



Written Communication in Organisations and The Need to Teach Report Writing to Tertiary Learners

KEYWORDS

corporate communication, written communication, report writing, tertiary learners

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ABSTRACT *English has become a worldwide and prestigious language for communication. It has become a connecting language for all nations in the fields of science, engineering and technology. Its dominance had made the language as an inevitable mode of communication globally. The corporate world can function effectively only if English is used as a means of communication. Corporate Communication is an expanse of managerial operations that coordinates all internal and external correspondences to have a stable relationship with the employees, public and other companies. Written communication is a part of corporate communication and is an important element of correspondence in the corporate world. It is a reliable and permanent means of documentation. This paper brings to notice the importance of report writing skills which is a component of corporate correspondence. The paper analyses the report writing skills of second year BCA tertiary learners of an Arts and Science college in Chennai, India and stresses on the need to teach report writing skills them.*

1. Introduction

English has become a global and prestigious language for communication. Statistics show that 350 million people speak and write English and another 350 million people speak and write English as their second language. This has made English as a global language. It has become a connecting language for all nations in the fields of science, engineering and technology. Its dominance has made the language as an inevitable mode of communication universally and has also influenced communications in the corporate world. The corporate world cannot function effectively without the use of the English language.

2. Communication

Communication is an indispensable part of life and fundamental for any kind of correspondence in an organisation. Raman, Meenakshi and Prakash Singh (2011) observe communication as, 'the successful transmission of information through a common system of symbols, signs, behaviour, speech, writing, or signals' (p. 2). When we observe any organisation be it a small business unit or a big firm, we see employers, managers, and executives attending a phone call, reading and writing emails or reports, discussing, dictating letters and making presentations. In brief we can say that they are 'communicating'.

2.1 Corporate Communication

Corporate Communication is an expanse of managerial operations that coordinates all internal and external correspondences to have a stable relationship with the employees, public and other companies. A corporate manager leads and supervises his subordinates and shares messages. A successful corporate manager is not the one who just has the management degree, but the one who comprises the managerial skill to correspond verbally and non-verbally in an effective way both internally and externally.

The four components of communication in an organisation are Speaking, Reading, Writing and Listening.

2.2 Written Communication

Written communication is a reliable and permanent form

of document. It aims to inform, motivate and persuade the readers. It is a significant management skill in today's business world. 'Poor writing' is one of the biggest problems confronted by the corporate world globally. 'Those who write poorly create barriers between themselves and their readers; those who write well connect with readers, open their minds, and achieve goals' (Garner A. Bryan, 2012 p. xv). He further says, 'paying a celebrity thousands of dollars to promote your company in 140-character tweets may seem crazy. But more and more businesses are doing just that' says (Garner A. Bryan, 2012 p xvi). Therefore good writing is a great asset for the success of organisation.

In big firms, ideas are not just shared through the telephone only, but a well-written document has to follow, supporting the conversation. When communication is done through 'speaking', feedback is received immediately. Facial expressions and gesture could also be as a means to express one's feedback. But, in written communication this advantage is impossible. The sender has to get the message 'right' the first time itself. This is why writing is more difficult than speaking. Prudent commendable writing shapes ideas, enhances a case, persuades others and wins the reader's support. 'The quality of a document reflects the quality of you or your business', writes Dorrell, Jean (2005 p. 65). 'The Writing Tool' carries the company's mission and vision to the world and enhances the image of the company globally.

2.2.1 Forms and Significance of Written Communication

Letters, memos, reports, emails etc are the various types business documents. Letters are written for internal and external purposes. Impressive letters should arrest the attention of the readers and focus it on the message. But, research in business writing says that there is a decline in the quality of letter writing. Subordinates would have no respect for their top executive, if he writes with spelling and grammar errors. Bad writing could also cost a company's credibility, image and money. The purpose of the letter would be distorted if it lacks clarity, readability, specificity of ideas and persuasiveness.

Memos are messages sent internally. It is less formal than letter. Memos help in improving the communication within the organisation and enhance steady internal business operations.

Emails have taken a significant part in corporate writing. Today, we cannot think about any business or communication without emails. Its ability to connect fast has made emails an inevitable component of communication. But, what kind of writing happens in emails? Company's inboxes are filled with emails that have spelling, grammar, punctuation structural errors, colloquialism and less email etiquette.

Business reports contain information about the proceedings of a company. It is a document that helps to understand the growth or depreciation of a company over a period of time. Reports should be written with clarity, since it bears facts about the company. Redundancy, error in sentence structure, spelling or grammar could blemish the image of the organisation. "Reports should contain facts, evidence and sufficient 'chapter and verse' for those in receipt of them to see them as an appropriate basis for decision and action" (Forsyth, Patrick 2009, p. 138). They are a valuable source of information, which the management can depend upon.

Reports could be categorized as routine, special, informational and analytical. A feasibility report comes under the category of special reports.

Reports like progress report, inspection report, performance appraisal and periodical report come under the category of routine reports. Investigation report, feasibility report and First Information Report (FIR) are called special reports. Informational reports provide information or data related to a particular field of study. The report could be a problem happening in a company or report submitted to the management regarding a particular subject. As the name suggests, these reports identify a problem, its causes and then bring out remedies. Facts and figures are also given to strength the findings of the report.

A survey or feasibility report is conducted with respect to the current working condition of a company and whether the company is going to undertake any new project. The findings are recorded in a feasibility report. It answers the question as to whether a particular project has to be implemented or not.

3. Diagnostic Test on Feasibility Report

3.1 Participants

A group of 50 second year BCA tertiary learners of an Arts and Science College in Chennai, India, were selected as a sample to conduct the diagnostic test on report writing.

3.2 Background

The learners were considered 'average' through the English class tests conducted by the institutions. The sample or the learners were both male and female between the age group of 18 to 21.

3.3 Procedure

The class of 50 students was divided into 8 groups. Being a computer-related department, the students had little knowledge on business report writing. The students were given an introduction to reports and on feasibility report. After which they were asked to write a feasibility report. They wrote a report on:

The management of your company proposes to establish a school near the factory site for the benefit of its staff. As Public Relations Officer you have been asked to study its feasibility and submit a report to the Personal Manager, specially referring to the following: finance, teaching staff, library, games and sports, construction cost, etc. Write a report. (Mohan Krishna, Meera Banerji, 1990, p 180)

4. Analysis

While writing a business report it is important to consider the accuracy, relevance, simplicity, completeness, recommendation, grammatical accuracy and format. (Gallagher, Kevin, 2010)

The class was divided into groups as A to H. The status of the reports written by the eight groups was analysed and rated as 'Yes', 'No', and 'Cannot Say'. In some reports, the information was unclear. So it was termed as 'Cannot say'. The information did not address the central idea of the report. The reports were analysed on the basis of accuracy, relevance, simplicity, completeness, recommendation, grammatical accuracy and format.

Table 1 Performance of II BCA Learners in Writing a Business Report

Essential Qualities for an Effective Report	GROUPS							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Accuracy	Yes	Can-not say	Yes	No	No	No	Can-not say	No
Relevance	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can-not say	Yes	No
Simplicity	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Complete	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Recommendation	No	Yes	Yes	No	Can-not say	No	Yes	Can-not say
Gram-matical Accuracy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Format	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

1. Table 2 showed that reports written by groups A and C were accurate. Accuracy would mean the expression of facts exactly and correctly. Groups D, E, F and H lacked in 'accuracy'. Groups B and G were not specific in giving details.

2. All the groups except H and F had written reports relevant to the topic. Group F did not understand the concept of writing a 'report and thus gave irrelevant details.

3. With regards to 'simplicity', groups A, B, C, E and F wrote with clarity. Groups D, G and H wrote reports that were confusing and unclear. The sentences were broken, thus the ideas were not conveyed clearly.

4. Except group C all the other groups failed in writing a complete report. The incomplete reports lacked proper introduction and conclusion.

5. Reports must have recommendations followed by analysis and conclusion. Groups B, C and G had recommendations that were useful.

6. It is important that reports should be free from grammatical errors. Groups A to F wrote reports that had no grammar errors, while groups G and H had a lot of grammatical errors.

Example: The school must situated in 3 km of the factory.

7. Like any other business document, reports also have a format. Group C had written their report in the correct format except for minor errors. The rest of the groups could not write according to the correct format. The reports lacked the structure of a business report.

Mostly, all the groups had errors in accuracy, simplicity or completeness. This was mainly due to their deficient English writing skills and lack of knowledge on report writing. Group C's performance was 'good' compared to that of the other group's performance. Group H could be termed 'less competent' compared to the other groups since they committed the maximum errors.

5. Findings

The findings of the study indicated that the tertiary learners lacked the knowledge to write a business report. They have not understood the importance of report writing in a business context. Their grammar skills are poor and inadequate for a successful career in the business world. The teachers should educate the learners on the need to enhance their English language skills, in order to succeed in the corporate world.

6. Conclusion

Very few corporate employees have the ability to write with little effort and accuracy. There is a great need for proficient writing in the business world. Good writing has its rewards of satisfaction, promotion, better professional image, credibility, etc. 'Corporations spend large amounts on in-house communication training because of message quality, timeliness, and quantity concerns' (Joy L. Roach and Marcia A. Anderson, 2007 p. 41, 42). Report writing has gained paramount importance in today's business scenario. So, the need to teach effective business writing to tertiary learners has become supreme.

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