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Error Analysis in Writing Business Letters Among Financial Management Students

Christian John Rhod D. Igsi¹, Cenverto T. Edianon², Angel Mae B. Castro³, Lea Charm C. Graciano⁴, Kharissa Mae B. Saranillo⁵, Mark Aaron A. Dacalanio⁶⊠

¹²³⁴⁵⁶Bachelor of Secondary Education, St. Mary's College of Bansalan, Inc., Bansalan, Davao del Sur, Philippines email: markdacalanio@smcbi.edu.ph

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Abstract

The English business writing correspondence is essential for Financial Management (FM) students, impacting their English writing proficiency both in academic and business purposes. This study identified the common errors in the written English business letters of FM students. The researchers employed a descriptive-qualitative method through Error Analysis Theory and Model of Corrective Feedback. Through this method, the researchers gathered data that provided a deeper understanding and analysis of the various writing difficulties encountered by FM students in their business letters. The letters were carefully checked and examined step by step to find and understand the mistakes that students usually make, helping to identify the areas where they often face difficulties and make errors. The results indicated eight types of error, which are sentence structure (21.3%), word choice (18.4%), capitalization (14.7%), preposition (11.8%), pluralization (9.6%), omission of article (8.8%), omission of linking verb (8.1%), and verb tense (7.3%). This implies that FM students are having difficulty in using the correct grammatical rules in writing. It is recommended that the students must be given feedback and great attention to reduce committing errors in writing business correspondence using the target language.

Keywords: business writing; error analysis; grammar; qualitative method, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most challenging skills in English. The majority of the students had problems in generating and organizing ideas and had a limited wide range of vocabulary. Despite having taken courses in English, Financial Management (FM) students still make grammatical and organizational errors in writing, inevitably resulting in misinterpretation and misunderstanding in business communication (Uba et al., 2020). Many businesses expect students to have strong English abilities, particularly in writing, due to the increased demand for written communication in the field of businesses, especially in developing coherent business letters.

A study in Thailand found that there are insufficient English writing abilities in grammar and vocabulary among business administration students and graduates, specifically, they have problems with writing emails and reports (Jitpanich et al., 2022). A study in Vietnam tested fourth-year students majoring in English found difficulties in

writing business refusal letters, students met a lot of difficulties which most came from vocabulary, format, style, and grammar (Hanoi et al, 2019). In Indonesia, first-year accounting department students had problems in writing business letters and faced difficulties in writing different types of business letters, along with, trouble in studying letter styles in English business letters (Dahler et al, 2014).

Moreover, there have been a relatively considerable studies in the Philippines concerning difficulties in writing business letters. A study in a university in the Davao region, Philippines, revealed that the corpora, taken from the subject of business correspondence, found that students committed common errors of in punctuation marks, diction, subject-verb agreement, spelling, capitalization, and contraction (Gomez, 2022). Moreover, In Makati City, a study suggests that teachers should utilize the Learning Management Systems (LMS) as supplement to the traditional method of teaching to enhance the college students' proficiency in business writing (Sicat, 2015).

The study is based on the Error Analysis theory by Stephen Corder (1974) and Model of Corrective Feedback by Ferris and Hedgcock (2005). Corder's Error Analysis theory affirmed the significance of identifying errors committed by second or foreign language learners. Corder stated that the research of errors is part of investigation of the process of language learning. It provides with an overview of linguistic development of a learner and may give indications to the learning process (Corder, 1974). The theory is appropriate for the study because it helps the researchers to be able to identify the errors committed throughout the process of language learning. The model of Corrective Feedback categorizes the errors into morphological, lexical, syntactic, and mechanical errors. Afterward, each category is divided into specific error subcategories. In analyzing the errors, the error log is used for identifying error patterns. After the errors are highlighted consecutively and completed into the table, the total number of errors is recapitulated as componential analysis (Ferris et al., 2005). This theory is appropriate for the study because it can help the students see when they have chosen incorrect strategies, improving their procedural knowledge. It can help the students in identifying their misconceptions and help them correct their understanding.

The researchers have not come across any study that deals with committing errors in writing business letters in the province of Davao del Sur. Accordingly, Business writing has a standard way of writing and formality in communication. It is essential to have more precise and more concise communication to effectively communicate particularly in an increasingly demand for written communication in the field of businesses, and it should be evident in the letter, otherwise, it shall create miscommunication and confusion (Antonio & Briones 2022). Therefore, it is the role of the researchers to conduct the study to evaluate the Financial Management (FM) students' English writing communication proficiency to help them not only for academic purposes but also in preparation for their future careers in business.

The study can be a source of data and a basis for the intervention plan that will help future researchers and educators develop more effective teaching methods. This method can include writing activities and techniques tailored to address specific problems. The study can improve the overall quality of education and student outcomes globally.

The main thrust of this study was to assess common errors, specifically it aimed to determine the types of errors present in the business letters written by financial management students in its specific expectations to improve its construction.

METHOD

This section discussed the research design, the participants of the study, data source, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

This study employed descriptive-qualitative method. This method was used as the preferred design when a simple phenomenon's description is desired. Qualitative descriptive research aimed to provide a thorough and accessible description of the data and to the surface of words and events (Sandelowski, 2000). The descriptive study assessed students' business writing skills. This study used error analysis, since the researchers aimed to identify the errors in a written text.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were second year Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) students majoring in Financial Management in a private institution in Davao del Sur, Philippines. This study used probability sampling in selecting the participants. Probability sampling allows for conclusions and inferences about the target population of a study in which every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected as a study participant (Stratton, 2021). The researchers identified thirty participants among financial management students to participate in the study.

Data Source

The researchers used the second-year BSBA majoring in financial management students' business written outputs in conducting the analysis of the study. The outputs consisted errors which the researchers analyzed and categorized.

Data Collection

The researchers first sought permission from the administration to conduct the study. After the approval, researchers communicated with the participants and collected three business letters from each of the thirty respondents, who are second-year BSBA students majoring in Financial Management (FM). These outputs were reviewed thoroughly, with errors identified and categorized according to their types. The errors analyzed based on the study's framework and presented in tabular form.

Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the Financial Management (FM) students' business letters and identified the errors, frequencies, and percentages of the errors. The study used the error analysis by Corder (1974), and the Model of Corrective Feedback by Ferris and Hedgcock (2005) in analyzing the errors. Then, the data were tabulated and classified based on the process utilized by Mandarasi (2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Error in Specific Expectations in the Business Letters Written by Financial Management Students

In the gathered data, 136 errors were found in the business letters written by the 2nd year business administration students. The findings of the error analysis revealed eight types of error: sentence structure (21.3%), word choice (18.4%), capitalization 14.7%, preposition (11.8%), pluralization (9.6%), omission of article (8.8%), omission of linking verbs (8.1%), and verb tense (7.3%). A study on error analysis in English written communication revealed four primary error levels: morphological errors (irregular forms in a word level of English written texts), syntactic errors (irregular forms in a sentence level in English written texts), mechanical errors (irregular forms of rules of English written texts) (Pantarapongsanti et al., 2022), and lexical errors (irregular forms of words and phrases used in contexts) (Bader, 2023). Research suggests that the lack of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge were the main reasons why people in the professional business industry faced challenges in drafting e-mails and business letters, leading to difficulties in sentence construction and paragraphs correctly (Herlina, 2022).

Frequency of Error Percentage (100%) Types of Error (136)Sentence structure 29 21.3% Word choice 25 18.4% Capitalization 20 14.7% Preposition 16 11.8% Pluralization 13 9.6% Omission of article 12 8.8% Omission of linking verbs 11 8.1% Verb tense 10 7.3

Table 1. Types and Frequency of Errors

Errors in Sentence Structure

Errors in sentence structure, such as lack of parallelism, incorrect verb forms, and awkward phrasing, can affect clarity and professionalism in communication. Example 1 lacked parallel structure between "We appreciate" and "to assist you," requiring alignment for grammatical consistency. Example 2 misused "in under process now," as "under process" is not standard English; the correct phrasing is "the order is currently being processed." Example 3 had structural issues with "in under process"

and "will be ship," which should be "is currently being processed" and "will be shipped." Example 4 contained unclear wording and an informal tone unsuitable for professional communication, requiring grammatical corrections for clarity. Example 5 was incomplete and grammatically awkward, needing restructuring for coherence. Research shows financial management students frequently struggle with sentence structuring, making errors in simple, compound, and complex sentences (Antonio et al., 2022). Studies highlight misconceptions about grammatical rules, emphasizing the importance of structured sentence construction in English (Patarapongsanti et al., 2022). Fundamental grammar principles define sentence types: simple sentences contain an independent clause (Wagner-Nagy, 2018), compound sentences connect clauses using conjunctions (Horodenska, 2019), and complex sentences consist of an independent clause and at least one dependent clause (Andriana et al., 2021).

Table 2. Errors in Sentence Structure

Examples	Original Sentences	Suggested Sentences (Expectations)
Example 1	We appreciate your interest in our services and to assist you in planning	"We appreciate your interest in our services and are happy to help you
	your special day.	plan your special day."
Example 2	We hereby confirm that the order in	"We hereby confirm that the order is
	under process now.	currently being processed."
Example 3	We hereby confirm that the order in	"We hereby confirm that the order is
_	under process now and we can assure	currently being processed and will be
	that on the next day it will be ship by	shipped out the next day".
	our motor van.	
Example 4	This product is gentle on your skin	This product is gentle on your skin
	and can help soothe and nourish it,	and can help soothe and nourish it.
	this product range for reseller, ₱140.00	For resellers, ₱140.00 for a minimum
	minimum for 12 sets, ₱160.00 for	order of 12 sets and ₱160.00 for a
	minimum for 6 sets.	minimum order of 6 sets.
Example 5	The varieties of the product that I	I would like to know the varieties of
	purchased. The date of manufacturing	the products I purchased, the date of
	and expiry so I could know.	manufacture, and the expiration
		date.

Errors in Word Choice

Word choice errors, such as improper terminology or incorrect word usage, can impact clarity and professionalism in communication. Example 6 misused "children" instead of "students," where "students" was more appropriate in a school setting. Example 7 confused "compliment" with "complement," altering the intended meaning of the sentence. Example 8 used "nature" instead of "natural ingredients," which provided better specificity. Example 9 mistakenly used "insure" instead of "ensure," affecting the sentence's correctness. Example 10 contained informal wording ("awesome"), which was better replaced with "greatly appreciated" for a professional tone. Studies highlight that EFL students frequently struggle with word choice, including collocation errors and subject-verb agreement issues (Kim, 2020; Ahmed et al., 2024). ESL writers often face challenges in selecting appropriate vocabulary, affecting academic writing clarity (Thuy et al., 2022). Research on financial

management students also supports the prevalence of word choice errors, emphasizing the importance of intentional vocabulary selection in written communication.

Table 3. Errors in Word Choice

Examples	Original Sentences	Suggested Sentences (Expectations)
Example 6	We take any threats seriously and will	"We take any threats seriously and
	take the necessary steps to protect our	will take the necessary steps to protect
	<u>children</u> .	our students ."
Example 7	Our company was <u>establish</u> to	"Our company was established to
	compliment the needs of our clients.	complement the needs of our clients.
Example 8	Our product, the Skin Perfection is	"Our product, the Skin Perfection is
	derived from <u>nature</u> .	derived from natural ingredients."
Example 9	We will insure that your concerns are	'We will ensure that your concerns
	addressed.	are addressed.
Example 10	Your feedback was awesome, and we	"Your feedback was greatly
	are excited to work with you.	appreciated, and we are excited to
		work with you."

Errors in Capitalization

Capitalization errors can impact clarity and professionalism in writing. Example 11 required capitalizing "With this" at the start of the sentence. Example 12 needed "To ensure" to begin with a capital letter for proper sentence structure. Example 13 incorrectly capitalized "Master's Degree," which should be lowercase unless used in a formal title. Example 14 correctly capitalized "Brilliant Skin" as a proper noun but should have kept "product" in lowercase. Example 15 mistakenly capitalized "Bachelor's Degree" when referring to it in a general sense. Research indicates that capitalization errors are common among EFL learners, especially in academic writing and internet-related terms (Siddiqui, 2015; Pathan, 2021). Financial management students frequently struggle with proper capitalization, highlighting the importance of distinguishing between common and proper nouns to maintain grammatical accuracy.

Table 4. Errors in Capitalization

Examples	Original Sentences	Suggested Sentences (Expectations)
Example 11	"with this, I would like to apply for a	"With this, I would like to apply for a
	teaching position in the college	teaching position in the college
	department."	department."
Example 12	"to ensure the success of this event,	"To ensure the success of this event,
	we are in need of various event	we are in need of various event
	supplies."	supplies."
Example 13	I am planning to take Masters	I am planning to take a master's
	Degree in Business Administration.	degree in Business Administration.
Example 14	"I am writing to inquire about your	"I am writing to inquire about your
-	Brilliant Skin Product."	Brilliant Skin product ."
Example 15	"I am a recent college graduate with	"I am a recent college graduate with a
	a Bachelor's Degree in business."	bachelor's degree in business."

Errors in Preposition

Preposition errors can affect sentence clarity and precision in communication. Example 16 misused "in regards" instead of the correct phrase "with regard to," which is standard in formal writing. Example 17 incorrectly used "interested of" when "interested in" is the appropriate structure. Example 18 mistakenly used "response for" instead of "response to," which better clarifies the subject of the response. Example 19 misused "at" in place of "in," where "in process" correctly reflects the order's status. Example 20 used "in" instead of "on" when referring to updates, with "on" being the preferred preposition for indicating a topic. Research shows that EFL learners frequently struggle with preposition usage, leading to errors in fluency and comprehension (Lee, 2019; Ahmed et al., 2022). Understanding proper preposition selection is crucial for effective written communication, particularly in academic and professional contexts.

Examples **Original Sentences** Suggested Sentences (Expectation) Example 16 regards the G-tech "With regard to to G-tech smartphone's features". smartphone's features... We are delighted that you are Example 17 "We are delighted that you are interested of our new product. interested in our new product". Example 18 This is the response <u>for</u> the letter that "This is in response to the letter that you have sent. you sent". Example 19 We hereby confirm that the order is "We hereby confirm that the order is currently in process". at process now... Example 20 We will also keep you updated in the "We will also keep you updated on the delivery schedule. delivery schedule".

Table 5. Errors in Preposition

Errors in prepositions were evident among Sudanese EFL learners, arising from the interference of the mother tongue (Albooni, 2023). A study found that Indonesian accounting students frequently needed to correct the omission of prepositions, which led to misconceptions of meaning (Mahardika et al., 2022). Errors occur in the form of addition, insertion, and choosing the wrong preposition (Mandasari, 2019). Based on the analysis, financial management (FM) students frequently make errors in the usage of preposition. In English grammar, prepositions were an essential part of English grammar that link nouns, pronouns, or phrases to other words in sentence. They provide information about time, place, direction, cause, and other relationships between the elements in a sentence.

Errors in Pluralization

Pluralization errors can lead to misunderstandings and inaccuracies in communication. Example 21 required "payments" instead of "payment" to reflect multiple transactions. Example 22 misused "product" when "products" was necessary

to match the plural verb "contain." Example 23 incorrectly used "furnitures," though "furniture" is an uncountable noun and does not take a plural form. Example 24 mistakenly used "envelope" instead of the plural "envelopes," which correctly reflects the quantity of items. Example 25 required "orders" instead of "order" to denote multiple transactions. Research indicates that EFL learners commonly struggle with pluralization, including irregular forms such as "foot-feet" and "goose-geese" (Fathoni et al., 2021). Understanding pluralization rules is crucial for grammatical accuracy, ensuring clarity and precision in writing.

Examples Original Sentence(s) Suggested Sentence (Expectations) This is to remind you that your 5th This is to remind you that your 5th and Example 21 6th payments of 38,933.33 is now and 6th payment of 38,933.33 now overdue. overdue. Example 22 Skin Perfection Care <u>product</u> Skin Care Perfection **products** contain contain no harmful ingredients that no harmful ingredients that can cause can cause skin irritation, allergies, or skin irritation, allergies, or other health other health problems. problems. Example 23 Our new line of furnitures will be "Our new line of furniture will be available by next month. available by next month." Example 24 5 pieces of envelope. 5 pieces of **envelopes**. Example 25 In regard to the payment for the said With regard to the payment for the said

orders.

Table 6. Errors in Pluralization

Omission of Article

order.

Article errors can impact sentence clarity and correctness in writing. Example 26 needed "the" before "prices" to specify a particular set of prices. Example 27 required "the" before "wine-tasting event" to indicate a specific occasion. Example 28 misused "a" instead of "an" before "online teacher," as "online" starts with a vowel sound. Example 29 omitted "a" before "report" and "scan," which were countable nouns requiring an article. Example 30 lacked "a" before "great new stock of wines" and was also missing the verb "has" for completeness. Studies highlight that article misuse, including omission and incorrect selection, is common among EFL learners (Qasem et al., 2022; Elumalai, 2019). Understanding article rules is crucial for grammatical accuracy, helping writers distinguish between general and specific references in communication.

Suggested Sentences (Expectations) Examples Original Sentence(s) The decision to increase prices of Example 26 The decision to increase the prices of our products is influenced by our products is influenced by dynamic dynamic factors. factors. Example 27 I hope you are able to attend wine I hope you are able to attend the wine tasting event. tasting event. Example 28 I have more than 1 year of I have more than 1 year of experience

Table 7. Omission of Article

	experience as a online teacher.	as an online teacher
Example 29	Failure to submit report or scan of	Failure to submit a report or a scan of
	arrival time will incur the penalty.	the arrival time will incur the penalty.
Example 30	"Filipino Diner and Drinks great	"Filipino Diner and Drinks has a great
	new stock of wines."	new stock of wines."

Omission of Linking Verb

Errors in verb usage, particularly with linking verbs, can lead to incomplete or unclear sentences. Example 31 required "are" before "committed" to indicate an ongoing commitment. Example 32 lacked "are" to properly link the subject "we" with the adjective "thrilled." Example 33 omitted "is" before "price range," making the sentence incomplete. Example 34 needed "is" to connect the singular subject "Our product" with its complement. Example 35 required "is" to clarify the description of "Filipino Diner and Drinks." Studies show that EFL learners struggle with subject-verb agreement, particularly in modal and linking verbs (Putri et al., 2023; Dwi, 2023). Poor verb structure can cause misunderstandings in business communication, highlighting the importance of clear subject-verb sentences (Greavu, 2019). Proper verb usage ensures grammatical accuracy and enhances readability in professional writing.

Table 8. Omission of Linking verb

Examples	Original Sentence(s)	Suggested Sentences (Expectations)
Example 31	"We committed to delivering the highest level of quality and services to meet your expectations."	"We are committed to delivering the highest level of quality and services to meet your expectations."
Example 32	"We thrilled to introduce our newest ITech smartphone."	"We are thrilled to introduce our newest ITech smartphone."
Example 33	"The price range for seller 140.00 minimum for 12 sets."	"The price range for seller is 140.00 minimum for 12 sets."
Example 34	"Our product, the Skin Care Perfection from natural ingredients."	"Our product, the Skin Care Perfection is made from natural ingredients."
Example 35	"Filipino Diner and Drinks great new stock of wine."	"Filipino Diner and Drinks is a great new stock of wine."

Errors in Verb Tense

Errors in verb tense can lead to confusion and disrupt sentence coherence. Example 36 needed "grabbed" instead of "grab" to correctly reflect a past action. Example 37 omitted "will," and "shipped" should be "ship" for proper future tense agreement. Example 38 incorrectly used "have" instead of "has," affecting subject-verb agreement. Example 39 required "packed" instead of "pack" to correctly indicate a completed action. Example 40 misused "has" when "having" was the appropriate verb

form to align with the subject. Studies show non-native English speakers frequently struggle with verb tense errors, including omission and misinformation in past and present tense forms (Sazali et al., 2024; Haryana, 2022). Proper tense usage ensures logical sequencing of actions, enhancing clarity and comprehension in written communication.

Table 9. Errors in Verb Tense

Examples	Original Sentence(s)	Suggested Sentences (Expectations)
Example 36	Your G-Tech smartphone grab my	Your G-Tech smartphone grabbed
	attention.	my attention.
Example 37	As agreed to, we will shipped your	As agreed to, we will ship your order
	order on COD terms.	on COD terms.
Example 38	Filipino Diners and drinks have a	Filipino Diners and Drinks has a
	great new stock of wines and we are	great new stock of wines and we are
	glad to you that we are hosting a wine	glad that we will be hosting a wine
	tasting event on December 10, 2023	tasting event on December 10, 2023
	Quezon City, Manila from 8:00 pm	Quezon City, Manila from 8:00 pm
	until 11:00 pm.	until 11:00 pm.
Example 39	It was <u>pack</u> with nutrition that help to	It was packed with nutrition that
	reduce dryness, flakiness, and improve	helps to reduce dryness, flakiness, and
	skin textured and glow.	improve skin texture and glow.
Example 40	My company, Empire Furniture	My company, Empire Furniture
	Design, and your company are	Design, and your company are
	operating in the same market, and <u>has</u>	operating in the same market having
	the same customers based on offering	the same customers with similar
	similar product lines.	product lines.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that financial management students commit errors in writing business letters. In the gathered data, there are 136 errors found in the business letters written by the 2nd year Business students. The researchers have come to realize that in the business world, writing a correct and precise business correspondence is essential to effectively communicate and disseminate information. Communication skills in the field of business are very crucial; therefore, FM students should possess enough knowledge and skills to write effective business correspondence. Moreover, students must be given feedback and great attention to reduce committing errors in writing business correspondence using the target language.

As we reflect, we have come to discover that in analyzing errors, future teachers may follow some strategies to connect real-world scenarios to the students, such as applying for jobs, responding to personal or business letters, or drafting a formal inquiry. By tailoring their letters to these situations, teachers may be able to identify student errors and provide feedback in order for students t reduce their errors in writing business correspondence using the target language. Additionally, teachers may also use tools and platforms like Grammarly, Quilbot, or Kahoot quizzes for interactive learning.

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