



THE ABILITY OF THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS OF SMKN 2 PARIAMAN IN WRITING INQUIRY LETTERS

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Abstract

This research is about students' ability in writing a business letter, especially an inquiry letter. This research was aimed at analyzing students' ability in writing inquiry letters deal with its letter organization. This research used descriptive research. The population of this research were all of the first year Office Administration students from two classes, X AP1 and X AP2. There were seventy-four students. The samples were twenty-five students taken by using random sampling technique. The instrument applied in this research was a written test about inquiry letter. Students were asked to write inquiry letter based on three topics that they have chosen in the previous week for sixty minutes. The data was analyzed by using a rubric score of the inquiry letter deal with its letter organization. The result of this research showed that students got 4 (well) in writing the inquiry letter deal with its letter organization. However, there were some organization of letter that did not write properly. Students were expected to have more understanding in writing a proper inquiry letter deal with its letter organization.

Keywords: writing ability, inquiry letter, letter's organization

A. Introduction

Writing is crucial to be learned because it can build connection in a society. It is happened whenever the writer delivers the ideas, thoughts and feeling towards the reader into written form. Writing is a good way to advance language development. As Kane (2000:1) describes writing as rational and valuable activity that provoke the writer to keep learning about the language.

Furthermore, writing is a process of expressing ideas, thoughts, and feeling into written form. Brown (2001:335) supports that writing is the written products of thinking, drafting, and revising that require specialized skills on how to generate ideas, how to organize them coherently, how to use discourse markers

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and rhetorical conventions coherently into a written text, how to revise text for clearer meaning and how to edit text for appropriate grammar and how to produce a final products.

This skill also can reduce illiteracy in society. In line, Jeremy (2004:3) mentions literacy (reading and writing) is fundamental in modern society to be able running in it. Writing skill is not only needed in school, but also at work. In education context, students are demanded to write well, whether it is for doing a task or test. Writing proficiency can measure their knowledge in testing language ability (in understanding language and giving feedback) or other skill or subject. Writing skill is needed in almost any job or career. Writing a report, letter, presentation and any other kind of writing are some examples of writing activity in work.

Students learn to write several texts in their school, such as narrative text (Fitriani, Saun, Al-Hafizh, 2014), descriptive text (Etika, Mukhaiyar, Saun, 2013). They will have to write different texts in each grade based on the syllabus. In addition, students in a vocational high school, particularly majoring in Office Administration, have several subjects that require them to write some documents related to office work. One of the subjects which teach them how to write various letters properly is Correspondence subject. This subject is specialized in writing correspondence (letter) both in Bahasa Indonesia and English.

A business letter is a formal letter that is used in business communication. One of business letter that they learn is inquiry letter. Inquiry letter is the first English letter that they learn in the Correspondence subject. Inquiry letter is a letter that requesting about information or something to recipient. Salim (1979:6) says that inquiry letter required in formal trade requiring formal procedures in writing. The letter of inquiry is often an early stage of the business transaction. By the letter of inquiry, prospective buyers ask or inquiry about products or services to be purchased. According to Salim (1979: 2-8) and Navickiené et, al (2012:64), prospective buyers usually ask the seller about specification of items, the price, terms of payment, the form of services that the seller provide, sample of the products, and the equipment that can be used as a support of the products.

According to Salim (1979:171) the organizations of a business letter are divided into the essential and additional parts. The essential parts of a business letter are letterhead (heading), date line, inside address, salutation (greeting), body, complimentary close, and signature block. The additional parts of a business letter are identification initials (references), attention line, subject line, enclosure, postscript, and carbon copy.

The letterhead includes the writer's company's name, address, telephone number, postcode, website URL, and e-mail address (Salim: 1979, and Thill and Boveč, 2012: 436). Salim (1979) delivers that reference line can contain chronological numbers, employee initials and department codes/numbers. Boveč and Thill (2012:436) explain the the standard method of writing dateline in U.S. is used the full name of month (no abbreviations), followed by the day (in numericals, without st, nd, rd, or th), a comma, and then the year. Shwom and Snyder (2011: A-17) explain how to write an inside address with four lines: name, company, company address, and city). In the first line, the writer writes courtesy

title like “*Mr.*” or “*Miss*” or “*Ms.*” are followed by the recipient’s name, and organizational title (if available) like *Manager* or *Director* (short title) in one line; if it is long like *Assistant Vice President* put it in the next line. Boveé and Thill (2012:437) deliver writing salutation is started with “Dear” “*Mr.*” or “*Ms.*” + (last name) + coma.

A body of a business letter usually have three parts: opening, message, and closing or ending. As Carrey and Dugger (2002:3-4) state that the first part is to state the purpose of the letter, the second part is to explain what information writer has or the issue, and the last part is usually contains of three kinds of closing which are the conclusion, requesting action, and thank the reader. It is important to keep the message straight to the point and clear. The body of letter will be explained later on inquiry letter. Parmaitri (2011: 14) explains three kinds of wordings of a complimentary close; “Yours Sincerely,” “Yours Faithfully,” and “Sincerely,”. Sutinah et, al. (2010:81)says that in signature block, the writer sign above his name.

Formal letter which is like an inquiry letter has some differences between letter in Bahasa Indonesia and English. The differences are found on how to write the date or dateline and the placed of letter’s organization (reference, dateline, enclosure, salutation, and subject line). Each part of a letter has some elements that are in it. For example, an inside address has four element; name of recipient, name of company, company address, and city. However, the students only put two or three elements in this part.

In conclusion, it was necessary to know the ability of students in writing an inquiry letter. In fact, Office Administration’s students’ ability in writing an inquiry letter has not been researched yet. So, the researcher was interested to conduct the research related to an inquiry letter in order to find out the common problem that students did in writing inquiry letter. The research was aimed to the first year students of vocational high school, majoring Office administration at SMKN 2 Pariaman.

B. Research Methodology

This research was conducted by using descriptive research. Gay, et al. (2012:9) also state that descriptive research is used to describe the situation that has already existed or current condition. The population of this research was the first year students of SMKN 2 Pariaman, majoring Office Administration. There were seventy-four students from two classes. The technique sampling that was used in this research was random sampling. As Cohen, et al. (2007: 110) mention that random sampling each participant in population have chance being selected. So, the researcher chose 25 students as the sample/representative through lottery system in rolled paper from the 74 first year Office Administration’s students who learned Correspondence in 2015/2016 and have learned about an inquiry letter.

The instrument of this research was a writing test. The students were asked to write an inquiry letter. Before writing the inquiry letter, the researcher provided five topics about inquiry letter. They are:

1. Requesting detail information of office furniture,
2. Requesting to give discount on 3D TVs,

3. Requesting for free installment of 100 CCTVs,
4. Requesting sample of products oh a new toys model.
5. Requesting specific information about a meeting room in Haylan Hotel (the price, size, facilitations),

They needed to vote one topics of an inquiry letter that they liked. The most three chosen topics were the topic that they used to write an inquiry letter later on. The students were asked to write an inquiry letter. The topics for the inquiry letter they need to write were the topic number one, four, and five. The research was done at SMKN 2 Pariaman on 4 - 20 May 2016 for the first year of Office Administration in the 2015/2016 academic year. The students were asked to vote on one of five topics about inquiry letter on 4 May 2016. Then, the researcher got the data of three most chosen topics by the students. The students were asked to write an inquiry letter based on the three most chosen topics a week later. They wrote the inquiry letter for about 60 minutes. And then, the researcher collected students' inquiry letters to score by using rubric score to find out students' ability in writing an inquiry letter. In addition, the rubric score were consulted with a Correspondence teacher and the researcher's advisors.

C. Result and Discussion

The data of this research were the inquiry letters that were wrote by the 25 first year students of SMKN 2 Pariaman, majoring Office Administration. Students 1-9 wrote the inquiry letters about requesting some new model of office furniture to Mic-Mac Company in Adelaide, South Australia. Students 10-17 wrote the inquiry letters about Toy Corporation of America which requesting sample of product of a new model of toys which is produced by a company in Indonesia. And, students 18-25 wrote the inquiry letters requesting detail information about a meeting room in Haylan Hotel (the price, size, and facilitation).

The data was analyzed deeper based on the letter's organizations. It consists of the students' ability in writing the inquiry letter based on its organizations. The organizations of a letter are letterhead, reference line, dateline, inside address, salutation, subject line, body of a letter (introduction, message, closing), complimentary close, and signature block.

Letterhead consist of the sender's address (the name of company, address, telephone number/fax, and postcode/website/email of the sender). The mean score of students' ability in writing letterhead of the inquiry letters was 4.76 (very well). It was proved by 20 (80%) from 25 students got the highest score (score 5; it states four aspects) in writing the letterhead. Then, there were four students (16%) who scored 4 (it states three of four aspects), one students (4%) scored 3 (it states two of four aspects), and none of them scored 2 (it states one of four aspects) nor 1 (there is no headline). It showed that almost all of the students fulfilled all of the general aspect in writing the letterhead (four aspects).

Reference line consist of the initial of writer or, and type writer and filling number of the letter. Whereas, dateline consists of the date of a letter (day, month, year). The mean score of students' ability in writing reference line and dateline of the inquiry letters was 4.04 (well). there were five students that got 5, eighteen

students got 4, and none of them got 3. However, there were two of them who did not write the reference line and dateline, so they got 2.

Inside address is the recipient's address. The mean score of students' ability in writing inside address of the inquiry letters was 2.8 (fair). This score means they hardly could write the inside address of an inquiry letter correctly. There were only two students who scored 5 (it states four aspects (name of the recipient with the courtesy title, company, company's address, and city)). There was one student who scored 4 (it states four aspects (name of the recipient without the courtesy title, company, company's address, and city)). Most of student, who were 16 of them, got 3 (it states three aspects). There were two students who scored 2 (it states two aspects), and other four scored 1 (it states two aspects).

Salutation is a greeting in a letter. It contains the words that the sender use to greet the recipient. Meanwhile, subject line can be also referred as the summary of the letter. The recipient can guess the contain of the letter when read the subject line. The mean score of students' ability in writing salutation and subject line of the inquiry letters was 3.72 (well). There were four students who scored 5 (salutation states three aspects (Dear+courtesy title+last name); subject line is clear and understandable). Then, there were twelve students who scored 4 (salutation states two aspects (Dear+Sir / Dear+Madam); subject line is clear and understandable). There were seven students who scored 3 (salutation states two aspects (Dear+Sir / Dear+Madam); subject line is unclear). Last, the lowest score that one student got was 2 (no salutation and subject line).

Body of a letter is divided into three parts, which are introduction, message, and closing. Introduction part states the introduction of the sender (writer and, or company) and how do they know about the products or services. Message part is to ask for information the sender need to know about the products or services. And last part, closing, is usually contains of the requesting action and thank the recipient. The mean score of students' ability in writing the body of the inquiry letter was 4.1 (well). In detail, the mean score of students' ability in writing the introduction was 3.88 (well), the message was 4.52 (very well), and the closing was 4 (well).

Based on the data, almost all of students could write the body (introduction) of an inquiry letter correctly. There were twenty-two students (88%) who scored 4 (it states one of two aspects (the introduction of the sender or how do they know the products or services) with clear sentences). There was one student who scored 2 (it states one of two aspects with unclear sentences). And, there were two students who scored 1 (there is no introduction of letter). Almost all of students could write the body (message) of an inquiry letter correctly. There were twenty-one students (84%) who scored 5 (it states the verb of inquiry (send, request, interest, need, inquire), all the asking questions/information as the instruction, and write in clear and concise sentences). There were two students who scored 3 (it states the verb of inquiry, all of the asking questions/information as instruction, but written in unclear sentences). And, there were two students who scored 2 (it states the verb of inquiry, some of the asking questions/information as instruction, and writes in unclear sentences). For closing part, all of the twenty-five students

got 4 (well). It meant they only write one of two aspects in closing of inquiry letter (the request of action or thank the recipient).

The mean score of students' ability in writing the complimentary close and signature block body of the inquiry letters was 4.36 (well). There were fifteen students who scored 5 (it states three aspects [the wordings of complimentary close (Yours Sincerely,/Yours Faithfully,/Sincerely)] correctly, signature, and full name of writer). There were six students who scored 4 (it states three aspects (the wordings of complimentary close incorrectly, signature, and full name). And, there were two students who scored 3 (it states two aspects (the wordings of complimentary close correctly and full name)). Last, there were two students who scored 2 (it states two aspects (the wordings of complimentary close incorrectly and full name)).

However, the researcher noticed the lack of understanding in writing the dateline, inside address, and salutation part. *First*, the students mostly used ordinal number in writing the dateline of a letter. Whereas, Bovee and Thil (2012: 436) and Wuryanti (2015:5) explain that the dateline is written by the day of month in cardinal number. Some students also misspelled the month in the dateline. *Second*, the students rarely wrote the recipient's name along with the courtesy title in the inside address of a letter. Whereas, Shwom and Snyder (2011: A-17) explain inside address with four lines, which are recipient's name, company, company address, and city. Most of the students only wrote company's name, address, and city. Considering by addressing the recipient personally, the recipient will give special attention to the letter, there are only three students who mention the name of recipient. *Last*, because of the students do not address the recipient to specific name, so the salutation is addressed to general recipient. Meanwhile, Bovee and Thill (2012:437) mention that by using specific name it will attract recipient's attention.

In conclusion, the ability of the first year students of Office Administration at SMKN 2 Pariaman in writing an inquiry letter was 4 (well) (see Table 1). There were two of them scored 5 (very well), twenty-one students scored 4 (well), and two students scored 3 (fair). It can be concluded that almost all of the students have written the inquiry letter in a proper organization.

D. Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the research findings, there are several conclusions that can be drawn. Based on analysis, the students' ability in writing letterhead was 4.76 (very well). The students' ability in writing the reference line and dateline was 4.04 (well). But, they got 2.8 (fair) in writing the inside address. The students' ability in writing the salutation and subject line was 3.72 (well). The students' ability in writing the body of letter was 4.1 (well); introduction part was 3.88 (well), message part was 4.52 (very well), and closing part was 4 (well). Last, the students' ability in writing the complimentary close and signature block was 4.36 (well).

The ability of the first year students of Office Administration at SMKN 2 Pariaman in writing an inquiry letter was 4 (well). There were two of them scored 5 (very well), twenty-one students scored 4 (well), and two students scored 3

(fair). It can be concluded that almost all of the students have written the inquiry letter in a proper organization.

Based on the finding, there are some suggestion that the researcher offer to the student, teacher, and the next researcher. *First*, it can be suggested that the first year of Office Administration students need to be more aware in writing the dateline, inside address, and salutation. They need to understand more in those parts writing.

Second, this test is done to find out the ability of students in writing the inquiry letter, without test their language ability in writing it. Although the recipients can understand the message in the body of the letter, there are some misspelled and the sentences are not arranging in a good grammar. So that, the researcher suggested, the teachers, both English and Correspondence teachers, should give more example of a good sentences in writing a letter. Furthermore, inquiry letter is the first English letter that they learn, so the error is excusable.

Third, suggestion for the next researcher who may be interested on the research about the inquiry letter. The next researcher can do this research on Office Administration major at college, especially the ones who are in Education major. They need to analyze how the students write the letter, because the research can show how much they understand the theory that they will teach to their students later on.

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Table 1. The Students' Ability in Writing an Inquiry Letter

Students	Letterhead	Reference Line and Dateline	Inside Address	Salutation and Subject Line	Body (Introduction)	Body (Message)	Body (Closing)	Complimentary Close and Signature Block	Total Score	Mean Score	Rating Scales
1	3	5	1	3	4	5	4	5	30	3,75	4 (well)
2	5	5	1	2	4	5	4	5	31	3,875	4 (well)
3	5	5	3	2	4	5	4	5	33	4,125	4 (well)
4	5	4	3	3	4	5	4	5	33	4,125	4 (well)
5	5	4	3	4	4	5	4	4	33	4,125	4 (well)
6	5	4	1	3	4	5	4	4	30	3,75	4 (well)
7	5	4	3	4	4	3	4	5	32	4	4 (well)
8	5	4	1	4	4	3	4	5	30	3,75	4 (well)
9	5	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	30	3,75	4 (well)
10	5	4	3	4	4	5	4	5	34	4,25	4 (well)
11	5	4	3	4	4	5	4	4	33	4,125	4 (well)
12	4	4	3	4	4	5	4	5	33	4,125	4 (well)
13	5	4	3	4	4	2	4	4	30	3,75	4 (well)
14	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	35	4,375	4 (well)
15	5	4	3	3	4	5	4	4	32	4	4 (well)
16	5	5	3	4	4	5	4	5	35	4,375	4 (well)
17	5	4	3	4	4	2	4	4	30	3,75	4 (well)
18	4	2	2	2	4	5	4	5	28	3,5	3 (fair)
19	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	38	4,75	5 (very well)
20	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	37	4,625	5 (very well)
21	5	4	3	5	4	5	4	5	35	4,375	4 (well)
22	5	4	2	4	4	5	4	3	31	3,875	4 (well)
23	5	4	3	4	4	5	4	3	32	4	4 (well)
24	4	2	3	5	1	5	4	2	26	3,25	3 (fair)
25	4	4	3	4	4	5	4	3	31	3,875	4 (well)
Mean Score	4.76 (very well)	4.04 (well)	2.8 (fair)	3.72 (well)	3.88 (well)	4.52 (very well)	4 (well)	4.36 (well)	32.08	4.01	4 (well)