

مجلة جامعة صبراتة العلمية
Sabratha University Scientific Journal



A Human Sciences Biannual Peer Reviewed Journal
Issued by Sabratha University

**The Use of Etiquette by Libyan EFL Postgraduate Students
in Writing Formal Emails**

إستخدام أداب التخاطب من قبل طلاب الدراسات العليا الليبيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية
في مراسلاتهم الرسمية عبر البريد الإلكتروني

Dr. Albashir Ahmed
Associate Professor, School of Languages, Libyan Academy

Legal Deposit No: 139-2017

International Number
ISSN (Print) 2522 - 6460
ISSN (Online) 2707 - 6555

Web site of journal:
<https://jhs.sabu.edu.ly>

The Use of Etiquette by Libyan EFL Postgraduate Students in Writing Formal Emails

إستخدام آداب التآاطب من قبل طلاب الدراسات العليا الليبيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في مراسلاتهم الرسمية عبر البريد الألكتروني

Albashir Ahmed

Associate Professor, School of Languages, Libyan Academy
Albashir.ahmed@academy.edu.ly

Abstract:

The role of email is becoming more and more important and email is considered one of the most effective tools of communication and correspondence nowadays. This research paper investigates the use of etiquette by Libyan EFL postgraduate students in writing formal emails. The aim is to shed light on the situation and determine to what extent Libyan EFL postgraduate students adhere to the rules of etiquette in their formal emails. Another aim is to try to find out if there are any problems, they face in this respect in order to find better ways that may help in dealing with them. To fulfill these aims, 39 students were asked to send a formal email to their instructor (the researcher) of subjects of their own choice. However, only 34 emails were received. The results have shown that the majority of the students who have participated in the study are aware of the overall structure and organization of emails written in formal style. However, examining details have shown that students face some problems that are not only related to style, but also to language and culture. It was apparent from the emails investigated that students lack practice and experience in writing formal emails. To overcome these difficulties, teachers are advised to raise their students' awareness of the importance of using formal emails as a means of communication and to provide them with sufficient practice by regularly using formal email in their correspondence with their teachers. Students also need to be aware of the inter-linguistic and cultural differences; what might be acceptable and favorable in Arabic may lead to miscommunication problems when used in English.

Key words: Email, Etiquette, Netiquette, Formal style

ملخص الدراسة:

يعتبر البريد الألكتروني من أكثر الوسائل الفعالة في التواصل والمراسلة وأهمية دوره في إزدياد مستمر. تبحث هذه الورقة في إستخدام آداب التآاطب عند طلبة الدراسات العليا الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في مراسلاتهم الرسمية عبر البريد

الألكتروني. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو إلقاء الضوء على الوضع لمعرفة إلى أي حد يلتزم فيه هؤلاء الطلاب بالقواعد والسلوك المتعلق بكتابة المراسلات الرسمية وإرسالها عبر البريد الإلكتروني. كما تهدف الدراسة أيضًا إلى التعرف على المشكلات التي قد يصادفها الطلاب بالخصوص وإمكانية إيجاد حلول لها. لتحقيق هذه الأهداف طُلب من 39 طالبًا كتابة وإرسال رسائل رسمية عبر البريد الإلكتروني لمدرسهم (الباحث) وتُرك لهم حرية إختيار مواضيعها، لكن ما تم إستلامه هو فقط 34 رسالة إلكترونية. أظهرت النتائج أن غالبية الطلاب المشاركين في الدراسة على دراية بتركيبة وتنظيم المراسلات الرسمية بشكل عام، ولكن فحص التفاصيل أظهر أن الطلاب يواجهون بعض المشاكل والتي لا تتعلق بالأسلوب فحسب ولكن أيضًا لها علاقة باللغة والثقافة. لقد ظهر جليًا من المراسلات التي تمت دراستها أن الطلاب يفتقرون إلى التدريب والخبرة في كتابة المراسلات الإلكترونية الرسمية. للتغلب على هذه الصعوبات يُصح المدرسون برفع وعي الطلاب بأهمية استخدام المراسلات الإلكترونية كوسيلة للتواصل وتزويدهم بالتدريب الكافي بإستخدام هذه المراسلات بشكل منتظم في مراسلاتهم مع مدرسهم. كما يحتاج الطلاب أيضًا لإدراك الإختلافات بين اللغات والثقافات، فما يكون مقبولًا ومستساغًا في اللغة العربية قد يؤدي إلى مشكلات في التواصل عند إستخدامه في اللغة الإنجليزية.

Introduction:

Email has become one of the most widely used communication tools nowadays and the number of its users has considerably increased. It will continue to do so due to the importance of email as a communication channel in the world of business and the degree of mobility for accessing email anytime anywhere, thanks to recent advancements in mobile technology.

Email has turned popular for several reasons. Firstly, it can be kept as a record, archived and accessed later. Secondly, it can hold attachments of not only text files but also images, sound and video files. Thirdly, it is a cheap means of communication compared to other means. Fourthly, it is flexible; it can be sent to almost anybody and accessed from anywhere at any time (Iliescu, 2014). Finally, it is fast. In fact, it is one of the fastest communication tools and thus, it is an appropriate choice for formal correspondence when the message is urgent (Williams).

Throughout a long period of time of teaching Libyan postgraduates in some Libyan institutions, it has been observed that those students have problems not only in writing emails (Ahmed, 2014) but also in following netiquette including the etiquette of writing emails especially when it comes to writing formal emails. This study aims at investigating the use of etiquette by Libyan postgraduate students in writing their formal emails. One of the specific aims of this study is to specify problems encountered by students, and suggest ways of solving them. The study is motivated by the widespread use of internet in general and particularly the growing need to use emails in student-teacher communication. The study is conducted on

postgraduate students in the Libyan Academy as an example of postgraduate institutions in Libya.

Etiquette of writing formal emails

In the following sections, the concept of etiquette will be clarified; questions such as what is netiquette and why is email etiquette important will be answered. In addition, the major characteristics of email such as subject, tone and content will be explained. What to do regarding attachments to email will also be considered. Finally, to help clarifying these points, a comparison will occasionally be made between the features of formal and informal emails.

Etiquette and netiquette

According to online Cambridge dictionary, etiquette is defined as ‘the set of rules or customs that control accepted behavior in particular social groups or social situations’. For example, social etiquette demands that men cannot sit while women are standing. Another example of social etiquette is that one should hold the door for the person behind him/her and if someone holds the door for someone, he/she should say ‘thank you’. By analogy, drivers are expected to observe the rules of the road. Netiquette, on the other hand, refers to applying the rules of etiquette in the cyberspace or the internet. In other words, netiquette is Internet etiquette including email etiquette.

Email etiquette

Following certain rules and respecting these rules when composing and sending an email is very important. These rules govern the form or the shape of the email, its tone and its content.

Form of email

The main components of a formal email are subject, greeting, main body, closing and signature (Hopkins, 2018). Firstly, the subject of an email should be clear, meaningful, and gives the reader an idea about email content. Secondly, the greeting of formal email should start with ‘Dear followed by a title (e.g., Mr, Mrs, Ms, Dr, Professor, etc.) and their last name not the first name. A formal salutation should not use the recipient’s first name only or the informal greetings ‘Hello’ or ‘Hey’ (MENLO College). Thirdly, acceptable closings of formal and academic email include ‘Best wishes’, ‘(Kind/Best) Regards’, and ‘Sincerely’ (Bailey, 2011). Finally, the signature should include sender’s full name, program, university and may also include his/her address and phone number (MENLO College).

Amongst the things that one should consider when writing an email is the font size and type. According to Iliescu (2014), it is very important when writing a formal email to use a professional font not a decorative one. Most formal emails are written in a simple standard font like Times New Roman. As for font color, black is the generally accepted color. Regarding font size, it is recommended to write your formal email in 10 to 12 font size. A smaller one might be difficult to read and a larger font size might look aggressive. Moreover, highlighting any part of the text should be done with standard features such as italicizing, underlining or making bold (Iliescu,2014, 23-24).

Another important thing for formal email is to have a clear and direct subject which addresses the readers concerns and issues; a subject that is brief and relevant to the content of the email (Smith, 2016).

Tone of email

Writing in a positive tone is one of the important characteristics of formal email. For example, saying ‘when I finish my assignment,’ is more positive than saying ‘If I complete the assignment’. Also words like ‘please’ and ‘thank you ’make the tone of your email positive while negative words like those which begin with non-, un-, or ex- or those which end with – less may reduce the positivity of your email tone. (Ibid)

Content of email

One of the important questions to be considered when composing an email is whether or not the content of the email is appropriate for virtual correspondence. Checking the grammar and the spelling of an email is important. Relying on spelling checker of the computer may not be enough, and reading and rereading the formal email before sending it off is necessary (Ibid).

Using a proper structure and layout is also necessary. Being efficient and to the point makes the email much more effective. In addition, including all the information related to the subject of an email and required to clarify the point may help in avoiding delays in getting the procedure done. However, the email should be brief by not including unnecessary information or unrequired details. Finally, attachment should be relevant to the email and should be mentioned in the email. Moreover, an attachment file name should indicate its content,e.g., ‘my thesis proposal.doc’. Also, files should be sent in familiar formats to ensure compatibility. Considering the size of the attachment is also necessary since some email companies put limitations on the size of attachments (Iliescu, 2014).

Another thing to be mentioned here is related to email address. It should be a professional email address such as one’s company or university email address (Iliescu 2014). Also, a forma

email address should be appropriate to the audience. For example, an email like superman13@gmail.com or beauty-queen@yahoo.com may not be appropriate for formal correspondence. Instead, one can create a second email address devoted to formal correspondence and professional use. As a suggestion, one can include his/her initial and/or surname in the email address as in albashir_ahmed@yahoo.com or jane_white@hotmail.com.

Finally, when writing an academic or formal email, one has to remember that “Miscommunication can easily occur because of cultural differences, especially in the writing form when we can't see one another's body language” (Smith, 2016: 9). Therefore, tailoring the email to the receiver’s cultural background is recommended to avoid misunderstanding.

Data collection

In order to obtain the data required to achieve the purpose of the study, 39 postgraduate students studying the subject of ELT Methodology in the Libyan Academy in the autumn semester of 2018/2019 were asked to write a formal email to their instructor (the researcher) about any topic of their choice. The topic was not specified to give students some freedom to write about something that interests them and suits their purposes. However, only 34 emails were received.

Since the rules of email etiquette are centered on how emails should appear and what they should contain (Iliescu, 2014), data of this study is analyzed according to the following major criteria: email form and email content. Under form, elements such as email address, subject, salutations and closings, font, paragraph spacing and signature were considered. As for the content, elements such as writing style, tone and punctuation were looked at. Since the researcher was dealing with emails sent by EFL students, grammar, vocabulary and spelling in their emails were also considered in the analysis.

Data analysis and results

Email form

1. Email address

Apart from a few email addresses, most email addresses followed the convention that formal email address should include names and initials. Some students have also included what seems to be their year of birth or other numbers which according to my experience with creating emails is required or suggested by email companies such as Google and Yahoo to avoid similarity with an already existing email. However, while some email addresses separated initials from

surnames with a dot or an underscore or a hyphen, others do not, which sometimes makes it difficult to recognize where initials end and where a surname begins.

2. Subject

As for the subject of the email, most of the students (29 out of 34) have included subjects in their emails. However, five students have left the subject slot blank. Also, not all subjects accurately reflect the content of the emails. For example, one of the students wrote “Dear Sir” in the subject slot. Moreover, a couple of students have made their subjects too long. For instance, one’s email subject was “Need of information about teaching and learning English language in my town”.

3. Salutations and Closings

Regarding salutations, all students have started their emails with salutations except for one student who did not give a salutation at all. Out of 34 students, 18 students started their emails with the word ‘Dear’ which is a good way of starting a formal email. However, what follows the word ‘Dear’ varied including ‘Dear Sir’, ‘Dear Professor’, ‘Dear Mr....’ and ‘Dear Dr...’. The last two were followed by the instructor’s first name not his surname which is formally wrong. Moreover, a considerable number have misspelt their instructor’s name and two students did not give their instructor’s name but other different names. Other salutations included good morning, good afternoon and good evening (3 students), again followed by the instructor’s name. One salutation was ‘hello doctor’ and two others were ‘Assalamu Alaikum (peace be upon you) one of which was followed by dear teacher....’ and the instructor’s name. Two of the above-mentioned salutations were not separated from the body of the email. Finally, three salutations were not initiated with any greeting but started directly with the instructor’s name to whom the emails were sent preceded with Dr, Mr or even both of them.

As for closings, out of 34 emails only 2 emails did not include closings. Eleven students used ‘Regards’ as a closing but in a variety of ways: ‘Regards’ (2 students), ‘Regard’ in the singular form (1 student), ‘Best regards’ (3 students), ‘With regards’ (1 student), ‘Kind regards’ (1 student), ‘Kindest regards’ (1 student) and finally, ‘My regards’ (1 student). Eight students used either ‘Sincerely’ (5 students) or ‘Yours sincerely’ (3 students). Three students used ‘Yours faithfully’ one of which has missed the s in yours. One student used ‘Respectfully’ as a closing. Two other students used ‘Thanks a lot’ and ‘Thank you’ in which the letter (h) in ‘thank you’ was missing. Two students used ‘Your student’ as a closing of their emails. One of the noticed errors in writing an email closing was attaching it to the text of the body of the email.

Three students wrote their closings as a final sentence of their email text, instead of writing it as a separate part below the body close to the left margin. Another student centralized his closing and signature instead of putting them to the left side close to the margin.

4. Font

As said before, the recommended font size for formal emails is between 10 and 12. The results showed that most of the students wrote their emails within this recommended range. Out of 34 students, nineteen used font size 10, eight students used font 12, one student used font 11 and three students used a bigger font size. They typed their emails in 13, 13.5 and 14. Regarding font type, it seems that students do not adjust their font type to be compatible with the formal style. They kept the default font type selected by the email company. Out of 34 emails, only five emails were written in Times New Roman the suitable font type for formal emails. Twenty-three emails were written in Helvetica font type, two in New serif, one in Calibri, one in Inherit and finally, one email was written in Georgia font type. It is worth mentioning here that one email was sent blank and thus no font type was used.

Finally, in terms of font color, all students used the standard color which is black except for two students; one has typed her email in a lighter red and the one who sent their email blank. The one who used a lighter red color also decorated the margins of her email with bunches of flowers of different colors.

5. Structure and layout

In this respect, the emails sent by the students can be classified into two categories: short emails (22) and long emails (12). The criterion used to distinguish between short and long emails is that short ones were less than 10 lines and long ones were more than 10 lines. Those which were short can be further divided in two subcategories: those which were written as one paragraph and those which were wrongly written in separate sentences each representing a paragraph in spite of the fact that these sentences can be written as a block of one paragraph. Similarly, in long emails two methods of organization can be identified; those which were divided into paragraphs and those which were written as one block in spite of the fact that they can be divided into several paragraphs as their content shows. Those which were arranged in separate paragraphs used the two methods of identifying paragraphs, that is, indentation or leaving space between each paragraph and the other. However, some of those who used space as a way of separating paragraphs left double space instead of one which is not considered right in formal context.

6. Signature

Out of 34 students, seven students sent their emails without a signature in addition to one student who identified himself by “Your student” without giving his name. Among those who signed their emails with their names, seventeen students signed with their first name and surname. However, six students signed with their full name. Five students signed their emails with only their first name which is not considered appropriate in formal emails. Two of those students, in addition to their names, added their registration, numbers one of which has also mentioned his group. Finally, one student mentioned his course name and his group as parts of his signature. None of the students mentioned his/her department or institution in the signature of their emails which is required in formal emails. In addition, two students put their signature above the closing not below it as it should be. Another error made by one of the students is centralizing their signature instead of aligning it to the left side.

Email content

1. Writing style and Tone

Students participating in this study were asked to write formal emails of subjects of their own choice and send them to their instructor. Therefore, they were expected to write in a formal and academic style. Going through the emails has shown that most of the students had some idea of how to express themselves formally in an email. Formal expressions including formal words like ‘ I would appreciate’, ‘ I would like’, ‘ I would be delighted to’, ‘ look forward’, ‘ would you please’ and ‘thank you’ were used in most of the emails. The following are some examples:

- ‘ I would be delighted to hear from you as soon as possible.’
- ‘Would you be available for a short discussion next Saturday?’
- ‘ I look forward to your reply.’
- ‘Thank you for the opportunity you provided us with to express our thoughts.’
- ‘ I do appreciate your time and endeavor for being more flexible and helpful with your students.’
- ‘ I would like to apologize by this letter for not coming to this day for health reasons.’

However, some students were not totally aware of how to express themselves formally and, thus, tended to use a more direct and less formal way to express themselves. Here are some examples:

- ‘Please send me information about the date and the exact hour.’

- ‘Can you please specify for us which lectures will be included?’
- ‘Do you want us to work in groups or alone?’
- ‘Waiting for your response.’
- ‘I want to inform you that the problem was solved.’

In addition to these problems in formal writing, some students tended to use short forms, which is a characteristic of informal style. Short forms like ‘I’m’, ‘I’d’, ‘I’ve’, ‘You’ve’, ‘couldn’t’ and ‘weren’t’ were used by a small number of students (4 students). As for tone, some positive words which indicate a positive tone were used throughout the emails. These included, ‘please’, ‘hope’, ‘delighted’, ‘grateful’, ‘promise’, ‘glad’, ‘enjoyed’, ‘benefitted’, ‘comfortable’ which were used extensively to express their feelings.

2. Punctuation and capitalization

Overall, students used punctuation in a proper way apart from a few occasions of misuse. Students ended their sentences with a period and their questions with a question mark except for a few cases where students failed to put a period or a question mark at the end of their sentences. Comma is also used by students especially in long emails where it is needed. For example, comma is used in coordinated sentences and with fronting a subordinate clause or after sentence connectors like ‘however’ and ‘therefore’. However, semicolon was never used by students in spite of the fact that it should be used in certain positions as, for instance, between two related sentences or when one sentence is followed by another explaining it. The following are some examples of the errors made by some students in using punctuation.

- ‘Do you want us to work in groups or alone’ (no question mark was used)
- ‘...and that also happened in this course, because the material does not show ELTM...’
(wrong place for a comma)
- ‘We also ask you to reduce the sheets, it is considered too much to be studied...’(use of a comma instead of a semicolon)
- ‘Finally, I would be lucky if I have another opportunity to be one of your students. again’ (use of a period before ‘again’ not after it which is a wrong position)
- ‘If you do not mind I would like to request from you to review my midterm examination.’ (a comma is missing after the if clause)

Another common error found in the students’ emails is leaving a space between the punctuation mark and the word preceding it or leaving no space between the word and the punctuation mark that precedes it.

Finally, there were a few errors that are related to capitalization. For example, some students failed to begin some sentences with a capital letter or capitalize letters that should be capitalized and vice versa. For example:

‘Therefore, would you please tell me what is....’ and ‘i like the subject and i am so comfortable with you as a teacher.’

3. Grammar, vocabulary and spelling

Grammatical errors made by students in their emails are related to the following areas ordered according to frequency of errors: prepositions, pronouns, subject and subject verb agreement, auxiliaries and models, clauses, and, finally, articles. In addition, there were some errors that are related to vocabulary. The following is a list of these errors with suggested corrections to them:

a. Prepositions

- ‘Regarding to the amount of work on both courses I have this semester, I am afraid that I might not finish in the given time.’ (The underlined preposition should be omitted)
- ‘I am especially interested to ask about the date of the final exam and the name of the lectures that will be included.’ (interested in asking not interested to ask)
- ‘This is such a kind of help because we are really on pressure.’ (under not on)
- ‘I am writing this e-mail to consult you which Canadian University you recommend me to apply in as I am travelling there sooner.’ (the preposition ‘about’ should be used before which and the underlined ‘in’ should be replaced with ‘to’)
- ‘since the assignments that we have in this semester prevent me and my friends to study from the beginning of the course.’ (The underlined preposition should be ‘from’ not ‘to’)
- ‘The questions of the exam were not difficult who have done their best and worked hard.’ (‘for those’ should be added before ‘who’)

b. Pronouns

- ‘The programme that you told me to send it to you.’ (the underlined ‘it’ should be omitted)
- ‘The material you have chosen contains headings under them are subheadings and under them are numbers of different points.’ (Wrong use of them: the whole sentence needs to be rewritten?)

- ‘And even those who memorize the material, they will forget them quickly after doing the exam.’ (The underlined ‘they’ should be omitted)
- ‘I do thank you again for you help.’ (The underlined ‘you’ should be replaced with ‘your’)
- ‘Your way of dealing also adds to us the comfortable manner to discuss and understand the subject directly.’ (dealing ‘with something’: ‘with something’ is missing)

c. Subject

- ‘I intended to present my lesson today, thus, was the will of ALLAH.’ (the sentence initiated by was lacks the subject)
- ‘because the materials does not show ELTM deeply that does not achieve my needs. (Lack of subject-verb agreement)

- ‘hope you are fine.’ (The sentence lacks the subject)
- ‘wish you a year full of success’ (The sentence lacks the subject).

The last two examples can be found in informal style but they are not acceptable when writing in a formal style.

d. Models and auxiliaries

- ‘May you inform me about more ways that might help me to enhance teaching and learning English language in my town?’ (Wrong use of the model May: May I be informed can be used to correct this error)
- ‘We also asking you please to reduce the sheets.’ (The auxiliary ‘are’ is missing and ‘please’ is not in the write position)
- ‘In general, the course was of a great value to me because I have not any experience in teaching.’ (“have not’ should be replaced with ‘do not have’)

c. Clauses

- ‘Please do it on Saturday whether in the first week or on Saturday in the second week. Because I couldn't come in another day.’ (The subordinate clause is separated from the main clause with a period and starts with a capital letter which is wrong)
- ‘...it is considered too much to be studied specially we have another subject needs time as ELT needs.’ (‘that’ or ‘which’ before ‘needs’ is missing)

d. Articles

- ‘I am writing to you to seek your permission for delay of what you asked me to prepare about Course lab.’ (The indefinite article ‘a’ before ‘delay’ is missing)
- ‘I have looked at group page on facebook, but there is no information about the final exam.’ (The definite article the before group is missing)
- ‘I passed through a healthy problems related to my Heart.’ (The indefinite article ‘a’ is used with a plural noun which is wrong)

e. Vocabulary

- ‘Indeed I am emailing you in order to thank you first for the hard efforts that you achieve while lecturing us ELT Methodology course.’ (‘achieve’ is a wrong word here; the write word is ‘made’)
- ‘I would like you to make another solution for the midterm exam.’ (‘make’ should be replaced with ‘have’ or ‘give’)

f. Objects order

- ‘I am writing to you this letter to ask you about what are the topics to be included in the final exam.’ (The direct object should be put before the indirect one: writing this letter to you)

As for spelling problems, they were limited to the words found in the following table.

Leukemia	*Luekimea	Deliver	*deliever
Writing	*writing	Sincerely	*scincerely
Delay	*dely	Interested	*intrested
Which	*whis	Lectures	*lectuers
Protesting	*protestanting	Thank	*tank
They	*theyr		

Apart from the word ‘Leukemia’ which may be difficult to spell, the other words are so common and familiar to students especially in their postgraduate level. It seems that those students who made these spelling mistakes did not check their emails for what might appear to be typing mistakes.

4. Efficiency

Efficiency means including all the necessary details to convey the message but in a brief way and to the point. The length of email will vary depending on its subject and the amount of information needed to clarify and express it so that the receiver will not find difficulty in

understanding it and reacts accordingly. For example, an email written by one of the participants was only four lines long because its subject was 'exam time' and the student only introduced herself and suggested a date for the final exam.

On the other hand, an email written by another student was 35 lines long divided into 8 paragraphs. The subject was 'comments on the course'. It was in the form of an essay with introductory paragraph and a conclusion. The second and third paragraphs were devoted to expressing appreciation and positive feelings towards the course and the teacher. In the paragraphs from 4 to 7 the writer of the email gave his comments about the course. In these comments, the student gave details of what was going on during the course and suggestions of how things could be changed. Then the writer of the email finished with paragraph number 8 which was also devoted to thanks and best wishes. In terms of length, these two emails represent the two extremes of a continuum along which other emails occur with a general tendency to be brief and to the point.

Discussion of results

The data analysis in the section above showed that students were somewhat familiar with the conventions of writing a formal email though not strictly following email etiquette rules. Therefore, apart from a few exceptions, most of the students observed the overall structure of the formal email suggested by Hopkins (2018) including the email address, the subject, the greeting, the main body and, finally, the closing and the signature.

Firstly, all of the students' email addresses followed the rule of having one's name and surname in spite of some differences in representing them in writing. Also, some students have added their year of birth which might have been suggested by the email companies due to clashes with already existing emails. However, the emails were not professional ones because they did not belong to the educational institution where the students were studying. This is due to the fact that the institution has not so far provided this email service to the students. As has been seen in the literature review (e.g. Iliescu 2014), professional emails are required for formal correspondence. Secondly, concerning the subject of emails, the majority of the participating students provided a subject in the subject slot. A small number of them, however, left it empty. Moreover, the subject of the email should be meaningful, specific and relevant to the content of the email (Advantage-Positioning). However, some students violated this rule by giving irrelevant subjects or by making their subjects too long. Thirdly, greeting in a formal or academic email also has rules including using 'Dear' followed by the title of the receiver if they

are known followed by their surname not the first name (MENLO College). The findings of this study have shown that most of the students started their greeting with 'Dear' followed by a title. However, no one used the surname of the recipient. This might be attributed to cultural reasons. In the students' culture, it is not so common to call a person by their surname even in formal or professional situations.

Fourthly, as for the main body of the email, four aspects were considered: style and tone; punctuation and capitalization; grammar, vocabulary and spelling and, finally, efficiency. The results of the study have shown that most of the students were generally aware of the style they were writing in; the words and the expressions used tended to be formal with a few exceptions. The same applies to the aspect of punctuation and capitalization where most of the students managed to use punctuation marks and capitalization where required. Finally, efficiency means focusing your email on what you want from the other party (Levander) and use only what is necessary to convey the message. Results have shown that the efficiency of the students' emails varies. Some students have either given too much detail or irrelevant information. This also can be attributed to cultural reasons and interference from Arabic where detail and elaboration is favored by some people. Fifthly, in terms of closing the email, the majority of the students succeeded in closing their email properly by using the right and formal closing such as regards, sincerely. However, a few students failed to do so by either using an informal closing or leaving their emails without a closing at all.

Finally, formal emails should end with a signature. Moreover, the signature should not only include the name of the sender but also other necessary information such as the company or the institution to which the sender belongs in addition to other contact information such as phone number and email address if different from the one used to send the email (Hopkins, 2018). In this respect, the results have shown that the majority of the students participating in the study only used their names to sign their emails. This can be attributed to the fact that all students are sending their emails to their teacher with whom they are familiar. They might have thought that such information is not needed for such non-authentic purpose.

Conclusion:

This study was devoted to investigate the use of email etiquette by Libyan EFL postgraduate students. Thirty four formal emails sent by the students to their teacher were analyzed to find to what extent formal emails written by students conform to the rules and standards of formal email style. The results have shown that the majority of the students participated in the study

were aware of the overall structure and organization of the formal email. However, investigating details showed that students have some problems which are not only related to the form of email but also to its content. According to my experience as a teacher, these problems are due to lack of practice in writing emails in general and especially formal email. Another cause is lack of experience with using formal emails as a means of communication in life.

To solve these problems and to overcome difficulties in writing formal emails, teachers are, first, responsible for raising their students' awareness of the importance of using formal emails as a means of communication nowadays. The second step is to give students the opportunity to have sufficient practice in writing and sending (and receiving) formal emails. This can be done by, for instance, regularly using formal emails in the communication that takes place between the students and their teachers. Finally, teachers should also attract the students' attention to the cultural and inter-linguistic differences which may have a negative effect on writing emails by causing miscommunication problems. Hopefully, these steps, with the determination and effort made by the students, will enable them eventually to write good formal emails that adhere to the rules of etiquette.

References:

- Advantage-Positioning. 23 rules for corporate email etiquette, https://www.advantage-positioning.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/23_Rules_of_Corporate_Email_Etiquette.pdf [Accessed on 17th November 2020].
- Ahmed, A. (2014) Investigation in the Application of Email in Thesis Supervision in Libya. Publication of the Second English Language Conference 14-15 June 2014. Zawia University.
- Bailey, Stephen (2011) Academic writing: A handbook for international students. 3rd edition. London & New York: Routledge.
- Cambridge Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/etiquette> [Accessed on 16th May 2020].
- Hopkins, Johns (2018) Email Etiquette Guide. https://carey.jhu.edu/uploads/documents/_2017.pdf [Accessed on 1st October 2020]
- Iliescu, Dragos V. (2014) Business Email Etiquette. <https://digitallibraryofbusinessandmanagement.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/business-email-etiquette.pdf> [Accessed on 16th May 2020].

Levander Kelly , Email Etiquette

https://www.regent.edu/admin/stusrv/student_dev/docs/Downloads/Professional%20Skills/Professional%20Etiquette/Email%20Etiquette_index.pdf

MENLO College. Writing a Formal Email. Silicon Valley's Business School.

<https://www.menlo.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/writing-a-formal-email.pdf> [Accessed on 3rd October 2020].

Smith, Jacquelyn (2016) Email-etiquette rules every professional should know - Business Insider.

Williams, D. (2001). Writing Skills in Practice: A practical guide for health professionals. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.