

## Grab Your Future: Socialization in Constructing a Powerful English Application Letter for College Students

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### ABSTRACT

In today's competitive job market, the ability to compose a professional English application letter is essential for university graduates, especially in non-native English-speaking contexts. This study explores the implementation and outcomes of a socialization program designed to enhance the English correspondence skills of sixth-semester Management students at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi (STIE) Sultan Agung, Pematangsiantar, Indonesia. A total of 75–80 students were divided into three groups (Group A, Group B, and Group C) and participated in a series of interactive workshops focused on the structure, language, and personalization of English application letters. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through observations, document analysis of student letters, reflection essays, and post-program questionnaires. The results revealed significant improvements in students' understanding of letter format, grammar usage, and the ability to tailor content to specific job advertisements. Peer review and collaborative learning played a crucial role in increasing student engagement and confidence in using English professionally. The discussion highlights the importance of genre-based instruction and social learning in developing employability-oriented communication skills. The findings emphasize the need for higher education institutions to embed practical, job-focused English training into their curriculum to better prepare students for real-world career demands. This study concludes that structured socialization programs can effectively equip students with the skills and confidence needed to construct impactful application letters, thereby enhancing their readiness for the job market. With the right support, students can take ownership of their career development, starting with how they present themselves on paper.

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## INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive job market, the ability to communicate effectively in English is no longer just an advantage—it is a necessity. As globalization connects economies and workforces across borders, employers have placed a premium on strong English communication skills, especially in professional correspondence such as job application letters (Yunus & Salehi, 2012). For college students preparing to enter the workforce, crafting a well-structured and compelling English application letter is a critical step in demonstrating not only language proficiency but also professional readiness.

Application letters, often referred to as cover letters, serve as a candidate's first impression in the recruitment process. Unlike resumes, which outline qualifications and experiences in bullet points, application letters allow candidates to narrate their suitability, convey motivation, and tailor their message directly to a prospective employer (Guffey & Loewy, 2015). A strong application letter reflects both competence and confidence—qualities highly sought after by employers. Unfortunately, many college students struggle to produce such documents, either due to limited exposure to formal writing or a lack of guidance on industry expectations.

The gap between academic English and workplace communication is well-documented. Many university curricula focus on theoretical knowledge rather than practical communication skills, leaving students unprepared for real-world professional writing (Hyland, 2003). Socialization efforts, such as workshops, peer sessions, and campus-wide campaigns, can bridge this gap by equipping students with essential tools for job correspondence. These initiatives not only teach format and structure but also instill an understanding of tone, clarity, and personalization—key elements of impactful English application letters.

Socialization in this context refers to the process of introducing and integrating students into professional communication norms and practices. According to Wenger (1998), learning is a social process that involves participation in a "community of practice," where individuals engage, share knowledge, and build skills collaboratively. By fostering a supportive learning environment centered on English correspondence, students are more likely to internalize both the language mechanics and the cultural expectations of job applications.

Moreover, the transition from academic life to professional employment marks a critical life stage for college students. As noted by Jackson (2014), employability skills—including communication, adaptability, and professionalism—are best developed when institutions create authentic, real-world learning opportunities. Therefore, embedding English application letter writing within socialization activities can enhance not only students' writing competencies but also their confidence and job readiness.

The urgency of this issue is further emphasized by employers' frequent complaints about graduates lacking basic communication skills (Robles, 2012). In particular, poorly written application letters may lead to lost opportunities, even for highly capable candidates. Errors in grammar, inappropriate tone, generic content, or lack of structure can signal a lack of preparedness and attention to detail—traits employers seek to avoid. Hence, targeted socialization programs that emphasize the construction of powerful English application letters can make a significant difference in students' employability outcomes.

This paper explores the importance of structured socialization efforts in teaching college students how to construct impactful English application letters. It examines the challenges students face, the role of academic institutions in providing relevant training, and the practical strategies that can help students succeed in their job search. By empowering students with these essential communication skills, universities can help them "grab their future" with greater confidence and professionalism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The ability to write an effective application letter in English has received growing scholarly attention, especially in relation to graduate employability and global workforce demands. Researchers have emphasized that English proficiency, particularly in writing professional documents, is a critical component of career readiness (Graddol, 2006). As English remains the dominant language in international business and education, mastering English correspondence skills is a valuable asset for university students aiming to enter competitive labor markets (Seidlhofer, 2011).

Application letters represent a genre of writing that demands both linguistic competence and an understanding of rhetorical purpose. Bhatia (1993) identified job application letters as one of several "promotional genres," characterized by a mix of factual content and persuasive language. To construct an effective letter, students must know how to present their qualifications strategically while maintaining professionalism, coherence, and a reader-centered tone. Unfortunately, many university students are unfamiliar with such conventions, especially if they lack experience in formal English writing or exposure to authentic models.

Studies show that explicit instruction and genre-based pedagogy significantly improve students' ability to produce quality application letters. Tardy (2009) argues that genre knowledge is socially situated and must be taught in context, allowing learners to engage with real-life models and communicative purposes (Herman, 2014). Genre-based instruction not only improves students' writing mechanics but also deepens their understanding of the function and expectations of different types of correspondence (Herman et al., 2023). For example, Cheng (2008) found that EFL learners demonstrated measurable improvement in organization, tone, and content when taught using a structured genre-based approach to cover letter writing.

Socialization into professional communication practices plays a crucial role in students' writing development. According to Duff (2010), academic and workplace writing skills are best acquired through meaningful social interaction, where learners engage in guided practice with peers, mentors, or instructors. Peer-review sessions, writing workshops, and simulated job application exercises have proven effective in this regard. These social environments allow students to observe, critique, and emulate effective writing strategies in a collaborative setting, ultimately fostering greater confidence and competence.

Moreover, cultural expectations and norms influence how application letters are perceived, especially in cross-cultural contexts. According to Kaplan (2001), rhetorical patterns vary across cultures, which can lead to misunderstandings or negative impressions when students apply for jobs in English-speaking countries. Therefore, socialization efforts must also include intercultural communication awareness to help students understand how to tailor their letters appropriately for global audiences. This includes sensitivity to tone, levels of formality, and directness—features that are not always emphasized in EFL instruction.

Technology-enhanced learning platforms also contribute positively to writing development. Platforms such as Grammarly, online writing labs, and university-sponsored learning management systems can support learners in revising and editing their application letters (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). However, while digital tools offer valuable assistance, they are most effective when integrated into structured learning environments where students receive human feedback and contextualized instruction. This again highlights the importance of socialized learning experiences over isolated writing practice.

In sum, the literature underscores the multidimensional nature of English application letter writing. It is not merely a linguistic skill but a socially constructed practice that blends language, genre awareness, intercultural competence, and collaborative learning. For university students preparing to enter the professional world, targeted socialization programs offer a promising strategy to equip them with the tools they need to write application letters that effectively represent their skills and aspirations.

## METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the implementation and outcomes of a socialization program designed to enhance students' skills in constructing English application letters. The objective was to assess the effectiveness of structured socialization and training activities in supporting students' ability to write clear, professional, and compelling application letters in English, which are essential for job applications and internship placements.

The participants of this study were sixth-semester students from the Department of Management at Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi (STIE) Sultan Agung, located in Pematangsiantar, Indonesia. The total number of students involved in the program ranged from 75 to 80. These students were divided into three learning groups: Group A, Group B, and Group C. Each group was assigned a facilitator and followed the same instructional structure and learning materials to ensure consistency in the delivery and assessment of the socialization program.

Data were collected through observation, document analysis, and student reflection essays. Observations were made during socialization sessions to assess engagement, participation, and collaborative learning behaviors. Student-produced application letters served as the primary source of data for evaluating writing improvement. Reflection essays provided insights into students' perceptions of their learning and the usefulness of the program.

In addition, a short post-program questionnaire was administered to gather feedback on the structure, content, and perceived effectiveness of the socialization activities. The responses were analyzed thematically to identify common strengths and areas for improvement. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively. Student letters were reviewed and categorized according to key criteria, such as clarity of structure, grammatical accuracy, personalization, and overall coherence. Thematic analysis was applied to reflection essays and questionnaire responses to extract recurring themes related to the students' learning experiences and perceived impact of the program.

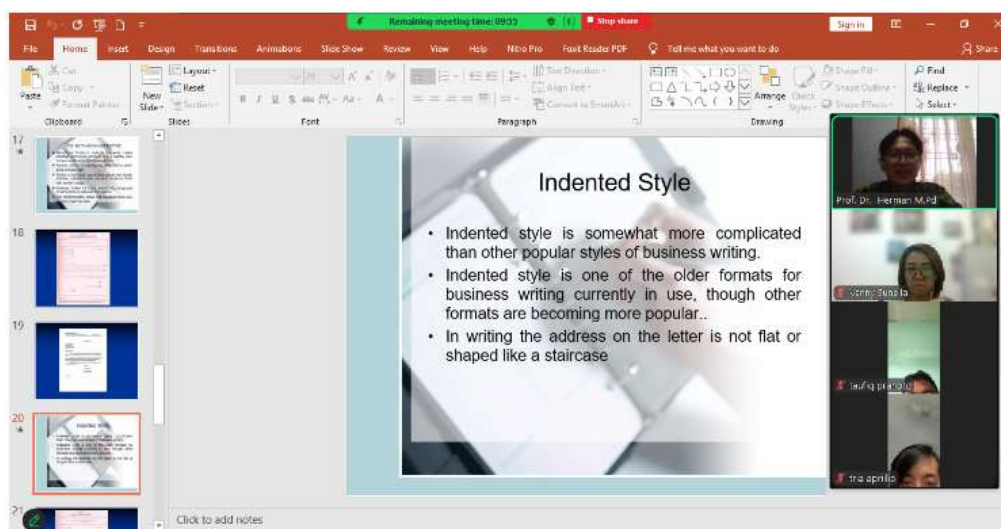
The implementation strategy was designed to promote not only the technical aspects of English writing but also critical thinking and audience awareness, which are essential for effective job correspondence. By structuring the program around active learning and peer feedback, students were socialized into the norms and expectations of professional English writing through a supportive and interactive environment.

## RESULTS

The socialization program aimed at improving students' ability to construct effective English application letters yielded several significant outcomes. Analysis of student work, observations, and reflection responses from the three groups—Group A, Group B, and Group C—revealed positive developments in both technical writing competence and professional communication awareness.

### 1. Improvement in Application Letter Structure and Format

At the start of the program, many students demonstrated limited understanding of the formal structure of English application letters. Common issues included missing components (e.g., subject line, proper salutation), informal tone, and inconsistent formatting. By the end of the program, approximately 85% of students submitted application letters that included all the required components: header, salutation, introduction, body, closing paragraph, and signature line. Students also showed improvement in maintaining a professional tone and organizing content in a logical flow.



**Figure 1. One of the formats in writing a good letter**

### 2. Enhanced Grammar and Language Use

Errors in grammar, verb tense, and sentence structure were prevalent in the initial drafts. However, through guided workshops and peer feedback sessions, most students showed notable improvement. Group B, in particular, demonstrated the greatest linguistic progress, with over 70% of students reducing major grammar errors in their final submissions. Students began to use varied sentence structures and appropriate formal vocabulary, indicating a better grasp of professional English.

### 3. Increased Personalization and Job Relevance

A key focus of the program was teaching students to tailor their application letters to specific job postings. In the initial workshop, students tended to use generic statements without clear links to job requirements. However, in their final submissions, over 60% of students across all groups successfully referenced specific skills or experiences in response to job advertisements. This shift from general writing to targeted, personalized content reflects a deeper understanding of the letter's purpose.

### 4. Growth in Student Confidence and Engagement

Based on observation and reflection essays, many students reported increased confidence in their ability to communicate professionally in English. During peer review sessions, students actively participated in giving and receiving constructive feedback. Several students noted that seeing peers' work helped them understand expectations more clearly. Group C, which initially showed the most hesitation, became more engaged in discussions by the third session.

### 5. Positive Student Perception of the Program

Results from the post-program questionnaire (completed by 72 students) showed that over 90% of participants rated the socialization sessions as "useful" or "very useful" for their career preparation. Students appreciated the practical focus of the workshops and expressed interest in more frequent training on job-related

English skills. Many indicated that this was their first time receiving formal instruction on writing an application letter in English, suggesting a significant gap in the existing curriculum.

#### 6. Peer Review as an Effective Learning Tool

Peer feedback played a central role in helping students improve their drafts. Students reported that reading others' letters helped them reflect on their own weaknesses and revise more effectively. This collaborative element also built a sense of shared learning and reduced anxiety around writing in English. Instructors observed that students became more critical and precise in their writing after engaging in peer review.

Overall, the results of the socialization program demonstrated that targeted, interactive instruction in English application letter writing significantly improved students' technical writing ability, confidence, and readiness for the job application process. The integration of structured learning, peer collaboration, and real-world application made the program both practical and impactful for students nearing graduation.

### DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the significance of targeted socialization programs in enhancing the English writing competence of university students, particularly in the context of professional correspondence. The improvement observed in students' ability to construct structured, personalized, and grammatically accurate application letters confirms the value of integrating real-world, communicative tasks into higher education, especially in non-native English-speaking contexts.

The program's effectiveness aligns with genre-based pedagogical theories, which emphasize that learners benefit most from explicit instruction on the social and rhetorical purposes of professional texts (Tardy, 2009). As seen in the students' progression, initial unfamiliarity with the conventions of application letters gave way to more audience-aware, structured writing, suggesting that when students are socialized into the "why" and "how" of writing—not just the "what"—they produce more effective texts. This reinforces the idea that writing should be taught as a social practice, not merely a linguistic skill (Hyland, 2003).

In particular, the improvement in personalization and relevance to job advertisements underscores the success of encouraging students to adopt a communicative, reader-focused perspective. Rather than relying on memorized or template-based writing, students learned to evaluate job requirements and strategically present their qualifications. This development reflects Bhatia's (1993) notion of "genre embedding," where learners are trained to adjust their writing to suit professional expectations and specific contexts.

The results also demonstrated the critical role of collaborative learning environments. Through peer review and guided workshops, students became active participants in their own learning and that of their peers. This mirrors Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice, wherein learners co-construct knowledge through shared activities and feedback. The peer review sessions helped reduce anxiety associated with English writing and encouraged reflective thinking, leading to higher engagement and better revision practices.

Moreover, the observed growth in students' confidence is consistent with constructivist learning theories, which argue that learners construct knowledge more effectively when they are engaged in meaningful tasks within a supportive community (Vygotsky, 1978). The reflection essays and post-program feedback confirmed that students valued the relevance of the task and the opportunity to apply their learning to real-life scenarios, enhancing both motivation and retention.

From a broader perspective, the findings suggest a need for greater institutional attention to employability-focused language instruction in Indonesian higher education. As noted by Jackson (2014), many graduates struggle with the transition from academic to professional communication due to a lack of authentic learning experiences. The positive student response to this program shows that with the right structure, even short-term interventions can have lasting impact on students' preparedness for the job market.

Despite these positive outcomes, the challenges faced—such as time management issues and some difficulty with feedback comprehension—point to the importance of scaffolded support. In future iterations, providing sample letters, bilingual support materials, and guided self-assessment tools could help address varying proficiency levels. Also, integrating such training into the formal curriculum would ensure that all students, not just those in targeted workshops, receive adequate preparation for professional communication.

In conclusion, the discussion reaffirms that socialization programs focusing on application letter writing in English are both timely and necessary. They serve as a bridge between academic learning and workplace expectations, providing students with the linguistic, strategic, and interpersonal tools required to succeed in a competitive job market.

## CONCLUSION

The implementation of a socialization program to teach the construction of English application letters among sixth-semester Management students at STIE Sultan Agung, Pematangsiantar, has proven to be an effective intervention in enhancing students' readiness for the workforce. The findings clearly indicate that many students lacked prior exposure to professional English correspondence and benefited significantly from structured, interactive, and collaborative instruction. This initiative addressed a critical skills gap, bridging academic knowledge and practical communication competence essential for job-seeking success.

Through a series of workshops, guided writing exercises, and peer feedback sessions, students demonstrated noticeable improvements in their understanding of the structure, tone, and content of application letters. The development of their ability to personalize letters based on job advertisements reflects a deeper understanding of professional audience expectations—an essential component of employability in today's competitive job market.

Equally important, the program fostered increased confidence in English writing and greater engagement in learning. The collaborative nature of the sessions created a supportive environment that allowed students to learn not only from instructors but also from their peers. These social learning experiences contributed to higher levels of motivation and helped reduce the anxiety often associated with writing in a second language.

Moreover, the program served as a practical model for how higher education institutions can integrate employability-focused communication training into their broader curriculum. In line with educational best practices, it combined elements of genre awareness, real-world relevance, and learner-centered interaction, all of which contributed to the effectiveness of the learning process.

In summary, this study confirms that socialization into professional English writing—particularly application letters is a valuable and necessary component of higher education, especially in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts like Indonesia. Empowering students with these skills not only increases their job prospects but also equips them with lifelong competencies in professional communication. The success of this program reinforces the call for more institutions to invest in practical English writing education that supports students' transition from academic life to the professional world. With the right support, training, and encouragement, college students can confidently "grab their future" one well-written application letter at a time.

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