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Student use and teacher requirement of e-mail conventions

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A Thesis Submitted to

The English Language Institute

Department of Teaching English as a Foreign Language

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Master of Arts in TEFL

by

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To all of my students across the world,

whom I have the pleasure of staying in touch with

thanks to the Internet,

&

To the Egyptian youth,

who courageously fought for their freedom and rights

in the revolution of January 25, 2011,

who need to be given the attention, care, and teaching

they have deserved for so long

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ABSTRACT

Galabi, Lora I. M.A., The American University in Cairo, May 2011. Student Use and Teacher Requirement of E-mail Conventions. Thesis Chair: Dr. Lori Fredricks.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the use of conventions by EFL students and the requirement of conventions by EFL teachers in student-teacher e-mail communication, in an English-medium university in the Arab world. A convenience sample of 61 students and 13 teachers from the Intensive English Program at the American University in Cairo, Egypt was used. Data were obtained for this exploratory study from a student survey, a teacher survey, and a sample of student e-mails, and were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and thematic content analysis.

Chi-square tests revealed a correlation between the frequency of use of the e-mail conventions, which students and teachers reported, of salutations, complete sentence, closings, and correct spelling; with the exception of the inclusion of salutations, teachers think students use those conventions much less than the students think they do. From the coding of the sample of e-mails it was evident that more than 60% of the student e-mails included information in the subject line, salutations, address terms, complete sentences, no SMS-style language, and the student's name at the end. However, more than half of the conventions were used by less than two-thirds of the student sample whose e-mails were analyzed.

In regards to the conventions teachers require, teachers require conventions related to language proficiency the least, and ones related to formality the most. However, overall teachers require e-mail conventions with much less frequency that what the student reported using and what the teachers claimed the students use, as seen in the results of descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Furthermore, the four conventions least required by teachers (closings, correct letter case, spelling and grammar) are also the ones least used in student e-mails.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Brief History of the Internet and E-mail

In 1968 the United States Department of Defense funded the creation of

ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network), a computing system that

helped the government avoid having all of its intelligence information in one basket;

it connected the computers of the government to computers of universities conducting

research, which were in different geographical locations. The people who developed

ARPANET for the government started experimenting with using this computing

system to not only send data but also to send personal messages (Baron, 1998).

ARPANET eventually evolved into what we now call the Internet.

In the 1980s the Internet began to be used by people in academia and in

business for discussion lists, chatting, and electronic mail (e-mail) (Warschauer,

1996). By the end of the twentieth century many college campuses had Internet

access, and the ability to use e-mail was no longer restricted to a closed group of

academics, but available to many faculty and students (Baron, 1998). As a result, e-

mail evolved into a common and fundamental form of communication between

teachers and students in university communities (Hassini, 2006; Jones, 2002;

Waldeck, Kearney, & Plax, 2001).

As the Internet became more available and accessible to the public, books and

other media were published on netiquette (Baron, 2002). These include books such as

Toward an Ethics and Etiquette for Electronic Mail (Anderson & Shapiro, 1985),

Netiquette (Shea, 1994), and *Using E-mail Effectively* (Lamb & Peek, 1995), and

numerous websites such as www.netmatters.com, www.learnthenet.com,

www.networketiquette.net, and www.livinginternet.com. The term *netiquette* came to

refer to guidelines for all interaction that takes place over the Internet. *Netiquette*

guidelines are mainly suggestive, just as etiquette guides simply offer advice on appropriate decorum in various social situations. One set of guidelines, offered by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), highlights the fact that what they advise does "not specify an Internet standard of any kind" and only "provides a minimum set of guidelines for Network Etiquette (Netiquette) which organizations may take and adapt for their own use" (Hambridge, 1995, p. 1).

Encompassed in *netiquette* is e-mail communication, for which there are no universal conventions (Hawisher, 1993). Sources that offer e-mail guidelines provide a variety of views and lack homogeneity (Baron, 2002; Hawisher, 1993). This may partially be due to a lack of consensus on whether e-mail is more like speech or writing. As Baron (1998) points out, "the linguistic character of email resides mainly in the eye of the beholder" (p. 161); some e-mail users think it should be more like formal writing, while others perceive it to be more like casual speech (Baron, 2002). Until now it remains somewhere on the continuum between writing and speech (Hawisher, 1993).

More specifically, in student-teacher e-mail communication, with which this study is concerned, there is also no standard consensus (Gains, 1998). However, despite the lack of agreement, suggestive norms do exist. Just as there is a social protocol for how student-teacher meetings are held in North American universities (e.g. greetings, small talk) (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005), there are also features commonly found in student-teacher e-mail communication. This communication is formal by nature, due to the fact that it is between a student and an authority figure. It is referred to in the literature as status-unequal communication (Chen, 2006), or unequal-status correspondence (Bjorge, 2007). Despite a lack of agreement on the

features of e-mail, it appears, as Stephens, Houser, and Cowan (2009) suggest, that student-teacher e-mail is on the formal writing end of the continuum;

> the norms for written work in higher education might be spilling over to email communication in the instructional setting […] instructors likely have enduring patterns of anticipated writing performance for students regardless of whether it is in class or on-line and students who violate this norm risk losing credibility and power. (p. 319)

Given this status-unequal interaction, negative effects on teachers' perception of students may result (Stephens et al., 2009) if students do not keep this status difference in mind or are unaware of it.

The E-mail Genre

People often participate in situations that involve recurring patterns of language use (Derewianka, 2003), so genres have developed to aid in responding appropriately to these situations which people constantly encounter (Devitt, 1993). Different social practices require the use of distinct genres to achieve various goals (Derewianka, 2003; Hyland, 2003), because they are socially constructed and dependent on unique contexts (Hyland, 2003).

E-mail is used in various contexts, from the personal to the professional, and may change accordingly, but it still requires the use of patterns of language. For this reason, despite a lack of prescriptive norms, some are now referring to e-mail as a genre (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000; Hawisher & Moran, 1993). Just as there are conventions for other genres of writing (e.g. poetry, letters, research) the same is true for e-mail writing. Socially recognized ways of using language are evident in e-mail communication because of the consequences that result when those ways are violated. For example, lack of politeness or incorrect grammar causes the

sender and the message to not be well received (Jessmer & Andersen, 2001). In an education context, communication via e-mail between students and teachers requires the use of recurring patterns of language, which include e-mail conventions and appropriate language, the lack of which has repercussions (Stephens et al., 2009).

Genre-based Pedagogy

Genre-based pedagogy centers on providing students with explicit explanations of ways language functions in different social contexts (Hyland, 2003). There are three popular areas of genre-based pedagogy: English for specific purposes, North American new rhetoric studies, and Australian systemic functional linguistics (Hyon, 1996). This study is not concerned with a specific approach, but with genre-based pedagogy in general, and its aim to teach students to understand the conventions of a genre and to be equipped to respond appropriately in various situations (Devitt, 1993).

Genre-theorists claim that the participant relationship is at the core of language use, and therefore, a text should display the writer's awareness of the context he is writing in and the reader he is writing to (Hyland, 2003). Considering the status-unequal aspect of student-teacher e-mail communication, students need to navigate the genre, despite a lack of social context cues, with an awareness of their audience: professors who desire formality even in electronic communication.

Students in second language (L2) education need the tools to communicate in occupational, social, and academic settings (Hyland, 2007). As Hyland (2003) explained, "The teaching of key genres is, therefore, a means of helping learners gain access to ways of communicating that have accrued cultural capital in particular professional, academic, and occupational communities" (p. 24). To be able use

genres, such as e-mail, appropriately, L2 students need to become familiar with both the form and content.

Statement of the Research Problem

The relationship between students and teachers is important for success in university, and given the fact that e-mail is widely used to establish and maintain this relationship, it is essential for students to be able to use this genre. This is especially true since teachers have expectations, and an inability to comply on the part of the student may have consequences. There is no standard way to write e-mails, which proves to be challenging for students in general, and even more so for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners who are managing the genre in a language other than their first language (L1). Research has shown that e-mail writing is problematic for ESL and EFL students, who often write informal and inappropriate e-mails to faculty (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005; Biesenbach-Lucas, Meloni, & Weasenforth, 2000; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002; Chen, 2006).

This leads to questions regarding the awareness of ESL/EFL students of the suggestive conventions of e-mail, and regarding the interaction of ESL/EFL teachers with their students through this genre and their requirement of the use of e-mail conventions. This study aimed to investigate these issues by focusing on e-mail conventions that were compiled from several studies, and my own experience in writing student-teacher e-mails. The conventions of the student-teacher e-mail genre that were examined in this study were: (a) information in the subject line; (b) salutations; (c) address terms; (d) correct letter case; (e) complete sentences; (f) lack

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of SMS-style language; (g) closings; (h) sender's name at the end of the e-mail; (i) correct spelling; and (j) correct grammar.

Research has reflected the importance of this issue in ESL and EFL teaching only in some parts of the world. Studies have been conducted related to e-mail use between EFL students and faculty in China, Taiwan, and the United States (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005; Biensenbach-Lucas, 2007; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1996; Lee, 2004; Liaw, 1996). However, there is a gap in research regarding student-teacher e-mail communication in the Arab world, and more specifically in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Research Questions

In this study the above stated research gap was looked into by exploring the following research questions:

1. What conventions do students use in student-teacher e-mail communication?

2. What conventions do teachers require in student-teacher e-mail communication?

3. What is the relationship between the conventions that students use and teachers require in student-teacher e-mail communication?

Delimitations

This study focused on the use of e-mail conventions of EFL students at the American University in Cairo, Egypt, in e-mails to their EFL teachers, and on the requirement of these conventions by their teachers. Variables of age and gender, of both students and teachers, were not investigated in relation to the research questions. The benefits of e-mail use in a university context, and more specifically in an ESL and EFL context, were also not be explored.

Definitions of Constructs and Terms

Electronic communication: synchronous and asynchronous communication conducted using any device with an Internet connection

    a. *synchronous communication:* communication between two or more people at the same time (e.g. chat, instant messaging)

    b. *asynchronous communication:* communication between two or more people at different times (e.g. e-mail, message boards, e-mail discussion lists)

Netiquette:

    a. a postmanteau (a blended word) of the words network and etiquette

    b. guidelines created for the all interaction over the Internet, created by a standards organization named the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), but also described in various published books (e.g. *Toward an Ethics and Etiquette for Electronic Mail* by Norman Zalmon Shapiro; *Netiquette* by Virginia Shea; *Using E-mail Effectively* by Peek & Lamb)

Convention:

    a. "an established technique, practice, or device" (*Merriam-Webster.com*, 2011)

    b. "usage or custom especially in social matters" (*Merriam-Webster.com*, 2011)

    c. In this study *conventions* refer to parts of the suggestive guidelines for e-mail writing

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

E-mail has become a daily part of many people's lives, and it is difficult to imagine living without it. However, the use of e-mail by the public only traces back to the 1980s, and it was still only limitedly available to the elite in academia throughout the twentieth-century (Hawisher, 1993). Universities were integral in the start of the use of e-mail. In the field of education in the United States, electronic communication began to be used in the 1980s to teach writing (Warschauer, 1996). It is also around this time that specifically e-mail began to be used in foreign language classrooms, mainly for the purpose of providing students with partners with whom to communicate in the target language and exchange cultural information (Warschauer, 1996).

Given that e-mail has only been around in the academic world for merely a few decades it is not surprising that the existing literature on e-mail in education is sparse, and even more so on e-mail in second and foreign language education. The majority of research focuses on the possible uses and benefits of e-mail in the classroom and its effects on learning, with a few studies on the effects of e-mail on instructors, and academic e-mail conventions. These areas are discussed in more detail in the following review of literature.

Benefits of E-mail in Education

In one of the earliest articles on e-mail in education, Kinkead (1987) noted the many benefits that e-mail can offer in an education setting. The study recommended e-mail as a good tool to involve students in peer review and group work, give students

feedback on their writing, and improve student-teacher communication. These benefits were further investigated in later studies.

A main benefit and use of e-mail in education is to provide students with an audience to interact with outside of the classroom. Tao & Boulware (2002) researched the use of e-mail between second graders, in an American school, and the researchers about books they were reading. The students were taught the conventions of e-mail and then encouraged to discuss their thoughts with the researchers, who were not their teachers. The project excited the students and resulted in the increase of their literacy communication skills. Borsheim (2004) conducted a similar study with ninth graders, at an American school, who e-mailed undergraduate students of English education about books they were reading. The results showed an improvement in the articulation of the students' thoughts. A third study (Blase, 2000), involving American high school students, investigated an e-mail exchange between students in schools in Ohio, Massachusetts, Texas, and Vermont, regarding a novel all of the students were reading in their classes. The students enjoyed interacting with peers in other parts of the country.

The benefit of a larger audience has often been tapped into in L2 education through language exchanges conducted via e-mail. One of the earliest studies on this topic is Soh & Soon's (1991) study on an e-mail language exchange between high school EFL learners in Singapore, whose L1 was Chinese, and EFL learners in Canada, whose L1 was French. The study found that the exchange helped students write more clearly. Tella's (1992) study found similar results. Secondary school students in Finland wrote e-mails in English to students in countries such as the US and the UK. Tella reported an improvement in the students' writing as a result of using the language in an authentic context.

Several studies have been published related to language exchange via e-mail in universities. Barson, Frommer, and Schwartz (1993) examined an e-mail project in which American undergraduate students at Harvard, Stanford, and the University of Pittsburgh interacted in French. The project allowed for the opportunity for authentic negotiation of meaning in the practice of formal and informal e-mail writing. A similar study by Van Handle & Corl (1998) described an e-mail exchange between German classes at two American universities; instructors found that the exchange increased the vocabulary of students and helped them write better. Stockwell & Levy (2001) also examined a language exchange in a university setting; undergraduate students of Japanese, at a university in Australia, e-mailed students in Japan. The study showed a correlation between the amount of e-mail writing that the L2 students did and the increase in their Japanese language proficiency. In another study (Stockwell & Harrington, 2003) regarding e-mail between Australian students of Japanese and Japanese native speakers, students showed improvements in their L2 syntax and lexis after engaging in writing e-mails in the L2.

Language exchanges via e-mail in universities have also been explored in the ESL/EFL field. Kaufman's (1998) study of 150 ESL students at the University of Puerto Rico who e-mailed students around the world, found that e-mail was a good tool for students to take part in authentic communication. Ruhe (1998) writes about a university exchange program in Canada that involved EFL students exchanging e-mails with students at another university in Canada, and two universities in the US. The exchange increased students' cultural awareness, and allowed students to exchange and get feedback on their writing. Fedderholdt (2001) also reported on an e-mail exchange between Japanese and Danish university students learning English. The language exchange increased the motivation and interest of the students to

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communicate in English. Leahy's (2001) study on an e-mail exchange between undergraduate law students in England and Germany, writing to each other in English and German, found that the exchange provided students with an opportunity to use the L2 in an authentic context. All of these studies of different language exchanges taking place over e-mail show the positive effects of e-mail writing in an L2 by giving students a means of authentic communication and, in some cases, by impacting their L2 proficiency.

Several research studies have also been conducted regarding the effect of e-mail on L2 writing. A study done by Grosz-Gluckman (1997) looked at the effect of e-mail on the writing of ten ESL university students and found that with prolonged e-mail communication students could improve the syntactic structures in their writing. Liaw (1998) conducted a similar study to investigate the efficacy of using e-mail in the EFL classroom with 26 freshmen students at a university in Taiwan. The study reported that students felt that e-mail improved the revision of their writing, helped them express themselves more, increased their interest in writing in English, and with prolonged e-mail use they felt that their L2 proficiency could increase. Similar studies were done with Spanish and Italian L2 university students. Gonzalez-Bueno's (1998) study examined the e-mail writing of students with their instructor and found that students wrote longer more expressive messages through e-mail than they normally expressed orally. Absalom and Marden's (2004) study looked at the writing of Italian L2 university students in an Australian university and discovered that e-mail had positive effects on the grammar, cohesion, and progression of ideas in their writing.

Student opinions on receiving feedback on their writing via e-mail have also been researched, and the majority of studies report positive perceptions. Crossouard & Pryor (2009) reported that doctoral students of education at the University of Sussex,

UK appreciated e-mail feedback from their professor and found it to be beneficial. Similarly, Seliem & Ahmed (2009) surveyed 80 undergraduate students in a TEFL program at Helwan University, Egypt, the majority of whom thought e-mail feedback from their professors impacted their writing in a positive way more than oral feedback, especially in regards to grammar, lexical choices, spelling and punctuation. A study at a Taiwanese university (Shang, 2007) explored the use of e-mail for sending peer feedback on assignments among 40 EFL freshman students. This study, however, concluded that this interaction did not significantly improve the writing proficiency of the students.

Since the early 1990's e-mail has been seen as a beneficial tool for student-teacher communication. D'Souza (1992) noted that e-mail was a good tool for communication between peers in an American university setting because it helped students express themselves more openly to instructors and increased their communication with peers. A 2002 Pew Internet Project (Jones, 2002), which surveyed a large number of American college students, showed that the majority of students who used e-mail to interact with their professors felt that it had a positive effect on their student-teacher relationship. This was asserted by Fung & Sheer (2007) in their study, in which 408 undergraduates at an English-medium university in Hong Kong were surveyed. The majority of students reported that the frequency of e-mail, helpfulness, and reply promptness of a professor strengthened student-teacher relationships.

In the ESL/EFL context, a study by Sabieh (2002) found that in a comparison between two groups of university students, one that communicated with the teacher face-to-face and one that communicated with the teacher by e-mail, the group that communicated via e-mail, along with being more active and motivated to

communicate in the L2 of English, also strengthened their student-teacher relationships. Another study, by Bloch (2002), investigated the rhetorical strategies that graduate ESL students used in their e-mails to their ESL writing instructor, and concluded that e-mail helped build the student-teacher relationship.

In addition to improving the relationship between students and professors, e-mail is also beneficial in increasing the participation of shy students. Kelly, Duran, and Zolten (2001) researched the effect of e-mail on 345 undergraduate and graduate students at three American universities, and found that reticent students preferred to communicate with their teachers through e-mail, a means of communication they found to be less threatening than face-to-face or telephone communication. Absalom & Marden (2004) also asserted the same about e-mail encouraging reticent students to participate more in the L2 classroom.

Effects of Well- and Poorly-written E-mails

As far back as the 1980s it has been stated that writers of e-mail need to be aware of the context in which they are writing and the audience to whom they are writing. Sproull and Kiesler (1986) investigated the use of e-mail in a Fortune 500 company, and discovered that e-mail writers were often self-absorbed and did not differentiate between messages they sent to subordinates, peers, and superiors. The researchers expressed that senders and receivers of e-mail needed to pay attention to the social context they were communicating in. In an education context, the same statement was made by Hawisher & Moran (1993) about e-mail writers often losing a sense of audience, and therefore, that students needed to be warned that, despite the lack of constraints that a live audience provides, one needs to keep the context and the audience in mind when writing e-mails. These warnings are also part of the netiquette guidelines published by the Internet Engineering Task Force (Hambridge, 1995). The

guidelines for e-mail include a suggestion to remember that the receiver of the e-mail has his or her own language, culture, and humor. In an article about the linguistics of e-mail, Baron (1998) wrote that e-mail changes the linguistic context in spelling, vocabulary, syntax, and semantic appropriateness. All of these articles point to the importance of remembering the context, the reader, and the medium when one writes e-mails.

The previous suggestions are important because receivers of e-mail are affected by poorly and inappropriately written e-mails. Jessmer and Anderson (2001) used a convenience sample of students in an undergraduate psychology course at an American university, to examine the effects of the nature and format of e-mail on how the sender is perceived. The study found that people with better grammar and who wrote more polite messages, were seen as friendlier, more likeable, more competent, and caused the receiver to desire to work with them. A study by Stephens et al. (2009), which surveyed 152 instructors at an American university, confirms Jessmer and Anderson's findings. Stephens et al. reported that lack of formality in e-mail messages from students caused the instructors to like the students less, view them as less credible, have a lesser opinion of the quality of the message, and be less willing to comply with their request. Duran, Kelly, and Keaten's (2005) study also investigated teacher perceptions of student e-mails, and found that university faculty were concerned about the informal and sometimes inappropriate e-mails they receive from student. It is interesting to note that although the focus of Jessmer and Anderson's study was not on the perceptions of a specific group of people, or on student-teacher e-mail in particular, the participants were university students whose opinions mirrored those of university instructors in Stephens et al.'s study. This

implies that as receivers of e-mail, students and teachers have similar perceptions of poorly- and well-written e-mails.

ESL and EFL students especially struggle in writing status-appropriate e-mails. Several studies have compared the e-mails of native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) to professors, mainly focusing on the pragmatics of different communication strategies, such as requests and negotiations (Bardovi-Harlig & Dornyei, 1998; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Biesenbach-Lucas et al., 2000; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2002; Chen, 2001; Lee, 2004). Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth (2000) explained that EFL students lacked appropriate pragmatic competence when writing e-mails to faculty. Students often pleaded for help in e-mails instead of taking the initiative to offer suggestions to problems, which made them appear needy. Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2000) reason that "the demands of e-mail as a new technological genre are not recognized by most NNSs" (2000, p. 12). Chen's (2006) case study of an EFL graduate student whose pragmatic problems included delayed purpose statements, irrelevant information, strong help requests, and a lack of status-appropriate politeness, concurs with Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth's (2000) findings.

Academic E-mail Conventions

Research on e-mail is still limited, and studies on e-mail conventions are few, but several do exist. Gains (1998) conducted a study in an attempt to define the genre of academic e-mail because there appeared to be no agreed upon protocol for how to write academic e-mails, and very few books were available for ESL and EFL students on this topic. A sample of 116 e-mails from academic and business sources were analyzed for subject headings, openings, closings, register, conversational features,

topic reference, and awareness of the distinct features of the medium of e-mail. Gains found that all of the academic e-mails included subject headings, but not all of them included the other features. The academic e-mails included a wide range of register, and included many conversational features. The sample of Gains' study was not limited to student-teacher e-mails, but included e-mails between peers and faculty as well. Gains concluded that more research needed to be done to define the genre of academic e-mail and develop pedagogical guidelines for ESL students.

Stephens et al. (2009), in one part of their study, analyzed the degree to which students and teachers, at an American university, were bothered by the lack of certain conventions in e-mails, which were referred to as structural components. The following violations of structural components in e-mails were examined: lack of a subject line, lack of inclusion of address terms, inappropriate address of the instructor, disorganization, excessive length, spelling mistakes, inclusion of shortcuts (e.g. "RU"), lack of the author's name at the end, and unclear requests. The study found a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of students and teachers regarding two of these structural components: the use of shortcuts and the lack of the sender's name at the end of the e-mail; the teachers were bothered much more by these components than the students were.

In the ESL/EFL field two studies were found which researched e-mail conventions. Chen's (2001) study compared the use of general e-mail textual features in the e-mails of Taiwanese and American graduate students at an American university. These features included address terms, salutations, self-introductions, phatic communication, and closings. The Taiwanese students included address terms and salutations with more frequency than the American students, and used more variation in the closings. Bjorge (2007) also compared the use of e-mail conventions

by NS and NNS of English in an academic setting. A sample of 344 e-mails, written by graduate students to two professors at a university in Norway, were analyzed. The study looked at degrees of formality in the greetings and closings used in these e-mails and found that NNS used a wider range of conventions than NS. Greetings such as "Good morning/afternoon/evening" were used in addition to the common greetings of "Dear" and "Hello," and "Yours respectfully" in addition to the typical closings of "Regards" and "Sincerely."

It appears that both Chen's (2001) and Bjorge's (2007) studies show NNS to use more e-mail conventions, specifically greetings and closings, than NS. This seems to go against the studies previously discussed, which stated that ESL/EFL students struggle in writing e-mails to teachers. However, the use of a larger variety of conventions does not automatically suggest proper use.

E-mail and Education in the Arab World

The majority of studies that have been presented have investigated e-mail in education with students in Canada, China, Finland, Germany, Japan, Puerto Rico, Singapore, Taiwan, the UK, and the US. Studies, related to this topic, conducted in the Arab world are very few: one in Jordan, and two in Egypt. In Jordan the use of e-mail with eight graders was researched by El-Koumy and Mirian (2008). Two groups were contrasted: a traditional class and one in which the students had to e-journal, which essentially meant e-mail their teachers. The study concluded that the group that used e-mail improved their English writing more than the traditional group.

In the Egyptian context, which this current study focused on, only two studies were found related to e-mail and education. This may be due to the fact that the Internet is fairly new to Egypt, having only been introduced through a university network in 1993, and then available commercially in 1996 (Warschauer, 2003). Sadik

(2006) investigated the use of asynchronous and synchronous electronic communication in an on-line Algebra course offered to secondary school students. The majority of students enjoyed participating in the discussion boards, but found e-mail interaction with other students inconvenient, largely because they reported that other students did not frequently check their e-mail accounts. The second study conducted in Egypt is Seliem and Ahmed's (2009), which looked at graduate EFL students of teaching; it focused on the perceptions of the students of e-mail feedback from their professors. As previously mentioned in this review of literature, the students had positive opinions of the electronic feedback on their writing.

Conclusion

Given that teachers are bothered by inappropriately written e-mails, researchers have advocated training students on how to write e-mails (Duran et al., 2005; Hawisher & Moran, 1993; Stephens et al., 2009). As far back a the early 1990s Hawisher (1993) said that ignoring the teaching of the e-mail genre would go against the history of the teaching of writing:

> One could argue that we should leave e-mail to the students, as an underground medium where they will use writing to achieve their own ends, far from our governing gaze. Yet historically we have brought into our first-year college writing courses any and all genres that seem pan-disciplinary: the editorial, the letter of application, the letter of complaint, and the letter to the editor. (p. 629)

Several researchers have reiterated Hawisher's advice and see the need for e-mail training for ESL and EFL learners (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Chen, 2006; Ruhe, 1998), especially to academic authority figures.

E-mail is still a prevalent form of communication between friends, colleagues, and in businesses, and is widely used in university settings between students and

teachers. Given the lack of research on both e-mail conventions in student-teacher communication, and the use of e-mail in the field of education in the Arab world, this study was designed to explore these topics. I want to examine if EFL students, in an English-medium university in the Arab world, such as the American University in Cairo (AUC), use e-mail conventions and if teachers require those conventions in student-teacher communication.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Participants

AUC is a private English-medium university in the Arab world that is rich in resources, and all of its students and faculty are granted access to the Internet. Every student and teacher is required to have a university e-mail account, and the majority of correspondence sent by the university is via e-mail. Therefore, AUC provided an appropriate sample for this exploratory study, which sought to uncover information about the use and requirement of conventions in student-teacher e-mail communication in the Arab world, and specifically in Egypt. However, in a country like Egypt, where only 15.4% of the population has access to the Internet (OpenNet Initiative, 2009), it is important to be aware that this is more of the exception rather than the rule.

In addition, AUC has an Intensive English Program (IEP) and thus provided a mainly Arab, and mostly Egyptian, EFL population, which this study aimed to examine. I used convenience sampling to get participants from the IEP. The participants were 61 students enrolled in the IEP of the English Language Institute (ELI) at AUC, in the spring 2011 semester. The sample included 30 undergraduate students, enrolled in the advanced level English class (IEP 99), and 31 graduate students, 4 enrolled in the intermediate level English class (IEP 120), 9 in the advanced level English class (IEP 121), and 18 in graduate module classes (see Appendix A for TOEFL cut-off scores). See Table 3.1 for demographic information, of nationality, age, type of secondary school attended, and where graduate students received their undergraduate education.

Table 3.1

Demographic Information of Students

Demographic Information	IEP 99 ($n = 30$)	IEP 120 ($n = 4$)	IEP 121 ($n = 9$)	Graduate Modules ($n = 18$)	Total ($N = 61$)
Nationality					
Egyptian	26	3	8	17	54 (89%)
Other[a]	4	1	1	1	7 (11%)
Age					
16-19	27	0	0	0	27 (44%)
20-29	3	3	5	12	23 (38%)
30-39	0	1	3	4	8 (13%)
40-49	0	0	1	2	3 (5%)
Secondary School					
Government	5	2	4	11	22 (36%)
Private	22	2	5	6	35 (57%)
Both	3	0	0	1	4 (7%)
Undergraduate University					
Egypt		3	7	16	26 (84%)[c]
Other[b]		1	2	2	5 (16%)[c]

Note. N/A = Not Applicable.
[a]Korean, Nigerian, Saudi Arabian, Sudanese, and one unidentified.
[b]Korea, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.
[c]Percentage of graduate students only.

The sample also included 13 out of the 20 IEP teachers who taught in the department that semester (see Table 3.2 for demographic information of the teachers). Therefore, only 68% of the IEP teachers, excluding myself, participated in the study. This response rate is a little less than the minimum of 70%, which is recommended for a sample to be representative of a target population (Perry, 2005, p. 124), and therefore analysis of the results regarding teachers only pertains to the sample.

Table 3.2

Demographic Information of Teachers

Demographic Information	IEP 99	IEP 120	IEP 121	Graduate Modules	Total
	($n = 7$)	($n = 0$)	($n = 4$)	($n = 2$)	($N = 13$)
Nationality					
Egyptian	4	0	1	2	7 (54%)
American	3	0	3	0	6 (46%)
Age					
20-29	3	0	1	0	4 (31%)
30-39	1	0	2	0	3 (24%)
40-49	1	0	1	0	2 (15%)
50-59	1	0	0	1	2 (15%)
60+	1	0	0	1	2 (15%)

Descriptive statistics were collected on the habits of sending e-mails of the participants (see Figure 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3). Teachers send e-mails to various contacts more frequently than the students do, and also to students slightly more frequently than the students e-mail them. A high percentage of students (66%) reported not having corresponded with teachers via e-mail prior to coming to AUC.

The participants who stated that they do not e-mail teachers/students were asked to indicate the reasons. None of the teachers chose any of the options on the survey, except for two teachers who chose "other." Those teachers offered explanations in their open-ended responses. One teacher said that he or she mainly uses Blackboard© to communicate with students, and the other teacher explained that, although he or she e-mailed students often when he or she taught a study skills course, he or she does not find it as beneficial to e-mail students when teaching a grammar course.

The students, however, did choose from the other options on the survey, to clarify their reasons for not sending e-mails to teachers. The majority of the students (33%) reported preferring face-to-face contact, followed by not seeing the need (10%). The other options ("I am not good with e-mail," "It takes too much time," and "other") were chosen by less than 5% of the students. Some students gave open-ended responses but reiterated what was stated in the options: one student said that he or she prefers to talk to the teacher in person, and another wrote that he or she is "bad at writing formal e-mails."
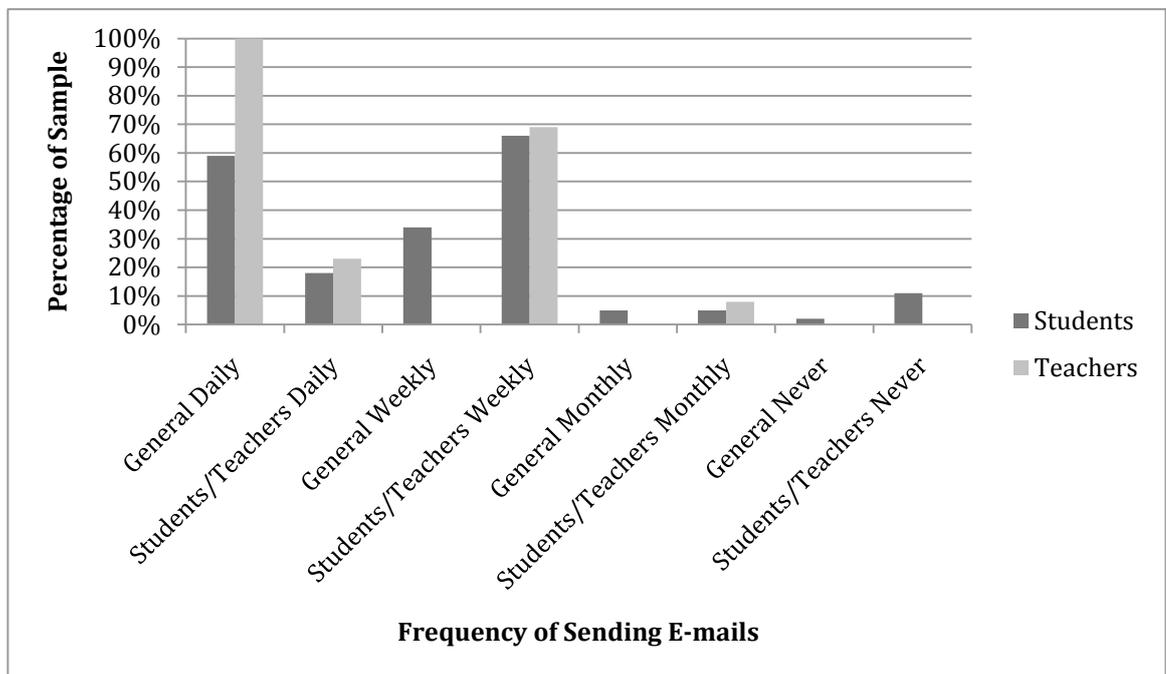
Figure 3.1. Frequency of sending e-mails generally & to teachers/students
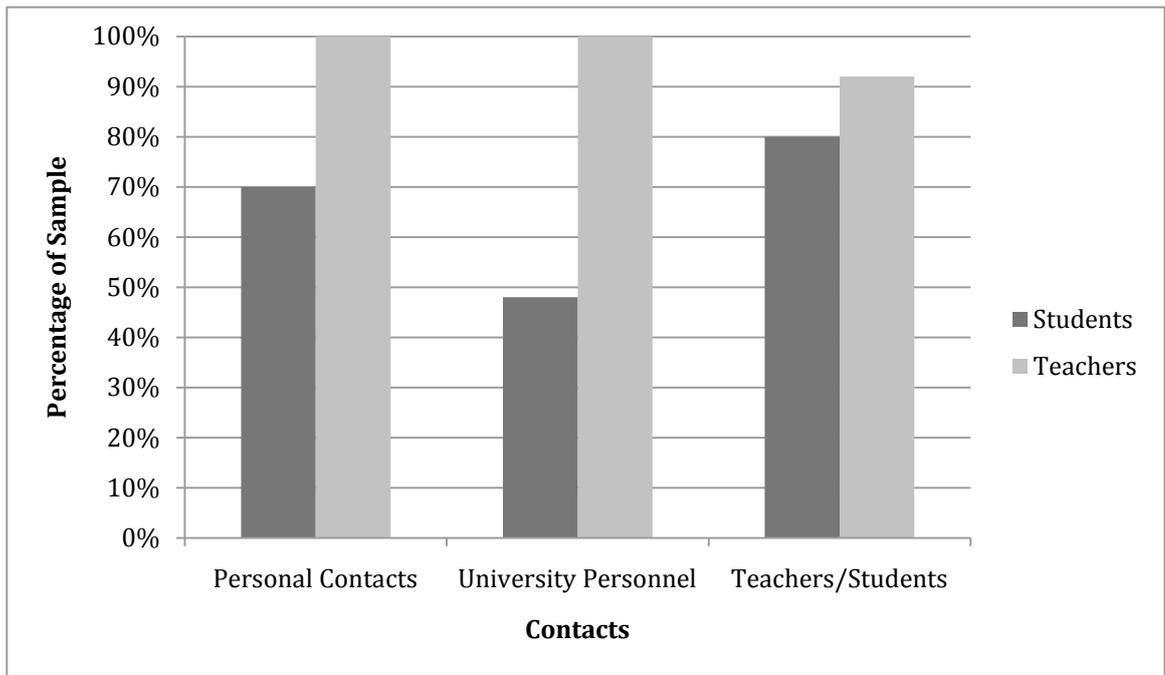
Figure 3.2. Contacts to whom students and teachers send e-mails
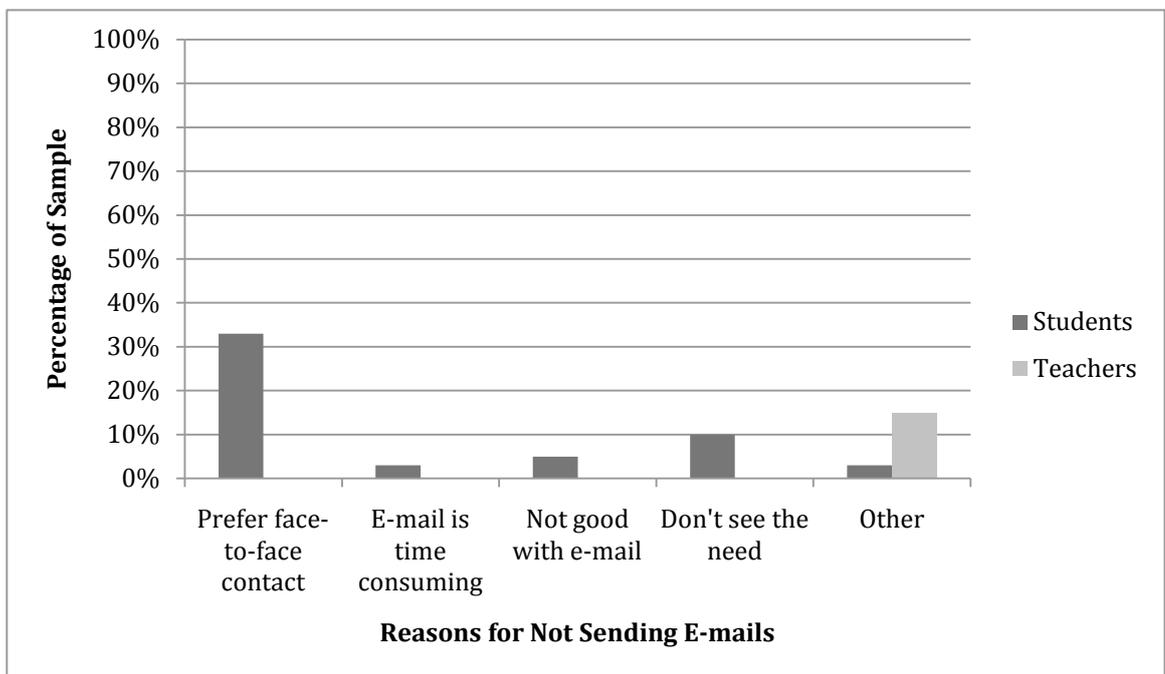
Figure 3.3. Reasons for not sending e-mails to teachers/students

Data Collection

Instruments. No questionnaires, related to the frequency of use of e-mail conventions, which could be used intact or adapted for this study, were found. I therefore created a student and a teacher survey using Kwik Surveys (2009), a free on-line resource. The surveys included demographic, e-mail use, and e-mail training questions, along with Likert-type scale items regarding the frequency of use (teacher and student survey) and frequency of requirement (teacher survey) of conventions commonly found in e-mails. These items related to e-mail conventions referred to in the netiquette guidelines of the Internet Engineering Task Force (Internet Engineering Task Force [IETF], 1995), and mentioned in other studies: Chen (2001), Gains (1998), Hawisher (1993), and Stephens et al. (2009), as well as my own experience as a student and a teacher.

The student survey consisted of 22 questions: 6 multiple-choice items, 2 of which were accompanied by the option to write an open-ended response; 2 multiple-answer items, one of which was accompanied by the option to write an open-ended response; 3 yes/no questions; and 10 5-point Likert-type scale items (see Appendix B). The teacher survey consisted of 35 questions: 4 multiple-choice items; 4 multiple-answer items, 2 of which were accompanied by the option to write an open-ended response; 4 yes/no questions; 22 5-point Likert-type scale items, 2 of which were accompanied by the option to write an open-ended response; and 1 open-ended question (see Appendix C). The responses to both surveys were anonymous. The AUC Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (AUC IRB) approved the collection of all data.

The reliability of the surveys was analyzed with the Laboratory of Educational Research Test Analysis Package (Laboratory of educational research test analysis

package [Lertap], 2010), a student trial-version of which is available for free on the Internet. The 10 5-point Likert-type scale items on the student survey produced a Cronbach alpha of .76. The 20 5-point Likert-type scale items on the teacher survey produced a Cronbach alpha of .94. This indicates that the student survey was moderately reliable, and the teacher survey was highly reliable. If question 16 on the student survey, which asked about the frequency of use of SMS-style language in e-mails to teachers, had been taken out, the reliability coefficient would only have been slightly higher: .78. It is unclear why the reliability of the student survey was only moderate. It was based on only 10 items, as opposed to the teacher survey, which was based on 20 items, and this may have resulted in a lower reliability coefficient. In addition, the limited English language proficiency of the students may have caused some confusion or misunderstandings, despite my attempt to make the wording of the questions as clear as possible. The students may have rushed to finish the survey, may not have answered it seriously, or may even have been doubtful of the anonymity of the survey, which could have also contributed to a decrease in reliability.

Instrumental data collection procedures. In order to administer the survey to the students I was granted permission, by both the undergraduate and graduate IEP coordinators, to visit all IEP classes. I visited the classes that the teachers invited me to, which were 10 out of the 12 IEP classes. In each class I introduced the study, gave, reviewed, and collected consent forms, and gave the students the on-line link to the student survey. After making sure that all of the students were able to open the link to the survey I left as not to influence their answers or make them feel pressured. They then took the survey on the computers in the IEP computer labs, where the classes were already scheduled.

I opted not to send the survey directly to the IEP students by e-mail for several reasons. The first reason is that this would have required an additional step of collecting the e-mail addresses of the students. The second is that if the addresses were written by the students I would have encountered the problem of illegible handwriting, which would have led to a decrease in data. Thirdly, I would have had to rely on the students remembering to take the survey in their free time, which again could have led to a decrease in data. Furthermore, because this study aimed to gather information about the e-mail use of students, I could not assume that students used or checked their e-mail accounts, despite being required by the university to have them.

In order to collect data from the teachers, I asked the IEP coordinator to send an e-mail, on my behalf, with the on-line link to the teacher survey, to the teachers requesting their participation. I assumed that this would increase the response rate. The introduction of the survey informed the participant that by answering the survey he or she was giving consent for his or her responses to be used in research. The responses to both surveys were collected and stored on-line by Kwik Surveys (2009).

Since data were needed on the state of e-mail use of EFL students and teachers at the time that the study was conducted, the effect of time was not important. Teachers probably had e-mail habits that they had maintained for quite some time, which would not drastically change without the implementation of department or university requirements, or without possibly needed training. In regards to the students, even though their e-mail habits could change as they progress through the university system, the study aimed to diagnose their e-mail habits at the time of the study and therefore time again was not an issue.

Verbal data. In addition to the surveys, data were collected from a sample of e-mails that students had written to teachers, in order to obtain additional information

on the use of e-mail conventions by students. Of the 61 students who consented to take the survey, 57 (24 undergraduates and 33 graduates) consented to allow me to receive e-mails they had written to IEP teachers that semester. The students represented 65% of those who consented to allow me to receive their e-mails, and 61% of those who took the survey. Over a two-week period I received 140 e-mails, which had an average of 38 words each. They were written by 37 students (16 undergraduate and 21 graduate), to 10 teachers (3 undergraduate and 7 graduate). A considerable portion of the e-mails (47%) was written by 6 students: 3 undergraduate and 3 graduate.

  Verbal data collection procedures. I e-mailed the teachers and asked them to forward as many of the students' e-mails as possible that did not contain any sensitive information. I chose to have the teachers forward the e-mails to me rather than the students because it is easier to be in contact with 19 people, rather than 57, and I assumed that teachers would be more dependable and prompt.

  The fact that the e-mails received only represented 61% of the student sample could be because of various reasons. One reason could be that the teachers either forgot or chose not to respond to my request. A second reason could be that some teachers felt it was a breach of the privacy of the relationship they have with their students, as was expressed by one teacher. A third reason could be that some students consented but had not actually written any e-mails to their teachers, as was explained by another teacher. A fourth reason could be that teachers did not have e-mails to forward because they do not communicate with their students via e-mail, or, as one teacher stated, they use other means of communication, such as Blackboard©.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and nonparametric statistics were calculated, and verbal data were analyzed for patterns and themes.

Analysis of quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all questions on the surveys using Lertap (2010) and SOFA Statistics (2009), both of which are free to download from the Internet. Chi-square tests were used to examine relationships between the frequency of use of e-mail conventions, reported by students and teachers, and the frequency of requirement of e-mail conventions by teachers. This study did not pose any hypotheses, but the third research question implied a null hypothesis that there is no relationship between the variables of the frequency of use of e-mail conventions by students and the frequency of requirement of e-mail conventions by teachers.

Analysis of verbal data. The verbal data that I collected from open-ended questions on the surveys were analyzed with descriptive statistics. Only the open-ended questions regarding the need for e-mail training for students, and the desire to receive e-mail training at the university, on the student survey, were analyzed by thematic content analysis because they were questions to which more than a few participants responded. I put the responses into two categories: need/want training and do not need/want training. I then identified sub-themes under those categories.

The main source of verbal data was the sample of student e-mails. I divided the e-mails into two categories: initial student messages and sequenced, sustained exchanges, as referred to by Biesenbach-Lucas (2005). The sample of 140 e-mails consisted of 105 initial student messages and 35 sequenced, sustained exchanges. I gave an identification number to every e-mail in counter-chronological order from the time received.

The only coding scheme that I found, which has been applied to e-mail, is the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) scheme, which was created to investigate requests and apologies in various languages using nine levels of directness or indirectness (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). This scheme did not directly apply to this study, so I coded the e-mails based on a coding scheme that I created to identify the conventions that were asked about in the Likert-type scale items on the surveys, which as previously mentioned in the Instruments section, were compiled from netiquette guidelines, other studies, and my own experience. I used a code for the following: information in the subject line, salutations, address terms, closings, and the sender's name at the end of the message. SMS-style language[1], incomplete sentences, and case (upper and lower case), spelling, and grammar mistakes were also coded. Punctuation mistakes were also identified even though punctuation was not a convention asked about on the student or teacher survey. I decided to additionally code for punctuation after I looked at about 20 e-mails and found common punctuation errors. In the process of coding the e-mails, I compiled a list of examples and errors of each convention, and frequency of use of those examples and errors, to look for patterns of what the students typically included in their e-mails.

A second coder, who is a colleague of mine, chose 20 random numbers, which corresponded with the identification numbers of the e-mails, and was given those e-mails to code. The overall reliability coefficient, Pearson $r = .97$, indicated high inter-coder reliability. The second coder only coded at a portion of the sample since the inter-coder reliability was calculated to ensure the reliability of my coding.

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[1] Emoticons were not coded.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The analysis of quantitative and verbal data answered the three research questions regarding the e-mail conventions students use, teachers require, and the relationship between the two.

E-mail Conventions Students Use

To answer the first research question regarding the conventions students use in student-teacher e-mail communication, data were gathered from three sources: the student survey, the teacher survey, and the sample of student e-mails.

Surveys. Data from the student and teacher survey revealed that a higher frequency was reported by the teachers for four out of the ten conventions: information in the subject line, salutations, address terms, and the student's name at the end of e-mails. The teachers also indicated that students use SMS-style language with higher frequency than the students stated. The students stated that they use correct letter case, write in complete sentences, write a closing, check their spelling, and their grammar with greater frequency than the teachers stated (see Table 4.1).

The differences between the reporting by students and teachers were assessed using chi-square tests between the frequency of use of each convention reported by the students and the teachers (see Table 4.1). The tests revealed a statistically significant difference between the two for salutations ($\chi^2 = 12.000$, $df = 4$, $p = .018$), complete sentences ($\chi^2 = 3.410$, $df = 3$, $p = .017$), closings ($\chi^2 = 12.032$, $df = 4$, $p = .017$), and correct spelling ($\chi^2 = 13.415$, $df = 3$, $p = .004$), with teachers claiming a higher frequency of use of salutations, but a lower frequency of use of complete sentences, closings, and correct spelling in the e-mails of students.

Table 4.1

Chi-square Tests Between the Frequency of Use of E-mail Conventions in Student E-mails Reported by Students and Teachers

E-mail Convention	χ^2	df	p	Students		Teachers	
				M	SD	M	SD
Information in the subject line	2.901	4	.574	4.21	1.04	4.31	0.72
Salutation	12.000	4	.018*	3.97	1.44	4.46	0.63
Address terms	2.254	4	.689	4.23	1.18	4.69	0.61
Correct letter case	4.465	4	.312	4.16	1.06	3.85	0.86
Complete sentences	3.410	3	.017*	4.31	0.88	3.85	0.95
SMS-style language	4.093	4	.394	4.11	1.17	3.85	1.17
Closing	12.032	4	.017*	4.36	1.10	3.85	0.86
Sender's name at the end	5.038	4	.283	3.90	1.42	4.31	0.82
Correct spelling[a]	13.415	3	.004**	4.49	0.84	3.54	0.84
Correct grammar[a]	8.844	4	.065	4.10	1.07	3.31	0.82

Note. A 5-point scale was used: *always* (1), *often* (2), *sometimes* (3), *rarely* (4), and *never* (5). The stem for the question on the student survey was: "How often do you DO the following when you write e-mails to TEACHERS?" The stem for the question on the teacher survey was: "How often do students DO the following in their e-mails to you?"
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

E-mails. The sample of student e-mails was divided into initial student messages and sequenced, sustained messages to see if there would be a difference in the frequency of use of any of the conventions due to this distinction. Descriptive statistics showed that there was no obvious indication that an increase or decrease in the frequency of use of any of the e-mail conventions could be related to the message being first or second in a thread (see Appendix D).

Coding of the e-mails revealed that most e-mails included information in the subject line (90%), a salutation (80%), the address terms of the teacher (76%), and complete sentences (97%). They also rarely included SMS-style language (6%). A little less than half of the e-mails did not have any letter case errors (48%), but they were written by only 30% of the students. The overwhelming majority of letter case

errors were lower case errors (85%), and a minority were upper case errors (15%).

Less than two-thirds of the e-mails included a closing (59%) or the student's name at

the end (63%). A portion of the e-mails did not have any spelling (25%), grammar

(50%), or punctuation (36%) mistakes. In addition, although a majority of the e-mails

included a salutation and address terms, those e-mails represented less than two-thirds

of the students (65% and 59% respectively). See Table 4.2 for the frequency of use of

conventions in student e-mails.

Table 4.2

Frequency of Use of E-mail Conventions in Student E-mails

E-mail Convention	E-mail sample (N = 140)		Student sample (N = 37)	
	n	%	*n*	%
Information in the subject line	126	90%	32	86%
Salutation	112	80%	24	65%
Address terms	106	76%	22	59%
Correct letter case	66	47%	11	30%
Complete sentences	136	97%	33	89%
SMS-style language	9	6%	6	16%
Closing	83	59%	20	54%
Sender's name at the end	88	63%	18	49%
Correct spelling	105	25%	17	46%
Correct grammar	70	50%	11	30%
Correct punctuation[a]	50	36%	7	19%

[a]Not included on the surveys.

Analysis of the examples of the e-mail conventions in the student e-mails

revealed the following patterns of use.

Subject line. Most of the e-mails that included information in the subject line

had the assignment name in the subject line (71%). The other 29% included greetings

(e.g. "hi"), requests (e.g. "question"), or explanations (e.g. "apology"), among other

things. One subject line had the entire first line of the e-mail message, and another had the entire body of the e-mail.

Salutations. The majority of the e-mails that included a salutation used "Dear" (70%), and "Hi" (20%). The remainder included other salutations such as "Hello," "hey," "Good morning," "Good afternoon," and "Good evening."

Address terms. Of the e-mails that had the teacher's address terms the majority included "Miss/Ms./Mrs." and the first name (73%). "Miss" and the first name (10%), "Miss/Ms./Mrs." and the last name (11%), the first name only (9%), and "Dr." and the first name (4%), were also used. Two e-mails, written by two different students, included "Mr." and the first name, even though the teacher being addressed was a woman.

Letter case. Letter case mistakes included very few upper case mistakes (15%); the majority were lower case (85%).

Upper case errors. All of the upper case errors were letters at the beginning of words that should not be capitalized in the middle of a sentence. For example (words with upper case letter errors are in italics):

"Kindly, attached find my *Narrowed*-down topic with its *Acadmic Purpose*."

"I'am very stressed, so *What* do you think if I won't come today to the campus?"

Only one e-mail had words completely in upper case letters:

"I HOPE YOU ARE SURE NOW THAT I DID MY HW AND BEFORE FRIDAY :)"

Lower case errors. The majority of case errors were lower case. Of those errors 44% did not have one or more *I's* (first person singular pronoun) capitalized, and 17% were written completely in lower case letters, which accounted for 8% of the entire sample of e-mails. For example:

"hi, can I send my summary to you before submittng it on turnitin.com to see whether or not the summary is good ?"

"hey miss [x] sorry for not being at class today, but I am relay so sick, and the doctor said i need rest. this is my final OP summary i couldn't use turnitin website it keeps telling me it is rong password, but i had to send u the summary on time.sorry again.
your's [x x]"

About 43% of the e-mails with lower case errors had words at the beginning of sentences that did not have the first letter of the word capitalized. For example (words lacking capitalization are in italics):

"Dear Ms/ [X]:
I took all my notes and information from the first two sources and I didn't use any more sources. *the* first two sources full of information. *can* I bring only the two sources or must I search about more sources???
Thanks
[X X]
UG2"

"Hello Miss [X]
ya off course this is my topic for my final OP and I sent it to the turnitin
There is no Plagiarism
and I want to check it grammatically so I decided to send it to you as the essay of Saturday or it is forbidden?"

Other e-mails with lower case errors lacked capitalization in the names of people (13%), in both the sender's own name and the teacher's name. Still others lacked capitalization in the salutation, closing, and address terms, the most prevalent of which was "thank you" in the closing (10%).

SMS-style language. Very few e-mails had SMS-style language (6%). In the e-mails that did "r," "u," "sry," "plz," "4," and "2moro," were used.

Closings. Of the e-mails that had closings 53% had a variation of "Thank you" (e.g. "Thanks," "Thanks again," and "Thanks anyway,"), and 51% had a variation of "Regards" (e.g. "Best regards," "Regards," and "Best").

Sender's name. Approximately half of the e-mails that included the sender's name at the end had the first name only (52%). The remainder included the sender's first and last name (40%). A few e-mails included the student's middle name or middle initial.

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Spelling. A common spelling mistake was the omission of a letter (40%) *(*e.g. "enogh," "sientific," and "inclue"). Other mistakes included misspelling of the teacher's name (20%), general spelling errors (20%) (e.g. "plarigism," "article," and "commun"), informal spelling (14%) (e.g. "wanna," and "ya"), extra letters (11%) (e.g. "comming," and "tommorrow"), and one word written as two or two words written as one (9%) (e.g. "donot," "Goodmorning," and "home work").

Grammar. There were a variety of patterns noted regarding grammar, which included mistakes in tense, articles, the possessive, among other things. The majority of mistakes were related to prepositions, sentences regarding attachments and sources, word order, word form or choice, question formation, and subject-verb agreement. A considerable portion of the e-mails with grammar mistakes had preposition mistakes (30%), as seen in the following examples (preposition mistakes are in italics):

"search *about* more sources"

"being *at* class today"

"I am writing *for* you from"

"I am waiting [X]'s opinion"

Others had mistakes in sentences referring to attachments (20%). For example:

"Please kindly find here attach my essay..."

"Kindly find attached file of my paraphrasing..."

"Kindly, attached find my Narrowed-down topic with its Acadmic Purpose."

"If you please find attached my..."

"I am going to send you an e-mail attached in it the RJ that I missed and the rewrite of the recent topic"

"If you would like to see this e-mail, attached with it the rewrite of the last essay."

"Please kindly correct of my re-writing essay no.1. as I attached."

"I attach here my essay"

Some had mistakes in sentences referring to sources or information being sent in the body of the e-mail (9%). For example:

"And there is the link: […]"

"This is my stuff and i will give them to you printed tomorrow."

"I put in this e-mail all the articles which we'll use in our mini OP ,me and [X]."

"These are [X] and [X], please find the following our Mini OP's title"

Word order mistakes were found in 19% of the e-mails with grammar mistakes, such as:

"I able to find sientific sources about this topic more than three"

"how to treat people sick under the genre of treatment"

"The most part that..."

"what do you think I should do or what grade I must have in this class to do this?"

Word form or word choice mistakes were present in 17% of the e-mails with grammar mistakes. For example:

"is this outline accepted and is it ok?"

"How are you? I wish everything is OK."

"i hope that you remarked that i have a problem with prepositions"

"but unfortunately I couldn't find any articles belongs to our topic"

A small portion of grammar mistakes were related to question formation (10%) and subject-verb agreement (10%), as seen in the following examples:

Question formation examples:

"I wonder if i didn't come today and didn't bring the printed sources, is that will affect my grades? I was too sick last days and i am still exhausted."

"I have a question; In the Final OP, I will be talking about 5 types of sports injuries, so i have to make a summary talking about all the 5 types ?"

Subject-verb agreement examples:

"a copy have been submitted"

"should I wait for sunday and brings them"

Punctuation. About half of the e-mails that had punctuation errors did not include periods at the end of a sentence, or apostrophes (49%). Another frequent punctuation mistake was incorrect punctuation in the address terms of the teacher (48%): (a) lack of a period after the address terms (e.g. "Mrs X,"); (b) punctuation other than a period after the address terms (e.g. "Ms, X," "Ms\X"); and (c) lack of a comma after the teacher's name (e.g. "Ms. X"). Lack of a comma after the closing was also common (42%). In addition, some of the e-mails included unnecessary punctuation in the sender's name (11%): a period after the sender's name at end of e-mail (e.g. "[X X.]"), or a comma between the first and last name of the sender (e.g. "[X],[X]"). Unusual punctuation was found in a minority of the e-mails with punctuation errors (9%). For example:

"Yes miss I would like too talk about a specific culture which is mine hope it will be ok bye you thank you........"

"can I bring only the two sources or must I search about more sources???"

"((the topic is about the effect of civil war on the situation in Sudan))"

"I have already wrote the notes but they are around 1000 word!! and I think the contain is interesting... so what should I do?"

"Hi Mrs/ [X] please can you answer me about the final op. topic (breast cancer){causes- solutions...,,,}"

Lack of a body. A few e-mails did not include anything in the body of the e-mail (*n* = 4). They only included an attachment, which was referred to in the subject line.

Conventions reported in surveys vs. e-mails. The descriptive statistics of the frequency of use of conventions reported in the surveys were compared to descriptive statistics of the conventions noted in student e-mails, and there were no major differences for half of the conventions. However, there are some differences worth noting regarding five of the ten conventions. Two conventions were found with greater frequency in the e-mails than reported on the surveys: salutations and the sender's name at the end. Students include salutations and their name at the end with higher frequency than they reported, but with lower frequency than the teachers reported them using. Students also do not use SMS-style language as often as both they and the teachers indicated. Two conventions were found with lower frequency in the e-mails than were reported on the surveys: closings and correct spelling. Students include a closing with lower frequency than they reported, but with slightly higher frequency than the teachers stated. Students also use correct spelling with a much lower frequency than they say they do. See Table 4.3 for descriptive statistics of the e-mail conventions reported by students and teachers and those noted in the e-mails.

Table 4.3

Descriptive Statistics of the Use of E-mail Conventions Reported by Students and Teachers & in Student E-mails

E-mail Convention	Student Survey (*M*)	Rank	Teacher Survey (*M*)	Rank	Student E-mails (%)	Rank
Information in the subject line	4.21	5	4.31	3	90%	2
Salutation	3.97	9	4.46	2	80%	3
Address terms	4.23	4	4.69	1	76%	4
Correct letter case	4.16	6	3.85	4	47%	8
Complete sentences	4.31	3	3.85	4	97%	1
SMS-style language	4.11	7	3.85	4	6%	10
Closing	4.36	2	3.85	4	59%	6
Sender's name at the end	3.90	10	4.31	3	63%	5
Correct spelling	4.49	1	3.54	5	25%	9
Correct grammar	4.10	8	3.31	6	50%	7

E-mail Conventions Teachers Require

The second research question was in regards to the conventions teachers

require in student-teacher e-mail communication. Data were collected to answer this

question from the 11 Likert-type scale items and one open-ended question on the

teacher survey. See Table 4.4 for descriptive statistics of the conventions that teachers

reported requiring.

Table 4.4

Descriptive Statistics of the Conventions Teachers Require in Student-Teacher E-mail

Communication

E-mail Convention	*M*	*SD*	Rank
Information in the subject line	2.77	1.72	3
Salutation	2.54	1.65	4
Address terms	2.92	1.77	2
Correct letter case	2.23	1.37	6
Complete sentences	2.46	1.45	5
Lack of SMS-style language	2.92	1.59	2
Closing	2.23	1.42	6
Sender's name at the end	3.00	1.52	1
Correct spelling	2.46	1.50	5
Correct grammar	2.23	1.37	6

Note. A 5-point scale was used: *always* (1), *often* (2), *sometimes* (3), *rarely* (4), and *never* (5). The stem
for the item on the teacher survey was: "Please indicate how often you REQUIRE students to do the
following in their e-mails."

On the open-ended question, which was accompanied by a Likert-type scale

item, teachers were asked if they require something in student-teacher e-mail

communication other than the 10 conventions asked about in the Likert-type scale

items. One American teacher, who teaches undergraduate students, commented that

that he or she requires students to respond to e-mails promptly. This was echoed by

another American teacher, who also teaches undergraduate students, who requires

students to promptly reply if the e-mail includes the words "urgent" or "read now." The same teacher requires students to "make the message clear." An American teacher, who teaches graduate students, requires students to "give a clear name to their attachments if they are sending any. The name they give has to reflect the content of their attachment and their own name." Two teachers responded by saying that they do not require anything in particular because they either "don't teach e-mail" or do not focus on the "content of the e-mails."

Teachers were also asked a multiple-answer question about how they communicate their requirement of the e-mail conventions, in the Likert-type scale items, to students. A little less than half of the teachers ($n = 6$) chose the "speak with them individually" option, 23% ($n = 3$) chose "teach a lesson about these e-mail conventions," 23% ($n = 3$) said they do not require any of the conventions in the Likert-type scale items, one teacher said he or she does not do any of the things stated, and two teachers chose "other." Those two teachers said that they tell the class at the beginning of the semester. None of the teachers chose the "give the class a document with e-mail instructions" option.

The Relationship Between the E-mail Conventions Students Use and Teachers Require

The third research question regarding the relationship between the conventions students use and teachers require in student-teacher e-mail communication was answered by comparing the data that were collected to answer research questions one and two. Chi-square tests were run between the conventions students use, according to the students, and teachers require, and between the conventions students use, according to the teachers, and teachers require. The results of the first set of chi-square tests showed statistically significance for all of the conventions, except for the

convention of the sender's name at the end of the e-mail (see Table 4.5). This would

mean that the null hypothesis is rejected and that there is a relationship between the

frequency of use of e-mail conventions by students and the requirement of those

conventions by teachers, except for the convention of name; teachers require less

frequent use of all of those conventions.

Table 4.5

Chi-square Tests Between the Frequency of Use of E-mail Conventions Reported by

Students and the Frequency of Requirement of E-mail Conventions by Teachers

E-mail Convention	χ^2	df	p
Information in the subject line	21.672	4	.001**
Salutation	11.813	4	.019*
Address terms	16.871	4	.002**
Correct letter case	28.376	4	.001**
Complete sentences	3.410	4	.017*
SMS-style language	18.426	4	.001**
Closing	26.621	4	.001**
Sender's name at the end	6.319	4	.177
Correct spelling	35.092	4	.001**
Correct grammar	29.376	4	.001**

* p < .05. ** p < .01.

Relatively similar results were obtained from chi-square tests between the

conventions students use, according to the teachers, and teachers require (see Table

4.6). The results were statistically significant for all of the conventions, except for the

use of complete sentences, the lack of use of SMS-style language, and the inclusion of

the sender's name at the end. Again, the null hypothesis is rejected; the results show

that there is a correlation between the frequency of use of conventions by students,

except the ones that were not statistically significant, and those required by teachers.

Teachers require these conventions with less frequency than the students use.

Table 4.6

Chi-square Tests Between the Frequency of Use of E-mail Conventions Reported by

Teachers and the Frequency of Requirement of E-mail Conventions by Teachers

E-mail Convention	χ^2	df	p
Information in the subject line	10.400	4	.034*
Salutation	11.600	4	.021*
Address terms	10.000	4	.040*
Correct letter case	9.533	4	.049*
Complete sentences	7.943	4	.094
SMS-style language	8.600	4	.072
Closing	12.667	4	.013*
Sender's name at the end	8.961	4	.062
Correct spelling	10.238	4	.037*
Correct grammar	12.000	4	.017*

* p < .05. ** p < .01.

E-mail Training

Students and teachers were asked on the surveys about the need for students to receive training in writing e-mails to teachers. The data from the student and teacher surveys were analyzed with descriptive statistics, and thematic content analysis was used for the data from the student survey.

Students. The majority of students do not think they need training in writing e-mails to teachers and do not want training at the university; 62% said no ($n = 38$), and 38% said yes ($n = 23$).

Results of the thematic content analysis of the open-ended questions on the student survey provided further insight into student-teacher communication, although they did not directly answer any of the research questions. Of the 61 students who participated in the survey, 16 undergraduate and 21 graduate students ($n = 37$, 61%), responded to the open-ended question regarding whether they need training in writing

e-mails to teachers. The responses were divided into two categories: do not and do need training; 21 do not, and 16 do.

Do not need training. One dominant sub-theme was found in these responses: adequate knowledge of e-mail writing ($n = 16$). For example:

> "I am used to send e-mails too much and i know what should i write." (undergraduate student [UG])

> "as I don't feel any troubles in writing e-mails to teachers or anyone else" (graduate student [G])

The remainder of the responses included other reasons, such as having already received enough training ($n = 2$), and the ability to consult the Internet ($n = 1$). One response mentioned not needing training in writing to teachers but to others:

> "Not to teacher specificlly but for wide range of my daily contacts"

Do need training. Two dominant sub-themes were found in these responses: the importance of formal writing ($n = 6$), and the lack of e-mail writing skills ($n = 6$). Responses under the first sub-theme included words such as "appropriate way," "official writing style," "formal way," and "e-mail format."

> "To learn the apporriate way to connect with teachers within e-mails" (UG)

> "I need to know how to write in formal way" (G)

The following are examples of responses under the second sub-theme:

> "BECAUSE I FEEL LIKE ALWAYS THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH MY E-MAILS" (upper case lettering is the student's) (UG)

> "I make some mistakes in writing e-mails" (G)

Two responses mentioned the influence on the student-teacher relationship, and one response mentioned future work:

> "I think it`s better because it`s more faster to connect with him by e-mail than i wait   to see him." (UG)

> "yes this will help me to contact better with my teachers." (G)

"yes i need because i'll connect with my employees and my manager a lot when i'll work." (UG)

Students were also asked an open-ended question about whether they would like to receive training at the university (AUC). Of the 61 students who took the survey, 22 (36%) provided responses; 12 students said that they do not want training at AUC, and 10 do.

Do not want training. The same main sub-theme that was found in the responses that indicated not needing training, was also found in the responses in regards to the desire for training at the university: adequate knowledge of e-mail writing ($n = 6$).

"I'm dealing with it very good." (UG)

"I dont think so no one complian from my e-mails" (G)

Another sub-theme that was found was the lack of time ($n = 4$).

"Training at AUC on writing e-mails to teachers, will takes time and efforts." (UG)

"I have no time to have a training" (G)

The other two responses expressed the irrelevance of training in e-mail writing and the ability to consult the Internet.

"because it is not a training matter" (UG)

"internet do the job" (G)

Do want training. The main sub-theme found in these was the importance of formal writing ($n = 8$), which was also found in the responses of the need for training.

"yes because it is important to learn how to write an formal e-mail before i graduet from a qualified university like the AUC." (UG)

"It will answer my questions about e-mail writing ,and it will make writing e-mails more easier." (G)

The other two responses explained the use of technology at the university and the

desire for variety in writing tasks.

> "especailly to people who send emials to their friends or teachers. because
> here in AUC, everything is dealing with technology and mails" (UG)

> "Because the writing module foucs on writing essaies only. we need some
> other kinds of writingin our business or academic communication." (G)

> **Teachers.** None of the teachers indicated that they need training for

themselves, and only one teacher indicated that he or she needs to increase e-mail

usage with students. The majority of teachers thought that the students need training

in writing e-mails to teachers; 77% said yes ($n = 10$), and 23% said no ($n = 3$). Only

two teachers provided responses to the open-ended question asking for further

comments about the e-mails they receive from students. They stated the following:

> "I think Egyptian students are generally pretty good about certain elements -
> correct salutation/closing and use of subject line. The bigger issue to me seems
> to be proofreading, and treating e-mail more like letter writing and less like
> sms-ing. However, most of our students have blackberries, so the line between
> e-mail and text is fairly blurred for them."

> "Yes, ALL students need to know how to write an e-mail. There needs to be a
> formal lesson or some kind of training."

The results from the data collected from the surveys and e-mails provided

insight into the use and requirement of e-mail conventions by EFL learners and

teachers in the IEP at AUC, and are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study proposed to fill a gap in research regarding student-teacher e-mail communication in the Arab world, specifically in the context of an English-medium university in Egypt, by investigating the e-mail conventions that students use and teachers require, and the relationship between them.

E-mail Habits of Students and Teachers

Information collected on the e-mail habits of the participants revealed that teachers and students send e-mails to each other with about the same frequency. Teachers, however, send e-mails more frequently and to a wider range of contacts, both personal and professional, while students send more e-mails to their teachers than to other contacts. This may be unexpected of a generation that is very technology-dependent. The popularity of phone texting, Blackberry© messaging, and Facebook©, in which communication is largely in the form of short messages that include phrases and abbreviated words, could be a possible reason for the less popular use of e-mail by students, although this would need to be confirmed by further research on this population.

Students who indicated reasons for not sending e-mails to teachers stated a preference for face-to-face contact as the biggest reason for not sending e-mails to teachers. Explanations for their reasoning was not asked on the survey, and would have been beneficial to inquire of the students, whether on the survey or through interviews. One explanation for their preference for face-to-face contact could be connected to the finding that 66% of the students reported not having used e-mail with teachers prior to attending AUC. Quite possibly, interaction via e-mail between

students and teachers is not common in the native culture of the students (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005), the majority of whom are Egyptian. Another reason could be an unease with the genre.

E-mail Conventions Students Use

The first research question, regarding the use of conventions by students in student-teacher e-mail communication, was answered with results from the student survey, the teacher survey, and the sample of student e-mails. Chi-square tests showed a correlation between the frequency of use of salutations, complete sentence, closings, and correct spelling, that students and teachers reported. With the exception of the inclusion of salutations, teachers think students use those conventions much less than the students think they do.

There is also a discrepancy between what students say they use and what is seen in their e-mails. They reported using closings, correct spelling, and correct letter case, more than what is demonstrated in the student e-mails. The reason for this difference is unclear but could be due to the sample of e-mails only being representative of 61% the entire student sample. However, for five out of the ten conventions examined in this study (information in the subject line, salutations, complete sentences, sender's name at the end, and lack of use of SMS-style language), students reported less frequency of use than was noted in the e-mails. Therefore, overall students did not exaggerate their use of conventions, but were rather modest in their reporting.

Teachers indicated that students included information in the subject line, correct letter case, closings, spelling, and grammar with similar frequency to what was found in the e-mails. However, they reported that students use salutations, address terms, the sender's name at the end, and SMS-style language with higher

frequency, and complete sentences with lower frequency than appear in the e-mails. Overall, results from the student e-mails support the teachers' claims, although, in some cases, the teachers claimed that students use conventions more than was indicated in the e-mails.

From the coding of the sample of e-mails it was evident that more than 60% of the e-mails included information in the subject line, salutations, address terms, complete sentences, no SMS-style language, and the student's name at the end.

Patterns seen in the e-mails were similar to those found in a couple of studies that examined conventions in academic e-mails. Gains' (1998) study of academic e-mails sent by faculty, staff, and students, found the two most common salutations to be "Dear" and "Hi." This was also true in Chen's (2001) study of e-mails of Taiwanese and American graduate students at an American university. The e-mails analyzed in the present study also included the salutations of "Dear" (70%) and "Hi" (20%) with the highest frequency. Gains (1998) also found a variation of "Best regards" to be the most frequently used closing, while Chen noted a variation of "Thank you" to be the most common. In the present study, variations of both "Regards" (51%) and "Thank you" (43%) were the two closings most used in student e-mails.

From these findings it appears that students are aware of e-mail conventions and use them, which is interesting considering the fact that the majority of the students did not communicate with teachers through e-mail prior to coming to AUC. However, it is important to keep in mind that the six conventions present in more than 60% of the e-mails, which represent only 61% of the student sample that was surveyed, represent less than half of the students whose e-mails were coded.

It is also important to note that 50% of the e-mails that had grammar mistakes represented 70% of the students. This may be expected of EFL students who are in the process of improving their language proficiency, but is still of concern because, as mentioned previously in the literature review, grammar mistakes can cause the sender to appear less friendly and less competent, among other things (Jessmer & Anderson, 2001; Stephens et al., 2009). There were patterns of grammar mistakes in the e-mail specifically related to the genre of e-mail. Mistakes in sentences referring to an attachment or sources accounted for 29% of the grammar mistakes. Expressions such as "I put in this e-mail" and "This is my stuff" illustrate a lack of knowledge of appropriate semantics related to e-mail (the former) and lack of formality (the latter).

Other mistakes found in the e-mails could be attributed to a lack of knowledge of the e-mail genre in general, and lack of awareness of the formality specifically present in student-teacher e-mail communication. The fact that 41% of the e-mails did not include a closing may be a result of unfamiliarity with the conventions of e-mail. This could also be the case for many of the punctuation mistakes, such as missing commas after closings and after the teacher's name in the address terms. Other punctuation mistakes, such as triple question marks and ellipses, and failure to include correct capitalization, may imply a perception of informality of the e-mail genre. Although the majority of spelling mistakes may have been typing mistakes (e.g. missing letters), the inclusion of informal spelling such as "wanna" further reflected an unawareness of student-teacher e-mail communication being status-unequal.

E-mail Conventions Teachers Require

Overall teachers require e-mail conventions with low frequency. This seems to contradict findings of other studies that show faculty concern for overly casual and inappropriate student e-mails (Duran et al., 2005; Stephens et al., 2009). The

difference in findings could be due to the fact that the teachers surveyed in this study are EFL teachers and are therefore more forgiving because they understand the limited English language proficiency of the students.

However, despite requiring conventions related to language proficiency the least, of the ten conventions investigated in this study, teachers require ones related to formality the most. This may imply that they are concerned with the conventions that mark the status-unequal relationship maintained via this form of communication. This concurs with Stephens et al.'s (2009) findings regarding faculty requirements and expectations of conventions in student e-mails. Of the nine conventions investigated by Stephens et al. (2009) five were also investigated in this study: information in the subject line, address terms, SMS-style language, the sender's name at end, and correct spelling. Stephens et al. (2009) found that, of the nine conventions, the violation of two bothered instructors the most: SMS-style language and the absence of the sender's name at the end of the e-mail; these are the two conventions that teachers, in the present study, reported requiring the most.

Age and nationality do not seem to play a role in the views of the teachers, since the various age groups were equally represented, and 54% were Egyptian, and 46% American. However, this is simply an assumption based on the demographic information gathered, since both were not variables in this study. In addition, the very small number of teachers does not allow for any generalizability.

The Relationship Between the E-mail Conventions Students Use and Teachers Require

Teachers require much less frequent use of e-mail conventions than what they claimed students use, and what the students themselves reported using. This was evident from the results of the chi-square tests between the frequency of requirement

of e-mail conventions by teachers and the use of those conventions by students, as reported by both students and teachers.

Regarding the conventions teachers require with the most frequency (information in the subject line, address terms, sender's name at the end, and no SMS-style language), they claimed more frequent use by students, of three (information in the subject line, address terms, and name) and less frequent use of one (lack of SMS-style language). In the sample of student e-mails, the inclusion of information in the subject line is also seen with high frequency. However, address terms and the student's name at the end of the e-mail are used with less frequency than the teachers require, but the teachers reported students using them with higher frequency than they require. And in regards to the exclusion of SMS-style language, teachers reported a low frequency, but students rarely include SMS-style language. Therefore, teachers are reporting having the requirement of three (subject line, address terms, and sender's name) of the four most required conventions met, and one not (SMS), but the student e-mails show that students are actually not including address terms and student's name with as much frequency as the teachers require, and are not using SMS language with similar frequency to what the teachers require. A possible explanation could be the small segment of the entire student sample that was represented in the e-mail sample (37 out of 61 students), or the possibility that teachers are noting the use of conventions that they have seen in student e-mails over the years.

Furthermore, the four conventions least required by teachers (closings, correct letter case, spelling and grammar) are also the ones least used in the e-mails. This relationship was not statistically tested, but there could possibly be a correlation.

E-mail Training

One could infer that since students are exceeding the requirement of e-mail conventions of their teachers, according to them, their teachers, and as seen in the sample of e-mails, then they are not in need of e-mail training. However, 77% of the teachers think that students need training, and 38% of the students said that they need training, which leaves room to believe that both teachers and students, although more teachers than students, see a need for e-mail genre pedagogy. One explanation could be that EFL teachers have low requirements of e-mail conventions, but still recognize the need for e-mail writing competence in the university context outside of the IEP. This, however, would need further research.

Despite indicating the need for students to receive e-mail training, teachers seem to suggest that there is no explicit instruction of e-mail in the classroom, since only 23% indicated that they teach a lesson about e-mail conventions. The low teacher requirement of conventions and lack of classroom explanation of requirements and e-mail conventions may be a reason why only 38% of students feel that they need training, and why adequate knowledge of e-mail was a common response of the students who do not see the need for training. As one student said, "no one complains about my emails." Stephens et al. (2009) explained that "members of Generation Y already believe they are strong technology users, but their knowledge might be weaker in how they understand organizational and institutional norms surrounding the use of technology like email" (p. 320).

Considering some of the common errors found in the e-mails, and the fact that more than half of the conventions were used by less than two-thirds of the student sample whose e-mails were analyzed, there may be a need for e-mail genre pedagogy, just as the teachers stated. However, if this need is not fulfilled in the EFL classroom

it is unclear where the teachers believe it should be met. The number of students who feel they need e-mail instruction (38%) should also be acknowledged. Where should they turn to receive this instruction? Is the lack of requirement and teaching of conventions by EFL teachers an indirect remark to these students that their perception of the importance of formal e-mail writing is exaggerated?

This study was limited and therefore the results cannot be generalized. Despite this being the case insights were provided into the conventions EFL students use and EFL teachers require in student-teacher e-mail communication, and the relationship between them, in an English-medium university context in Egypt.

Implications

ESL and EFL university students are often placed in classes in ESL and EFL programs because their level of English is not sufficient for academic life. These programs aim to prepare students for academic coursework in English (American University in Cairo [AUC], n.d.; Hawisher & Moran, 1993). The IEP of the university where the present study was conducted states that it seeks to prepare students "to function effectively within the English-medium liberal arts context" of the university and that its students "are empowered to face the academic challenges ahead" (American University in Cairo [AUC], n.d.). Therefore, If the goal of university ESL and EFL programs is to enhance the English level of students so that they can integrate into the academic world, which involves communication with teachers via e-mail and is often not easily mastered by ESL and EFL students, EFL Programs need to include e-mail instruction in their curriculum. These programs may need to require teachers to communicate with students via e-mail, just as they require teachers to hold office hours.

Despite the fact that teachers in this study indicated low requirement of e-mail conventions, professors beyond the IEP may be more concerned with students' e-mails. Since the student-teacher relationship is important and communication is often via e-mail students need to be able to write appropriate e-mails to teachers in order not to be perceived negatively, and to build and not unknowingly hurt the relationship.

Advocates of genre pedagogy see the need for teachers to provide their students with models and to give them the opportunities to practice genres. Students may seem ignorant or unable to write in a specific genre, but they may just lack exposure to and practice in the genre (Devitt, 1993). Therefore, teachers need to model and expose students to genres to give them opportunities to use them and to learn from them. It is important for the language learner to gain understanding of genres in order to understand his or her language environment and to navigate it (Hyland, 2003). In spite of the lack of prescriptive norms for e-mail teachers need to inform students of the genres so that they can recognize the conventions they may come across (Hawisher, 1993). In addition, giving students structure to follow for an ambiguous genre, Hyland (2007) claims, "is not only facilitating, but also reassuring" (p. 152).

Teachers of English, according to certain research studies, should teach the genre of e-mail to ESL and EFL students (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2005; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Biesenbach-Lucas et al., 2000; Chen, 2006; Duran, Kelly, and Keaten, 2005; Hawisher & Moran, 1993), because faculty report negative effects of inappropriate e-mails from students, but may not be informing students of what they expect or require. Students need to know what teachers desire from them, and that their credibility is being reduced when they do not follow appropriate e-mail

conventions (Stephens et al., 2009). Chen (2006) confirms this need. She stated that L2 learners need to know how e-mail is used for institutional communication, and how they are expected to act through the e-mail medium.

In order to gain this knowledge ESL and EFL students may be aided in having a model to emulate. Some people may believe that e-mail gives students the time to edit their messages before they send them, but, as Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) wrote, if they are not aware of what is correct or proper they will continue to make the same mistakes. Chen's (2006) case study of an EFL Taiwanese graduate student demonstrated that although the student worked on editing her e-mails to professors, she struggled because she did not have a model or explicit rules to follow, which would have helped her. Teaching e-mail begins with initiating students into this on-line relationship. One study (Rose, 2004) even suggests teaching e-mail conventions by reading an e-mail epistolary novel with students, such as *Exegesis* (Teller, 1997) or *e* (Beaumont, 2000).

Limitations

This was a very limited exploratory study that included a very small teacher sample of only 13 participants, and an e-mail sample that only represented 37 students, with close to half of the e-mails belonging to only six students. A larger teacher sample, and e-mails representative of more of the students would have strengthened the findings of this study.

There were also limitations related to items on the surveys that produced conflicting responses due to unforeseen ambiguity in some of the questions. On the student survey seven participants indicated that they never send e-mails to teachers. Therefore only seven students were expected to pick choices from the question that followed regarding the reasons why they do not e-mail teachers, and 54 students to

choose the option "I do send e-mails to teachers." However, only 40 students chose the latter option. Some students may have interpreted this question as asking for the reasons why they do not e-mail teachers in the instances that they choose not to. The same issue occurred on the teacher survey. One teacher stated that he or she does send e-mails to students but then picked "other" for the reasons they do not e-mail students, when they could have chosen the option "I do e-mail students." These questions on the surveys needed to be reworded to prevent confusion.

Furthermore, the findings of this study could have been augmented if they had been triangulated with interviews with teachers and students to further understand several issues. As previously mentioned in the discussion, it would have been beneficial to ask students about their preference for face-to-face contact rather than e-mail as a way of communicating with their teachers. Interviews with the teachers may have provided more insight into why teachers do not require the conventions with high frequency, the reasons why they perceive students to need training, and where they believe students should receive this training.

Suggestions for Further Research

Research on student-teacher e-mail communication is very limited and there is a need to explore e-mail use in education further, especially in the Arab world. Although this study attempted to initiate research on this topic in Egypt in particular, and resulted in interesting findings, it has also shed light on the need for more extensive research.

Research has confirmed e-mail to be a common form of communication in universities but much of that research was conducted in a western and a mainly American setting. More research is needed regarding e-mail use between students and teachers in the Arab world, and the perceptions of both students and teachers about

this form of communication. Some students in this study expressed a preference for face-to-face contact with teachers over e-mail. It would be interesting to further explore their reasons and see if culture and/or lack of familiarity with the e-mail genre influence their preference.

Further investigation is needed on the requirements and expectations of university professors in English-medium Arab universities, and their reactions to the violations of those expectations in student-teacher e-mail communication, in order to see if their views are similar to those of their counterparts in North American universities. Measures from other studies, such as Stephens et al.'s (2009) Likert-type scale items regarding the degree to which violation of conventions bother teachers, could be used to gauge instructor perceptions. The effects of age and nationality on teacher requirements and expectations also need further. It is also important to understand if students are aware of the expectations of their professors and the possible consequences of the violations of those expectations.

Even though the current study showed that students use SMS-style language with very low frequency in their e-mails, teachers in this study are concerned with its effect on e-mail. Further research is therefore needed on the possible effect of texting on students' e-mail writing.

Lastly, a longitudinal study can be conducted to see the effects of the frequency of use and time on e-mail writing. E-mails of students over a span of time can be compared to see if explicit instruction of e-mail would cause improvement, or if frequency of use alone, over time, is enough to create a change.

Conclusion

The Internet, for better or for worse, is here to stay and is ever-evolving. Educators and educational institutions are constantly looking for and implementing

new ways to use it to teach. Research is now being conducted on the possible uses and benefits of social media, such as Twitter and blogs, in the classroom. Even with the advent of innovative uses of the Internet in the classroom, it is clear that the teacher is still seen as an authority figure to be respected and communicated with in specific ways. EFL teachers may contribute to maintaining or dismantling the difference in status in this relationship, but they still need to prepare EFL students for communication with university teachers and professors, who, according to research, still expect the descriptive conventions of e-mail to be followed.

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Table A.1

TOEFL Cut-off Scores for IEP Placement (American University in Cairo, 2010)

IEP Class	iBT	iBT Writing	CBT
99	62-75	17-19	177-204
120	45-61	14-16	133-176
121	62-73	17-18	177-201
Graduate Modules	74-78	19-20	202-212

1. Nationality:

Egyptian
Other (please specify):

2. Age:

16-19
20-29
30-39
40-49
50-59

3. Which type of secondary school did you attend?

Government school
Private/International school
Both

4. If you are a graduate student, where did you get your undergraduate education?

I am NOT a graduate student.
Name of university:

5. Which English course are you taking right now at the AUC?

IEP 98
IEP 99
IEP 120
IEP 121
Graduate Module(s)
Other (specify below):

6. How often do you SEND e-mails?

Daily
Weekly
Monthly
Never

7. To whom do you SEND e-mails? (check ALL that apply)

Personal contacts (friends, family, etc.)
University personnel (secretaries, department supervisors, university offices)
Teachers
I DO NOT send e-mails.

8. Before coming to AUC did you use e-mail to communicate with teachers?

Yes
No

9. How often do you SEND e-mails to teachers now?

Daily
Weekly
Monthly
Never

10. If you DO NOT send e-mails to teachers, what is the reason? (check ALL that apply)

I prefer to talk to them in person.
It takes too much time.
I do not see the need.
I am not good with e-mail.
Other (specify below).
I DO send e-mails to teachers.

Please specify (if other):

How often do you do the following when you write e-mails to TEACHERS?

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
11. Write something in the subject line					
12. Write a salutation (i.e."Dear,")					
13. Write address terms (title + name of teacher; i.e. "Mrs. Mary")					
14. Write words in correct letter case (Not in UPPER CASE & not all in lower case)					
15. Use complete sentences					
16. Use SMS-style language (i.e. "C u l8r")					
17. Write a closing (i.e. "Thank you/Sincerely/Best regards")					
18. Write your name at the end					
19. Correct your spelling before sending the e-mail					
20. Correct your grammar before sending the e-mail					

21. Do you think you need training in writing e-mail to teachers?

Yes
No
Why or why not?

22. Do you want training at AUC on writing e-mails to teachers?

Yes
No
Why or why not?

APPENDIX C: Teacher Survey

1. Nationality:

Egyptian
Other (please specify):

2. Age:

20-29
30-39
40-49
50-59
60 or above

3. Which English course(s) do you currently teach? (check ALL that apply)

IEP 98
IEP 99
IEP 120
IEP 121
Graduate Module(s)
Other (specify below):

4. How often do you SEND e-mails?

Daily
Weekly
Monthly
Never

5. To whom do you SEND e-mails? (check ALL that apply)

Personal contacts (friends, family, etc.)
Faculty/Peers (teachers, supervisors, secretaries, etc.)
Students
I DO NOT send e-mails.

6. How often do you SEND e-mails to STUDENTS?

Daily
Weekly
Monthly
Never

7. If you DO NOT send e-mails to students, what is the reason? (check ALL that apply)

I prefer face-to-face contact.
It is time consuming.

I do not see the need.
I am not good with e-mail.
Other.
I DO send e-mails to students.

Please specify (if other):

Please indicate how often you REQUIRE students to do the following in their e-mails.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
8. Write something in the subject line					
9. Write a salutation (i.e."Dear,")					
10. Write address terms/your title & name (i.e. "Mrs. Mary")					
11. Write words in correct letter case (Not in UPPER CASE & not all in lower case)					
12. Use complete sentences					
13. NOT write in SMS-style language (i.e. "C u l8r")					
14. Write a closing (i.e. "Thank you/Sincerely/Best regards")					
15. Write your name at the end					

16. Use correct your spelling					
20. Use correct your grammar					

18. Please indicate how often you REQUIRE students to do something OTHER than

what was stated in Questions 8-17 in their e-mails.

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Other (specify below)					

Please specify what you REQUIRE that is not stated in Questions 8-17:

19. HOW do you REQUIRE students to do the things you indicated above? (check

ALL that apply)

I speak with them individually when they do not do those things in their e-mails to me.
I give the class a document with e-mail writing instructions.
I teach a lesson about these e-mail conventions.
I do not do any of these things.
Other (specify below).
I DO NOT require any of the conventions in the previous question.

Please specify (if other):

How often do students DO the following in their e-mails to you?

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
20. Write something in the subject line					
21. Write a salutation (i.e."Dear,")					
22. Write address terms/your title & name (i.e. "Mrs. Mary")					
23. Write words in correct letter case (Not in UPPER CASE & not all in lower case)					
24. Use complete sentences					
25. ** Write in SMS-style language (i.e. "C u l8r")					
26. Write a closing (i.e. "Thank you/Sincerely/Best regards")					
27. Write your name at the end					
28. Use correct your spelling					
29. Use correct your grammar					

30. How often do students DO something other than what was stated in Questions 20-29 in their e-mails to you?

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Other (specify below)					

Please specify what they DO that is not stated in Questions 20-29:

31. Do you think students need training in writing appropriate e-mails?

Yes
No

Do you think YOU:

	Yes	No
32. Need to increase your e-mail use with students		
33. Need e-mail training		
34. Would like to receive e-mail training at AUC		

35. Please write any further comments you may have regarding the e-mails students write to you.

APPENDIX D

Table A.2

Descriptive Statistics of Conventions in Initial Student & Sequenced, Sustained E-mails

E-mail Convention	% of Initial Student E-mails ($n = 105$)	% of Sustained, Sequenced E-mails ($n = 35$)
Information in the subject line	88%	97%
Salutation	79%	83%
Address terms	72%	86%
Correct letter case	47%	51%
Complete sentences	98%	94%
Lack of SMS-style language	6%	6%
Closing	62%	51%
Sender's name at the end	62%	66%
Correct spelling	74%	77%
Correct grammar	50%	48%
Correct punctuation	39%	26%