

Structured and Unstructured Email Writing Skill: A Study of Nepali Students

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Abstract

The main objective of the present study is to compare structured and unstructured email writing skills among Nepali students. This study explores the common mistakes on email writing of Nepali students of Higher Secondary School. The data was collected from 30 students of Class XI and XII of GVN School, Nepalgunj (Nepal). They were in two structured and unstructured group. They were asked to send email and collected the samples for data analysis. They were also asked to fill the questionnaire via Emo. From the data analysis, they had some common mistakes on format and grammar on Email writing and they have certain discourse-specific thematic pattern on email writing the research found that there is significant difference between structured and unstructured groups in Email writing skills.

Keywords

structured and unstructured group; email writing skills; common mistakes on email; thematic patterns



I. Introduction

In the history of language teaching and learning, there have been different methods and approaches. These methods and approaches have been revised and modified based on different theoretical, linguistic and psychological frameworks.

The emergence of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) revolutionized the field of language teaching and learning and caused radical changes in this process. In other words, the purpose of CLT was to understand others and to be understood by others (Zandmoghdam, 2007).

Language acquisition can basically be divided into two ways; structured and unstructured. What goes on in our class rooms is the structured language teaching and learning. Unstructured second language acquisition is usually the result of spontaneous communication in social situation. On the other hand the structured language teaching and learning which is guided, tutored and is formal is the class room teaching method implemented in schools and colleges all over. (Krashen 1981, 1985).

In the information age, email has become the dominant form of communication. Being able to write a polished, professional email is now a critical skill both in college and the workplace. There are some key distinctions between formal and informal email writing. The structured or tutored group has less common mistakes on email than the experimental or unstructured group of students.

Sometimes, difficulties in writing happen due to translation from one language to another. Ariremakeo (2021) states "converting one language (SL) to another (TL) so that the TL could convey the intended message in SL. In other words, it is a process through which the translator decoded SL and encodes his understanding of the TL form".

1.1 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the differences between structured and unstructured E-mail writing skill of Nepali high school's students.

1.2 Research Questions

This research aimed to find out the difference between structured and unstructured language learning among Nepali students. This research gives understanding, insight, and clear answers to questions like:

1. What are the mistakes that Nepali high school students encounter Email writing in English?
2. What is the thematic progression patterns used in EFL Nepali high school students' email writing text?

1.3 Limitation of the Study

The participants were only Nepali students of Class XI and XII of GVN Secondary School, Banke District, Nepalgunj, Nepal.

II. Review of Literature

TBLT (Task Best Language Teaching) tries to equip the learners to learn the intended target language in a meaningful situation. In the traditional language methods, the presentation of language was bit by bit while the teacher was in a full control of the classroom and most of decisions refereed to him/her. The learning of languages did not result in communication and only rote learning of isolated materials of the most important goal of language learning. Learners were recognized as passive agents with clean slate. Different affective, psychological factors of the learners were ignored by the teachers and even curriculum designers. On the contrary, in TBLT the roles of learners has changed radically and they should participate in teaching and learning activities as actively as possible to internalize different function of language in real life situations

2.1 Structured and Unstructured Tasks

Tavakoli and Skehan, (2005) defined it as the clarity of larger structures and series of activates and events to be explained in time. According to this definition, one can claim that tasks with logical story line structures and frameworks are easier to understand and need less cognitive processing to unfold than those tasks with loose and irregular structure.

In an investigative attempt, Tavakoli and Skehan (2005) studied whether and how the degree of structure in a narrative task might influence L2 oral performance. The results of their study revealed that overall task structure has positive and significant effects on complexity, accuracy and fluency of output.

Tavakoli and Foster (2008) concluded that 'L2 performance is affected in predictable ways by design features of narrative tasks' (p. 459). Structured, narrative tasks with a tightly structured storyline induced learners to produce more fluent language. They also found that tight narrative structure combined with pre-task planning opportunity led task performers to speak more accurately in an L2. In another investigative attempt, Tavakoli and Skehan (2005) studied whether and how the degree of structure in a narrative task might influence L2 oral performance. The results of their study revealed that overall task structure has positive and significant effects on complexity, accuracy and fluency of language. In a more recent study, Tavakoli and

Foster (2008) attempted to, among other things, replicate the effects for task structure found in this research program. In order to enhance the comparability of the results, they used the same structured and unstructured task employed by Tavakoli and Skehan (2005).

According to Skehan and Foster (1997; 1999) and Tavakoli and Skehan (2005) structured tasks can increase accuracy in the case of oral production on the part of the learners.

2.2 Structured, Semi-structured and Unstructured

Teaching learning activity falls either in one of these categories – structured, semi-structured or unstructured. Most of the structured methods are dominated by the teacher where the learners are mostly passive learners. They learn the vocabulary and grammar just by listening to the teacher and taking notes. Repeated reading and drilling are encouraged by the teachers for making the students learn language. Structured methods have a clear beginning, middle and end. They follow a defined pattern from which there won't be any variation. In structured writing, Nurbani (2022), states "In learning management, teachers need to: (1) make good plans with the existence of lesson plans; (2) Develop or formulate learning objectives; (3) Prepare subject matter (4) Determine learning methods and media; (5) Prepare assessment techniques".

Semi-structured learning includes guided discussion among students. In this method there is interaction between the teacher and the students. Though text books and materials are used for teaching learning, they are just used as tools for guided discussion. Conducting a test on vocabulary (dictation), asking the students to memorize an attractive language expression or poem, reading aloud a text etc., can be included in this category.

Unstructured teaching learning method is completely learner centered and the students should feel free to involve, discuss and interact with one another. They are open ended and are not guided or limited by rules. Here the learners are given the freedom to explore the possibilities and engage themselves with different activities to support their own learning.

In Email writing, students who are taught in classroom or elsewhere have better structure and clear idea than who are not taught. The course curriculum, in which it was taught, and if the students have practiced in Computer science classes: have better skills on Email writing than who have learned by doing.

III. Research Method

3.1 Participants

The participants were total 30 students from class XI and XII both male and female they were EFL learners from Government high School in Nepal.

The language of all participants was Nepali. They were learning English as a foreign language due to less exposure available for them in the context of Nepal. None of them had been to an English speaking country before this study. They had been learning English as an academic subject for two years and they were somehow proficient in general English. Their age was 16 to 18 years old. The main criteria for participants selection was the ease of access and availability.

3.2 Tools

The process of data collection was done through the following instruments:

a. Nelson Proficiency Test

In order to make sure that all the participants were at the same level in terms of their language proficiency, Nelson English Language Proficiency Test (section 300D) was used. This multiple-choice test comprised cloze passages, and Email writing test was taken. The English language proficiency test used in the present study was adopted from Fowler and Coe (1978). The overall internal consistency of this proficiency test was determined by Hashemian, Roohani and Fadaei (2012) using Cronbach Alpha (CA) and it turned out to be was 0.82, which is an acceptable and high index of reliability.

b. Email Writing

Lab of the college was provided for participant in two groups and they were asked to write email in certain circumstances specified for each group. As far as an oral narrative task is concerned, due to its very monologue nature, it induces learners to produce stretches of language which are not influenced by interactional and external variables (Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Moreover, since many of the previous studies have used narrative tasks, this would enhance the comparability of the results of this study.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

In order to collect the data, about email writing for the participants in the two groups and each participant was called from the class individually to write Email and asked to write whatever they want to share to their friends about their progress problem and interest. It is worth noting that the Email of the participant were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

Both groups performed tasks and their Email production recorded and analyzed to know their skill.

The following methods were used to measure the production of relative clauses:

- a. Obligatory context: refers to where that particular grammatical feature must have been used!
- b. Lexical diversity: will be calculated by calculating the total number of different verbs used in one's Email.

Therefore, the whole study will be conducted in two three sessions.

Session 1: a language proficiency test to make sure that participants are equal in terms of level of proficiency.

Session 2: a structured task will be performed by group 1

Session 3: an unstructured task will be performed by group 2.

All task performances will be taken as recorded and analyzed.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The main purposes of the present study were to investigate the effect and difference of structured and unstructured task on Email writing of Nepali students of EFL learners. To this end, the null hypotheses were posed:

Research Hypothesis

There is bit significant difference between Structured and unstructured tasks in English language learning for Email writing. In the following section, we refer to the measures that were employed in the current study.

Table 1. Language Production of Structured and Unstructured Groups

Measure Group	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Learning Proficiency Structured	15	35	48	42.27	3.882
Unstructured	15	32	44	38.60	3.832

As shown in Table 1 there are differences in the mean scores of the structured and unstructured groups. As indicated in the table, the mean scores of accuracy and fluency for structured group are greater than that of unstructured group. On the other hand, the mean score of complexity for unstructured group is greater than structured one. To confirm or reject these differences, three Independent-samples t-tests were performed which are presented in Table 1.

The present research was an attempt to provide new evidence for the impact of different types of tasks (structured and unstructured) on the production of email of Nepali students.

The present study found a positive impact of structured task on the accuracy of performance have claimed that structured tasks can facilitate the process of accuracy aspect of language learning if sufficient and appropriate inputs are provided on the part of teacher in a natural-like situation.

Forty students were selected of class XI and XI. Among them 20 students under closed or structured group, that is to say they were taught the professional writing course like email writing, letter writing, resume, report writing and so on. But the other 20 students are not from the same sections, as they were not the students of professional writing course. They are asked different questions about email writing and they all were write an email to the researcher as a friend, as a professor, as a parents just for the purpose of this research. They wrote their mails and some of the samples mails are kept under for discussion. Their email ID is kept confidential as per their request.

Sample Email: 1

Hey Mr. Rojina,

My name is Jagriti. I'm very happy to receive your email. I am a student and use sometimes English at work but i feel nervous when i speak sometimes i feel blocked. I hope you can help me improve my speaking.it is important for work. I look forward to the 10-day challenge. It's very useful to me.)))))

Regards.

1. Emily is a female name. Using Mr. in front of this name is not appropriate because Mr. is only used for males. With the greetings, it is always important to learn the name of the person he/she is emailing and make sure his/her title is appropriate. If he/she does not know the name of the person, he/she can use *Sir* or *Madam*. If one doesn't know if the person is male or female, then he/she can use *Dear Sir* or *Madam*.
2. Missing article. When giving your profession, it should always include an article such as **a**n engineer, **a** teacher, **a** doctor, **a** sales manager.

3. Words like sometimes, always, usually, often, occasionally, rarely, never are called Adverbs of Frequency. Generally, these words always go before the verb. *I always go ... We sometimes eat ... I usually feel ... I often make ...*
4. English is the name of a language. Languages are always spelled with a capital letter. English. Chinese. Spanish. Russian. Latvian. This is also true for the names of countries. For example, *I come from China. I come from India. He comes from Brazil. We come from Morocco.*
5. The word “I” is always capitalized. With the informality of texting and social media, many people do write emails very informally with all lowercase letters. This may be okay for emails to friends and family. But for professional emails, it is never okay to write the word “I” with a lowercase letter.
6. Same as number (5).
7. This is a punctuation problem. Be sure to always include one single space between sentences. It is unprofessional and very difficult to read an email with no spaces between sentences.
8. The first word of this sentence is “Sometimes” so the beginning of the word should have a capital letter. Similar to (5), it is common to forget this in informal emails to friends and family but for professional emails it is important to remember this rule.
9. Same as (7).
10. Same as (8).
11. I see this –))))) – often in emails and in social media. I think it is supposed to be a smiley face. In English typing, the only way to show a smiley face with the keyboard is with these symbols.: –)
12. The closing should always be followed by a comma (,). For example: Sincerely, // Best wishes, // Warm regards,
13. There is no name at the end of this email. You should always include your name after the closing of the email in professional emails.

Sample Email: 2

Hello Madam,

My name is shyam. I use often english for my work but i don't feel good about speaking. I can write emails and read in English.I understand everything. But with speaking i'm very nervous so i'm happy about your emails. to answer your question, i mostly feel speaking is my challenge because i forget the words i need.I understand when i hear them but I forget everything when I speak.

Im thankful for your advices.)))))

Sincerely

The above email has the similar types of error to the first email. The both emails were written by the unstructured group or they were not the students of professional writing course and they were not instructed well. It is also the problem of language from them as they were studying on Nepali medium courses.

The follow examples are from the structured group that means they were instructed before how to write an email. They have better result or less error or mistakes on their emails, though not faultless.

Sample email: 3

Dear Madam,

I am Ashok Dahit. As you have told me to send you an email for your research purpose, I am going to write it for you. I hope you will surely reply me after getting my email. It will be helpful for your purpose. Please keep my email ID confidential.

Best Regards.

Ashok

Sample Email: 4

Respected Mam

I am a student of Class XII English professional writing. I am going to send this mail as you have asked to send you. I hope you will get the mail. I hope you will reply me too.

Yours,

N.R.

The above email 3 and email 4 were from the structured group. Their emails are a bit better in form, grammar and spellings. But they don't have written it much formally and there is no unity and coherence on sentences. They don't have well patterns of theme on their writings. The other emails are also so vulnerable from the unstructured group that they too informal and sometimes they have used Nepali in roman letter writings. The following sample shows the use of slang and too informal language:

To analyze the thematic pattern of email text, the thematic progression (TP) analysis was examined with the framework of theme reiterating (TR), Zig-Zag pattern and multiple rheme patterns. The students of structured group have better results than the unstructured group. It was analyzed with the purpose and context of email writing. In the following example of an email, theme choice is underlined and the related words are in italic.

I am Ashok Dahit. As you have told me to send you an email for your research purpose, *I am* going to write it for you. *I* hope you will surely reply me after getting my email. It will be helpful for your purpose. Please keep my email ID confidential.

Best Regards.

Ashok.

4.2 Discussion

The results revealed that performing a structured task under careful online planning conditions would seem to be the best combination of task structure and online planning since it enables a person to produce language with comparatively higher levels of complexity and accuracy and arguably fluency. This combination might enable language pedagogy to foster the 'balanced language development' in which the development of fluency is matched by the development of accuracy and complexity.

There are some reasons for these results. One of them has to do with unfamiliarity of Nepali learners with the authentic material because as we know there is no use of such materials in Nepali context. The second reason refers to this fact that in Nepali context and curriculum there is not much given emphasis on email writing due to the lack of technology and due to the poor infrastructure of colleges.

This study emphasized the effectiveness of the task-based approach on English Speaking. This suggests that the students' production improved substantially with the application of task based instruction.

The current study made it clear that structured language teaching is definitely more effective than unstructured process. As we know English is taught as a foreign language

in Nepal and the learners has no exposure to real situation of language uses. The focus of language learning and teaching is mainly on educational objectives and communication and interaction receive no attention in this context. The methods of language presentation are mainly traditional and grammatical items are at the center of language teaching activities, so there is no opportunity for learners to practice whatever they need to learn in real-life situations.

V. Conclusion

As discussed earlier, one of the most important aspects of structured teaching how to write email is the time and energy allocated by the learners to different activities in order to acquire fluency, complexity as well as accuracy and earn these language aspects as effectively as possible. As a result, the students could produce better email for formal and informal purpose. In the case of unstructured tasks, the performance of the participants was not as regular as in the case of structured tasks. We can contribute this fact to ambiguity and lack of clarity in the case of unstructured tasks. The participants were not able to make a rational and clear connection in their email if they are unstructured or are not taught the skills. Therefore, from the data analysis, it was found out that they have some common mistakes on format and grammar on Email writing and they have certain discourse-specific thematic pattern on email writing. There is the difference between structured and unstructured groups in Email writing skills.

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