

## Online Course Development for Email Writing Using a Genre-Based Approach and Scaffolding Strategy<sup>\*</sup>

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**Ko, Bo-Ai. (2017). Online course development for email writing using a genre-based approach and scaffolding strategy. *Modern English Education*, 18(2), 131-159.**

This study explores the potential of an email writing lecture designed for an online writing community. Data were collected from 103 undergraduate students who enrolled in the English Writing Composition course at a cyber university in Korea during the second semester of 2016. The main writing activity included three email writings incorporating the function of requesting, based primarily on the genre approach. The effectiveness of the genre-based instruction on the online-based lecture was analyzed using the criteria of task fulfillment and appropriacy (TFA), cohesion and organization (C&O), and grammatical control (GC). In addition, this email writing course required students to participate in a survey activity designed to improve their genre awareness, including the purpose, the reader's awareness, and the degree of formality in a range of writing contexts. The target students were also involved in the particular activity of an online discussion board to share their email writing experiences, such as difficulties encountered (in both text and context levels) and practical solutions when writing emails in English. The systematic code content analysis of 187 postings including entries and comments on the online discussion board was conducted. The effectiveness of the college-level online email writing class including online tools is highlighted in line with the perspectives of socio-constructivism and the scaffolding approach, which can be successfully applied via genre-based writing instruction.

[analysis of email writing/online discussion board/scaffolding instruction/  
genre-based approach/이메일쓰기분석/온라인토론방/비계교수/장르기반접근법]

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<sup>\*</sup> This study was sponsored by the 2016 research fund of Seoul Digital University.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Email writing is not only significant in the area of computer-mediated communication (CMC), in where multimedia-based English education can be realized by using computers and internet networking, but also it enables English learners to naturally improve the genre awareness of email text if teachers can appropriately support the socio-constructivist perspective, even in formal writing classroom settings. Furthermore, formal classroom language learning can be extended to authentic language use. For these reasons, email writing has been a research target in the field of genre studies. Admittedly, it is not easy for every email writing class to employ pen-pal writing with native English writers in the classroom setting, although email experience with native writers would help learners enjoy a sense of achievement in terms of real language use. However, in the beginning level of email writing, other important aspects can be considered in the college-level online writing community, as learners need to know the characteristics of email writing as the text and context levels, beyond the lexico-grammar.

The purpose of the study described in this paper is to conduct action research in order to develop an optimal lecture format utilizing email writing in an online-based cyber university setting in the EFL Korean context. Most cyber universities in Korea have been providing their students with sentence-level composition courses and more advanced text-level academic essay writing courses. Recently, to meet target students' needs as workers in a range of business sectors, there has been a steady increase of business-related writing courses covering email writing (J. Kim, J. H. Lee, & S. Cho, 2006; E. Y. Park, 2004; D. Y. Ryu, 2014). In many cases, the courses provide students with fundamental email writing content using commercial textbooks from publishers such as Oxford or Cambridge Press, focusing on more functional expressions and the email format. However, from the perspective of sociolinguistic language education, most courses on email writing fail to relate the text studied to the relevant context-building efforts.

The researcher has been teaching English email writing for more than six years in an online-based cyber university, attempting to analyze the needs of online students in email writing lectures and the characteristics of their writing products and contexts. Based on the researcher's teaching experiences, the target students' primary needs were assumed to be learning the email text structure and language features through guided writing based on the genre approach, starting from presentation, joint construction, and independent writing. Yet they also needed something more. Email writing, which is quite similar to L1 equivalent text type, provides the target group students with extensive transferable L1 experience, including text structure and a mixed style of spoken and written modes (the matter of formality), awareness of the audience, specific purpose of the email writing, and subsequent social action. Furthermore, they need to overcome the pre-anxiety and negative

feeling as L2 learners to write emails to their native English counterparts. This kind of important aspect needs to be addressed and dealt with in the email writing lecture along with the online writing community. Thus, this research attempts to establish these challenging tasks in the existing genre-based email writing lecture format, by adding online survey and online-based discussion board tools. In other words, this email writing lecture format might take care of the real goal of the genre-based approach from the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) tradition, linking the text to the context levels. In an effort to focus on above mentioned issues, the following two research questions were raised:

- 1) How effective is the specially designed genre-based email writing class in an online cyber university at the text level?
- 2) How effective is the specially designed genre-based email writing class in an online cyber university at the context level?

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. The Korean Context of Genre-based Instruction**

In the early 1990s, as critical views of process writing emerged, the genre-based approach to teaching English writing (especially for ESL areas focusing more on immigrants, indigenous people, and primary / secondary school levels rather than college level) was used in Australian contexts under the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereinafter SFL) (Halliday, 1985; Hyland, 2007; Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Martin, 1992) and has since expanded to many ESL and EFL educational contexts. The basic definition of genre indicates that it is a socially recognized way of writing to do a particular purpose. So far, the genre-based instruction has been explored with a greater emphasis on the powerful academic genres such as narrative, procedure, report, argument and exposition. To empower the disadvantaged language groups of students with more visible ways of literacy teaching, the SFL genre-based scholars have been developing the concrete procedure of writing instruction and methodology for a range of academic genres; teachers explicitly introduce a new text type from the beginning (Hyland, 2007; Martin, 2009). For example, when target students need to know how to write narrative writing, teachers present the overall format of narrative writing by using technical terms such as orientation, complication and resolution, with recommendable samples of the genre narrative. Through the modeling process, target students will be equipped with clear ideas on how to get started with the new powerful genre. Accompanied by step-by-step

scaffolding worksheets to practice language features in word, sentence, and text levels, students will be ready to write the new genre without being overwhelmed by making the appropriate format and language choices by themselves. Also, through the process of joint construction with teachers and peer groups, students will undergo the scaffolding steps to become independent writers of narrative writing. As a springboard to master a new genre of writing, the writing instruction supports the students to be equipped with the essential parts of writing gears and to efficiently access the socially recognized ways of writing given their limited school period (to be able to catch up with other privileged groups of students who have already mastered using the advantages of their English native family gears (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 1999). In the beginning stage or during the instruction stages, teachers also make an effort to raise the target students' genre awareness and to contextualize the concerned genre writing. This wholesome literacy process has been so far proven to be successful along with the evaluation tool of text analysis based on SFL functional grammar.

Compared to other ESL or EFL educational contexts, Korean college-level English writing has relied heavily on some prominent commercial reference books provided by colleges or English institutions. Thus, although genre-based instruction was introduced to Korean educational contexts to address college students' pressing needs, it did not seem to flourish, and only some scholars and educators who experienced with the theoretical framework and practical methods for classroom application have been trying the new writing approach with their target groups in a very limited manner. As a result, comparatively little research has been done so far in using a genre-based approach when teaching English writing in Korean contexts (S. W. Kim, 2010; K. Lee, 2006; H. Park, 2012; H. Ryu, 2006; E. Shim, 2005). There has also been a lack of genre-specific writing across the curriculum.

Instead, in the Korean context, another tradition of genre study, English for specific purposes (ESP), spread to the tertiary education level (mainly academic writing for EFL undergraduate and graduate students) and workplaces with practical purposes, along with some text types such as job application letters, résumé writing, academic essay writing, or term paper writing. This trend seemed helpful for these writing areas among some target groups. B. Jeon and H. Eun (2007) explained that, apart from the genre-based approach, many scholars and writing educators applied the ESP area designed by Swales (1990); relevant research works could be found in secondary schools (K. Lee, 2006) and many college works. For example, K. Lee (2006) taught college application letter writing to 30 Korean high school students using genre-based instruction, employing the joint construction stage with peer groups. The result was significant in that particularly lower-level students' writings were improved in terms of using a number of moves and steps and applying genre-specific vocabulary as well as syntactic and rhetorical features.

Yet recently, the genre-based instruction under the Australian SFL tradition has been explored in some college levels along with various research interests by genre scholars or educators in EFL Korean contexts. In particular, in the Korean EFL context, with expository writing (text type of arguing), H. Park (2012) analyzed the effects of genre-based instruction to college students in terms of the length, text structural theme development, and grammatical features, including modality, voice, and connectives. The results of the analysis showed that the genre-based instruction significantly contributed to Korean learners' development of writing expositions in terms of the growth of the text length, text structure, and appropriate use of grammatical devices. In particular, this instruction proved to be helpful for learners of lower writing ability to improve the genre of exposition. This experimental model research successfully utilized the congruent genre instruction (explicit teaching and peer group joint construction based on scaffolding literacy) followed by the text analysis of systemic functional grammar, which is one of few cases in the Korean context.

## 2. Email Writing as a Genre Study

Martin (2009), a prominent scholar for the genre-based approach, pointed out that language is a meaning-making system and, ultimately, genre language learners need to learn that writing is a social action to be achieved through gradual awareness of its purpose, audience, and interactions of proper linguistic choices for each genre type. In this context, the email writing of an important text type in this global era, known as core communication, can be fully applicable, even in classroom settings, for language teachers to be able to achieve the essential goals of genre writing and education. In particular, the motto of SFL-based genre study in Australia seems to be important in the sense that supporting ESL/EFL learners to be able to access any powerful genres in the English-speaking cultures and countries, such as email writing in English, means empowering them to be able to participate effectively in the established circles of societies and cultures (Kress, 1991). In this regard, email writing in English in Korean EFL contexts can be an essential writing genre with which Korean EFL writers are able to accelerate their access to English-speaking countries effectively and realize their intended social actions (i.e., business or academic sectors) in this global era.

In Korean contexts, however, research on email writing has been explored mostly with the purpose of comparison between L1 and L2 email texts, rather than as a genre study with contextual factors, and the research findings have been limitedly focused on syntactic and lexical improvement of the target students' email text level. For example, J. R. Yoon's (2010) research about the effects of email exchange activity on English writing and learning demonstrated the positive effects of 20 Korean college students' email exchange.

J. R. Yoon (2010) used a survey tool and corpus analysis of lexical variation, t-units, and error analysis with selected students' email texts. The findings indicated that during 8-week email-writing period, the number of t-units increased with the syntactic variation, but there was no significant change in lexical variation. Another research work on English email writing compared and analyzed email texts of L1 and L2 writers (J. H. Chang, 2001). J. H. Chang (2001) sought to determine if any differences existed in learners' purposes for email writing, length difference between L1 and L2 email writing (the number of words, t-units, average length of t-units), the difference of sentence types between L1 and L2 email writers, and finally word choice. J. H. Chang claimed that L2 email writers tend to use more informal colloquial language than their L1 counterparts in email exchanges, mainly because L2 writers more likely use email writing for socializing than L1 users.

For direct reference on email writing class in EFL contexts with genre study tradition, it is worthwhile to note that Yasuda's (2011) research can be one model for genre scholars or educators to start with. In her research, Japanese EFL college writers attended genre-based email writing lectures for 15 weeks, along with the task-based approach, and their pre-test and post-test email writings were analyzed in terms of overall writing competency, genre-appropriate language features, and—more importantly—genre awareness (writing purpose, audience, requesting task as a social action) through a survey activity. This study also attempted to describe the genre context as well as text analysis in a step-by-step manner, presenting the college-level email writing lecture based on the genre approach. Although this research setting occurred in an offline college classroom, it provides many common research contexts to this online-based email writing lecture format.

### 3. Asynchronous Online Discussion as a Problem-Solving Task With Scaffolding Strategy

According to Loncar, Barret and Liu (2014), the essence of asynchronous online discussion exists in an online computer-mediated communication (CMC) system that permits students to read and take part in online discussions at their own pace. Gao, Zhang and Franklin (2013) also indicated the strength of asynchronous online discussion (AOD) by emphasizing that it helps students actively shape their knowledge even in the classroom setting, by giving them enough room to explore and critically exchange their views within online communities in a comfortable manner. In line with the increasing numbers of online educational institutions, asynchronous online discussion at the college level has continuously been of interest to a range of educational scholars, including those who have their tradition with constructivism; this kind of online discussion board can be used as problem-solving tasks to make learning an interactive and collaborative experience that is

guided by a social constructivist approach to teaching and learning.

Specifically, in the area of online literacy classes at the college level, under the constructivism tradition, many language educators have been utilizing AOD integrated with a problem-solving task as part of their instructional strategy (B. A. Ko, 2016). In fact, a range of scholars from different disciplines as well as language educators have indicated that problem-solving focuses on using past experience and knowledge, thinking deeply, and using cognitive skills to solve new problems. This process not only helps solve problems, but can also encourage students to interact/discuss with peers and develop their cognitive skills when applied in a cooperative learning setting (Hou, Sung, & Chang, 2009). For instance, Hou, Chang and Sung (2008) utilized problem solving-based AOD pattern with college students without the instructor's intervention or guidance and used a content code scheme and sequential analysis to figure out the possibility of in-depth discussion for problem-solving. Although the results pointed out that, to some degree, the instructor's prompt roles to extend the students' discussion might be necessary, their study reconfirmed the importance of the problem-solving-based online discussion board itself at the college level along with a well-organized discussion procedure and feedback system.

Furthermore, with the Vygotskian educational approach of socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes the notion of scaffolding, effective classroom interaction patterns have been explored in many different disciplines, including ESL/EFL language learning contexts. The term 'scaffolding', inspired by Vygotsky's concept, succinctly means an expert assisting a novice or an apprentice, but it is a special kind of temporary help that assists learners in acquiring new skills, concepts, or levels of understanding (Gibbons, 2002). The notion of scaffolding can be explained further with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the gap between what a learner can do by himself/herself and what can be achieved with the support of a knowledgeable peer or instructor. As Vygotsky claimed, effective collaborative learning contexts need to be fostered by utilizing the notions of scaffolding and ZPD between teacher and students or among peer groups, mainly through meaningful and effective dialogue patterns (Vygotsky, 1978). The idea that mixed group members such as more capable students and less capable ones successfully seek problem-solving in challenging writing tasks has been adopted in some online educational contexts as well as offline language classroom settings. In a recent study, a significant increase in active participation and meaningful negotiations was found within the scaffolded groups as opposed to the non-scaffolded group (Huang, Wu, & Chen, 2012).

In addition, a recent review of the types of scaffolding used in online learning identified four main types of scaffolding: conceptual scaffolding, procedural scaffolding, strategic scaffolding, and meta-cognitive scaffolding, which prompts students to think

about what they are learning throughout the process and assists students in reflecting on what they have learned. One study showed that meta-cognitive scaffolding can be used to encourage students to make reflection and help build a sense of community among learners (Jumaat & Tasir, 2014). Specifically, Reingold, Rimor, and Kalay (2008) recommended using meta-cognitive scaffolding to support students working on a common task. They concluded that this could support learners to experience their work as part of a community of learners. This pedagogical implication presumably indicates that various forms of scaffolding strategies in online learning environments should be adapted appropriately or contexts specifically in order to lead online learners to new, highly technological socio-cultural settings in a successful manner (Yelland & Masters, 2007).

When considering the general characteristics of self-directed and goal-oriented adult learners in online educational settings who still need to control their learning by participating in their online learning community (by rejecting only as a passive lecture receiver), many other modified versions of the scaffolding approach should be designed and applied. In a similar vein, for example, when genre-based writing instruction at the college level under socio-cultural theory is applied in the online language learning contexts, instructors are able to operate their online lecture from modeling, joint construction, and independent writing as separate sessions through the online lecture instruction (in an explicit and demystifying way) and, as a supplementary tool, through online discussion activity, students are further supposed to develop their genre awareness (purpose, audience and context building) and problem-solving with their peer groups mainly through a two-tiered scaffolding approach (Gibbons, 2002). By doing this, the interrelatedness of the teacher's and learner's roles and the active roles of both in the learning process can be effectively achieved. Under the learning framework of social constructivism, more reflective and collaborative learning fostered by the scaffolding approach through online discussion tools can supplement the main part of genre-based instruction. This research study has the very goal of designing the online writing lecture and discussion session under the above-mentioned socio-constructivist framework.

### **III. METHOD**

#### **1. Participants**

The 103 English department undergraduate students at a cyber university in Korea who took the English Composition Practice II course in the second semester of 2016 participated in this study. As similarly representing one of the cyber university's

characteristics, the demographic profile of the participants showed that their age ranged from their twenties to their sixties, and many of the participants worked (in jobs related to English education or other business areas) and studied simultaneously. Most participants (more than 90%) were English major students while the rest was from other various ranges of majors. The main goal for the course was for students to develop their English writing skills up to the text and context level through the practical genre of email writing, which is essential for their preparation to get into English-related business areas or improve their email writing in their current jobs. More detailed information on participants is provided in section IV (Results; 2-1. The Results of Survey Analysis).

## 2. Course Description

The English Composition Practice II online-based course seeks to introduce English email writing to foreign language writers by using genre-based instruction, which has the characteristics of the explicit teaching of text structure and language features through sample text demonstration, joint construction, and independent writing sessions in sequence (Hyland, 2007). Thus, under the genre-based instruction, the lecturer designed the course in such a way to provide the students access to essential patterns and possibilities of variation in email sample texts with instructional scaffolding throughout the whole course period. In addition to the text level-focused lecture format, this course included more online activities of survey and discussion boards so that the target students' genre awareness could be activated and improved with the context building of email writing. In more detail, the online email course at the cyber university is composed of 14 weeks of lectures, with three sections of 25 minutes each (totaling 75 mins for one week). The following Table 1 shows the lecture titles from week 1 to 14. The lecture titles were based on the target students' need analysis, covering the first half of basic email functions and the latter half of more advanced business contexts.

**TABLE 1**  
The Lecture Titles of the Online Email Course

Week	Lecture title	Week	Lecture title
week 1	Introducing yourself	week 2	Arranging meetings
week 3	Discussing travel plans	week 4	Recommending
week 5	Inviting	week 6	Making inquires
week 7	Placing orders	week 8	Responding to orders
week 9	Making payment	week 10	Complaints
week 11	Checking progress	week 12	Discussing proposals
week 13	Social situations	week 14	Review session

Each lecture started with the lecturer's presentation and modeling session (the first 25 min session), analyzing the title related email text in an explicit way to identify the email format and language features. The next session for joint construction (the second 25 min session) was followed and this time, the students had an online based lecturer-supported (guided) practice with the same email texts which were already demonstrated to the students. Finally the third session was a more advanced practice session for the students' independent writing. The practice session for independent writing utilized the blended HTML5 (HyperText Markup Language 5) technique of e-learning which allowed students to input their writing from phrase to sentence and finally up to text-level practice task, along with a feedback system in a systematic manner. The carefully scaffolded steps of three sessions were conducted throughout the course in a recycling way. Actually the lecturer's roles during the main lecture sessions were to present the lecture content to the students with an explicit methodological model as well as to facilitate the students to move forward as more independent email writers through the first session to second and the final session. Furthermore, this course attempted different teacher-learner roles by adding different types of online activities such as survey and discussion board during the course. It was designed to activate student-student interaction and the other level of scaffolding strategy.

### 3. Data Sources and Analysis Tools

To address the two research questions of this study, mainly four sets of quantitative and qualitative data sources were collected: email assignments, corpus data, online survey and online discussion board. To investigate the effectiveness of the online email course based on genre approach at the text level (in terms of email text format development and genre-appropriate linguistic choices), overall text analysis of the students' email assignments using the criteria of TFA, C&O and GC as well as AntConc frequency analysis on genre specific linguistic expressions were chosen as analysis tools. Also, to investigate the effectiveness of the email course at the context level (in terms of raising the students' genre awareness such as the purpose of email writing, reader awareness and the degree of formality), online survey analysis and the code content analysis of online discussion board were used both qualitatively and quantitatively

#### 1) Email Writing Assignments; Overall Text Analysis Using the Criteria of TFA, C&O and GC

The main purpose of these sequenced assignments of email writing is to give

students opportunities to develop their skills in formal requesting email writing in academic and business contexts with pedagogical but more closely authentic settings. The first assignment was to write an email to introduce themselves to the class professor and to make two requests for their email class. The second assignment was to write an email to a business partner in a formal manner, complaining about their shipment condition with a further request for their future business. The final email assignment was to thank to the professor for their email class and achievement and to request two things for future email class to the professor. The final email task was compared to the first one in specific terms of the email function of requesting to the same addressee (the professor). Through these tasks, students experienced formally addressing the receiver of the emails (reader awareness) and the specific functions or purposes of each email (e.g., requesting, introducing and thanking, complaining), along with getting used to the text format of email writing. These email writing products were assessed using the three analytic criteria of task fulfillment and appropriacy (TFA), cohesion and organization (C&O), and grammatical control (GC), based on Lumley's (2005) scale descriptors (see more detailed criteria descriptions in Appendix). The criteria were chosen by the reason that it would fit for text analysis and assessment based on genre study, particularly for the assessment of the requesting or giving information which was the same type of task used in this study (Lumley, 2005; Yasuda, 2011).

## 2) Corpus of Email Assignments; AntConc Frequency Analysis on Genre-Specific Linguistic Expressions

To examine the students' email writing development on genre-specific linguistic choices in relation to the email function of 'requesting', a corpus of the students' email assignments was created, and then the concordance software AntConc 3.4 was used to provide a frequency count of a range of formulaic, genre-specific expressions to make request.

## 3) Background Survey Analysis in the Beginning Stage

In order to activate students' genre awareness of email writing at both the text and context levels, students were asked to complete a background survey, which counted for 5% (as a participation score) of the total 100% evaluation score scale. The survey was administered at the beginning of the course (from week 1 to 2) using the cyber university's LMS online survey tool. The nine survey items included basic background survey items such as age range, gender, job area, and general English proficiency (with

TOEIC score), and—more importantly—experience in email writing in L1 (Korean) and L2 (English) in a range of contexts (general, business). The last survey item asked students to identify three of their greatest concerns when writing emails in English from the following choices: 1) grammatical error, 2) word choice, 3) text format, 4) addressing, 5) overall email length, 6) formality, 7) spoken or written style, 8) greeting and closing, 9) purpose of email writing, and 10) whether overall meaning can be communicated.

#### 4) Online Discussion Board as Problem-solving Task; Code Content Analysis

This course was designed for the target students to improve their English email writing (as an important genre in their lives) in both text and context levels under the socio-constructivist perspective. Thus, the course not only managed an effective email writing lectures using genre-based approach but also combined with an online discussion forum where students could exchange their thoughts and experience on email genre writing up to context level. Contrastingly with the previous closed ways of the students' interaction patterns mainly through Q&A board to the lecturer, this course managed to open a discussion board for three weeks between the first and final assignments to activate student-student interactions by sharing their authentic problems during their email assignments. When positing, students were allowed to use their convenient language (either Korean or English) so that they could do this activity in a comfortable way.

The lecturer's main role in this task was to provide the students with some guideline by reminding what the course was for and what specific issues would be acceptable. The lecturer was not involved to the students' online discussion for the purpose of making students' interaction more actively among themselves. Discussion board activity was added as an evaluation tool (accounting for 10% of students' grade) to encourage students' active participation. The postings of main entry writings and comments were examined systematically by the mixed method of code content analysis based on Hew and Cheung's (2008) research which deals with the similar online discussion board. Figure 1 shows the discussion board notice for guiding students to participate actively in the online discussion and readily engage with a brief review on email writing lectures.

**Online Discussion Board – Presenting the discussion topic**

**Title: “Sharing my English email writing experience”**

Dear English Composition Practice II community members,

Hello again!

This class is a composition course to learn a new genre of email writing in English. As a community member of the Composition Practice II course, you should share the class goal to improve your composition skills for email writing in English in both general and business contexts. Since the first week, you have been learning email writing systematically, utilizing sample email texts through modeling, joint construction, and independent writing practice in the genre-based approach. However, you have also learnt that, even though you have been learning about the text format of email writing in English and relevant sentence patterns and expressions systematically at the text level, you still need to catch up with genre awareness, such as the purpose of email writing (as a specific genre) and the concept of audience (with whom you are writing email) as well as the situation in the context level with in a sociolinguistic perspective. Otherwise, you cannot be a successful writer for a specific genre of email writing.

In this online discussion, I hope that you as an online writing community member will be able to share your experience to become a good email writer in English in an honest manner, inclusive of any difficulty in both the text and context levels and any episodes to overcome your difficulty. Simply put, you can share any useful internet sites for email writing, such as pen pal sites or writing centers, or any simple tip/writing strategy to become a good email writer as a practical solution or guideline. This online writing community is composed of mixed groups, with both experienced and novice writers of email in English, and I hope that those who have experience writing email in English will more actively share their successful stories and tips with those with less experience. In this manner, I think the whole community will build a greater sense of community while learning email writing up to the context level (not only limited to the text level), along with genre awareness, and will encourage balanced writers in the genre of email writing. Discussion board participation can be in either English or Korean to ensure your more active and sincere participation and contribution to this online writing community. I hope that you will be able to improve your email writing through this meaningful discussion board as a problem-solving task. Also, this activity would be very helpful for your final assignment, which will substitute for our final exam.

**FIGURE 1** The Discussion Board Notice Writing

## **IV. RESULTS**

### **1. Text Level; Overall Text Analysis and Genre-Specific Linguistic Expressions**

#### **1) Text Analysis Results based on Task Fulfillment and Appropriacy (TFA), Cohesion & Organization (C&O), and Grammatical Control (GC)**

This course asked the students to submit three assignments during the 14-week period—in the beginning stage (week 4), in the middle stage (week 9), and in the ending stage (week 14)—to make them practice writing academic and business emails in a formal manner, focusing on the functions of requesting, complaining, and thanking. To track their overall

progress in writing emails, the TFA, C&O, and GC criteria were applied as the evaluation framework. Each assignment accounted for 15% of the total 45% (the total perfect score), with the TFA, C&O, and GC counting for 5% for each section of each assignment. As the course designed the first and third assignments in quite a similar way in terms of the task (requesting and thanking) and academic setting (addressing the lecturer as a student, more authentic task) and the second assignment was relatively different from the first and last ones in terms of task (complaining) and setting (business setting, not authentic, addressing an imaginary business partner), the actual progress patterns were more closely compared with the first and the last assignments. The evaluation was done by the researcher (lecturer) according to the criteria; when the assignment period ended, the lecturer gave each student concrete feedback with the score on the online assignment submission box.

The overall numerical scores of TFA, C&O, and GC were summed up for each section, and the totals for the first and last assignments were also compared. Ninety-two students submitted the first assignment, compared to 88 for the last assignment, so 4 students' scores were not summed up for the last assignments. Still, the last assignment's scores were higher than the first one in every section, as shown in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
Overall Numerical Scores of TFA, C&O, and GC

Assignment	TFA	C&O	GC	Total
1st (92 students)	422	411	400	1233
2nd (85 students)	419	394	389	1202
3rd (88 students)	432	417	410	1259
Total	1273	1222	1199	

Comparing the TFA, C&O, and GC of the first and last assignments, at least the numerical scores show that each section had an almost even improvement curve. However, looking more closely at each section by the level of proficiency, the advanced group of students did not show much change based on the score only, but some of them might have become aware of the text format, especially paragraph formatting (indenting or skipping one line consistently), when they received feedback on this point in the first assignment and then reflected this understanding successfully in their last assignment. Their formal way of requesting and thanking seemed to be developed in a more sophisticated way by using a range of linguistic expressions. Also, those who belonged to the intermediate level of English writing proficiency had the most amount of influence on each section (TFA, C&O, and GC); they gradually learned to click on the text format adjustment from the first assignment to the last one along with addressing the tasks of requesting, complaining, and thanking in a mixed formal and informal manner. As for their grammar control, they could proofread for basic grammar errors (e.g., capital letters), email format and punctuation for

salutations (e.g., Dear Ms. Ko,) and complimentary close (e.g., sincerely,) or signature (their last name first, given name later, using the first letter with capitals). More remarkably, their TFA and C&O areas were quite improved as the course used the genre-based approach, which emphasizes the text format with sample modeling and explicit teaching. In this course, students in the intermediate level of English writing proficiency benefitted the most. Approximately 20 students in this group showed a steady improvement curve on their scores for each assignment. Compared to this group of students, beginner students appeared to have continued writing their email assignments with similar grammar errors and in an informal manner, even though C&O area—especially email text format and punctuation—was partially improved in some cases.

The following is a sample of one advanced-level student’s third assignment in this course, which displays a range of linguistic features and formal expressions of thanking and requesting. In comparison to her first assignment, which nonetheless demonstrated a consistent and flawless email format, the third assignment improved substantially in terms of the writer’s confidence in controlling and addressing the function of appropriate requesting (C&O) and extending word choice and syntactic patterns beyond the modeled examples suggested throughout the lectures.

Dear Professor Ko,

This is (the student’s name), and I am a fourth-year student of the English Language Studies. I would like to thank you for everything you have taught me in English Composition II. This fourteen-week course was awesome! The informal and formal expressions for emails that I learned in the class helped me improve my writing speed. Now, it takes less time to decide which expressions I should use for the purpose of the email. I am also thankful that you gave us the opportunity to discuss “Writing emails and how to overcome challenges”. I enjoyed sharing my stories and ideas with my classmates on the discussion board. Through their stories, I learned very useful tips for better writing and I was able to give some of my peers advice about difficulties that they were struggling with. It was very encouraging for me to hear that some of my classmates loved my stories and ideas about email writing.

As you requested, I would like to propose some ideas to make this course more effective and productive as an e-learning course. I would appreciate it if you could allow us to discuss more diverse topics during the semester. One of the advantages of online courses is more interaction. Different from traditional courses, even shy and quiet students can easily give their opinions, and it is possible to have a huge group discussion. I was also wondering if you could encourage students to actively use the “Resources” link on the website. I think that everyone uses different resources to improve their writing skills, so uploading source materials would greatly benefit all students. This could be an amazing repository of learning materials.

Thank you again for your wonderful lectures the last fourteen weeks.

Respectfully,

**FIGURE 2** A Sample of One Advanced-Level Student’s Email Assignment

## 2) AntConc Frequency Analysis on Genre-Specific Linguistic Expressions

In order to examine the progress of the students' sentence-level linguistic expressions related to a specific function of the assignments, AntConc 3.4 version was applied with the corpus of the three assignments of the target students' email writings. In particular, the overlapping function of 'requesting' in a formal manner in both the first and third assignments was closely analyzed in this section. The key verbs for the search were selected through sample assignments, focusing on the relevant paragraph of 'requesting'. First, the direct verb for requesting, 'request', was searched using the \* code. Similar verbs with a meaning of requesting (synonym)—'suggest', 'propose', and other verbs that can be used to make the requesting function (e.g., 'wish', 'want', and 'make')—were selected as well. In addition, auxiliary verbs such as 'would', 'could', and 'should' were searched for their frequency in close relation to formal manners. Finally, patterns of complex sentences, such as 'I wonder if' and 'It would be appreciated if' were searched.

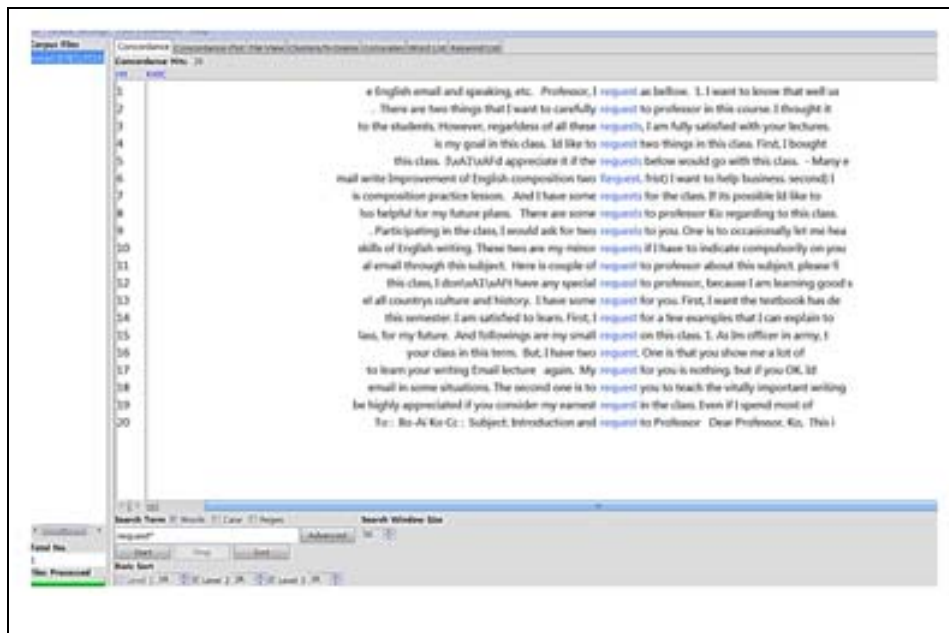


FIGURE 3 The Sample of AntConc 3.4 Concordance Analysis

The comparison in Table 3 shows the basic data analysis of each element's frequency between the first and third assignment corpus.

**TABLE 3**  
Frequency Chart of Requesting Verbs

	Verb Items Related to Requesting	Category	1st Assignment Frequency	3rd Assignment Frequency
1	request		13	37
	suggest	direct verb usage	11	7
	propose		0	5
2	wish	More casual use/	5	7
	make	alternative as direct	3	4
	want	verbs	97	29
3	would	Auxiliary verbs/	97	173
	could	Complement for formal	37	52
	should	manner	12	9
4	I wonder if...		8	3
	It would be appreciated if...(if complex)	Formulaic expressions for requesting	64	84
	I would like to...		46	87

As shown in Table 3, the use of 'request' increased in the third assignment corpus and the more casual and informal verb 'want' sharply decreased. In addition, the auxiliary verbs 'would' and 'could', which are more relevant to the formal requesting semantic function, were found in more cases in the third assignment corpus. The formulaic expressions for requesting (e.g., 'I would like to' and 'if' complex sentences) were found more often in the third assignment corpus than the first one. This result implies that more students became aware of the differences between formal and informal ways for addressing the request task in email writing and were able to apply more linguistic choices for polite and formal requests as the lectures proceeded.

Another important finding is that many advanced students were willingly exploring the different range of verb phrases or syntactic patterns for polite and formal ways of making requests in the assignments, which means the genre-based instruction does not produce only fixed or stereotyped linguistic choices in a particular genre of writing (Hyland, 2007), but there could be more room for flexibility and creativity for those who have learned and progressed to a certain level of English writing proficiency. Those at the intermediate or beginner level had a tendency to copy the modeled sentence patterns provided by the lecturer in sample texts; yet even among these levels, some students were attempting to apply what they had learned from the lectures to their known sentence patterns, resulting in some grammatical errors that needed to be addressed. However, overall, genre-based instruction followed by relevant email practices was quite successful in terms of increasing the usage of linguistic expressions in formal ways of requesting (specific task-related expressions), especially for advanced students and some intermediate students. For beginner students, more systematic grammatical instruction seemed to be needed beforehand.

## 2. Context Level: Survey Analysis and Online Discussion Board Analysis

### 1) The Results of Survey Analysis

To activate students' genre awareness of email writing in both the text and context levels, a background survey was conducted at the beginning of the course for two weeks; about 60% of students (59 of 102 students) participated in this survey. This was a relatively lower level of survey participation than expected, but to some degree it could reflect the general trend of most students' need analysis for the course. According to the survey results, the male-female ratio of survey participants was 39% male and 61% female, and the age range was mostly in their 30s (38.9%), 40s (28.8%), and 20s (22%), while the rest were in their 50s (8.47%) and over 60 (1.83%). Their job area included general business firms (28.8%), English education (15.2%), trading companies or foreign companies (8.47%), branches in foreign countries (6.77%), and others (30.5%). One group of students (10.26%) was not assigned to any job area; they were just students. The survey participants' general English proficiency (TOEIC score) was distributed mainly in the 300-500 (44%) and 500-700 (22%) ranges. Some students earned higher scores (800: 10.33%; over 900: 6.77%) or lower scores (100-300:16.9%). The various range in TOEIC score distribution shows this course's participants had a high deviation of English proficiency levels. Regarding the question items on how much experience the students have in email writing in L1 (Korean) and L2 (English) in a range of contexts (general, business), for L1, participants were divided almost evenly between those experienced in L1 email writing (somewhat, a lot) and those with no experience (not at all, A little). However, for L2 (English) email writing, the students with no or only a little experience outnumbered those with somewhat more or a lot of experience (77% to 23%). In the business setting, they showed a very similar ratio of those with experience in email writing in English (about 24%) and those with no experience (about 76%). Based on the statistics of general English proficiency levels and email writing experience in English, about 30% of the students were considered advanced learners; the remaining 70% could be divided into beginners with somewhat different levels. These results imply that students for this course represent a mixed group in terms of English proficiency level and email writing competency level. Finally, the last survey item asked learners about their three greatest concerns when writing emails in English. The survey results were as follows:1) grammatical error (72.8%), 2) word choice (61%), 3) formality (33.8%), 4) whether overall meaning can be communicated (35.5%), 5) spoken or written style (33.8%), 6) text format (32.2%), 7) purpose of email writing (18.6%), 8) greeting and closing (11.8%), 9) addressing (10.1%), and 10) email's overall length (3.8%). The results show that the majority of participants were more interested in

grammatical errors, word choice, and formality which is one of the main reasons for the email writing course (to distinguish the formal and informal manner).

## 2) The Results of Online Discussion Board Analysis

Initially, the researcher coded each posting using the facilitating technique scheme based on Hew and Cheung's (2008) research framework in the context of a university-level online discussion forum. To analyze the postings on the online discussion board with the specific topic of 'sharing my email writing experience', initial coding with up to 30 entries was examined, and the coding scheme was finalized along with another 157 entries as the coding and key content summary kept pace with the process. Double coding was accepted as some entries contained two or more code contents and commenting. The coding scheme was first classified into two categories: main entry and comments writing. It was assumed that the main entry section would have lengthier writings in which the participants shared their thoughts and experiences in detail. The comments section was expected to be relatively shorter and simpler than the main entries, with more postings for emotional support and giving extra information. The coding scheme is followed in Table 4.

**TABLE 4**  
Code Scheme of This Study

Main Entry		Comments	
Category	Code	Category	Code
Sharing email writing process	1	Expressing sympathy And giving a compliment	1
Informing practical tips for email writing in English	2	Encouraging	2
Summarizing or refreshing main elements of the lecture	3	Giving appreciation	3
Encouraging to boost confidence in email writing in English/suggesting	4	Sharing experience combined with willingness to do something (getting motivated)	4
Thanking for the lecture	5	Recommending/Suggesting	5
Asking for help/questioning	6	Expressing different opinion	6

### (1) Code counting (Main entry vs. Comments)

The result of the code counting as a whole indicates that there were the different role functions of the main entry and comments writing. The number of entries and comments for each coding is shown in Table 5 as follows.

**TABLE 5**  
Number of Entries and Comments for Each Code

	Code#1	Code#2	Code#3	Code#4	Code#5	Code#6
Main Entry (total:77)	29	17	8	7	8	8
Comments (total 110)	56	12	19	15	4	4

The majority of codes in the entry section were number 1 (sharing email writing process: 29 out of 77 entries) and number 2 (informing practical tips for Email writing in English: 17 out of 77 entries). The basic function of the main entries was assumed to be ‘giving one’s opinion and experience’; as expected, most of the lengthy entries (i.e. more than 10 lines) belonged to this theme category, with kind of active students expressing their email writing experience in an enthusiastic manner. Although the number of entries was not many for code numbers 3 and 4 (summarizing or refreshing main elements of the lecture, encouraging to boost confidence in email writing), these entries had a big influence on students’ ability to invoke many comments and accordingly make contributions to the online community through emotional touch or cognitive stimulus.

Meanwhile, essential functions for writing comments were to provide other students with emotional support and to build up the sense of online community. The codes of the overwhelming majority were ‘sympathizing’ (code 1: 56 of 110), ‘giving appreciation’ (code 3: 19 of 110), and ‘encouraging’ (code 2: 12 of 110). The emotional theme codes outnumbered the other categories, such as ‘recommending’ (code 5: 4 out of 110) and ‘expressing different opinion’ (code 6: 4 out of 110). Although the important cognitive categories (e.g., questioning and objecting in the comments writing) were comparatively low, the other functions of community building and emotional support were in full bloom by the participants of sincere comments writing.

When the postings of this discussion board were observed at specific times (i.e., beginning, middle, and end stages), some noteworthy group dynamics were revealed through a more detailed code analysis of entry writings. In the beginning stage, mostly advanced students in terms of English proficiency (especially writing skills) or students experienced in email writing in English tended to initiate main entry writings more actively by stating their successful learning on email writing along with providing practical tips on how to use email writing in EFL contexts. Some students carried out their roles as emotional supporters by emphasizing the confidence in the sense that novice email writers in English should overcome unnecessary hesitations; they are often afraid of making grammatical errors and awkward expressions in writing emails to English-speaking persons and rarely attempt to send emails even though they might have sufficient capability to communicate in English. Entry #26 addressed this issue, and 8 comments responded to this by sympathizing very strongly and triggering other students’ honest sharing about their

similar experiences. Advanced students included those who had work experience in business overseas, lived in English-speaking countries, or were exposed to a certain level of email writing in English through internet shopping to overseas or trading. One approximately 70-year-old lady had been using email writing in her business work area. When she explained her background story on email writing practice (entry#33), many students' comments sympathizing and praising her efforts and sincerity followed. Advanced students surely led the beginning stage of the online discussion by contributing both informative lengthy threads and very sincere and emotional scaffolding. It was very pleasant to observe that their writings did not seem to show off their advanced level of English proficiency or capability to write English emails, but most of their entries were so persuasive and sincere that other groups (i.e., beginner and intermediate levels) could open up and share their stories in the next stage.

In the middle stage, the main feature was that more interaction occurred between advanced students and beginner students. Beginner students actually began opening up and sharing their stories in lengthy threads with details, and some students actively asked for help by questioning their problems (entries#54, #62, #89, #108). So a question-and-answer patterned discourse appeared more and, in the comments, advanced students took on a greater role in scaffolding in a very kind and encouraging way. In the middle stage, the synergy effect to help each other and communicate more actively between the mixed groups seemed to increase; sometimes, beginner students (entry#65) shared their first attempt to use English email writing by buying something through an overseas internet route or reserving hotel accommodations for overseas travels, thereby giving practical ideas for using email writing in English in an EFL context. Entry#67 summarized the main features of email writing in English, which provided insights into email writing by refreshing what the students learned through the lectures and their personal experiences; this learner fulfilled a really supportive role with cognitive scaffolding. Practical tips were continuously provided by some advanced students; Entry#41 explained email formality or how to avoid typos and grammatical errors and strongly recommended using a collocation dictionary. Entry#53 suggested using some practical tools such as 'Grammarly', 'Hemingway', or 'VisuWords'. Entry#107 provided more practical tips, such as using spellchecker or Google search engine. More practical tips were explosively shared among the mixed groups and were followed by positive comments, thereby further activating the sense of an online writing community.

In the ending stage, unfortunately the participation heat cooled down somewhat, and the number of comments on writing decreased significantly, compared to the beginning and middle stages. However, the main writing entries of beginner students continued as they freely shared their experiences, including appealing difficulty and failure in email writing in English and suggesting some solutions and willingness to practice email writing on a

regular basis. The positive atmosphere of the online writing community continued, and questioning patterns (entry#139 & entry#169) appeared again.

(2) Impressive entries depending on different code themes

Specifically related to theme codes #2 (informing practical tips for email writing in English) and #3 (summarizing or refreshing main elements of the lecture), some students—mostly advanced students—raised important issues about this course’s aims to build context as well as text-level email writing. Some examples of key words on which students focused and paid more attention on the discussion board included: the importance of context building, reader awareness, confidence matter, suffering from an obsession not to make grammatical errors or perfect English, language use through real-world experience (e.g., direct overseas shopping through internet), formal and informal manners, transferring email skills from L1 to L2, email format learning through sample modeling, regular exercise and practice, basic writing skills, and editing by employing useful tools.

To exemplify the entries representing the important theme codes, such as context building and confidence matter, Figures 4 and 5 (translated into English) provide a snapshot of the online discussion session.

**Title: It is important to understand the counterpart’s situational context in email writing**  
 When we try to email in English, we can get some chances to meet a range of international people. That means we can come across a range of international people in terms of geography and cultural backgrounds. In this sense I think we need to try to understand the other counterparts before we take care of the content of email writing only. That is to say, supposing that the writers have a reasonable understanding of each other’s situations and contextual things beforehand, they can be in a good position to write more successful emails. Generally speaking, we need to consider the counterpart’s culture and style by overcoming the writer’s egocentric thinking. If we try to do email writing in a general stereotyped way, we might convey the content of email writing which we intend to, but probably the effect of delivery might not be higher than expected. So I would like to say that one of the important elements in email writing in English is to understand the counterpart’s culture and situational background beforehand.

**FIGURE 4** Example of Main Entry (#10)

Figure 4 shows a sample of “summarizing or refreshing main elements of the lecture” (main entry – code #3), in which the student refreshed the importance of context building in relation to reader awareness, one of the course aims. It was quite significant that one student highlighted this important issue again through the online discussion board so that many other students responded very positively to this issue, and the researcher was convinced that the lecture aim of that point was achieved to some degree.

**Title: My opinion of the discussion**

I agree that we need to be more confident. We are often afraid of making mistakes, and this does not help us improve our English at all. You might think that you look stupid when you make mistakes, but actually no one will judge you. Back in school in Toronto, one of my professors said, "No one can speak perfect English." I believe this is true because I saw lots of Canadians and Americans making grammar mistakes. Please think about our Korean level. Are you perfect in Korean language? I bet that no one will "yes," but we sure can say that we are fluent in Korean! Rather than stressing yourself out trying to be a perfect English writer or speaker, it would be more sensible to focus on how to make a clear point of view in your writing. When I am embarrassed by my mistakes, I always say, "Let it go, that's not a big deal." I also like your idea that writing journals can improve our English. To be honest, I do not write journals, but I love to write restaurant reviews and book reviews. I often summarize newspaper articles or ones from magazines that I am interested in. The most important thing is choosing topics you can enjoy. Just give it a shot! Any topics that you like! It does not have to be long. "The more you practice, the better you get."

**FIGURE 5** Example of Comment Entry (#19)

Figure 5 shows a sample of 'recommending' (comments writing – code 5) and 'expressing sympathy and giving a compliment' (comments writing – code 1). As sharing a sincere experience-based story, the student participated in comments writing with a persuasive suggestion to have confidence in English email writing by avoiding any obsession such as perfect English. This kind of comments writing was one of good examples to prove that there were student facilitators who proactively did the key role of scaffolding.

## V. DISCUSSION

### 1. Online Email Writing Course With Genre-Based Approach to Improve Text Format and Genre-Specific Linguistic Choices

Based on the positive results of the text analysis of the target students' email assignments, overall, the students progressed in their email writing at the text level, inclusive of fulfilling the specific tasks of requesting, introducing, and thanking in a formal manner by using relevant verb phrases and syntactic patterns, familiarizing a formal email format (e.g., salutation, complimentary close, and signature), along with a consistent way of formatting paragraphs, including email format-related punctuation. The researcher's evaluation criteria of TFA, C&O, and GC for comprehensive text analysis along with the additional tool of AntConc analysis for the usage frequency and collocation of a range of formal ways of requesting surely demonstrate students' overall improvement on email writing in terms of the text level. As indicated earlier in the result analysis section,

especially for beginner students, there should be more systematic help and instructional assistance to take care of their lack of grammar control beforehand or simultaneously with this kind of genre-based instruction.

The result of the class satisfaction score and analysis of student comments performed at the end of the semester were also relatively higher than the last semester, which means the modified genre-based instruction followed by the relevant writing tasks (three times with replacement of the previous final exam) made the target students feel more satisfied with the overall design of the course and effective class management. The genre-based instruction with the three stages of presentation, joint construction and independent writing effectively extended to the relevant email tasks (assignment activity), which were carefully designed to write with authentic purpose and content. Many students seemed to appreciate the structured and systematic online course design, and those who sincerely followed the practice session of independent writing and email tasks (three times) with the lecturer's individual feedback developed a sense of achievement and made improvements on the course goals.

As the third email assignment gave a chance to reflect the course's good points and asked students to make two requests for further improvement, which fulfilled the role of a written interview on the course, many constructive and productive requests for a better online course dealing with email writing were addressed; they could be very significant for pedagogical suggestions in the target students' voice. These requests included the following: 1) The course's alternative email task can be exchanging emails among students, which would make students feel more real and authentic in performing the email assignments. 2) This course focused on a more formal way of writing emails in business and academic settings, but it could also include a more informal way of writing emails to catch up with current contexts of the email genre. 3) There should be some chances to share the target students' email samples, especially good ones so that they can learn from their community members' writings and get more motivated. 4) More detailed grammar explanations during the lecture would be much more helpful for those who do not have basic grammar knowledge.

## 2. Genre Awareness and Context Knowledge Building Through the Online Email Writing Course

This course had a clear goal to integrate the text level of competency with the proper context knowledge building for the genre of email writing. The additional activity of the online discussion forum to share the difficulty of email writing in English and online survey activity in the beginning stage of the course proved to be quite effective in extending the traditional genre-based instruction to a more integrated course of text and

context building. As explained in the result analysis section, the survey activity seemed to raise genre awareness and further the online discussion forum among a mixed-ability group, enabling them to actively discuss context-related issues, such as reader awareness and formality issues (formal and informal manners) as well as the purpose of email writing.

In particular, advanced students with a higher level of English writing proficiency and more email writing experience in English fulfilled a scaffolding role for inexperienced students by sharing their successful stories with sincerity and providing very practical tips to improve email writing in English. This online discussion forum among the mixed groups utilized the pedagogical notion of scaffolding literacy, where group members competent and experienced in writing emails successfully led less competent members as practical informers and emotional supporters, and the confidence issue in attempting email writing in English was explosively exchanged among the mixed group members. This was beyond the ability of the instructor's scaffolding roles and, as the sense of the online community grew, the mixed group members' discourse patterns were more activated with important issues related to building email contexts. Many students requested more chances to engage in the online discussion forum for further better course management in the sense that even shy and passive students were able to open up about their difficulties and ask for practical help from other competent group members through the online discussion forum; as for advanced group members, they were satisfied with their job to actively share their worthwhile experiences and communicate with other students. Without the additional activity of the online discussion forum on email writing, this course could not have been so fruitful, just staying in the limited area of traditional text level-focused genre-based email writing course.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The aim of this study was to explore the effectiveness of the specially designed genre-based email writing course at an online university in Korean EFL contexts, satisfying learning outcomes organically at both the text and context levels. This action research also examined the possibility of whether this kind of email writing online lecture at the university level, including an online discussion board and survey activities, can be successfully embedded in socio-constructivist pedagogy that promotes learners' active involvement in literacy learning process and authentic problem-solving tasks. The research results clearly showed a positive pedagogical implication that this kind of online email course could fulfill its goals of the genre-based instruction, which goes beyond the text level to the context level. In this course, most target students were satisfied with their linguistic improvements on email writing; furthermore, they could improve their genre

awareness by discussing the purpose of email writing, reader awareness, and formality issues (how to address recipients in different email contexts). All of these important learning outcomes could be achieved with the systematic genre-based instruction and the scaffolding strategy of the online discussion forum. More precisely, the two levels of scaffolding strategies—the lecturer’s instructional scaffolding through modeling and joint construction along with explicit explanation of language features and email schematic structure and the competent peer group students’ cognitive and emotional scaffolding through the online discussion forum—were successfully performed through this genre-based online email course .

This research is not without limitations. It needs to increase the level of reliability by having another examiner for the theme analysis of the postings and assignment evaluation. In addition, the email assignments can be replaced with more authentic email exchanges, and the online discussion forum can be more systematically analyzed. This limitation of the current study will require further research in a range of online email courses in cyber university settings under a socio-constructivist framework, with more consideration of online educational contexts, which can be quite different from face-to-face lecture settings. The balanced approach of genre-based instruction to integrate text and context levels along with an online writing community would have much greater potential to maximize the socio-constructive framework of genre studies. The students’ authentic requesting activity, as reflected through the text assignments (writing an email of requesting) and online discussion forum, should be taken seriously as an alternative to the course improvements. Their voices were surely authentic, making this action research fruitful and significant.

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## APPENDIX

### Criteria Description of Text Analysis

#### Task Fulfillment and Appropriacy (TFA)

1. (a) Text is entirely inappropriate to given context or (b) predominantly incomprehensible although (c) a few words or sentences may be present
2. (a) Text relates poorly to given context and is only sporadically appropriate or (b) comprehensible (c) Some appropriate vocabulary within restricted range
3. (a) Text relates in part to given context although (b) with some confusion of meaning. (c)

Appropriate vocabulary used although there are considerable errors

4. (a) Text relates generally to given context (b) with few confusions of meaning. (c) Vocabulary choices are generally effective although there are some inappropriacies
5. (a) Text relates well to given context. It is thoroughly appropriate and (b) easily understood. (c) Vocabulary choices are appropriate and effective.

#### **Cohesion & Organization (C&O)**

1. Very disjointed with minimal organization
2. Limited control of simple cohesive devices; some basic organization but little awareness of appropriate organization of ideas relevant to this task
3. Simple cohesion is controlled but problems of over use or inappropriate choices occur; there is some awareness of appropriate organization of ideas relevant to this task
4. Generally cohesive, though some problems may be noticed in this area; organization of ideas is mainly effective
5. Text is cohesive and organization is clear and appropriate to task

#### **Grammatical Control (GC)**

1. Poor control of grammatical structures within this context
2. Some control of grammatical structures suitable for this context but errors dominate
3. Fair control of grammatical structures within this context but with considerable errors
4. General good control of grammatical structures suitable for this context with a few obtrusive errors
5. Competent control of grammatical structures appropriate to the context with only unobtrusive errors

#### **Examples in: English**

**Applicable Languages: English**

**Applicable Levels: Tertiary**

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Received 8 March 2017

Revised 22 April 2017

Accepted 20 May 2017