

Exploring Language Proficiency on Job Application Letters of EFL Learners

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Abstract

Language proficiency is vital for academic success, professional communication, and personal expression enhancing critical thinking and ensuring effective conveyance of ideas. The ability to write a well-crafted application, resume, and efficient writing is the first step to getting a job. This study aims to explore the proficiency of Bachelor Level students on job applications based on structures and language used. The research used qualitative methods and discourse analysis as a research design. Test and interviews were used as a tool to explore their proficiency. Collected data were analyzed in terms of structures, SVO- patterns, and use of verbs, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation. Participants were interviewed to explore their strategies for learning in class, motivation, and practice. The research found that the students are below average in writing job applications in terms of sentence structures, SVO- patterns, use of verbs, punctuations, and CV. The research concluded that writing should be taught at the school level by applying modern strategy. However, in terms of using simple sentences, the use of vocabulary and spelling are satisfactory. The pedagogical implication of the study is to focus on the structural part of job application, structure of sentences, writing CV, and SVO pattern applying inductive methods and modern techniques.

Keywords: Application, EFL, Exploring, Proficiency, Respondents.

Introduction

Language, is a system of conventional spoken, manual, or written symbols using which human beings, as a member of the social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, imaginative expression and emotional release. Heary Sweet an English phonetician and language scholar stated that language is the expression of ideas employing speech sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, and this combination answers to that of ideas into thoughts (Crystal, et al. 2023).

Language skill refers to the ability to use language accurately, fluently, correctly, and with a high degree of capacity to be pragmatic with sensible judgment of practical situations. There are four skills of language learning, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing like other skills, writing skill refers to the visual representation of speech in which a language user puts down the graphic symbols on paper that represent language. It is all the above skills since it is permanent. Harmer (2006) says writing has fewer signs and symbols than speech but they can be just as powerful. Writing usually turns up as a finished product. Writing is the process of encoding a message and its main purpose for language

processing is the learners' act of thinking in the target language which helps them to comprehend the construction better (Sharma, 2010). Writing a letter is a kind of skill. Writing a letter is only possible after developing writing skills. A letter is a written message from one person to another. The role of letters in communication has significantly changed. The development of the telegraph, telephone, and the internet have all had an impact on the writing and sending of letters. It is an effective means for exchanging news, and views and maintaining good mutual relations between the offices and the persons. The letter also represents the efficiency of the writer and the ability to impress the reader. A good letter is objective, impressive, and able to present the subject matter in an understandable form to the receiver.

Job application letters are designed in the manner of sales letters. It serves as a cover letter for the enclosed resume. The main purpose of a job application letter is to attract the employee's attention, create interest in the applicant, build an interest to look carefully at the resume and make it easier for the employer to take positive action (Debasish, 2009, p 283). The purpose of the application letter is to get employers interested enough to read the application and contact them for interviews. There are two types of application letters. Solicited application letters are written in response to an advertisement. Unsolicited application letters are written at the writer's initiative. In both cases, the writer is supposed to give all relevant details of his qualifications and experiences.

Debasish (2009) states that a good application letter should be longer than three paragraphs. The job application letter is prepared by individual employees to the office asking the information, permission, or opportunity in the office. It should be written politely courteously and ideally.

In this study, I tried to explore the proficiency of the students in writing job applications regarding structural parts and language used in it what strategies they have been applying in their writing, and their roles in motivation and practice in the classroom. This research helps them to expand their knowledge and skill in writing job applications ensuring a good job and opportunity in the future as it is mandatory for applying for a job.

In today's world, the use of the English language is mandatory. In addition to opening up employment opportunities, being able to use a foreign language helps to make a real connection with people and to know more about diverse cultures, places, and lifestyles. The more proficient you are, the better you can express yourself. In the context of Nepal, the English language is learned as a foreign language or the target language. Even if they understand, they can't express it in written form as the hardship is remarkable in writing.

Many factors are responsible for poor writing skills, such as techniques, methods, and materials used by the teachers in the class, mother tongue

interference, medium of learning, homely environment, and so on. Especially, in community-based public campuses which are located in semi-urban and urban areas, the students consider English as a study to pass only the exam. Moreover, they have not participated in effective communication. They do not enjoy being involved in writing activities. In fact, except for English, other subjects are taught in the Nepali language. They have little exposure to academic writing. In most places, they have to write a letter in Nepali language. When they apply for a job in an English medium school, they write in English. Thus, my research was to find the proficiency of the students in job application writing. The questions that stir up this research were to what extent the techniques of writing job applications are contributing to their meaningful learning and What challenges have the students been facing in learning to write job applications.

This study is significant for those who get involved directly or indirectly in the field of English language teaching, especially teachers, students, and job seekers. This study is relevant to course designers, researchers, textbook writers, examiners, and examinees as this study provides a clear outline of writing job application letter proficiency.

The objectives of the study were to explore the writing proficiency of Bachelor level students in case of job application based on structural parts and language used and to list out pedagogical implications for job application writing

Literature Review

The key concept of job application writing proficiency associated with the research phenomena has been conceptualized. Further, the latest and relevant empirical studies have been reviewed.

Pokhrel (2016) carried out the research entitled Bachelor Level Students' Proficiency in Free Writing. The objective of the study was to find out the writing proficiency of the students in free writing. The study explored that the writing proficiency of the students was not satisfactory and the organization of subject matter, sentence structure, proper knowledge and illustration were very poor. It shows that attention is to be concentrated on writing. The curriculum should be designed in such a way that can provide lots of opportunities for the learners to focus on writing. Wijayanti (2021) carried out research entitled How Indonesian Students Write Job Application Letters. The study showed job application letters have variants of the model and the languages used by them are still less persuasive. It means participants wrote in various models. They could not apply any particular model. The language used by them is also not contextual and effective. It also shows that they didn't learn any particular model. They should be focused especially on the writing model.

Khanal (2021) carried out research entitled Bachelor Level Students' Proficiency in Free Writing: A Case of Rupandehi. The objective of the research was

to find out the free writing proficiency of Bachelor level students in case of essay writing. He found that his proficiency in essay writing was below average. He also found that the modern approach and pedagogy to teaching writing in English as a foreign language situation is not being followed in the environment under study. He used a case study as a research strategy and he used a purposive sampling method to collect the data. His study shows that students' writing skill is very poor due to classroom strategy. They can improve their writing proficiency only through practice in the classroom. Rosalina, et al (2023) researched Exploring Job Application Letters of EFL Learners Application letters. The participants in this study were high school students at vocational schools. They found out that only two students out of four students were able to write an application meeting the criteria. They found out that teachers should pay more attention to teaching writing subjects, especially making sentences.

Demir M. and Gunaydin, Y. (2023) researched A Digital Job Application Reference: How do Social Medial Posts Affect the Recruitment Process? This study aims to determine the influence of candidate employees' social media accounts on human resource professionals' hiring decisions as a job application reference in the tourism industry. A qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted and research questions were designed using thematic analysis. The study showed that human resource managers in the tourism industry generally prefer to examine candidates SMAs rather than traditional references because they can quickly and cheaply screen many applicants (pp. 457-477).

Methodology of the Study

The research used qualitative methods and discourse analysis as a research design. I conducted the study in two phases. I selected two community-based public campuses of Rupandehi purposively: one from semi-urban and another from urban areas. I selected three students from each campus studying a Bachelor in Education, second-year majoring in English. I involved all students to participate in the test. I used vacancy announcements as a tool which was published on social media. I selected three answer sheets for each campus randomly and checked them on the basis marks allocated. I applied one more primary tool, i.e. interview to explore their writing proficiency. Based on Subedi (2017, p.262) and Hedge (2000, p.148), I evaluated the tools based on the parameters: structures of job application (date, superscription, salutation, body including starting and ending, subscription, signature and CV) and use of language (sentence structures, vocabulary, the accuracy of grammar, spelling and punctuation.) The participants were given alphabetical names as S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6 for ethical consideration. Participants were interviewed to explore the strategy, motivation, and practice based on structures of job application and use of language.

Result and Discussion

This chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the informants. The purpose of the study was to explore writing proficiency on the job application and list out some pedagogical implications. Based on test items and interviews, I found their performance categorically.

Structures of Job Application

None of the students wrote applications with full structures. S1, S3, and S4 neither used subscription nor the ending of the letter. All the students wrote of the subject although it is optional. S5 started with as I passed +2... It shows that he has no idea how to start the letter. As stated in Seely (2009, pp.35-39), there are two types of approaches to writing a CV. They are the traditional approach and the new approach. As Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (8th Ed.) states there are two types of CV. They are British and American style. None of the students followed these styles. They wrote in their style and they were incomplete. It shows that they did not learn either of the styles. Debasish (2009) mentions that a job application consists of three paragraphs. Only S3 and S4 wrote in three paragraphs but S1, S5, and S6 wrote in two paragraphs and S2 wrote in one paragraph as stated in Seely (2009), If the greeting is Dear sir\mam, then ending as the subscription is yours faithfully, and if the greeting is Dear Mr. Greel \Miss\Mrs. Alameda, the ending is yours sincerely. It seems that all the students followed this system. When asked about the contributing factors, all six students said that they were not taught about the structures of job applications and different styles of resumes. They also replied they did not practice in class and were not focused on the structural part. They paid attention only to the language aspect.

Sentence Structure and Vocabulary

As language observed in all respondents' job application writing, use of simple sentences was found. S1, S4, S5, and S6 used only simple sentences in their writing. There was no use of conjunctions. S3 was found to be used in simple and compound sentences. Only S2 used three types of sentences, i.e. simple compound and complex however, S2 had relatively showed above average, during the interview, all of them responded with the same causing factor, i.e. lack of practice and they felt easier in expressing in simple sentences although they know compound and complex sentence.

Although they seemed to have little range of monaurally last, they repeatedly applied the same vocabulary in many places, they used proper and contextual vocabulary. S1, S3, and S6 used vocabulary, such as qualified, experience, extra-qualification, dedication, etc. During the interview, S2 and S4 replied that they paid attention to vocabulary and they had offline dictionaries on their mobile. S5 replied that social media also supported enriching vocabulary.

Accuracy of Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation

The errors in subject-verb agreement, use of verbs, use of prepositions and use of articles were found. More errors were found in the SVO pattern and the use of verbs. Very less errors were found in the use of articles and prepositions on average. When they were asked about errors, they replied that the deductive approach was a medium of teaching and lack of practice. They committed errors in spelling also but it was found not to be serious types of errors. Students were found to be using only full stops and commas. None of them used more than a full stop and comma. During the interview, they replied that punctuation was not taught in the classroom. They did not have any idea also. Grammar was taught deductively in the classroom. Due to it, they were unable to learn properly. It shows that grammar and punctuation are to be taught in context inductively.

Conclusion

Students are unable to convey the information as asked though they have been the English course since their beginning years and getting exposure comparatively more being majoring in English. They are found poor in maintaining the structures of job applications. They have incomplete structures. They could not have the idea of the subscription and signature part of the application. They could not understand the curriculum vitae to be included along with the application and styles of writing a CV. They have a problem in starting and ending the letter. It seems that they have no idea that this part is not taught properly.

The sentence structures they used in the application are below average. They did not seem to have a good knowledge of the type of sentences. They used only simple types of sentences. They did not use compound and complex types of sentences in their writing. It shows that their writing proficiency is below average. Vocabularies they used in the job applications are satisfactory. This is a strong part of the students as vocabularies are contextual and standard as well they seemed to have a problem with SVO pattern and use of verbs. I found them satisfactory in terms of using full stops and commas, but they did not know how to use colons, semi-colons, hyphens, dashes, and inverted commas. In spelling, they did not have a remarkable problem. This part of the writing is satisfactory. Students pointed out the problems regarding teaching methods, techniques, and approaches including encouragement and motivation. Likewise, on being questioned about structures of application, they reported that structures were not taught separately and focused. Moreover, regarding sentence structures, grammar, and punctuation, they clearly indicated that the modern approach and pedagogy to teaching English as a foreign language situations are not being followed in the environment under study.

In the overall judgment of students' proficiency in writing job applications, I concluded that it was below average and not satisfactory. They are found below average in terms of overall structures of application, SVO patterns, use of verbs,

punctuation, and sentence structures. I also found that it was below average due to the teaching strategy being followed, lack of practice, and lack of motivation.

As this research is expected to be functional for the people who are directly or indirectly involved in English language learning-related activities like curriculum-designers, teachers, students, and job seekers, it has implications for the study.

Basic things required in English are not found strong. So it is to be strengthened from school level education. Students need more writing exposure as they have very little writing practice and they have a habit of practicing during examinations and if needed. Structures and language are to be considered while writing letters. Thus, it should be taught at the school level. Teachers should replace traditional approaches with inductive approaches while teaching job applications. While teaching job applications, teachers should use newspapers, magazines, and social media. To avoid the errors of grammar, it is to be taught in context rather than in isolation. Teachers should support the learners in using punctuation marks in context.

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