


## THE IMPACT OF PROVIDING INSTRUCTIONS TO EFL LEARNERS BY ANALYZING THEIR PROFESSIONAL RESUME



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### ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the effectiveness of providing instruction to EFL students by analyzing important components of writing a professional resumé. Through this qualitative research, a comparison between two different undergraduate groups at different universities was carried out. The first group, considered the instructed group, received instruction on how to write resumé through pursuing a professional writing course. The second group, called a non-instructed group, was not exposed to professional writing, nor to any instruction on how to write a professional resumé. In this study, sampled data was used as the research method to investigate the research question. Findings revealed the importance of providing instruction to learners because the first group outperformed the other group based on the specific components of writing a resumé taught to them. It was also evident that a formal learning of professional writing helps learners to shape their experiences and integrate them with their language background, to create a professional resumé that can attract readers' attention.

**Contribution/ Originality:** The study draws attention to the lack of opportunities to prepare students for work-ready skills and shape their experiences and qualification to write professional resumé. This study focuses on the essential components of writing a professional resumé which every learner must be aware of.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Although writing is not an easy skill to gain, it is one of the most important language skills that English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners need to develop to achieve their communicative goals. Written production is the process that occurs between writers and receivers (Kadiasih, 2021). As it has been indicated by Cer (2019) "writing is a complex process as it is one of the necessary skills to generate the symbols and signs required to express our emotions and thoughts" (p. 2). To clearly express the intended messages, writers need to think initially about insights, ideas, and the genre that they should apply because this stage plays a crucial role in producing effective writing (Elsiddig, 2019). Thus, writing skill is not only exclusively challenging to EFL/ESL learners, but also to natives who try to transfer their beliefs and ideas through written performance. Nuruzzaman, Islam, and Shuchi (2018) explored that writers may encounter different writing issues "...such as content, organization, grammar, purpose, audience, vocabulary and mechanics" (p. 31). On the other hand, EFL

learners encounter major difficulties in writing about different genres since they need to improve their linguistics and pragmatic knowledge of the targeted language to achieve their communicative goals (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017).

Writing comprises many components and steps that learners need to be aware of when submitting different papers for specific purposes. As Fasikh and Murtadho (2019) explained that "... the writer uses words to make sentences, sentences to make paragraphs, and paragraphs to make compositions-letters, reports, college themes" (p. 86). Writing skills need to be strengthened for different purposes related to academic settings or professional settings. Students need to be prepared to create professional reports or letters. Prasetianto and Maharddhika (2020) revealed the importance of the development of writing competence by stating that "writing skill is also needed for their professional work in doing business and to get a good International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score band as a scholarship requirement" (p. 75). This is also consistent with what Fasikh and Murtadho (2019) explored "the ability to write well is also an asset in most careers...search for a job usually requires a letter of application and a resume" (p. 87). Therefore, teachers and students need to collaborate in developing their professional writing to achieve different communicative purposes.

ESL/EFL teachers need to help their students to be better communicators in using the target language. Fasikh and Murtadho (2019) stated that four proficiency skills help learners to develop their communication skills in different contexts. Since writing is "...considered as a basic communication skill in the current communication world" (Mehr, 2017), it would benefit university students in their career life. Ramadhani (2021) indicated that "business correspondence is commonly taught in University, the goal is to prepare students to be ready to compete and promoting their ability and skill to the job provider after they have finished studying in university" (p. 226). This is indicated that many studies (Brown, 2017; Grise-Owens & Crum, 2012; Miller, Grise-Owens, Drury, & Rickman, 2018; Read & Michaud, 2015; Vengadasalam, 2020; Zaghar, 2019) focused on the importance of providing professional writing to EFL learners, but few studies (Campbell, 2020; Krall & Pastusek, 2009) spotlighted on the impact of providing instruction on EFL learners' resumé.

One of the significant aspects of teaching EFL/ESL students is associating classroom exercises and activities with real world practices, such as practicing resumé writing (Fun, Chan, Li, & Ng, 2017). It is important for students to expose and learn how to effectively write a business document in a professional way to properly match career-related requirements (Ng, Keng, Fun, Yun, & Leong, 2013). Thus, understanding how to write a professional resumé is an essential key to obtaining the desired job and facilitating the process of reaching the interview stage (Worman, 2021). Moreover, EFL students need to recognize the crucial components of writing an employment document since each professional type of writing has specific purposes, formats, and elements (McLean, 2012). One of the most important things that students need to emphasize their competencies and qualifications that show their fitness for the applied position (Keiper, Sieszputowski, Morgan, & Mackey, 2019; Kirk, 2018). Thus, the investigation of this study was on the importance of receiving teachers' instructions in developing students' business writing including writing resumé. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the following:

1. What are the components that EFL learners should include in their resumé to be professional?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Professional Writing Instruction

Professional writing is considered an important skill "...to full competence in social work practice, our faculty is compelled to respond" (Grise-Owens & Crum, 2012). Business writing provides students with the necessary competence and skills that they need to develop in the workplace. Vengadasalam (2020) indicated the importance of providing different professional writing courses by universities to develop work-ready skills for students' future careers. The author concluded that moving students from academic writing to real-world writing would contribute to having professional authors in the workplace. Further, learners lose interest if they could not understand the purpose of studying specific courses (Campbell, 2002). In other words, teachers could increase students' motivation

in developing their writing skills in the target language when they show them how their learning is meaningful and could be implemented in real situations.

To develop students' writing skills, students need teachers' instruction and feedback. [Li and Yi \(2020\)](#) concluded that learners' writing development occurs when teachers provided effective and clear instruction and applications. This is matching to what has been explored by [Ariyanti and Fitriana \(2017\)](#) who stated that teachers' role is beneficial because they guide, advise, scaffold, and develop learners' essay writing. Hence, instructors need to improve students' linguistic and communicative competence. [Putri, Utomo, and Fargianti \(2021\)](#) explained that in learning writing, students' pragmatic and discourse competencies should be enhanced in the classroom by focusing not only on the accuracy of linguistic forms but also on the functional uses of language to achieve native-like proficiency, primarily in the flow of information (p. 92).

Since teachers' constructive feedback on students' use of language is crucial, teachers should provide continuance comments and suggestions during the writing process because this cycle may increase learners' awareness of professional writing ([Hasibuan & Simatupang, 2018](#)). [Ozkayran and Yilmaz \(2020\)](#) agreed with the previous study in that EFL learners need to receive extensive practice in writing in the target language to decrease their errors productions. Thus, providing students with feedback on their linguistic and functional knowledge of the target language helps them write effectively in different discourses, including resumé.

[Campbell \(2020\)](#) investigated students' resumé and showed that providing students with lessons on how to write an English resumé would assist them in recognizing which information they need to include and which criteria they need to follow. This indicated the importance of "... training to write an application letter with good impression especially in a personal touch and contact details" ([Ramadhani, 2021](#)). Therefore, EFL teachers should provide an opportunity for students to practice developing their resumé to prepare them for actual job offers. This agreed with the result that was shown by [Krall and Pastusek \(2009\)](#) who explored that working with students on their resumé would show obvious improvement related to common mistakes avoidance and job search skills.

## *2.2. Components of Resumé Writing*

Learning how to create a resumé helps learners how to reflect on and present their educational and work experiences professionally. Resumé is defined as "a selective record of your background—your educational, military, and work experience, your certifications, abilities, and so on" ([McMurrey, 2019](#)). Thus, students need to learn how to introduce their achievements, experiences, and qualifications in a way that could increase their chances to attract the targeted organizations. There are different language aspects that could weaken and decrease applicants' opportunities including inaccuracy, misspelling, word-choice, generality, formatting, and the way of presenting the information ([McLean, 2012](#)). Thus, there are several components in resumé creation that students need to be aware of, such as resumé layout, format, and grammar usage.

### *2.2.1. Format*

Each formal document would have a specific format that needs to be applied. [Krall and Pastusek \(2009\)](#) pointed out the necessity of recognizing the way learners present themselves to employers and the need to highlight the important components of resumé, which are related to the format, such as readability. Regarding resumé formatting, there are main details that learners should expose to, which are: "... 1) use a simple, a professional layout; use Times New Roman or Arial fonts in standard 10 or 12 point size... 2) Addressee and contact detail... summarize...including Grade Point Average (GPA), campus, study major, qualification and personality in teamwork" ([Ramadhani, 2021](#)).

One of the business correspondence features that need to be considered when writing resumé is language usage. Students need to take into their consideration that "simple but professional language is preferable without unnecessary wordiness, familiarity or slang" ([Sviatiuk, 2015](#)). Professional writing requires students to avoid some elements that may decrease the formality of the submitted document. In other words, other aspects may negatively

contribute to decreasing the chances of hiring managers' attention such as using italics, highlights, colors, and underling (McLean, 2012). McLean suggested that job seekers should use black and white and avoid using colors when writing their resumé. Additionally, before submitting the targeted document, students need to make multiple revisions related to the layout, design, and format of the paper. It is significant to consider the readability and hiring managers who read the proposed paper to raise the opportunities to read the professional resumé.

### 2.2.2. First/Third Person Pronouns

Formal writing indicates how personal or possessive pronouns can be used in each writing genre. A pronoun is "...a word that takes the place of a noun, noun phrase, or noun clause" (Hasibuan & Simatupang, 2018). In academic settings, students receive instructions on how to use personal pronouns depending on the purpose of their writing. Instructors may use different teaching methods and strategies to increase students' awareness of the proper use of personal pronouns. Therefore, students should recognize that each context has a specific usage of personal pronouns. MacIntyre (2019) proved that students avoided using the first personal pronoun in their academic writing because they were instructed during the course that using the first pronoun is considered less formal than using third personal pronouns. Thus, teachers' instructions and feedback are helpful tools in facilitating students' understanding of the correct usage of personal pronouns.

### 2.2.3. Action verbs

Dynamic verbs are one of the effective components that can be concerned when writing a resumé. The action verb is "...a word that shows that someone or something is doing" (Hasibuan & Simatupang, 2018). Learning how to use action verbs to present skills and experiences may increase an employer's curiosity to know more about the candidate's competence and background. Afifa (2019) found that "the use of action verbs in writing recount text is significant because it can help to measure students' ability in recount text" (p. 34). Action verbs can provide a great description of the person's capacity and skills. Consequently, using dynamic verbs that spot the light on your achievements and strengths in resumé writing is beneficial (McLean, 2012).

### 2.2.4. Parallelism

Parallelism is one of the grammatical features that EFL students may encounter difficulties using it appropriately. Parallelism is identified as "...the use of the same pattern of words to demonstrate that two or more ideas are of equal importance is known as parallel structure" (Putri et al., 2021). They also revealed that EFL learners often misuse parallel constructions when combining different ideas in phrases. Therefore, instruction by EFL teachers leads students to list and present ideas in a parallel and proper way.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study involved two groups of undergraduate EFL students from two different Saudi universities. The first group was from the applied linguistic department, whereas the other was from the English and translation department. The sample was randomly selected by choosing ten students for each group. All students were non-native English speakers, and their first language was Arabic.

The corpus of the gathered data was analyzed by investigating and evaluating students' resumé. Students' resumé was considered sampled data written by the students to help investigate the impact of providing instructions to EFL students in writing resumé. In this study, the first group was purposefully asked to write a resumé after taking a professional writing course and received instruction of the important components of resumé. However, the second group was asked to write a resumé without receiving instruction. This means that the first group possessed material, was provided instruction, and instructor's feedback; however, the second group did not receive any help or instruction

from their instructor before the experiment. Both groups submitted their resumé through Blackboard. The first group was called the instructed group, and the second group the non-instructed group in this study.

Students' resumes were collected and analyzed based on specific components including first/third person pronouns, grammar, layout, and information and details. The study followed the components of resumé recommended by McLean (2012) because the first group was instructed based on those components. The data analysis passed through two phases. The first phase was identifying the components in both groups' resumé while the second phase compared the resumes of both groups based on those components. Furthermore, in this study, we considered the ethical issues by maintaining confidentiality by making all the names of the participants and the names of the institutions anonymous. Hence, we described the data rather than providing the actual names.

#### 4. RESULTS

The data was analyzed and organized into five themes to answer the investigated research question, which was: what are the components that EFL learners should include in their resumé to be professional? The data identified several components that EFL learners either included or missed while writing their resúmes, such as pronouns (first/third person), phrases, grammar, information and details, and layout. Each component represented the similarities and differences between the two groups.

##### 4.1. Pronouns: First/Third Person

The data related to pronouns differentiated the two groups. The second group who did not receive any instruction or explanation used the first-person pronoun to write their professional summary statement in their resumé. It seems that they tried to represent themselves by directly writing complete sentences. However, the students in the first group, who had learnt how to write resumé, avoided using the first-person pronoun in their professional statements; they followed another approach, which was representing themselves without using personal pronouns, such as *I* or *he/she*. The following Table 1 presents different examples of avoiding using the first-person pronouns by the first group, whereas group 2 examples show the use of the first-person pronouns:

Table 1. Using the first-person pronouns by the second group.

No.	Group 1	Group 2
1	Successfully translated over 300 complete projects.	I can develop my skills and gain new experiences.
2	Managed online ads to announce regular events and fundraising drives.	I teach an English online class for college students.
3	Translated text projects, including legal documents, website content and news articles.	I study English and translation at X university.
4	Communicated with clients effectively to establish scope and requirements of translation.	I have a great passion for writing and translating.
5	Poised to build valuable experience and ready to contribute to the work field.	I seek to employ my knowledge and scientific and practical experience in customer service and communication with them.

##### 4.2. Phrases

Data revealed obvious differences in students' awareness of the way of using phrases to present their work experiences and skills. Most second group students, who had not learnt how to write resumé, tried to list their skills and experiences in a general and vague way. They did not highlight their achievements and qualifications clearly, and rather only listed isolated expressions such as *social person*, *leadership*, as shown in Table 2. In contrast, the first group of students who had learnt how to write a resumé, used dynamic or action verbs such as *provided*, *prepared*, and

managed. They tried to show not to tell the holders how to use their skills and power by providing clear examples to increase the chances of attracting others' attention as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of groups' phrases.

No.	Group 1	Group 2
1	Provided interpretation and transcription services as needed by corporate client	Communicating and coordinating with customers/subscribers
2	Proofread and review translated books	A member of the volunteering club
3	Prepared and wrote advertisements for two TV programs.	Social person
4	Managed online ads to announce regular events	Leadership
5	Reviewed weekly sales circulars and monitored price changes	Flexibility and ability to manage priorities

#### 4.3. Grammar

Through analyzing learners' resumé, it seems that both groups spent sufficient time in checking their spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Regarding linguistic aspects, the data indicated that both groups wrote accurate and clear statements. Their subject-verb agreement, articles, tenses, adjectives, and word-choice were used properly. The particular part of the resumé that showed students' accuracy was their professional summary statement. Clearly, the data reflected the active voice that students used to be more direct and clear the data also revealed students' usage of parallelism appropriately. Excerpts 1 and 2 present two different statements from different groups. Excerpt 2 reflects on how both groups of participants used parallelism to list different adjectives, such as *excellent*, *bilingual*, *hardworking*, and *strong*.

**Excerpt 1.** A written statement by a participant from the first group.

*As a university student, I seek to employ my knowledge and scientific and practical experience in customer service and communication with them. I also possess many leadership and organizational skills that enhance my ability to be an effective member of the work team to make a difference.*

**Excerpt 2.** A written statement by a participant from the second group.

*A computer science professional, holds a Master of Computer science. Seeking to leverage solid development skills with a focus on collaboration, communication, passion, and creativity. Excellent time management skills, bilingual, hardworking, and a strong leader who works well under pressure.*

#### 4.4. Information and Details

The data showed two noticeable differences between the resumé of both groups. The first difference was the use of headings, the first group who had learnt how to write a resumé, divided their information into clear sections including personal contact information, professional summary statement, work experiences, educational background, and skills; whereas, the second group missed important sections, such as educational and work experience parts.

The second difference was in presenting details. The first group clearly presented their details; and tried to be more specific to attract the seekers' attention by manipulating the use of descriptive words, such as *completed* to show a specific accomplishment. For example, Excerpt 3 shows how the instructed student reflected on her qualification and skills when she described how her English language facilitates the delivery of the French language. However, the other participant from the non-instructed group poorly presented her details; she only listed her skills in a vague and general way. Excerpt 4 shows her imprecise details.

**Excerpt 3.** Specific details written by a participant from the first group.

*Completed an array of services by bringing English-language material to the French language market, including translation, transcription, interpretation and more.*



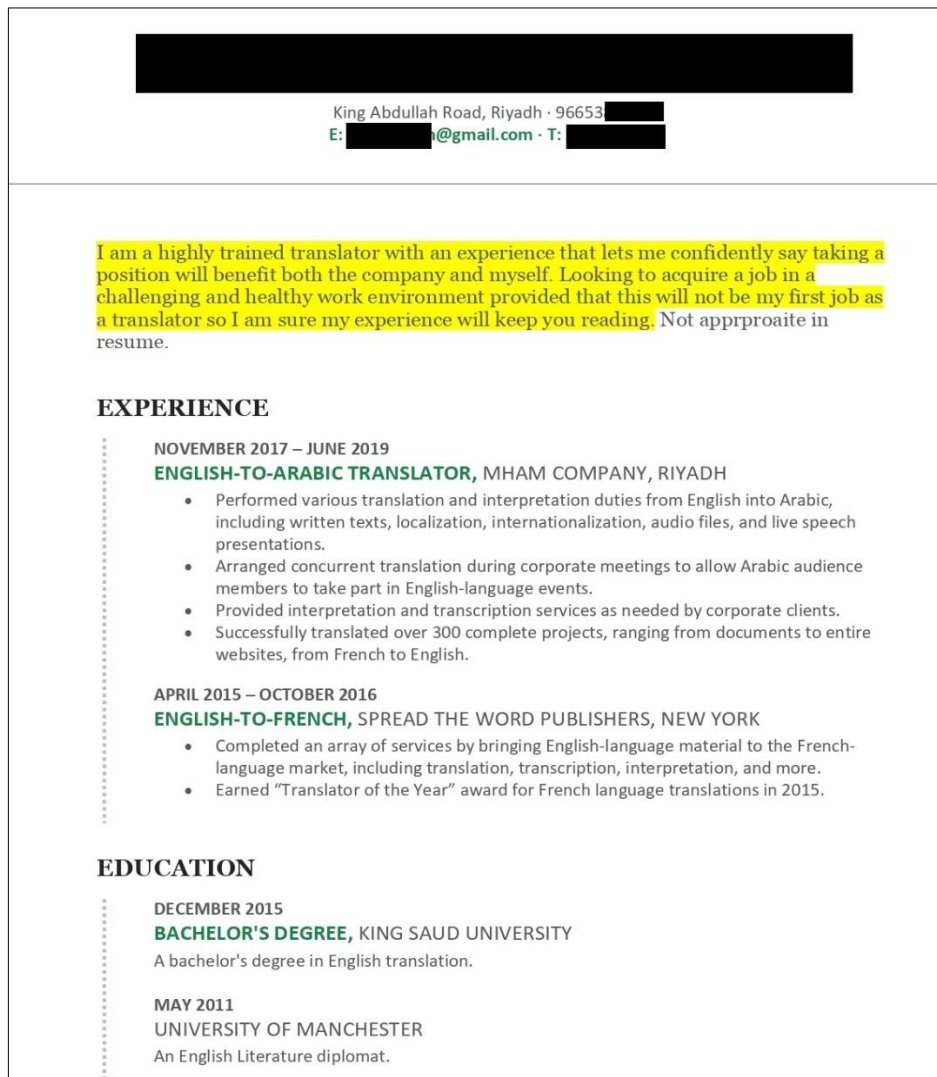
**Excerpt 4.** Imprecise details written by a participant from the second group.

*Ability to translate English to Arabic and vice versa.*

#### 4.5. Layout

Regarding the format of the resumé, both groups mostly failed to use the proper layout utilizing font style, size, italic, highlighting, and colors. It seems that students preferred to use colorful resumé because they used colored background for their own resumé, which is not professional and formal. They used different font types and sizes but not Times New Roman or Arial. The font size that was used by some students was 9; whereas, the other students used the font size 14 and 16. Also, a few students highlighted the text of their professional summary statement in color (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Overall, the data identified the weaknesses and strengths between the two groups based on the use of specific components including first/third person pronouns, phrases, grammatical structures, information presentation, and formatting. Figures 1 and 2 bear examples of resumes selected randomly from the submissions made by first and second groups. The first page of each participant's resumé is illustrated as an example to reflect on how they represented their educational background and accomplishments. The participants' personal information was hidden for maintaining their confidentiality.



**Figure 1.** A resumé written by a student from the first group (the instructed group).

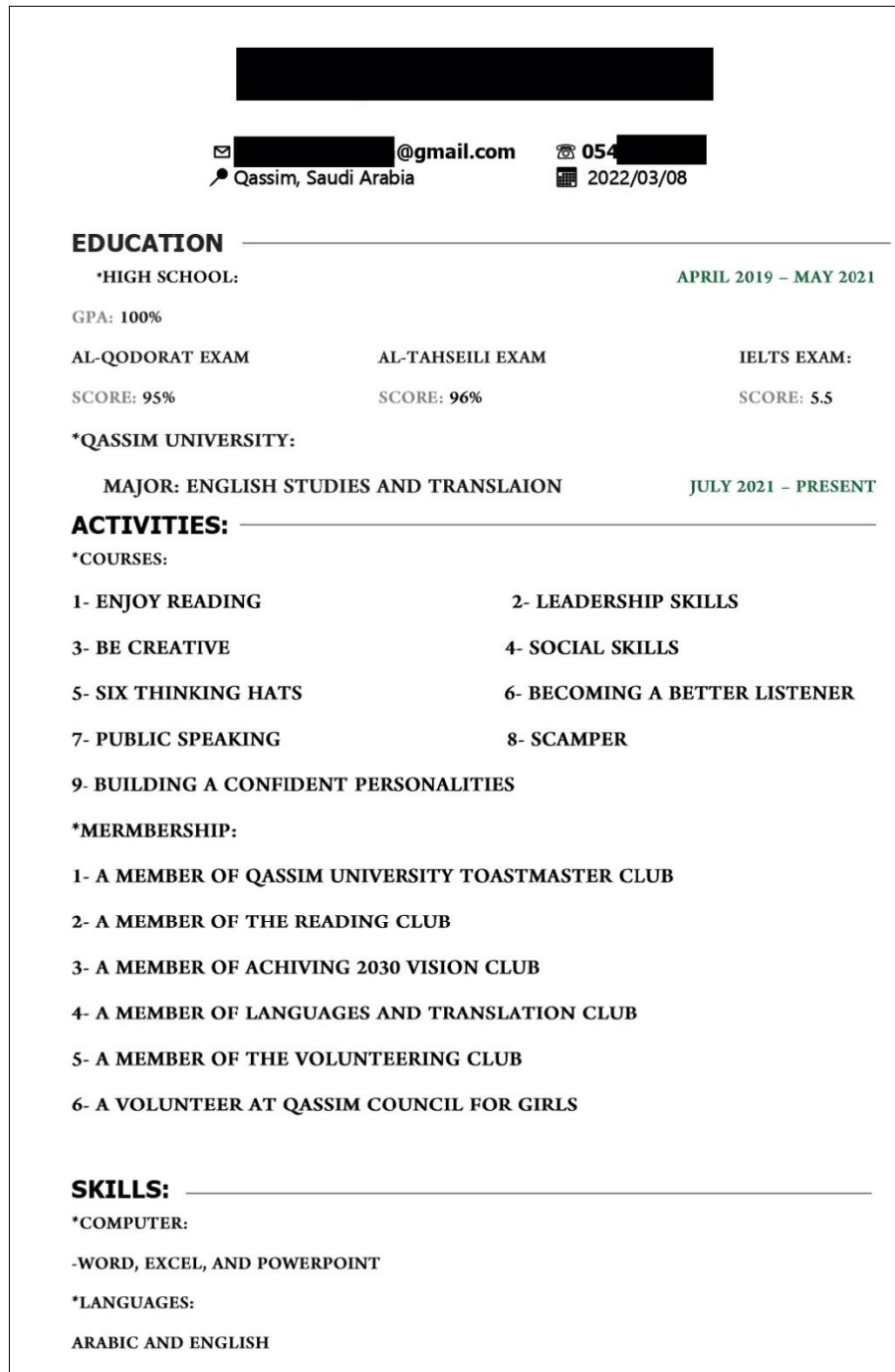


Figure 2. A resumé written by a student from the second group (the non-instructed group).

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study explored EFL learners' resumé and the impact of the provided instruction on recognizing the important components of professional writing. The study utilized the comparison method to investigate the effectiveness of teaching learners in different scenarios. The objective was to find out how they used their linguistic knowledge and their work experiences to create professional writing. The findings indicated that students who received professional writing instruction related to resumé, outperformed the other group who only relied on their linguistic competence. This result is consistent with Ebrahimi, Namaziandost, Ziafar, and Ibna Seraj (2021) who stated that providing instruction in writing classes leads EFL learners to "...the proper use of varied forms of structures and expressions and this, in turn, may sensitize them to know more about what language features to work on to increase their writing proficiency" (p. 1087).



Although both groups were aware and had knowledge of language aspects, the lack of using the language for writing a resumé by both groups was identifiable. It was found out that both groups could write accurately in English because their educational background was in English, and they practiced writing on different topics in writing courses. Writing instruction is considered one of the other pedagogies that facilitate learners' performance and raise awareness (Wu, Hsieh, & Yang, 2021). However, the problem was the use of this English language to produce a professional resumé, which can surely help them recruited in future. McDonough, Uludag, and Neumann (2021) referred to the necessity of learners' exposure to resumé components because it helps raise their awareness of how to present their educational and work experience information in a professional and concise way.

The findings reflected the second group's weaknesses in their resumé, which include writing vague statements. They tried to present essential details that are considered suitable for the targeted position, but addressing ambiguous details may decrease the opportunities to be convinced. According to Rauf and Saeed (2021), "a resumé contain[s] many spelling errors [and lack of important details that may reflect candidates' inability to present their skills and work experiences in a professional way]" (p. 164). However, it was found out that the first group reflected their energetic writing since they were instructed and learned important elements of the resumé and how to highlight the relevant skills and experiences to the position. Thus, integrating the side of linguistics with the side of writing professionalism may facilitate landing an interview.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research investigated the importance of providing instruction to EFL learners in professional writing classes. This study is different from the other studies because the main focus is on how exposure to professional writing takes place in writing resumé by integrating their linguistic knowledge with highlighting their educational and work experiences professionally. EFL learners can write in their foreign language, but not all of them have the opportunity to be trained to attract hiring managers' attention by writing competent resumé. The group which did not receive any instruction, was unlikely to write professional resumé because it lacked experience and knowledge of the crucial components of professional resumé. This weakened their resumé because they only relied on their language skills. However, one of the limitations of the current study is that students do not have enough work experience; this might affect their writing resumé besides their lack of knowledge of how to write persuasive employment documents.

The authors recommend English teachers and lecturers to provide clear instructions, explanations, and examples to increase learners' awareness of how to use the language in writing professional tasks, such as resumé. French (2020) stated that "...professional academics would benefit [students] from a greater critical, theoretical awareness of the ways in which academic writing experiences and expectations inform their professional identity" (p. 1615). Undergraduate learners should be encouraged to start writing and developing their own resumé not only as an assignment but also to motivate them to look for a part-time job to gain work experience and be ready for future life. In this way, learners will be able to think of the English language from a different angle and try to use their language knowledge to align with their experiences in a professional way.

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