety of teaching writing methodologies for practicing more time in both academic and non-academic contexts. The students should treat the role of the teacher as significant in improving one's writing. The teaching-learning context should be student-centric and the feedback may assist them in enhancing their writing skills. The students should be encouraged to read a lot for developing their vocabulary, grammar and knowledge of the world.



Effective written business communication is required for the development of other language skills and competencies in language learning. There should be in-depth research to be taken out on the various difficulties of business writing by ESL learners in other professional contexts.

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