



Enhancing Students' Ability to Write Professional Emails for Office Communication through Guided Practice

A Classroom-Based Study

Fitria Wahyu Nugraheni

Akademi Sekretari Marsudirini Santa Maria, Indonesia

*Penulis Korespondensi: fitriawahyunugraheni@gmail.com

Abstract. This study seeks to explore the application of guided practice in instructing professional email composition for office communication and to assess its effect on students' writing proficiency. This study utilised a qualitative descriptive design inside a classroom setting, supplemented by quantitative data. The participants were secretary students engaged in an English course centred on office communication. The data were gathered via classroom observation, writing assignments (pre-test and post-test), and student reflection surveys. The findings reveal that guided practice was effectively implemented through structured stages, including modeling, guided exercises, feedback, and revision. The results also indicate a significant improvement in students' writing ability, particularly in terms of organization, language use, and the use of appropriate tone and politeness. In addition, students showed positive responses toward the use of guided practice, as it helped them better understand the structure and conventions of professional email writing and increased their confidence. In conclusion, guided practice is an effective instructional strategy for improving students' professional email writing skills. It is recommended for use in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, particularly in preparing students for workplace communication.

Keywords: EFL; Guided Practice; Office Communication; Professional Email Writing; Secretary Students.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary globalized workplace, effective written communication has become an essential competence, particularly for students preparing for professional roles in office settings. Among various forms of written communication, email remains one of the most widely used tools for professional interaction, serving functions such as requesting information, confirming schedules, and maintaining business relationships. For students in secretary education programs, the ability to write professional emails is not only an academic requirement but also a crucial workplace skill that directly influences their future employability and professional performance (Bhatia, 2014; Hyland, 2019).

Writing is universally recognised as one of the most difficult skills for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Unlike speaking, writing requires learners to demonstrate control over multiple linguistic components simultaneously, including grammar, vocabulary, organization, and tone. Recent studies highlight that mastering writing is a multifaceted and incremental process requiring sustained practice and effective instructional methods (Richter & McNamara, 2024). EFL students frequently encounter difficulties in generating texts that are both grammatically correct and contextually suitable for professional communication (Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal, 2016).

In the context of professional email writing, the challenge becomes even more specific. Students are expected to apply appropriate formats, maintain a professional tone, and use polite expressions suitable for workplace communication. However, previous research indicates that many students face difficulties in structuring emails effectively, selecting appropriate expressions, and maintaining coherence in their writing (Al-Khatib, 2001; Jalilifar & Beitsayyah, 2011). These challenges are often linked to limited exposure to authentic models and insufficient guided practice during the learning process.

One pedagogical approach that has gained attention in recent years is the use of guided practice in writing instruction. Guided practice refers to a structured learning process in which students are supported through models, prompts, feedback, and gradual scaffolding provided by the teacher. This approach allows learners to develop their writing skills step by step, reducing cognitive overload and increasing their confidence in producing written texts. A recent study by Rahman and Aziz (2024) found that guided writing strategies significantly improve students' writing performance and engagement, indicating that learners benefit from systematic support during the writing process.

Moreover, the significance of feedback within guided practice has been emphasised as a crucial element in enhancing the quality of students' writing. Feedback offers learners insights into their performance and assists them in recognising areas for enhancement. It is described as a dialogic process that supports learning by enabling students to refine their ideas, structure, and language use in writing (Carless & Boud, 2018; Zhang & Hyland, 2024). In line with this, studies on written corrective feedback show that purposeful and consistent feedback contributes positively to students' writing development and learning outcomes (Ferris, 2014; Lee, 2020).

Moreover, new studies in EFL contexts underscore the significance of writing as a process that encompasses planning, drafting, and rewriting. Students who are guided through these stages tend to demonstrate better writing performance compared to those who receive minimal instructional support (Graham & Sandmel, 2011; Sun & Wang, 2025). This reinforces the idea that guided practice, which integrates these stages, can serve as an effective approach in teaching writing, particularly in professional contexts such as email communication.

Despite the growing body of research on writing instruction and guided practice, there is still limited research focusing specifically on professional email writing in secondary education contexts, especially in Indonesian higher education. Most previous studies have focused on general academic writing or writing at the school level, leaving a gap in

understanding how guided practice can be applied to develop workplace-oriented writing skills among university students.

Consequently, the objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of guided practice on the writing abilities of students and to investigate the implementation of this approach in the instruction of professional email writing for office communication. Furthermore, this investigation investigates students' reactions to the implementation of guided practice in the learning process. By focusing on a classroom-based context, this research is expected to provide practical insights for English lecturers, particularly those teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP), in designing effective instructional strategies that align with the demands of the workplace.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing is regarded as one of the most intricate skills in the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It necessitates that learners incorporate a variety of elements, including grammar, vocabulary, coherence, cohesion, and organisation, into a meaningful text. In addition to being a linguistic endeavour, writing is a social practice that necessitates a comprehension of context, purpose, and audience, as per Ken Hyland (2019). This suggests that students must be capable of adjusting their writing to accommodate a variety of communicative contexts, particularly in professional environments. Additionally, research suggests that numerous English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students encounter challenges with writing as a result of inadequate practice and restricted linguistic resources. According to Muhammad Fareed, Muhammad Ashraf, and Muhammad Bilal (2016), pupils frequently encounter difficulties with organisation, grammatical accuracy, and idea development. The necessity of effective instructional strategies to facilitate the development of writing is underscored by these challenges.

Email communication is essential for professional interaction in the contemporary workplace. Professional email writing necessitates not only linguistic proficiency but also pragmatic awareness, which encompasses the capacity to employ appropriate tone, structure, and civility strategies. Recent studies emphasize that effective professional communication follows specific conventions that must be explicitly taught. For instance, Naoko Taguchi (2018) highlights the importance of pragmatic competence in context-specific communication, including workplace interactions. Similarly, Ken Hyland (2019) stresses that genre knowledge is essential for producing effective professional texts, including emails. These studies suggest

that students must understand not only language forms but also communication conventions in professional contexts.

For secretary students, these skills are particularly important, as they are expected to handle workplace correspondence professionally. Therefore, teaching professional email writing should focus not only on grammatical accuracy but also on authentic workplace communication practices and conventions.

Guided practice is an instructional approach that provides structured support to learners during the learning process. It involves modeling, scaffolding, and feedback to help students gradually develop their skills. According to Barak Rosenshine (2012), guided practice enables students to practice new skills with teacher support before moving toward independent performance. Building on this, recent studies confirm the effectiveness of guided practice in writing instruction. M. M. Rahman and A. A. Aziz (2024) found that guided writing significantly improves students' writing performance by providing structured steps and continuous support throughout the writing process.

In the context of writing instruction, guided practice helps students understand how to organize ideas, use appropriate language, and produce coherent texts. It also reduces students' anxiety and increases their confidence in writing, which is particularly important for EFL learners. By providing structured guidance, teachers can help students gradually build both competence and confidence.

Feedback is an essential element of guided practice, as it offers learners insights into their performance and areas for development. David Carless and David Boud (2018) contend that feedback should be perceived as a dialogic process that actively involves students in the learning process. Feedback can manifest in a variety of ways in writing instruction, such as peer feedback, instructor feedback, and self-assessment. Icy Lee (2017) underscores the importance of effective feedback in fostering students' understanding of their writing weaknesses and promoting revision. Additionally, Ken Hyland and Zheng Zhang (2018) emphasise that student engagement with feedback is a critical factor in the enhancement of writing quality.

Writing is also widely recognized as a recursive process that involves multiple stages, including planning, drafting, and revising. Steve Graham and Karin Sandmel (2018) demonstrate that process-based writing instruction contributes significantly to improved writing performance. In guided practice, these stages are explicitly taught and supported by the teacher. Students are encouraged to plan their ideas, draft their writing, and revise their work

based on feedback. This structured process helps learners develop a deeper understanding of writing as a skill that can be improved through practice and reflection.

Despite the growing body of research on writing instruction, guided practice, and feedback in EFL contexts, there is still limited research focusing on the integration of these elements in teaching professional email writing, particularly in secretary education programs. Most existing studies focus on general academic writing or secondary-level education, leaving a gap in workplace-oriented communication skills at the higher education level.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining how guided practice can be implemented in teaching professional email writing for office communication and how it influences students' writing ability and learning experience.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The implementation of guided practice in the teaching of professional email writing and its impact on students' writing abilities were the subjects of this study, which employed a classroom-based qualitative descriptive design. In order to gain a comprehensive comprehension of the teaching and learning process and the reactions of students to guided practice, a qualitative approach was implemented. In addition, the analysis was also supported by limited quantitative data, particularly in the measurement of students' improvement in writing performance through scoring rubrics.

This study was conducted at Akademi Sekretari Marsudirini (ASM) Santa Maria Semarang. The participants were students of the English Correspondence course who were focused on office communication.

Purposive sampling was employed to select a sample of 20 students from a single class, who were directly engaged in the acquisition of professional email writing skills.

To collect the data, the researcher used the following instruments:

a. Observation Checklist

Used to observe the implementation of guided practice during classroom activities.

b. Writing Test (Email Task)

Students were asked to write professional emails based on given scenarios.

c. Students' Reflection Questionnaire

Used to gather students' responses toward the use of guided practice.

Data were collected through several steps:

a. Classroom Observation

The researcher observed the teaching process using an observation checklist to identify how guided practice was implemented.

b. Writing Task (Pre and Post)

Students were given a writing task before and after the implementation of guided practice to measure improvement in their email writing ability.

c. Students' Reflection

At the end of the learning process, students completed a reflection questionnaire to express their perceptions and experiences.

The data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods:

a. Qualitative Analysis

Data from observation and students' reflections were analyzed using thematic analysis, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

b. Quantitative Analysis

Students' writing scores were calculated using a scoring rubric and compared between pre-test and post-test to identify improvement.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Implementation of Guided Practice in Teaching Professional Email Writing

Based on classroom observations, the implementation of guided practice was carried out through several structured stages. The lecturer first provided a model of a professional email, followed by an explanation of its structure, including subject line, opening, body, and closing. Students were then given guided examples and templates to support their understanding before practicing writing their own emails.

During the writing process, the lecturer actively provided feedback and guidance, particularly on language use, organization, and tone. Students were also given the opportunity to revise their work based on the feedback received. This process reflects the concept of guided practice as proposed by Barak Rosenshine (2012), where students gradually move from supported learning to more independent performance.

The observation checklist results showed that all key components of guided practice were successfully implemented. Students were actively engaged in the learning process, and the classroom atmosphere was interactive. This indicates that guided practice can be effectively applied in teaching professional email writing in a classroom setting.

Students' Improvement in Writing Professional Emails

The improvement in students' ability was measured through the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores based on the writing rubric.

Table 1. Students' Writing Scores.

Assessment	Mean Score
Pre-test	9.2
Post-test	13.8

The student's writing performance has significantly improved, as evidenced by the mean score rising from 9.2 to 13.8 out of 16. This suggests that students' capacity to compose professional emails was enhanced by guided practice.

In terms of specific aspects, the most noticeable improvements were found in:

- Email structure and organization → students were better able to arrange their ideas clearly
- Tone and politeness → students used more appropriate expressions
- Language accuracy → fewer grammatical errors were observed

These findings support previous studies which suggest that guided writing helps students improve their writing skills through structured support and practice. As noted by Steve Graham and Karin Sandmel (2011), students who engage in process-based writing tend to produce better writing outcomes.

Students' Responses toward Guided Practice

Data from students' reflection questionnaires revealed generally positive responses toward the use of guided practice in learning professional email writing.

Most students stated that:

- Guided examples helped them understand how to write emails properly
- Feedback from the lecturer was useful in improving their writing
- The step-by-step process made writing easier and less confusing

Some sample responses from students include:

"I understand better how to write a formal email because there is an example."

"The feedback helps me correct my mistakes."

"I feel more confident writing emails now."

In addition, the majority of students reported increased confidence in writing professional emails after the activity. This finding aligns with the idea that guided practice reduces students' anxiety and supports their learning process.

However, some students still reported difficulties, particularly in:

- a. Choosing appropriate vocabulary
- b. Constructing grammatically correct sentences

This suggests that while guided practice is effective, continuous practice and exposure are still needed to fully develop students' writing competence.

The findings of this study indicate that guided practice is an effective instructional approach in enhancing students' ability to write professional emails for office communication. The improvement in students' writing performance, as reflected in the increased mean scores from pre-test to post-test, suggests that structured instructional support plays a significant role in developing writing skills in EFL contexts.

One of the key factors contributing to this improvement is the use of **scaffolding** within guided practice. The teaching process in this study followed a structured sequence, including modeling, guided exercises, feedback, and revision. This gradual release of responsibility enabled students to develop their writing skills step by step, moving from supported practice to more independent performance. This finding is consistent with recent studies which emphasize that scaffolding strategies help reduce learners' cognitive load and improve learning outcomes (Zhang & Hyland, 2018; Han & Hyland, 2019).

In terms of writing organization, the findings show that students demonstrated significant improvement in structuring their emails. Initially, many students produced emails that lacked clear organization and essential components. However, after the implementation of guided practice, most students were able to include key elements such as subject lines, appropriate openings, well-developed body content, and polite closings. This indicates that explicit instruction combined with guided practice supports students in understanding and applying the conventions of professional communication. Recent research also highlights that genre-based instruction plays a crucial role in helping students produce contextually appropriate texts (Hyland, 2019).

Another important finding is related to students' use of **tone and politeness**. Before the intervention, students tended to use informal expressions or inappropriate language. After engaging in guided practice activities, including exposure to models and feedback, students showed better awareness of professional tone and appropriate expressions. This suggests that guided practice contributes not only to linguistic accuracy but also to pragmatic competence. According to recent studies, developing pragmatic competence is essential in professional communication, as it enables learners to use language appropriately in different contexts (Taguchi, 2018).

The role of **feedback** was also found to be crucial in improving students' writing performance. In this study, feedback was provided during the writing process, allowing students to revise their work and improve their final drafts. This supports the argument that feedback is most effective when it is integrated into the learning process rather than provided only at the end (Lee, 2017). Furthermore, research on written corrective feedback shows that consistent and meaningful feedback contributes significantly to students' writing development (Zhang, 2018).

In addition, the findings support the concept of **process-based writing**, which emphasizes writing as a recursive process involving planning, drafting, and revising. Students in this study were encouraged to revise their emails after receiving feedback, which resulted in improved writing quality. This is in line with recent research indicating that process-oriented writing instruction enhances students' ability to organize ideas and produce coherent texts (Graham & Harris, 2018).

From the perspective of students' responses, the findings indicate that guided practice had a positive impact on their learning experience. Students reported that the use of examples, templates, and step-by-step guidance made the writing task easier and more manageable. This suggests that guided practice can reduce students' anxiety and increase their confidence in writing. Confidence is an important factor in language learning, as students who feel more confident are more likely to participate actively and engage in learning activities.

However, despite the overall positive findings, some challenges were still identified. A number of students continued to experience difficulties in vocabulary selection and grammatical accuracy. This indicates that while guided practice is effective in improving organization and structure, additional support is needed to further develop students' linguistic competence. Continuous practice and exposure to authentic materials are recommended to address these issues.

Another limitation of this study is related to the research context, which involved only one class with a limited number of participants. Therefore, the findings may not be generalized to broader contexts. Future research is suggested to involve larger samples and different educational settings to provide more comprehensive insights into the effectiveness of guided practice in teaching professional email writing.

Overall, the findings of this study confirm that guided practice is a practical and effective instructional strategy for improving students' professional email writing skills. By integrating modeling, scaffolding, feedback, and revision, guided practice provides a structured learning environment that supports students in developing both linguistic and pragmatic

aspects of writing. This approach is particularly relevant for secretary students, as it prepares them with essential communication skills required in the workplace.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study aimed to investigate the implementation of guided practice in teaching professional email writing for office communication and to examine its impact on students' writing ability. The findings reveal that guided practice was effectively implemented through structured stages, including modeling, guided exercises, feedback, and revision. These stages provided students with systematic support, enabling them to gradually develop their writing skills.

The results of the study indicate that guided practice significantly improved students' ability to write professional emails. This improvement was evident in several aspects, including organization, language use, and the use of appropriate tone and politeness. Students were able to produce more structured and contextually appropriate emails after participating in guided practice activities.

In addition, students showed positive responses toward the use of guided practice. They reported that the use of examples, templates, and feedback helped them better understand how to write professional emails and increased their confidence in writing. This suggests that guided practice not only enhances students' writing performance but also supports their learning experience.

The student's writing performance has significantly improved, as evidenced by the mean score rising from 9.2 to 13.8 out of 16. This suggests that students' capacity to compose professional emails was enhanced by guided practice.

Further, based on the findings of this study, several suggestions are proposed: (1) Lecturers are encouraged to implement guided practice in teaching professional email writing, as it provides structured support that helps students develop their skills more effectively. The use of models, templates, and continuous feedback is highly recommended to guide students throughout the writing process; (2) Students are encouraged to actively engage in the writing process, particularly in revising their work based on feedback. Continuous practice and exposure to authentic email examples can further enhance their writing competence and confidence; (3) Institutions, particularly those offering secretary or office-related programs, are recommended to integrate professional email writing more intensively into the curriculum. Providing practical and workplace-oriented learning activities can better prepare students for real-world communication; (4) Future studies are suggested to explore guided practice in

different contexts, with larger sample sizes and varied research designs. Further research can also focus on integrating digital tools or authentic workplace simulations to enhance students' professional writing skills.

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