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Effects and Retention of Explicit Instruction on Academic Email Address Forms among Chinese Students in Korea

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This study examined the effects of explicit instruction on Chinese international students' use of academic email address forms and their confidence in contacting faculty in a Korean university context. Chinese international students were selected for this study because they constitute one of the largest international student groups in Korean universities, where academic communication involves both Korean and English. Eighty-two first-year students enrolled in a general English course participated in a classroom-based instructional study with three assessment points. Address-form use was analyzed descriptively, and learner confidence was examined using a paired-samples *t*-test. The proportion of conventionally appropriate address forms increased from 12.2% in the pretest to 97.6% in the posttest and remained high at the delayed posttest (97.5%), indicating sustained improvement in students' use of appropriate academic email address forms. Learner confidence in academic email communication also increased significantly between the pretest and the delayed posttest. Interview findings indicated that students became more aware of the importance of appropriate email address forms and reported less uncertainty when initiating emails. These findings suggest that explicit instruction can support pragmatic performance and confidence in academic email communication. Pedagogical implications for explicit instruction on academic email communication in general English courses are provided.

[Chinese international students/explicit instruction/email address forms/learner confidence]

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has diversified universities worldwide, prompting higher education institutions to enroll students from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004). Governments in East Asia have actively promoted internationalization through national higher education strategies, accelerating this trend (Jon & Yoo, 2021). Consequently, Korean universities have sharply increased their international student enrollment. The Ministry of Education (2025) reported that Korea hosted 253,434 international students as of April 2025, representing a 21.3% increase from the previous year. Chinese students constitute the largest group, comprising approximately one-third of all international students.

Most Chinese international students pursue full degree programs and participate as long-term academic members. They engage in a wide range of academic activities on increasingly multilingual campuses, where Korean and English both shape academic communication. Although Korean remains the primary language of instruction, universities rely on English for formal academic interaction and faculty communication. Chinese students studying in Korea frequently write emails to professors in English to request clarification, academic assistance, or administrative support, making email communication a key instructional target. In many Korean universities, the general English course is a mandatory graduation requirement, and it often serves as one of the primary institutional contexts in which students engage in structured English instruction. However, mandatory general English courses are often structured around the assumed needs of domestic students, potentially leaving international students' discipline-specific academic communication practices insufficiently addressed. This institutional gap highlights the need to examine how pragmatic instruction within general English courses can better support international students' academic communication practices.

Building on research in academic email writing and pragmatic instruction, this study investigates how explicit instruction influences Chinese international students' use of academic email address forms in a Korean English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom context. The study focuses on address forms because they constitute conventionalized yet frequently problematic elements in first-contact emails. Address forms are often the first point of contact in student–faculty email communication and therefore play an important role in shaping initial impressions.

In addition to examining learners' performance, the study measures learner confidence as a secondary outcome. The ability to produce appropriate address forms does not necessarily ensure that learners feel prepared to initiate academic email communication. Because contacting faculty in English may be perceived as challenging, learner confidence was included to examine whether instructional gains were accompanied by increased perceived

ability to write academic emails to faculty.

To examine instructional effects over time, this study uses a pretest–posttest–delayed posttest design and evaluates immediate learning gains and long-term retention. The present study builds directly on the author's previous investigation of Korean EFL students' development of email address forms following explicit instruction (Ko, 2023). While the earlier study demonstrated sustained pragmatic gains within domestic EFL students, it did not examine how the same type of instruction might work for international students studying in a multilingual institutional environment. Chinese international students in Korean universities use English for academic communication while continuing to learn both English and Korean within Korean academic culture. This creates a context for pragmatic development that differs from the one examined in the previous study. By focusing on this student population and including learner confidence as a secondary outcome, the present study broadens the scope of pragmatic instruction research within an internationalized university setting rather than simply repeating earlier findings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. International Students and Academic Communication in EFL Contexts

The rapid expansion of international student mobility has transformed academic communication practices across higher education institutions worldwide. International students frequently engage in academic interaction in a language that is not their first language while also trying to understand new academic rules and professor–student expectations in an EFL university context. Previous research has shown that international students often encounter linguistic and sociocultural challenges when adapting to local university academic environments.

Andrade (2006) reported that language proficiency significantly affects students' academic participation and interaction with faculty. In her large-scale survey of international students in U.S. universities, Andrade found that limited English proficiency was associated with reduced classroom participation, difficulty understanding lectures, and hesitation in initiating communication with professors. Students frequently reported anxiety about speaking in class and uncertainty about appropriate ways to approach faculty members, suggesting that linguistic limitations directly influence both academic performance and communicative confidence.

Brown (2008) further emphasized that difficulties arise not only from limited linguistic competence but also from unfamiliar implicit academic expectations, which may intensify stress and constrain engagement. Drawing on qualitative interview data, Brown

demonstrated that many challenges stemmed from unspoken norms regarding class participation, independent learning, critical discussion, and appropriate ways of interacting with instructors. When these expectations were not made explicit, students experienced heightened stress and reduced willingness to engage, indicating that linguistic proficiency alone does not sufficiently explain adjustment difficulties in academic communication.

Similarly, Campbell and Li (2008) found that international students' challenges extend beyond language proficiency to include academic conventions related to writing practices, student–faculty communication, and institutional hierarchy. Their study highlighted that expectations surrounding appropriate communication are often implicit, leaving international students uncertain about how to position themselves in relation to faculty authority.

Within these broader adaptation challenges, academic email communication functions as a consequential site where linguistic competence, institutional hierarchy, and implicit academic norms converge in everyday institutional interaction. Cross-cultural studies have documented systematic differences in how students formulate email requests to faculty. For example, Chen (2001) compared Taiwanese and U.S. graduate students' email requests and found that culturally shaped perceptions of power, familiarity, and imposition influenced their discourse strategies. Although both groups used preparatory interrogatives and expressions of personal desire, American students incorporated more internal modifiers, resulting in greater indirectness and a higher level of perceived politeness.

Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) analyzed email requests written by native and non-native speakers of English and reported that non-native speakers relied more heavily on direct strategies and lexical politeness markers such as please, whereas native speakers employed a broader range of syntactic modifiers.

Research on interlanguage pragmatics further suggests that learners' email communication may also reflect sociocultural norms transferred from their first language. Chinese politeness practices, for instance, have been widely described as emphasizing respect, hierarchy, and the maintenance of interpersonal "face" in social interaction (Gu, 1990; Hwang, 1987; Mao, 1994). Within this framework, address behavior functions as an important marker of social relations and status differences. Scholars have noted that Chinese speakers often prefer explicitly marked address terms when interacting with individuals in positions of authority, as such forms visibly signal deference and respect. When interacting in a second language, these culturally embedded norms may influence learners' pragmatic choices, a phenomenon commonly described as pragmatic transfer (Kasper, 1992). In academic email contexts, such transfer may partially explain why Chinese learners sometimes select highly formal address expressions—such as "*Title + full name"* —when writing to faculty members. Although these forms may not always align with conventional English academic email norms, they can be interpreted as attempts to maximize politeness and avoid potential face-threatening

acts when addressing a higher-status interlocutor.

Empirical research examining Korean EFL students' email request practices remains comparatively scarce, particularly in relation to institutional power negotiation and address-form selection. Son (2021) analyzed 40 authentic emails written by Korean EFL students and examined directness, internal modification, and external modification. The results showed no significant effects of English proficiency, leading the author to suggest that Korean EFL learners generally demonstrate a restricted pragmatic repertoire.

2. Instruction on Email Requests in Student–Faculty Communication

A substantial body of second language (L2) research demonstrates that instructional intervention can facilitate learners' development of pragmatic competence (Taguchi, 2015). Overall, studies have shown stronger effects for explicit instruction that provides metapragmatic information, although carefully designed implicit instruction can also promote development through noticing and guided input processing. Reviews of research on request speech acts further indicate that although many studies have examined instructional effects on L2 requests, most have focused on spoken interaction rather than written communication (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2020).

Research in EFL contexts has likewise demonstrated that instruction positively influences learners' email request writing. Chen (2015) used a pretest–instruction–posttest design to examine Chinese EFL learners' email requests and found that instruction significantly improved learners' performance, particularly in their use of framing moves. However, learners continued to struggle with content moves, such as request strategies and request support, which suggests that different pragmatic components develop at different rates. Similarly, Yasuda (2011) examined Japanese undergraduate students' performance in a genre-based writing course that incorporated email tasks and found that the course enhanced learners' genre awareness and appropriate language use, thereby supporting the effectiveness of genre-based approaches to L2 writing instruction.

Studies in Korean EFL contexts further support the role of explicit instruction in developing pragmatic competence. Research shows that Korean EFL learners often prioritize linguistic accuracy over pragmatic appropriateness in email requests and use a limited range of pragmatic strategies (e.g., Han, 1999; Kang, 2011; Kim, 2020; Yang, 2001). More specifically, Kang (2011) found that Korean university students relied heavily on a limited set of conventional politeness expressions when performing requests in English, while E.-M. Yang (2001) identified differences between Korean English users and American English speakers in their use of downgraders in requestive emails. These findings demonstrate that Korean EFL learners may have difficulty selecting sufficiently varied and contextually appropriate politeness strategies in English requests.

Instructional studies have subsequently shown that such pragmatic limitations can be addressed through focused instruction. Yin (2020) found that explicit instruction increased learners' use of indirect request strategies, downgraders, supportive moves, and impersonal perspectives in Korean EFL students' email writing. Similarly, Y. Yang (2006) showed that form- and function-focused instruction through email writing practice improved learners' pragmatic performance, although deductive and inductive instructional approaches produced no significant differences.

Ko (2023) further demonstrated that targeted explicit instruction focusing specifically on email address forms produced improvements that were retained at a delayed posttest administered ten months later. However, that study examined learners situated within relatively homogeneous linguistic environments and did not investigate international students navigating multilingual institutional settings.

Related instructional evidence in Korean university contexts has also emerged from studies involving international students. Lee and Cha (2022) found that learning log activities in an English communication course enhanced writing accuracy, interest in learning English, and task-specific confidence among international students. Although that study did not specifically examine email pragmatics, it suggests that classroom intervention can positively influence international students' academic communication outcomes.

While prior research has provided evidence for the effectiveness of instruction in improving overall email request performance, most studies have treated email requests as a holistic communicative skill rather than isolating specific pragmatic components for targeted investigation. However, relatively little instructional research has examined learners' use of email address forms, despite their role in signaling institutional hierarchy and power relations in student–faculty communication. Moreover, the long-term affective consequences of instruction, such as changes in learners' confidence and emotional responses when contacting faculty via email, remain underexplored, especially among international students in Korean university contexts.

Despite accumulating evidence for instructional effects in email pragmatics, relatively few studies have examined the sustained development of specific pragmatic components, particularly among international students in Korean university contexts. Chinese international students were selected as the focus of this study because they constitute one of the largest international student groups in Korean universities and are likely to encounter challenges in academic email communication due to differences in educational and communicative norms.

Although the present study is situated within the broader literature on email request pragmatics, it does not examine request realization at the speech-act level. Rather, it focuses on email address forms as conventionalized expressions that reflect institutional hierarchy, interpersonal positioning, and politeness in student–faculty communication. Accordingly,

the study is more appropriately situated within a sociopragmatic and politeness-oriented framework than within speech-act competence.

This study's research questions (RQs) are as follows:

RQ 1. What patterns of email address-form use do Chinese international students demonstrate when contacting English-speaking faculty?
RQ 2. To what extent does focused explicit instruction improve learners' appropriate use of email address forms?
RQ 3. Are instructional gains sustained over time, and how are they associated with learners' reported confidence?

These research questions examine the effectiveness and sustainability of explicit academic email writing instruction, while also considering learner confidence as a secondary outcome.

III. METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining email writing tasks, confidence surveys, and follow-up interviews to examine changes in students' email address-form use and task-specific confidence over time.

1. Participants and Context

The participants in this study were 82 Chinese international students enrolled in compulsory first-year general English courses—*Global English 1* (spring semester 2025) and *Global English 2* (fall semester 2025)—at K University in Sejong, Korea. A demographic questionnaire was administered during the first week of *Global English 1*. All participants were first-year undergraduate students with an average age of 20 and were enrolled in compulsory general English courses. None of them had experience with formal education in English-speaking countries prior to enrollment. As summarized in Table 1, participants represented a range of majors, including sociology, economics, and business administration. In terms of gender, 42 participants were male and 40 were female.

TABLE 1
Participants' Demographic Information

Distinction		*N*	*%*
Gender	Male	42	51
	Female	40	49
Major	Sociology	30	37
	Economics	25	30
	Business Administration	27	33

At K University, administrators place international students in general English sections designated exclusively for international students; international and domestic Korean students do not attend these classes together. Although the university offers separate sections, it uses the same curriculum and textbook for international and domestic students.

Global English 1 and *Global English 2* meet once a week for two hours. The textbook covers listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills. However, it does not include any instructional content specifically focused on academic email writing or email communication with faculty members. Because the curriculum does not explicitly address academic email writing, this gap provides a clear rationale for the present instructional intervention. Within this institutional structure, general English courses are organized by academic majors rather than by language proficiency level. In the present study, two course sections participated, and the researcher taught both sections, thereby minimizing instructional variability in teaching style, assessment, and classroom management. Following university policy, the instructional language was determined based on students' preferences. During course orientation, approximately 95% of students indicated a preference for Korean as the primary instructional language. Accordingly, the instructor conducted the course primarily in Korean and used English selectively for vocabulary explanations and specific instructional content, resulting in a Korean-dominant approach with partial English use.

For ethical considerations, participants were clearly informed beforehand that their email responses would be retained only for research analysis and would not influence their course grade. Additionally, participants were informed that their information would remain confidential and that participation was voluntary.

2. Research Design and Instruction

A longitudinal classroom-based design was adopted to examine both the immediate impact of instruction and the durability of pragmatic development over time. Three assessment points were incorporated across the academic year. The pretest was given in the first week of the spring semester, the posttest in the fourth week (one week after instruction), and the delayed posttest at the end of the fall semester, approximately nine months after

instruction. Instruction was implemented in the second and third weeks of the spring semester within regular class meetings (50 minutes per session).

While the instructional focus on email address forms builds on the author's earlier work (Ko, 2023), the present study extends that research by examining Chinese international students studying in a multilingual Korean university context and by incorporating learner confidence as an additional outcome variable. This context allows the study to examine how pragmatic instruction operates for learners who must communicate in academic settings using more than one language and culture. To maintain functional consistency across assessments, all writing tasks required students to initiate a formal email request to a faculty member. Variations in professor names and situational details were introduced at each phase in order to reduce task familiarity effects while preserving comparable levels of communicative demand. Table 2 summarizes the test prompts.

TABLE 2
Email Request Situations in the Pretest, Posttest, and Delayed Posttest

	Request Situation
Pretest	You recently missed a class due to illness. Write an email to your professor explaining the situation and politely requesting the lecture materials you missed. (Professor's name: *Daniel Wright*)
Posttest	You are unsure about one of the assignment instructions posted on the course website. Write an email to your professor requesting clarification about the assignment requirements. (Professor's name: *Michael Brown*)
Delayed Posttest	You would like to improve your performance in the course. Write an email to your professor requesting advice on how you can better prepare for the upcoming exam. (Professor's name: *Steven Clark*)

The study employed a one-group pretest–posttest design conducted within an intact classroom context, and no separate control group was included. As a result, although the design allows the study to track changes in students' email address-form use and task-specific confidence over time, the absence of a comparison group means that alternative explanations for the observed changes cannot be completely ruled out.

The same group of students progressed from *Global English 1* to *Global English 2*, allowing the study to track longitudinal changes in address-form use and learner confidence over time. Of the 82 students who completed the pretest and posttest in *Global English 1*, two did not participate in the delayed posttest because they did not enroll in *Global English 2* in the following semester. Accordingly, analyses involving the delayed posttest were conducted using data from the 80 students who completed all three assessments across the academic year. Thus, the delayed posttest participants were a subset of the original participants who completed both the pretest and posttest. In total, 244 emails were collected (82 pretest, 82 posttest, 80 delayed posttest).

The instructional sessions combined metapragmatic explanation with guided analytical

activities. Students examined sample student–faculty email exchanges and discussed how different address-form constructions index institutional hierarchy and role relations in English academic settings. Rather than treating address forms as isolated formulae, the sessions emphasized sociopragmatic awareness by encouraging learners to reflect on how opening expressions may influence a recipient's interpretation within cross-cultural academic contexts (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1996). Although instruction addressed both openings and closings, the present study focuses on address-form use in order to provide a focused analysis of pragmatic performance and retention.

3. Measures and Data Collection

A total of 244 email texts were collected across the three phases. Learner confidence was measured at the same three time points using a 12-item questionnaire (see Appendix B for details). Learner confidence was operationalized as a multidimensional construct comprising task-specific perceived capability and anxiety related to academic email writing and was treated as a secondary outcome variable. A five-point Likert scale was used to record responses. Anxiety-related items were reverse-coded, and composite scores were calculated by averaging item responses.

Follow-up interviews were conducted approximately one week after the delayed posttest. All students who completed the delayed posttest (n = 80) participated. Interviews were conducted in Korean and explored perceptions of instructional impact on address-form use and confidence. All interviews were audio-recorded with prior consent.

The interview recordings were first transcribed in Korean and then translated into English by the researcher. To ensure translation accuracy, the translated excerpts were reviewed by a bilingual colleague familiar with both Korean and English academic contexts.

4. Data Analysis

Email address forms were coded into eight categories based on the presence and accuracy of academic titles and name components. The coding framework builds on the categorization scheme used in Ko (2023), but was applied to a different learner population—Chinese international students studying in a multilingual Korean university context. To ensure objectivity in classification, institutional guidelines from English-speaking universities (Purdue University, 2022; Yale College, n.d.; University of Massachusetts Boston, n.d.) were referenced to define conventionally acceptable address-form structures in English academic email communication. Institutional guidelines from English-speaking universities consistently recommend the use of an academic title followed by the recipient's last name (e.g., *Dear Professor Smith*) as the standard form in formal student–faculty email

communication. The eight descriptive categories were collapsed into two evaluative categories: appropriate and inappropriate. Forms conforming to the standard structure (*Dear + correct academic title + last name*) were coded as appropriate, whereas forms involving first names, incorrect titles, omission of titles, or absence of a salutation were coded as inappropriate. Address-form distributions are reported descriptively across the three test phases.

Learner confidence was analyzed as a secondary outcome. Confidence change between the pretest and delayed posttest was examined using a paired-samples *t*-test based on the data from the 80 participants who completed both the pretest and the delayed posttest, and descriptive statistics are reported using all available data at each time point. Following Bandura (2006), the perceived-capability items were conceptualized as task-specific self-efficacy related to academic email writing. Anxiety-related items were reverse-coded and combined with the perceived-capability items to produce an overall learner-confidence score, with higher scores indicating greater perceived capability and lower anxiety.

Interview data were analyzed following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The interview transcripts were read multiple times to achieve data familiarization and identify recurring patterns related to students' experiences with academic email communication. Initial codes were generated from the data and subsequently grouped into broader themes reflecting learners' perceptions of instructional usefulness, confidence development, and awareness of appropriate email address forms. The qualitative analysis was conducted to complement the quantitative findings by providing insight into how students interpreted the instructional experience and how the observed quantitative changes were reflected in their reported experiences.

IV. RESULTS

This section reports longitudinal patterns in students' address-form use across the three assessment phases and presents supporting qualitative evidence.

1. Changes in Address Forms Across Time

The analysis examines how students structured email openings, with particular attention to title accuracy, name format, and the inclusion or omission of formal address markers. To illustrate the classification categories, representative examples from the pretest are presented below. Participants are labeled as P1–P80 to ensure anonymity.

(1) Pretest (P1): *Dear + correct academic title + first name*
Dear Professor Daniel,
I am writing to ask if I could have last week's lecture material. I was very sick and I couldn't attend the class.

Example (1) illustrates the pattern "*Dear + correct academic title + first name*," in which the academic title is accurate but followed by the professor's first name instead of the last name.

(2) Pretest (P2): *Dear + incorrect title + first name*
Dear Mr. Daniel,
I am a student in your class. I would like to ask for lecture material for last class because I was absent last week. I missed the class because I went to the hospital.

Despite grammatical accuracy, example (2) reflects the pattern "*Dear + incorrect title + first name,*" as the student selected a non-academic title together with the professor's first name.

(3) Pretest (P3): *Others* (no title, name only)
Daniel Wright,
I am writing to ask for last week's class materials. I missed the class. I was sick.

Email (3) was categorized as "*Others* (no title, name only)*"* because the student addressed the professor using the full name without an academic title or a conventional salutation (e.g., *Dear*).

(4) Pretest (P4): *None*
Hello,
I was absent last week. Is it possible to get class materials?

Example (4) was categorized as "*None*" form because the student did not use an academic title or formal salutation to address the professor.

The pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest results indicate that students used eight distinct types of address forms in the email corpus, as summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Distribution of Address Forms across Test Phases

Address Form	Pretest (*n* = 82)	Posttest (*n* = 82)	Delayed Posttest (*n* = 80)
CT-LN	10/82 (12.2%)	80/82 (97.6%)	78/80 (97.5%)
CT-FN	6/82 (7.3%)	0/82 (0%)	0/80 (0%)
CT-Full	26/82 (31.7%)	2/82 (2.4%)	2/80 (2.5%)
IT-LN	10/82 (12.2%)	0/82 (0%)	0/80 (0%)
IT-FN	5/82 (6.1%)	0/82 (0%)	0/80 (0%)
IT-Full	20/82 (24.4%)	0/82 (0%)	0/80 (0%)
Others	3/82 (3.7%)	0/82 (0%)	0/80 (0%)
None	2/82 (2.4%)	0/82 (0%)	0/80 (0%)
Total	82 (100%)	82 (100%)	80 (100%)

Note. CT = correct academic title; IT = incorrect academic title; LN = last name; FN = first name; Full = full name; Others = name only without title; None = no address form.

Table 3 demonstrates a clear shift in address-form selection across the three assessment points. In the pretest, only 12.2% of students used the conventionally appropriate form "*Dear + correct academic title + last name*." In contrast, most students used nonstandard or inappropriate language. Specifically, 31.7% used a correct academic title followed by a full name, 24.4% used an incorrect academic title with a full name, and 12.2% used an incorrect academic title with a last name. An additional 6.1% used other nonstandard forms, such as name-only addresses or zero address forms.

Following the instructional sessions, students showed a clear shift toward the conventionally accepted address-form structure. In the posttest, 97.6% used "*Dear + correct academic title + last name*," while 2.4% used "*Dear + correct academic title + full name*." No incorrect titles, name-only forms, or zero-address forms were observed in the posttest. Example (5) shows the use of "*Dear + correct academic title + full name*."

> (5) Posttest (P4): *Dear + correct academic title + full name*
> *Dear Professor Michael Brown,*
> *I am writing to ask if it would be possible to meet with you to discuss my final course grade. I would appreciate the opportunity to better understand my performance in the course. Thank you for your time.*
> *Sincerely,*
> *Student Chang*

This email (5) was categorized as "*Dear + correct academic title + full Name*" because the student used the appropriate academic title but included the professor's full name rather than the last name only.

In the delayed posttest, students largely maintained their use of the conventionally appropriate address form. Specifically, 97.5% of students used "*Dear + correct academic title + last name*," while 2.5% used a correct academic title followed by a full name. No

other nonstandard address forms were observed in the delayed posttest. For analytic clarity, the eight descriptive categories were reorganized into a binary evaluative distinction in order to compare overall appropriateness between the initial and delayed assessments. Forms that aligned with widely accepted academic email conventions—specifically the combination of a correct academic title and last name—were treated as appropriate, whereas all remaining constructions were grouped as inappropriate.

A comparison of the pretest and delayed posttest revealed a marked shift in the distribution of address forms (see Table 4). In the pretest, 12% of students (10 out of 82) used appropriate address forms, whereas in the delayed posttest, 97% of students (78 out of 80) used appropriate forms.

TABLE 4
Address Form Appropriateness at Pretest and Delayed Posttest

	Pretest	Delayed
Appropriate	n = 10 (12.2%)	n = 78 (97.5%)
Inappropriate	n = 72 (87.8%)	n = 2 (2.5%)
Total	n = 82 (100%)	n = 80 (100%)

These results show that the increased use of the conventionally appropriate address form was maintained at the delayed posttest.

2. Changes in Learner Confidence Over Time

This subsection reports longitudinal changes in learners' confidence in initiating email communication with faculty, conceptualized as a secondary outcome of the instructional intervention.

TABLE 5
Descriptive Statistics for Learner Confidence at the Pretest and Delayed Posttest

Section	Items	Pretest M (SD)	Delayed Posttest M (SD)
Address-form confidence (A)	5	2.06 (0.40)	4.10 (0.45)
Academic email task confidence (B)	3	2.67 (0.51)	3.63 (0.49)
Academic email anxiety (C)	4	2.67 (0.49)	3.31 (0.11)
Overall confidence	12	2.43 (0.41)	3.79 (0.36)

Note. A five-point Likert scale was used to record responses (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Items in Section C were reverse-coded prior to analysis so that higher scores indicated greater confidence. Descriptive statistics are reported separately for the pretest (n = 82) and delayed posttest (n = 80).

Descriptive statistics for learner confidence at the pretest and delayed posttest are summarized in Table 5. Overall confidence increased from the pretest (M = 2.43, SD = 0.41) to the delayed posttest (M = 3.79, SD = 0.36), with increases observed across all confidence

subcomponents. Address-form confidence (Section A), the primary focus of the instructional intervention, showed the largest gain, rising from the pretest (M = 2.06, SD = 0.40) to the delayed posttest (M = 4.10, SD = 0.45). Academic email anxiety (Section C), after reverse coding, also showed higher scores at the delayed posttest than at the pretest, indicating a reduction in anxiety and an overall increase in confidence. A paired-samples t-test was conducted on complete cases (n = 80) to examine whether the observed increase in overall learner confidence was statistically significant.

TABLE 6
Paired-Samples *t*-Test for Overall Learner Confidence

Outcome	Pretest *M (SD)*	Delayed Posttest *M (SD)*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Overall confidence	2.43 (0.41)	3.79 (0.36)	47.62	79	< .001

Note. The analysis was conducted using complete cases (n = 80), including only participants who completed both the pretest and the delayed posttest.

A statistically significant improvement in overall learner confidence from the pretest to the delayed posttest was found using a paired-samples t-test ($t(79) = 47.62$, $p < .001$), as presented in Table 6.

3. Interview Findings Supporting Quantitative Results

The following excerpts provide qualitative context for the quantitative findings. Several participants reported that they began proofreading their emails more carefully before sending them to faculty members after the instructional sessions. As P12 explained:

> *After the instruction, I always check my email again before sending it. I make sure to check the professor's last name and title because I do not want to sound rude, especially unintentionally. Before the class, I only thought about grammar, but now I think about whether my email sounds rude.* [Interview excerpt, P12]

Other interviewees described developing a greater awareness of address form conventions beyond surface-level politeness markers. For example, P7 reflected on their earlier reliance on formulaic expressions:

> *I used to think that adding please made my email polite, but now I realize that how I start the email is more important than simply using polite words. Before this class, I focused on words like please or thank you because I thought politeness depended on those expressions. I didn't pay much attention to whether I was using the correct title or the*

> *professor's last name. Now I understand that the first line of the email shows respect and that using the right title is part of academic culture, not just grammar.* [Interview excerpt, P7]

Some participants also described internalizing address form conventions as part of their long-term academic communication practices. As P23 noted:

> *After learning this, the appropriate and inappropriate address forms come to mind automatically. It feels like this knowledge has become part of my long-term memory, and I am glad to have learned something that I was never taught in high school.* [Interview excerpt, P23]

In addition to changes in address form awareness, interview data illustrated shifts in learners' affective responses to academic email writing. Participants reported that writing emails in English had previously felt difficult and intimidating. P31 described this shift in confidence as follows:

> *Writing emails in English used to feel scary for me. Through the instruction, I realized that address forms can sound rude depending on cultural norms. Now I feel confident, and I am no longer afraid of emailing my professors*. [Interview excerpt, P31]

Together, these excerpts triangulate the quantitative findings by illustrating how learners interpreted and internalized changes in both address-form use and confidence.

V. DISCUSSION

This section interprets the quantitative and qualitative findings in relation to Chinese international students' use of academic email address forms and the effects of explicit instruction in a Korean university context.

1. Interpretation of Pretest Patterns

The pretest results revealed substantial variation in learners' use of email address forms, which indicates that many students felt uncertain about how to initiate academic emails to faculty. In particular, some students relied on constructions such as "*Dear + correct academic title + first name*," a pattern that deviates from conventional English academic norms, in which writers typically follow honorific titles with the last name only (e.g., *Dear*

Dr. Wright). Others used the "*Dear + correct academic title + full name*" form (e.g., *Dear Dr. Daniel Wright*). Although not grammatically incorrect, such forms are generally considered nonstandard in English academic correspondence and may be perceived as overly formal in first-contact situations. This pattern may reflect pragmatic transfer, as previous studies have shown that learners often transfer L1-based politeness conventions into English academic contexts (Chen, 2001, 2006).

In many East Asian academic contexts, the inclusion of a full name alongside an academic title is commonly associated with politeness and deference, which may explain learners' preference for such forms in English email communication. As discussed in the literature review, Chinese communicative norms often associate formally marked address expressions, including the use of full names, with respect toward higher-status interlocutors (Gu, 1990; Hwang, 1987). Learners' reliance on full-name address forms in the pretest may thus reflect an effort to signal deference within hierarchical relationships, even if such forms are not commonly used in English academic settings. More specifically, the pretest preference for "*Title + full name*" may be understood not simply as a linguistic error but as a culturally shaped over-marking of respect. In contexts of uncertainty, Chinese learners may choose a fuller and more formal address form to avoid the risk of appearing disrespectful to a professor. Such choices are plausibly related to Chinese interactional norms emphasizing hierarchy sensitivity and overt expressions of respect.

From this perspective, the use of "*Title + full name*" can be interpreted as an attempt to maximize politeness toward a higher-status interlocutor, even though the form may sound pragmatically infelicitous in English. This preference for "*Title + full name*" may reflect pragmatic transfer from Chinese politeness norms emphasizing hierarchy and explicit expressions of respect (Gu, 1990; Mao, 1994).

Recent research on intercultural email communication similarly notes that international students often rely on culturally familiar politeness strategies when navigating new institutional communication norms, particularly in situations involving power asymmetry between students and faculty (Nguyen, 2018).

Importantly, the presence of grammatically accurate requests alongside non-target-like openings suggests that learners' difficulties were not rooted in linguistic deficiency but in limited familiarity with conventionalized English norms governing academic email openings. Interview data further support this interpretation, as students reported that they intentionally included full names because they worried that omitting part of the instructor's name might appear disrespectful.

Overall, these findings show that students were highly concerned about politeness but were not fully familiar with typical English academic email practices.

2. Effects of Explicit Instruction on Address Form Use

The substantial post-instructional improvement in learners' use of address forms provides evidence of development in pragmalinguistic knowledge and sociopragmatic awareness. After explicit instruction, learners markedly increased their use of conventionally appropriate forms (*Dear + academic title + last name*), and this pattern was largely maintained in the delayed posttest. These findings suggest that address forms constitute a formulaic and routinized component of pragmatic knowledge that responds well to explicit instruction.

The findings align with previous studies demonstrating that learners benefit from instruction targeting structural components of academic emails, such as openings and closings (Chen, 2015; Nguyen, 2018). In this study, explicit instruction helped learners recalibrate L1-based politeness strategies by clarifying the conventionalized relationship between address forms and institutional roles in English academic contexts. The continued use of this pattern at the delayed posttest suggests that students retained these address-form conventions beyond the immediate effects of instruction.

These findings highlight the importance of targeted pragmatic instruction in supporting long-term academic email practices among Chinese international students in Korean university contexts.

Despite overall effectiveness, a small number of learners continued to produce "*Dear + correct academic title + full name*" forms in the posttest. This residual pattern likely reflects the persistence of L1-based politeness reasoning, as some students may have interpreted the inclusion of a full name as an added expression of respect. Rather than signaling misunderstanding, this pattern illustrates the gradual process of pragmatic adjustment.

3. Interpretation of Confidence Changes

Learner confidence was examined as a secondary outcome to capture learners' affective readiness to initiate academic email communication, rather than to use it as a primary indicator of instructional effectiveness. Consistent with instructional studies that treat confidence or attitudes as complementary rather than primary outcomes (e.g., Lee & Cha, 2022), the present study included confidence measures to reflect students' perceived readiness to contact faculty via email.

Confidence increased substantially from the pretest to the delayed posttest. This increase corresponds with the sustained improvements observed in address-form performance and suggests that learners became more confident alongside improvements in their demonstrated pragmatic ability. Interview findings further illuminate these quantitative patterns. Students reported that explicit presentation of address form conventions reduced uncertainty about

how to begin emails and increased their assurance in initiating academic communication.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that learners' confidence developed alongside their pragmatic performance, supporting the role of explicit instruction in shaping both cognitive and affective dimensions of academic email communication.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the pedagogical value of integrating focused pragmatic instruction into general English courses in university EFL contexts. Even brief, explicitly structured classroom interventions can support learners in developing greater awareness of institutional communication norms that are rarely addressed in standard textbooks.

These results carry important pedagogical implications. First, when designing general English courses in university EFL contexts, instructors may incorporate brief, focused instruction on conventionalized pragmatic features—such as email address forms—to enhance learners' pragmatic awareness of academic communication norms. Making such conventions explicit can reduce uncertainty in student–faculty communication and help learners navigate hierarchical academic relationships more appropriately. Importantly, this type of focused instruction can be integrated into existing course structures without requiring major curricular revisions.

Second, when teaching Chinese international students in general English courses, instructors can clearly explain how politeness in students' first language may differ from English academic conventions. Discussing these differences openly can help students adjust more easily to academic communication in English and feel more confident when contacting faculty.

Several limitations should be taken into account when evaluating the findings of the present study. First, learner confidence was measured using a Likert scale questionnaire, which captures perceived readiness rather than actual communicative behavior. Accordingly, the confidence findings should be interpreted as reflecting learners' self-perceived preparedness rather than direct evidence of communicative performance.

Second, the study examined a single instructional group without including a control group. Future research should incorporate comparison groups or native-speaker baseline data to provide stronger empirical evidence for isolating instructional effects.

Third, the analysis included a relatively small email corpus, which limits generalizability. Future studies should draw on larger corpora of authentic student emails to enable more robust analyses.

Finally, this study focused exclusively on address forms as one component of academic email communication. Future research should investigate additional pragmatic and discourse

features, such as request strategies, mitigation devices, and closing moves, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of learners' academic email practices.

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APPENDIX A

Instructional Outline for Academic Email Writing

1. Purpose of Academic Email Communication
   Explanation of formal student–faculty communication contexts (e.g., requests for extensions, grade clarification, appointment scheduling) and discussion of politeness and institutional hierarchy in academic email discourse.

2. Address Forms in Academic Emails
   Explicit instruction on appropriate academic titles (e.g., Professor, Dr.), the title + last name structure, contrast with first-name use, and identification of common inappropriate forms in formal correspondence.

3. Email Closings in Academic Emails
   Instruction on appropriate academic closings, avoidance of informal or overly casual expressions, and inclusion of sender identification in accordance with academic conventions.

4. Model Analysis and Guided Revision
   Analysis of sample emails to identify appropriate and inappropriate openings and closings, followed by guided rewriting activities to reinforce pragmatic awareness and form–function alignment.

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire: Confidence in Writing Academic Emails to Faculty

Instructions

The following statements ask about your confidence in writing academic emails to faculty members in English. Please mark your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. There are no correct or incorrect responses. Please respond honestly based on your experience.

Scale:

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree

Section A. Address-Form Confidence

1. I can choose an appropriate academic title (e.g., *Professor, Dr.*) when writing an email to a faculty member.
2. I can correctly use "*Dear + academic title + last name*" when starting an email to a faculty member.
3. I can avoid inappropriate or overly informal forms of address (e.g., first names only) in academic emails.
4. I can adjust my form of address depending on the recipient (e.g., professor vs. teaching assistant).
5. I can choose a professionally appropriate form of address even when I am unsure of the recipient's exact academic title.

Section B. Academic Email Task Confidence

6. I can maintain an appropriate level of formality throughout an email to a faculty member.
7. I can clearly express the purpose of my email to a faculty member.
8. I can complete an academic email to a faculty member even if I make some language mistakes.

Section C. Academic Email Anxiety

9. I feel nervous when emailing a faculty member in English.
10. I avoid emailing faculty members because I am unsure how to address them appropriately.

11. I worry that my form of address in academic emails may sound rude or inappropriate.
12. I feel uncomfortable starting an email to a faculty member in English.

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Tertiary

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