Examining email etiquettes of Filipino accountancy students: insights from faculty members in a higher education institution

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Abstract - This study explored some best practices for accountancy students when composing emails to their faculty members, including developing a professional tone and crafting concise and meaningful emails. Qualitative approach was utilized as the framework in conducting the research and Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was employed. Purposive-convenience sampling technique was used in gathering the participants and with the use of the thematic analysis approach, interview transcripts were read and examined many times and were organized, arranged, grouped, and coded to different themes and subthemes that reflect the purpose of the study. In presenting the findings related to the first research question, five main themes were formed (1) use of English as the definite conventional language, (2) clearly and comprehensively conveying emails using any given language, (3) the use of English language as a formal language, (4) English language as a tool in measuring competency and skills of students, (5) observing proper grammar articulation in any given language. Five concurrent themes also for the second research question are (1) not giving attention to those students that do not follow email etiquette, (2) teaching and informing students the proper way of sending emails; discerning students, (3) life disposition through email, (4) presenting proper email formats that students can follow, (5) having a positive insight on the students who uses proper email etiquette.

Keywords: email, etiquettes, perceptions, language, Filipino accountancy students

I. INTRODUCTION

In the current digital era, email has prevailed as the primary form of communication for students and faculty members in higher education institutions, particularly for students who need to reach out to their faculty members for various reasons. Students engage in the communication for the purposes of clarification, efficiency, and personal or social motives (Young et al, 2011). Effective email communication is not only a means of conveying information but also a reflection of the students 'professionalism and respect for the recipient. The field of accounting has grown exponentially in the past few years, and with it, the need for professionals with an understanding of the accounting principles and processes. Along with this growth has come an increased need for individuals to possess proper email etiquette when communicating with faculty members. In the context of accountancy programs, where attention to detail and accuracy are crucial skills, email etiquette is particularly important. Good email etiquette not only reflects a student's respect for the faculty members they are interacting with, but it also demonstrates the student's ability to communicate in a professional and respectful manner. The upholding of a student-faculty relationship has an enormous effect on academic success, and students' usage of online communication for clarification purposes appears to create an interpersonal connection with their instructor (Young et al, 2011). This study will explore some best practices for accountancy students when composing emails to their faculty members, including developing a professional tone, crafting concise and meaningful emails, and understanding the importance of timely responses.

Within the existing research studies regarding email etiquettes of accountancy students, there may be studies in foreign countries, but there are no existing studies in the Philippines. Given that every country varies in terms of cultures, beliefs, and practices, it is plausible that there are differences in etiquettes of accountancy students from different parts of the world. Therefore, a research gap emerges for studies that explore this matter. Regarding the current study, the researchers assert that several elements, such as the formality of the language employed, may affect how students behave in email correspondence with teachers.

The primary objective of this study is to look into how accounting students behave when emailing their faculty members. Specifically, the study will examine whether the students are aware of the proper etiquette for email communication, as well as any differences between the email etiquette of accountancy and other students. Additionally, the study will explore how email etiquette affects the overall communication between students and faculty members, and the impact it has on the academic success of the students.

By examining the various aspects of email etiquette among accountancy students and the implications it has on their academic success, this study will cater valuable understanding into the current state of email communication in the accounting profession. Moreover, the findings of this study can be further developed to promote effective email communication between accountancy students and faculty members, leading to improved academic performance and greater overall success.

This study aims to add to the discussion regarding email etiquette among accounting students from the insights of faculty members in a higher education setting. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following items: (a) How do faculty members perceive the language use of Filipino accountancy students in composing emails for academic purposes? (b) How do faculty members perceive these students based on their email etiquettes?

1.1 Languages used by students in composing emails to the faculty members

Email and other technologies support the teaching and learning of languages. Accordingly, the benefits for teachers and students are as follows: "(1) when students use email in the classroom for language learning, they become familiar with the tool, especially how the tool would guide them to enhance their language learning; (2) at more convenient times, a teacher could interact with a student or group of students working on a project; and third, email saves time for some assignments" (Rokni, 2013).

This study sought to determine the language proficiency in writing a sample of emails from College of Education English major undergraduates to junior students. The writing inventory evaluated the respondents' writing activities and conducted a linguistic and lexical analysis at various language and lexical levels. The findings showed that the students in this study employed a range of language, from inquisitive to reactive, while organization, vocabulary, and mechanics adopted a hybrid form of communication. The students use brief answers and code-switching in their written outputs.

The usage of emails gives students a chance to interact, collaborate, and inform while requiring skills. The students would have the opportunity to employ a variety of senses while learning through computer technology. Computer technology is becoming more and more crucial to the educational system in today's digital age. The current focus of education is shifting from traditional instruction to one that encompasses a variety of technologies to provide a multi-sensory approach to learning. With the use of computer technology, students are given the opportunity to explore a variety of stimuli in order to gain a better understanding of the material covered in class. Computer technology enables students to engage multiple senses in their learning process, such as using visual resources, hearing audio, and feeling tactile inventions, and more. This allows students to gain a better understanding of what they are studying and enhances their engagement and knowledge retention. Additionally, the learners' ability to absorb criticism more readily helps them be independent (Hayati & Gooran, 2014).

Due to the advancements of electronic communication, proper use of language, as well as brevity, clarity, and attention to tone and manner applied to emails should be considered. (Hamzah et al, 2010). According to Noraien (2007), email is suitable for a variety of modes of communication, such as casual conversations, dialogs, journals, and writing conferences. Due to their shyness, students find it challenging to communicate with or consult with their teachers, but through this medium, they can write more, ask more questions, and utilize more language skills. On the other hand, According to Gomaa (2010), writing is the most challenging of all language abilities to learn since it involves a complex and sophisticated process. As a result, communication is made difficult by poor writing skills that use unsuitable language and lacks imagination. According to Pennington (1995), Asian nations typically use a method that is traditionally product-oriented, examination-focused, and heavily focused on grammar. The goal of the student's enthusiasm in learning the language is to be highly competitive on standardized tests.

Students make mistakes and repeat them because their first language interferes with their ability to acquire the target language. Writing assignments may call for more detail and precision than other jobs. Although most students struggle with adequately communicating their thoughts, many pupils can understand the language (Flanegin & Rudd, 2000).

1.2 Relevance of Email usage between Student-Faculty Interactions

The usage of digital communication in educational institutions has been especially prevalent in this last decade as the world turns to the technological era. Emails and other present-day services have facilitated the modern mode of communication between the faculty and students. Just about anyone living in the 21st century has access to emails—young or old. It is also cost-effective compared to its predecessor and serves as a better alternative in comparison. Because of these various reasons and more, emails have been one of the used platforms in educational institutions.

Emails are generally formal in nature. When writing to a correspondent via email, it is customary to be written in a proper format—complete with the subject header, formalities, closing remarks etc. These are what is expected to be found in most messages, especially in a formal setting. Emails can also be portrayed in an informal way depending on the sender. Although in a university setting, this can diminish the credibility of the student. Emails from students to instructors that are impolite may have unfavourable effects (Haider & Zandi, 2022). This may serve as a challenge to the students who are aware of the power dynamics involved and the effects of practical failure. In addition, when teachers read emails from language learners, they frequently view them as disrespectful due to their ignorance of the many socio-pragmatic standards of language use among their students (Winans, 2020) As such, the growing need of raising awareness of students in terms of pragmatic facets has been increasing. The communication process is complex and multifaceted, regardless of the situation or medium (Weiss & Baldauf, 201)

Emails' primary function is to serve as a way for students to get in touch with the faculty members whether to request information about various inquiries or to inform the faculty members about the students' circumstances. Email is a cheap and accessible communication medium for college and university campuses. It has also developed into a way to find and utilize information resources (Hasset et al, 1995). Lecturers have utilized emails for official appointments, additional inquiries, distance teaching and other plethora of reasons. Emails have served as a cornerstone of information sharing in this modern technologically advanced world.

The use of email has been the go-to form of contact in professional settings due to its formal nature and ease of access. Moreover, the use of emails serves as a guidance tool for various educational institutions particularly in exchanging large files or documents from students to faculty members. Therefore, the formality and politeness matter in using emails.

II. METHOD
2.1 Research Design
Qualitative design was utilized as the framework in conducting the research. The study focused on examining the variables introspectively and was determined to further illustrate the relationship between the factors; the researchers believe that a qualitative approach was necessary to take. Furthermore, the topic researched could be interpreted as a subjective study as the topic leans heavily on the opinions of the respondents, it further intensified the need to take a qualitative approach. Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) is used to conduct this study which seeks to give in-depth analyses of individual lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015). As the gathered data is based on the experiences of its respondents regarding email etiquettes and their perspectives, the researchers found IPA to be the possible method to be used. It was beneficial to fully understand what this person was going through and how they interpreted their situation (Smith & Larkin, 2009).

2.2 Data Source and Participants

Eight faculty members in all took part in the investigation. Purposive-convenience sampling was employed to assemble the participants. As a result, the accessibility of the interview subjects was taken into consideration when choosing the study's location. The identified participants, who are faculty members in one of the universities in Tacloban City were purposely selected considering the following criteria: (1) already handled accountancy students and (2) received emails from accountancy students. The identified participants were reached personally and were given the request letters for the interview as well as the consent form explaining the study's goals, their voluntary involvement, and the strict confidentiality with which the data would be handled. The participants then scheduled a date for the face-to-face in-depth interview.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected through conducting interviews and setting several questions answered willingly and respectively by the selected faculty members in a higher education institution. Their answers sufficed the needed information and served as the basis of the topic, and the answers of the participants completed the collection of data. Since the participants are all teaching at the same university as the researchers, they approached the participants and informed them of the content and purpose of the study.

To obtain approval to conduct the interviews, a request letter was sent to the relevant offices. The consent form states that faculty members' involvement was voluntary, that they had the ability to revoke it, that anonymity was ensured, and their responses and identity will remain confidential and anonymous. After they agreed, their convenient time was sought so that a schedule for face-to-face interview could be set. Specifically, The open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview were written in English, and they draw replies on the following topics: the faculty members' perception of students using different languages in communicating and their email etiquettes, and how they address experiences wherein students do not observe email etiquette. For validation purposes, follow-up questions were added to suffice and supply the needed information for the researchers.

Using the thematic-analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), interview transcripts were read and examined many times and were organized, arranged, grouped, and coded to different themes and subthemes that reflect the purpose of the study. "Three steps were undertaken to code the interview transcripts: making the text manageable, hearing [noting] what was said and developing theory" (Lewins & Silver, 2007). The transcripts were identified by codes for the faculty-participants, P1 for Faculty Member 1, to preserve anonymity. In coding the interview transcripts, the study used Johnny Saldana's methods.

First cycle technique, according to Saldana (2021), are coding tactics used in the first cycle coding of data. This research study used In Vivo coding for the first cycle and came up with 46 codes for the first research question, and 64 codes for the second. Conversely, "the second cycle methods are coding strategies that require such analytic skills as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building" (Saldana, 2021). Applying both eclectic and axial coding methods, the study was able to refine the 110 codes to 22, eight for the first research question and fourteen for the second. The codes were then refined into 10 themes, 5 for each research question.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1 Perception Towards Students' Language Use in Academic Email

Based on the answers collected from the participants, English is the primary language used by students in sending emails to their faculty members in Eastern Visayas State University-Tacloban City, a university in the Philippines. Semi-structured interviews conducted across the university reveal that despite the fact that Waray-waray is the original language of the region, the students often resort to English communication. Waray-waray, the vernacular language follows English in terms of language prevalence during communication in emails and online platforms. Tagalog and 'Taglish', (mixed Tagalog and English), is used in lesser frequency. It is easy to understand why English is preferred for official communications. Business, academic and governmental organizations all use English as the lingua franca for cross-regional communication. Schools in Eastern Visayas, would also adhere to that norm, making English the language of choice for its students. Besides, English has unsurprisingly become the dominant language in a globalizing world, expectedly the same is true even in the remote regions like Eastern Visayas.

In presenting the findings related to the perceptions towards students' language use in academic emails, five main themes were formed to describe how the languages used in email communication of students affect the perceptions of the faculty members. These themes are: (a.) the use of English as the definite conventional language, (b) clearly and comprehensively conveying emails using any given language, (c) the use of English language as a formal language, (d.) using English language as a tool in measuring competency and skills of students, and (e.) observing proper grammar articulation in any given language.

(1) The use of English as the definite conventional language

According to a participant, he usually ignores students that don't use English when sending him an email, especially if he gave instructions using the said language. This idea is culled from the following excerpt:

> *"If it is not in English, I do not actually make "pansin" if the emails are not in format. Because when I give formal emails, I use English and when I give instructions in English, it must be answered in English. Otherwise, I would not make "pansin" again." (P1)*

Based on the response collected from one of the participants, the language used is an important factor in sending email to faculty members, especially that the instructor gave the instructions in English so it is expected that the faculty member would receive responses using English language as well. In this case, he uses email to communicate with the students under the accounting department to give directions on activities or assignments. Accordingly, the benefits for teachers and students are as follows: "(1) when students use email in the classroom for language learning, they become familiar with the tool, especially how the tool would guide them to enhance their language learning; (2) at more convenient times, a teacher could interact with a student or group of students working on a project; and third, email saves time for some assignments" (Rokni, 2013).

(2) Clearly and comprehensively conveying emails using any given language

Other participants do not prioritize or give attention to the language used by their students as long as the message can be understood properly, this concept will be stated in the statements that'll follows.

> *"In my opinion, (language used), not really. As long as the message is clear, and I was able to get (what) the sender is trying to convey." (P2)*
> *"On this question, for me, what typical language they are using does not affect my perception of them if it is understandable and comprehensible." (P3)*

From the above statements, we can conclude that the language used by the accountancy students when emailing their instructors does not really matter to the faculty members, whether it's English, Tagalog, Taglish, or the vernacular language, Waray-waray, as long as the message does not contain bad words and if it is understandable and comprehensible. Due to the advancements of electronic communication, proper use of language, as well as brevity, clarity, and attention to tone and manner applied to emails should be considered (Hamzah et al, 2010).

(3) The use of English language as a formal language
Different from other answers, some of the faculty members perceive students that use English language as formal students just as stated in the following statements.

> *"Using English language is more formal compared to other languages like Filipino or Taglish. It is also because in business field, English is the common language used." (P4)*
> *"As college students, you should be fluent in communicating using the English language because it is more formal." (P6)*

Formality of message when sending emails to faculty members depends on the language used, according to some of the participants. When communicating in a formal context, it is important to use the English language as a sign of respect and formality and using standard language with appropriate grammar and vocabulary.

(4) Using English language as a tool in measuring competency and skills of students
Some said that using the universal language measures the competency and skills of the students. The following statements indicate these perspectives.

> *"I commend students who tried to make use of the standard language or the universal language as the form of their expression, because, for me, it is also a sign of competency, and skills." (P5)*
> *"It measures the academic quotient of the student. So, if the student is really performing well, he produces a letter that is better than those who are actually low in academic quotient or performance. If the student is actually using Filipino, that means he cannot express in English. So therefore, he is not equipped with the language that actually signals that the student is not reading a lot because he cannot deliver the (message) in the said language." (P8)*

Based on the responses above, the English language is a great tool for measuring students' competency and skills in various areas. The language can be used to assess grammar, vocabulary, writing, speaking, pronunciation, listening, and comprehension. According to Gomaa (2010), writing is the most challenging of all language abilities to learn since it involves a complex and sophisticated process. As a result, communication is made difficult by poor writing skills that use unsuitable language and lacks imagination. However, we cannot deny that there are still students that cannot properly express their ideas and opinions in the English language, and that's when the perception of the faculty members that have been interviewed will differ. Although most students struggle with adequately communicating their thoughts, many students can understand the language (Flanegin & Rudd, 2000).

(5) Observing proper grammar articulation in any given language.
One of the faculty members that we have interviewed have different answer from the others, language used does not matter but the construction of the email does, the following statement supports this idea.

> *"Language used does not affect my perception, but it depends on how they construct their sentences, if their articulation of the message they are trying to convey is great, then sometimes there is an impression that this student is polite or smart. So, it is best that if you are going to send an email, there is a subject, caption if needed like what is the gist of your email, including your section and name - introduction. Just like that, simple etiquette." (P7)*

Filipino people somehow are very particular with the grammar and construction of a sentence especially that the majority of people in the Philippines speak English at least somewhat fluently, making it one of the largest English-speaking countries in the world. English is one of the official languages of the Philippines, where more than 14 million people are English speakers. The use of correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation is essential in creating a clear and precise message that reflects positively on the sender. According to Pennington (1995), Asian nations typically use a method that is traditionally product-oriented, examination-focused, and heavily focused on grammar.

3.2 Perception Towards Students Based on their Email Etiquettes

This section of the study addressed the significance of email in terms of interaction between the students and the faculty members and how perception of the students is affected based on their competence in the usage of the medium. In presenting the findings related to the perception towards students based on their email etiquettes, the data collected showed that following email etiquette in the medium is a favourable attribute that a student should have and likewise, showing incompetence is a demerit that needs to be improved upon. Five (5) concurrent themes were found in response to the research question. These themes were (a.) Not giving attention to those students that don't follow email etiquette, (b.) Teaching and informing students the proper way of sending emails, (c.) Discerning students, life disposition through email, (d.) Presenting proper email formats students can follow, and (e.) Having a positive insight on the students who use proper email etiquette.

(1) Not giving attention to those students that don't follow email etiquette.
According to some respondents, they usually ignore students who don't conform with their own standards of proper email etiquette. The respondent provided the following statement.

> *"I usually ignore the emails that do not even have the subject, emails that do not have the body--even if it's in English if it does not have the body. I would ignore that email. That is how I address emails that do not conform with my standards." (P1)*
> *"When it comes to email, if the proper etiquette is not observed, then I am not doing anything, I do not respond, and I leave it the way it is unless the output itself is missing." (P7)*

Emails are more often, are expected to be written with finesse, especially in a formal setting like an educational education. Some faculty members may expect the students to understand the educational hierarchy in place and as such, expect the students to be formal when in communication with the faculty members. According to Haider and Zandi (2022) "Impoliteness in student emails to faculty can have negative consequences" and as the responses provided shown, the end result leads to the faculty members ignoring the emails sent to them.

(2) Teaching and informing students the proper way of sending emails
Some respondents indicated that they would call the attention of the students and will inform the student to use proper email etiquette in calling the attention of the lecturer. The following statements showed their responses.

> *"I would call the attention of the student or I would just talk to her or him in my reply to the email. I would remind the student that they have to observe some email etiquettes." (P2)*

"I think emails should have the proper greetings and address. For example, using Sir and Ma'am." (P3)

"I teach them and include it in my lesson. Since email etiquettes are not taught in class, I think it is better if there will be seminars or webinars where in all students can attend and learn on the basic etiquettes not just in emails but also to other platforms like messenger." (P4)

"Actually, I take it as avenue in the classroom to discuss the ethics on how to make a letter to the faculty. But I do not name names. It is just a general statement, like when you do like this and like this…it should be like that. So that everybody has the same understanding on how to make a letter. Because that mistake, or that error may be committed by some, may also be committed by others. That's why I made it a purpose that every time there is something wrong, I see from my student, I do it in a classroom input so that everybody will understand." (P8)

These respondents preferred to educate the students themselves on how they should conduct in email when in correspondence with the faculty members. When teachers read emails from their students, who utilize a distinct set of socio-pragmatic language norms, they frequently judge them as rude (Winans, 2020). Compared to the previous responses, the respondents still have strict albeit, lighter expectations from the students to conform to the email etiquette standards and as such, they take these moments as a teaching experience rather than to reprimand.

(3) Discerning students' life disposition through email.

A respondent provided that they can understand the student's way of life on how they conduct themselves in communicating with the faculty member. The following statement states their claims:

"When you read emails from the students, you can also somehow detect their character, their personality, their disposition in life, their mode of expression, which could somehow relate to their psychology. It also gives me a hint of how they are doing, and what is their status, and at the same time, it also helps me to relate and respond properly to how they are expressing their opinions and sentiments." (P5)

Based on the response provided above, email competency can reveal extensively about a person's demeanour. Students who can properly articulate their thoughts and show competency reveals the student's informative nature likewise, students that portray incompetence or informal behaviour shows the students lack formal knowledge and capability.

(4) Presenting proper email formats students can follow.

The respondents provided that they would demonstrate to the students the proper email formats according to them that could serve as a guide for the students in future email communication. Their responses are expressed in the following statement.

"I am not the type of person, especially in emails, that is confrontable, I just replied to them, perhaps, with an example or a model of how they should reply. So it's more of showing rather than telling, So when I reply to them, I reply to them with a format that could somehow be an example for them that the next time you'll be writing a letter." (P5)

"I always reiterate in my orientation that if they want to send a message via email or any platform, they should follow the basic etiquettes that I presented." (P6)

The respondents revealed that instead of chastising the students in their behaviour - sending email in an inappropriate way or the email lacks content and proper addressing to whom they are going to send it. The faculty instead take this a teaching moment and instead show the students on how it is done in a way that can serve as a format for the students. Recent researches have revealed that when faculty members take the teaching approach, it serves as a useful resource for students on how to properly use email, as well as providing a standard format for them to follow. For example, appropriate language, formatting, addressing recipients, and in what scenarios it is most suitable to use email compared to other means of

communication. This approach helps to ensure that students are aware of appropriate email etiquette when engaging with others.

(5) Having a positive insight on the students who uses proper email etiquette
In contrast to the themes beforehand, a respondent has a positive inclination to the students who shows competence in their email writings. The respondent's is shown in the following statement.

> *"The student is actually using the right words, having the right tone, it means that the author is actually courteous as well as… he is informed as to the appropriateness of forwarding a letter or forwarding output or request to the faculty. So, it actually signals whether he is actually educated as to appropriateness of conduct as well as tone used in making a request or stating other facts or other concerns through a letter. So, courtesy and politeness matters to giving impression to the teachers, to me. When he used the right words, when he has the right formatting. Like saying good afternoon…having the greetings and have the discussion. And then, end with the right tone that actually signals that the student is somewhat ethical." (P8)*

According to the respondent, proper email etiquette and articulation is a litmus test of sorts to determine the capabilities of the students. Students who do show competence when it comes to email etiquette leaves a good impression on the faculty members as it shows the literacy and capabilities of the students.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through the participant's responses, it is revealed that language use and email etiquette play a role in the faculty members' reception towards the student. It is found that the majority of the faculty members preferred to be communicated with the English language for varying reasons – which could be for formality, measuring the competencies of the students, or as a required format. Some faculty members found that language used by the students "does not matter in terms of preference as long as the message is conveyed properly", or "proper grammar articulation is observed". The study discovered that usage of proper email etiquette plays a positive merit in the perception of the faculty members towards as it serves as a tool to measure the competency of the student and can disclose the way of life of the person in question. In contrast, not observing proper email etiquette can negatively affect how the faculty members regard the student in question. Some opt to ignore the students to serve as disciplinary action to reprimand students. Although, some respondents take this as a learning opportunity and teach the students themselves the proper way of communicating with the faculty members or present an example themselves to serve as a guide to the students in the future.

Through the gathered findings from above, it could be concluded that using English language and observing proper email etiquette could have positive benefits if in communication with the faculty members. Future research may investigate on a wider scope wherein participants will be students from different college courses to be able to compare and contrast the attitudes and characters of students and their way of communicating with the faculty members. Future studies may also explore the etiquettes of students on the different social media platforms aside from emails.

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