

## Teaching Genre-Based Writing to Tertiary Level Students

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### Abstract

The research focuses on teaching writing *a job application letter* through genre-based pedagogy to tertiary level students. To date, there have been researches on the language analysis in different genres of English texts and teaching how to write *the job application letter* at tertiary level by deploying the instructions mentioned in the *Straightforward* teachers' book (B1). However, to the best of the author's knowledge, there is little on language analysis in *the job application letter* in English and how to write it at tertiary level. To facilitate students in writing *the job application letter*, the current research analyses the language features of *the job application letter* in English from Eng 2001 Module prescribed in universities in Myanmar. The schematic structure of the genre is categorized by deploying the theoretical framework of Bhatia (1993). In addition to text analysis, two teaching activities based on *the Teaching Learning Cycle(TLC): a four-stage model* (Hammond,1992) are set. Apart from that, the expected challenges in doing these two activities are presented. Finally, scaffolding activities designed to overcome these challenges are mentioned. With the linguistic analysis of *the job application letter* and deploying two teaching activities, this research generates important pedagogical implications for the teaching/ learning of the *job application letter* through genre-based pedagogy at tertiary level setting and contributes to the enhancement of academic English language teaching in universities in Myanmar.

**Key words:** Job application letter, schematic structure, genre-based theory, the Teaching Learning Cycle (TLC)

### Introduction

The *Job Application Letter* is a specialized form of text type accepted by university students because it supports the direct application of the learning experiences for future job performance. If the text types in writing session reflect the kinds of writing students really need to do when they leave university, it will definitely be useful for them. The art of job application, therefore, becomes one of the genres of teaching writing in the curriculum. This paper states the importance of genre approach to writing job application letter in second language writing. Myskow and Gordon (2009) mentions that genre-based pedagogies are paradigm approach in L2 writing after process-based pedagogies in late 1980s. Hyland (2007) states that genre-based pedagogies enable teachers to ground their courses in the texts that students will have to write in their target contexts, thereby supporting students to participate effectively in the world outside the ESL classroom.

### Teaching Context and Text Selection

The teaching context is Dagon University in Myanmar where the author is working and where English is regarded as a foreign language. The participants are the second year university students who are specializing in Myanmar and have learnt English as a compulsory subject since they were primary school students. Their English proficiency level is B1 of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). There are about 50 students in the class. The classroom is still in the chalk and talk situation. The genre chosen for the analysis is *Job Application Letter*. The reason for choosing this text type is that it is included as one of the assigned text types for the writing session of the prescribed textbook "Straightforward" published by Macmillan (See Appendix1). This textbook is mainly intended

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for the students in Myanmar. This genre-based analysis will be deployed in teaching of writing job application letter in the university classroom situation because the lack of explicit teaching of language in relation to genres put many students under disadvantaged conditions. Nunan (1994) stated that the objectives of a project conducted in Australia in early 1990s, “An Evaluation of the Disadvantaged Schools Project Writing Package” in the classroom achieve a number of objectives. On the students’ part, it could bring improvements in their ability to write more effectively according to the requirements of the *Job Application Letter* and for the teachers, this analysis will boost understanding of the significant language features of a particular genre so that the teacher will be able to design activities accordingly to facilitate the learning this particular genre for the students.

### **Social Purpose and Context**

The text is a job application letter for the post of cook at Bristol Summer Camps Network. The candidate is writing to the Director of BSCN UK, PO BOX 29, Temple Quay. The social purpose of this genre is to obtain an interview for a job by highlighting the most relevant information in the candidate’s curriculum vitae. Moreover, it also makes the writer present “open-ended creative opportunity for favorable self-presentation” James, Scholfield, and Ypsiladis (1994). In addition, Bhatia (1993) states that the communicative purpose of job application letter is meant to promote the writer himself. In fact, job application is one specific realization of rather large categories of promotional literature. The most important function of a job letter, if written in response to an advertisement, is to offer a favourable, positive and relevant description of the abilities of the applicants in terms of the specifications or requirements of the job advertised.

### **Aim**

The aim of this research is to facilitate students’ performance on learning writing the *job application letter* through the genre-based pedagogy at the Tertiary Level in Myanmar.

### **Research Methodology**

This research strives to address the following question:

1. What is students’ perspective on learning writing the *job application letter* through the genre-based pedagogy?
2. Is teaching genre-based pedagogy beneficial to tertiary level students in writing the *job application letter*?

### **Text Analysis**

In doing text analysis of the application letter, the genre theory and genre pedagogy in the Australian tradition based on functional models of linguistic analysis are deployed on account of the fact that functional approach to linguistic analysis aims to “account for relationships between the forms of the language, and the various uses to which the language is put” (Nunan, 1994). Structural description of job application letter by Bhatia(1993) and guidelines for studying written texts by Hyland (2004) and Hood et al. (1996) are adopted.

### **The Overall Framework or Schematic Structure of the Genre**

The schematic structure of the whole text will be identified based on the theoretical framework of structural description of job application letter by Bhatia (1993) (See Appendix 2).

The analyzed job application letter opens with *introducing candidature* which normally consists of three parts, namely offering the candidature, essential detailing of the candidature and indicating potential value of the candidature. However, in this letter, there are only two parts. Like the sales promotion letter, the job application letter is the first attempt by

the applicant to start a possible working relationship with the employer. It also includes the most essential and important aspects of the candidature as *offering incentives*. It mentions qualification which requires candidature to enclose their detailed C.V, requests soliciting response to the employer and finally ends politely.

### Lexico-grammatical Features of the Text

The cohesion of the text is achieved through some use of conjunctions such as *but* and *because*, the use of reference (few pronouns) like *I, you, your advertisement* and vocabulary chain such as “(a)*advertisement, job, temporary work, vacancies*(b) *assistant cook, restaurants, cook, cookery*(c)*French, Italian, English*”.

Concerning with the significant grammatical feature of this genre, the writer uses mainly declaratives “*I look forward to*” rather than interrogatives and imperatives. Moreover, some of the distinctive features of the text such as the predominant use of the present tense in the verbs of thinking like “*believe, think*”, the primary use of “*being*” and “*having*” clauses are to help reader read on and create a thing that is going on here and now. Moreover, the use of past tense “*studied*” in **offering incentives stage** highlighting the past event and the present perfect like “*have worked*” to express experiences can also be found. The compound sentence “*I do not have any formal qualifications in cookery but I studied tourism....*” and complex sentence “*I am very interested in any vacancies you have for a cook...*” are used. Themes mainly are concerned with the person’s qualification rather than thing because the text is mainly about a promotion genre. In addition to this, the use of long noun group “*Jobs Abroad for temporary work with BSCN, a cook for families on skiing holidays*” and many prepositional phrases indicating the circumstances around events “*in France, in Sicily, in Ragusa*” are found.

As it is a job application genre, the vocabulary choices in the text are mostly related to job and work “*vacancies, cook, formal qualifications, tourism, University, etc*” carrying formal connotations but in polite way.

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire is administered to elicit information about their attitudes towards writing the *job application letter* using a 4-point Likert scale. The statistics is calculated by using Microsoft excel.

### Interview

After interviewing 5 students by using question set for students, the interviews in L1 are transcribed and translated into English and their responses from interview are analysed by creating matrices strategy through Categorization strategies such as *Creating matrices* (Gay et al., 2009:431) to know their responses to teaching writing the *job application letter* by the genre-based pedagogy.

This research begins with teaching context and text selection. It then goes on to the text analysis of job application letter based on the theoretical framework of Bhatia (1993). Then, suggestions are made on what it means to implement genre teaching in more practical ways, providing two teaching activities *the Teaching Learning Cycle(TLC): a four-stage model* (Hammond, 1992). After that, it presents findings of students’ perspective on teaching writing the *job application letter* and addresses the challenges to be encountered during teaching learning process.

## **Pedagogical Suggestions**

Hyland (2004) highlights that “whatever the orientation, however, all genre analysts see language as a key feature of writing and as the way we create social contexts.” It means if teachers do not teach particular writing genres explicitly, then students will be seriously disadvantaged in their learning. The explicit teaching of the language use, hence, plays an important role in teaching L2 writing. Based on the text analysis, some pedagogical suggestions will be made addressing potential gaps in the current teaching materials for the second year students. Teaching schematic structure of the target genre and providing peer feedback or self-assessment forms are vital in teaching learning situation. Apart from these activities, teaching critical literacy will be taken into consideration because critical thinking aims at generating and evaluating arguments and it is also the questioning and enquiry we engage in to judge what to believe and what not to.” (Curriculum Development Council 2004: 78).

### **Design of Two Activities**

Genre analysis is a powerful tool for teachers because it uncovers the connection between forms and functions to full social purpose of the genre (Hyland, 2004). In addition, genre-based pedagogy offers teachers an explicit teaching methodology to present in a highly systematic and logical manner (Firkins, Forey, & Sengupta, 2007) Therefore, classroom activities surrounding stages and the language features of the whole model are designed based on the Teaching-Learning Cycle for a Unit of Work for Beginner Learners (Hammond, 1992). There are four stages in this TLC Cycle: Building knowledge of Field, Modelling of Text, Joint Construction and Independent Construction of the text (See Appendix 3).

### **Analysing the Genre Model**

The first activity of the Job Application Letter addresses both stage 1 and stage 2 of the cycle. In building knowledge of field, the vocabulary related to this genre is taught. In this task, students have to choose the correct words to complete the sentences (see Appendix 4) prescribed in the text book. Wallace (1996: 345) suggests that a set of questions can be used as a starting point for the critical reading of a text in the classroom. Therefore, in analyzing the text, the following questions will be used as a beginning point to make students familiar with the cultural and social purpose of the genre: Why has this text been written? Who wrote the text?

The aim of this activity is to help the learners develop a metalanguage to describe the generic structure of the text, which would assist them during the second activity which is to follow in group. A description of the schematic staging of the text is to be built up by putting blanks for metalinguistic labels to be filled by students (See Appendix 5).

### **Writing a Job Application Letter**

The second activity of this genre is mainly concerned with stage 3 of the TLC Cycle: Joint Construction of the text. In this activity, students have to write another text of the same genre by working in group. Firstly, students have to do vocabulary matching exercise in the text book which let them know the phrases of the language used in writing job application letter (See Appendix 6). Secondly, the class is divided into a group of 5 and asks them to write their own construction of a similar letter to increase their awareness of the text as an object of study. Finally, the phrases of language that are useful in writing application letters will be scaffolded and ask them to write application letter in groups of 5 to get student to student interaction so that students will internalize the schematic structure and linguistic features of the *Job Application Letter* (See Appendix 7). In this activity, students can refer to the model of the text that they analyse in the first activity and transfer language from the model to the

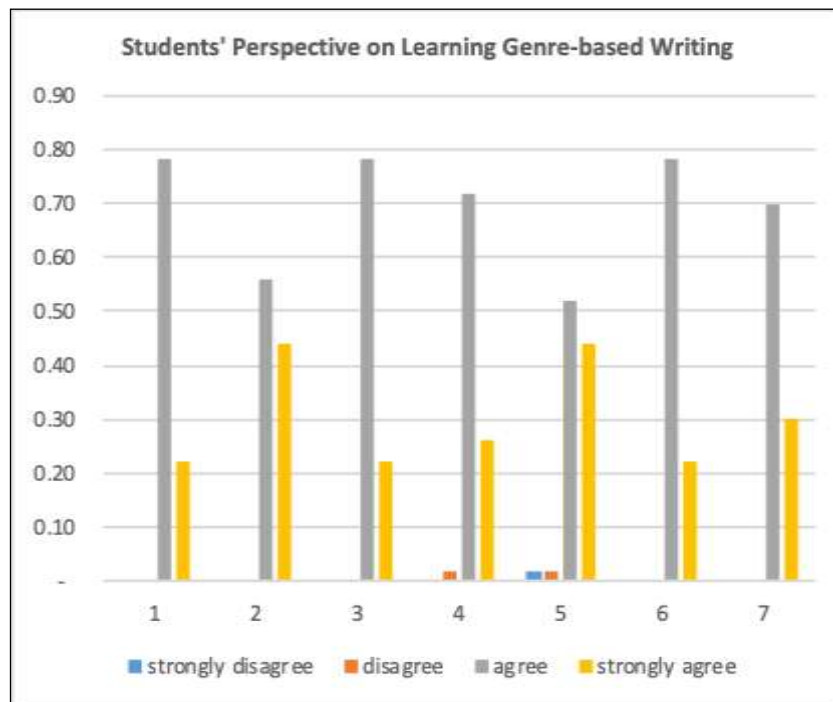
situational context of their own assigned text. In this stage, teacher monitors their writing. Although students are at the beginning stage in their second-language development, it is hoped that they will be able to produce a fairly effective text approximating *job application letter* genre.

### Findings

In response to research questions, students' own perception about learning writing the *job application letter* through the genre-based writing, the findings of the questionnaire are mainly based on linguistic knowledge, their perception to group work and deployment of genre-based writing based on four Likert scales.

Table 1. Students' perception on learning genre-based writing

Facts	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Vocabulary is important in writing job application letter.			78%	22%
2. Grammar is a crucial part in writing job application letter.			56%	44%
3. Schematic ( generic) structure plays a crucial part in job application letter.			78%	22%
4. It is beneficial to students to break down the structure of the text before writing.		2%	72%	26%
5. Group work is profitable.	2%	2%	52%	44%
6. Students can produce a new text after doing group work.			78%	22%
7. Students can become independent learners in writing job application letter through genre-based pedagogy.			70%	30%



The above chart explains one of the most interesting points related to teaching writing the *job application letter* through genre-based pedagogy. It illustrates that students agreed and strongly agreed with vocabulary, grammar and schematic structure of the text are really important in learning genre-based pedagogy. But there is a slight disagreement in doing group work in writing while over 90% of students agree with doing group work. They absolutely agree that they can become independent learners and analytical thinkers in learning a *job application letter* through teaching genre-based writing.

In order to study students' perception on teaching writing *job application letter* through the genre-based pedagogy, interview data are interpreted by deploying *Creating matrices* (Gay et al., 2009:431) (See Appendix 9). Matrices analysis illustrates a summary data of individual interviews with 5 students out of 50 students. The analytical tools like interview are used to identify their challenges in different level of language, how teachers scaffolded them to overcome these challenges and their preferred learning method. First and foremost, most of the students strongly agreed that vocabulary level is challenging to them in writing. They continued to discuss that despite the difficulties, teachers' way of teaching like deploying genre-based writing can be a great help in studying. All the students agreed that analysing sentence by sentence of the whole text into meaningful chunks in detailed explanation is a great advantage. For the text level, students said that teachers deconstruct the text in English paragraph by paragraph again by comparing this genre with other ones. All 5 students absolutely agree that learning the *job application letter* through genre-based pedagogy can help them cope with this genre and overcome their hindrances in academic writing.

### Expected Challenges

In doing the activities, one may expect to face the challenges while teaching this genre. Students may be stressful when assigned the first activity to write this type of genre. To avoid this challenge, teachers assign them to do as group work and scaffold them with useful

language support to write in this genre. Besides, teachers may face challenges in checking whether they are using correct generic structure or language feature or not as it is a large class. To overcome this, a formative assessment feedback sheet will be deployed to implement genre innovation pedagogy in the classroom. It is expected to be beneficial and promising tool for a large class. A genre specific assessment criterion is a useful indicator for students to track their progress. This is used for the formative assessment of students' performance. It can also make students to be more engaged with the generic structure and language features. To assess the writing, written Language Assessment Activity (Nunan, 1994) will be used for assessment. Nunan's assessment sheets are designed mainly for *Explanation* genre. However, his fundamental aims and genre-oriented philosophies are very much in line with the aims of the author's assessment (See Appendix 10).

### Conclusion

In short, genre-based pedagogy guides students to write from the very simple steps through scaffolding by teachers to independent steps. It also promotes and facilitates them to become independent learners. It is suitable for academic setting especially for enhancing students' writing skills such as writing *job application letter*. Therefore, it is believed that a genre-based pedagogy provides students with learning activities presented within a social contextual framework, which encourages them to focus on language and assist them to become more independent thinkers and analytical learners. It enhances students' creativity that promotes critical thinking of higher order thinking skills (Bloom's taxonomy, 2001).

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## Appendix 1

Via G. Marzotti, 145

Ragusa

Sicily

Italy

Tel:+ 393933834

Email: [vito@writeme.com](mailto:vito@writeme.com)

19 April 2017

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I am writing in response to your advertisement in Jobs Abroad for Temporary work with BSCN. I am very interested in any vacancies you have for a cook in summer camps in France.

I have worked as an assistant cook in several restaurants in Sicily. This winter I also worked as a cook for families on skiing holidays in France.

I believe I am suitable for the job because I enjoy working with children and I like cooking for large groups of people. I also speak some French, as well as Italian and English. I do not have any formal qualifications in cookery but I studied tourism at the University of Palermo.

My CV is enclosed. I am currently working as a cook in a school here in Ragusa. Therefore, I am available for work from May 30. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you very much.

Yours faithfully,

***Vito Ajala***

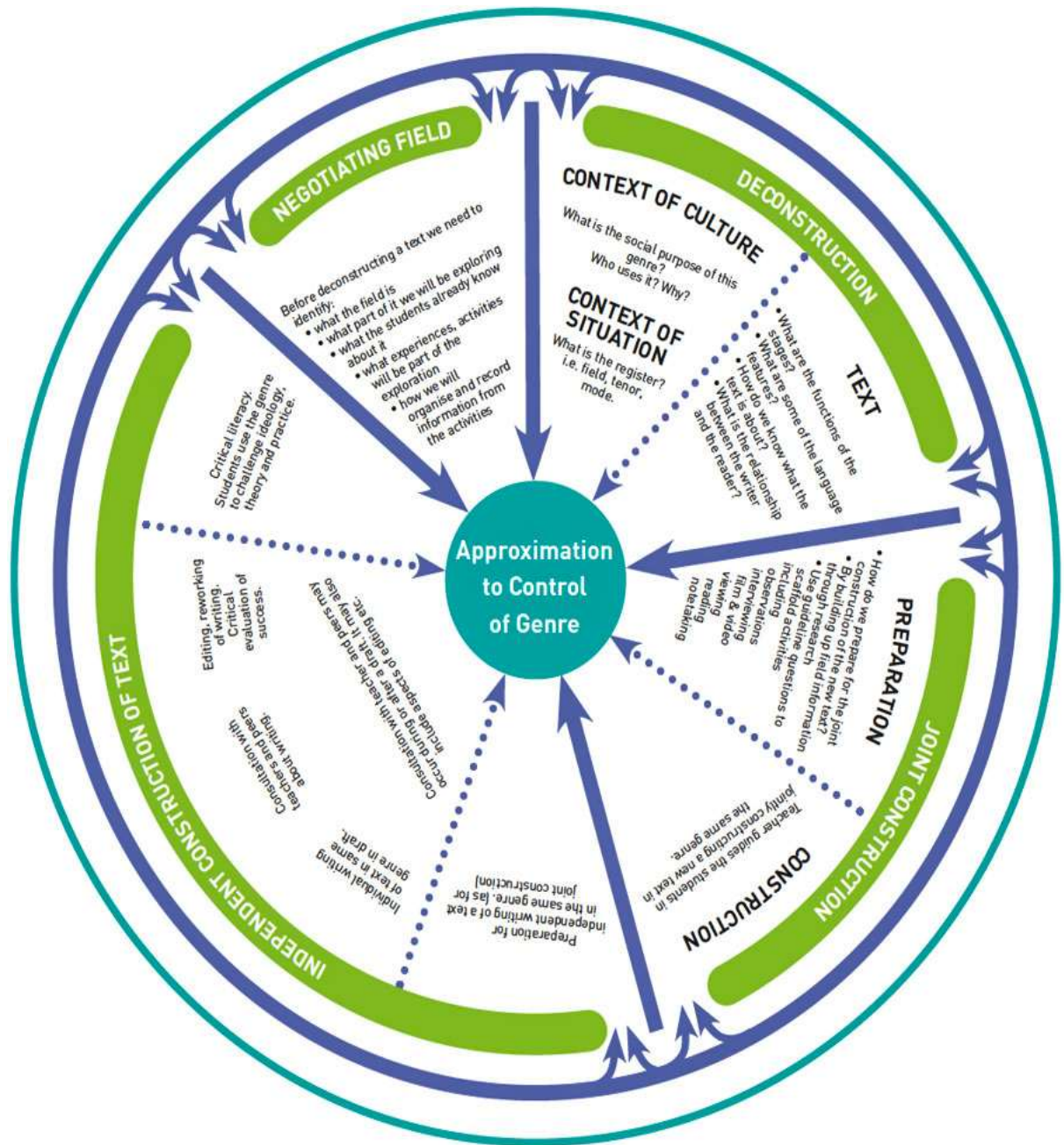
Vito Ajala



## Appendix 2

Via G. Marzotti, 145 Ragusa Sicily 3 Italy 4 Tel:+ 393933834 5 Email: <a href="mailto:vito@writeme.com">vito@writeme.com</a>	<b>Writer's address</b>
19 April 2017	<b>Date</b>
Dear Sir/ Madam,	<b>Greeting phrase</b>
<p>I am writing in response to your advertisement in Jobs Abroad for Temporary work with BSCN. I am very interested in any vacancies you have for a cook in summer camps in France.</p> <p>I have worked as an assistant cook in several restaurants in Sicily. This winter I also worked as a cook for families on skiing holidays in France.</p>	<b>Introducing candidature</b> <i>Offering candidate</i>  <i>Essential detailing of candidature</i>
<p>I believe I am suitable for the job because I enjoy working with children and I like cooking for large groups of people. I also speak some French, as well as Italian and English. I do not have any formal qualifications in cookery but I studied tourism at the University of Palermo.</p>	<b>Offering incentives</b>
My CV is enclosed.	<b>Enclosing documents</b>
<p>I am currently working as a cook in a school here in Ragusa. Therefore, I am available for work from May 30. I look forward to hearing from you.</p>	<b>Soliciting response</b>
Thank you very much.	<b>Ending of the letter</b>
<b><i>Vito Ajala</i></b>	<b>Writer's signature</b>
Vito Ajala	<b>Writer's name</b>

Appendix 3



**Appendix 4**

Name-----

Class-----

## Vocabulary: Work

Choose the correct words to complete the sentences.

1. Many film stars had a very different *jobs/ works* before they started their acting *careers/jobs*.
2. Madonna hated her *career/ work* at a donut shop, but she needed a *job / work*.
3. Brad Pitt had a *career/ job* as a dancing chicken outside a restaurant.
4. Tom Cruise was thinking of a *career/ work* in the church before finding *job/ work* in the movies.

(This worksheet is adapted from students' text book)

**Appendix 5**

Name-----

Class-----

**Read the letter and label the letter with descriptions from the box.**

Introducing candidature (offering candidate)	Writer’s signature	Offering incentives
Soliciting response phrase	Enclosing documents	Greeting
Date	Ending of the letter	Essential dealing of candidature
Writer’s address	Writer’s name	

Via G. Marzotti, 145 Ragusa Sicily 6 Italy 7 Tel:+ 393933834 8 Email: <a href="mailto:vito@writeme.com">vito@writeme.com</a>	-----
19 April 2017	-----
Dear Sir/ Madam,	-----
I am writing in response to your advertisement in Jobs Abroad for Temporary work with BSCN. I am very interested in any vacancies you have for a cook in summer camps in France. I have worked as an assistant cook in several restaurants in Sicily. This winter I also worked as a cook for families on skiing holidays in France.	----- -----
I believe I am suitable for the job because I enjoy working with children and I like cooking for large groups of people. I also speak some French, as well as Italian and English. I do not have any formal qualifications in cookery but I studied tourism at the University of Palermo.	-----
My CV is enclosed.	-----
I am currently working as a cook in a school here in Ragusa. Therefore, I am available for work from May 30. I look forward to hearing from you.	-----
Thank you very much.	-----
<b><i>Vito Ajala</i></b>	-----
Vito Ajala	-----

### Appendix 6

Name-----

Class-----

**Complete the sentences in column A with a phrase from column B.**

A	B
1. At the donut shop, Madonna was <b>in charge</b>	a. <b>of work.</b>
2. She was <b>fired</b>	b. <b>as a model</b>
3. Brad Pitt used to <b>work</b>	c. <b>for cleaning the tables</b>
4. When he was young, he was often <b>out</b>	d. <b>from the job.</b>
5. For a time, Tom Cruise <b>earned</b>	e. <b>of the coffee machine</b>
6. He was <b>responsible</b>	f. <b>a living</b> in a New York restaurant

(This task is adapted from the text book.)

**Appendix 7**

Group No -----

Class-----

**Write a job application letter for the following advertisement.****PREMIER COFFEE MIX .**

We are looking for young and energetic sales promoter. Send your CV and the names of two referees to: The Director, No.196/A, Main Street, Thaketa, Industril Zone, Thaketa Township. No.108, Seit Kan Thar Street, Industrial Zone (3), Hlaingtharyar Township, Yangon, Myanmar. Please include a short letter telling us:

- The expected salary
- Your experience and qualification
- Why you believe you would be suitable

You can use the following language in your application letter.

**Beginning a letter of application**

Dear Mr/Ms -----

Dear Sir/ Madam

**Information about yourself**

I have worked as-----

This winter/summer/spring I also worked-----

I am currently working as a -----

I studied ----- at -----

I believe I am suitable for this job because-----

**Ending your letter**

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanking you in advance-----

Yours sincerely-----

Yours faithfully---

## Appendix 8

### Student Questionnaire

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Class \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please tick (✓) the bracket of your choice with a pen and write down only S1, S2, -----in the place of name.**

1. My scores in matriculation English paper was

*Mark only one bracket*

(        ) 40-44

(        ) 45-49

(        ) 50-54

(        ) 55-60

(        ) 61- above

2. Did you attempt informal letter writing while you were sitting for matriculation exam?

*Mark only one bracket*

(        ) Yes

(        ) No.

3. Apart from this, what other types of writing have you done?

*Mark only one bracket*

(        ) essay

(        ) job application letter in English

(        ) job application letter in Myanmar

(        ) leave letter

(        ) paragraph writing

4. Vocabulary is important in writing job application letter.

*Mark only one bracket*

(        ) Strongly disagree

(        ) Disagree

(        ) Agree

(        ) Strongly agree

5. Grammar is an important part in writing job application letter.

*Mark only one bracket.*

(        ) Strongly disagree

(        ) Disagree

(        ) Agree

(        ) Strongly agree

6. Sentence structure is an important part in job application letter.

*Mark only one bracket.*

(        ) Strongly disagree

(        ) Disagree

(        ) Agree

(        ) Strongly agree

7. Schematic (generic) structure plays a crucial part in job application.

*Mark only one bracket.*

(        ) Strongly disagree

(        ) Disagree

(        ) Agree

(        ) Strongly agree

8. It is beneficial to students to deconstruct (break down) the structure before writing job application letter.

*Mark only one bracket.*

(        ) Strongly disagree

(        ) Disagree

(        ) Agree

(        ) Strongly agree

9. It is profitable to students to write job application letter in group.

*Mark only one bracket.*

(        ) Strongly disagree

(        ) Disagree

(        ) Agree

(        ) Strongly agree

10. Students can produce a new job application after doing group work.

*Mark only one bracket.*

(        ) Strongly disagree

(        ) Disagree

(        ) Agree

(        ) Strongly agree

11. You can become an independent learner in writing application letter through genre-based pedagogy

*Mark only one bracket.*

(        ) Strongly disagree

(        ) Disagree

(        ) Agree

(        ) Strongly agree



### Appendix 9

#### Matrices Analysis of Students' Interview

Students	Any experience of doing group work	Your feeling on writing <i>job application letter</i> trough group work	Genre-based writing is applicable to writing <i>job application letter</i>	Linguistic challenges ( vocabulary, grammar, text )	Do you have confidence to write new <i>job application letter</i> after you have learnt in details lexico grammatical features of the sample text
S1	Had an experience when he/she was a matric student	Happy, interested, Can do discussion between peers	absolutely	Vocabulary	Had
S2	Had an experience when he/she was a matric student	Happy, Get new experiences	Effective in writing	Vocabulary	Have confidence and want to participate in writing and can produce new text
S3	Not yet	Effective and beneficial to students	Certainly	Vocabulary, Text structure	Have confidence and want to participate in writing and can produce new text
S4	Not yet	Convenient, get good advice from students and active groupmates	Really effective	Grammar	Have confidence and want to participate in writing and can produce new text
S5	Not yet	Unstressed,	Sure	Vocabulary and grammar	Have confidence and can produce new text as an independent learner

**Appendix 10**  
**Written Assessment Activity**

<b>Criteria</b> <b>(Tick appropriate box)</b>	<b>Very Competent</b>	<b>Competent</b>	<b>Limited Competent</b>	<b>Not Competent yet</b>
<b>Structure and organization</b> -introduce the ideas in a letter format -Use logical , sequenced stages of a job application letter				
<b>Language features</b> -use appropriate vocabulary -use appropriate tense -use relevant linking words, e.g. if , but , because -use nominated process -use language to maintain appropriate tenor				
<b>Accuracy</b> -use grammar accurately e.g. word order, verb endings, pronouns -spell and use punctuation accurately				
Other Comments				
Global rating (circle)	Lowest 1_2_3_4_ 5_ Highest			