



Enhancing Students' Writing Skills through a Techno-Pedagogical Intervention

Princess Babaran¹, Kim Joyce Bayubay², Jireh Angelica Marie Manio³, Kristine Mae Auayang⁴, Darin Jan Tindowen^{*5}

¹Basic Education School, University of Saint Louis, Tuguegarao City, Philippines

^{2,3,4}School of Education, Criminology, Arts and Psychology, University of Saint Louis, Tuguegarao City, Philippines

⁵University Research and Innovation, University of Saint Louis, Tuguegarao City, Philippines

ABSTRACT: Several academic institutions have favored email as a mode of communication since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this research was to see how effective the Operation EMAIL, a techno-pedagogical intervention in enhancing the email writing skills of first-year education students. The study employed a quasi-experimental research design utilizing pre-test and post-test and involving control and experimental groups. The online action program involved 13 participants from the experimental group and 13 participants from the control group. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data gathered in the study. The results revealed that the participants gained low scores in their pre-test. After the post-test, the participants under the control group only gained a little increase in their scores while the participants under the experimental group significantly gained higher scores. Finally, there is a significant difference in the post-test scores between the control and experimental group. In conclusion, the Operation EMAIL is effective in enhancing the email writing skills of the first-year education students.

KEYWORDS: Email, Email Writing Skills, Operation EMAIL, Teacher Education Students

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an activity where a mind affects other minds, and it is through the flow of communication that people initiate shared insights and negotiate their behaviors (Hedman & Valo, 2015). This implies the creation of social worlds and not just the circulation and distribution of information between people. In fact, communication is not only a basic means of spreading information but also a way of expanding social entities for co-creation of comprehending as it requires individuals to approach it with a sense of awareness toward themselves and others. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a sudden shift took place, switching the natural face-to-face communication into virtual communication, thus changing human existence from real beings to virtual ones and affecting interpersonal relationships (Baeva, 2016). Communication, through e-mail, is a kind of a virtual asynchronous communication, which means that it is not happening at the same time for both the sender and the receiver (Prieto-Arranz et al., 2013).

Email writing is a fundamental part of the written communication in the current fast paced, transforming environment. Effective writing involves mindful choice of words, their correct order in sentences and the sentences' cohesive composition into paragraphs (Verma & Pande, 2014). Thus, the ability to improve a sense of attachment, common knowledge and trust is disfigured due to the lack of interpersonal symbols, which may become an issue (Morgan et al., 2014). Actually, it usually contains a wide-range of practical mistakes. With respect to email writing, the possible causes of failure include the following: a significantly great level of straightforwardness, inadequate lexical and syntactical mitigation channels, undesirable address forms, troublesome time frames, no presence of greetings and closings, lack of acknowledgment, no room for dialogues, ambiguous statement of issues, untrustworthy means or explanations for the request, and students' lack of awareness of proper emailing tips because generally, it is not absolutely inculcated (Chen, 2015).

Students possess the technical ability to utilize e-mails but they lack email writing etiquette. With the maximized use of email for communication, it is vital to train students on email writing attached with etiquette. This will make them to become better trained professionals and help them in fetching better results (Verma & Pande, 2014). In addition, competence in writing is an important requirement for any professional. English communication skills are the key to success in a career path and organization in either

written or verbal way of communication. Writing with English language competence is an important skill in today's pursuits since people use this skill to transfer and supply messages, ideas, and feelings in order to establish good relationships and understanding (Decharotchanawirun, 2015).

At a university level, email has become a feasible alternative of direct communication (Chen, 2015). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic where people were restricted to move physically, email has been the preferred means of communication by several academic entities. The University of Saint Louis is not an exemption. Thus, the target of this study is to discover the strengths and weaknesses of students' writing skills in order to help them enhance their emailing through an online action program and to give them the opportunity to render proper and appropriate emails to the school's administrators and staffs.

The Operation EMAIL: An Online Action Program for Email Writing Enhancement

Operation EMAIL stands for **E**lectronic **M**ail **A**dvancements **I**nstilled through **L**earning. This operation is an intervention program that aims to teach students through a flexible way of learning and to enhance their email writing skills during this moment of pandemic. Through its implementation for the present study, weekly video uploads are employed. The videos are being made by the researchers themselves where they act as teachers who serve as agents of improvement toward the emailing skills of students with a closed-coordination and guidance of a language expert who also took part in teaching through a recorded discussion. Thus, videos consist of succeeding topics that are crucial in constructing email messages. The contents are the topics about the scope of email, importance of email, parts and types of email, proper email construction, challenges in email writing, and tips in writing an effective email. Prior to the outbreak of the Corona Virus, students are used to communicate their concerns and send their hardcopy letters directly to the school staffs most of the time without having to send it through email. However, the face-to-face communication was hindered by the pandemic that led students to do emailing as a remedy for communicating school concerns and transactions. Due to the distribution and emergence of the corporate email accounts to all students in the University of Saint Louis, the researchers think of coming up with this kind of intervention to really give the students multiple opportunities to produce effective email messages. Thus, it is essential to come up with this intervention to help students become competent and proficient in their current and future communication undertakings. This operation is beneficial for students to acquire knowledge and skills and have fun through watching.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This quantitative study employed a quasi-experimental research design. Specifically, a pre-test and a post-test through which the scores of the participants were compared after accomplishing the tests. Prior to the post-test that was prepared, the participants were taught using the online action program, Operation EMAIL. A control and an experimental group were catered in this study. The study was conducted at the University of Saint Louis Tuguegarao, one among the higher education institutions in Region II. The participants of the study were the 34 first-year education students who were officially enrolled for the school year 2021-2022. Hence, only 30 among them enrolled in the NEO-LMS, and only 26 among those who enrolled answered the tests. 13 out of the 26 students were catered under the experimental group to undergo the intervention program, while the remaining half of the students were catered under the control group to undergo no intervention at all. Participants were grouped according to the match of their characteristics based on the results of their pre-test that there should be no homogenous set of scores among participants and the sets of participants should be of the same year level and program. The researchers used the pre-test and post-test as the main instruments administered to the participants. An email request situation was used as the type of test administered, providing students with a topic to focus on for the construction of their writing. This assessed the writing competencies of the participants, specifically their word choice, sentence construction, written communication skills, and email etiquette. Self-made videos were used as a learning material, uploaded on the NEO-LMS where the researchers and one language teacher discussed relevant topics. All of the instruments mentioned above that were used in this research were validated by an expert, particularly the involved language teacher. An adapted questionnaire was used as a tool for evaluation from the study of Pasicolan et al. (2021) with little modifications to see whether the online action program is significant and effective.

The data for this study was collected in three stages:

Pre-implementation Phase

A pre-test was given to the participants prior to implementing the suggested email writing enhancement action program to initially assess the level of writing skills of the target participants. The test was an email situation test where the participants are tasked to construct their own email message according to what was relevant in the situation given. In order to really assess proper emailing, the researchers provided an actual email account for the participants to send their emails. Thus, the pre-test scores determined the matching of the participants to be situated in both groups. Also, a pre-survey was conducted to determine the learning styles of the participants. Those visual learners were situated in the experimental group, while the independent learners were situated in the control group.

Implementation Phase

For a duration of three weeks, the participants were involved in the suggested email advancement program. The participants in the control group were given electronic modules, while those in the experimental group were given both the electronic modules and videos. The LMS was utilized by the researchers in releasing two videos and two modules per week. Throughout this duration, the content of this approach was identical to that of the pre-test and post-test.

Post-implementation Phase

A different email request situation test was administered as a post-test after the topics of the email writing enhancement action program had been taught to the participants. The same step that was done in the pre-test was employed for the participants to send their answers in the post-test having an actual email account where they will send their email messages. In making the rubric and in finalizing the scores, the researchers worked in closed-coordination with a language expert to maintain objectivity. Following the completion of the post-test, the participants' scores were assessed and compared to see if there would be any significant difference. The data was analyzed using frequency, percentage and mean score were used to determine the pre-test and post-test scores of the participants assessed through a scoring rubric. Paired Sample T-test was used to determine the significant difference of the pre-test and post-test scores of the control and experimental groups. Independent sample T-test was utilized to interpret the significant difference between the post-test scores of the control and experimental groups. Furthermore, weighted mean was used to analyze the pre-test and post-test scores of all the participants and the evaluation of the experimental group on the implementation of the Operation EMAIL.

RESULTS

Table 1. Pre-Test Scores of the Participants in the Control and Experimental Groups

Scores	Description	Control Group		Experimental Group	
		N	%	N	%
26-30	Outstanding	0	0.00	0	0.00
21-25	Very Good	2	15.40	1	7.70
16-20	Average	2	15.40	3	23.10
15-below	Needs Improvement	9	69.20	9	69.20
Overall Mean Score		16.15	Average	15.92	Average

Table 1 shows the pre-test scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups. It shows that the scores of the participants under both groups were generally low in their pre-test. Prior to the online action program, it can be shown in the table that most of the participants' scores in both groups are ranging from 0-15 though they obtained an average overall mean score, which signifies that they really need improvement in their email writing skills based on what have been revealed in their pre-test.

Table 2. Pre-Test Scores of the Participants in the Different Dimensions of Email Writing in the Control and Experimental Groups

Dimension	Points	Control Group	Experimental Group
Organization	8	2.85	2.69
Construction	7	2.85	2.69
Message	5	2.15	2.23
Subject line	5	3.30	3.31
Greeting and closing	3	3	3
Recipient	2	2	2
Overall Score	30	16.15	15.92
Overall Description		Average	Average

Table 2 shows the pre-test scores of the participants in the different dimensions of email writing in the control and experimental groups. It can be shown in the table that all participants in both groups are skillful when it comes to the construction of the greeting and closing as well as to the correctness of the recipient account that they are to send email with. Hence, the table reveals that most of the participants in both groups obtained low scores under organization, construction, message, and subject line. This signifies that the participants in both groups really need an improvement in the major construction of their email messages, which includes important emailing contents and grammatical aspects.

Table 3. Post-Test Scores of the Participants in the Control and Experimental Groups

Scores	Description	Control Group		Experimental Group	
		N	%	N	%
26-30	Outstanding	0	0.00	13	100.00
21-25	Very Good	3	23.10	0	0.00
16-20	Average	3	23.10	0	0.00
15-below	Needs Improvement	7	53.80	0	0.00
Overall Mean Score		16.15	Average	28.15	Outstanding

Table 3 shows the post-test scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups. It can be shown in the table that the participants in the control group still exemplify an average rating and most of them still need improvement after accomplishing the post-test. On the other hand, the table reveals that all of the participants in the experimental group obtained significantly high scores and an outstanding overall mean score in their post-test when it comes to enhancing their email writing skills after undergoing the online action program. This means that the online action program is an effective tool in enhancing email writing skills with the results that have been revealed between the scores of both groups.

Table 4. Post-Test Scores of the Participants in the Different Dimensions of Email Writing in the Control and Experimental Groups

Dimension	Points	Control Group	Experimental Group
Organization	8	2.85	7
Construction	7	2.85	6.38
Message	5	2.61	4.77
Subject line	5	3.45	5
Greeting and closing	3	3	3
Recipient	2	2	2
Overall Score	30	16.76	28.15
Overall Description		Average	Outstanding

Table 4 shows the post-test scores of the participants in the different dimensions of email writing in the control and experimental groups. It can be shown in the table that the participants in both groups are really that skillful when it comes to crafting their greeting and closing as well as to the correctness of their recipient's accounts to send their messages. Meanwhile, the participants in the control group exemplify that they really need an improvement when it comes to organization, construction, message, and subject line, which were generally the same to that of their pre-test results. Hence, the table reveals that the participants in the experimental group exemplified outstanding performances among the dimensions that really need improvement. This means that the online action program is really a great help in improving students' performances in all considered dimensions of email writing.

Table 5. Significant Difference between the Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of the Participants in the Control and Experimental Groups

Groups	Test	Scores	t-value	p-value
Control Group	Pre-Test	16.15	-4.382	.001*
	Post-Test	16.76		
Experimental Group	Pre-Test	15.92	-11.991	.000*
	Post-Test	28.15		

*significant at .05 level

Table 5 shows the significant difference on the pre-test and post-test scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups. It shows that there is a significant difference on the Pre-test and Post-test scores of the participants in both groups. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that though there is only a small increase between the Pre-test and Post-test scores of the participants in the control group, there is still a significant difference. Meanwhile, it was clearly shown in the table that the pre-test score was greatly increased toward the Post-test scores of the participants in the experimental group with 12.23 score difference.

Table 6. Significant Difference on the Pre-Test Scores of the Participants in the Control and Experimental Groups

Groups	Pre-Test Scores	t-value	p-value
Control Group	16.15	.143	.888
Experimental Group	15.92		

**significant at .05 level*

Table 6 shows the significant difference on the pre-test scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups. It can be shown in the table that there is no significant difference between the pre-test scores of the participants in both groups. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. This signifies that the participants were perfectly matched, which means that the grouping was done ideally because participants in both groups exemplified the same level of scores.

Table 7. Significant Difference on the Post-Test Scores of the Participants in the Control and Experimental Groups

Groups	Post-Test Scores	t-value	p-value
Control Group	16.76	-9.132	.000
Experimental Group	28.15		

**significant at .05 level*

Table 7 shows the significant difference on the Post-test scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups. It shows that there is significant difference on the post-test scores of the participants in the experimental and control groups. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that the post-test scores of the participants under the experimental group were significantly higher than the post-test scores of the participants under the control group. It can be stressed that the online action program is effective in enhancing the email writing skills of first year education students.

DISCUSSION

Email writing is a crucial aspect of written communication in today's highly competitive, ever-changing economy (Verma & Pande, 2014). The results revealed that first-year education students at the University of Saint Louis scored poorly, but that they can still improve after completing their pre-test. This suggests that they are still lacking in their understanding of email building. It signifies that the regular learning talks they had before to participating in Operation EMAIL may not have been sufficient to benefit them in enhancing their email writing skills. This concurs to the conducted study of Chen (2015) and Haddouch (2017), wherein students in the control group, who also had their pre-test and post-test scores recorded, made only minor progress in terms of email content, as evidenced by minor increases in the utilization of conventionally known strategies and mitigation devices, collated to those in the experimental group, who made more progress with the employment of the online action program. The findings also support earlier research findings that students have trouble organizing their thoughts to the point where they are unable to gather all necessary information to communicate their concerns and clarify whatever action the email requires (Alsmadi & Alhami, 2015; James, 2015). This is clearly demonstrated by students' regular faults in constructing their email messages in a logical and thorough manner, which resulted in them receiving low scores in the category of organization and construction in emailing, which had a significant impact on their grades. The findings of Verma and Pande (2015) are similarly consistent with the findings of this study, since it was discovered that college students struggle with correct organization of thoughts and concerns when composing emails. However, the possibilities in email writing in terms of delivering their message to the correct recipient's account and building their greeting and closure were the components they felt to be the least difficult.

Meanwhile, the quantitative findings demonstrated that the students made significant improvements in both their pre-test and post-test scores after the completion of the intervention program, indicating a beneficial outcome. The findings support previous research that students improved more in areas of framing moves such as subject line creation, greetings, and closings than in areas of content moves such as the organization and construction of the entire email message in terms of conveying their requests, as proved by the control group's emails for both tests compared to the experimental group's emails, which showed a significant and holistic change in both tests (Chen, 2015; Ogwu et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the control group had a notable outcome with its small gain in both tests, highlighting their difficulty in emailing with only their own personal knowledge. And the implemented intervention through the aid of the online action program with many talks of critical emailing matters had a valuable influence on the experimental group's scores. After the lesson, students became more goal-oriented, had explicit audience mindfulness, and became more knowledgeable of the language choices in emailing, according to the findings of a prior study (Yasuda, 2011; Bahgat et al., 2018; Evans, 2012). Through their post-test findings, both groups have shown considerable progress in both tests, particularly those who are in the experimental group, whose abilities were developed as an outcome of the intervention program after finishing the discussion of emailing essentials.

Because the target of the study was to assess the effectiveness of an online action program for improving the email writing skills of first-year education students, it was explored that the students, particularly those who took part in the online action program, made significant improvements in their email output over the pre-test. This supports the findings of Wei (2017) and Haddouch (2017) that students made significant development in each assessment component in the post-test after teaching, as evidenced by the present study's comparison of the scores of both groups in each grading category. This suggests that Operation EMAIL is a successful instructional method for improving students' email writing skills. According to Wannadilok (2017) and Lv (2018), the students were challenged in their formal tone, followed by issues with appropriate words, correct grammar, organizing a proper structure, cultural awareness, composing the message body, writing an opening message, writing a subject line, and writing a concise message, as well as concerns about emailing. Thus, without the use of the online action program in their involvement in the current study, these issues would have been the control group's difficulties. Additionally, the execution of Operation EMAIL helped those who are under the experimental group quickly overcome these issues because they were provided essential and competent conversations about emailing, which proceeded with a great boost in their post-test results. Correspondingly, the post-test scores of those under the experimental group appear to be higher than that of the control group's post-test results. It is an affirmation to the study of Chen (2015) that on the post-test, the students showed significant improvement when it comes to their framing techniques, as proved by greater usage of palpable subjects, accurate greeting compositions, outright identifications of self, and closure moves than that of the pre-test. As a result, it is emphasized that the current online action program is good in enhancing college students' email writing capabilities, and it is essential to consider that approaches of interference are effective in increasing students' emailing abilities (Geiger, 2014; Celik & Olcer, 2018). As a result, the online action program may also be called successful because it focuses on the students' grammatical skills as well as other important skills for clearer communication through its impressive results. This suggests that an intervention program is required to broaden students' horizons when it comes to email writing in order to facilitate message building.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that the implementation of Operation EMAIL is effective in enhancing the first-year teacher education students' email writing skills. This intervention program exemplified a great impact in enhancing students email writing skills especially in terms of how they organize, construct, and craft the sequence of their message contents. It serves as a teaching supplement that offered students an opportunity to enhance their email writing skills. Together with valuable contents that were simultaneously uploaded to provide a purposeful learning to the experimental group, the intervention served as a way for the students to really enrich their skills in writing emails. Moreover, it was regarded that the online action program was excellently evaluated by the students under the experimental group stressing that there is really a need for students to engage in such kind of undertakings. Since the Operation EMAIL is effective, it is proposed that there is a significant requirement to continue the program especially for language teachers. In this time of the pandemic, lessons are being delivered through the use of digital platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams and the like, which may also provide an adequate learning to students. Beyond these means, the uploading of videos that were recorded and edited to aid students in augmenting their email writing skills is distinctly suggested to be done in various Learning Management Systems like the NEO-LMS.

As language teachers carry out this program, the time frame of conducting it should be considered to give enough span for students to learn. Hence, the program should not take students to spend hours to obtain the essential matters that are expected to be instilled in their minds. Language teachers may use the materials employed in the current study to enhance the email writing and other communication writeups of students with the full permission of the researchers.

The Operation EMAIL may also be initiated by teachers in the college department by implementing the current intervention to other programs and levels with the consideration of appropriate skills and techniques being included in the teaching process.

Also, the teacher education department may conduct a Service-Learning Program focusing on the conduct of webinars or seminars about email writing skills to help in promoting relevant knowledge and skills in the use of email.

Moreover, teachers may employ workshops as a follow-up strategy to simultaneously monitor the learning progress of students. After giving enough time to let students watch recorded videos, they may provide exercises requiring the students to construct their own simple emails until they can be able to reach the complexities of such to be turned-in on the Learning Management System used.

The videos that were recorded should be innovative and engaging in order to really catch the attention of students to learn and to watch daily or weekly depending on the pacing planned. It should also approach the students in a friendly manner without dreary moments for students to enjoy and give their full interest in acquiring valuable skills in email writing. On top of that, videos that were recorded must be appraised by experts to video editing to check its elements for good quality productions.

Future researchers may conduct a similar scope of study looking into other interventions or strategies to purposefully enhance the email writing skills of students especially the higher education students in all programs and levels. They may establish their programs

within a certain subject relevant to the nature of emailing in order to really have students participate without excuses. Thus, they should consider the minimum number of participants having a total of thirty participants in each group. Students must really participate in these kinds of research-based programs especially during this time of pandemic as most of their learning endeavors take place through online delivery of instructions.

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