

Evaluating AIDA Learning Transfer Through Students' Proposals

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Abstract

Business communication & negotiation courses are targeted to develop students' persuasive competence into authentic professional writing. This study aims to evaluate the extent to which previously learned Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action (AIDA) principles are reflected in proposals produced by student groups in a Business Communication and Negotiation course as project accomplishment. Evaluative qualitative document analysis was used in this study with a directed content analysis approach. Seven submitted group proposals were screened and analyzed. The result indicates that Interest and Desire were the strongest elements, each receiving a mean analytic rating of 2.43 on a 0–3 scale. Attention was unevenly developed ($M = 1.57$), while Action was the weakest element ($M = 1.29$), particularly when proposals ended with general expressions of hope rather than a specific next step. Overall, the corpus demonstrates moderate learning transfer of AIDA principles. The students were generally able to relate their proposals to stakeholder needs and explain the benefits of their proposed solutions. However, they were less successful in supporting attention-building statements with evidence and in giving readers a clear and specific next step. These findings suggest that student-produced proposals can provide useful evidence of learning transfer while also showing areas where further practice and guidance are needed.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Successful learning should be proven by how mastered the students in applying the theories they learnt. How they use, adapt or transform the knowledge in a different context is called learning transfer [1],[2]. In the context of Business Communication and Negotiation class, written business proposals can be an option as a means for learning evaluation. Not perceived as a document to inform, a proposal is an audience-directed message that attempts to secure approval, resources, partnership, or another form of support. Thus, Bovee and Thill propose that to achieve this proposal's purpose, the writer must explain why a problem deserves attention, demonstrate why it is relevant to the intended reader, articulate the value of the proposed solution, and clarify the response expected from the decision-maker [3]. By accommodating professional communication practices, proposal projects may function as authentic assessment tasks. In this regard, authentic assessment is used to bridge classroom learning with real-world context [4].

One framework commonly taught for planning persuasive business messages is Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action (AIDA). Lewicki et al. define the AIDA model as a hierarchy in which a message first attracts attention, sustains interest by demonstrating relevance, develops desire by communicating benefits or value, and directs the audience toward action [5]. AIDA model is more common in marketing and communication field, but this model is also ideal for evaluation internal communication in education field [6], including evaluating learning transfer through authentic assessment task.

Applying AIDA principles in a proposal cannot guarantee a strong persuasion. In fact, Wijayanti analyzed sixty job application letters written by business students using the AIDA principles and found several variations in the sequence of elements, while the language of the letters remained insufficiently persuasive [7]. In this case, the findings suggested that an analysis should extend beyond the presence of Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. This further signifies how each function should be applied. More importantly, attention should be given not only to whether the claims are adequately substantiated but also to whether the proposal effectively addresses the specific needs of the intended organization.

Previous studies have applied the AIDA model to various persuasive communication contexts, including internal communication [6] and student job application letters [7]. However, its use to evaluate learning transfer through student-produced proposal remains underexplored. Therefore, this study evaluates the extent to which previously learned AIDA principles are reflected in students' business proposals and examines how the four AIDA elements are textually realized.

2. METHOD

This study employs evaluative qualitative document analysis design. Document analysis is appropriate when documents are treated as meaningful research data that can be systematically selected, examined, interpreted, and synthesized [8]. The analysis follows a directed qualitative content analysis approach because the initial categories are derived from an existing conceptual framework, namely Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action [9]. Although the four AIDA elements provide the deductive coding structure, the analysis remains open to inductively identified subcategories, such as problem-based attention, statistical attention, stakeholder relevance, functional benefits, social benefits, explicit action, and implicit action. The design is evaluative because it examines both the presence and the quality of each persuasive function in the proposals.

The study was conducted in an undergraduate Business Communication and Negotiation course in a management program at a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in 2026. Prior to completing the final project, students had learned about composing persuasive business messages, including the AIDA model. As the final project, each group was required to develop a written negotiation proposal. One notable aspect is that the guidelines in the project did not explicitly require the proposal to be organized based on the AIDA model. Within that instructional setting, the proposal project is suitable to evaluate whether students independently transferred previously learned persuasive principles to authentic assessment task. Building upon the coding framework, instead of becoming a rigid sequence, AIDA model serves as four persuasive functions namely attention highlighting the urgency of the discussed issue, interest to connect issues to the intended audience's

needs and concerns, desire emphasizing the benefits of the proposed solution and lastly, action encouraging readers to make a decision as a follow-up.

The coding procedure began with a full reading of the seven proposals to understand their overall content and rhetorical context. The proposals were then anonymized as P01–P07 and coded using the four AIDA elements. The unit of coding consisted of clauses, sentences, headings, bullet points, table cells, or other meaningful textual segments. A segment was coded as Attention when it established the urgency of an issue; Interest when it connected the proposal with the intended stakeholder's needs or concerns; Desire when it communicated benefits or value; and Action when it highlights a requirement of a follow-up response from the target reader. After all relevant segments had been coded, each AIDA element within each proposal was rated on a 0–3 scale based on its presence, explicitness, audience orientation, specificity, and evidential support. The resulting proposal-by-element matrix was then used to compare patterns across the seven proposals. In performing the analysis process, several stages derived from the principles of deductive and directed content analysis [8].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Extent of AIDA Elements

The analysis revealed noticeable differences in how the four AIDA elements were applied across the seven student group business proposals. As presented in table 1, all seven proposals demonstrated the presence of Interest and Desire, with each function earning an average analytic score of 2.43. By contrast, the Attention function appeared in six of the seven proposals (85.7%). Its relatively low mean score of 1.57 suggests that it was often developed through broad and general claims rather than supported by concrete evidence. Action, however, proved to be the most difficult function to implement. This is reflected in its lowest mean score of 1.29 and its occurrence in only 71.4% of the proposals. Overall, the student groups were more capable of demonstrating relevance to stakeholders and articulating the benefits of their proposals than of capturing readers' attention or directing them toward a specific course of action. It is aligned with Hu et al. who state that authentic assessment should facilitate students applying what they learn in class in a realistic context, not only testing theory comprehension [10].

Table 1. Distribution and Quality of AIDA Elements

AIDA element	Present, n	Present, %	Mean rating	Initial interpretation
Attention	6	85.7	1.57	Present in most proposals, but often broad and weakly evidenced.
Interest	7	100.0	2.43	Strong audience relevance and stakeholder recognition.
Desire	7	100.0	2.43	Benefits were consistently presented; quality varied in specificity.
Action	5	71.4	1.29	Weakest element; many closings lacked a concrete next step.

Table 2. Element Rating Matrix

Proposal	Attention	Interest	Desire	Action	Total / 12
P01	2	2	2	1	7
P02	1	2	2	0	5
P03	2	3	3	3	11
P04	2	3	3	3	11
P05	1	2	2	1	6
P06	3	3	3	1	10
P07	0	2	2	0	4

Table 2 describes the greater detailed presence of each AIDA element across all proposals produced by the students. Specifically, the distinction between presence and quality of an element became an essential point in this analysis. As an instance, as shown in table 2, all proposals had explained the benefits or facilities capable of generating Desire. Nonetheless, Bovee and Thill argued that the quality of this element depends on how effective these benefits are converted into specific value for the audience, measurable commercial cooperation schemes, risk-mitigation mechanisms, or forms of service guarantee[9]. Similarly, although several proposals included polite closing statements, these alone were insufficient to demonstrate strong Action. To exemplify, the expression “Besar harapan kami agar kerja sama ini dapat dipertimbangkan dengan baik” (P02) lacked a specific decision request, meeting proposal, timeline, or follow-up procedure. This influences how a proposal sounds, making it more polite and less demanding as gives readers space to consider the offer and discuss it [11] [12]but it is not the essence of Action.

3.2 Textual Realization of AIDA Elements

3.2.1 Attention: Establishing the Importance of the Issue

Attention was most commonly realized through descriptions of a current business problem, changing market conditions, price differences, or the scale of the proposed activity. The strongest example appeared in P06, which specified that the national event targeted approximately 600 participants and connected this scale with promotional potential for the sponsor. P01 also established a recognizable problem by describing Lova Wear’s low social-media engagement and unstable online sales. However, the majority of Attention claims relied on assertions supplied by the case scenario rather than independent evidence, customer data, market research, or cited statistics.

A weaker pattern appeared in P02 and P05, which moved quickly into product or service presentation without clearly establishing the magnitude or urgency of the audience’s problem. In addition, P07 showed limited implementation of the Attention function. This is evident from the proposal that immediately expressed gratitude and presented the available budget and facilities rather than capturing the sponsor’s interest through a compelling opening. From this pattern, it suggests that students often approached the opening of the proposal as a formal introduction instead of strategically framing the reason for the reader to engage with the proposal. Critically, a key point of a proposal’s introduction is to highlight the urgency of the issue so that readers can recognize its significance and understand why it requires attention [13]. Instruction should therefore distinguish between

providing background information and constructing an evidence-supported persuasive opening.

3.2.2 Interest: Connecting the Proposal with Stakeholder Needs

The following element covers Interest. Compared with other AIDA elements, the data revealed that Interest function was evident in all proposal. This can be observed from the recognition of the intended reader's needs, constraints, or strategic priorities. The coffee-supply proposals provided the clearest examples of this transfer. In specific, P03 linked the local coffee with the hotel's pursuit of authentic guest experience while also addressing operational stability. Further, P04 also explicitly described that "stabilitas pengiriman adalah hal mutlak bagi hotel bintang empat." Similar approach was also taken with the catering proposal by bridging its offer with PT Global Prima's commitment to employee-wellness commitment while at the same time also considering the budget limitations. Rooting from these examples, it implies how students have adequate ability to sustain relevance by linking case information with the concerns from their target stakeholders.

Despite the strong overall scores achieved by the proposal groups, the level of development of the Interest function varied across the proposals. Some proposals, especially the shorter letter-style, have successfully identified the relevant audience concerns. However, when analyzed closely did not further justify the strategic importance of the concerns of how the proposed partnership could bridge the problem. For example, P07 listed the available sponsorship facilities in detail, but provided limited explanation of how these facilities could support FreshUp Drink's branding objectives. Drawing upon this difference, merely identifying the audience benefit is not sufficient to maintain reader interest. Thereby, proposals are required to expand their justifications by explaining how the offered benefits can address the audience's needs and create meaningful value for the intended readers. The benefit needs to be developed and connected to the audience's interests, needs, and expectations[9].

3.2.3 Desire: Constructing Benefits and Value Propositions

The implementation of the Desire function disclosed a successful level across the proposal. Most students have elaborated the potential benefits of the proposal by including functional, financial, promotional, reputational, and relational value. This is reflected from P03 and P04 that set as the strongest examples. In the proposals, they advanced the general quality claims and developed more comprehensive value prepositions. It is apparent in the benefits such as authentic local products, co-branding, flexible pricing, buffer stock, quality guarantees, barista training, equipment maintenance, and trial periods that were emphasized. In a similar manner, P06 also showed effective development of Desire by presenting clear sponsor benefits associated with each sponsorship package. The proposal puts its extra care in including visible sponsor benefits, including logos, booths, product sampling, social-media collaboration, and category-specific exposure.

On the other hand, the other proposal relied to more general claims. One notable example is from P02, suggesting that the proposed cooperation could elevate sales and expand market reach. The other example is in P01 that emphasized the reputational and commercial gains. Despite its relevance of these claims, performance indicators, timelines,

baseline data, or projected outcomes are also paramount aspect to be considered in the proposal. Meanwhile, desire stage is strengthened when a message clearly communicates benefits and demonstrates how the proposed offer provides value to the targeted audience [14]. Thereby, the findings narrow down on how students had transferred the concept of Desire function but had not yet mastered the development of persuasive value prepositions.

3.2.4 Action: Specifying the Expected Reader Response

The last element discussed is Action. From the result, it has shown how Action was the least developed aspect in the AIDA model. As shown from the table, the only two proposals that achieved the core of 3 are only proposal from P03 and P04. Both of the proposal in this case possessed stronger action and follow-up steps when compared to the other proposals. To mention, in P03, the group initiated to send product samples and organized the free coffee-cupping sessions with the hotel's Food and Beverage team. To add, P04 also proposed a stronger follow-up action by inviting representatives from the Food and Beverage and Purchasing departments to participate in a final negotiation meeting and cupping session. From those exemplary actions, it suggests the importance of not only identifying the intended activity but also involving stakeholders that are expected to involve in the event.

Despite the notable examples above, most proposals did not include a great detail of follow-ups. From the proposal composed by P01, P05, and P06, general request for consideration, broad invitations to cooperate, or contact information without informing a clear next step were concluded. While showing degree of politeness and reflecting positive tone are considered essential, it is still considered insufficient in guiding the reader to response with a specific decision. Taking this further, it emphasizes how a strong action statement should also clarify the expected outcome, whether through approving a budget, arranging a meeting, revising a quotation, signing an agreement, or responding within a certain timeframe. The findings suggest that some students viewed proposals primarily as tools for presenting offers rather than as strategic communication that encourages stakeholders to take concrete action. Indeed, proposals should be a means of communication to make readers change their intention into action[15]. Therefore, students should be taught to be more aware of it.

Overall, the corpus demonstrates moderate learning transfer, with a mean rating of 1.93 out of 3 (64.3% of the maximum score). Transfer was strongest in recognizing stakeholder interests and articulating benefits, while the main weaknesses involved evidence in Attention and turning a courteous closing into a concrete Action. A weak connection between the rhetorical situation and the intended audience response may limit the proposal's persuasive effect [16]. Virgen likewise emphasizes Action as the stage that turns audience attention into a concrete behavioral response[17]. However, differences in proposal format, case complexity, and document length mean that these patterns cannot be attributed solely to students' understanding of AIDA.

Several notable implications were noted for the Business Communication and Negotiation course. In particular, it would be better if the AIDA model is explicitly be connected with the functional sections of a business proposal rather than taught only as a

sequence for advertising or short sales messages. In addition, classroom instruction should provide students with guided practice in converting case facts into an evidence-supported Attention statement. This is done as a mean to polish students' skills in better skill of constructing stronger and reliable proposal. Third, value-proposition exercises should require students to specify the intended stakeholder, the benefit, the supporting mechanism, and a measurable outcome. Fourth, proposal rubrics should separate a polite closing from an effective call to action by assessing whether the document specifies the requested decision, responsible party, follow-up activity, and timeframe.

4. CONCLUSION

In summary, this study explored how students transferred their knowledge from the AIDA principles to seven business proposals written in the Business Communication and Negotiation course. Rooting from the result, it disclosed salient findings to address the research questions. In spite of the absence of explicit instruction to apply the model, the analysis shows a moderate transfer. To elaborate, the elements of Interest and Desire were found to be the strongest among the four AIDA elements. This indicates the student's capability in connecting their proposals to stakeholder needs while at the same time also effectively communicating the value of their proposed solutions. The Attention function was less consistently supported by evidence. Likewise, the Action function was the weakest, as several proposals ended with general expressions of hope rather than a specific requested response.

This study enriches the existing literature by providing empirical data on how proposal artifacts could be utilized as authentic evidence of students' persuasive communication performance. From the pedagogy perspective, the result contributes significantly to the evidenced-based opening, audience-specific value propositions, and explicit calls to action. Despite its strengths, this study also notes several limitations upon the use of the small corpus, group-level authorship, variation in proposal format and length, and the use of five different case scenarios. Moreover, the document analysis alone is not sufficient enough to verify whether students consciously recalled the AIDA principles while composing their proposals. Thereby, this study recommends future research to enrich the data findings by also combining document analysis with student reflections, interviews, previous assessment results, or reader evaluations. In addition, researchers could compare proposals completed before and after targeted instructional scaffolding. This comparison would offer deeper insight into the development of persuasive writing skills and learning transfer.

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