

Beyond the Classroom: Integrating Experiential Learning Theory into Professional Correspondence

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ABSTRACT

Effective professional correspondence is increasingly recognised as an essential competency for graduates entering today's dynamic workplace. As the nature of workplace settings has become more complex and challenging, a persistent concern among employers is the insufficient development of adaptable and audience-aware communication skills among graduates. Despite its importance, the teaching of professional correspondence in higher education often focuses on static templates and decontextualised grammar exercises, lacking emphasis on authentic workplace communication experience. To bridge this gap, this conceptual paper proposes the applicability of Kolb's Experiential Learning theory to the micro-skills required in professional settings. This framework shifts the instructional focus from product-oriented formatting to process-oriented, authentic learning. It synthesises practical implementation approaches, including workplace simulations, role-play settings, and real-world client responses, where students are able to encounter the genuine consequences of their active communication tasks. By positioning students in realistic communication settings integrated with experiential learning cycles, the traditional classroom can be transformed into an authentic communicative environment. Ultimately, this framework allows students to successfully develop communication confidence and employability readiness. The implications for curriculum design and future research are also highlighted.

Keywords: Professional Correspondence, Experiential Learning Theory, Authentic Learning, Workplace Communication

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary professional context, the ability to produce effective correspondence ranging from strategic emails and formal proposals to internal memos and complex reports has emerged as a foundational competency for graduate success. As organisational environments grow increasingly intricate and globally interconnected, employers are placing a premium on candidates who demonstrate not only technical linguistic proficiency but also a high degree of contextual adaptability. The ability to tailor communication to specific audiences, adjust tone effectively and make strategic choices is now a professional necessity, not just an added benefit. It is an essential requirement for sustained career viability and professional efficacy.

Despite the rising urgency for these skills, pedagogical practices in higher education have often remained tied to traditional, and arguably insufficient methodologies (Suyo-Vega et al., 2024). Instruction frequently leans heavily on static templates, formulaic structures, and decontextualised grammar exercises. While these tools may provide a degree of structural comfort, they often fail to mirror the dynamic, unpredictable nature of modern business communication. By prioritising rote adherence to formats over authentic critical engagement, such

approaches may unintentionally leave graduates ill-equipped to navigate the complex social and professional nuances inherent in their future workplaces (Boretti, 2026).

The growing emphasis on employability has consequently prompted higher education institutions to reconsider the effectiveness of existing approaches to teaching professional communication. Universities are increasingly expected not only to impart disciplinary knowledge but also to cultivate transferable competencies that enable graduates to navigate complex workplace environments successfully. Among these competencies, professional correspondence occupies a unique position in integrating linguistic knowledge, critical thinking, interpersonal awareness, ethical judgement, and contextual decision-making into a single communicative act (Wajdi et al., 2025).

Recent educational scholarship increasingly advocates for authentic learning experiences that bridge the longstanding divide between classroom instruction and workplace practice. Authentic learning encourages students to engage with realistic problems that mirror professional environments, thereby fostering deeper understanding, transferable skills, and meaningful knowledge construction (Vlachopoulos, 2025). Rather than viewing students as passive recipients of information, authentic pedagogies position learners as active participants who construct knowledge through experience, collaboration, reflection, and problem-solving.

To bridge the persistent gap between classroom theory and professional reality, this paper proposes a pedagogical shift focused on David Kolb's Experiential Learning (EL) theory. Rather than viewing communication as a product to be formatted, professional correspondence should be understood as a dynamic process which involves a cycle of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualising, and experimenting (Kolb, 1984). By integrating this framework into the curriculum, educators can move beyond the constraints of a traditional classroom. Through the implementation of immersive workplace simulations, reflective role-play, and engagement with real-world client scenarios, students are provided with a "safe" environment to encounter the genuine consequences of their communication choices. Ultimately, this paper suggests that by grounding the learning process in authentic experience and critical reflection, higher education can foster the communication confidence and professional readiness that today's graduates need to succeed.

As a conceptual paper, this study does not report empirical findings but instead synthesises relevant theoretical and pedagogical literature to establish a foundation for the proposed framework. The following sections review key literature on experiential learning, authentic learning, constructivism, and professional communication pedagogy before presenting the Experiential Correspondence Framework and discussing its implications for curriculum development, teaching practice, and future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations of Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), originally developed by David A. Kolb, provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals construct knowledge through experience. Kolb (1984) conceptualises learning as a cyclical process comprising four interconnected stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation, and Active Experimentation. Rather than positioning learning as the passive absorption of information, ELT emphasises that knowledge is continuously created and re-created through the transformation of experience. This positions the learner as an active agent who engages with real-world situations, reflects on those experiences, derives conceptual meaning, and applies newly formed understanding to subsequent contexts.

The cyclical nature of Kolb's model is particularly significant for skill-based learning, as it integrates both cognitive and behavioural dimensions of learning (Rafiq-uz-Zaman et al., 2025). In the Concrete Experience stage, learners encounter authentic situations that require immediate engagement. This is followed by Reflective Observation, where learners critically examine their actions and outcomes, often through dialogue or self-assessment. In Abstract Conceptualisation, learners connect experience with theoretical frameworks, enabling generalisation and deeper understanding. Finally, Active Experimentation allows learners to apply refined concepts in new contexts, thereby reinforcing learning through practice (Passarelli & Kolb, 2023).

The strength of ELT lies in its integration of experience, reflection, and action, making it highly applicable to professional education. In communication-related disciplines, where contextual judgement and adaptive thinking are essential, ELT provides a mechanism for bridging theoretical instruction and workplace practice (Soifert, 2025). Rather than teaching communication as a fixed body of rules, ELT encourages learners to develop adaptive expertise through iterative engagement with authentic tasks.

Complementing Kolb's model is the theory of constructivism, which asserts that knowledge is actively constructed by learners rather than transmitted by instructors. Constructivist theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky emphasise the role of cognitive development, social interaction, and scaffolding in learning (Mishra, 2023). In particular, Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development highlights the importance of guided learning experiences where students can perform beyond their independent capability through structured support (Margolis, 2020). This aligns closely with experiential learning environments, where instructors facilitate rather than dictate learning processes.

Similarly, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger introduce the concept of situated learning, which argues that knowledge is inseparable from the context in which it is produced and applied. According to this perspective, learning occurs most effectively when individuals participate in authentic social practices rather than decontextualised instruction (Saljo, 2023). The idea of "legitimate peripheral participation" further explains how learners gradually move from peripheral involvement to full participation within a community of practice (Muller, 2022). This is particularly relevant to professional communication, where individuals must learn not only linguistic structures but also the social norms, expectations, and power dynamics of workplace discourse.

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives converge on a shared principle: meaningful learning is experiential, contextual, and socially mediated. This convergence provides a strong theoretical justification for rethinking traditional approaches to professional correspondence instruction, which often remain detached from authentic communicative contexts.

Current Trends in Professional Communication Pedagogy

The teaching of professional communication has undergone significant transformation in response to evolving workplace demands and educational paradigms. Traditionally, business and professional writing courses have emphasised product-oriented pedagogy, where assessment focuses primarily on the final written output. Students are often provided with templates for emails, reports, and letters, and are evaluated based on grammatical accuracy, structural conformity, and adherence to formal conventions (Sarhady, 2022). While such approaches offer clarity and procedural guidance, they frequently fail to reflect the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of real workplace communication.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift towards process-oriented pedagogy, which emphasises the stages of writing including planning, drafting, revising, and reflecting (Huang, 2026). This shift aligns with broader educational movements that prioritise critical thinking, problem-solving, and learner autonomy. In process-oriented models, students are encouraged to engage with audience analysis, rhetorical purpose, and iterative revision, thereby developing a more nuanced understanding of communication as a strategic activity rather than a mechanical task (Putri et al., 2025).

According to Phan (2025), contemporary scholarship in professional communication further highlights the importance of authentic learning environments, where students engage with realistic or simulated workplace tasks. Therefore, contemporary pedagogy must shift toward authentic learning workplace communication, where tasks simulate the unpredictable social, hierarchical, and digital dynamics of modern corporate environments. By immersing students in these realistic scenarios, higher education institutions can directly cultivate graduates' employability readiness, ensuring a seamless transition from academic writing to professional problem-solving. Studies in business communication education have shown that students who engage in authentic writing tasks demonstrate higher levels of engagement, improved retention of knowledge, and greater confidence in handling professional scenarios compared to those in traditional lecture-based courses (Sun et al., 2024).

Additionally, digital transformation has significantly influenced professional communication pedagogy (Egorova & Bulankina, 2024). The rise of email communication, collaborative platforms, and artificial intelligence tools has reshaped how professional correspondence is produced and consumed. As a result, communication courses are increasingly incorporating digital literacy, collaborative writing tools, and multimodal communication practices into their curricula. These developments reflect the growing recognition that professional communication is no longer confined to static written documents but involves dynamic, technology-mediated interactions.

Despite these advancements, many institutional practices still rely heavily on prescriptive templates and standardized assessment rubrics. This creates a tension between innovative pedagogical theories and traditional assessment structures. While educators may advocate for authentic and process-oriented learning, institutional constraints often reinforce product-based evaluation, limiting the extent to which experiential approaches can be fully implemented (Mediamar et al., 2026).

This gap between pedagogical innovation and classroom practice underscores the need for more structured frameworks that can integrate experiential principles directly into professional communication instruction. It is within this context that experiential learning theory offers a promising foundation for reimagining how professional correspondence is taught in higher education.

Experiential Learning in Professional Writing

In recent years, the application of experiential learning principles to writing instruction has gained increasing attention, particularly within business communication, technical writing, and higher education pedagogy. Writing is no longer viewed solely as a linguistic product but as a socially situated, iterative, and cognitively demanding process that requires writers to engage in continuous decision-making. Within this context, experiential learning offers a pedagogical bridge between theoretical instruction and authentic communication practice.

Research in professional writing pedagogy indicates that students often struggle to transfer classroom-based writing knowledge to real-world contexts due to the absence of authentic communicative pressure (Lee, 2022). Traditional instruction, which emphasises formulaic structures and model answers, tends to simplify writing tasks in ways that do not reflect the complexity of workplace communication. As a result, students may perform well in controlled academic environments but experience difficulty when required to write under conditions involving ambiguity, time constraints, and diverse audiences.

Experiential approaches attempt to address this limitation by embedding writing tasks within realistic scenarios. For example, client-based projects, service-learning initiatives, and workplace simulations have been widely adopted in writing courses to create authentic communicative conditions. These experiential interventions serve as a prime vehicle for authentic learning workplace communication, forcing students to navigate real-world stakes, immediate feedback loops, and diverse professional audiences. As a result, the development of these micro-skills directly enhances student motivation, increase engagement, and improves the ability to apply writing knowledge in professional contexts (Chao et al., 2025; Marlina, 2024), ultimately shifting their employability readiness from theoretical potential into practical capability.

Essentially, experiential writing pedagogy also emphasises reflection as a critical component of learning (Ma et al., 2026). Students are encouraged to analyse their writing decisions, evaluate the effectiveness of their communication strategies, and identify areas for improvement. This reflective practice aligns closely with Kolb's experiential learning cycle, particularly the Reflective Observation and Abstract Conceptualisation stages, where learners transform experience into conceptual understanding.

Furthermore, collaborative writing environments have been recognised as an effective means of simulating workplace communication practices (Nissi & Lehtinen, 2022). In modern organisations, writing is often a collective activity involving negotiation, revision, and shared decision-making. Incorporating collaborative tools such as cloud-based document platforms allows students to experience distributed authorship, peer feedback, and iterative drafting processes that closely resemble professional communication workflows.

Despite these advancements, existing applications of experiential learning in writing instruction tend to be fragmented and discipline specific. Many initiatives are implemented as isolated projects rather than as structured pedagogical frameworks that systematically integrate experiential cycles into curriculum design. This limitation highlights the need for a more coherent model that explicitly aligns experiential learning theory with the micro-skills of professional correspondence.

Research Gap and Conceptual Positioning

Although experiential learning has been widely adopted in higher education across disciplines such as business, engineering, healthcare, and education, its application to professional correspondence instruction remains underdeveloped and insufficiently theorized (Beard, 2026). Existing literature predominantly focuses general writing pedagogy, rather than the specific micro-skills required for professional correspondence, such as tone modulation, audience adaptation, genre awareness, and strategic messaging (McLean, 2022).

Most current pedagogical models either emphasise writing as a product, focusing on structure, grammar, and formatting, or treat experiential learning as an ancillary component embedded within broader curriculum activities such as internships or capstone projects (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2023). While these approaches contribute to student learning, they do not fully address the need for a systematic framework that integrates experiential cycles directly into the teaching of professional correspondence itself.

A key gap in the literature is therefore the absence of a dedicated experiential pedagogical model for professional correspondence micro-skills. In particular, there is limited guidance on how specific workplace communication tasks—such as drafting a crisis response email, writing a client negotiation message, or preparing interdepartmental memos—can be systematically aligned with the stages of experiential learning theory. According to Forman et al. (2021), without such a structured framework, educators may struggle to consistently implement experiential principles in a way that ensures pedagogical coherence and measurable learning outcomes.

Additionally, while previous studies acknowledge the benefits of experiential learning, including increased engagement, improved retention, and enhanced problem-solving skills, fewer studies have examined how these benefits translate specifically into professional correspondence competence (Wajdi et al., 2025). This represents a significant theoretical and practical gap, particularly in light of increasing employer demands for graduates who can communicate effectively in complex, real-world environments.

This conceptual paper addresses this gap by proposing the Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF), which integrates Kolb's experiential learning cycle directly into the instruction of professional correspondence. By situating professional correspondence within an experiential learning structure, the proposed model contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends Kolb's experiential learning model into the domain of micro-level communication skills development. Practically, it provides educators with a structured pedagogical approach to systematically implement authentic learning workplace communication in classroom settings, ultimately optimizing student employability readiness for the complex and evolving demands of the modern workforce.

DISCUSSION

Proposed Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF)

To address the persistent gap between classroom-based instruction and workplace communication demands, this paper proposes the Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF), a pedagogical model grounded in David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984). The framework reconceptualises professional correspondence not as a static writing product but as a dynamic, iterative process of meaning-making shaped by authentic workplace conditions. It integrates experiential cycles directly into writing instruction, enabling learners to develop communication competence through structured engagement with realistic professional scenarios.

The ECF aligns the teaching of professional correspondence with Kolb's four-stage learning cycle, namely, Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation, and Active Experimentation, applied specifically to workplace communication tasks such as emails, memos, complaint responses, and professional reports.

Mapping Kolb's Cycle to Professional Correspondence

There are four stages to Kolb's Cycle to professional correspondence, which include the concrete experience stage, the reflective observation stage, the abstract conceptualisation stage and the active experimentation stage.

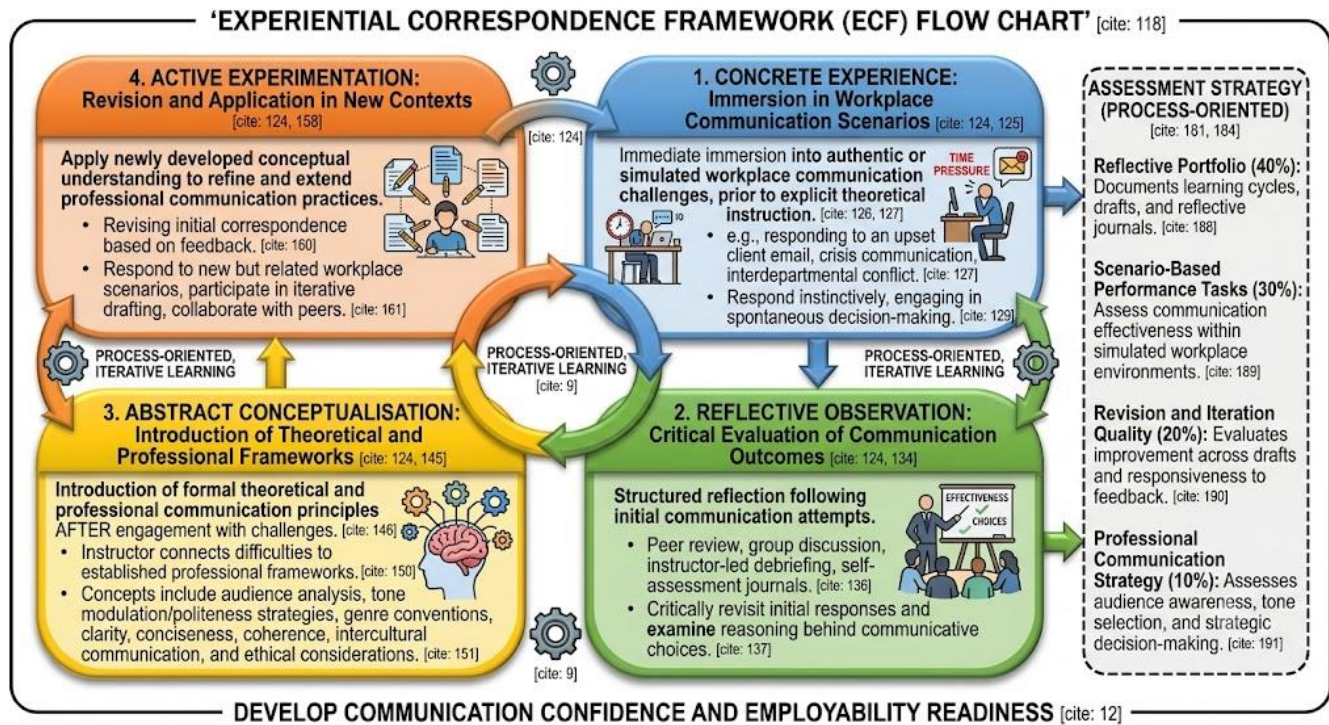


Figure 1. The Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF)

Figure 1 illustrates the Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF), demonstrating how Kolb's four-stage experiential learning cycle is systematically mapped to the development of professional correspondence micro-skills. The cyclical process begins with **Concrete Experience**, immersing learners immediately into authentic, time-sensitive workplace communication scenarios prior to any theoretical instruction. This progresses into **Reflective Observation**, where students critically evaluate their initial communicative choices and interpret potential stakeholder perceptions. Subsequently, the **Abstract Conceptualisation** stage introduces formal theoretical frameworks—such as audience analysis, tone modulation, and genre conventions—allowing learners to ground their lived experiences in established communication principles. Finally, **Active Experimentation** challenges students to iteratively revise their correspondence and apply their refined conceptual understanding to new contextual demands. As depicted on the right side of the model, this iterative cycle is supported by a continuous, process-oriented assessment strategy that evaluates the learner's holistic progression through reflective portfolios, scenario-based tasks, revision quality, and overall communication strategy.

(1) Concrete Experience: Immersion in Workplace Communication Scenarios

The Concrete Experience stage of the Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF) begins with immediate immersion into authentic or simulated workplace communication challenges, prior to any explicit theoretical instruction. In this phase, students are placed in realistic professional scenarios such as responding to an upset client email, crafting a crisis communication message, addressing interdepartmental conflict, or composing formal apology or clarification emails. These tasks are deliberately designed to mirror the complexity of real organisational communication, where messages must be produced under conditions of time pressure, emotional sensitivity, and contextual ambiguity. Rather than receiving templates or structural scaffolding, learners are

required to respond instinctively, thereby engaging in spontaneous decision-making that reflects actual workplace expectations.

This approach aligns with the principles of experiential learning, which emphasise that knowledge is constructed through direct engagement with experience rather than passive reception of information (Kolb, 1984). By confronting students with authentic communicative demands at the outset, the model disrupts traditional product-oriented writing pedagogy and encourages learners to recognise the limitations of formulaic approaches to professional correspondence. In this sense, the Concrete Experience stage serves as a critical pedagogical catalyst, compelling learners to confront the realities of professional communication before being introduced to theoretical frameworks that explain and refine their performance.

(2) Reflective Observation: Critical Evaluation of Communication Outcomes

The Reflective Observation stage of the Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF) engages students in structured reflection following their initial communication attempts. At this stage, learners participate in a range of guided reflective activities, including peer review sessions, group discussions on communication effectiveness, instructor-led debriefings, and self-assessment journals. These activities are designed to encourage students to critically revisit their initial responses to workplace communication scenarios and to examine the reasoning behind their communicative choices. Through collaborative dialogue and guided questioning, students are exposed to multiple perspectives on the same communicative act, enabling them to recognise that professional correspondence is inherently interpretive and audience-dependent.

During this reflective phase, students critically analyse how their messages are being perceived by different stakeholders, particularly in terms of tone, clarity, purpose, and professionalism. They also evaluate the potential consequences of ineffective communication, including misunderstandings, damaged professional relationships, and organisational inefficiencies. In addition, students are encouraged to consider the emotional and ethical dimensions of their responses, particularly in high-stakes or sensitive workplace situations. This process of structured reflection fosters metacognitive awareness, enabling learners to identify gaps between their intuitive communication strategies and expected professional standards. In alignment with experiential learning theory, reflection serves as the mechanism through which raw experience is transformed into meaningful learning, allowing students to challenge assumptions about what constitutes “effective” professional writing (Kolb, 1984). Furthermore, this reflective process supports deeper learning by encouraging learners to critically evaluate their communicative behaviour within authentic social and organisational contexts, consistent with the principles of situated and socially mediated learning (Gannar & Kilani, 2025).

(3) Abstract Conceptualisation: Introduction of Theoretical and Professional Frameworks

The Abstract Conceptualisation stage of the Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF) introduces formal theoretical and professional communication principles only after students have first engaged with and reflected upon authentic workplace communication challenges. This sequencing represents a deliberate pedagogical reversal of traditional instruction, in which theory is typically presented prior to practice. Instead, the ECF positions theory as a meaningful response to lived communicative experience, thereby enabling learners to construct conceptual understanding that is directly grounded in practice. This approach is consistent with experiential learning theory, which emphasises the transformation of experience into knowledge through reflective abstraction and conceptual integration (Kolb, 1984).

At this stage, instructors guide students in connecting their observed communication difficulties to established professional communication frameworks. Key concepts introduced include audience analysis and stakeholder mapping, tone modulation and politeness strategies, genre conventions in business communication, principles of clarity, conciseness, and coherence, intercultural communication awareness, and ethical considerations in professional messaging. Rather than presenting these concepts in isolation, the instructor functions as a facilitator who helps learners interpret their communicative experiences through theoretical lenses. For instance, a poorly received email may be analysed in terms of misaligned tone, inappropriate register, or insufficient audience awareness, allowing students to understand the underlying causes of communication breakdowns.

This instructional approach ensures that theory is not perceived as abstract or detached from practice, but instead emerges organically from students' lived communicative challenges. This aligns with situated learning perspectives, which argue that knowledge is most effectively acquired when it is embedded within authentic social and contextual practices rather than taught as decontextualised information (Wang et al., 2025). In this way, Abstract Conceptualisation serves as a critical bridge between experience and application, enabling deeper cognitive processing and more durable learning outcomes. This can also offer meaningful learning and facilitate the transfer of communication skills from classroom to professional settings.

(4) Active Experimentation: Revision and Application in New Contexts

The Active Experimentation stage of the Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF) represents the phase in which students apply their newly developed conceptual understanding to refine and extend their professional communication practices. At this stage, learners are actively engaged in revising their initial correspondence based on feedback received during earlier stages of the learning cycle. They may also be required to respond to new but related workplace scenarios, participate in iterative drafting processes, and collaborate with peers to develop improved communication strategies. This iterative approach reflects the dynamic nature of professional writing, where communication is rarely final and instead evolves through continuous revision, negotiation, and contextual adaptation.

For instance, following feedback on a crisis response email, students may be tasked with rewriting the message for different stakeholder groups, such as senior management, external clients, or regulatory bodies. This requires learners to reconsider the tone, level of detail, and strategic intent depending on audience expectations and organisational hierarchy. Such activities reinforce the application of theoretical knowledge in practical contexts, allowing students to test and refine their understanding of professional communication principles in authentic-like conditions. In doing so, the stage strengthens the transfer of learning by simulating workplace realities where messages are routinely revised in response to feedback, evolving situations, and changing communicative demands. This aligns with experiential learning principles, which emphasise learning through active engagement and iterative experimentation within authentic contexts (Kolb, 1984), as well as situated perspectives that highlight the socially responsive and adaptive nature of workplace communication practices (Trasmundi, 2026).

Instructional Design and Classroom Implementation

The instructional design of the Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF) is grounded in the principle of authentic, experience-based learning, where students are immersed in realistic communication environments that mirror professional workplace conditions. The framework is operationalised through four interconnected pedagogical strategies: workplace simulations and scenario-based learning, role-play and character-based communication, real-world client engagement, and collaborative writing in digital environments. Collectively, these strategies are designed to replicate the complexity, ambiguity, and iterative nature of professional correspondence, ensuring that students develop not only technical writing skills but also adaptive communicative competence aligned with workplace expectations.

To illustrate the framework in practice, consider the micro-skill of tone modulation. During the Concrete Experience stage, a student is tasked with immediately drafting a response to a hostile client demanding an unreasonable refund, doing so without prior theoretical instruction or structural templates. In the subsequent Reflective Observation stage, the student participates in a peer review session and realises their instinctive response reads as overly defensive and dismissive, recognising the potential consequences of damaged professional relationships. Moving to Abstract Conceptualisation, the instructor facilitates a discussion introducing specific theoretical frameworks, such as politeness strategies, register, and stakeholder mapping, helping the student interpret exactly which lexical choices created the abrasive tone. Finally, during Active Experimentation, the student revises the client email to project an empathetic yet firm professional tone and is then challenged to adapt the same core message into a neutral, objective internal memo for senior management. This single exercise effectively bridges the gap between theoretical communication principles and authentic workplace realities.

A central component of the framework is workplace simulations and role-play activities. In simulations, instructors design evolving case studies in which students assume organisational roles and engage in ongoing correspondence involving scenarios such as crisis communication, customer service interactions, interdepartmental coordination, and international business exchanges. These simulations unfold dynamically over time, requiring students to continuously revise and adapt their communication strategies. Complementing this, role-play activities introduce emotional realism and interpersonal complexity by assigning students stakeholder roles such as managers, clients, suppliers, regulatory authorities, and colleagues. These roles may be enacted by peers, instructors, or AI-based systems, enabling learners to experience negotiation, ambiguity, and relational dynamics in professional communication contexts.

In addition to simulated environments, the framework incorporates real-world client engagement and collaborative digital writing to enhance authenticity and workplace relevance. Where possible, students interact with external stakeholders such as university departments, local businesses, or non-governmental organisations, producing real emails, reports, or proposals that carry genuine communicative consequences. This fosters a sense of professional responsibility and accountability in writing. Furthermore, collaborative writing tasks using digital platforms simulate modern workplace practices, where communication is collectively constructed through negotiation, peer feedback, and iterative revision. The assessment strategy complements these instructional approaches by shifting from product-based evaluation to a process-oriented model, incorporating reflective portfolios, scenario-based performance tasks, revision quality, and communication strategy. This ensures that both the final output and the cognitive processes underlying communication decisions are systematically evaluated, aligning assessment with experiential learning principles.

Assessment Strategy

Assessment within the Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF) represents a deliberate shift from traditional product-based evaluation toward a more holistic, process-oriented, and competency-based approach. Rather than focusing solely on the final written output, assessment is designed to capture the full learning journey, including students' experiential engagement, reflective thinking, and iterative improvement. This approach recognises that professional communication competence is not merely a function of grammatical accuracy or structural conformity, but also involves strategic decision-making, audience awareness, and the ability to adapt communication in response to feedback and evolving contexts.

A recommended assessment structure reflects this multidimensional perspective by incorporating four key components. A reflective portfolio (40%) documents students' learning cycles, drafts, and reflective journals, enabling evaluation of metacognitive development over time. Scenario-based performance tasks (30%) assess communication effectiveness within simulated workplace environments, focusing on authenticity and contextual appropriateness. Revision and iteration quality (20%) evaluates the extent of improvement across drafts and responsiveness to feedback, highlighting the importance of developmental progression. Finally, professional communication strategy (10%) assesses learners' ability to demonstrate audience awareness, appropriate tone selection, and strategic communication decision-making. Collectively, this structure ensures that assessment captures both the final communicative product and the cognitive and reflective processes that underpin professional correspondence competence.

Pedagogical Benefits, Challenges, and Implementation Strategies of the Experiential Correspondence Framework

The Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF) offers several significant pedagogical benefits that collectively enhance the quality and relevance of professional communication instruction in higher education. First, it enhances authenticity in learning by immersing students in realistic workplace communication scenarios that mirror actual professional demands. This authenticity strengthens the transfer of learning, enabling students to apply classroom knowledge more effectively in real-world contexts. In addition, the framework develops adaptive communication competence by requiring learners to adjust tone, structure, and strategy according to evolving scenarios and stakeholder needs. The experiential nature of the framework also increases student engagement and motivation, as learners are actively involved in meaningful tasks rather than passive exercises. Furthermore, the integration of reflection throughout the learning cycle fosters critical thinking and

metacognitive awareness, allowing students to evaluate their communication decisions and improve continuously. Collectively, these benefits contribute to bridging the longstanding gap between theoretical instruction and workplace communication practice.

Despite these advantages, the implementation of the ECF is not without challenges. One significant concern is instructor workload, as designing realistic, evolving communication scenarios and providing detailed feedback can be time-intensive and resource-demanding. Another challenge involves student resistance, particularly among learners who are accustomed to highly structured, template-based writing approaches; these students may initially struggle with the ambiguity and openness of experiential tasks. In addition, assessment complexity presents a further challenge, as evaluating process-oriented learning requires more nuanced judgment compared to traditional product-based grading. Measuring reflection, iteration, and communication strategy demands clear criteria and consistent evaluation practices to ensure fairness and reliability.

To address these challenges, several strategies are proposed. Instructor workload can be reduced through the development of reusable scenario banks and the integration of AI-assisted drafting and feedback tools, which streamline scenario design and evaluation processes. Also, student resistance can be managed through gradual scaffolding, beginning with structured tasks and progressively introducing more open-ended, authentic communication challenges. Finally, assessment complexity can be addressed by employing clear, well-defined rubrics that prioritise reflection, strategic communication decisions, and iterative improvement. These mitigation strategies ensure that the ECF remains both pedagogically rigorous and practically feasible for implementation across diverse higher education contexts.

CONCLUSION

The Experiential Correspondence Framework (ECF) offers a significant rethinking of how professional correspondence is taught in higher education. At its core, the framework argues that effective communication cannot be developed through template memorisation or procedural imitation alone. Instead, it requires the development of contextual intelligence, which emerges through repeated engagement with authentic or simulated workplace experiences. By embedding Kolb's experiential learning cycle into correspondence instruction, the framework positions communication as a dynamic, iterative process shaped by experience, reflection, conceptual understanding, and experimentation.

A key implication of this conceptual shift is the reconceptualisation of curriculum design in higher education. Rather than organising instruction around static content delivery or genre-based templates, the ECF encourages institutions to structure learning around authentic communication scenarios. This transforms curriculum design into a process of experience orchestration, where students are continuously exposed to realistic professional situations that require adaptive communication responses. Such an approach better reflects the complexity of contemporary workplace communication, where meaning is negotiated rather than predetermined.

The framework also redefines the role of educators in professional communication instruction. Within the ECF, instructors move away from being primary transmitters of rules and model answers and instead assume the role of facilitators of experiential learning environments. Their responsibilities include designing meaningful communication scenarios, guiding reflective dialogue, and scaffolding theoretical understanding based on students' lived communicative experiences. This shift aligns with constructivist and student-centred pedagogies, where learning is actively constructed rather than passively received.

Importantly, the framework contributes directly to the development of employability-oriented competencies, including adaptability, audience awareness, emotional intelligence, and strategic decision-making in communication. These competencies are increasingly valued in globalised and digitally mediated workplaces, where communication is rarely linear or predictable. By engaging students in experiential cycles of communication practice, the ECF strengthens their readiness to operate effectively in complex professional environments.

Looking forward, the successful implementation of the ECF opens several avenues for future research. Empirical studies are needed to evaluate its effectiveness across different disciplinary and institutional contexts,

particularly through mixed-methods approaches that examine both measurable communication outcomes and learner experiences. Future research should also investigate long-term impacts on graduate employability, communication confidence, and workplace performance. Such studies would provide valuable evidence to support broader adoption of experiential pedagogy in professional communication education.

In conclusion, the Experiential Correspondence Framework provides a theoretically grounded and practically adaptable model for bridging the persistent gap between classroom instruction and workplace communication demands. By shifting the focus from static writing products to experiential learning processes, the framework enhances the development of meaningful, transferable communication competence and offers a forward-looking approach to preparing graduates for the complexities of modern professional life.

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