Research Paper

Analysis of Email Writing Skills of Engineering Students - A Study

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ABSTRACT: *This study is aimed to identify the developments of email writing skills among engineering students of AP (Andhra Pradesh), India. A total of 125 engineering students were participated in this study. The study analyzed the formal email writing skills through the collected databy using a questionnaire.The researchersweredeveloped a framework for the best outcomes of the email writing. The results of the questionnaire were represented in terms of mean values and its related percentages. From these results we understood that there is significantneed to improve the email writing skills of engineering students.It is also perceived from the results of the study that, the studentsconsist of low level linguistic strategies, formal language style, communicative style and email etiquettes.This means there is a need to address these issues to improve student's email writing strategies such as style, language, etiquettes, formal academic accessibility and culture of email. The paper finally offers some pedagogical implications in email writing settings.*
KEYWORDS:Email writing skills, Analysis, Grammar, Email culture, Professional communication, etiquettes

I.   INTRODUCTION

The formal email writing is required to enhance the academic communicationamong engineering students. The email writingis an essential skill that is required for the engineering studentsfor the effective technical communication within their academics.

The following 5 abilities are required for the engineering studentsto generate the linguistic based email.
1.   Language, style and format
2.   Following the etiquettes
3.   Formal accessibility of email
4.   Email cultural competency
5.   Avoid informal language style

Along with the engineering education the studentsare exploring to the different creative writing strategiessuch as technical letter writing, technical report writing, business formats and technical proposals. Palmer (2000) stated that more than 95% of engineering students are regularly using the computers and smart phones for academic and professional communication. Among all LRSW skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) the writing skill is more essential to compose the email (Maldonado and Perez 2015). The students write more text messages and the number of words in the email to exchange message with others (Harrison JandVanbaelen, R. 2011). However, most of the engineering students do not relish with writing activities, despite of occupational necessity to mastery various textual writings in order to function professionally with their future workplace (Lewin and Mason 2014).

In the terms of email writing, the lack of linguistic expressions is alsoa major reasonbehind the ineffective email communication (Parviz and Gorjian 2014). The literature review has shownthat the email writing differs greatly with other models writing strategies (Whittaker and Sidner 1996). For example, in email, addressing the receiver (To), salutations, subject line, body of the message, closing lines and farewell lines can differ significantly from

letter writing (Lewin and Mason 2014). The exclusive structures of email such as inbox, composing, Cc, Bcc, attaching files and sending processesare related to the technical writing issues. The linguistic issuessuch as spelling, grammar and formation of the sentencesare required to address the sender and receiver (LaQueyand Ryer, 1993; Strawbridge, 2006). The digital advanced writing platforms are continuously bringingthe enormous modifications in spoken and written forms (Baron 2001).

The United States of America evidently suggested that, the email training sessions may enhance the learner'sabilities suchas opening greetings, subject line, formal conversation writing and etiquettes in emails (Aguilar-Roca et al. 2009). The young learners tend to be more advanced in email communication; they spend more time to build relationship via internet communicative platforms(Thayer and Ray 2006). However, email culture and organizational culture differ greatly from context to context, and the relax tone of emails used by many young learners may not work well with in the more formal environment. Learners need to develop the effective writing strategy to avoid ambiguity in context (Lotherington and Jenson 2011). The command over typing skills and spellings accuracy is most important to write effective emails (Lindsey Thiel, Karen Sage and Paul Conroy 2016).

Research and literature has shown that the proper use of email writing is not widespread among engineering students. This study analyzes the email writing skills of engineering students and developed a framework (*see figure 2*) for the young learners to help them inachievingtheformal linguistic format ofemail. This study figures out the basic structure of email with the essential labels to fill the all sections of composing format(*see figure1*).However, according to the researchers knowledge, there is no study investigated the engineering students email writing skills with a questionnaire modaland no C components frame work was proposedearlier. The frame work and results of this study help the engineering students, researchers and curriculum developers to incorporate the email writing strategies in their required educational areas.

II. LANGUAGE AND ETIQUETTES STRUCTURE IN EMAIL COMMUNICATION

Research has shown that the engineering students often exchange the email with teachers and companions. In this regard, students need to compose in subject line, opening and appropriate closing. It is also a notified factor that, email technological principals changed the semantics and English language structure. This turn lead to changes in assumptions about the linguistics of email. Crystal (2006) can influence the structure of email discourse. Crystal points out that the mailer software commands the structure of the email message as email users have to accomplish with the existing options to compose a new message. The language in email is applicable to non-verbal cues and written forms. Murray (2000) argues that the contextual factors including the topic of interaction, the setting, and the relationship between the participants, play a vital role in shaping the language and discourse of the email message. Flynn and Khan (2003) recommended that students need to use well-structured sentences in which they should use accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation. They also emphasize the necessity of using the accurate capitalization as the use of lowercase letters only or uppercase letters only can impede the understanding and acceptance of the message.

Some netiquette rules have been prescribed to increase email users' awareness of the appropriate way to start and end their messages in English. Greeting has been identified, according to Gupta (2012), it an important section that should be coined carefully according to the sender's assessment of role, status, power and relationship with the receiver. Gupta stated that email writers should close their messages with a right tone that suits their relationship with the recipients. She suggests the use of 'best regards' as the most convenient closure in English email interaction.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The previous studies such as email writing style and its features, linguistic structure and email etiquettes studies provide the context for our study. Baron (2003) stated that the advent email communication is a new era in innovative communication technologies. The email communicative style replaced the traditional letter or as an extension of informal spoken conversation. However, it is important for the senders and receivers to manage more formal linguistic and etiquettes styles.

Aguilar-Roca, N et.al (2009) significance of email study focusing on professional formatting of email writing among students and teachers drew the formal writing strategies of students towards teachers.

Bunz and Campbell (2004) worked on the polite accommodation of email writing, the study directing the polite phrases (etiquettes) represents the verbal markers and structural elements. The salutation remarks such as 'Dear' 'Hello' [recipient name] and closing remarks, such as 'Regards', 'Please' 'Thank You' and 'Regards' represent the senders and receivers politeness behavior in the study.
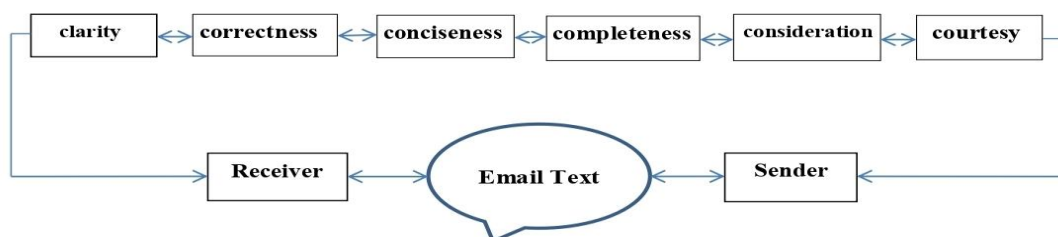
Bou-Franch (2011) conducted a study on pragmatic transfer in email writing among EFL students. This study specifically addresses the s how EFL learners' email writing practices are oriented with formal and informal language. The study analyzes email skills such as 'naming', 'opening', 'requesting' and 'closing' of EFL students. In our study, we selected some linguistic features that were identified in the literature as distinctive in EMC (Electronically Mediated Communication) (Thurlow and Brown 2003; Ling and Baron 2007; Crystal 2006).

Zhu (2012) identified opening email components such as recipient, closings, thanking, addressor's name, head acts which include the request, brevity of the message and etiquettes in email communication. However, recent research has shown that formal and informal styles combine in email writing in different ways for different contexts (Lorenzo-Dus&Bou-Franch, (2013).

IV. BASIC STRUCTURE AND FEATURES OF EMAIL

Figure 1: Basic Structure and Features of Email in Composing Format with Labels

1. Recipient E-mail (Id) address (To)
2. Copies sent to recipients directly involved with the message (Cc) (Bcc)
3. Subject line summarizes the main idea of the message
4. Sample greetings (salutations)
5. Opening sentence related to main concept and expands the subject
6. Message body supports the main idea
7. Closing statement requests exact action
8. Farewell greetings

V. FRAMEWORK OF C COMPONENTS

Figure 2: The interpretation of C components between Sender and Receiver

Email is not an informal messenger; it consistsof formal structure and a format. The users may use the proper format and structure by applying the following C components to create a structured email. The C components such as *clarity, correctness, conciseness, completeness, consideration and courtesy* are required for meaningful text (Rus 2015). In this regard, this study developed a framework for students to achieve effective communication between *sender* and *receiver*.

The core aim of the framework is to write email with '*clarity and correctness*' in the '*To line*', it helps the composer to develop an authentic header to address the recipients. The subject line is needed to fill with '*conciseness*' manner to summarize the text without '*repetition*' and with '*coherence*'. The text message is requires'*completeness*', to be developed the text without '*ambiguity*' and '*abrupt expressions*'. According to the frame work the closing lines are end with '*consideration*' of the recipient without gender bias. Finally the component '*courtesy*' will appear in farewell '*etiquettes*' of sender. From the application of the C components the email writing will enhance the sociolinguistic value of workplace communication. The C components abilities are presented in form of writing in email by students.

The questionnaire was developed based on the frameworkof C components. The relation between questions and framework were mentioned in Table 1.

VI.   RELEVANCE BETWEEN QUESTIONNAIRE AND FRAMEWORK

The Table 1 presents the reliability between questions and framework of applied C components, the each question of the questionnaire was considered the C components. The C components interpreted 2 to 4 times with questions.

Table 1: Relevance between Questionnaire and Frameworkof Ccomponents		
Sl.No	**Questions**	**Relation of C components with Framework**
1	Q1, Q4, Q8 and Q10	Courtesy
2	Q1, Q6 and Q8	Consideration
3	Q2, Q3, Q4 and Q7	Completeness
4	Q2 and Q7	Conciseness
5	Q2,Q3, Q5 and Q6	Correctness
6	Q2, Q7 and Q9	Clarity

VII.   METHODOLOGY

Most of the email writing research studies has referred tothe understandingoftechnicalities behind the email writings. The current research has made an attempt to analyze the email writing skills of engineering students and proposeda few suggestions to develop email writing skills with frame work of C components.

To assess the email writing skills, the study randomly selected the 125, IV. B. Tech students of various engineering branches. This study approached the questionnaire method to collect the data, and the questionnaire considered the framework of C components. The each question of the questionnaire represents the different sections of email composing format. The questionnaire was designed based on Likert scale format and it consists of ten questions.The questionsof the questionnaire are correlated with academic tool, technical competency (Bcc and Cc), composing style, email culture, language manner, and etiquettes. The quantitative method wasused to analyze the data and results (mean and percentages), and in another hand the qualitative method was used to discuss the obtained results from Table 3. The results were debated with question wise in the discussion part.

VIII.   INSTRUMENTATION AND PROCEDURE

The various teaching and research experiences have been encouraged the authors to develop the questions for this study. The questionnaire contains same ten open-ended questions for all students. A total number of 125 students were completed this survey. The researchers were distributed the questionnaire manually andcollected the responses from both female and male students, and they are between 20 to 22 age group. The questionnaire was prepared in English language and explained to the students to clear their ambiguity (questions were mentioned in Table 2). The collected data was analyzed in an Electronic Ms Excel worksheet. The mean and percentages were calculated separatelyfor better the understanding of the results.

For the analysis of the data, the questionnaire employs from 1to5 steps on Likert scale with 1 is Strongly Agree (SA), 2 is Agree (A), 3 is SomeTimes (ST), 4 is Disagree (DA), 5 is Strongly Disagree (SDA), this scale inspects the learners email writing skills.

IX.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Questions	Mean & Percentages				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	SomeTimes	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q1	57 (46%)	51(41%)	17(14%)	-	-
Q2	20(16%)	45(36%)	30(24%)	17(14%)	13(10%)
Q3	33(26%)	42(34%)	25(20%)	10(08%)	15(12%)
Q4	30(24%)	46(37%)	24(19%)	15(12%)	10(08%)
Q5	-	40(36%)	30(27%)	15(14%)	25(23%)
Q6	52(42%)	38(30%)	15(12%)	10(08%)	10(08%)
Q7	35(28%)	50(40%)	25(20%)	10(08%)	05(04%)
Q8	35(28%)	30(24%)	35(28%)	16(13%)	09(07%)
Q9	30(24%)	35(28%)	20(16%)	25(20%)	15(12%)
Q10	-	43(37%)	28(24%)	29(25%)	15(13%)

Table 3: Mean and Percentages of each question of the questionnaire

Table 3 reveals mean and its corresponding percentages of the *FirstQuestion.* From this table we detected that all students have selected the first three options only. There are two reasons in opting strongly agree, sometimes and agree options, the first reason is that,*the low level understanding of the email exchanges* andthe second reason is *feeling difficulties to access the email as academic tool (*Palmer, 2000*).* It is also perceived that only 46 percent of the students are completely access the email as an *academic tool.* The table also revealsthat both options disagree and strongly disagree associated with first question were not opted by anystudent. This is because of thatthe majority of the students are aware of sending, receiving and knowing the significance of email accessing.The'courtesy' and 'consideration' components of the frame work are related with this question.

The *Second Question* is related to the student's *writingability* towards briefing the subject line.This question accompanying with the frame work components such as 'completeness', 'conciseness', 'correctness' and 'clarity'to *concise* the *subject line*. The responses from Table 3 reveals that 24 percent students opted disagree and strongly disagree. This means that the 24 percent of the students are*reluctant to write subject line*with 'completeness', 'conciseness', 'correctness' and 'clarity'.Only 16 percent of the students have selected first option which meansthey havegood writing*ability* to address the subject line with meaningful text (Lewin and Mason 2014). According to email policy the complete sentence is not requires in subject line, even though, the students are not in a comfortable position to address the *subject line*. This is because in their interpretation *the body of the message will carry complete message,*so, in that perception the subject line may be a *negligiblespace*. Based onlow responses for Strongly Agree we concluded that it is essential for engineering students to enhance their*precise language*writing *proficiency* and *concise* the *message*to complete the *subject line*.

Table 3 is reported a few significant percentages for the *Question Three.* From this analysis totally 20 percent of the students opted disagree and strongly disagree.The *lack of formal language formats*the students are not in the position to address the recipient with appropriate greeting terms such as *Mr/Mrs/Dear/DearSir/Madam/Respected* for the authentic manner.Using apt phrasesdevelopsthe healthy interactions between sender and receiver. In most of the situations students didn't close the greeting sentences with *commas, full stops, questions marks* and *colons*. The salutation lexis of email such as *From* and *To* are variant from other writing formats. The frame work components such as 'completeness' and 'correctness' are represented by the salutations and greetingsin email.

Regarding to the *Question Four* analysis, from the Table 3, the majority of the students are writing the closing phrases such as *regards, sincerely and cordially,*however, still 20 percent of the students responded with disagree and strongly disagree. This 20 percent explored that, the students are not willing to write the proper *closing phrases*before closing the email. Using the accurate phrase at the end of email reflects the writer's culture. However, 24 percent of the students are using the suitable closing phrases in email. Closing the email with the relevant phrasesreflect the C components such as 'courtesy' and 'completeness'.

The discussion of the *Question Five*is related to the frame work component 'correctness'. This question represents the unique responses and it should be surprise for researchers, the *zero* percent of the students selected strongly agree. The percentages which are obtained from this question they represent the Cc (Carbon Copy). Based on the results the authors understood that the students are *unaware of understanding the exact meaning and importance of utilizingthe Cc.*This is the major cause that the Strongly Agree received *zero* percentage. However, the authors understood that, students are addressing the *To line with recipient mail IDs*. It is significant for the students to know what *is*the *variation and utilization of Cc and Bcc in email.* The analysis revealed that, the *electronic logical competency* is required for the students to fill the Cc format. The frame work component 'correctness' is exactly relevant to utilize the 'Cc'.

From the table 3 this the study noticed that 8 percent of the students opted strongly agree, 42 percent of the students selected agree, 30 percent of the students chosen sometimes, 12 percent of the students opted strongly disagree and 8 percent of the students opted strongly disagree. The question five and six have similar functions in email, even though the responses revealed that, the majority of the students agreed that they are addressing *Bcc, without technical awareness*. The 'Bcc' (Blind Carbon Copy) refers to a *single recipient* and most of the engineering students did not *acknowledge this technical abbreviation*and it may appears in 'To' line. The *technical competency* is required to know the variations in between Cc and Bcc, these two technical abbreviations appears in different forms of *Microsoft Windows Versions*of composing email formats. The frame work components such as 'consideration' and 'correctness' are deliberatelyrelated to this question.

The Table 3unearths the few significant percentages related to *Question Seven*. According to the responses the 28 percent of the students opted strongly agree, 40 percent of the students selected agree, 20 percent of the students chosen sometimes, 8 percent of the students opted disagree and 4 percent of the students preferred strongly disagree. From the received values, the authors understood that the studentsare unclear with grammar*, punctuations and spellings* in email text. These compositional expressions create a *positive impression* on sender. The *linguistic expressions* such as *pronouns, helping verbs, phrasal verbs, requesting and pleasing words* enhance the *communication grace*. Students are needed to write the *simple syntax* and avoid *long sentences* to clear the message. It is upright to use *preset perfect continuous sentences* in introduction part and with overall text. The careful analysis of this questionrevealed that still 4 percent of the students opted strongly disagree; this indicates that, students*need to learn functional grammar, making simple sentences and semantic expressions* to complete the body of the message (Pelagie M et al. 2012).However, the 'completeness' and 'correctness' are the two componentsare related to this question.

The frame work component 'courtesy' is involved with this question. The *low level of cultural competency* was observed among the students from the analysisof*Question Eight.* The *email*culture competency is not an easy task for students to *acquire.*To acquire this competency, firstly the students need todevelop the *regularbrowse attitude of email* and secondly they need to understand the *national, international* and *local cultures*of email.The students can overcome their*email communication barriers*by adopting the'email cultural competency'. Responding to the email within *24 hours is a noble email communicative culture.* This cultural competency is possible through the regular sending and receiving the email in academic atmosphere.According to the Table 3 only 28% of the students have the email cultural competency.

The Table 3 was shown the *Ninth Question* percentages, from this analysis, we noticed that 24 percent of the students opted strongly agree, 28 percent of the students selected agree, 16 percent of the students chosen sometimes, 20 percent of the students disagreed and 12 percent of the students opted strongly disagree. The question nine relevant to the language proficiency in email writing, according to the writing skills the*easy language utilization, legibility, level of language ability*and *native language influence*are also interpret with this question. The 12 percent of the students are strongly disagree with the language proficiency, in this sense; the study comes to a conclusion that the 12 percentage of the students arefamiliar with*generalmanageablewriting patrons*. These patrons can generate the inadequacy language communication in the receiver's consideration. In this regard they tend to transform these patrons into language proficiency writings, such as *explicit* and *legibility* to avoid *unwanted deictic expressions* in their email writing. The frame work component 'clarity' is rightly optedwith this question.

The relevance between email writing and component 'courtesy' is discussed in this question. The question ten refers to *email farewell etiquettes*; the word 'etiquette' is a buzz word for today's professional world. Above all nine questions are unconditionally deliberated to email etiquettes. The analysis of the tenth question was recorded the *0 percentage*for strongly agree, it means that, the majority of the students are unaware of*email etiquettes.* This *unwritten code* reveals the sender and receiver's email cultural attitude. The usage of *emoticons, personal abbreviations, capital and bold writings, and underlining the sentences*arealso related to email etiquettes. This unwritten code depends on *sender's and recipient's etiquette knowledge.* The *proofreading* is also a considerably etiquette to avoid the ineligibility inemail before to click the send key. This question is not relevant to the linguistic properties; however, it depends on formal behavior of the students while accessing the email (Anett Sundqvist and Jerker Ronnberg 2010).

The results and discussion supports the researcher's belief that the engineering students are need to enrich the ability of email writing skills with the proposed frame work components.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper truthfully recommends the followings to improve the email writing skills among engineering students.

- Introduce the email as academic communicative tool for the formal and effective communication in higher educational intuitions
- Teaching semantic expression, syntax, punctuations, professional expressions and email vocabulary
- Encourage the students to communicate through emails
- Email communication can reduce the excess of time and economical expenditure of the students
- It is important to teach email etiquettes for engineering students for the betterment of workplace communications

XI.   CONCLUSION

The email writing skills such as academic tool, technical competency (Bcc and Cc), composing style, email culture, language manner, cultural competency and etiquettes of engineering students were mainly addressed in this study. The data describe the students email writing skills and their level of knowledge towards the composing format. From the results the study anticipates that the participants have knowledge to compose emails, even though the participants haveless command on email writing set-ups to complete the all composing sections in formal way. The study highlighted the applied C components of framework namely, clarity, correctness, conciseness, completeness, consideration and courtesy,support to enrich the various sessions of email composing for a successful communication. Still the further and future research is required to know the original knowledge tocompose and wiring complexities of email writing among engineering students.

In the present years the email language is becoming global language for the universal communication. Even though, the usage of technological terms and cultural competency of email writing is not an easy task for engineering students. However, from the results and discussion the study reveals that thestudents are surely working on emails with their own uncertain writing formats. The present study observed that 125 students acknowledge the importance of email writings skills through the questionnaire. Finally, we conclude this paper with above statements and strongly believe that, all the rural and urban established higher educational institutions and autonomous institutions of India need to introduce the effective email writing formats and allow the students to use the email as an academic tool.

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