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English Correspondence: Case Study of English Education Department
of University of HKBP Nommensen Students' Perspective
of Cover Letter/Application Letter

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menyelidiki perspektif mahasiswa Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas HKBP Nommensen mengenai penulisan surat lamaran dalam mata kuliah Korespondensi Bahasa Inggris. Menyadari pentingnya surat lamaran dalam komunikasi profesional dan pengembangan karier, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai pemahaman, tantangan, dan kepercayaan diri siswa dalam menguasai keterampilan ini. Dengan menggunakan metodologi deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 25 mahasiswa melalui kuesioner dan dari 10 mahasiswa melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur. Temuan utama mengungkapkan bahwa meskipun mahasiswa mengakui relevansi penulisan surat lamaran dengan karier masa depan mereka, mereka menghadapi tantangan dalam mengatur konten, menjaga profesionalisme, dan menyesuaikan surat dengan persyaratan pekerjaan tertentu. Penelitian ini menyoroti efektivitas materi kuliah tetapi mengidentifikasi perlunya metode pengajaran yang lebih interaktif dan praktis, seperti lokakarya, tinjauan sejawat, dan aplikasi dunia nyata. Temuan ini menawarkan rekomendasi yang dapat ditindaklanjuti untuk meningkatkan proses belajar mengajar, memastikan mahasiswa lebih siap untuk komunikasi profesional dan pasar kerja yang kompetitif.

Kata Kunci: *Surat Bisnis, Korespondensi Bahasa Inggris, Perspektif*

Abstract

This research investigates the perspectives of English Education Department students at the University of HKBP Nommensen regarding cover letter writing within the English Correspondence course. Recognizing the importance of cover letters in professional communication and career development, the study aims to assess students' understanding, challenges, and confidence in mastering this skill. Using a qualitative descriptive methodology, data were collected from 25 students through questionnaires and from 10 students through semi-structured interviews. Key findings reveal that while students acknowledge the relevance of cover letter writing to their future careers, they face challenges in organizing content, maintaining professionalism, and tailoring letters to specific job requirements. The research highlights the effectiveness of course materials but identifies a need for more interactive and practical teaching methods, such as workshops, peer reviews, and real-world applications. The findings offer actionable recommendations to enhance the teaching and learning process, ensuring students are better prepared for professional communication and the competitive job market.

Keywords: *Business Letter, English Correspondence, Perspective*

INTRODUCTION

In the professional and academic landscape, English correspondence skills play a crucial role, particularly for students preparing to enter competitive job markets. Among the essential components of professional communication, the cover letter holds a unique position. A well-crafted cover letter is more than a mere formality; it serves as an introduction to potential employers, highlighting a candidate's qualifications, motivations, and suitability for a particular role. It bridges the gap between a resume and a personal interaction, making it a pivotal document in securing employment. However, the process of creating a compelling and effective cover letter often proves to be a challenge, particularly for students. For English Education Department students at the University of HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar, especially Group PIA1 in the third semester, mastering cover letter writing is an integral part of their academic curriculum in English Correspondence subject with 2 (two) credits. Many of these students aspire to careers in education or other fields where effective communication is vital. As a result, their ability to produce professional documents such as cover letters becomes a significant determinant of their future career success. However, despite its importance, cover letter writing remains a complex skill to master. It requires not only a deep understanding of language and grammar but also the ability to strategically present one's skills and experiences in a manner that aligns with professional expectations. This complexity is compounded by challenges such as limited

exposure to real-world job scenarios, difficulty in maintaining a professional tone, and uncertainty about proper formatting and structure.

The English Correspondence course is designed to address these challenges, equipping students with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary for effective professional writing. Through this course, students are introduced to the principles of formal communication, the structure of various professional documents, and the stylistic nuances of business English. However, there is a need to critically evaluate how students perceive and apply these skills, particularly in the context of cover letter writing. Understanding their perspectives—whether positive or negative—can provide insights into the effectiveness of the curriculum and highlight areas where students require additional support or resources.

This research focuses on students' perspectives on cover letter writing within the context of the English Correspondence course. It explores their experiences, challenges, and attitudes toward this critical aspect of professional communication. Key questions include: Do students feel confident in writing cover letters? What are the most common difficulties they face? How do they perceive the relevance of the course materials and methods to real-world applications? Furthermore, the research seeks to identify whether the course adequately prepares students for the demands of professional communication and employment.

The importance of this research lies in its potential to bridge the gap between academic instruction and practical application. By analyzing students' perspectives, this research aims to provide actionable recommendations for improving the teaching and learning process of cover letter writing. It will contribute to the enhancement of English correspondence courses by aligning them more closely with the expectations of the modern workforce. Moreover, the findings may help educators design more effective strategies to build students' confidence, refine their writing skills, and ultimately prepare them to excel in their professional endeavors.

Finally, this study not only addresses an academic concern but also underscores a practical issue with far-reaching implications for students' careers. By focusing on students' perspectives on cover letter writing, it aims to provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities in teaching English correspondence, fostering a deeper understanding of how to prepare students for success in an increasingly competitive job market.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach to understand students' experiences, attitudes, and challenges related to cover letter writing. The qualitative approach was selected to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon from the students' viewpoints. A case study design was used to focus specifically on students enrolled in the English Education Department at the University of HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar. This design enables a detailed examination of students' perceptions and the factors influencing their learning process. The population of this research was the third semester students of the English Education Department at University of HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar. And the sample of the research were the PIA1 group and PIA2 group. A purposive sampling technique is used to select participants who have experience with cover letter writing as part of their coursework. So, the researcher chose PIA1 as the sample of the research. The participants in PIA1 were totally 25 students who were currently enrolled in and completed the English Correspondence course. These 25 students would answer the questionnaire with 20 questions and ten students from the total students would answer 10 questions in the interview section.

A structured questionnaire was distributed to gather initial data on students' perspectives. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions which measure students' frequency of practice, confidence levels, and perceived challenges using a Likert scale: Always, Often, Sometimes, Seldom, and Never. The interview aimed to explore students' perspectives on cover letter/application letter in English Correspondence subject. The researcher conducted interviews with 10 students to gather information about their experiences and activities in the teaching and learning process of English Correspondence subject in cover letter/application letter topic. To facilitate this, the researcher prepared a set of questions. The questionnaires and the interview questions were distributed using Google Forms. The collected data was then recorded on an interview sheet, with Google Forms helping streamline the data collection process.

The data from questionnaire responses and interviews were analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring patterns and themes, such as common challenges, effective teaching strategies, or students' perceptions of relevance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data Findings of Questionnaires

The table below showed the data findings of questionnaires based on the responses of 25 students served in the Goggle Form sheets.

Table 1. Data Findings of Questionnaires

No.	Questions	Scale				
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1. Understanding of Cover Letters						
1.	How often do you feel confident about the purpose of a cover letter when writing it?	8 students (32%)	12 students (48%)	5 students (20%)	0 student (0%)	0 student (0%)
2.	How often do you find cover letters important in job applications?	18 students (72%)	7 students (28%)	1 student (4%)	0 student (0%)	0 student (0%)
3.	Do you understand the differences between a cover letter and other professional documents, like a CV?	7 students (28%)	11 students (44%)	7 students (28%)	0 student (0%)	1 student (4%)
2. Writing Skills and Organization						
4.	How often do you feel comfortable organizing the structure of a cover letter?	4 students (16%)	13 students (52%)	8 students (32%)	0 student (0%)	0 student (0%)
5.	How often do you use professional language when writing a cover letter?	9 students (36%)	8 students (32%)	6 students (24%)	2 students (8%)	0 student (0%)
6.	Do you feel confident in summarizing your skills and experiences in a concise manner?	6 students (25%)	8 students (33,3%)	9 students (37,5%)	1 student (4,2%)	0 student (0%)
3. Challenges Faced in Writing Cover Letters						
7.	How often do you struggle with choosing the right words or phrases in a cover letter?	3 students (12%)	10 students (40%)	7 students (28%)	4 students (16%)	1 student (4%)
8.	Do you find it difficult to tailor your cover letter to specific job applications?	1 student (4%)	6 students (24%)	16 students (64%)	2 students (8%)	0 student (0%)

9.	How often do you face challenges in addressing a potential employer appropriately?	5 students (20%)	5 students (20%)	15 students (60%)	1 student (4%)	0 student (0%)
4. Use of Resources and Feedback						
10.	How often do you use online tools or templates for writing a cover letter?	7 students (28%)	9 students (36%)	7 students (28%)	1 student (4%)	1 student (4%)
11.	How often do you ask for feedback from teachers or peers on your cover letter?	8 students (32%)	8 students (32%)	11 students (44%)	0 student (0%)	0 student (0%)
12.	How often do you revise your cover letter based on feedback?	7 students (28%)	9 students (36%)	6 students (24%)	3 students (12%)	0 student (0%)
5. Relevance of English Correspondence Course						
13.	Do you feel that the English Correspondence course has improved your cover letter writing skills?	18 students (72%)	4 students (16%)	3 students (12%)	0 student (0%)	0 student (0%)
14.	How often do you find the materials used in the course helpful for writing cover letters?	11 students (44%)	8 students (32%)	7 students (28%)	1 student (4%)	0 student (0%)
15.	Do the examples provided in class align with real-world job application scenarios?	12 students (48%)	9 students (36%)	4 students (16%)	0 student (0%)	0 student (0%)
6. Confidence in Writing Cover Letters						
16.	How often do you feel confident submitting a cover letter without further assistance?	8 students (32%)	6 students (24%)	7 students (28%)	2 students (8%)	3 students (12%)
17.	How often do you feel your cover letter effectively represents your abilities?	10 students (40%)	8 students (32%)	6 students (24%)	2 students (8%)	0 student (0%)
18.	Do you feel confident about using appropriate tone and style in your cover letter?	9 students (36%)	9 students (36%)	8 students (32%)	1 student (4%)	0 student (0%)
7. Future Application of Skills						

19.	Do you think the skills you've learned in writing cover letters will help in your career?	17 students (68%)	7 students (28%)	0 student (0%)	1 student (4%)	0 student (0%)
20.	How often do you practice writing cover letters outside of class assignments?	3 students (12%)	7 students (28%)	11 students (44%)	3 students (12%)	1 student (4%)

Data Findings of Interview Section

From the interview data, some key findings categorized under relevant topics, they are:

1. Understanding of Cover Letters
 - a. Most students described a cover letter as a formal document accompanying a resume to introduce themselves and explain their qualifications for a job. (Student 1,2,3,5,10)
 - b. Students emphasized its role in showcasing skills, expressing enthusiasm, and creating a strong first impression. (Student 1,2,5,10)
 - c. Some students highlighted personalization as a key factor in making their application stand out. (Student 2,3,4,10)
2. Relevance to English Correspondence
 - a. The majority of students believe learning about cover letters is highly relevant to their future careers. (Student 1,2,3,5,10)
 - b. They see cover letters as critical for professional communication, particularly in global job markets. (Student 1,2,5,10)
 - c. Many students acknowledged its broader applicability in internships, scholarships, and other formal communications. (Student 1,2,9,10)
3. Challenges in Structure and Content
 - a. Students struggled with:
 - i. Understanding what to include in each section (e.g., opening, body, and closing). (Student 1,4,10)
 - ii. Writing professionally while maintaining a personal tone. (Student 3,4,10)
 - iii. Tailoring cover letters to specific jobs or companies. (Student 2,6,10)
 - iv. Keeping the content concise yet complete. (Student 3,5,8)
 - b. They also faced difficulty organizing information clearly and selecting the most relevant experiences. (Student 2,3,9)

4. Personal Experience
 - a. Most students had attempted to write a cover letter, either as an assignment or in real-life scenarios. (Student 1,9,10)
 - b. Challenges included:
 - i. Matching skills with job requirements. (Student 1,9,10)
 - ii. Writing a strong opening and closing. (Student 2,10)
 - iii. Structuring the letter professionally without redundancy. (Student 2,5,10)
5. Teaching Methods
 - a. Students generally found teaching methods effective, especially when they included examples, step-by-step guides, and practical exercises. (Student 2,4,5,8)
 - b. However, they suggested:
 - i. Incorporating more interactive activities (e.g., peer reviews, group discussions). (Student 4,10)
 - ii. Providing more opportunities for hands-on practice and feedback. (Student 2,9,10)
 - iii. Using real-life examples and templates tailored to different fields. (Student 4,10)
6. Practical Applications
 - a. Students agreed that cover letter writing skills are highly applicable to their future careers, particularly for job applications, internships, and networking opportunities. (Student 1,2,5,8)
 - b. They recognized the importance of presenting themselves professionally to make a positive impression. (Student 2,5,7)
7. Feedback and Support
 - a. Many students received feedback on their cover letters, which helped them improve in areas like structure, clarity, grammar, and professionalism. (Student 1,2,4,10)
 - b. Feedback also boosted their confidence and refined their understanding of key components. (Student 2,4,7)
8. Use of Tools and Resources
 - a. Students used tools like Canva, Grammarly, Google Translate, and Microsoft Word templates to assist in writing. (Student 1,3,7,8,10)

- b. These tools helped with layout, grammar checks, and generating ideas for content. (Student 2,9)

9. Perceived Confidence

Confidence levels improved after taking the English correspondence subject, but students still felt the need for more practice to master cover letter writing. (Student 1,2,9,10).

10. Suggestions for Improvement

Suggestions included:

- a. Adding workshops, mock applications, and real-world examples. (Student 1,9)
- b. Providing personalized feedback and more practical activities. (Student 2,8)
- c. Integrating digital tools and exploring good and bad examples of cover letters. (Student 4,10)

Data Analysis

Data Analysis of Questionnaires

We explored the perspectives and experiences of students regarding various aspects of writing cover letters, as gathered from the questionnaire. The responses provide insights into their understanding, challenges faced, use of resources, and the relevance of the English Correspondence course in enhancing their skills. By examining these factors, we aim to identify areas of strength and aspects that require further attention to improve students' proficiency in writing effective cover letters. Here is an analysis based on the provided data from the questionnaire:

a. Understanding of Cover Letters

The data shows that a majority of students (48%) often feel confident about the purpose of a cover letter when writing it, while 32% always feel confident. This indicates a relatively strong understanding among the respondents. Furthermore, 72% of students consistently recognize the importance of cover letters in job applications. However, there is some variation in understanding the differences between a cover letter and other professional documents like CVs, as only 44% of students often understand these differences.

b. Writing Skills and Organization

While 52% of students often feel comfortable organizing the structure of a cover letter, only 16% always do, suggesting a potential area for improvement. A notable 36% of students consistently use professional language, with another 32% doing so often.

Confidence in summarizing skills and experiences appears to be moderate, as only 25% always feel confident, and the majority (37.5%) sometimes struggle in this area.

c. Challenges Faced in Writing Cover Letters

Students face several challenges when writing cover letters. For instance, 40% often struggle with selecting the right words or phrases, and 64% sometimes find it difficult to tailor their cover letters to specific job applications. Additionally, 60% of respondents sometimes face challenges in addressing potential employers appropriately, highlighting the need for targeted training in these aspects.

d. Use of Resources and Feedback

Students seem to utilize resources and seek feedback to varying degrees. For example, 36% often use online tools or templates, and 32% always ask for feedback from teachers or peers. However, 44% only sometimes seek feedback. Interestingly, most students (36%) often revise their cover letters based on feedback, though a smaller group (28%) consistently does so.

e. Relevance of the English Correspondence Course

The English Correspondence course is perceived positively by the majority of students, with 72% agreeing that it has improved their cover letter writing skills. The materials used in the course are seen as helpful by 44% of respondents, and 48% believe that the examples provided align with real-world scenarios.

f. Confidence in Writing Cover Letters

Confidence levels vary when it comes to submitting a cover letter independently. Only 32% always feel confident, while 24% often do, and 28% only sometimes feel confident. Regarding the tone and style of cover letters, 36% of students feel confident both always and often. However, there is room for improvement in ensuring that students feel their cover letters consistently represent their abilities, as only 40% always agree with this statement.

g. Future Application of Skills

The majority of students (68%) strongly believe that the skills learned in writing cover letters will benefit their future careers. However, consistent practice outside of class remains low, with only 12% always practicing and 28% often doing so, while 44% only sometimes engage in this activity.

Data Analysis of Interview Section

The following analysis presents insights derived from the interview data, highlighting students' experiences, challenges, and perceptions related to cover letter writing. The interview responses provide qualitative depth to the questionnaire findings, offering a richer understanding of the participants' perspectives. By examining their thoughts and reflections, we aim to uncover underlying themes and patterns that contribute to their overall learning and confidence in mastering cover letter writing skills.

1. *Understanding of Cover Letters*

Can you explain your understanding of a cover letter and its purpose in professional communication?

The responses from ten students reveal a shared understanding of cover letters as formal documents accompanying resumes to introduce applicants, express job interest, and highlight relevant skills and qualifications. Many students recognize that a well-written cover letter personalizes the application, creates a strong first impression, and sets applicants apart. However, the clarity and depth of explanations vary, with some students offering detailed insights and others providing basic definitions with informal language or grammatical errors. These findings suggest a need for further practice in formal communication and deeper conceptual understanding. Educational opportunities such as workshops on drafting and critiquing cover letters could help students refine their writing, tailor content to specific jobs, and effectively present their qualifications to potential employers.

2. *Relevance to English Correspondence*

How do you perceive the importance of learning about cover letters in the English correspondence subject?

The responses highlight the importance of learning about cover letters as part of the English correspondence subject, emphasizing its role in developing professional communication skills crucial for job applications, internships, and formal proposals. Students recognize that mastering cover letter writing helps articulate qualifications clearly, make strong first impressions, and stand out in a competitive job market, particularly for international opportunities. This skill boosts confidence and prepares them for professional scenarios, enabling effective self-presentation to potential employers. Additionally, it equips them with the tools to structure and format communications professionally, demonstrating

its practical value in a globalized workplace. Overall, students view cover letter instruction as essential for both personal and professional growth.

3. *Structure and Content*

What challenges do you face in understanding the structure and content of a well-written cover letter?

Students face various challenges in understanding the structure and content of a well-written cover letter, including determining what to include in each section, such as the introduction, body, and conclusion, and organizing information in a clear and professional manner. Many struggle to balance formality, confidence, and personalization while tailoring the content to specific jobs or companies. Crafting strong openings and closings, avoiding repetition, and selecting suitable language are also common difficulties. Additionally, maintaining clarity and conciseness while showcasing achievements and addressing job requirements proves challenging for many. These issues highlight the need for more guidance and practice to develop effective cover letter writing skills.

4. *Personal Experience*

Have you ever written a cover letter before? If yes, can you describe your experience and the difficulties you encountered?

Most students have experience writing cover letters, often through assignments or exams, but they commonly face challenges such as starting the letter, choosing the right tone, crafting a strong opening, and tailoring content to specific roles. Balancing professionalism with personal expression, avoiding repetition of resume content, and structuring the letter concisely while covering essential details are recurring difficulties. Limited knowledge of cover letter formats and a lack of practical experience further hinder their efforts. Despite these challenges, many students view the process as a valuable learning experience, highlighting the need for targeted instruction and practical exercises to improve their cover letter writing skills.

5. *Teaching Methods*

How do you feel about the teaching methods used in the English correspondence subject, particularly in covering the topic of cover letters?

Most students find the teaching methods for cover letters in the English correspondence subject helpful, particularly the clear, structured approach with examples and step-by-step guidance. However, they express a desire for more practical application,

feedback, and interactive activities like group discussions or peer reviews to enhance their learning. While students appreciate the opportunity to draft letters and receive feedback, some still feel confused by practice questions and would benefit from additional clarification. Overall, students believe more hands-on practice and engagement would further strengthen their learning experience.

6. *Practical Applications*

In your opinion, how applicable are the skills learned about cover letters to your future career?

The responses consistently emphasize the strong applicability of cover letter skills to students' future careers. Many students recognize that knowing how to write an effective cover letter is crucial for job and internship applications, as it helps create a positive first impression and showcases their qualifications. Students also highlight the importance of customizing cover letters for specific roles, which is essential for presenting themselves professionally to potential employers. Several respondents mention that the skills gained are not only valuable for job applications but also for other professional situations, such as networking and interviews. Overall, students view cover letter writing as a critical skill that will aid them in future career opportunities by enhancing their professional communication and increasing their chances of success in job applications.

7. *Feedback and Support*

Have you received feedback on your cover letter writing? If so, how has it helped you improve your skills?

The responses indicate that most students have received feedback on their cover letter writing, and they find it valuable in improving their skills. The feedback helped them identify areas for improvement, such as grammar, tone, clarity, and structure. Many students appreciate that the feedback made their cover letters more professional and effective, helping them present their skills and experiences more clearly. Constructive criticism has also increased students' confidence, allowing them to refine their writing and tailor their letters to specific job requirements. Some students specifically noted improvements in organizing their ideas, aligning content with job expectations, and making their letters more appealing to employers. However, one student mentioned not receiving feedback on their cover letter assignment, though they observed significant improvement after studying the subject. Overall, students recognize that feedback plays a critical role in enhancing their cover letter writing, enabling them to craft more focused, polished, and professional letters.

8. *Use of Tools and Resources*

Do you use any online tools, templates, or guidelines when writing a cover letter? If yes, which ones, and how helpful are they?

The responses show that a majority of students use online tools, templates, and resources to assist with writing cover letters, finding them valuable for ensuring professionalism and improving the quality of their work. Popular tools include websites like Canva, Zety, Microsoft Word templates, and Grammarly, which students use to format their letters, check for grammar and spelling errors, and gain structure suggestions. These tools help students save time, maintain a professional layout, and ensure clarity in their writing. Some students also use job-specific platforms like Indeed and The Muse for guidance on what to include in their letters. However, one student mentioned relying on basic rules without using tools, while another noted using Google Translate and ChatGPT for grammar checks and job search assistance. Overall, students find these online resources helpful in organizing their cover letters, maintaining correct grammar, and tailoring their content to specific job applications.

9. *Perceived Confidence*

How confident do you feel about writing a cover letter in English after taking the English correspondence subject?

The responses indicate that most students feel more confident in writing cover letters in English after taking the English correspondence subject, although they acknowledge the need for further practice to enhance their skills. Many students express increased confidence due to the lessons on structure, key phrases, and professional tone, which helped them understand how to express their skills and experiences effectively. While some students feel prepared and capable, others note that they still need more practice, particularly in applying the steps consistently and improving their grammar. A few students mention areas where they still feel uncertain, such as remembering the specific steps or refining their writing style. Overall, the students feel that the subject has significantly boosted their confidence in writing cover letters, but additional practice and experience would help them feel even more assured.

10. *Suggestions for Improvement*

What suggestions would you give to improve the teaching and learning process of writing cover letters in the English correspondence subject?

The students have provided several suggestions to improve the teaching and learning process of writing cover letters in the English correspondence subject. A common recommendation is the inclusion of more hands-on activities, such as workshops, group discussions, and peer reviews, to allow students to practice writing cover letters and receive immediate feedback. Many students emphasize the importance of using real-world examples, including both successful and ineffective cover letters, to help them understand what works best in different contexts. Some students also suggest integrating digital tools into the lessons to familiarize students with modern job application processes. Additionally, students propose incorporating more practical exercises, like mock job applications, and offering personalized feedback to help them identify areas for improvement. By focusing on practical application and more interactive learning experiences, students believe they could better develop their cover letter writing skills.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the critical importance of mastering cover letter writing as part of professional communication for English Education students. The findings underscore that students recognize the relevance of cover letters in their future careers and value the skills taught in the English Correspondence course. However, despite this recognition, students face persistent challenges, such as organizing content effectively, maintaining professional tone, and tailoring letters to specific job applications.

The research reveals that while the course materials and teaching methods are generally effective, there is room for improvement. Students have expressed the need for more interactive and practical learning experiences, including workshops, peer reviews, and the use of real-world examples. Additionally, integrating digital tools and offering personalized feedback can further enhance students' understanding and confidence in writing cover letters.

By addressing these challenges and aligning the curriculum with real-world expectations, educators can better prepare students for professional success. This research provides actionable insights to refine the teaching and learning of cover letter writing, ensuring students are equipped with the skills necessary to excel in an increasingly competitive job market.

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