LEARNING HOW TO WRITE SOCIALLY APPROPRIATE EMAILS THROUGH TEXTBOOKS: AN EVALUATION OF INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract: This study investigates email pragmatic instruction in four sets of international English textbooks. The prevalence of email communication in today's technology-mediated world necessitates its inclusion in second language classroom instruction. However, our analysis of the books reveals inadequate attention to the sociocultural aspects of email writing. The analysis also indicates limited opportunities for learners to notice form-function-context connections, engage in output practice, and reflect on their pragmatic performance. These findings underscore the gap between research recommendations and current teaching practices, highlighting the urgent need for textbook writers to integrate research findings for enhanced pragmatic instruction. The findings also provide recommendations for teaching email communication in the second language classroom.

Textbooks play a crucial role in second language (L2) teaching, often serving as the primary source of target language (TL) input for teachers and learners. However, past studies identified limitations (e.g., Hu & McKay, 2014; Ishihara & Paller, 2016; Petraki & Bayes, 2013). Tomlinson (2016) noted that textbooks often lag behind language teaching theories. For instance, English language textbooks prioritize monolingual communication, neglecting multilingualism and intercultural communicative competence (Hu & McKay, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2021). In addition, textbooks often lack adequate pragmatic content, teaching meaning out of context, and excluding authentic language samples and meta-pragmatic information needed for pragmatic decision-making (Petraki & Bayes, 2013; Ren & Han, 2016; Vellenga, 2004).

Thus, thorough evaluation and teacher training are essential for effective textbook use to support student learning.

To date, most studies into the pragmatic content of textbooks have been primarily concerned with oral speech acts (Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004; Ishihara & Paller, 2016; Nguyen & Ishitobi, 2012; Petraki & Bayes, 2013), while virtually no studies have addressed the pragmatics of email communication. Given that L2 learners face many challenges with email communication and therefore require pedagogical assistance (Chen et al., 2016), our study fills this critical gap. We focus on how the pragmatics of email communication is presented in selected international English textbooks to offer implications for textbook writers and teachers.

Email Communication

Computer-mediated communication like emails has been used widely, but research on email pragmatics has only recently begun to proliferate (Bjørge, 2007; Bou-Franch, 2011; Chen et al., 2016; Economidou-Kogetsidis et al., 2022). Emails are a mix of oral and written language, resembling both conversations and informal letters (Herring et al., 2013). However, unlike conversations, email language lacks paralinguistic and non-verbal cues (though emoticons and capital letters may represent some features). Emails also differ from letters as they are instant and often shorter, with synchronous exchanges (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2018). Due to such interactivity and intertextuality, email threads may not require a formal opening or closing (Dürscheid & Frehner, 2013).

Being a hybrid medium, emails may vary greatly in styles and formats depending on specific writer-recipient relationships and situations (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2018). For example, group emails appear to be more formal than one to one emails (Bou-Franch, 2011). Emails to professors require the use of status-appropriate language, such as proper titles, indirectness and formality (Chen, 2006; Formentelli, 2009). Meanwhile, emails to equal status recipients require less formality, often characterized in the absence of certain standard formats such as opening and closing paragraphs (Nguyen & Pham, 2021).

Email writing styles vary across cultures. For example, Bjørge (2007) found that writers in high power distance cultures address authority figures more formally than those in low power distance cultures. Merrison et al. (2012) compared British and Australian tertiary students' email requests, revealing more direct requests in British emails and more indirect ones in Australian emails. These stylistic differences can pose challenges for L2 learners who may write inappropriate emails to professors due to a lack of awareness of email conventions and TL pragmatic norms (Chen, 2006). For instance, their emails may be too direct, casual, and lacking in status-congruent language (Chen, 2006). Although spending time in the TL environment can improve email communication, acquiring tacit values and etiquettes remains difficult. Thus, explicit instruction is necessary for teaching learners how to write emails effectively (Chen, 2006).

The Learning and Teaching of L2 Pragmatics in Textbooks

Learning a language and achieving proficiency requires learners to not only acquire its grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, but also develop the ability to accurately interpret and

appropriately express pragmatic meaning as part of their communicative and interactional competence. In intercultural settings, effective communication requires sensitivity to pragmatic variation and use of strategies to accommodate and negotiate meaning (Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018; Tajeddin & Alemi, 2021).

However, the learning of pragmatics in foreign language contexts is often limited, with textbooks as the main source of input. Studies show various shortcomings in teaching pragmatics through textbooks. For instance, Vellenga (2004) found that ESL and EFL textbooks lacked sufficient pragmatic information, context, and metapragmatic explanations. Wong (2022) noted a mismatch between textbook input and natural telephone conversations. Petraki and Bayes (2013) observed that textbooks did not adequately cover different request-making forms and failed to encourage learners to compare first language (L1) and L2 request performances. Many other studies reported similar issues (e.g., Bui & Nguyen, 2023; Grant & Stark, 2001; Nguyen & Ishitobi, 2012; Ton Nu & Murray, 2020).

Despite the fact that recent textbooks have made some progress in teaching pragmatics (e.g., see Tatsuki, 2019), there is still much room for improvement. For example, a study by Ren and Han (2016) on ten English language textbooks published in China between 2009 and 2013 found that while the books presented multiple forms for the same functions and offered some metapragmatic information on formality, this information was presented inconsistently. In addition, like previous books, the coverage of pragmatic knowledge remains limited in these textbooks. Likewise, a recent analysis of a set of pragmatics-focused materials designed by pragmatics scholars has revealed that even these materials failed to reflect the latest thinking in pedagogy (Nguyen & Basturkmen, 2021), highlighting the need for teachers to adopt a critical and informed approach to using textbooks.

Research also shows that while experienced teachers are more adept at selecting and adapting textbook content and methodology to suit their students' levels and learning needs, novice teachers may view textbooks as absolute authority and feel a lack of confidence in adapting them (Grossman & Thompson, 2008). Given the crucial role of teachers as mediators between curriculum materials and students' learning, further textbook evaluation studies are needed to raise teachers' awareness and provide guidance in textbook use and adaptation (Petraki & Bayes, 2013; Ren & Han, 2016).

Principles of Pragmatic Instruction

The study of instructed L2 pragmatics is influenced by second language acquisition theories, including the Noticing Hypothesis, Output Hypothesis, and Skills-acquisition theory. The Noticing Hypothesis suggests learners need relevant input, notice the target form, and understand its social function (Schmidt, 1990). The Output Hypothesis proposes that learners need meaningful language practice to notice the gap between their production and desired production, thus aiding deeper and more nuanced understanding (Swain, 2005). According to the skills-acquisition theory, systematic practice and feedback are essential for developing accurate and fluent language use over time (DeKeyser, 2014).

Research on the effectiveness of pragmatic instruction has confirmed the relevance of these theories, demonstrating that learners' pragmatic competence is best facilitated when they are

supported to develop awareness of form-function-context relationships in the TL as opposed to their L1 (Plonsky & Zhang, 2019). It is also essential for learners to engage in output practice, especially repeated practice that is useful for fluency development, and receive feedback to improve their performance (Li, 2019). Furthermore, recent developments in the field have also emphasized the importance of learners' agency and identity in pragmatics learning. From this perspective, pragmatic instruction should not impose a native speaker's model at the expense of learners' cultural identity but only provide a range of options for learners to reflect and act upon (Ishihara, 2019).

In light of these findings, Nguyen and Le (2019) recommend improvements for language teaching materials. They suggest textbooks should provide sustained exposure to authentic pragmatic input and raise learners' awareness of form-function-context mapping. Textbooks should also impart both linguistic and sociocultural knowledge to ensure accurate and appropriate language use. Abundant practice opportunities are advised to develop pragmatic fluency. Lastly, textbooks should help learners navigate intercultural differences without losing their personal and cultural identity.

Research Questions

In order to provide practical implications for teaching email pragmatics in L2 classrooms, our study investigates the extent to which existing research on the pragmatics of email communication and pragmatics instruction is reflected in a series of international English textbooks designed for learners ranging from beginner to advanced levels. Specifically, we focus on email speech acts (e.g., job applications, email complaints) and ask three questions:
1. To what extent are email speech acts taught across different levels in the selected books?
2. What aspects of email speech acts are taught?
3. What types of activities are used to teach and practice email speech acts?

METHOD

The Data Set

For this study, we selected four sets of global English textbooks that have been most frequently used in public universities and private language schools in Vietnam over the past five years. Each set comprised various levels, ranging from beginner (CEFR A1/A1+) to advanced (CEFR C1), resulting in 22 books that were analyzed (Table 1). All of the books employed a multi-syllabus approach, where teaching units were arranged by topics, tasks, language focus, and skills. The 22 books were published between 2016 and 2019.

Table 1. The Selected Books

	A1	A1+	A2	B1	B1+	B2	B2+	C1	Total
Close up		x	x	x	x	x		x	6
Gateway		x		x	x	x	x		5
Life	x		x	x	x	x		x	6
Solution			x	x	x	x		x	5

Analysis

In order to address the research questions, we drew on relevant literature (e.g., Nguyen & Le 2019; Petraki & Bayers, 2013; Vellenga, 2004) to develop a checklist for evaluating how email pragmatics was treated in the books being examined (Table 2). The checklist focused on the types of speech acts that were taught in relation to email writing, the accompanying pragmatic information provided (e.g., linguistic and sociocultural aspects of email communication), and the instructional activities that were used to teach email writing.

Table 2. Evaluation Checklist

Categories of pragmatic content & instructional activities	Checklist
Types of email speech acts • Types of email speech acts typically mentioned in the heading of the writing part of the unit, e.g., "A formal email of complaint", "Writing a cover email", "Writing an email requesting information", or in writing sections such as "Useful expressions", "Key phrases", "Writing reference", "Writing bank".	• Do the books teach a wide range of speech acts in emails?
Linguistic aspects of email writing, including characteristics and functions of email communication, discourse structure (e.g., opening and closing moves, sequence of content moves), strategies for performing the target act, and other linguistic devices to modify the degree of directness, formality and tone of the message. • Email characteristics: Explicit instructions or activities where learners discuss the format of an email as compared to a letter, e.g., "When writing an email, don't use texting language (for example, *ur* for *you're* and *lol* for *laugh out loud*)" (*Close up A2,* Writing reference section, p. 170). • Functions: Explicit instructions or activities where learners read a sample email and identify the writer's communicative intents, e.g., "Tick the things that Kate does in her reply: a. Accept the invitation; b. Make an offer …" (*Close up A2,* Unit 10, p. 130). • Email discourse: Explicit instructions on opening, sequencing information and closing an email, or activities where learners identify the various moves in a sample email, e.g., "Email follows the same rules as letters: an opening greeting, clear	• Do the books explicitly teach characteristics of email communication and how it might differ from other modes of communication such as telephone conversations and business letters? • Do the books guide students to recognize the communicative function of the email (e.g., to make requests, to complain, to invite and reply, etc.)? • Do the books teach how formal and informal emails are typically opened and closed? • Do the books teach expressions for realizing the target act (e.g., request strategies)? • Do the books teach linguistic devices to modify the degree of directness, formality and tone of the message?

Categories of pragmatic content & instructional activities	Checklist
paragraphing and a closing phrase" (*Solution C1*, Unit 6, p. 73). ● Speech act realization strategies: Typically included in sections such as "Useful expressions" or "Key phrases", as well as activities where learners identify linguistic resources for conveying specific communicative intents, e.g., "When you invite someone or respond to an invitation, you often need to use modal verbs. Look at the examples below." (*Close up A2,* Unit 10, p. 130). ● Directness & formality: Explicit instruction or activities where learners identify formal vs. informal language, or assess the degree of directness and formality of different expressions, e.g., "Are the invitation and reply formal or informal? How do you know?" (*Gateway B1+,* Unit 4, p. 53).	
Sociocultural aspects of email writing, including norms regarding appropriate language use in specific cultural and situational contexts. This broad category covers attention to contextual factors, discussion of norms, and awareness of the effect of particular linguistic choices on the recipient. ● Contextual factors: Explicit instructions or activities where learners identify pertinent social factors such as participants & their role relationships, settings, imposition, e.g., "What is the relationship between each pair of correspondents? Which are big requests and which are small requests?" (*Life B2,* Unit 3, p. 41). ● Norms of appropriateness: Explicit instructions on form-function-context mapping, or activities where learners assess the contextual appropriateness of the given message, e.g., "When you are writing a letter or an email, you must make sure that you use the correct tone. For example, an email to a friend will be informal, but a letter of application for a job will be formal." (*Close up B2,* Unit 1, p. 14). ● Effect on the recipient: Explicit instructions or activities where learners assess the interactional consequentiality of the message, e.g., "Is the tone of the email reasonable? Do you think the email will	● Do the books provide meta-pragmatic information such as how contextual factors (e.g., participants, topics, settings) might influence choice of format, linguistic expressions and tone of the message? ● Do the books discuss norms of appropriateness (e.g., what pragmatic behaviour is considered appropriate in business settings?) ● Do the books discuss the interactional consequences of certain choices of linguistic expressions and tones? (e.g., how is the recipient of a particular email message likely to react?) ● Do the books discuss cross-cultural variation in norms of email communication?

Categories of pragmatic content & instructional activities	Checklist
get the response or action the writer wants?" (*Life B2,* Unit 11, p. 137). ● Cross-cultural variation: Explicit instructions or activities where learners compare and reflect on variations in the operation of politeness in their L1 and TL, and how this difference is reflected in the choice of pragmatic strategies, e.g., how do people in your culture open and close an email to authority figures?	
Awareness-raising activities A range of activities where learners may be asked to identify, discuss, or compare and contrast email format & structure, linguistic forms for conveying communicative intents as well as factors affecting the choice of forms in a range of social and cultural contexts. An activity may have a focus on several contents simultaneously. For example, the activity below involved both identifying opening and closing moves in sample emails (linguistic aspects) and identifying appropriate moves in relation to the target audience (sociocultural aspects). "Writing skill: Expressions in emails Look at the emails in Exercise 1. Complete the table. Starting an email Ending an email Dear … All the best _____ _____ b. Which expressions are best for emails to friends? Which expressions are best for work or business emails?" (*Life A1,* Unit 10, p. 125)	● Do the books include awareness-raising activities that draw learners' attention to the format and language of emails? ● Do the books include awareness-raising activities that draw learners' attention to other important linguistic aspects of email writing such as opening and closing moves, linguistic strategies for carrying out the target act, tone, directness, formality? ● Do the books include awareness-raising activities that draw learners' attention to the socio-cultural aspects of email writing (e.g., context, cultural norms, and effects)?
Output production activities Communicative writing practice and scaffolding activities providing language and writing support. ● Controlled writing activities involving sentence or paragraph completion, reordering moves, rewriting sentences into more or less formal versions. The purpose is to help build sub-skills before learners are asked to produce writing independently.	● Do the books include scaffolding activities (e.g., form-focused activities and guided writing) that allow students to develop control over writing and practice writing in a guided manner before they are asked to write emails independently?

Categories of pragmatic content & instructional activities	Checklist
● Guided writing activities making use of writing frames or prompts (e.g. content moves, paragraph structures). The purpose is to provide content support and help build writing confidence. ● Free writing activities are communicative tasks where learners are free to use their own ideas and linguistic resources to construct meaning.	● Do the books include free writing tasks that allow students to focus on meaning and facilitate fluency?
Feedback and reflection Typically checklists for review and revision, or questions prompting learners to reflect on different aspects of their emails, e.g., format, structure, linguistic forms, interactional consequentiality, especially in consideration of cultural variations. Below is an example of a peer review checklist focusing on function-form-context mappings: "Exchange emails with your partner. Use these questions to check your partner's email. Then write a reply to their email. ● Is the situation and the action demanded clear? ● Is the email in the correct register (formal or informal) and polite in its request?" (*Life B2,* Unit 3, p. 41)	● Do the books provide opportunities for learners to reflect on their emails and revise them? ● Do the books encourage students to analyze and reflect on cultural variations, stereotyping and misunderstanding, thus enhancing their cross-cultural awareness?

Our procedures for extracting and analyzing email pragmatics related content from the books are as follows:

● First, we reviewed the table of contents of each book to identify units that explicitly dealt with the instruction of email writing for specific communicative functions (e.g., writing an invitation email). Then, we carefully analyzed every page of the identified units and categorized their instructional content based on the specifications in Table 2.

● We observed that a single practice activity or set of instructions for students might include more than one teaching content (e.g., both discourse structure and formality) or the same content might be addressed in more than one activity or set of instructions. As our focus was on identifying types of teaching content and activities, we counted each content separately when an activity or set of instructions in a unit addressed more than one content. However, when the same content was repeated in different activities or sets of instructions in the same unit, we only counted it once. We treated an activity with a dual focus (e.g., awareness-raising and output production) as two different activities.

● We tested the coding categories (Table 2) on one unit from each book and revised the categories until they satisfactorily fit the data. The first author coded the remainder of the data twice to establish internal consistency. The third author then cross-checked the final results. Cases of discrepancy were discussed until full agreement was achieved by the team.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Research Question 1: To what extent are email speech acts taught across different levels in the books?

Our first research question examined the extent to which email speech acts were taught across different levels in the books under consideration. To this end, we examined both the coverage of email speech acts as well as the amount of teaching content, defined as content devoted to explaining and practicing email speech acts. We found that on average, the books covered email speech acts in 19.4% (36/186) of their instructional units, with beginner and intermediate-level books allocating more units to this content than the other books (Table 3). However, our examination of the amount of teaching content revealed that the books allocated disappointingly low proportions of pages to pragmatic information pertaining to email writing and practice activities, ranging from just 0.6% to 1.9% of total pages (Table 3). These findings suggest that the books may not provide sufficient opportunities for learning email pragmatics, which aligns with the concerns raised in prior research regarding limited attention given to pragmatics in language coursebooks (Ishihara & Paller, 2016; Petraki & Bayes, 2013; Ren & Han, 2016).

Table 3. **Proportions of the Books' Content Dealing with Email Speech Acts**

	Beginner (A1/A1+)	Elementary (A2/A2+)	Intermediate (B1/B1+)	Upper-intermediate (B2/B2+)	Advanced (C1)
Total no. of units	34	33	43	43	33
No. of units teaching email speech acts	8	6	11	8	3
Proportion of units teaching email speech acts	23.5	18	25.5	18.6	9
Total no. of pages	520	523	1372	871	540
Total no. of pages teaching email speech acts	10	9	29	10	3
Proportion of pages teaching email speech acts	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.1	0.6

Moreover, we found that the distribution of email speech acts taught across the levels was uneven, with a greater number of email speech acts covered in beginner, elementary and upper-intermediate-level books than in the other books (Table 4). This inconsistency deprives learners

of the opportunity to practice email speech acts as they progress through various proficiency levels. The selection of types of email speech acts for teaching across the levels also seemed to lack systematicity (Table 4). While some speech acts like invitations and replies and asking and giving advice were commonly taught, other types were only occasionally covered. Complex acts such as complaints and job applications, which often require more nuanced pragmatic language use, were expectedly covered at higher levels; however, it is unclear why highly formulaic acts such as thanking were not taught at the beginner level (see Council of Europe, 2018). This lack of consistency in the selection of email speech acts for teaching across the levels suggests a lack of clear guiding principles for teaching pragmatics in language teaching materials, as noted in previous studies (Ren & Han, 2016).

Table 4. Range and Distribution of Email Speech Acts across the Levels

	Beginner (A1/A1+)	Elementary (A2/A2+)	Intermediate (B1/B1+)	Upper-intermediate (B2/B2+)	Advanced (C1)
Requests		xx	xx	xxx	
Responses to requests (e.g. acceptance)		x			
Invitations	xxx	xxx	xxxx	x	
Responses to invitations (e.g. rejection)	xx	xx	xxxx		
Seeking advice	x		xx	x	x
Giving advice	xx	x	xx	x	X
Thanking		xx		x	
Apologies	x			x	
Complaints			x	xx	
Sympathy	x				x
Asking news	x			xxx	
Giving news	x		x	xxx	
Showing interest	x				
Giving opinions			xx		
Job application					x
Avoiding misunderstanding					x
Total number of speech acts	13	11	18	16	5
Total number of books	3	3	8	5	3
Average number of speech acts per book	4.3	3.7	2.3	3.2	1.7

Research Question 2: What aspects of email writing are taught?

In our second research question, we examined the types of pragmatic information on email communication covered in the books. This information was classified into two main categories: linguistic aspects such as speech act realization strategies and formality, and sociocultural aspects such as context and politeness norms as detailed in Table 2.

Our quantitative analysis results demonstrated that in general the books focused more on linguistic (accounting for 77.1% of total content) than sociocultural aspects (accounting for 22.9% of total content), although this ratio varied greatly across the books, as shown in Table 5. Within the category of linguistic aspects, the books generally placed a greater emphasis on formality, speech act realization, and email discourse structure than on the characteristics and functions of email communication. As for sociocultural aspects, *'Life'* was the only set of books that provided an extensive coverage of context and norm of appropriateness. However, all the books neglected to address the effects of linguistic choices on politeness and cross-cultural variation in politeness norms (Table 5).

Table 5. The Proportions of Email Pragmatics-related Teaching Contents across the Books

	Life	Close up	Gateway	Solution	Total
Linguistic aspects	**22/38 (57.9)**	**50/59 (84.8)**	**24/30 (80)**	**12/13 (92.3)**	**108/140 (77.1)**
Email characteristics	2/38 (5.3)	2/59 (3.4)	0/30 (0)	1/13 (7.7)	5/140 (3.6)
Communicative functions	2/38 (5.3)	4/59 (6.8)	1/30 (3.3)	0/13 (0)	7/140 (5.0)
Email discourse structure	3/38 (7.9)	17/59 (28.8)	7/30 (23.3)	3/13 (23)	30/140 (21.4)
Speech act realisation strategies	7/38 (18.4)	12/59 (20.3)	9/30 (30)	4/13 (30.8)	32/140 (22.9)
Directness & formality	8/38 (21)	15/59 (25.4)	7/30 (23.3)	4/13 (30.8)	34/140 (24.3)
Sociocultural aspects	**16/38 (42)**	**9/59 (15.3)**	**6/30 (20)**	**1/13 (7.7)**	**32/140 (22.9)**
Contextual factors	9/38 (23.7)	3/59 (5)	3/30 (10)	0/13 (0)	14/140 (10.7)
Norms of appropriateness	6/38 (15.8)	6/59 (10.2)	3/30 (10)	1/13 (7.7)	16/140 (11.4)
Effect (e.g., how would the recipient react?)	1/36 (2.6)	0/59 (0)	0/30 (0)	0/13 (0)	1/140 (0.7)
Cross-cultural variation	0/38 (0)	0/59 (0)	0/30 (0)	0/13 (0)	0/140 (0)

Furthermore, we found that the teaching content was unevenly distributed across different levels, with linguistic aspects receiving more emphasis at beginner (72.7%), elementary (84.6%), and intermediate levels (84.6%), but less so at upper-intermediate (70.7%) and advanced levels (66.7%) (Table 6). On the other hand, socio-cultural content was emphasized more at beginner (27.3%), upper-intermediate (29.3%), and advanced levels (33.3%), but less so at elementary and intermediate levels (15.4%) (Table 6). This unequal distribution of content may limit learners' opportunities to reinforce their pragmatic knowledge as they progress through different levels.

Table 6. The Distribution of Email Pragmatics-related Teaching Contents across Levels

	Beginner	Elementary	Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	Advanced	Total
Linguistic aspects	**16/22 (72.7)**	**22/26 (84.6)**	**33/39 (84.6)**	**29/41 (70.7)**	**8/12 (66.7)**	**108/140 (77.1)**
Email characteristics	0/22 (0)	1/26 (3.8)	1/39 (2.6)	1/41 (2.4)	2/12 (16.7)	5/140 (3.6)
Communicative functions	1/22 (4.5)	1/26 (3.8)	2/39 (5.1)	3/41 (7.3)	0/12 (0)	7/140 (5)
Email discourse	6/22 (27.3)	7/26 (26.9)	9/39 (23)	7/41 (17)	1/12 (8.3)	30/140 (21.4)
Speech act realisation	6/22 (27.3)	6/26 (23.1)	10/39 (25.6)	7/41 (17)	3/12 (25)	32/140 (22.9)
Directness &formality	3/22 (13.6)	7/26 (26.9)	11/39 (28.2)	11/41 (26.8)	2/12 (16.7)	34/140 (24.3)
Sociolinguistic aspects	**6/22 (27.3)**	**4/26 (15.4)**	**6/39 (15.4)**	**12/41 (29.3)**	**4/12 (33.3)**	**32/140 (22.9)**
Context	3/22 (13.6)	2/26 (7.7)	4/39 (10.3)	5/41 (12.2)	1/12 (8.3)	15/140 (10.7)
Norms of appropriateness	3/22 (13.6)	2/26 (7.7)	2/39 (5.1)	6/41 (14.6)	3/12 (25)	16/140 (11.4)
Effects on the recipient	0/22 (0)	0/26 (0)	0/39 (0)	1/41 (2.4)	0/12 (0)	1/140 (0.7)
Cross-cultural variation	0/22 (0)	0/26 (0)	0/39 (0)	0/41 (0)	0/12 (0)	0/140 (0)

To evaluate the depth and adequacy of the pragmatic information provided, we further conducted a qualitative analysis of the books' contents. Our analysis showed that the books provided inadequate and at times incorrect information on features of email communication. For example, of five instances where email characteristics were discussed, only one addressed the disparities between face-to-face conversations and emails and why it can be easier to misinterpret people's intentions through emails. However, this topic was only introduced at the advanced level (Example 1). Conversely, none of the books provided a discussion of the

dissimilarities between emails and letters. Furthermore, when teaching email format, all of the books taught learners to apply a single rule for the opening and closing of letters and emails (see Example 2), despite the nuanced differences between the two modes of communication, as noted in the literature (e.g., Dürscheid & Frehner, 2013). Additionally, some of the books recommended the use of emoticons but advised against using "texting language" in informal emails, without providing sufficient explanation, which does not effectively assist learners in understanding the nuances of email communication.

Example 1

Work in pairs. Discuss the questions.

1. It's said that up to 40 percent of all emails are misinterpreted in some way. Why do you think this happens?

2. When was the last time you had a misunderstanding in an email exchange with someone? What happened?

Read the extract from a business communications forum and compare your ideas from Exercise 1.

It's very easy to be misunderstood in an email. That's because people generally treat an email like a face-to-face conversation, where exchanges can be short and to the point. But of course they are not the same. In face-to-face conversations, we are able to communicate feelings with gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice, as well as words.

In email writing, both the writer and reader must imagine the tone. So if the reader is feeling sensitive, he or she might take offence at something intended to be a joke. Or when the writer tries to express urgency about something, the reader might misinterpret this as impatience or anger when really it's nothing of the kind.

(*Life Advanced,* Unit 11, p. 137)

Example 2

An informal email
Writing strategy

● Email follows the same rules as letters: an opening greeting, clear paragraphing and a closing phrase

(*Solution C1*, Unit 6, p. 73)

We also found that although the books explicitly taught different email registers, they placed much emphasis on recognizing formality (33/34 instances) rather than the directness level of different linguistic choices (1/34 instances). Occasionally, the books indicated the politeness value of language forms, but they did not adequately explain the subtle differences between the forms (Example 3). Our analysis also showed that only 45% (10/22) of the books explicitly

covered contextual factors, with a primary focus on the impact of social relationships on email registers (Example 4). On the other hand, other essential factors such as imposition and its effect on politeness were mentioned in only one book (Example 5). This lack of a consistent emphasis on context in the books can make it difficult for learners, especially those with limited real-life exposure, to learn how to adapt their language use to different social situations. Unfortunately, these missed learning opportunities were not compensated for in sections of the books dealing with oral speech acts. A close look at those sections indicates that learners were neither taught the slight differences between different realization strategies, nor were they consistently guided to analyze context to understand the reason behind participants' linguistic choices.

Example 3

Learning in focus
Using modals

- When you invite someone or respond to an invitation, you often need to use modal verbs.

- We use modal verbs to invite, to ask permission, to politely accept or decline invitations, to ask for advice and to make offers.

Look at the examples below:

Could/ May/ Can *I bring a friend to your party? (polite permission)*

Shall *I help you with the decorations? (offer)*

Would *you like to go out with me? (invitation)*

*I **would** love to come. (accepting an invitation)*

Should *I bring anything to the party? (asking for advice)*

*I'm sorry, but I **can't** make it (declining an invitation)*

(Close up A2, Unit 10, p. 130)

Example 4

B Read the writing task and then answer the questions below.

You have received an email from your college principal. (email given)

1. Who will you write to?

2. What tone will you use?

(*Close up B2,* Unit 10, p. 130)

Example 5

Writing short email requests

2 Writing skill: Being polite

Answer the questions

1. What is the relationship between each pair of correspondents?

2. Which are big requests and which are small requests?

3. Which phrases for requests and apologies are only used formally? And informally?

(*Life Upper-Intermediate,* Unit 3, p. 41)

Research Question 3: What types of instructional activities are used to teach email pragmatics?

Our third research question investigated the types of instructional activities used for teaching and practicing email speech acts in the books under analysis. We classified these activities into three categories: awareness-raising, output practice and reflective activities, as explained in Table 2. Awareness-raising activities involve learners identifying, discussing, or comparing different aspects of email writing such as discourse structure, linguistic forms as well as contextual factors affecting registers. This type of activity occurred in 91% of the books (20/22), accounting for a large proportion of the books' teaching content (55.7%). Output practice includes a range of scaffolding activities providing language and content support as well as free writing practice. Output practice occurred in 90% of the books (20/22), accounting for 32.5% of the total teaching content. Finally, reflective activities encourage learners to review different aspects of their emails such as format, discourse structure, linguistic forms, register and tone, as well as consider cross-cultural differences in email communication. Reflective activities focusing on linguistic and sociocultural aspects of email writing occurred in 73% of the books (16/22) and accounted for 11.9% of the total number of instructional activities. However, reflective activities focusing on cross-cultural differences were completely absent (Table 7).

Our analysis also revealed that among awareness-raising activities, those with a linguistic focus far outnumbered those with a sociocultural focus (39.7% vs. 15.5%), affirming the tendency to emphasize linguistic over sociocultural content in the books as previously discussed. Of output production activities, free writing practice accounted for 15.5%, far exceeding both activities providing language support (i.e., controlled writing, 8.8%) and those providing content support (i.e., guided writing, 8.2%) (Table 7).

Table 7. The Distribution of Instructional Activities across Books

	Life	Close up	Gateway	Solution	Total
Awareness-raising	**4/73 (56.2)**	**38/76 (50.0)**	**20/29 (69)**	**9/16 (56.3)**	**108/194 (55.7)**
Focus on linguistic aspects	*22/73 (30)*	*33/76 (43.4)*	*15/290 (51.7)*	*9/16 (56.3)*	*79/194 (39.7)*
Email characteristics	2/73 (2.7)	0/76 (0)	0/29 (0)	0/16 (0)	2/194 (1)
Communicative functions	2/73 (2.7)	7/76 (9.2)	4/290 (13.8)	1/16 (6.3)	14/194 (7.2)
Email discourse	4/73 (5.5)	10/76 (13.2)	3/29 (10.8)	2/16 (12.5)	19/194 (9.8)
Speech act realisation	4/73 (5.5)	8/76 (10.5)	5/29 (17.2)	4/16 (25)	21/194 (10.8)
Directness & formality	10/73 (13.7)	8/76 (10.5)	3/29 (10.8)	2/16 (12.5)	23/194 (11.9)
Focus on sociocultural aspects	*19/73 (26.0)*	*5/76 (6.6)*	*5/29 (17.2)*	*1/16 (6.3)*	*30/194 (15.5)*
Context	13/73 (17.8)	4/76 (5.3)	5/29 (17.2)	1/16 (6.3)	23/194 (11.9)
Norms of appropriateness	4/73 (5.5)	1/76 (1.3)	0/290 (0)	0/16 (0)	5/195 (2.6)
Effects on the recipient	2/73 (2.7)	0/76 (0)	0/29 (0)	0/16 (0)	2/194 (1)
Output practice	**23/73 (31.5)**	**27/76 (35.5)**	**9/29 (31)**	**4/16 (25)**	**63/194 (32.5)**
Controlled writing	*6/73 (8.2)*	*10/76 (13.2)*	*1/29 (3.4)*	*0/16 (0)*	*17/194 (8.8)*
Guided writing	*4/73 (5.5)*	*7/76 (9.2)*	*3/29 (10.3)*	*2/16 (12.5)*	*16/194 (8.2)*
Free writing	*13/73 (17.8)*	*10/76 (13.2)*	*5/29 (17.2)*	*2/16 (12.5)*	*30/194 (15.5)*
Reflection on form, function, context	**9/73 (12.3)**	**11/76 (14.5)**	**0/29 (0)**	**3/16 (18.8)**	**23/194 (11.9)**
Reflection on cross-cultural variation	**0/73 (0)**	**0/76 (0)**	**0/29 (0)**	**0/16 (0)**	**0/194 (0)**

Additionally, there was an imbalanced distribution of activities among different levels, with higher level books featuring more awareness-raising activities and lower-level books emphasizing output practice (Table 8). This may appear counter-intuitive, as pragmatic productive skills typically require greater cognitive processing as compared to pragmatic

receptive skills and can be more challenging for learners at lower levels. In general, learners at these levels require a strong understanding of email writing conventions, which can be facilitated through awareness-raising activities before they attempt to produce effective email messages.

Table 8. The Distribution of Instructional Activities across Levels

	Beginner	Elementary	Inter	Upper-intermediate	Advanced	Total
Awareness-raising	**16/37 (43.2)**	**17/34 (50)**	**34/56 (60.7)**	**31/50 (62)**	**10/17 (58.8)**	**108/194 (55.7)**
Linguistic focus	*12/37 (32.4)*	*11/34 (32.4)*	*28/56 (50)*	*22/50 (44)*	*6/17 (35.3)*	*79/194 (39.7)*
Email characteristics	*0/37 (0)*	*0/34 (0)*	*0/56 (0)*	*1/50 (2)*	*1/17 (5.9)*	*2/194 (1)*
Functions	3/37 (8)	2/34 (5.9)	6/56 (10.7)	3/50 (6)	0/17 (0)	14/194 (7.2)
Email discourse	2/37 (24.3)	4/34 (11.8)	8/56 (10.7)	4/50 (14)	1/17 (5.9)	19/194 (9.8)
Speech act realisation	6/37 (16.2)	2/34 (5.9)	7/56 (12.5)	4/50 (8.0)	2/17 (11.8)	21/194 (10.8)
Formality & directness	1/37 (2.7)	3/34 (8.8)	7/56 (12.5)	10/50 (20)	2/17 (11.8)	23/194 (11.9)
Sociocultural focus	*4/37 (10.8)*	*6/34 (17.6)*	*7/56 (12.5)*	*9/50 (18)*	*4/17 (23.5)*	*30/194 (15.5)*
Context	3/37 (8.1)	6/34 (17.6)	6/56 (10.7)	6/50 (12)	2/17 (11.8)	23/194 (11.9)
Norm of appropriateness	1/37 (2.7)	0/34 (0)	1/56 (1.8)	2/50 (4)	1/17 (5.9)	5/195 (2.6)
Effects	0/37 (0)	0/34 (0)	0/56 (0)	1/50 (2)	1/17 (5.9)	2/194 (1)
Output production	**17/37 (45.9)**	**12/34 (35.3)**	**17/56 (30.4)**	**13/50 (26)**	**4/17 (23.5)**	**63/194 (32.5)**
Controlled writing	4/37 (10.8)	1/34 (2.9)	7/56 (12.5)	4/50 (8)	1/17 (5.9)	17/194 (8.8)
Guided writing	4/37 (10.8)	4/34 (11.8)	4/56 (7)	2/50 (4)	2/17 (11.8)	16/194 (8.2)
Free writing	9/37 (24.3)	7/34 (20.6)	6/56 (10.7)	7/50 (14)	1/17 (5.9)	30/194 (15.5)
Reflection on form-function	**4/37 (10.8)**	**5/34 (14.7)**	**5/56 (8.9)**	**6/50 (12.0)**	**3/17 (17.6)**	**23/194 (11.9)**
Reflection on L1-L2 variation	**0/37 (0)**	**0/34 (0)**	**0/56 (0)**	**0/50 (0)**	**0/17 (0)**	**0/194 (0)**

Another finding was the considerable difference in the frequency of free writing activities among different levels, with higher levels having fewer free writing activities than lower levels (Table 8). Conversely, controlled writing activities were more prevalent in beginner and intermediate-level books, while guided writing activities were more common in both lower and higher-level books than in intermediate and upper-intermediate books (Table 8). While it is useful for learners to engage in free writing, it is crucial that low level learners receive adequate language and content support to develop essential writing sub-skills and gain confidence before attempting to write. Unfortunately, the distribution of writing practice in the examined books did not seem to be carefully planned to provide low level learners with the necessary scaffolding. We found that only one of eight units in the beginner's books and one of six units in the elementary-level books provided scaffolded practice opportunities, allowing learners to progress from controlled to guided writing activities and ultimately free practice. For the majority of the time, learners using the lower-level books practiced email writing without either or both types of support, which does not assist them in building language skills as well as in developing writing confidence (Table 9).

Table 9. Sequencing of Output Production Activities

	Beginner	Elementary	Intermediate	Upper-intermediate	Advanced
Controlled → Guided → Free writing	1/8 (12.5)	1/6 (16.7)	1/11 (9.1)	0/8 (0)	0/3 (0)
Controlled → Free writing	3/8 (37.5)	0/6 (0)	3/11 (27.3)	3/8 (37.5)	0/3 (0)
Guided → Free writing	1/8 (12.5)	0/6 (0)	1/11 (9.1)	0/8 (0)	0/3 (0)
Controlled → Guided writing	0/8 (0)	0/6 (0)	1/11 (9.1)	0/8 (0)	1/3 (33.3)
Controlled writing only	0/8 (0)	0/6 (0)	1/11 (9.1)	0/8 (0)	0/3 (0)
Guided writing only	0/8 (0)	2/6 (33.3)	2/11 (18.2)	2/8 (25)	1/3 (33.3)
Free writing only	3/8 (37.5)	3/6 (50)	2/11 (18.2)	3/8 (37.5)	1/3 (33.3)

Discussion

In this study, we examined how and to what extent email pragmatics is taught in four sets of international English textbooks. Our findings indicate that the textbooks have both strengths and limitations. One of the strengths we observed was that the textbooks dedicated a considerable amount of their email teaching content to teaching registers, helping learners understand the conventions and styles required for formal and informal emails. This is crucial because L2 learners often face challenges when writing formal emails to authority figures, such as professors, due to a lack of sophisticated language skills and awareness of how discourse constructs and is constructed by power (Chen, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2018). We applaud the examined books for their explicit focus on email registers and stylistic variations.

Moreover, we found that there was an attempt to engage learners in contextual analysis to understand the effects of relationships on email registers and tone, although this approach is inconsistent across all the books. It is worth noting that previous textbooks have been criticized for teaching speech acts out of context and failing to provide metapragmatic information to help learners understand the connections between form, function and context (Ishihara & Paller, 2016; Petraki & Bayes, 2013). Therefore, it is encouraging to see that at least half of the examined books begin to include an explicit discussion of context.

We found numerous awareness-raising activities, particularly those focusing on recognizing formality and language forms for expressing pragmatic intents. These activities are vital for the development of L2 pragmatic competence since learners not only require exposure to input but also need to notice target forms to acquire them (Schmidt, 1990). Therefore, the inclusion of such activities provides a solid foundation for learners to develop pragmatic skills.

However, our findings also revealed some gaps in the ways email pragmatics is taught in the books. First, although the books have demonstrated some positive trends as discussed above, we believe that there should be more opportunities for in-depth discussions of email pragmatics. For instance, previous research has shown that although emails incorporate features of written language, they are essentially different from letters. One of the differences is that because of their interactive nature, emails do not always require openings and closings like letters (Dürscheid & Frehner, 2013). It is therefore crucial for the books to include explicit information on such nuanced differences to assist learners who may be unfamiliar with email conventions.

More effort should be made to help learners recognize the level of directness in linguistic expressions. Although current teaching of email speech acts focuses on specific registers (e.g., a formal cover email versus an informal invitation email), learners are not consistently guided to understand how context affects language choices and politeness. Instead, they are often given lists of "useful expressions" without learning the differences among them. This can lead to the misconception that all expressions have the same politeness value, regardless of the situation. Important concepts like imposition, face, and politeness in English speech act performance (Brown & Levinson, 1987) are ignored. Teachers' ability to discuss these concepts effectively depends on their pragmatic knowledge of the target language, which may be insufficient in many cases (see Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh, 2008).

Another shortcoming of the books is the lack of attention to cross-cultural variations in the performance of email speech acts. As noted in previous studies, email writers from different cultures may have different expectations regarding formality and directness and many of those tacit rules are difficult to acquire through mere exposure (Bjørge, 2007; Li & Chen, 2016; Formentelli, 2009). This variability may pose considerable difficulties to L2 learners in making stylistic and pragmatic choices appropriate for the sociocultural context in which they communicate (Chen, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2018). Therefore, learners should be given opportunities to explore and reflect on how norms of appropriateness may differ across languages and cultures to develop intercultural sensitivity and ability to "shuttle between communities and communicative events" (Marlina, 2018, p. 5).

Finally, more thoughts should also go into designing and sequencing teaching content and practice activities to optimize learning. A more carefully planned selection of speech act types is necessary to provide learners opportunities to revisit previously learned pragmatic knowledge

as they progress from one level to the next. Moreover, learners at lower levels need more extensive scaffolding before attempting to write and more opportunities to engage in reflection and review to improve their email writing performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Previous research has found that textbooks often prioritize linguistic knowledge at the expense of pragmatics and intercultural communication, a finding that our study supports (Petraki & Bayes, 2013; Tatsuki, 2019). This is concerning, given the strong advocacy of scholars in the field for the inclusion of pragmatics in language teaching materials. Despite this advocacy, progress has been slow since Vellenga's (2004) ground-breaking study brought to light the lack of pragmatic content in English language textbooks. This situation emphasizes the gap between research recommendations and the way pragmatics is currently taught in textbooks. It underscores the need for textbook writers to integrate research findings into the design of teaching and learning content, in order to better facilitate pragmatic instruction (Ishihara & Paller, 2016; Tatsuki, 2019).

The findings suggest supporting teachers in using textbooks to benefit learners. Previous research shows that teachers often overlook pragmatics in the classroom due to limited emphasis in language teacher education programs (Vásquez & Sharpless, 2009). However, recent teacher development initiatives demonstrate that proper training can improve teachers' pragmatic awareness and pedagogical knowledge, leading to more effective materials and lessons (Yates & Wiggglesworth, 2005). Unfortunately, attempts to involve teachers in materials development has been limited (Tatsuki, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to continue such initiatives in the future.

Finally, while our analysis provides some insights into the opportunities for learning email pragmatics in the examined books, it is important to acknowledge that its focus is limited to this specific aspect and does not diminish the overall quality of the books. To fully assess the effectiveness of these materials in teaching email pragmatics, it is crucial to consider how they are implemented in the classroom to impact students' learning. Future research can also include interviews with teachers and observe their practices to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their use of materials in action. This information can then be fed back into teacher development programs to further support their use of pragmatics-focused materials in the classroom.

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