

Analyzing Technical Genre Exemplars in the systematic functional linguistic Genre-based Instructional Frame-work for Developing Rhetorical Awareness in Technical Writing in Higher Education

Azza Ashraf Mohammed Abdelrahim

Assistant professor in TEFL

Languuages and Translation Department

Tabuk university

E-mail: azza@ut.edu.sa

Maha Ashraf Mohammed Abdelrahim

Researcher in TEFL

English Department

Minia University

Email:mismaha_8484@yahoo.com

Abstract

This article reports the findings of a quasi-experimental study investigating the effect of using the analysis of technical genre exemplars within the systematic functional linguistic framework for developing rhetorical awareness in technical writing. The study participants were sixty undergraduate students at university. Genre analysis test and writing samples were conducted at the beginning and the end of the course to assess their rhetorical awareness. The findings revealed that analyzing technical genre exemplars developed students' rhetorical awareness. Analyzing technical genre exemplars helped students be aware of how texts in technical writing were shaped for different purposes, audiences and context. Furthermore, students' rhetorical awareness was transferred into their technical writing.

Key words

Rhetorical awareness; technical writing; genre analysis; Genre Exemplars

Introduction

Second-language acquisition (SLA) research considers the approach of genre instruction as the method that students use to discover the features of written and spoken texts. Many studies showed the effect of genre analysis approach on developing students' reading and writing in second language (Cheng, 2007; Cheng, 2008a; Cheng, 2008b; Henry& Roseberry,1998; Mustafa,1995). However, no empirical study, to our knowledge, has been conducted on genre analysis for developing rhetorical awareness in technical writing. The current study rigorously investigated students' analyzing technical genre exemplars to enhance their rhetorical awareness in technical writing.

Review of Literature

SLA researchers have made many attempts to identify the term genre. Swales' book about genre analysis in academic and research has laid the foundation for genre analysis. According to Swales, genre comprises communicative events in which writers share communicative purposes for constituting genre's rationale which shapes discourse structure and affects the choice of style and content (Swales, 2011). Routledge Linguistics Encyclopedia claimed that genre has specific discourse structures and features to achieve its communicative purpose (Malmkjaer, 2013). As it is the writer's response to the social context and genre analysis (Johns, 2003), it takes into consideration the intrapersonal, institutional, sociocultural, and organizational factors that affect genre construction. Hence, conducting a genre analysis might help learners understand its features and discover that texts are not the same in all disciplines. They are written for different audiences in response to different situations to achieve certain goals.

Rhetorical awareness means that students should be aware of the rhetorical elements in their writing including purpose (why the document is being written, understanding the relationship between the features of text and its communicative purpose), audience (who will read the document, who might read your work), and Context (the background of situation in which the document is created, the circumstances of the environment where a piece of communication takes place). Students need to carry out genre analysis tasks to discover all the essential features related to rhetorical action. After some practices in genre analysis, they will internalize the specific features of each genre and use them in the construction of their own writing. According to (Swales, 2011), such genre-analysis tasks give students new insight into the mechanisms of rhetoric in their texts. However, from the researcher's point of view, such genre analysis tasks give students an awareness of the rhetorical features when they construct their own writing.

Since the early ninties, there has been a shift in the use of genre and genre analysis. The teaching of genres has been influenced by three approaches to genre – the approach of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), New Rhetoric approach, and Systemic Functional Linguistics approach. A genre analyst of English for Specific Purposes focuses more on the specialized words and particular grammatical structures. New rhetoric genre perspective is more interested in the rhetorical organization of the text such as "move" and "step" analysis of a particular genre and in search

of the grammatical structures effected by the rhetorical consideration (Riazi, 2016). Systemic functional linguistics gives more attention to the main function of language for making meaning in a context rather than as a set of specific structures. It requires realizing three kinds of linguistic sources in text to understand a genre: ideational sources which are responsible for constructing text content; interpersonal sources which are responsible for constructing tenor (the relationship between speaker/listener or writer/reader), or social relations, or attitudes in a written text; and textual features which are responsible for constructing mode (how the flow of information is organized in a written text) (Bartlett & O'Grady, 2017; Byrnes, 2013; Stukker, Spooen, & Steen, 2016; Yan and Webster, 2014)

The genre analysis that is based on Systemic functional linguistics approach provides the theoretical background of the current study. Giving students opportunity to analyze the linguistic features based on register variables of field, tenor and mode, along with the resources of linguistic metafunctions (interpersonal, textual resources, and ideational) can foster learners' knowledge of how particular written genres use particular rhetorical and linguistic features. In the current study, using technical writing (e.g, report, email, letter, memo, user manual, resume.....etc.) as the main content of the genre analysis, is supported by the SFL background described above. The audience in technical writing is apparent in the content of technical writing. Many different functional goals, including giving information, writing instructions, writing a cover letter, writing memo, writing user manual.....etc., can be realized via modes of technical writing genre to respond to specific readers (tenor) for a specific social situation (field).

Most of the studies that investigated the use of genre analysis over the past 27 years were more concerned with developing reading and writing (Cheng, 2008a; Hyon, 2001; Kalali, 2015) generic competence (Deng, Chen and Zhang, 2014), genre awareness (Negretti&Maria, 2011; Yayli, 2011), rhetorical structure (Lee, 2016), generic features (Cheng, 2007), and very few studies like Cheng (2008b), to our knowledge, showed the effectiveness of genre analysis on the awareness of only two rhetorical parameters (reader/writer and purpose) and did not measure its effect on all the rhetorical awareness. Moreover, Cheng's study was conducted on one student so the study's result cannot be generalized. Other studies like Kakh, Mansor, and Zakaria (2014) investigated the effect of rhetorical analysis tasks on postgraduate students' sense of audience in thesis writing. The findings suggested that rhetorical analysis may improve learners' sense of

audience. Chandrasegaran (2012) conducted a study in which he investigated whether instruction in identifying rhetorical moves analysis in a writing class would have a positive effect on students' choice and organization of moves in students' essay writing. The finding showed that the high correlation between participants' move analysis and essay writing scores suggest that raising students' rhetorical awareness through instruction in move analysis affected positively on move organization and choice in their writing.

In addition to these studies, there is one attempt that discovered students' rhetorical sensitivity after analyzing some genres for developing their reading. Hyon (2001) provided empirical evidence of the effect of an EAP reading course based on genre on non-native adult speakers. The study investigated the effect of analyzing class genres (e.g., news story, textbook, and article) on their second language reading. The genres of reading were analyzed in terms of purpose, structure, content, and language style. Results revealed that some students applied the genre features they acquired to their second language reading and writing. Moreover, they gained rhetorical sensitivity that may transfer to other reading texts. The scope of the study of Hyon (2001) was limited in terms of the lack of instruments to investigate the effectiveness of genre analysis on rhetorical sensitivity.

Reviewing previous studies, it became obvious that there is no study, to our knowledge, that was conducted using genre analysis to develop students' rhetorical awareness in technical writing. Therefore, the point regarding how to enhance students' rhetorical awareness through analyzing exemplars of technical genre within Systemic functional linguistic framework has not been adequately explored so far. The chief aim of the current study, consequently, is to enhance students' rhetorical awareness in technical writing through using the analysis of technical genre exemplars based on the framework of SFL of Genre-based Instruction. In the light of this aim, the current study tries to find an answer to the following main questions:

- 1-How effective is the use of analyzing technical genre exemplars in developing students' rhetorical awareness in technical writing?
- 2-To what extent is the students' rhetorical awareness transferred into their technical writing?

Methodology

A 14-week technical genre analysis course was designed and delivered by the author and a doctoral candidate researcher. Students were met twice a week. Each session was 120 minutes. The data were collected in technical writing course taught by the author in University. The genre- instruction of how to conduct a genre analysis usually lasted an hour; the remaining time was devoted to students' discussions and conferences. The study followed a one group pre/post quasi experimental design. Since most of the students were expected to analyze many forms of technical writing during their study at university, the SFL genre approach (Bartlett and O'Grady, 2017; Swales, 2011) was adopted for their analysis of the rhetorical features of technical writing.

Participants

Over the course of one semester, a total of 60 Saudi female students who spoke Arabic as their first language consented to be participants in this study. They were studying computer science at Tabuk university in the north of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. All the participants' majoring was in computer science department. They enrolled in the third year in the university. They were between the ages of 18-20 years old.

Instruments

A rhetorical analysis test and an analysis of writing samples were the two instruments used in this study. The rhetorical analysis test (see appendix B) was conducted to assess students' rhetorical awareness (audience, purpose, and context) of technical writing (e.g, report, job application, user manual, memo). It consisted of nine items. Item one assessed students' awareness of purpose. Items two to six assessed students' awareness of audience. Items seven to nine assessed students' awareness of context. The rhetorical analysis test was piloted by ten professors in applied linguistics before it was used in the study. The test items were also constructed based on reviewing literature related to rhetorical awareness and technical writing including Dos Santos (2002); Swales (2011); Devitt (2010); Lunsford, Wilson, and Eberly (2009). Most of the amendments proposed by the ten professors in applied linguistics were about rewording some items and omitting certain items. Their comments and recommendations were considered in the final version of the test. Subsequently, a test was administered to 60 female students to assess their rhetorical awareness. A second instrument was analyzing students' own productive technical writing samples to assess whether students' rhetorical awareness was transferred into their writing. A rhetorical awareness analytical scoring

rubric was constructed to assess students' writing samples before and after the intervention. It was constructed in the light of reviewing literature and previous studies including Brookhart (2013); Walvoord, Stevens, and Levi (2013); Anderson (2016); Tyagi and Misra (2011). It comprised three criteria for assessing rhetorical awareness in technical writing including purpose, audience, and context.

Procedures

The sixty Female participants were randomly selected by the author after taking the approval of the vice dean of the college and students' consent to participate in this study. To assess students before the intervention a pre-test was administered by a Ph.D. candidate researcher and marked by a third party that consisted of three volunteer teachers with knowledge and expertise in the course. Analytical scoring rubric (see appendix c) was constructed for grading students' writing samples.

Treatment

The treatment was carried out over a 14-week period during the 2017 winter term of the academic year. During the experimental intervention period, the author provided explicit instruction about how to analyze the text ideationally (purpose awareness), interpersonally (audience awareness), and contextually (context awareness) at the beginning of each session. Various guided technical writing exemplars (memo, resume, reports, manuals) followed by group work activities were used for practising the analysis (see Appendix A).

After the explicit instruction, the author provided guided activities. Students were asked to analyze the texts ideationally, interpersonally, and contextually. Ideationally, students identified the text purpose, i.e. they mentioned the reason for writing that type of writing. Interpersonally, the students were asked to identify the kind of relationship between the writer and the reader(e.g., what is the relation between the writer and the reader?, who was involved in the writing?, what was their status?, how did their status affect their way of writing?, and how did the readers interpret the writers' rhetorical features?). Contextually, students were asked to notice the organization of information (e.g., How is the text organized, how is the layout /background of the text, and what ways did the writer use to introduce and end his text?). Then, Students conducted pairs discussions and whole class discussion. In all, there was an explicit instruction guided by the researcher to develop students' rhetorical awareness.

After that, the author divided students into small groups and gave them hands out (see some exemplars in Appendix A) to be practised. The author asked students to answer the questions below the text. The questions were as these examples: 'what is the purpose of the manual? Or 'what did the author intend to do? Or 'What phrases ,words, sentences did the writer use to refer to the purpose?' in order to raise students' purpose awareness. The students also answered questions such as 'what was the kind of relation between the author and the reader?' or 'what was the status of the writer and the reader? Or 'who is the intended reader?' in order to heighten students' awareness of the audience and questions like 'what was the background of situation in which the text was created?' or ' what were the circumstances in which this text was written?'

After six weeks of technical genre analysis, the exemplars were used as a guide for students to to write their own technical writing (e.g., memo, report, user manual, incidental report, internal progress report ,cover letter...ect) beside the analysis. At the end of each session, the author received the students' writing samples.

Data collection

The data of the study were collected from 60 female students. The course of the study was taught by the author. The study started on the second week of semester to ensure the regular attendance of students and that they resumed their classes, it concluded two weeks before the end of semester to avoid course withdrawals that might occur.

The rhetorical analysis test was administred at the beginning and end of the treatment by other researcher. Students required 60 minutes to complete the entire text. The rhetorical analysis test's reliability was established two weeks before the beginning of the study. It was conducted to a randomly selected group of forty students in the same level of the treatment group. Those students were excluded from the study. After fifteen days from the first administration, the same students were retested by the researcher. Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between the test/ re-test, and it was 0.93.

Writing samples were collected from students by the other researcher. They were collected two times: at the beginning and at the end of the treatment to determine if students' rhetorical awareness was transferred into their technical writing after conducting genre analysis of some technical writing exemplars. An analysis of the writing samples was conducted by

the author and the other researcher. To determine inter-rater consistency between the author and the researcher, an inter-rater reliability analysis was conducted using Pearson correlation coefficient which was 0.91. This indicates an agreement between the two raters with regard to their realizations of the same rhetorical purpose, audience, and context.

Data analysis

Preliminary statistical analyses such as Pearson's coefficient of internal consistency and paired sample T-test were conducted for data analysis. Consequently, all data of the final-version instruments were found reliable.

Analyses, Findings, and Discussion

How effective is the use of analyzing technical genre exemplars in developing students' rhetorical awareness in technical writing?

To check for any differences between the rhetorical analysis pretest and the posttest one in the same group, the "t-test" for paired samples was used. The findings reported in Table 1 revealed that t-value was (20.4) and significant at 0.01 level. This result indicated that there were significant differences between the mean scores of the rhetorical analysis pretest and the posttest one which indicate that analyzing technical genre exemplars had a positive effect on developing students' rhetorical awareness in technical writing. This result answered the first research question confirming that analyzing technical genre exemplars did result in positively on developing students' rhetorical awareness. Table 1 presents a summary of the data analysis obtained from the rhetorical analysis pretest and the posttest one.

Table 1: T-test Results of the Rhetorical Analysis Test

Group	No.	Means	St.Deviation	D. f.	t. value
Pre test	60	1.50	0.50	119	20.4
Post test	60	7.90	3.71		

*Significant at 0.01 level

To what extent is the students' rhetorical awareness transferred into their technical writing?

Sixty technical writing samples were analyzed by the author and the researcher (see Appendix D). The initial analysis was conducted at the beginning of semester to assess their rhetorical awareness before the

intervention. Another analysis was conducted at the end of the course to assess their rhetorical awareness after the intervention.

The two rater analyzed the students' samples of writing in their awareness of purpose, audience, and context. Using the "t-test" for paired samples, the analysis of collected data showed that the obtained t-value (23.4) was significant at 0.01 level. Table 2 presents a summary of the data analysis obtained from participants' pre-writing samples and their post-writing samples. As shown in Table 2, t-value showed that there were significant differences between the mean sores obtained from students' pre-writing samples and the post ones, which mean that learners transferred their rhetorical awareness into their technical writing.

Table 2: T-test results of the analysis of pre/post writing samples

Group	No.	Means	St.Deviation	D. f.	t. value
Pre test	60	1.5	0.5	119	23.4
Post test	60	6.5	2.5		

*Significant at 0.01 level

This finding confirms the literature-based theoretical research that recognizes genre analysis as a powerful learning means (e.g. Cheng, 2007; Deng et al.,2016; Hyon, 2001; Kalali, 2015; Lee, 2016; Negretti& Kuteeva, 2011; Yasuda, 2011; Yayli, 2011). This finding further complement the findings of other experimental studies which showed the effectiveness of genre analysis on only one or two elements of rhetorical awareness (Cheng, 2008b; Lee, 2016; Kakh, Mansor, and Zakaria, 2014). The finding further validates the study conducted by Hyon 2001 which discovered that students gained rhetorical sensitivity and may transfer to reading other texts through analyzing some genres.

The quasi-experimental design of the current study, the treatment used, the procedures of data collection, and the statistical analyses conducted all contributed to providing rigorous and promising results. All of these procedures made us confident that the analysis of technical genre exemplars developed students' rhetorical awareness in technical writing. Importantly, this study presented far-reaching implications for SL teaching/learning practices. The study not only supports the significant role of genre analysis as a powerful learning means (e.g. Cheng, 2007; Deng et al.,2016; Kalali, 2015; Lee, 2016; Negretti& Kuteeva, 2011; Yayli, 2011) but also experimentally validates the correlation between genre analysis and rhetorical awareness. The current study remains the first experimental

investigation to provide an empirical validation of the effect of genre analysis on rhetorical awareness.

Conclusions

The current article reported the findings of a quasi-experimental study that investigated the effect of analyzing technical genre exemplars for developing students' rhetorical awareness in technical writing. The study investigated (i) the use of analyzing technical genre exemplars in developing students' rhetorical awareness in technical writing and (ii) how students' rhetorical awareness was transferred to their technical writing. Following rigorous procedures, 14-week treatment course was conducted. Learners were exposed to a course of analyzing technical genre exemplars. Genre analysis test and writing samples were used to assess students' rhetorical awareness in technical writing. Analyses revealed a significant difference in learners' rhetorical awareness after the intervention.

Empirical -based studies on the effect of genre analysis on rhetorical awareness were not conducted before. The main focus of the previous studies was on assessing one or two elements of rhetorical awareness (e.g. awareness of audience or awareness of reader). It is, therefore, the contribution of this study that it provided empirical evidence illustrating that analysis of technical genre exemplars can indeed positively influence learners' rhetorical awareness in technical writing.

One limitation of the current study is the lack of male participants, although no research is yet reported on differences of gender in rhetorical awareness. Future research endeavours should, however, include male language participants to establish this conclusion empirically. A control group to establish this conclusion empirically is needed also for future research.

Note

We were unable to include male participants in the current study because there were no co-educational settings due to cultural and religious restrictions. We were also unable to include a control group in the study because of restrictions of students' schedule in the department of computer science.

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Appendices

Appendix (A) Technical Genre exemplars

To: Yearbook Staff Members
From: Yearbook Staff Trip Committee
Date: February 1, 20—
Subject: Progress Report 3: Planning for Trip to Disney World

Because our yearbook staff trip to Disney World is less than two months away, we are working hard to make an enjoyable adventure possible. This report outlines the accomplishments, the work remaining, and one problem encountered during January.

WORK COMPLETED (January 1–February 1, 20—)

We are marking a few things off the to-do list. With our current level of enthusiasm, we will get there.

Finances and Reservations

The staff sponsored two doughnut sales to add \$350 to the travel fund.

Three buses from the White Goose Line costing \$800 each have been reserved. In addition, reservations have been made for three nights at the Disney Dunes Hotel and a deposit of \$500 paid to the hotel.

Equipment

Because university policy requires insurance for the school-owned cameras and computers we will need, we have purchased a replacement value policy from Lunden Insurance to cover the time of our trip.

WORK SCHEDULED

The remaining responsibilities are earning the rest of the money and making additional reservations.

Finances

The fund balance now contains \$9,675 of the \$11,000 we need for the trip. Five other fund-raising projects have been scheduled. However, if the future projects are as successful as the last two, we may raise the remaining \$1,325 after only three projects have been completed.

Incident Report

Summary

On January 31, 20—, between 8:00 a.m. and 10:15 a.m., Number 4 flour bin was contaminated by water leaking through a small hole in an overhead steam exhaust pipe, but no permanent damage was done to the facility or equipment. The contamination was isolated to the one bin, and the contents were discarded. After thorough testing, production resumed after ten hours. The report of contamination and all test results were filed in the plant office for regulatory review.

Description

On January 31, 20—, Alexine Blanc and Julio de Mola were preparing a batch of Double Devilish Chocolate Brownie mix. At 10:15 a.m., Blanc noticed clumps in the Number 4 flour bin. Because all dry ingredients supplied to Grandma's have anti-caking additives, Blanc and de Mola knew something was wrong.

At 11:30 a.m., the lab tests indicated that the substance causing clumping in the flour contained water and metal rust particles. No foreign substances were found in the samples from the other six bins, nor did the tests show any problems with the samples from packaged goods.

The information about the foreign materials in Bin 4 led investigators to look for leaks over the bin. A piping company, Adair Contractors, located and repaired a 1/16-inch diameter hole in the juncture where two exhaust pipes meet.

Outcome

All materials in Number 4 flour bin were discarded. The empty bin was thoroughly sanitized before use. Once cleared by the laboratory, other bins were placed back in operation. Production was off-line for ten hours on January 31, 20—. None of the contaminated materials were packaged or shipped to consumers. No one was injured or sickened because of the incident.

Conclusion

In the future, bin covers will be closed tightly until batch mixing begins. Because the piping contractor has guaranteed the repair work for one year, I do not anticipate more leaking from this area. However, I do recommend a thorough inspection of the entire exhaust pipe system. In addition, I believe systematic testing of all ingredients would further ensure our promise of quality products.

Appendix (B)

Rhetorical Analysis Test

Personal Information	
Name	
University ID	
Section	

Read the following text and answer the questions

Internal Progress Report

To: Yearbook Staff Members

From: Yearbook Staff Trip Committee

Date: February 1, 20—

Subject: Progress Report 3: Planning for Trip to Disney World

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Three buses from the White Goose Line costing \$800 each have been reserved. In addition, reservations have been made for three nights at the Disney Dunes Hotel and a deposit of \$500 paid to the hotel.

Equipment

Because university policy requires insurance for the school-owned cameras and computers we will need, we have purchased a replacement value policy from Lunden Insurance to cover the time of our trip.

WORK SCHEDULED

The remaining responsibilities are earning the rest of the money and making additional reservations.

PROBLEMS/PROJECTIONS

The University Board has agreed to consider our request to be excused from classes early on the day we leave. Otherwise, we cannot reach Orlando before three o'clock in the morning. If we arrive in the middle of the night, we will probably spend the day planned for Disney World catching up on sleep. We might think of changing the schedule if the board denies our request. Other plans are proceeding as expected, and we should have all work for the trip completed by March 16, two weeks before departure.

1- What is the purpose of the text?

.....

2- Who produced the text?

.....

- 3- Who is the intended audience?
.....
- 4- How is the social relationship between the writer and the reader?
.....
- 5- How does the reader's status affect the way the writer chose the language?
.....
- 6- How are the writer's language choices interpreted by the reader?
.....
- 7- Does the writer use any attractive techniques to draw the readers' attention to the text?
.....
- 8- Has the writer considered the layout and organization of the text? Does this suggest any thing about the document?
.....
- 9- What were the circumstances in which this text was written?
.....

Appendix (C)

Rhetorical awareness analytical scoring rubric

Level Criteria	4 Complete awareness	3 Moderate awareness	2 limit awareness	1 Un awareness	points
purpose	The writer states the purpose of writing clearly with detail.	The writer writes phrases related to the topic. The purpose is vague	Writing does not clearly state the purpose. The reader is left with questions.	The writer does not state the purpose of writing clearly	
audience	Writing is skillfully adapted to the audience with the understanding of a specific audience. Writing clarifies the status or the relation between the writer and the reader.	The writer shows little sense of audience.	The writer's sense of audience is vague	The writer shows no sense of audience.	
context	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context. Writing is clearly organized. The writer considers the formality/informality of the context, the layout	Demonstrates adequate consideration of Context. The writer demonstrates adequate consideration of the formality/informality of the context, the layout	Demonstrates minimal attention to context	Lacks attention to context. Writing is disorganized . The writer does not consider the formality/informality of the context, the layout	
				Total ...>	

Appendix (D)

WRITING SAMPLES

To: manager.....
 From: Sara.....
 Date: march 25, 2017.....
 Subject: achievement of Computer.....

.....

This Report described the achievement of your
 Computer ^{LAP} during period from the fifth to tenth
 of April.....

Worked Completed:

- ① maintenance of computer sets
- ② up date of program
- ③ Downloaded anti-virus ~~software~~ software

.....

Work Scheduled:

- ① Access of internet
- ② increasing the number of computer sets

.....

Problems:

- ① There not internet access
- ② There not Project
- ③ mostth of computer sets became out of date

incidental Report

Summary:

on Thursday 2-8-2015 Between 10 a.m. & 12 p.m.

There was a fire broken out in computer lab.

and the electronic was off.

There were many smokes and many students

became ill.

Description:

There was a big pressure on all the electronic in the building. The electronic was worked for a long time. So this lead to broken out fire.

Outcomes:

• 30 sets of computer were damaged.

• The projector was burnt and the computer lab was damaged.

• 10 students became ill, and

• There was one student in danger case.

and she went to hospital.

Conclusion: In the future decreasing

of pressure in the computer.

and providing exit door for avoiding a fire.

Cover letter.

Shahid Luthi,
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Ali Alqarni
manager of
tabuk university.

I am writing this letter to apply for this job
computer instructor at tabuk university.

I am interested working in because it is
the famous university in the Saudi Arabia.

I am best for this job because I have
suitable qualifications for this job.

I have master degree in instructor from
Cambridge university.

~~I have~~
I am worked 3th year in the field.

I a hard worked, I get this job done.
enclosed is my resume for your
consideration.

Kind regards

Shahid.

