



Enhancing Business Email Writing Ability through the Integration of Genre-based Approach and Data-driven Learning

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Email functions as a pivotal tool in facilitating today's business correspondence. Similar to other written genres, email incorporates distinct conventions and linguistic patterns that are recognized within a particular community. Deviating from the established conventions and recurring patterns can pose challenges for individuals engaging in communication within this genre. This study, which utilized a mixed methods research design, formulated a teaching approach that synergized genre-based approach (GBA) with data-driven learning (DDL) to facilitate business email writing instruction, while its effectiveness in enhancing students' aptitude for written communication was investigated. The participants comprised 24 EFL university students with elementary (n=12) and intermediate (n=12) English proficiency levels from diverse academic disciplines. They underwent a 10-hour instructional course designed to augment their business email writing competence. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test assessments, supplemented by semi-structured interviews. The findings indicated a statistically significant improvement in participants' business email writing ability subsequent to the intervention. Qualitatively, students' post-intervention emails exhibited well-organized structure, comprehensive content, and contextual appropriateness, underpinned by practical, professional, and linguistically accurate language use. Furthermore, students expressed satisfaction with the pedagogical approach as it effectively prepared them for real-world business email communication.

Keywords: business email writing, email communication, teaching writing, genre-based approach (GBA), data-driven learning (DDL)

INTRODUCTION

Email has become an indispensable medium for business communication in the contemporary era. Its textual nature helps alleviate the pressures associated with spontaneous interactions, providing writers with valuable time for thoughtful deliberation before sending or responding (Bloch, 2002). However, workplace writing, including email communication, does not directly transfer from general language

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learning (Hailali & McKinley, 2021). In other words, proficiency in English acquired in a general context does not automatically lead to mastery in the specialized skill of business email communication; specific training is necessary. This is particularly true for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, whose traditional language classrooms prioritize linguistic accuracy and native-like proficiency (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013; Rzońca, 2021). The composition of effective emails can pose significant challenges for them, necessitating training to bridge the gap between classroom practices and real-world workplace communication.

Previous studies have highlighted the significance of genre knowledge in facilitating effective email communication. Genre knowledge refers to a comprehensive understanding and familiarity with the conventional text structure and language use that conform to expectations of a specific community (Swales, 1990; Thongchalerms & Jarunthawatchai, 2020). It entails the ability to construct business emails that exemplify characteristic norms and practices upheld by business professionals. Zhang (2013) emphasized the influence of genre knowledge disparity of learners on their ability to communicate effectively in business writing compared to their professional counterparts. Chen (2015) further underscored the importance of explicit genre instruction in formulating appropriate email compositions.

In addition to possessing genre knowledge, EFL learners require appropriate resources to support their email writing endeavors. Data-driven learning (DDL) is an instructional approach that provides learners direct access to authentic language examples acquired from corpora. Prior research has explored the integration of DDL and GBA in teaching various written genres, primarily focusing on academic writing genres while neglecting writing for business purposes (Tsai, 2021). Addressing said gap, this study aimed to integrate GBA and DDL as a promising method for teaching business email writing to enhance students' communication skills in a global business setting.

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of integrating GBA and DDL on the business email writing ability of EFL students. To achieve this, three research questions were formulated:

1. Does the teaching approach integrating GBA and DDL significantly improve EFL students' business email writing?
2. How does GBA affect students' business email writing ability?
3. How does DDL affect students' business email writing ability?

Literature Review

Genre-Based Approach (GBA)

The Genre-Based Approach (GBA) stands as a potent pedagogical approach, particularly for instructing genre-specific writing within specialized domains such as academia and professional discourse (Osman, 2004). At its core, GBA entails explicit instruction of form and function intrinsic to a particular genre, raising students' awareness of the underlying textual structural and linguistic conventions (Rezvani et al., 2014). Textual structure, termed "move structure", refers to the arrangement of communicative components which are meticulously orchestrated to serve the genre's

communicative intent (Swales, 1990). Linguistic conventions encompass the art of strategically selecting language to aptly fulfill specific communicative functions. Understanding how moves are sequenced and selecting conventional linguistic features contributes significantly to successful genre-specific writing.

Previous studies have demonstrated the advantageous effects of GBA on specific writing genres. For instance, Kuipe et al. (2017) employed GBA to guide the creation of event plans. Ueasiriphan and Tangkiengrisisin (2019) trained EFL engineering students to write work instructions using GBA. Alber et al. (2020) investigated the impact of GBA on instructing business email composition for learners with no prior working experience. Insights drawn from the aforementioned studies marked the significant role of exposing learners to ample examples of the target genre and enhancing their awareness of genre conventions and cultural dimensions through explicit instruction, as these factors influence writing quality.

Data-driven Learning (DDL)

Data-driven learning (DDL) represents a practical application of corpus linguistics in language learning, offering students access to authentic language examples, which can be placed under scrutiny and utilized to enhance their writing proficiency. Previous research has shed light on the advantages of DDL, its capacity to confirm or challenge learners' intuitions (Pérez-Paredes, 2019), facilitate error correction and revision (Crosthwaite et al., 2020; Dolgova & Mueller, 2019), lexicogrammatical learning (Mussetta & Vertaliatis, 2018; Yilmaz, 2017) and identify collocations (Chen et al., 2019).

The successful implementation of DDL in language learning is contingent upon various factors within the learning context. Mizumoto & Chujo (2016, p. 56) have categorized potential dimensions related to DDL along a continuum of "soft" and "hard" DDL, as shown in Table 1. The positioning along this continuum profoundly impacts the design of DDL activities, directly influencing the effectiveness of DDL implementation.

Table 1
DDL variations from research (Mizumoto & Chujo, 2016, p. 56)

Dimensions	Application spectrum	
	Hard DDL	Soft DDL
Corpus data	Authentic	↔ Simplified
Corpus size	Large	↔ Small
Concordancer	Web/Local Computer	↔ Paper-based
Language	Monolingual	↔ Bilingual
Task	Divergent (No definite answers)	↔ Convergent (Definite answer)
Activity	Student-centered	↔ Teacher-led
Instruction	Inductive (Implicit)	↔ Deductive (Explicit)
Situation	Outside classroom	↔ In classroom
Grouping	Individual	↔ Pair/Group

In previous studies, DDL has been employed to fulfill a diverse array of pedagogical objectives, with the design of these studies adapting to the specific learning contexts. For instance, Yilmaz (2017) investigated the impact of DDL on learners'

lexicogrammatical learning and their attitudes towards the approach. In the study conducted by Mussetta and Vertaliatis (2018), DDL training was organized for the second-year students in a language course and the fourth-year students in a literature course. Chen and Flowerdew (2018) set up DDL workshops for postgraduate students in Hong Kong, introducing the use of DDL for academic writing. Similarly, Chen, Flowerdew, and Anthony (2019) conducted workshops for in-service university lecturers in Hong Kong with varying years of teaching experience. Dolgova and Mueller (2019) examined the effects of supplementary DDL training on writing accuracy in graduate students majoring in Computer Science and Engineering with upper intermediate and advanced English proficiency levels. These studies exemplify the diverse scope of DDL implementation across various educational settings, showcasing its potential effectiveness in enhancing language learning outcomes.

Despite the numerous advantages of using DDL in teaching various writing aspects, as mentioned earlier, it is not exempt from challenges. A significant challenge lies within the substantial time investment required, which is in excess of traditional deductive learning approaches (Dolgova & Mueller, 2019). Furthermore, successful implementation of DDL necessitates extensive training in cognitive and technological skills for effective utilization of corpus tools, and proper training is the key to success (Boulton & Cobb, 2017; Dolgova & Mueller, 2019). Teachers' and learners' perceptions can impede the successful application of DDL in classroom language learning, especially when working with unfamiliar tools and techniques (Gatto, 2020; Mizumoto & Chujo, 2016). Lastly, the limited availability of DDL teaching materials suitable for the specific target learners poses an additional challenge (Meunier, 2019).

Previous studies have provided compelling evidence supporting the efficacy of GBA and DDL in teaching writing. Building on this evidence, some researchers have integrated these two approaches to enhance writing instruction. For instance, Flowerdew (2015) conducted a workshop combining GBA and DDL to facilitate postgraduate students' thesis discussion section writing. Similarly, Eak-in (2015) utilized a combination of GBA and DDL to improve undergraduate Engineering students' abstract writing. Boettger (2016) also adopted the integration of GBA and DDL for teaching academic writing across various disciplines. In Boettger's study, the participants were editors who provided proofreading services for EFL graduate students.

While these studies demonstrated the successful incorporation of GBA and DDL, the combination was primarily explored within the academic context. However, this present study aimed to address a notable gap in the literature by investigating the integration of both DDL and GBA for teaching business-related writing, and specifically focusing on the context of emails.

METHOD

Participants

The study included 24 undergraduate students with either A2 or B2 English proficiency levels according to the CEFR. These students had received EFL education in Thailand

for at least ten years, with no prior experience composing business-related emails. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary.

Teaching Materials

The teaching materials were structured into two main sections. The initial section functioned as an introduction to data-driven learning (DDL), providing a foundational component aimed at nurturing students' DDL skills. Classroom activities were tailored following John's (1991) three-step model for DDL implementation, which encompassed the stages of identification, classification, and generalization. The subsequent section comprises two distinct units involving the composition of an inquiry email and a complaint email. The activity design within this section incorporated both GBA and DDL. For GBA, classroom activities followed Feez and Joyce's (1998) five stages of the teaching-learning cycle: building the context, modeling and deconstructing the text, joint construction of the text, independent construction of the text, and linking related texts. Concurrently, DDL was incorporated into the activities related to language use.

Intervention

The intervention in this quasi-experimental study comprised a comprehensive 10-hour training program. This program included a 2-hour session focused on DDL training and four 2-hour sessions allocated to writing inquiry and complaint emails (each unit took two 2-hour sessions). Classroom activities encapsulating the synergy between GBA and DDL commenced from the second session and structured on the five stages of the teaching-learning cycle (Feez & Joyce, 1998), which are as follows.

Firstly, to establish the context, students were introduced to the specific email genre, examining its unique characteristics such as move structure, communicative objectives, roles, relationships, and cultural dynamics. Secondly, students participated in teacher-guided email analysis designed to foster their comprehension of move structure, prevalent linguistic patterns, and other noteworthy element characteristics of the email genre. Thirdly, students applied the knowledge acquired from earlier exercises to analyze additional email samples. During this stage, the teacher explicitly presented ubiquitous linguistic features found in the target email genres to the students and encouraged them to practice analyzing linguistic patterns that benefit communicative achievement. Fourthly, students undertook autonomous writing tasks, drawing upon the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the preceding stages. To facilitate their writing, students were encouraged to use BLC online KWIC concordancer. Lastly, students and the teacher engaged in discussions to forge connections between the genre under study and other interconnected genres to create an expanded understanding of genre relationships and enhanced ability to navigate varied discourse contexts.

Data Collection

This study employed a mixed methods research design, whereby the quantitative data were gathered from pre-test and post-test assessment scores. The tests were scenario-based written examinations designed to evaluate students' aptitude in composing inquiry and complaint emails. For the inquiry email task, students, in the role of a purchasing officer, were tasked with requesting a quotation for ready-mixed concrete

from a supplier. They were required to communicate key information, including the quantity of concrete needed, delivery details, and purchase terms and conditions. In the complaint email task, students assumed the role of a consumer whose company had recently installed a new printing system that was encountering network issues. Students had to articulate the problem and that action be taken by the service provider. The pre-test was administered prior to the intervention, while the post-test was conducted subsequently for each unit intervention. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were obtained through students' pre-test and post-test email compositions and semi-structured interviews. Each student underwent a semi-structured interview conducted in their native language by one of the researchers upon completion of the intervention. These interviews aimed to elicit students' reflections and experiences pertaining to the utilization of the new teaching approach within the course.

Data Analysis

To address the first research question, a paired-sample t-test was employed to analyze the scores obtained from the pre-test and post-test assessments. To enhance the reliability of the findings, an intercoder with professional expertise in the field of business was enlisted to participate in the coding process. For research questions 2 and 3, the students' email compositions underwent coding based on the distinctive moves associated with each genre of email.

FINDINGS

The improvement of students' email writing ability after the intervention

Table 2 presents the outcomes of the quantitative analysis pertaining to students' writing competence. The results showcase a statistically significant improvement in both email subgenres, as evidenced by a significant difference ($p < .000$). To gauge the concordance between the assessments of the two raters, inter-rater correlation was computed using Pearson's correlation coefficient. The findings unveil a robust positive correlation between the two raters, with $r = 0.692$ for the pre-test and $r = 0.782$ for the post-test assessments.

Table 2
Paired sample t-test analysis of students' business email writing

	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Sig.
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Inquiry email	24	13.45	3.80	18.27	1.23	.000**
Complaint email	24	14.68	2.06	18.52	1.05	.000**

Significant level at $p < .05$

Table 3 presents a detailed analysis of each dimension of email composition explored in the current study. The first dimension, task fulfillment, encompassed the framing move and content move. The framing move focused on elements such as email format, subject, salutation, sign-off, and signature. In the case of inquiry emails, the prior to training score for employing the framing move was 2.45 ($SD = .88$), which increased significantly to 3.77 ($SD = .36$) after training, showing a statistically significant difference at $p < .001$. Similar statistically significant improvements were observed in

the use of framing moves for complaint emails, with pre-intervention score of 2.16 (SD = 1.04) and post-intervention score reaching 3.75 (SD = .39), revealing a significant difference at $p < .001$.

Concerning the content move, which involved the ability to achieve the communicative purpose and contextual appropriateness, the mean score for students' writing inquiry emails was 4.85 (SD = 1.77) before the intervention, and it increased to 7.12 (SD = .59) after training, revealing a statistically significant difference at $p < .001$. For complaint emails, the pre-intervention score for the content move was 5.97 (SD = .94), and the post-test score was 7.2 (SD = .65), indicating a significant difference at $p < .001$.

The analysis of language use focused on grammatical knowledge and vocabulary knowledge. In the inquiry email pre-test, students' grammar score was 2.93 (SD = .95) and improved to 3.47 (SD = .49) after training, showing a statistically significant difference at $p < .012$. A similar trend was observed in writing complaint emails, with the pre-test grammar score at 3.12 (SD = .49) and post-training score at 3.64 (SD = .37), showing a statistically significant difference at .001.

Regarding vocabulary use, students' vocabulary score in writing inquiry emails prior to training was 3.20 (SD = .84) and increased significantly to 3.98 (SD = .25), indicating a statistically significant difference at $p < .001$. Similarly, the score for vocabulary use in complaint emails rose from 3.41 (SD = .50) before training to 3.85 (SD = .23) after training, demonstrating a statistically significant difference at $p < .001$.

Table 3

Paired sample t-test analysis of students' writing classified in dimensions

	Task fulfillment									
	Framing					Content				
	Pre-test	SD	Post-test	SD	Sig.	Pre-test	SD	Post-test	SD	Sig.
Inquiry	2.45	.88	3.77	.36	.001**	4.85	1.77	7.12	.59	.001**
Complaint	2.16	1.04	3.75	.39	.001**	5.97	.94	7.2	.65	.001**

	Language use									
	Grammar					Vocabulary				
	Pre-test	SD	Post-test	SD	Sig.	Pre-test	SD	Post-test	SD	Sig.
Inquiry	2.93	.95	3.47	.49	.012**	3.20	.84	3.89	.25	.001**
Complaint	3.12	.49	3.64	.37	.001**	3.41	.50	3.85	.23	.001**

Significant level at $p < .05$

Unpacking students' email writing: the role of genre-based approach

In this study, students were each tasked with composing two distinct types of emails. The first email was an inquiry email in which students were assigned to request a quotation from their business partner. The second email involved writing a complaint directed to a service provider addressing issues with the printing network system.

The qualitative analysis of the impact of the genre-based approach (GBA) on students' writing encompassed two fundamental dimensions: framing moves and content moves. The qualitative analysis yielded the subsequent insights.

Framing moves

Framing moves pertain to elements such as the subject line, salutation, sign-off, and signature. The comprehensive analysis revealed significant similarities in the framing moves between the inquiry and complaint emails in all aspects.

Subject. Concerning the email subjects, the analysis revealed that students' subject lines frequently grappled with either being excessively broad or overly succinct during the pre-test. This observation causes challenges for recipients to discern the email's intent, necessitating assumptions about its underlying purpose, as evidenced in Example (1). However, the post-test outcomes showcased a marked enhancement in students' composition of email subject lines. Students adeptly infused keywords and specificity into their subjects, resulting in more clearly concise and concrete output. This advancement effectively steered recipients toward a more accurate understanding of the email's purpose. Example (2) demonstrates the email subjects students employed following the intervention.

- (1)
 - a. quotation
 - b. Request service
- (2)
 - a. Quotation request
 - b. Problem with printing network

Salutation. A range of salutations were observed in the pre-test, including both conventional and unconventional forms. The conventional salutations initiated with 'Dear' and were coupled with diverse variations like 'Dear + position' and 'Dear + name'. However, the more formal "Dear Sir/Madam" was used sparingly. Additionally, some students incorporated casual salutations like 'Hello' in their emails, indicating a certain level of familiarity between the sender and the recipient. Upon analysis, the selection of salutations in the pre-test seemed influenced by the interlocutors' cultural background. This occurrence was particularly evident in Thai culture to address individuals by their names rather than surnames, with this reflected in their choice of salutations, such as "Dear Mananya" and "Hello Mananya".

In the post-test, the majority of salutations adhered to business conventions, prominently featuring formulations such as 'Dear + recipient's name' and 'Dear Sir/Madam'. This observed trend illustrated the heightened genre awareness that students have developed, along with an increased discernment in selecting appropriate salutations. Similarly to their pre-test practices, students continue to address the recipient by their first names rather than employing surnames, which reflects their inherent cultural background. During the interview, students articulated their increased cultural sensitivity fostered throughout the training. They mentioned that when aware of sharing the same cultural background with the recipient, they would opt for addressing them by name in the salutation. However, when corresponding with business partners from diverse cultural backgrounds, they would adhere to 'conventional patterns', utilizing formulations like 'Dear Sir/Madame' or 'Dear + Mr./Mrs./Ms. + Surname'.

Sign-off and Signatures. Regarding the sign-off and signature practices, the findings from the pre-test phase indicated that numerous emails lacked a sign-off and solely

featured a signature. Among the emails that did incorporate a sign-off, “Best regards” emerged as the most frequently employed choice. Other utilized sign-offs included “Sincerely”, “Yours sincerely”, “Regards”, and “Yours Faithfully”. The subsequent signatures accompanying these sign-offs displayed variation, encompassing forms such as ‘name’, ‘name + surname’, ‘name + position’, and ‘company name’. Notably, the students’ cultural background exerted some influence on their inclination to use their names rather than surnames, aligning with the common practice in Thai culture.

In the post-test, a heightened alignment with conventional sign-off norms was evident, encompassing a more diverse range of choices such as “Best regards”, “Regards”, “Yours sincerely”, “Yours truly”, “Sincerely” and “Best wishes”. Intriguingly, “Best regards” did not dominate as the most frequent sign-off; its frequency was on par with that of other sign-offs. This shift in email sign-off practices likely emanated from explicit instruction regarding sign-offs and the provision of an expanded selection of options for students to select from. Signatures following the sign-offs predominantly featured the individual’s name, with instances of ‘name + surname’ and ‘name + contact information’ being less frequent. As observed in the post-test, cultural background persisted as an influential factor, guiding students to prefer using their names over surnames as signatures, thereby reinforcing their cultural identity in communication.

Content Moves

Content moves included the opening, main move, supportive move, and closing move within the email composition.

Opening. Similarity in using the opening move was observed in both inquiry and complaint emails. In the pre-test, the opening move was used to fulfill diverse functions, including self-introduction, rapport-building, and contextual framing as illustrated in Example (3). Self-introduction served to establish credibility, particularly in cases where the sender and recipient lacked prior acquaintance. In order to build rapport, students incorporated gratitude expressions like “Thank you so much”. To set the context, students referred to the situations that prompted them to write the emails.

The analysis also unveiled instances where students’ openings exhibited inconsistencies in intimacy, indicating a potential misunderstanding or lack of awareness regarding the appropriate sender-recipient relationship. Example (3c) highlights the juxtaposition of contrasting tones within the opening section, as observed in the pre-test writing task 1, which involved writing an inquiry email. Notably, the sentence “How’s it going, Mrs. Mananya” conveyed an informal and overly casual tone while incorporating a formal title and Thai cultural identity, ‘Mrs. Mananya’. This opening preceded a subsequent shift towards formality in the sentence, “Your company is one of the biggest concrete suppliers in Thailand.” This disparity underscores the necessity for heightened clarity and awareness concerning appropriate language usage in business email communication.

- (3)
 - a. I am a purchasing officer of APPC construction company. I writing to about ask for quotations and order products.
 - b. Thank you so much Superprinter for set up a new photocopying system.

c. How's going Mrs. Mananya. I'm purchasing officer of construction company. Your company is one of biggest concrete suppliers in Thailand. We're so glad to colab with you.

In the post-test, students persisted in incorporating the practices of self-introduction, rapport-building, and context setting in the opening move, maintaining continuity with the established pattern identified in the pre-test. Noteworthy was a significant trend characterized by the widespread use of rapport-enhancing expressions such as "Hope this email finds you well" and "I hope you are doing well". This shift indicated a professional and formal approach to establishing strong business relationships fostered by explicit instruction. Moreover, students exhibited an elevated strategic awareness and adeptly responded to the given prompts. For instance, they integrated expressions of regret, such as "I'm sorry to bother you with this email" to foster a courteous tone, signifying their respect for the recipient's time and attention.

Main move. The outcomes stemming from the analysis of the main move exhibited variations across different emails. In the pre-test of the inquiry email, students exhibited a prevalent tendency to opt for direct statements, exemplified in Example (4a). Direct inquiry statements facilitated recipients' understanding of the writers' communicative purpose. The frequently used patterns included "I want to get a quotation...", "I would like to have your quotation..." and "Please send me your quotation...". The improvement in students' writing of the main move became apparent in the post-test. The findings indicated that, while students still employed direct statements to pose their inquiries, they demonstrated a wider variety of language patterns and a higher level of professionalism regarding usage. Specifically, these patterns framed their requests in a polite manner, as evidenced in 'Could you please...', 'Would you please...?', and 'We would appreciate it if you would...' as illustrated in Example (4b).

- (4) a. I want to get a quotation for 2000 cubic yards of M5 ready-mixed concrete.
b. Would you kindly send us your quotation for 2000 cubic yards of M5 ready-mixed concrete?

For the composition of the complaint email, students employed indirect statements of complaint in the pre-test, as illustrated in Example (5a). This strategic choice appeared to stem from a deliberate intent to avoid confrontational and aggressive overtones, which are often concomitant with direct complaint expressions. Indirect statements of complaint enabled students to convey their dissatisfaction while refraining from making explicit accusations towards their business partners. A shift in strategy was discernible in the post-test. The majority of students opted for direct complaints, succinctly expressing their dissatisfaction in a clear and specific manner, leading to straightforward communication of their grievances. Example (5b) provides instances of direct complaint usage observed in the post-test. This shift to direct statements of complaint can be attributed to explicit instruction, which heightened students' awareness of this form of expression. Students reported that they learned of the commonality of direct complaints in emails during the intervention, making them more comfortable with their application in the post-test.

- (5) a. After a week of using it, I found serious problems with the printing network, causing terribly inconvenience and delay to my work.
 b. I'm writing to complain about a serious problem with the printing network.

Supportive move. This move involves the augmentation of the main move with pertinent supplementary information aimed at enhancing the clarity and effectiveness of the main move. In the inquiry email (prior to the intervention), students omitted crucial details due to either their perceived insignificance or the absence of explicit prompts. This phenomenon was particularly evident when students were tasked with incorporating essential supplementary details such as the quotation submission deadline, product delivery specifics, and the inclusion of terms and conditions related to their potential purchase. The analysis revealed that while students integrated all prompted aspects, they excluded the terms and conditions in their emails. Subsequent interviews showed that students doubted the significance of these terms and conditions, resulting in their omission. This outcome likely stems from the students' limited exposure to professional communication practices, rendering them unfamiliar with the essential components required for effective correspondence.

In the post-test, students demonstrated enhanced proficiency in employing supportive moves to facilitate successful inquiry email communication. Students incorporated all requisite information, including the crucial terms and conditions, which they recognized as pivotal components. It was interesting and noteworthy that students deployed strategies tactfully refining their requests within the supportive move. For instance, they utilized polite language, such as inserting the adverb "please" or framing queries courteously while soliciting their business partners to provide the requested quotation within a specified date. An intriguing observation was noted in the division of content into multiple paragraphs by some students. This compositional approach involved collectively presenting the main move and supportive move, replete with specific information or requests while segregating the delineation of terms and conditions into a distinct paragraph. This phenomenon likely stems from the genre-based approach since it furnishes students with a flexible compositional guide, contrasting it with a fixed writing model. Example (6) exemplifies how students utilized supportive moves, ingeniously interweaving the main move to create a coherent and comprehensive discourse of inquiry email.

- (6) We would like to have your quotation for 2000 cubic yards of M5 ready-mixed concrete. Please submit your quotation before 15th of June 2022, for delivery 30th June, 2022, at the DDP Kiatisak construction site, Bangkok.

We enclosed a form of agreement setting out the terms and conditions which will be applied to all purchase order.

In the complaint email (before the intervention), students elaborated on the circumstances underlying the issue, aiming to clarify the current situation. However, the efficacy of their content experienced a degree of compromise. To illustrate, some students incorporated expressions of compliment within their emails as a strategy to temper the tone of dissatisfaction. In the post-test, students showed their heightened attention to detail. They elucidated the situation skilfully, moving beyond the mere

mention of the repercussions stemming from printing malfunctions. Classroom discussions effectively emphasized the significance of presenting unambiguous and pertinent details in an appropriate manner, a crucial facet in constructing efficacious business complaints. Through this guided approach, students acquired skills regarding striking a delicate balance between expressing dissatisfaction and upholding good business relations. Example (7) illustrated the combination of content and supportive moves in a student's email.

- (7) I'm writing to complain about the new photocopying system. Our company set up a new photocopying system. After a week of using it, we found a serious problem with the printing network, causing inconvenience and delay to work.

Closing. In a broader context, it becomes evident that multiple strategies were, in effect, employed for closing email compositions. Students displayed a discerning approach, selecting strategies that harmonized with the distinct content of each communication. In the context of inquiry emails, where the task was to solicit a quotation, the prevalent choice of email closing was the use of an inviting question. However, students' tendency to invite further question closings often deviated from conventional patterns, displaying grammatical inaccuracies. Furthermore, expressions of gratitude were commonly integrated, such as "Thank you" and "Thank you in advance." Students also incorporated anticipatory language, typified by phrases like '...look forward to...' and '...waiting for...' in the pre-test closing. Example (8a) demonstrates the outcomes from the pre-test of inquiry email closing. After the intervention, students continued to employ strategies akin to those used in the pre-test of inquiry email writing, yet with a heightened adherence to conventional patterns that resonate more closely with the professional milieu, as in Example (8b).

- (8) a. I will waiting for your reply, if you require more information please feel free to ask me.
b. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Many thanks in advance for your reply.

Shifting the focus to the complaint email, where students were directed to articulate their dissatisfaction over printing network issues, a prominent strategy for closing was the deployment of a call-to-action approach. This approach entailed a request for a response from the recipient, who functioned as the service provider responsible for acknowledging and addressing the predicament. Some students proffered potential solutions, thereby manifesting an expectation for assistance in resolving the problem. Notably, these closing strategies contributed to tempering the tone of disagreement within the email content. For instance, expressions of gratitude and the inclusion of '...please' or the formation of polite requests through questioning all served to ameliorate the impact of the complaint. Additionally, students exuded optimism that the issue would be swiftly rectified in their email closings while demonstrating confidence in the service provider's ability to swiftly redress the matter. Example (9a) demonstrates email closing in a student's pre-test of complaint email. In the post-test, a marked advancement was evident. The prevailing strategy was the expression of expectation for prompt resolution, frequently signalled by the keyword 'hope', as demonstrated in

Example (9b). Students exhibited an increased level of politeness in their email closing, employing expressions of gratitude and framing inquiries as polite requests. Nonetheless, a subset of students also persisted in highlighting the urgency of the situation, emphasizing the inconvenience they were currently contending with, as illustrated in Example (9c).

- (9) a. I would be highly grateful if you could come and fix the printer. I would request you take immediate action.
 b. I would like you to send some technicians to solve this problem. I hope that you will deal with this matter promptly. Thank you.
 c. I hope that you will deal with this matter promptly as it is causing me considerable inconvenience.

The effects of data-driven learning approach on students' email writing ability

To explore the influence of data-driven learning (DDL) on the enhancement of email composition, students were tasked with documenting the query terms employed in their post-test compositions. Table 4 illustrates specific instances wherein students utilized DDL in their email compositions.

Table 4

Keyword search and examples of adapted sentences in email composition

Email subgenre	Keywords	Examples
Inquiry email	Quotation	Request for Quotation
	quotation	Would you kindly send us your quotation for 2000 cubic yards of M5 ready-mixed concrete.
Complaint email	terms and condition	We enclosed a form of agreement setting out the terms and conditions which will be applied to all purchase orders.
	complain	I'm writing to complain about the new printing network of your photocopying system.
	inconvenience	I hope that you will deal with this matter promptly as it is causing me considerable inconvenience.

According to the table, it is evident that students strategically utilized specific keywords relevant to their respective email tasks. For instance, in the context of requesting a quotation, all students invariably sought terms related to 'quotation' that consequently found its place in the subject lines and the inquiry-making moves of their emails. Beyond task-specific keywords, students expanded words relevant to the given scenarios. Interviews revealed that students selected researched words based on their ability to anticipate the content of their forthcoming emails.

The overall analysis of students' language use before and after corpus consultation revealed significant improvement. Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate a student's composition prior to and following DDL training, respectively. Focusing on the use of the words 'quotation', 'delivery', and 'deliver', the results indicated that before training, students composed the email using understandable language. However, after DDL training, the student consulted the BLC online KWIC concordancer to search for

‘quotation’ and ‘deliver’, subsequently applying these words to produce more accurate and conventional language patterns. Nevertheless, the enhanced language use may not solely be attributed to DDL but could also be influenced by explicit instruction during genre-based teaching, as exemplified by the improved closing statement.

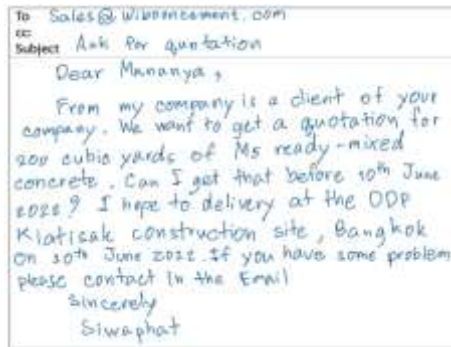


Figure 1
Pre-test Inquiry Email composition

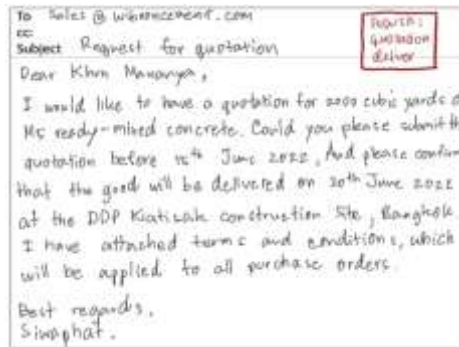


Figure 2
Post-test Inquiry Email composition

While working with the BLC online KWIC concordancer, students adopted various techniques to optimize their search experience. One prominent strategy involved employing both uppercase and lowercase variations of keywords such as ‘Quotation’ and ‘quotation’. The rationale behind this approach lay in the case sensitivity of the concordancer, whereby using uppercase letters yielded subject line instances. Another noteworthy technique entailed the extension of concordance line lengths. By doing so, they acquired more extensive contextual information, facilitating nuanced inference and enhancing their linguistic pattern analysis. Some students reported that they exercised discernment in their selection, opting for sentences where comprehension was assured, thus minimizing communication errors and ensuring content accuracy. The aforementioned techniques resulted from classroom discussions, where students collectively exchanged insights on harnessing DDL to amplify their writing efficacy.

In addition to the techniques they employed, students emphasized their multi-stage utilization of DDL throughout the various phases of the writing process. They applied it to identify potential patterns before initiating writing while actively composing their emails and subsequently during the review phase to assess language accuracy. This holistic adoption of DDL underscored its integration into their entire composition workflow.

While DDL undeniably aids students in accessing pertinent examples of language patterns utilized in business communication, it does have inherent limitations. The analysis confirmed DDL’s effectiveness primarily at the sentence level of writing. When students employ DDL to search for target words and acquire practical language patterns beyond the sentence level, the resultant compositions may lack optimal effectiveness. In other words, effective email writing necessitates the cohesive and coherent connection of ideas throughout rather than a collection of disparate stand-alone sentences. Example (10) draws from a complaint email demonstrating a student’s

composition that exhibits disjointed sentence structure, lacking necessary cohesion and coherence.

- (10) I'm writing to complaint about a serious problem with the printing network. A new photocopying system that was set up last week as well below the standard expected. I hope that you will deal with this matter promptly as it is causing me considerable inconvenience. I would like you to send some technicians to solve this problem and make it better in the future.

The effective utilization of DDL requires adequate grammatical and vocabulary knowledge, enabling students to accurately and appropriately apply patterns derived from concordance lines to their own writing. This requisite proficiency (or lack thereof) demonstrates itself in Example (11) and highlights a student's erroneous application of concordance patterns within their specific context due to limited vocabulary resources. The student attributed this inconsistency to their direct adoption of a sentence from the corpus, albeit with minimal modification, which included an irrelevant purchase order number (PO) not aligned with the given prompt.

- (11) After we set up a new photocopying system last two weeks, it had worked normally, but next week later we found abnormality about printing network. Therefore, we would like to complain about your product that we ordered last two weeks on PO#1478102022 as attached.

DISCUSSION

The study's comprehensive findings confirm the efficacy of integrating the genre-based approach (GBA) and data-driven learning (DDL) in enhancing EFL students' proficiency in business email composition. This enhancement is particularly evident in the domains of genre knowledge and linguistic competence.

Impacts from Genre-Based Approach

In follow-up interviews, students reported that explicit instruction had significantly elevated their genre awareness and resulted in a deeper understanding of genre conventions. These perspectives on GBA are consistent with those from previous studies, including Zhang (2013), Chen (2015), Arono and Arsyad (2019), Ueasiriphan and Tangkiengsirisin (2019), and Thongchalem and Jarunthawatchai (2020). Knowing how to construct an email serves as a guide to help the students compose effective emails to achieve their communicative purposes. Pre-intervention, the collective attributes, having been obtained by the students, empower them to excel in the professional context. The impact demonstrated by GBA on raising students' awareness of the business email genre stands to have a long-term influence on their writing performance. Students reported applying the analysis of email features when composing subsequent emails, indicating a sustained integration of genre-specific considerations. The ability to consider genre-specific elements is likely transferrable to other writing contexts, contributing to an overall enhancement of their writing proficiency.

I had no experience in writing business email, so in the pre-test, my focus was only on content. However, after the intervention, I realized that emails have a specific

format and textual structure. Understanding the sequence of a business email greatly aids in writing, resulting in more comprehensive communication. I can apply the techniques we learn for analyzing emails to other writing genres. (Student 1)

Classroom discussions also offered a valuable complement to explicit instruction to nurture genre knowledge. According to Hyland (2003), effective written communication necessitates a grasp of both genre conventions and the social dynamics that underpin successful communication. Thus, engaging students in discussions about the social and communicative dimensions of the target genre can significantly enrich their overall writing proficiency. Beyond heightening students' awareness, classroom discussions also provided a platform for an exchange of diverse perspectives. Through active participation in explicit instruction and classroom discussion, students cultivated the capacity to dissect contextual elements such as writer-recipient roles, interpersonal relationships, and cultural backgrounds - dimensions that had previously evaded their attention.

The success of GBA in business email instruction finds solid grounding in its alignment with the teaching-learning cycle (Feez & Joyce, 1998). This study's instructional approach adeptly harnessed this framework, tailoring it to the specific context of teaching business email writing for EFL students. This adaptive modification not only underscores the framework's potency within this context but also highlights its prospective versatility for wider application. This suggests the promising potential for its practical adaptation in future research endeavors.

Impacts from Data-Driven Learning

Insights drawn from student interviews shed light on the pervasive integration of DDL into students' writing composition process. DDL was used for acquiring collocates, validating linguistic intuitions, and facilitating error correction, which is in line with the findings from Chen et al. (2019), Crosthwaite et al. (2020), Dolgova and Mueller (2019), and Pérez-Paredes (2019). Importantly, students also conveyed their positive attitudes towards employing DDL for email writing, corroborating earlier research by Yilmaz (2017), Chen and Flowerdew (2018), and Chen, Flowerdew, and Anthony (2019). This collective affirmation among students confirmed the pronounced utility of the corpus-based pedagogical approach, especially in their future workplace communication.

I was confused in the first week using corpus because I have never dealt with the tool like that before. But once I get used to it, I realized it is easy to use and really useful for my writing. I definitely keep using it, especially when I have to write business email for work. (Student 22)

The analysis of post-intervention emails revealed the role of DDL in fostering language use within email composition. Accurate language use substantially contributes to comprehensibility, thereby elevating overall written ability. This idea is particularly true for tasks that enabled students to adeptly integrate corpus-provided patterns with minimal or no modification, such as requesting quotations and concluding emails. On

the contrary, assignments necessitating original content generation, such as complaint emails, encountered challenges since the Business Letter Corpus (BLC) collected data specifically related to the business written domain rather than general language use. Despite that, the students interviewed expressed their intention to persist in using the data-driven learning technique for business email writing. They found the technique useful and easy to use. The exposure to numerous examples from the corpus has substantially enhanced their confidence in the autonomous composition of emails.

While DDL proves effective in various aspects, it does not consistently produce flawless outcomes. In particular, challenges arise when moving beyond the sentence level. Despite students' proficiency in selecting appropriate collocates and constructing accurate phrases or clauses, they face limitations in connecting these elements to craft cohesive and coherent overall content. These limitations highlight the need for explicit instruction that extends beyond sentence structure. Solely relying on corpus-based learning may not comprehensively foster writing beyond the sentence level.

The effectiveness of DDL in this study is likely attributed to the judicious design of the instructional course. As proposed by Mizumoto and Chujo (2016), the success of corpus-based pedagogy hinges upon a tailored approach aligned with learners' specific profiles. Selected for this study was a user-friendly corpus tool designed to incorporate specialized business writing content. This strategic selection minimized the acclimatization burden associated with novel tools and concurrently proffered relevant and contextual data. Thus, it becomes evident that course design is an instrumental catalyst in precipitating the observed success.

Despite confirming the effectiveness of integrating GBA and DDL to teach business email writing, there are a few issues to be aware of. Firstly, the study did not delineate students' writing performance across proficiency levels, which ranged from A2 to B1. This could have contributed to more nuanced insight into potential variations in pre- and post-intervention writing outcomes. Secondly, contemporary business communication unfolds within a multicultural context, where individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds engage in commercial interactions. Establishing connections between language learning and cultural awareness is crucial for successful language acquisition (Kayır, 2018). Thirdly, it is noteworthy that Generative AI (GenAI) was not extensively utilized during the data collection phase to facilitate writing. The integration of GenAI in teaching business email writing could potentially unveil novel insights.

CONCLUSION

The study implemented an instructional approach that integrated a genre-based approach (GBA) and data-driven learning (DDL) for the enhancement of business email writing skills. The quantitative findings showed the efficacy of this intervention in enhancing students' proficiency in business email composition, both in genre knowledge and linguistic knowledge.

The implications of these findings carry substantial pedagogical relevance. Educators and curriculum designers can draw upon the insights to inform the development of materials and curricula that prioritize business writing skills and other courses rooted in

real-world communication. Furthermore, the acquired skills, particularly in terms of conventional and linguistic accuracy patterns, are transferable skills that can resonate across various communication scenarios. These enhanced writing proficiencies hold the potential to instill a more professional tone in business email correspondences, thereby elevating communicative effectiveness in professional environments.

Suggestions for future studies include two key aspects. Firstly, future research should consider shifting its focus towards examining the communicative effectiveness of business emails within the dynamics of communication and appropriateness in business contexts where English is employed as a lingua franca (ELF). This approach would provide a more realistic portrayal of real-world communication dynamics, prioritizing practical effectiveness over mere linguistic accuracy. Secondly, subsequent studies could explore the integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) within an educational framework for instructing business email writing. The rising significance of GenAI positions it as a powerful tool, potentially offering valuable insights to enhance the teaching and learning processes in the domain of business email communication.

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