

# An Analysis of Business E-Mails Written by Arab Female Business Students

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**Abstract**—Writing is an important skill in students' academic and professional lives and plays a substantial role in their everyday communication. As such a comprehensive multi-layered investigation into students' writing becomes imperative to gain a better understanding of the issues students face while learning this skill. This study explores the business writing skills of Arab female undergraduate business students in the College of Business Studies in Kuwait using a genre approach to guide the analysis of the e-mails written by the students in their business correspondence module. An analysis of 44 students' written formal and informal e-mails was thoroughly executed to investigate students' competency in writing different e-mails with different styles and for different purposes. The data provided valuable insights into students' practices while writing business e-mails and pinpointed issues students faced in their writing. Findings suggest that it could be beneficial and productive for ESP teachers to address the teaching of writing skills to business students using genre analysis in the hope of yielding better-written outcomes.

**Index Terms**—ESP, E-mail writing, genre analysis, business English, writing evaluation

## I. INTRODUCTION

During the previous decades, learning English has gradually become a fundamental component in most educational systems worldwide, especially those endeavoring to prepare students for their work life. Additionally, English has become recognized as the global language of business and many business interactions if not most are conducted between non-native English speakers (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) for example an Arab businessman doing business with a Chinese businessman using English as the medium of communication. As a result, many institutions have incorporated English for Specific Purposes (ESP) modules and courses in students' education in the hopes of equipping students with necessary written as well as spoken communicative skills. Additionally, these modules are tailored to fulfil students' needs and are essential and vital for their success not only in their academic life but also in their careers (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). ESP branches out into 1) English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and 2) English for Occupational/ Professional Purposes (EOP/EPP). The former concentrates on teaching the language needed in an academic setting while the latter focuses on preparing students to use English in an occupational setting, but both have the same objective which is to help students acquire the needed skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) to thrive and succeed (Jordan, 2006; Hartle, 2017).

Writing is a valuable form of communication in the modern world and essential in business. Teaching business students to write genres related to the business community they are to engage with in the future is a critical part of their applied training at the College of Business Studies (CBS) in Kuwait. Introducing them to e-mails, reports, letters, memos etc. as pieces of business writing and helping them identify how they can construct similar texts is the responsibility of the ESP teacher. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) state that due to the interdisciplinary nature of ESP, the ESP teacher must acquire the knowledge and experience of the content and context of other disciplines such as business, law, computer science, etc., to be then able to help students bridge the gap between the discipline they are studying, and the English language needed.

My interest in conducting this current study is to investigate students' e-mail writing to identify areas that are problematic to them. Although there have been various studies that investigated Arab learners' writing, this present study investigates specifically the e-mail writing performance of Kuwaiti female business students in Kuwait and how well students can recreate accurate business e-mails following the genre approach which focuses on students' ability to use the moves associated with the e-mail as a genre. This study also examines how well students can create formal and informal e-mails that adhere to each style's characteristics. Several rubrics are used to evaluate these aspects.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Writing and ESP

Since the early days of recognizing ESP as a separate activity within English language teaching (ELT), and one that centers around teaching specific language to specific groups that need it for certain purposes, its focus was on the practical outcomes. ESP has always been concerned with needs analysis, text analysis and ensuring that students are

equipped with the communicative skills that are required to fulfil their tasks in their study or work environment (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

The writing skill is a very important skill in ESP and a focal medium of communication in business English (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). It allows students and potential recruits to express their ideas via different genres such as reports, essays, projects, articles, reviews, case studies, e-mails, memos etc. Although the importance of the writing skill is non-disputable in ESP, and teachers, as well as students, realize its imperativeness in their education and career, perfecting this skill remains a challenge for students, especially in the Arab context (Al-Khatib, 2017) and more specifically in the Kuwaiti one (Taqi & Shuqair, 2014) as it requires other macro skills such as planning, drafting and revising to reach the final product (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Additionally, Arabic and English differ considerably linguistically (Talosa & Maguddayao, 2018), grammatically and culturally (Hyland, 2006). In addition, L1 interference is a major issue for students and affects their learning process and shapes their writing outcome (Elachachi, 2015; Bakhshayesh, 2015; Mudhsh et al., 2021). Many students transfer characteristics of their L1, in this case Arabic, such as grammar, and sentence structure into their L2 writing (Al-Jamal, 2017), but what might be acceptable in their L1 might not be in L2 writing.

Students' ability to produce coherent and cohesive pieces of business writing is affected by many factors, and one of them is their proficiency in the target language. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) believe it is very important for students to have a sufficient bank of general, semi-technical, as well as technical business vocabulary to draw from, knowledge and understanding of grammatical rules, as well as sentence structure and correct use of punctuation marks (Robert, 2006; as cited in Suliman et al., 2019). Another factor influencing students' writing is culture. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) state that "language reflects culture and culture can shape language" (p. 66). This means that, by helping students grow their awareness of the culture of the target language they are learning, any misinterpretation or conflict from the misuse of language can be avoided. It is then imperative for students to understand the target language's culture as it is a defining factor that shapes their writing.

#### *B. Business E-Mails as a Genre*

E-mails nowadays have almost replaced the letter and many people send e-mails to communicate with each other for personal and work-related purposes. When characterizing e-mails as pieces of writing that are made up of short sentences which lack grammatical structure and are full of abbreviations (Kerkeb, 2013), it could be assumed that writing e-mails is a simple task, and that might be the case for personal e-mails but that does not apply to business e-mails. Kerkeb (2013) states that business e-mails are communicating what in previous decades business letters were. Then from this standing point, business e-mails should be written as grammatically structured as business letters using full sentences as well as technical vocabulary and with the omission of abbreviations. This leads us to believe that teaching business e-mail writing to business students could be accomplished using a genre approach which has recently gained popularity in teaching writing skills over other methods such as the process method and product method.

Swales (1990, p. 58) defines genre as: "A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre". Bhatia (1993) further adds that a genre is not only composed with specific factors in mind; for instance, the audience the text is intended for, the content, the form or the platform or channel it is shared on, but its structure also depends on the communicative function it helps to realize and achieve. Hyland (2006) extends on this and states that genre is ultimately a way of grouping texts that represent a group's writing style in response to a recurring situation. From such a definition it can be said that business e-mails follow a particular structure and are composed with specific moves that allow us to identify them as a genre.

When writing e-mails certain parts and elements are constantly present regardless of the purpose of the e-mail whether it is to inquire about something, request information, offer services, extend an invitation etc. The moves it follows are recognized by individuals in the business community and are constantly reoccurring in business e-mails. Furthermore, making students aware of the importance of business e-mail functions, which Vladutescu et al. (2015) state are determined by context and situation, as well as e-mail moves, is a crucial part of e-mail pedagogy (Dinesh, 2019). Students' writing could improve if they are made aware of the significant impact of genre and register on their writing (Hartle, 2017). The e-mail as a genre follows specific moves that are identified as: 1. header, 2. salutation, 3. body: opening, main, and closing, 4. complementary close, and finally 5. Signature. Therefore, teaching learners how to apply these moves in their e-mail writing can assist in recreating accurate e-mails.

Gains (1999) found that there was high consistency in the usage and implementation of text features, such as subjects, closings, openings, linguistic features like compression, abbreviation, omissions, and register in his investigation of business e-mails, but no evidence was found of conversational discourse incorporated into the e-mails. This could be attributed to the nature of his sample as it was collected from a "closed system for internal electronic mail" and as such could have "legal status" (p. 82) connected to it that influenced the type of language used. On the other hand, an analysis by Gimenez (2000) revealed that the language used in the e-mails in his sample was more relaxed both in style and register and that writers used straightforward language, personalized abbreviations, and contracted forms. He concluded that the informal language and the flexibility of style found in the e-mails "equates" with what e-mail users believe is an important feature of e-mails which is "efficiency" (p. 250).

Another study by Scheyder (2003) investigating the use of complementary closings of native Americans revealed that more than half the sample omitted the complementary closing in their e-mails and those that did use it, mostly used it in e-mails requesting information or asking for help and opted to use phrases such as “thanks” and “thank you”, while only 1% used “sincerely” (p. 33) to close their e-mails. She claims that most manuals on e-mail writing, for example, Flynn and Flynn (1998; as cited in Scheyder, 2003, p. 28) ignore the complementary close and place more emphasis on the teaching of the salutation line and signature.

### C. Statement of the Problem

A review of the literature suggests that Arab students find the writing skill very challenging. This extends to the writing of business e-mails. Many students find writing well-structured e-mails that encompass all aspects and moves of an e-mail not only difficult but also challenging since writing business e-mails requires students to adhere to style and register that are context, situation, and addressee appropriate.

### D. Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the analysis of the business e-mails produced by business students at the College of Business Studies (CBS) in Kuwait:

#### (a). Main Questions

1. To what extent do formal business e-mails written by Arab female business students adhere to the standard format of business e-mail writing?
2. To what extent do informal business e-mails written by Arab female business students adhere to the standard format of business e-mail writing?
3. To what extent are Arab female business students able to write formal business e-mails?
4. To what extent are Arab female business students able to write informal business e-mails?

#### (b). Sub Questions

1. In which parts of the formal e-mail did students fail to use formal language the most?

To address these questions, the researcher conducted an in-depth inquiry into female Kuwaiti students' writing, particularly their business e-mail writing in the business correspondence module.

#### (c). Hypothesis

Teaching business students to write formal or informal e-mails using a genre approach will improve their e-mail writing skills.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### A. Design

This study aims to investigate whether Arab female business students can write e-mails that adhere to business e-mail format. It also investigates these students' ability to write formal and informal business e-mails as well as identify the parts of the e-mail that are problematic to students. This research adopts an informative design to review and survey preceding studies related to the topic of this study. It aims to analyze the e-mails written by 44 business students in fulfillment of a business correspondence module. The results and findings could have pedagogical implications for the teaching of business writing to business students in Kuwait.

### B. Participants

53 Female business students, enrolled in the Business Correspondence course in the College of Business Studies (CBS) in Kuwait, participated in the current study. Students were asked to write 2 different e-mails as part of the final exam that assessed their mastery of the business writing genres that they were introduced to during the course. Students were given 2 hours to complete the given tasks. The first task was to write a formal thank you e-mail, or a formal inquiry e-mail and the second task was to write an informal e-mail to invite a business associate to a business lunch. 9 samples were excluded due to students leaving them blank or because there was not sufficient writing to analyze. Table 1 below shows that 44 samples were considered for this study.

TABLE 1  
TASK AND SAMPLE SIZE

Task	Sample size
1. Formal thank you e-mail/ inquiry e-mail	44
2. Informal invitation e-mail	44

### D. Instruments and Analysis

The data was analyzed using 4 different rubrics. The first rubric examined the standard format of an e-mail students were introduced to during the course. The students' e-mails were evaluated according to how well the e-mails followed the format and Table 2 below shows the scale followed.

TABLE 2  
RUBRIC 1 E-MAIL CORRECT FORMAT SCALE

Scale	Description
Very good	0 – 1 move of the e-mail is missing
Good	2 moves of the e-mail are missing
Not good	3 + moves of the e-mail are missing

The second and third rubrics examine how well students were able to write formal and informal e-mails. During the course, students were introduced to the characteristics of both formal and informal e-mails, which they had to exhibit in their e-mail writing. Tables 3 and 4 below show the scales used.

TABLE 3  
RUBRIC 2 FORMAL E-MAIL WRITING

Scale	Description
Very satisfactory	0 – 1 informal phrase or word used
Satisfactory	2 informal phrases or words used
Un-satisfactory	3 + informal phrases or words used

TABLE 4  
INFORMAL E-MAIL WRITING

Scale	Description
Very satisfactory	0 – 1 formal phrase or word used
Satisfactory	2 formal phrases or words used
Un-satisfactory	3 + formal phrases or words used

The final rubric investigates which part of the formal e-mail showed informal language the most. Table 5 below shows the main parts of an e-mail.

TABLE 5  
RUBRIC 4 INFORMALITY IN THE FORMAL E-MAIL

Part of e-mail	Salutation	Body			Complementary Clause	Signature
		Opening	Main details	Closing		
Informality						

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Email Format (Following Genre Moves)

(a). Formal E-Mail

The current study investigated 44 students' ability to write business e-mails using a genre approach where they had to recreate e-mails following specific moves which, as stated previously, are 1. Header, 2. Salutation, 3. Body, 4. Complementary close, and 5. Signature. The results exhibited in Table 6 and Figure 1 show that more than half of the students (52.3%, n= 23) wrote good formal business e-mails following the standard e-mail writing format. This means that their e-mails had 3 of the e-mail moves mentioned above. This is followed by 15 students (34.1%) who wrote very good formal business e-mails which indicates that all or almost all moves were present in their e-mails. The remaining 6 (13.6%) students' performance in this aspect was not good as 3 or more moves were missing from their e-mails. It was also found that 36 (81.8%) of students failed to include the header in their formal e-mails as shown in Figure 2. A Chi-squared test for Goodness of fit statistically and significantly revealed that the majority of students were adept at writing formal business e-mails that adhered to the standard format ( $\chi^2 = 10.0, DF = 2, p \text{ value} < 0.01$ ).

TABLE 6  
DISTRIBUTION OF THE STUDENTS' LEVEL IN USING GENRE MOVES IN WRITING FORMAL BUSINESS E-MAILS

Level of Skill	n	%	p-value
Not good	6	13.6%	0.007**
Good	23	52.3%	
Very good	15	34.1%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>	

\*\* Significant at 1% level of significance based on Chi-squared test for Goodness of fit.

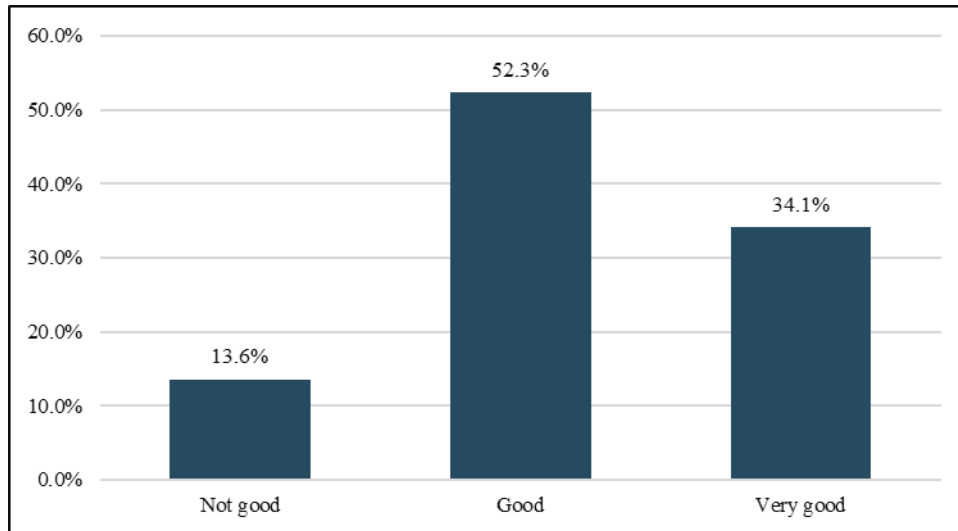


Figure 1. Distribution of the Students' Level in Using Genre Moves in Writing Formal Business E-Mails

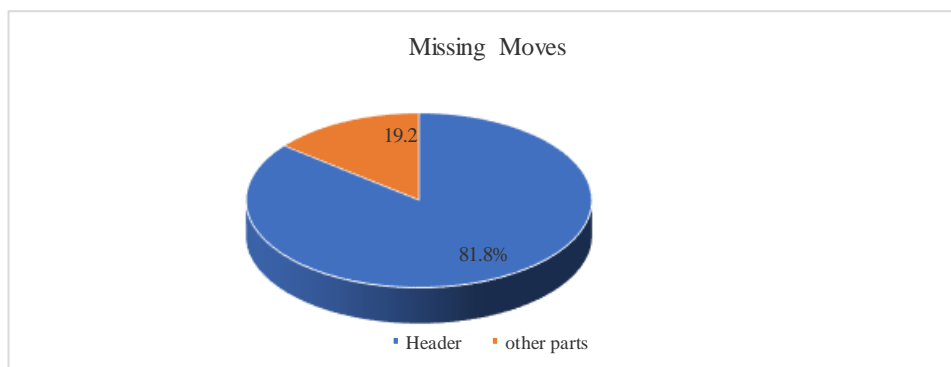


Figure 2. Missing Moves

(b). *Informal E-Mails*

Moving on to students' performance in informal business e-mail writing, it was found, as shown in Table 7 and Figure 3, that the majority of students (56.8%,  $n = 25$ ) were very good at implementing the e-mail moves in their writing of informal business e-mails, followed by 12 students (27.3%) who displayed a good skill in writing informal business e-mails. On the other hand, almost 16% of students (7) did not perform well in writing informal e-mails. It was also found that 36 (81.8%) of students failed to include the header in their informal e-mails as shown in Figure 2 above. A Chi-squared test for Goodness of fit statistically and significantly revealed that the majority of students strongly adhered to the format of informal business e-mail writing and incorporated most of the moves taught ( $\chi^2 = 11.8, DF = 2, p \text{ value} < 0.01$ ).

TABLE 7  
DISTRIBUTION OF THE STUDENTS' LEVEL IN USING MOVES IN WRITING INFORMAL BUSINESS E-MAILS

Level of Skill	n	%	p-value
Not good	7	15.9%	
Good	12	27.3%	
Very good	25	56.8%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>	0.003**

\*\* Significant at 1% level of significance based on Chi-squared test for Goodness of fit.

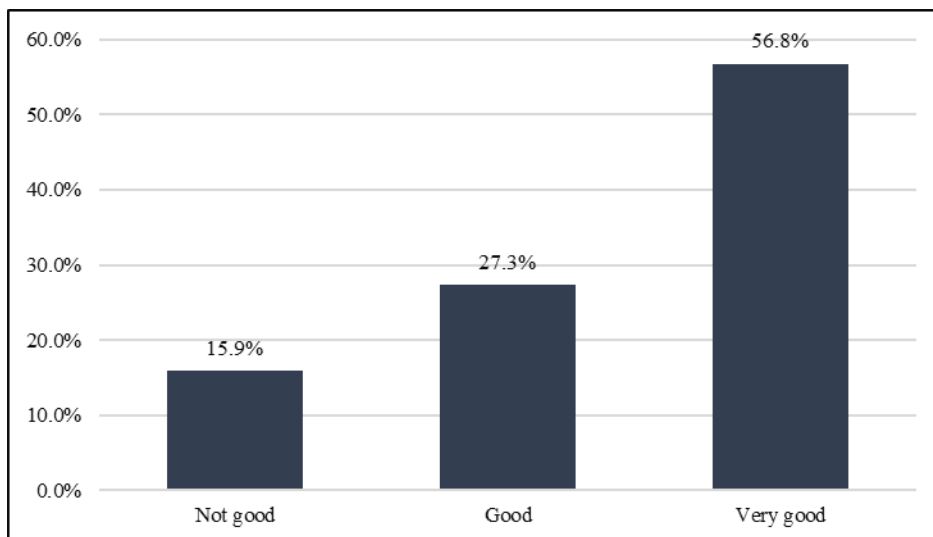


Figure 3. Distribution of the Students' Level in Using Moves in Writing Informal Business E-Mails

(c). Association Between the Level of Implementing Genre Moves in Formal E-Mail and Informal E-Mail

TABLE 8  
ASSOCIATION BETWEEN LEVEL OF IMPLEMENTING GENRE MOVES IN FORMAL E-MAIL AND INFORMAL E-MAIL

Level of writing Formal e-mail		Level of writing Informal e-mail			Total
		Not good	Good	Very good	
Not good	n	3	3	0	6
	%	50.0%	50.0%	0%	100%
Good	n	3	7	13	23
	%	13.0%	30.4%	56.5%	100%
Very good	n	1	2	12	15
	%	6.7%	13.3%	80.0%	100%
Total	n	7	12	25	44
	%	15.9%	27.3%	56.8%	100%

Table 8 above demonstrates that most business students who displayed a good level of competency in composing formal business e-mails following the specified moves (56.5%, n=13), reported very good competency in writing informal business e-mails following the same moves, while most students who were very good in writing formal business e-mails (80%, n=12), reported very good in writing informal business e-mails. A chi-squared test for the association between two variables was run and its results revealed that there was a statistical association between the level of employing genre moves in writing formal e-mails and informal e-mails ( $\chi^2 = 12.4, DF = 4, p \text{ value} < 0.05$ ). Overall, the results of the correlation between the level of employing genre moves in writing formal e-mails and informal e-mails suggest that there is a statistically significant positive correlation (p-value < 0.01) between them, since Kendall's tau correlation coefficient was 0.433. Thus, as the level of using genre moves in writing formal e-mails improves, the level of using genre moves in writing informal e-mails improves as well.

The results obtained in this section of the study which addressed the students' ability to write formal and informal e-mails that adhere to the standard format of e-mail writing using a genre approach support the present hypothesis that teaching students to write e-mails using a genre approach could have a positive impact on their writing. This is also in concurrence with what Hartle (2017) found in his study. Due to students being aware of e-mail moves, they were able to write well-structured e-mails. This means that most students were able to incorporate most of the taught e-mail moves into their formal and informal e-mail writing.

Additionally, results showcased that move 1 of the e-mails, which is the header was neglected by students and that they failed to include it in their formal as well as informal e-mails. In contrast, Scheyder (2003) in her investigation of native Americans' writing found that half the sample omitted the complementary close which in our study is considered the fourth move. Contradictory to her findings, our findings revealed that most students ensured that they included a complementary close preceding their signature. This issue of omitting the header could be credited to the fact that the exam is paper-based, and students did not realize that they had to fill in the field of the header provided and proceeded to write the content of the e-mail immediately. Students were very adamant in ensuring they started the e-mail with a proper salutation and ended it with a complementary close as well as their signature. This could be because textbooks and manuals place a huge emphasis on salutations and signatures as Scheyder (2003) claims. I believe that students incorporated these elements due to their awareness of the five moves of the e-mail genre taught using the genre approach during the course.

Furthermore, a positive correlation was found between the two variables which were formal and informal e-mails regarding the moves implemented in their composition. It was established that the more students used moves to write

formal e-mails and hence improve their writing, the more they used moves in informal e-mail writing and simultaneously improved their writing in it as well.

It is worth noting here that students graduating from CBS will enlist in the workforce and obtain positions in banks, private companies, and government sectors. Their skill in writing e-mails will be a deciding factor in recruiting them as well as other communicative skills and as Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) affirm, English is indeed the language of business communications and thus, students need to be proficient in it to adequately communicate with other speakers of English native or non-native. This is very important especially as Kerkeb (2013) explains that business e-mails in today's technological and commerce world are replacing the business letter and performing similar functions. This in turn creates a need to implement new teaching methods such as the genre approach to achieve better learning outcomes.

### B. Email Formality vs Informality

#### (a). Formality of Formal E-Mail

This study set out to investigate the formality displayed in the formal e-mails written by Arab female business students and the following results were obtained.

TABLE 9  
DISTRIBUTION OF LEVEL OF FORMALITY IN FORMAL BUSINESS E-MAILS (N=44)

Level of Formality	n	%	p-value
Un-satisfactory	18	40.9%	0.431
Satisfactory	15	34.1%	
Very satisfactory	11	25.0%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Table 9 shows that (40.9%, n= 18) of students were unsatisfactory in their writing of formal e-mails which indicated that 3 or more informal phrases were used in their formal e-mail writing. This is followed by (34.1%, n=15) of students who performed satisfactorily in this area and (25.0%, n=11) students who showed very satisfactory performance regarding writing formal e-mails and the use of formal language. A Chi-squared test for Goodness of fit statistically revealed that students did not show a determine pattern in the formality of business e-mails ( $\chi^2 = 1.68, DF = 2, p \text{ value} > 0.05$ ), which indicated that the performance of students in the formality of business e-mails is distributed equally across the scale. Figure 4 below further illustrates this point.

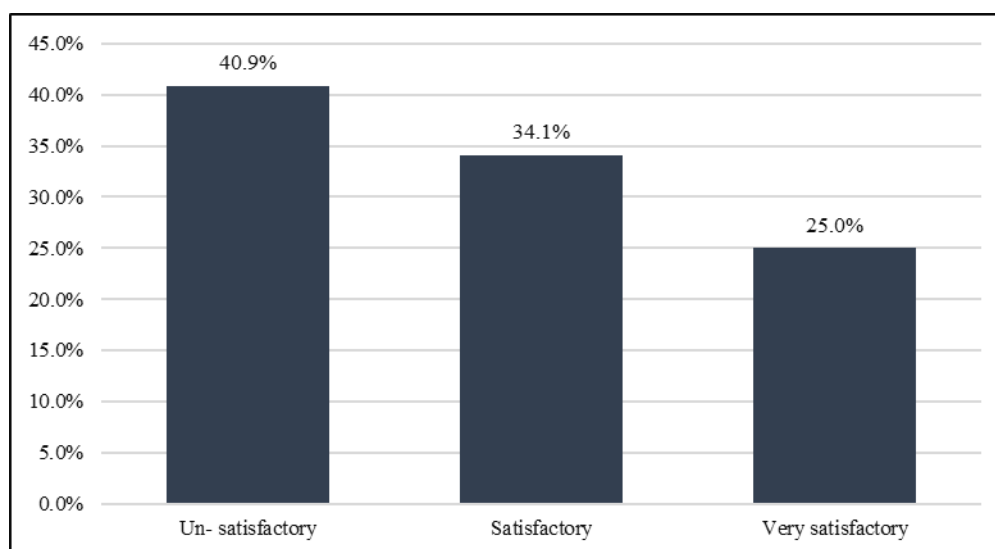


Figure 4. Distribution of Level of Formality of in Formal Business E-Mails (N=44)

The results highlight that 40.9% of students performed unsatisfactorily in writing formal e-mails. This could be attributed to the fact that students tend to use English to communicate simple day-to-day issues. When students are requested to use more complex language in their writing they simply do not know how to do so. Although much stress is put on teaching technical, formal, and complex vocabulary due to its imperativeness in ESP as Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) emphasized, students opt to use simple everyday vocabulary in their writing. Additionally, even though students are taught how to distinguish between what is acceptable to use in formal versus informal e-mails, they fall back on what is natural to them, which is simple short sentences with simple and abbreviated vocabulary. By combining the number of students whose performance was satisfactory and those who were very satisfactory, we found that they made up more than half the sample. This implies that most students were able to compose good formal e-mails.

#### (b). Informality of Informal E-Mails

Moreover, the study investigated the informality of informal e-mails and the results in Table 10 and Figure 5 below indicate that most students (90.9%, n= 40) reported very satisfactory performance regarding the informality of business e-mails. This shows that students were very competent in writing informal business e-mails. A Chi-squared test for Goodness of fit statistically and significantly revealed that students strongly adhered to the characteristics of informal business e-mails in their informal writing ( $\chi^2=29.5$ , DF=1, p value<0.01).

TABLE 10  
DISTRIBUTION OF LEVEL OF INFORMALITY OF BUSINESS E-MAILS (N=44)

Level of informality	n	%	p-value
Satisfactory	4	9.1%	0.000**
Very satisfactory	40	90.9%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>	

\*\* Significant at 1% level of significance based on Chi-squared test for Goodness of fit.



Figure 5. Distribution of Level of Informality of Business E-Mails (N=44)

The above results signify that students wrote very good informal e-mails using simple sentences and personalized abbreviations. This is in concurrence with the results yielded in Gimenez’s (2000) study where he found that writers used simple and relaxed style and register in their informal e-mails. Since one of the tasks students were asked to do in this study was to informally invite a business acquaintance to a business lunch, the language they used was simple, friendly, and full of abbreviations as well as modern emojis. Table 11 below provides examples of students’ use of abbreviations, emojis and casual language.

TABLE 11  
EXAMPLES OF RELAXED LANGUAGE

Number	Phrase	Part of the e-mail used in
1	WBW (with best wishes)	Complementary close
2	Hi Sara,	Salutation
3	I love you, see you	Complementary close
4	Thanx	Closing of body
5	CU Soon 😊	Complementary close
6	Aisha 😊	Signature
7	Long time no see!	Opening of body
8	Ya’ll R invited	Opening of body
9	Hi guys	Salutation

(c). Association Between the Performance of Students in the Category of Informality and Formality of E-Mails

TABLE 12  
ASSOCIATION BETWEEN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE STUDENTS IN INFORMALITY AND FORMALITY OF E-MAILS

Performance in Informality of e-mail		Performance in Formality of e-mail			Total
		Un- satisfactory	Satisfactory	Very satisfactory	
Satisfactory	n	2	1	1	4
	%	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	100%
Very satisfactory	n	16	14	10	40
	%	40.0%	35.0%	25.0%	100%
Total	n	18	15	11	44
	%	40.9%	34.1%	25.0%	100%

Table 12 above shows that half of the students whose performance was satisfactory regarding the informality of informal business e-mails (50%, n=2) performed un-satisfactory regarding the formality of formal business e-mails, and likewise, the majority of those students who performed very satisfactory regarding the informality of informal business

e-mails (40%, n=16) performed un- satisfactory regarding formality of formal business e-mails. A chi-squared test for the association between two variables was performed, and it revealed that there was no statistical association between the performance of the students in the informality of e-mail and their performance in the formality of e-mail ( $\chi^2 = 0.20, DF = 2, p \text{ value} > 0.05$ ). We conclude then, that students' performance in the formality of e-mail does not depend on their performance in the informality of e-mail.

### C. Parts of E-mail With Informal Language

The study also examined which part/s of the e-mails written by the students contained informal language. Collectively the results are presented below in Table 13.

TABLE 13  
PARTS OF E-MAIL WITH INFORMAL LANGUAGE

Parts of e-mail with informal language	Responses		Percent of students
	N	Per cent	
Salutation	11 (1)	13.3%	26.8%
Body	37 (8)	44.6%	90.2%
C.C	8 (0)	9.6%	19.5%
Signature	27 (2)	32.5%	65.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>83 (11)</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>202.4%</b>

The number between brackets refers to the number of students that performed satisfactorily in this single part only.

As presented in the above table, the total number of cases that corresponded to each part was 83. Up to 37 (90.2%) of all students who used informal language in the e-mail used it the most in the body of the e-mail since it represents (44.6%) of all the cases reported. Moreover, there were 27 (65.9%) students who incorporated informal language in the e-mail in the signature.

Since we have 83 cases reported with informal language in some parts of the e-mail, and the total number of the sample that participated in the current study was 44, almost every student used informal language in at least two parts of the e-mail. Figure 6 below further illustrates this point.

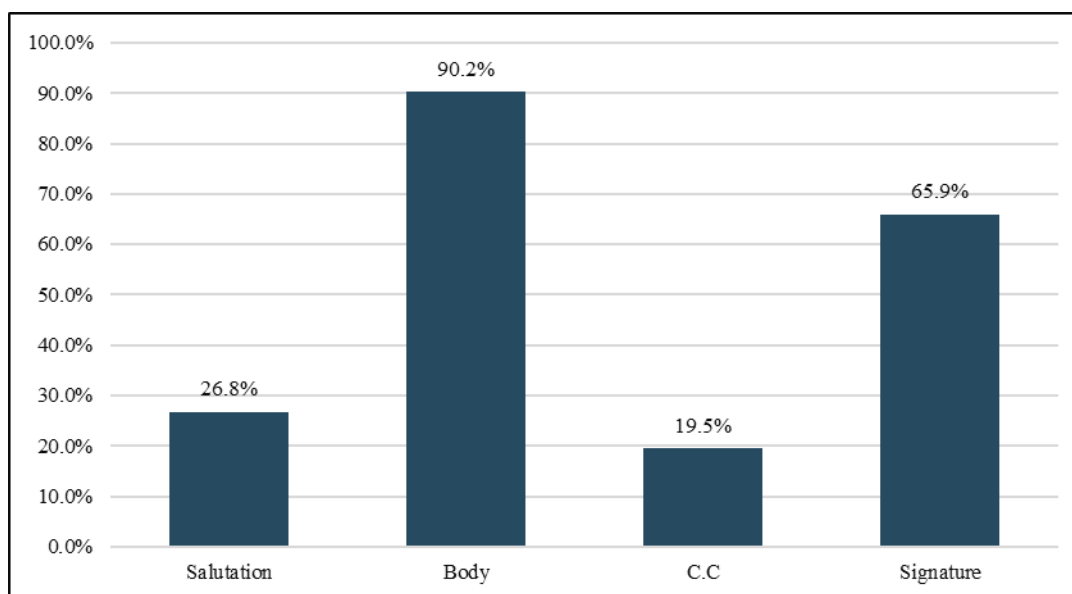


Figure 6. Parts of E-Mail With Informal Language

TABLE 14  
EXAMPLES OF INFORMAL LANGUAGE USED IN FORMAL E-MAILS

Number	Phrase	Part of the email used in
1	See you soon	Complementary close
2	Hello	Salutation
3	Bye	Complementary close
4	Nora	Signature
5	I'm writing (use of contractions)	Opening of body
6	Can you give a brochure. (incorrect use of punctuation+ language of request isn't formal)	Body
7	How are you?	Opening of body
8	dear / my/ thank you/ kuwait /london (no use of capitalization)	Salutation/ body/ opening / closing

Evidently from the results exhibited above, students used a considerable amount of informal language in the body of the e-mails. They used simple sentences that lacked complexity and employed contractions and simple vocabulary in

their writing. As stated previously writing is a challenging skill for Arab learners because of the difference between English and Arabic from a linguistic, grammatical, and cultural aspect (Al-Khatib, 2017; Hyland, 2006; Talosa & Maguddayao, 2018). This could affect the students' vocabulary choice and sentence structure. Students try to use simple straightforward language in communicating their ideas and in doing so fail to stay true to the context and register of the formal e-mail. However, in the informal e-mail, this was not an issue because they were encouraged to use simple language and employ a relaxed register and style. Additionally, punctuation marks, which are an important aspect of formal e-mail writing, were an issue for the students. This could be because Arabic is different from English in its punctuation system, and this could be the reason this issue occurred. Previous studies by Bakhshayesh (2015) and Al Fadda (2012) state that students' writing is strongly affected by L1 interference. For example, in Arabic, there is no capitalization or contracted forms like there is in English. It is then understandable that punctuation marks are problematic to Arab students when writing and their lack of using them detracts from the formality of their writing.

## V. CONCLUSION

### A. Implications of the Study

This study has yielded interesting results regarding ESP students' e-mail writing. Using the genre approach to tackle teaching business e-mails to Arab female business students in Kuwait has proven effective as the students exhibited a high level of competency in writing business e-mails by implementing the moves of the e-mail as a genre. On the other hand, it is apparent from the results that Arab female business students, although competent in writing well-structured and well-planned formal and informal business e-mails that incorporate the genre moves taught, struggled in using the correct style, in their formal e-mails. They showed a high level of competency in informal e-mail writing which indicated that they do have sufficient day-to-day vocabulary and language skills to communicate their ideas and that they do realize that the recipient of their e-mail is someone they are on informal terms with and thus, used more casual language that was relaxed both in style and register. It was when they were requested to write in a more formal style that they appeared to struggle, and hence failed to produce the appropriate complex sentences with more technical vocabulary. This in turn raised the question of whether more emphasis should be placed on teaching style, register and the context of e-mail writing and not just on teaching e-mail moves using a genre approach, considering that although this approach has proven effective in shaping e-mails, it fails to address contextual issues such as style, register and tone. Further investigation should be conducted to comprehend the basis of the problem and help students overcome it so that their writing improves.

### B. Limitations of the Study

The current study has several limitations that could be further investigated in future research. The first is the size of the sample. Applying this study to a larger sample could yield different and significant results. Additionally, this sample was only taken from the College of Business Studies in Kuwait. Collecting further data from other colleges that are part of PAAET or even from other tertiary institutions in Kuwait could provide more insights into the L2 writing skills of Kuwaiti female students. Furthermore, expanding the study to include not only female but also male students, could also yield useful results that could have pedagogical implications on the teaching of e-mail writing to Arab students and more specifically to Kuwaiti ones.

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