

# **Formal Email Writing Convention: Differences Between Native and Non-native Students<sup>1</sup>**

**Shama E Shahid**

## **Abstract**

*The use of emails in student-faculty communication is a regulated process. The regulations are formulated in order to ensure that the correspondences are in line with the institutional requirements and maintain professionalism. There is limited information about such regulations amongst native students and non-native students regarding formal email writing conventions. This study examines the formal email writing conventions of non-native students under a regulated environment. A purposive non-probability sampling of 10 non-native students from a British university was collected. The findings indicated that language prowess, request letter acts, and the use of formality had positive impacts on formal email writing among non-native students. It can be concluded from the above findings that teachers of ESL should pay attention to how students formulate the structure and content of emails as these matters directly impact their writing capability.*

**Keywords:** *Email, English as a second language, Environment, Formal email writing conventions*

## **Introduction**

Increased interconnectedness of the world has resulted in a higher level of interaction among people of different backgrounds. Consequently, the diversity created by globalization is more prevalent in the institutions of learning, such as universities where local students are instructed together with international students. English is a lingua franca; hence non-native speakers have to learn it as a second language. As a result, differences have been observed between comprehension and expression aptitudes among native speakers (L1 students) and foreign speakers (L2 students in this case).

Advancement in technology has increased the efficiency of the communication process among individuals. As a result, in many cases, instances of face to face communications have been continuously phased out by the newest forms of information sharing. One of the new modes of interaction is the use of emails accompanied by its ability for attachment of multiple files of different forms. The inexpensive, fast, convenient,

1 The article is drawn from my thesis submitted to the University of Roehampton as my master's dissertation.

and environmentally friendly nature of emails have popularized their use in college education (Peck, 2014). Consequently, the use of formal emails has gained popularity in professional and academic contexts due to its efficiency. Emails are consistently used as a means of communication and interaction among students and faculties (Danielwicz-Betz, 2013). However, the pragmatics of language used in emails sent by university students when they make requests to their professors and faculty remains a controversial issue. Danielwicz-Betz (2013) maintains that there are no specific guidelines that inform the choice of form and style of constructing email messages among students.

There are notable differences between students who use English as a first language and those who use English as a second language with respect to the pragmatics of language used in email conversations. The differences can be attributed to students' lack of awareness regarding the identity of the recipients with whom they wish to converse. As a result, ESL learners often face uncertainties regarding the decorum on linguistic forms to be used in emails in academic settings. Hendricks argues that the divergence in the language used by ESL students compared to the native students can be observed in basic grammatical competence and practical competencies in business writing skills (2010). As a result, ESL students have glaring inadequacies in composing emails following the norms of academic and formal communication settings.

The insufficient alterations in the communication of ESL students are a result of limited and non-elaborate strategies of politeness (Hendricks 2010). Krulatz and Park identified the use of directness in the communication of Norwegian and native American speakers in terms of direct words such as 'want' (2016). Imperatives implied by the improper use of punctuations also contribute to the level of directness, differences observed between email communications of native-speaking students and the non-native learners. Other factors that may influence the divergence found between the use of language in emails by native speakers and non-native include the practice level, anxiety level when writing different information, and culture shocks.

## **Literature Review**

The use of email as a means of communication in academia is a form of interaction between academics and students. The interaction between non-native students and their professors, who are scholars with higher knowledge of language use, presents a chance for the students to exercise their learning of the desired language (Gan, 2013). When professors deem that the messages written by students are not understandable, students are forced to reconstruct to convey their intended meaning. The guidelines by some instructors on the composition of email messages during the interaction process reinforces the language learning process (Gan, 2013). As a result, interactionism email interaction between L2 students and the faculty impacts the development of writing skills among such learners (Gan, 2013).

Scholars consider email writing as a genre because it has its own repetitive patterns

(Galabi, 2011; Cowan, 2009). The identification of the use of emails as a genre prompts a definition of the required textual characteristics such as grammar and spellings as well as the comparison between the observance of such requirements by ESL and EFL students (Hasan & Akhand, 2011). Much attention has been paid to the academic writing of ESL students with respect to the genre; this is because it is deemed that the frequent use of emails between the faculty and students, being a formal interaction, has an impact on how ESL students acquire their academic writing skills. Therefore, it is crucial to establish written emails from a faculty point of view on the learning and teaching of the English language.

## **Email as a Genre**

Understanding email writings as a genre requires the consideration of context. Galabi (2011) identifies writing genres as those situations characterized by recurrent patterns in the usage of language. Different social scenarios demand different genres in response to the fact that “they are constructed socially and depend on unique contexts” (Galabi, 2011, p.3). There are diverse contexts readily observed in email conversations ranging from personal to professional. Personal contexts may have fewer demands regarding the construction of email (Galabi, 2011). On the other hand, professional and academic contexts require adherence to specific guidelines in writing emails (Ren, 2016). The adoption of different writing styles in other genres, such as letters, applies to email writing as well. Socially accepted norms to converse formally must be observed. Therefore, professional email conversations should observe politeness and correct grammar usage because the absence of these factors leads to a possible misunderstanding of the sender by the recipient (Ren, 2016).

Stephens, Houser, and Cowan (2009) mention that the interactions between students and teachers are formal and have a pattern that is based on and follows specific conventions and appropriateness in language. The breach of these conditions results in negative repercussions. Some of the negative feedbacks resulting from lack of proper decorum in the use of email as a means of communication are low opinions about the message by the student, low credibility associated with the message, and reduction in the probability of a professor in complying with the request being made (Stephens et al., 2009). Therefore, it is imperative for students to understand email writings as a genre that requires the consideration of context while drafting messages.

## **General Email Textual Features**

Several studies have investigated textual features of email writing. Some of these features include presented in this section.

### *Openings*

Multiple research studies have examined the use of openings in email conversations; the use of openings was mainly dependent on three main factors, namely cultural

background, language proficiency, and the sequence of messages (Bou-Franch, 2011; Ko Eslami, & Burlbaw, 2015; Tajeddin & Pezeshki, 2014). Bou-Franch (2011) discovered that 93 percent of the emails from native Spanish students involved in the study contained a form of official opening (such as dear Sir/Madam) regardless of whether it was the first message in the conversation thread or subsequent message.

Regarding cultural background, Tajeddin and Pezeshki (2014) compared Iranian and American use of email written in English and observed that both groups tended to use official openings. However, the authors noted that Iranian students used small talk in the openings while other openings were denser. Cook (2016) further confirmed that cultural differences affected the types of openings that an individual used while writing an email. In view of the language proficiency, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) reported that the level of proficiency in English determined the use of openings and the use range from direct omission, grammatically wrong but acceptable, to those openings that disregarded title and may be considered offensive such as the use of 'Mrs.' instead of 'Dr.' or 'professor.' This paper will focus on the types of openings rather than the presence or absence of the element.

## ***Closings***

Closings are categorized into three aspects: pre-closing, farewell, and self-identification (Ko, Eslami, & Burlbaw, 2015). Cultural differences also affect the variations of closings used where Iranian students used a diverse composition of closings while American students used standardized forms of closings such as regards, yours sincerely, and so on (Eslami, 2013). Besides, Iranian students used longer closing moves that ranged from pre-closing markers of thanking, farewells, apologizing, to self-identification (Cook, 2016). However, closings were not prone to language proficiency mistakes.

## ***Email Request Head Acts***

Zhu (2012) defines email request head acts as the minimum elements required to achieve the desired output from a request. Head acts represent the central part of a request sequence, and they are classified by the request strategies and the different categories including direct (e.g. I want to meet you), conveniently indirect (e.g. *are you available on next Thursday?*) or hints (e.g. *enclosed is the attachment of my student profile*) (Ko, Eslami, & Burlbaw, 2015, p.8). Tyter (2015) compared the differences between request strategies used by L1 and L2 students in academic settings. The study discovered that native speaking students used syntactic modifiers (embedding, i.e. *I would appreciate if you could help me*) while ESL students employed lexical modifiers (e.g. subjectivizer, such as- *I think, I wanted to know, and I was wondering if.* and consultative devices, such as- *is there any chance? and do you think that?*) in their email request strategies (Tyter, 2015). Non-native students tended to use more directness in their head acts while native speakers were oriented towards conventionally indirect forms and use of hints.

## ***Extra-Linguistic Factors***

The application of deadlines and frequency of required academic texts imply that time and the likelihood of writing are considered essential in academic writing (Schüppert & Gooskens, 2011). Tyter (2015) found that non-native students took more time in composing their emails compared to native speakers while their likelihood of writing emails was lower compared to that of EFL students. To conclude, it is apparent that the academic writing language can be a first or a second language to the student, and ESL and EFL students have different attitudes towards the English language (Eshghinejad & Moini, 2016). Therefore, the investigation of writing emails in the field of academia needs to incorporate the identified factors.

## ***Context***

Social context cues are essential in the communication between individuals as they establish the required protocol and observe the politeness accorded to the hierarchy (Wang, Walther, & Hancock, 2009). In the academic field, the protocol indicates that members of the faculty are higher-ranking personnel compared to all students. Therefore, written communications from students to professors should contain various social context cues to reflect the difference in social hierarchy between them (Alvídrez et al., 2015). While native speakers of English may effectively employ the different social context rules, misuse among non-native students might often indicate aspects of impoliteness in communication between them and their professors.

## ***Grammar***

Grammar issues in email exchanges between the faculty and students are common in both 'EFL' with 'native' and ESL students but non-native students are more likely to commit serious grammatical errors compared to 'native' students (Island, 2016). Abdeen (2017) asserts that ESL students are more likely to commit serious text-level grammatical errors than sentence-level grammatical errors.

Text-level grammar errors involve the inappropriate use of words causing the loss of the intended message. Candlin and Hyland (2014) point out that every text contains a structure, which is meant to pass information in a specific way. As such, the commission of such errors in academic writing among students results in utter confusion and consequent misunderstanding by the reader. Text-level grammar is also characterized by the inappropriate choice of words by students writing academic materials such as articles or email correspondences. Bailey (2014) explains that an individual is required to use both verbs and nouns to create a comprehensible sentence. The failure to adhere to these rules often results in the loss of the intended meaning.

Sentence-level errors, on the other hand, entail arranging words and clauses in a way that does not make sense when read. Purpura (2013) points out that a writer is supposed

to consider not only the main clauses but also the compound or complex clauses when constructing a sentence in order to construct a logical statement. Andrews (2010) views that text-level grammar has more influence on an individual's knowledge of a language compared to sentence-level grammar, thus, teachers should prioritize improving the former while teaching grammar. According to the author, L2 students are more likely to make text-level than sentence-level grammatical errors. By contrast, however, Datchuk and Kubina (2013) conclude that a majority of ESL students struggle with sentence-level adjectival mistakes more than any other aspect of writing. Students are fond of using short forms of words such as LOL for "laughing out loud" and 4 instead of "for" which affects their text-level grammar negatively (Ikeguchi, 2013). The trend can be attributed primarily to overgeneralization and ignorance of rule restriction (Tak, 2014). Text-level grammatical errors that are commonly made by L2 students include verb confusion (verb-subject agreement).

Other grammatical errors include wrong tense, word order, incorrect choice of word forms, and preposition errors (Matsuda & Cox, 2011; Yoosawat & Tangkiengsirisin, 2016). Island (2016) identified various grammatical issues that can be observed to ensure professional etiquette, that is, polishing through proper editing. Singh et al. (2017) maintained that ESL students are more likely to make serious grammatical errors than EFL students because they were also taught by ESL teachers. Besides, the students might have a cognitive inability to comprehend various subjects within the grammar system such as subject-verb agreement, tenses, and essential and nonessential clauses. Therefore, the remedies to improving grammar usage by ESL students in their academic writing include training ESL teachers adequately and employing strategies that will ensure students comprehend the various concepts aptly (Singh et al., 2017).

Hsieh (2016) discovered that ESL students who were allowed to use online resources to write an essay showed a significant improvement in how they expressed their thoughts with respect to the grammar rules. Therefore, the combination of technology and collaboration portrayed in a classroom learning environment that is facilitated by the use of Internet resources is a great resource for enhancing ESL students' grammatical accuracy.

## **Significance of the Study**

The frequent usage of emails in academic settings by ESL students indicates the need for educational and formal language in their communications. Classrooms and system-set evaluation mechanisms may reveal that ESL students are proficient in their use of academic writing due to their increased preparedness before examination periods. Standardized tests fail to reveal the ability of students to contextualize interaction scenarios (Roever, 2011). In this regard, this study is useful for various reasons. First, the language used in emails unveils ESL learners' contextual and pragmatic capabilities in making academic and formal conversations. Second, the corrections and pointers in the correct usage of academic writing in a formal setting present educators with chances

to informally teach ESL students the proper usage of formal language in an educational setting. Third, instructors can use emails as an integral means of increasing students' practice in academic writing skills. Finally, instructors can use emails as an approach to communication to ensure continuous and individualized assessment regarding the growth of students in professional communication skills.

### **Research Questions**

- How do formal email writing conventions by non-native speaking students differ from the conventions of the native speaking students?
- What are the differences between non-native and native students in their formal email writing conventions?

### **Methods and Participants**

A cross-sectional design approach under qualitative research was used in this study to measure the exposure and outcomes (Setia, 2016). Participants consented to quote the texts for use in the study. The participants were assured that their identity and personal information will be kept confidential. Therefore, it was easy to collect authentic email samples. The researcher used participants' email copies to collect data on their naturally occurring behaviors of drafting and sending emails in academic contexts. Purposive non-probability sampling was used to obtain 10 non-native students from a British University to participate in this study. Six of them were males and the rest females. Eight of the students were Asians and two were from Africa. Their mean age was twenty-three years. The ten students were then requested to provide five emails each that they have sent to their professors in a formal context. The emails were then collected and documented in one file as shown in Appendix 1. A total of 50 emails were collected over a period of one week. The emails were then analyzed linguistically using guidelines from previous studies.

The ten participants were obtained through well-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The criteria for selecting participants included the following; non-native English speakers, have regular formal communication with the academics using email and must be a university student. The exclusion criterion also entailed the last time the student contacted their academics. Non-native students who contacted their academics more than six months ago were excluded from the study. Further, non-native students speaking English for the last ten years were also excluded.

This study involved the use of both primary and secondary data even though a mono method research strategy was employed. Secondary data was also collected using an advanced web search strategy. First, the characteristics of emails composed and sent by non-native students to their academics were identified in terms of emails' openings and closings, email request heads, extra-linguistic factors, punctuations, spellings, context, and grammar. Then the same keywords and key-phrases were used to search

the Internet for journal articles, educational books, and other resourceful materials to do a comparison helpful in identifying how formal email writing conventions by non-native-speaking students differ from the conventions of the native students. The advanced search strategy included the use of Boolean connectors in various online databases particularly EBSCOhost, T and F online, JSTOR, and many others. Other sites such as Google Books and Google Scholar were used to search the materials. The Boolean connects that were used include 'AND,' 'OR,' and 'AND NOT.'

## **Data Analysis**

The primary set of data was analyzed in comparison with the secondary data as proposed by Peck (2014), who asserted that email composition should be formed in a professional language and with considerations given to the writer or writer's position (Peck 2014). The process of analyzing email requests as proposed by Chen and Baker (2010) entails examining the entire orientation of the email, that is, the general features in the text (general email textual features) such as openings and closings. It also involves assessing samples of the request sequence which majorly focuses on head acts. The general content of the non-native students' email to faculty members is also considered to determine the margin of directness or indirectness which, in turn, would influence the judgment of the politeness of the email. Overall, the data were analyzed using linguistic analysis. Barceló-Coblijn et al. maintained that currently there are no specific methodological approaches to carrying out a linguistic analysis (2017). The latest software that can analyze language effectively is called Netlang. After analyzing the secondary data, the researcher did a linguistic analysis. Data from previous studies, educational books, magazines, and other resourceful materials were used to make the comparison.

## **Findings**

This study conducted a simple and unique linguistic analysis based on Chen and Baker's (2010) approach. This study utilized a corpus of 50 emails sent to the faculty by 10 non-native students. The entire orientation of an email message can be determined by examining the following aspects: emails' openings and closings, email request heads, extra-linguistic factors, punctuations, spellings, context, and grammar.

## **Openings**

All the students were well-informed on recognition and use of salutations which was observed throughout their emails. However, the fifth student considered the use of grammatically informal and unacceptable phrases such as 'Dear Mam' instead of 'Dear Miss/ Mrs.' (See Appendix 1). Depending on the context, five students used greetings as listed below, but they also omitted the element in sequential emails.



**Table 1: Summary of Greetings Used by the Students**

Student No.	Email number	Number of greetings used
1	1	1
2	4	1
5	5	1
6	2	1
8	2	1

On the other hand, the third, fourth, seventh, ninth, and tenth students did not use greetings at all. This finding corresponds to Hallajian and David’s (2014) findings which indicated that most students often start with an opening, which can be considered as a “greeting” or “self-explanatory” (Hallajian & David, 2014).

**Closings**

Most students were familiar with pre-closing markers such as ‘thank you,’ ‘looking forward to hearing from you,’ ‘yours sincerely’ ‘good-bye’ and such (See Appendix 1). The same was omitted in sequential emails of a number of the students, for instance, the fifth email of the third student, the third email of the sixth student, and the fourth emails of the ninth and tenth students. The findings of this study regarding this aspect coincide with the findings of prior studies. For example, a study that was conducted by Hallajian and David indicated that students mostly used closings in their first emails but failed to continue using them in the sequential emails (2014). This phenomenon is currently unexplored and there is a need to explore as it has potential implications in teaching English as a second language.

**Request Letter Acts**

The findings of this study of email request acts correspond to the CCSARP framework of Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) which this study followed. The findings from this study suggest that most non-native many (49%) applied direct request strategies to their lecturers.

**Table 2: Percentage of Requestive Directness (N=50)**

Request type	Request strategies	Percentage
Direct request	Imperatives	1/50 (02%)
	Direct questions	6/50 (12%)
	Want statement	6/50 (12%)
	Expectation statement	3/50 (06%)
	Need statement	29/50 (49%)
	Total	13/50 (26%)

Conventionally indirect requests	Query preparatory	10/50 (20%)
Hints	Strong/mild hints	8/50 (16%)
Others	Gratitude, assurance, etc.	3/50 (06%)

These findings also correspond to those of Ko, Eslami and Burlbaw (2014) who investigated the pragmatic development of non-native students in requestive emails. The authors discovered that non-native students used different request letter acts from those of native English students.

### *Linguistic Prowess and Grammar Rules*

Most of the emails were composed using simple words that are easy to comprehend by the reader. It is also notable that the non-native students who participated in this study observed grammar rules, although there were a few mistakes. The following is an excellent example of an email that uses simple language with flawless grammar is:

*"I am writing this time for a query. As far as my visa application process is pending for a decision, I would like to know about the payment system of my accommodation fees. Can I pay the whole accommodation fees in one single installment, instead of three separate installments? Thanks in advance."*

The example above is flawless and uses simple words to communicate the point. The student's other emails were also fairly accurate (Refer to Appendix 1 for more details). However, some other students had grammatical errors in their emails and their language was complicated. The following (student 8, mail one) email illustrates the case in point. This is to be noted that this student's other emails also contained some errors.

*"Greetings!!! I am hereby too pleased to receive this email to enroll in a Ph.D. program which was always my dream. Please let me know the criteria for admission. However, after completing MSc in Project Management, I haven't yet appear in the IELTS exam and will be appear my April. Is it possible to enroll in the program without IELTS? Moreover what is the tuition fee structure? Waiting to hear from you."*

The above email has a lot of grammatical errors, including tense confusion. The email was also poorly punctuated, thus, rendering it a poor form of communication in the context of student-faculty interaction. This can result in the professor developing a negative perception. Many students will naturally adhere to that format to receive responses and feedback from the professor. Further, there were some emails that passed the intended messages clearly despite the multiple grammar and punctuation errors. However, some emails had serious mistakes, just like the one shown above.

Overall, the average outlook for the language prowess and grammar usage among non-native students when emailing was outstanding. Most of the students wrote emails in

a well-articulated manner and they displayed their prowess in the language through their writing. Most of the emails could be accepted in a formal setting based on the guidelines provided by Peck (2014). However, the trend observed from this analysis is that as much as the larger portion of the participants portrayed themselves as being average, there were also severe cases. . This finding corresponds to the findings of Jewels and Albon (2018) which found that most non-native students often used a simple language with little to a few grammatical and punctuation errors. The aim of comparing each finding with the findings of prior studies is to try to put the phenomenon under investigation in the context of what is already known.

### ***Formality and Informality***

It was observed that most non-native students wrote formal emails to their professors adopting the guidelines provided by Peck (2014). Most of them addressed their academics using titles such as 'Dear Sir/Madam'. Only a few students referred to their professors using their first names. For example, the seventh student never used a title but instead referred to the professors using their first names. This act may sound rude and impolite, but it is also important that one understands the cultural underpinnings that may have influenced the student's choice of openings.

Collectively, the results of the linguistic analysis indicated that the participants of this study had a certain level of proficiency in writing formal emails. This conclusion is based on the grounds that they registered an outstanding performance with respect to most of the aspects of this linguistic analysis. Their only notable weaknesses were on punctuation and a few grammatical errors. Thus, there is a need to find a similar research report that examined the above aspects among native English students.

The second phase of data analysis yielded divergent results. Hallajian and David (2014), who looked especially at Iranian students studying in Malaysia, were used in analyzing the findings of openings and closings. Regarding the openings, the comparison of primary data and secondary data confirmed that indeed most non-native students mostly used openings in their emails to the academics. Openings can further be classified into greetings and self-identification. Most of the openings were components of greetings or self-identification. Another notable thing was that openings or the greetings and self-identification phrases or statements can be grammatically incorrect or be offensive depending on the titles used.

Further, a comparison of secondary data and primary data revealed that most non-native students used closings when writing emails to their professors in the context of academia. Additionally, closings can further be subdivided into pre-closing, farewell, and self-identification (Hallajian & David, 2014). These categories of closings do not necessarily exist in emails, but they are the most dominant across various cultures. Further, it was discovered that students from certain cultures such as Iraq tend to use formal styles of communication and use more thanking, apologizing, and farewell than

American natives (Hallajian & David, 2014). Despite the fact that several recent studies have explored this topic; no current study has examined the use of closings. Therefore, further research examining the use of closings in emails in student-faculty interaction should be conducted.

No research has examined the relationship between the use of directness and indirectness and academic writing from the perspective of non-native students. However, several studies have examined directness and indirectness in many languages including English and Russian. An investigation revealed that native speakers tended to use indirectness in their requests, whereas non-native use directness when making requests (Almegren, 2017). This finding partially agrees with the outcome of this study.

Areas directly related to academic writing include formality and informality and language prowess and grammar rules. A study indicated that the relationship between the professor and the student determines formality and informality in email composition (Shim, 2013). The investigation also revealed that involuntary usage of informal language in a formal context affects the decorum required in academic writing (Shim, 2013). This study indicated that most non-native students used formal language when formulating emails to the faculties.

## **Discussion**

This section summarizes the general remarks concerning the research and findings. Second-language acquisition is affected by various factors, among them the first language interference, environmental elements of interaction, and mastery of content. Many theories have come up with tenets to explain how the second language is acquired. The linguistic analysis of the emails showed that most non-native students could send structurally acceptable emails to their academics. Besides, most of them were also able to generate appropriate content for the emails. Some of the challenges that were noted among the non-native students were various barriers to effective learning. These barriers differ from one context to another, and that is why different non-native students have different levels of mastery of the English language.

Besides, the findings of this study also showed that non-native students' language prowess, use of request letter acts, and the use of formality are directly related to the level of their academic writing skills. Students who had satisfactory language prowess, the ability to apply directness and indirectness in emails appropriately, and could embrace formality in emails to the faculty could also compose academic texts efficiently.

## **Conclusion and implications**

The central assumption that was made in regards to this study to what extent non-native students' formal email writing conventions differ from that of NS students. Due to time constraints, the researcher opted for a cross-sectional design as a way of observing the corpus that consisted of 50 emails of 10 non-native students from a renowned British University. A longitudinal design study would have provided a

comprehensive perspective of the phenomenon under investigation because of time adequacy and methodological advantages. Even though this study is characterized by significant methodological shortcomings, its findings can make a small contribution to teaching English as a second language. Besides, the results of this study can serve as a resource for future studies intending to explore this problem further using more structured and comprehensive research methodologies. Moreover, the best research methodology for this study would be the use of mixed methods.

The findings of this study suggest that to perfect their writing skills, L2 students should work harder to learn the language used in academic work besides attending the regular curriculum involving professors, lecture attendances, and assignment submission. For instance, students can participate in workshops that aim to improve speech and writing of academic papers. A study revealed that the workshop approach could be used efficiently in teaching English Composition writing among non-native high school students (Lin & Enchemayer, 2014). The writing workshops should be student-centered to enhance the development of English writing competence (Lin & Enchemayer 2014). Such workshops may feature areas such as:

- a) Review of reason, tone, and voice and their match with the relationship to scholarly written work.
- b) Review of stages in the written work process, including prewriting, composition, revising, and altering of the written work.
- c) Engagement in composing exercises that mirror each progression depicted previously.
- d) Review and survey of the relative significance (or insignificance) of normal second language blunders in scholarly composition.
- e) Exploration of normal sorts of composing requests understudies will experience in school, including explanatory expositions, outlines, evaluates, article exams, accounts, and abstract investigation.

Students in the same institution and location can attend symposiums organized amongst themselves. Symposiums or seminars have also been used to effectively teach English as a second language in Canada and other countries (Uchihara & Yanagisawa, 2017). Those performing better can help the less performing at different levels to improve their English language competence. Non-native students can also take the initiative to empower each other in academic performance. Empowerment encourages a student who raises his or her interest in self-development. The students can get a professor or a faculty member willing to work with them to achieve the goal. Students can engage in practical public speaking before others and one-on-one participation in in-depth, extensive discussions. Public speaking and open talks enhance the development of speaking and builds confidence while minimizing anxiety about making errors. Students should also have a humble attitude towards positive and constructive criticism. According to Gillen (2006), criticism enables individuals

to interpret persuasive articles hence boosting the learning process. Also, it has been observed that ESL students in some institutions perform better compared to other institutions due to the surrounding and the effect the surrounding has on them. If the native speakers embrace and accommodate the non-native students at a personal level, the non-native students will develop a more in-depth focus on the foreign language. The teachers should have strategies of engaging native speakers to accommodate non-native students at personal levels for improved learning. Furthermore, teachers need to be well informed on how to execute various instructional approaches efficiently. Teachers should also consider the use of mobile learning to facilitate second language acquisition (Ahmad Zaki & Md Yunus, 2015).

While doing the linguistic analysis, the researcher coincidentally noted some trend regarding the content and structure of emails and the average number of words used by email. A well-structured study should be conducted to confirm this trend. Its implication in linguistics is diverse; this was just an additional observation to the purpose of this study. Good research is the one that raises more questions than it answers (Meadows, 2013).

Further study is needed to establish whether the trend of omitting the closing marks is also similar among students who are native speakers. Additionally, further research should be conducted to determine why non-native students often forget to include an acceptable closing tag at the end of their sequential emails.

Another area that needs further study is the differences in the directness level of requests between native and non-native students. It is imperative to confirm if this is the same among native speakers who are students. Understanding this difference will have significant implications in English Language Education.

Regarding grammatical errors, the situation can be attributed to the notion that students do not have enough time to interact with their professors, thus, they are not well versed with the aspects that influence the composure of emails to the faculty members. An excellent example of a controlled environment in emailing is when the receiver or the professor, in this case, provides preconditions that can allow him to respond to one's mail. In this regard, the professor can come up with a particular format of emails that he can only reply to.

Finally, further studies on this topic should be conducted using different methodological strategies. As mentioned earlier, the researcher opted for a cross-sectional design study because of time limitations. This methodological approach has proved to have several shortcomings. Hence, a future study employing mixed methods and longitudinal design should be conducted to confirm the findings of this study.

## References

- Abdeen, W., 2017. The effect of the academic attainment of ESL teachers on evaluation of ESL learners' errors: Educational degree-based study. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 8(1), 94-107.
- Ahmad Zaki, A. & Md Yunus M. (2015). Potential of mobile learning in teaching of ESL academic writing. *English Language Teaching*, 8 (6), 11-19
- Almegren, R. (2017). Speech act of greeting for American native speakers of English and Saudi Native speakers of Arabic: A comparative study. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 6(7), p.243.
- Alvídrez, S., Piñeiro-Naval, V., Marcos-Ramos, M. & Rojas-Solís, J. (2015). Intergroup contact in computer-mediated communication: The interplay of a stereotype- disconfirming behavior and a lasting group identity on reducing prejudiced perceptions. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 52,533-540.
- Andrews, R. (2010). Teaching sentence-level grammar for writing: The evidence so far. *Beyond the grammar wars. A resource for teachers and students on developing language knowledge in the English/Literacy classroom*, pp.91-108.
- Bailey, S. (2014). *Academic writing: a handbook for international students*. London: Routledge.
- Barceló-Coblijn, L., Serna Salazar, D., Isaza, G., Castillo Ossa, L. & Bedia, M. (2017). Netlang: a software for the linguistic analysis of corpora by means of complex networks. *PLOS ONE*, 12(8), p. e0181341.
- Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (1989). The CCSARP coding manual. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies* (pp. 273-294). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Bou-Franch, P. (2011). Openings and closings in Spanish email conversations. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(6), 1772-1785.
- Candlin, C.N. & Hyland, K. (2014). *Writing: texts, processes and practices*. London: Routledge.
- Chen, Y.H. & Baker, P., (2010). Lexical bundles in L1 and L2 academic writing.
- Cook, V. (2016). *Second language learning and language teaching*. (5th ed.) Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp.58-62.
- Cowan, J. (2009). Academic writing and publishing - by James Hartley. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 40(4), 303-326.
- Danielewicz-Betz, A. (2013). (Mis)use of email in student-faculty interaction: Implications for university instruction in Germany, Saudi Arabia, and Japan. *The JALT Call Journal*, (1), 23-57.
- Datchuk, S.M. & Kubina, R.M. (2013). A review of teaching sentence-level writing skills to students with writing difficulties and learning disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 34(3), 180-192.
- Economidou-Kogetsidis, M., 2011. "Please answer me as soon as possible": pragmatic failure in non-native speakers' e-mail requests to faculty. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(13), pp.3193-3215.
- Eshghinejad, S. & Moini, M. (2016). Politeness strategies used in text messaging. *Sage Open*, 6(1), 1-13.

- Eslami, Z.R. (2013). Online communication and students' pragmatic choices in English. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 9(1), 71-92.
- Galabi, L. (2011). *Student use and teacher requirement of e-mail conventions*. Masters. An unpublished master's thesis, The American University in Cairo.
- Gan, Z. (2013). Understanding English speaking difficulties: an investigation of two Chinese populations. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 34(3), 231-248.
- Gillen, C.M. (2006). Criticism and interpretation: Teaching the persuasive aspects of research articles. *CBE-Life Sciences Education*, 5(1), 34-38.
- Hallajian, A. & David, M. (2014). "Hello and good day to you dear Dr. ..." greetings and closings in supervisors-supervisees email exchanges. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 118, 85-93.
- Hasan, M. & Akhand, M. (2011). Approaches to writing in EFL/ESL context: Balancing product and process in writing class at tertiary level. *Journal of NELTA*, 15(1-2), 77-88.
- Hendriks, B. (2010). An experimental study of native speaker perceptions of non-native request modification in e-mails in English. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 7(2), 221-255.
- Hsieh, Y. (2016). A case study of the dynamics of scaffolding among ESL learners and online resources in collaborative learning. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 30(1-2), 115-132.
- Ikeguchi, C. (2013). *Explorations on the issues involved in classroom emailing*. 1st ed. [ebook] Tsukuba Gakuin University, pp.61-68. Available at: <http://www.nus.edu.sg/celc/research/books/4th%20Symposium%20proceedings/9.%20Cecilia%20Ikeguchi.pdf> [Accessed 11 May 2018].
- Island, H.D. (2016). "OMG! you said what in class? TMI!" College student and professor perceptions of professional etiquette Violations. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 4(10), 2477-2482.
- Jewels, T. & Albon, R. (2018). "We don't teach English, We teach in English": Teaching non-native English-speaking University students. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives*, [Online] 9(1), 1-29. Available at: <http://lthe.zu.ac.ae> [Accessed 24 Mar. 2018].
- Ko, S.W.H., Eslami, Z.R. & Burlbaw, L.M. (2015). Investigating non-native English-speaking graduate students' pragmatic development in requestive emails. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 3(1), 1-15.
- Krulatz, A. & Park, K. (2016). Fostering pragmatic competence: Strategies and materials for email writing. In J. Dobson & M. Savage (Eds.), *Tri-TESOL Transcending Boundaries and Interweaving Perspectives Conference Proceedings* (pp. 34-46).
- Lin, L. & Enchemayer, E. (2014). The practice and effect of a workshop approach to teaching English writing in ESL composition courses. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 4(5), 8-15.
- Matsuda, P.K., & Cox, M. (2011). Reading an ESL writer's text. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, 2(1), 4-14.
- Meadows, A. (2013). *Research integrity – more questions than answers - the scholarly kitchen*. [Online] The Scholarly Kitchen. Available at: <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2013/05/29/research-integrity-more-questions-than-answers/> [Accessed 24 Mar. 2018].



- Purpura, J.E. (2013). *Assessing grammar*. London: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Peck, A. (2014). OMG RU really going to send that? Email communication with students. *Essays from E-xcellence in Teaching*, 3, 15-22.
- Ren, W. (2016). Pragmatic strategies to solve and preempt understanding problems in Chinese professionals' emails when using English as lingua franca communication. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 21(8), 968-981.
- Roever, C. (2011). Testing of second language pragmatics: past and future. *Language Testing*, 28(4), 463-481.
- Rosen, R.S. (2010). American sign language curricula: A review. *Sign Language Studies*, 10(3), 348-381.
- Schüppert, A. & Gooskens, C. (2011). The role of extra-linguistic factors in receptive bilingualism: Evidence from Danish and Swedish pre-schoolers. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 16(3), 332-347.
- Setia, M., 2016. Methodology series module 3: Cross-sectional studies. *Indian Journal of Dermatology*, 61(3), 261-264.
- Shim, Y.S., 2013. International faculty perceptions of requestive emails by Korean university students. *Multimedia-Assisted Language Learning*, 16(4), 111-131.
- Singh, C., Jageer Singh, A., Abd Razak, N. & Ravinthar, T. (2017). Grammar errors made by ESL tertiary students in writing. *English Language Teaching*, 10(5), p.16.
- Stephens, K.K., Houser, M.L. & Cowan, R.L. (2009). RU able to meat me: T the impact of students' overly casual email messages to instructors. *Communication Education*, 58(3), 303-326.
- Tajeddin, Z. & Pezeshki, M., 2014. Acquisition of politeness markers in an EFL context: Impact of input enhancement and output tasks. *RELC Journal*, 45(3), 269-286.
- Tak, J. (2014). Grammatical agreement errors in Korean university students' English compositions: a corpus-based study. *The Jungang Journal of English Language and Literature*, 56(3), 433-450.
- Tytar, K. (2015). Comparative analysis of email request strategies used by native and non-native speakers of English in academic settings. An unpublished thesis, University of Montana.
- Uchihara, T. & Yanagisawa, A. (2017). *Lessons from Western's symposium on teaching and learning vocabulary in another language | Contact*. [Online] Contact.teslontario.org. Available at: <http://contact.teslontario.org/lessons-from-westerns-symposium-on-teaching-and-learning-vocabulary-in-another-language/> [Accessed 25 Mar. 2018].
- Wang, Z., Walther, J. & Hancock, J. (2009). Social identification and interpersonal communication in computer-mediated communication: what you do versus who you are in virtual groups. *Human Communication Research*, 35(1), 59-85.
- Yoosawat, P. & Tangkiengsirisin, S. (2016). Effects of grammatical and mechanical errors on e-mail readers' perceptions toward e-mail Writers. *PASAAPARITAT*, 31, 31-52.
- Zhu, W., 2012. Polite requestive strategies in emails: An investigation of pragmatic competence of Chinese EFL learners. *RELC Journal*, 43(2), 217-238.

## **Appendix 1: The Corpus**

Here are the primary data of 50 formal emails from 10 non-native speakers of English.

### **Student 1**

**1. (Date-03.02.2018)**

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I am a current student of Mathematics in your reputed University. Some of my close friends and family members want to visit London to meet me. For this purpose, I need to invite them first. Please let me know the procedure of invitation. Thanks

**2. (Date-07.02.2018)**

Sir,

How are you? It is been over a month I couldn't manage to contact you due to my adjustment here. I am doing well, although very slow in study. Hope you are doing well. Please keep me in your prayers.

**3. (Date-07.03.2018)**

Sir, thank you sir for your kind reply. I am enclosing here the number of the person. Keep me in your prayers.

**4. (Date-08.03.2018)**

dear Sir, Here is the mail confirming about the payment of my total accommodation fees in a single term. Thanks

**5. (Date-05.04.2018)**

Dear Madam,

I am unable to open my student portal at all with my student portal ID and password after the spelling of my name has been changed. Would you please kindly provide me my new student portal ID and password so that I can use it probably which is crucial for my study? Thanks.

### **Student 2**

**6. (Date-06.02.2018)**

Dear Sir,

I have not been issued for a debit/credit card yet, so I would be very grateful if it is possible to make a bank transfer of the entire accommodation fees from my bank account.

As such, it would be of great help if you can kindly provide me your bank account details so as to pay my accommodation fees.

**7. (Date-10.02.2018)**

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your kind reply. As far as my visa application process is pending for tomorrow, I would like to initiate the payment process option the day after tomorrow hopefully.

**8. (Date-15.02.2018)**

Dear Sir,

I am writing this time for a query. As far as my visa application process is pending for a decision, I would like to know about the payment system of my accommodation fees. Can I pay the whole accommodation fees in one single instalment, instead of three separate instalments?

Thanks in advance.

**9. (Date-18.02.2018)**

dear Sir/Madam,

I am a new International Postgraduate student at the University in Applied Chemistry which is going to be started from September, 2017. I am a student of on-campus accommodation. I have already deposited £250 and made an accommodation fee payment plan in three instalments. Also, I hope to complete and submit my online enrollment within a day or two. Thanks

**10. (Date-03.06.2018)**

Dear sir, I have got my CAS form very recently and managed to apply for the tier 4 general student visa by September 06, 2018. Due to my delay in visa application, I am afraid, I will be late arriving at my allocated room and miss the orientation program starting from 13 September, 2018 as well as some of the earlier classes starting from September 18, 2018. The visa application will take maximum three weeks from September 6, 2018. I do apologize for the unexpected delay.

Looking forward to hearing you soon

**Student 3**

**11. (Date-02.03.2018)**

Dear Sir,

I have got an unconditional offer recently to study at your University. As now I have

to complete my CAS form and apply for the tier 4 visa, I need to make some changes in my main application. Please let me know the procedure. Looking forward to hearing you soon.

Yours sincerely,

**12. (Date-05.03.2018)**

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your kind reply. According to my unconditional offer letter, it is stated that a CAS request form is issued to me with the following documents required:

- YOU MUST SUBMIT A COPY OF YOUR PASSPORT WITH YOUR CAS REQUEST FORM
- YOU MUST SUBMIT A COPY OF THE FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS NEEDED TO SHOW MONEY AVAILABLE TO YOU

Unfortunately, I am confused with the second condition. How much money do I need to show in my account? In addition, I also have forgotten whether I have written my correspondence address and permanent address correctly.

Under the circumstances stated above, please let me review my application.

Thank you

**13. (Date-07.03.2018)**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for your kind response. About the change in my personal details, my present as well as correspondence address in my county is: Please let me know whether these information are written correctly.

**14. (Date-07.03.2018)**

Dear Sir, I would like to change the payment option section as I myself will finance my expenses. As far as I remember, in my application, I mentioned that my father will finance my expenses. Thank you.

**15. (Date-10.03.2018)**

Dear Sir, I apologize for all the inconvenience that have incurred. I am re-sending my masters certificate including transcript along with the email confirming my deposit payment which were the requirements of my conditional offer at University. Please find these documents in the attachments.

**Student 4**

**16. (Date-08.03.2018)**

Dear Sir, I am re-sending these files in PDF format.

Please let me know if these documents are in compliance with my conditions.

**17. (Date-12.03.2018)**

Dear Sir,

I am an international student applying for a master's degree on the University. As a part of my application, I have got a conditional offer requiring a scanned copy of my master's degree certificate and a deposit of £2500 which I have submitted already. Please kindly let me know the further procedure of my application. Looking forward to hearing you soon.

**18. (Date-17.03.2018)**

Dear Sir,

Please let me know my Student ID so that I can deposit 2500 GBP to the university which is required as a condition for admitting in this university.

**19. (Date-18.03.2018)**

Dear sir, please let me know the program schedule and venue. hope to meet you all in the program soon. thanks in advance.

**20. (Date-23.03.2018)**

Dear Sir, with due respect, I sincerely apologize for this belated response as I was actively engaged with my current job.

**Student 5**

**21. (Date-04.04.2018)**

Sir, I can confirm you that I am ready for the allocated interview on 10th April 2018 at 11 a.m. since I do not have any classes to take on that day. Looking forward to your kind response.

**22. (Date-06.04.2018)**

Dear Mam, How are you? Are you currently living at USA? Mam, I am trying to apply for higher studies. For this, I need your permission to use your address as a primary recommendation. Please grant me your permission. Take care mam.

**23. (Date-07.04.2018)**

Dear Mam, as far as I remember, I was under your tutorial course in my Hons. 3rd year, and I got some of your classes on American Literature and some novels.

**24. (Date-05.05.2018)**

Dear Mam, can I kindly have my letter of recommendation today? Please let me know when I have to come. Tried to text and call you, but the phone number was off.

**25. (Date-06.05.2018)**

Dear Sir/ Madam, I am unable to open my student portal at all with my student portal ID and password after the spelling of my name has been changed. Would you please kindly provide me my new student portal ID and password so that I can use it probably which is crucial for my study? Thanks.

**Student 6**

**26. (Date-01.04.2018)**

Dear Sir, Is double occupancy available at your hall? If so, then what is the procedure? Thanks in advance.

**27. (Date-04.04.2018)**

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am trying to apply for an M.Ed. course in your respected university. I have a question. What is the minimum required score of IELTS for M.ed in TESL at this university? somewhere it is written as 6.0 n somewhere it is written as 7.0! My band is 6.5 and 6 in individual (Listening-6.0, reading-6.0, writing-7.5, speaking-6.5). Can I apply for the course? I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.

**28. (Date-07.04.2018)**

Dear Sir, I have recently applied for the position of Probationary Officer in your reputed bank. An ID number was given to me immediately after successful submission of the application. But unfortunately I have lost it somehow.

Under the circumstances stated above, I would be grateful if you kindly help me retrieving my ID number and oblige me thereby.

**29. (Date-10.06.2018)**

Dear Sarah, I would like to register for the Post-Graduate Studies in order to express my ideas more coherently with appropriate references to academic literature. Thanks

**30. (Date-18.06.2018)**

Dear Sir, I am a current post graduate student of your University. Please let me know the upcoming conferences and meetings to be held on relevant subject in this university. Thanks

## **Student 7**

### **31. (Date-02.02.2018)**

Dear Mary, Can I meet you on Wednesday, February 14 at 2 p.m. regarding my individual assignment? Thanks

### **32. (Date-03.04.2018)**

Dear Sally, Due to huge course load in this semester, I am afraid, I would not be able to continue this Academic Writing module.

Thanks

### **33. (Date-25.05.2018)**

Dear Anne, Can I meet you on Tuesday, January 30, around 3.30 p.m.? I did not get any marks from your course. Thanks

### **34. (Date-28.05.2018)**

Dear Sandra,

I would like to register for your course in order to express my ideas more coherently with appropriate references to academic literature. Thanks.

### **35. (Date-31.05.2018)**

Dear Margaret, Can I meet you on Thursday, December 14, around 12.30 p.m. for the purpose of individual research project structure? Thanks

## **Student 8**

### **36. (Date-05.01.2018)**

Dear Rafael!!

Greetings!!! I am hereby too pleased to receive this email as to enroll in PHD program which was always my dream. Please let me know the criteria for admission. However, after completing MSC in Project Management, I haven't yet appear in the IELTS exam and will be appear my April. Is it possible to enroll in the program without IELTS? Moreover what is the tuition fee structure?

Waiting to hear from you.

### **37. (Date-06.01.2018)**

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Greetings!!! I am from India. I would like to enroll in the PHD program of Management. Before then let me introduce myself briefly. My last degree was from United Kingdom, MSC in Project Management held on 2015. After completing masters from UK not yet appeared in the IELTS exam. Please let me know the entry requirement and tuition fee structure. However, is it possible to get admission by this year?

Please feel free to contact me without any hesitation. Waiting eagerly to hear from you.

Bes regards

**38. (Date-07.01.2018)**

Dear Sir, Hope that u r doing well. I appreciate your prompt response towards my enquiry. Best regards

**39. (Date-08.02.2018)**

Dear Sir, Thank you for your feedback. I guess the tuition fee is quite high for me. Is theres any option for stipened the tuition? Or instalmen method? If so that would be bit easier for me to bear. Hope that you will take me as your consideration. Best regards

**40. (Date-10.02.2018)**

Dear Sir, II am sorry to know that you couldn't catch me on cell. However i am now available on this number. If you are available now please give me a call for any query.

Waiting to hear from you soon.

### **Student 9**

**41. (Date-03.03.2018)**

Dear Carine,

Hope that you are doing well. i have been read through your research paper on google and i am eagerly interested to work with you. I have completed my MSC from a reputed University in London and my major was Marketing. Currently I am in my home country, working as student counsellor and in admin in a private university of my country. As my MSC was in Marketing, i would appreciate if you provide any guideline to me or be peer with me on this topic.

Waiting to hear from you soon.

**42. (Date-05.05.2018)**

Dear Sir, Thanks very much for your time and for consideration. Please send me the course timetable, it is not showing in my moodle. Kind regards.

**43. (Date-18.05.2018)**

Dear Madam, Thanks you very much for increasing my course starts date. But Ukvi haven't send my documents back yet, I haven't receive any response from them. Without documents I can't travel. Today is the last working day, I am afraid that I'll be late. Look forward to hear from you,

**44. (Date-21.05.2018)**

Dear sir, With due Respect I have emailed the registrar for course change with my statement. I want to confirm that how much time university take in this process, Because course starts date is the 2nd of October. Is it possible that the process complete before course starts so that I join on first session.



**45. (Date-30.05.2018)**

Dear Sir, My enrollment is complete and My Student ID number has been provided recently. But my oyster card is not approved yet they said your Education establishment do not provide evidence.

**Student 10**

**46. (Date-09.06.2018)**

Dear Sir, I have send Cas request form along all documents. If you need any other documents please tell me I will provide you as soon as possible because I don't have enough time my class start date is 14 August 2018. I need Cas no so I will file my visa application ASAP.

**47. (Date-12.06.2018)**

Dear Sir,

I hope you are well. I am one of your post graduate students. I am hospitalized at the moment thats why I couldn't come today. I apologize you to informing late.

**48. (Date-15.06.2018)**

Dear Sir, With due respect it is stated that I am not feeling well due to temperature and skin allergy. I am new here and still not register in surgery. I started my work on first draft and it is almost complete, but i need to improve it. Please give me favor i need 3 more days to complete my task.

**49. (Date-17.06.2018)**

Dear Sir, I collect my BRP. I will submit on Monday. Please inform me about your office direction. Because yesterday I tried to submit it but I can't find ur office.

**50. (Date-19.06.2018)**

Dear Sir, I'm trying my best to get appointment soon 'nd successfully I got it tomorrow from another center near my city. Hope to see you soon. Thanks.

**Contrinutor: Shama E Shahid** is a lecturer at International University of Scholars. She has completed her M.A. (English Literature) from department of English, Dhaka University. She holds a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics and TESOL from University of Roehampton, London. Her research interests are: Applied Linguistics, English Language Teaching and Technology in Education.