

Students' Perceptions of ChatGPT for Pragmatic Acceptability in Academic Online Messaging

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has created new opportunities to support students in producing more appropriate academic communication, particularly in online interactions with lecturers. This study investigated English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' perception of using ChatGPT to support pragmatic acceptability in academic online messaging, focusing on tone, politeness, formality, and contextual appropriateness. The study involved 100 undergraduate students from the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Tanjungpura who had experience using ChatGPT to compose or revise English messages intended for lecturers. A descriptive quantitative design was employed using a questionnaire developed based on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) framework. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations. The findings revealed that students generally held positive perceptions of ChatGPT in supporting pragmatic acceptability in academic online messaging. Among the UTAUT constructs, Facilitating Conditions obtained the highest mean score ($M = 4.305$), followed by Performance Expectancy ($M = 4.128$), Overall Perception ($M = 4.125$), Effort Expectancy ($M = 4.003$), and Social Influence ($M = 3.610$). These findings suggest that ChatGPT can serve as an accessible tool for supporting students' pragmatic awareness and digital academic communication when used critically as a complementary writing aid.

Keywords: *academic online messaging; ChatGPT; pragmatic acceptability; students' perception; UTAUT.*

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies have increasingly transformed communication practices in higher education beyond conventional academic interactions. Academic communication, which was traditionally associated with face-to-face discussions and formal written documents, now frequently occurs through digital platforms such as email, learning management systems (LMSs), and online messaging applications

(Algryani et al., 2023; Komljenovic et al., 2025). In this context, students regularly communicate with lecturers to discuss coursework, request consultations, seek permission, and communicate about other academic matters. As these interactions increasingly take place through digital platforms, students are expected not only to communicate accurately but also to use language that is appropriate for academic contexts.

For EFL learners, achieving effective communication in online academic messaging remains challenging. Effective communication requires more than grammatical accuracy, as messages are also evaluated on how appropriately language is used in a particular social and academic context. Pragmatic acceptability concerns whether a message is perceived as appropriate according to contextual expectations, interpersonal relationships, and communicative purposes. In student–lecturer communication, this is reflected through the appropriate use of tone, politeness, formality, and contextual appropriateness. However, previous studies have shown that EFL learners frequently experience difficulties producing messages that meet these expectations. This challenge is consistent with studies indicating that pragmatic competence remains one of the most difficult aspects of second language acquisition because learners must consider linguistic forms together with sociocultural and contextual norms (Taguchi, 2015; Taguchi & Roever, 2020). Students often produce grammatically correct messages that are perceived as overly direct, insufficiently polite, or inappropriate when communicating with lecturers (Chauhan, 2022; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2016). Similar findings have also been reported in Indonesian higher education, where students continue to experience challenges in maintaining appropriate politeness strategies and academic language in digital communication (Arsita et al., 2025; Pratiwi & Anindyarini, 2021).

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced new opportunities to support students' academic communication. Among AI-powered tools, ChatGPT has become increasingly popular because of its ability to generate, revise, and refine written texts. Previous studies have reported that ChatGPT can support writing development, language practice, and academic learning experiences (Barrot, 2024; Kasneci et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023). Beyond improving grammatical accuracy, ChatGPT can also suggest alternative expressions, adjust tone and politeness, maintain an appropriate level of formality, and provide context-sensitive language. These capabilities indicate that ChatGPT may support pragmatic aspects of academic communication by helping students review and refine their messages before communicating with lecturers.

Although studies on ChatGPT continue to increase, existing research has primarily focused on writing quality, academic writing performance, language learning, and students' acceptance of AI-assisted technologies (Strzelecki, 2023; Teng, 2024; Tusino et al., 2025). At the same time, research in pragmatics has mainly examined pragmatic competence, politeness strategies, and communication appropriateness in academic interactions (Chen & Wu, 2022; Nicholas et al., 2023). Despite the growing body of research on ChatGPT in language education, limited studies have specifically investigated students' perceptions of using ChatGPT to support pragmatic acceptability

in English academic online messaging, particularly within Indonesian higher education. This gap is particularly relevant because maintaining appropriate tone, politeness, formality, and contextual appropriateness remains challenging for many EFL learners.

To investigate students' acceptance of ChatGPT, this study adopts the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) proposed by Venkatesh et al. (2003). The framework explains technology acceptance through four constructs, namely Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, and Facilitating Conditions. By applying this framework, the present study investigates how EFL students perceive the use of ChatGPT in supporting pragmatic acceptability in English academic online messaging. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing discussion on AI-assisted language learning, particularly regarding the role of ChatGPT in supporting pragmatic aspects of academic communication. In addition, the findings may provide practical insights for English language educators and students regarding the responsible use of AI in academic writing and communication.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: How do EFL students perceive the use of ChatGPT in supporting pragmatic acceptability in English academic online messaging based on the UTAUT framework?

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate students' perceptions of using ChatGPT in supporting pragmatic acceptability in English academic online messaging. A descriptive quantitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to describe students' perceptions and technology acceptance rather than measure learning outcomes or examine the effectiveness of ChatGPT. The study was guided by the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), which explains technology acceptance through four constructs: Performance Expectancy, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, and Facilitating Conditions. Pragmatic acceptability, reflected through tone, politeness, formality, and contextual appropriateness, served as the communication context in which ChatGPT was used.

The study was conducted in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Tanjungpura. The participants consisted of 100 undergraduate students from the 2021–2025 cohorts who were selected using purposive sampling. To ensure the relevance of the data, participants were required to meet several inclusion criteria. They had to be active students, have experience communicating with lecturers in English through academic online messaging, have used ChatGPT as a writing support tool, and have used ChatGPT specifically to compose, revise, or improve messages intended for lecturer communication. Participants also needed to have used ChatGPT to support at least one aspect of pragmatic acceptability, including tone, politeness, formality, or contextual appropriateness.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire was developed based on the UTAUT framework and previous literature on pragmatic acceptability and AI-assisted language learning. Before

completing the main questionnaire, respondents answered several screening questions to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria. The final instrument consisted of 24 Likert-scale items distributed across five constructs: Performance Expectancy (12 items), Effort Expectancy (3 items), Social Influence (2 items), Facilitating Conditions (3 items), and Overall Perception (4 items). In addition, one open-ended question was included to obtain supplementary information regarding students' experiences of using ChatGPT in academic communication.

Before the main data collection, the questionnaire was piloted with 33 respondents to examine its validity and reliability. Item validity was assessed using corrected item-total correlation with a minimum criterion of 0.30. Six items that did not meet the criterion were removed, resulting in a final instrument consisting of 24 items. The reliability of each construct was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, with coefficients ranging from 0.603 to 0.896, indicating marginal to good internal consistency. These results suggest that the questionnaire was sufficiently valid and reliable for the main study.

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics with IBM SPSS Statistics. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to describe students' perceptions of each UTAUT construct. The mean scores were subsequently interpreted using predetermined class intervals ranging from Very Low to Very High to identify the overall tendency of students' perceptions toward the use of ChatGPT in supporting pragmatic acceptability in English academic online messaging.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of students' perceptions of using ChatGPT in supporting pragmatic acceptability in English academic online messaging. The findings are presented based on the mean scores of the UTAUT constructs and are discussed in relation to previous studies on AI-assisted language learning, pragmatic communication, and technology acceptance.

Table 1: Overall Descriptive Statistics of Each Construct

No.	Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Performance Expectancy	4.1275	0.56760	High
2	Effort Expectancy	4.0033	0.74985	High
3	Social Influence	3.6100	0.75069	High
4	Facilitating Conditions	4.3050	0.62722	Very High
5	Overall Perception	4.1250	0.55789	High

As shown in Table 1, all five constructs obtained mean scores within the High and Very High categories, indicating that students generally held positive perceptions of using ChatGPT to support pragmatic acceptability in English academic online messaging. Facilitating Conditions recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.3050$), suggesting that students perceived sufficient technological resources and support for using ChatGPT in their academic activities. Performance Expectancy ($M = 4.1275$), Overall Perception ($M = 4.1250$), and Effort Expectancy ($M = 4.0033$) were also

categorized as High, indicating that students considered ChatGPT useful, accessible, and easy to use. Although Social Influence obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 3.6100$), it remained within the High category, suggesting that students' decisions to use ChatGPT were influenced more by their personal experiences than by recommendations from others.

The findings indicate that students perceived ChatGPT as a useful tool for supporting pragmatic acceptability in academic online messaging. Rather than using ChatGPT solely to correct grammatical errors, many respondents reported using it to revise tone, improve politeness, maintain an appropriate level of formality, and adjust messages according to different academic situations before communicating with lecturers. These responses suggest that students recognize the importance of producing messages that are not only grammatically accurate but also appropriate within academic and interpersonal contexts.

The open-ended responses further illustrate how students used ChatGPT to refine their communication. One respondent explained that ChatGPT transformed an overly direct message into a more respectful and professionally structured version before it was sent to a lecturer: *"One example was when I needed to contact my lecturer to ask about the availability of a proposal revision consultation. I initially wrote the message by directly translating my Indonesian thoughts into English. Although the message contained the necessary information, the wording sounded unnatural, overly direct, and lacked an appropriate level of politeness for academic communication"*. Another respondent reported using ChatGPT to add greetings, self-introduction, and a clearer explanation when requesting permission to miss class, *"ChatGPT suggested using a more polite and professional tone by adding a proper greeting, introducing myself with my name, student ID number, department, and class, clearly stating the reason for my absence, and ending the message with an apology and words of gratitude..."*; while another stated that ChatGPT helped revise consultation requests to sound more polite and professional, *"I used ChatGPT to help me check whether correct in pragmatically especially for politeness and formal use words that I wanted to send to my lecturer to request a consultation about my research proposal..."*. Several respondents also indicated that ChatGPT assisted them in organizing their messages more clearly and selecting expressions that better reflected respect toward lecturers. These responses demonstrate that students used ChatGPT not merely as a grammar checker but also as a tool to evaluate how their messages might be interpreted by the recipient.

These findings are consistent with the concept of pragmatic acceptability, which emphasizes that successful communication depends not only on grammatical correctness but also on the appropriateness of language use within a particular social and contextual setting. In student-lecturer communication, messages are expected to reflect appropriate tone, politeness, formality, and awareness of institutional relationships. The respondents' experiences indicate that ChatGPT helped them reflect on these aspects before sending their messages, particularly when they were uncertain about how their wording might be perceived. This finding supports the view of Yule (1996) that effective communication involves selecting language that is appropriate to the communicative context rather than focusing exclusively on linguistic accuracy. Likewise, Brown and

Levinson's (1987) politeness theory explains that speakers often employ mitigation and indirectness to reduce the imposition of requests, especially when communicating with individuals who hold higher institutional status. Moreover Suparno et al. (2023) emphasize that power relations and social status remain influential in digital communication, making politeness strategies particularly important when students communicate with lecturers in online environments. The respondents' descriptions of revising direct requests into more respectful expressions illustrate the application of these pragmatic principles in academic online messaging. This interpretation is also supported by Susilawati (2019), who argues that effective academic communication requires speakers to perform speech acts appropriately according to the communicative context and the relationship between interlocutors. In student–lecturer interactions, the appropriateness of requests and other communicative acts contributes to the effectiveness and professionalism of academic communication. These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that ChatGPT supports writing development through immediate feedback, alternative language choices, and opportunities for reflection (Barrot, 2024; Kasneci et al., 2023; Song & Song, 2023; Teng, 2024). Moreover, these findings are in line with Tahir (2025), who reported that ChatGPT can facilitate the development of learners' pragmatic competence by encouraging them to reflect on language choices and contextual appropriateness during communication.

Regarding technology acceptance, the findings indicate that students' perceptions were influenced by all four UTAUT constructs. Performance Expectancy and Effort Expectancy both obtained high mean scores, indicating that students considered ChatGPT beneficial while requiring relatively little effort to use. Many respondents reported that ChatGPT enabled them to revise messages more efficiently by suggesting alternative expressions, reducing the time needed to reformulate requests, and helping them communicate more confidently with lecturers. These findings are consistent with Venkatesh et al. (2003), who propose that users are more likely to accept a technology when they perceive it as useful and easy to use.

Among the four constructs, Facilitating Conditions obtained the highest mean score. This finding suggests that the availability of internet access, digital devices, and familiarity with AI technologies supported students' use of ChatGPT in academic communication. Since ChatGPT can be accessed easily through commonly used digital devices, students were able to incorporate it into their existing communication practices without substantial technical barriers. This result is consistent with previous studies reporting that adequate technological resources encourage the adoption of AI-assisted learning tools in higher education (Ningsih et al., 2025; Salam, 2025).

Although Social Influence received the lowest mean score, it remained within the High category. This finding suggests that students' decisions to use ChatGPT were influenced less by lecturers, peers, or institutional expectations and more by their own experiences using the technology. The open-ended responses further support this interpretation because respondents rarely mentioned recommendations from others. Instead, they emphasized personal reasons for using ChatGPT, such as improving politeness, reducing uncertainty, and ensuring that messages sounded more respectful

before being sent to lecturers. This finding indicates that students continued use of ChatGPT is primarily driven by its perceived usefulness in addressing their own communication needs rather than by external encouragement.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The findings were based on self-reported perceptions and therefore do not directly measure the actual pragmatic quality of students' academic messages. In addition, the participants were drawn from a single study program at one university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies may analyse authentic student–lecturer messages or employ experimental designs to examine the influence of ChatGPT on students' actual pragmatic performance across different educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated EFL students' perceptions of using ChatGPT in supporting pragmatic acceptability in English academic online messaging through the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) framework. The findings indicate that students generally perceive ChatGPT as a useful and accessible tool for supporting pragmatic aspects of academic communication, particularly in relation to tone, politeness, formality, and contextual appropriateness. Students also perceived that ChatGPT functions as a supportive resource for reviewing and refining academic messages rather than replacing their own communicative judgment. Among the UTAUT constructs, Facilitating Conditions emerged as the strongest factor influencing students' acceptance, while Social Influence played a comparatively smaller role, suggesting that students' acceptance was primarily driven by the perceived usefulness and accessibility of the technology.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on AI-assisted language learning by extending the discussion beyond writing quality and grammatical accuracy to the domain of pragmatic acceptability in academic online messaging. The findings demonstrate that students recognize the potential of ChatGPT to support more appropriate and context-sensitive communication with lecturers, highlighting the relevance of integrating AI-assisted writing tools into discussions of pragmatics and technology acceptance in English language education. These findings also reinforce the importance of using AI critically as a complementary tool that supports students' pragmatic awareness and effective academic communication.

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