



PRAGMATIC POWER OR PERIL? INDONESIAN STUDENTS RESPONDING TO CHATGPT'S LINGUISTIC SUBTLETIES IN WRITING ARGUMENTATION

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Abstract: This study investigates Indonesian university students' responses to the pragmatic meaning conveyed by ChatGPT in the context of argumentative writing. Employing a qualitative approach, the research explores students' perceptions of the ease of understanding and utilizing the pragmatic cues embedded in AI-generated text, their attitudes toward using the tool, and their behavioral intention for continued use. Findings reveal that while students appreciate ChatGPT's usefulness and ease of use for generating argumentative content, their engagement with its pragmatic meaning is more nuanced. Students often modify AI-generated language to align with their own writing styles and perceived academic appropriateness, indicating a level of critical awareness. A writer's stance and attitude towards the argument are often conveyed through pragmatic choices. Students' modifications could reflect an effort to inject their own voice and perspective, which might be absent or inadequately represented in the AI-generated text. **Keywords:** *Argumentative writing; ChatGPT; Indonesian university students; Pragmatic meaning; Technology acceptance.*

INTRODUCTION

The increasing integration of advanced language models, such as ChatGPT, into the academic workflows of university students worldwide has become a salient phenomenon, particularly impacting the landscape of language education (Abd-Alrazaq et al., 2023; Sain et al., 2024). In the Indonesian higher education context, students are increasingly leveraging ChatGPT for various academic tasks, including written assignments in English (Susanto et al., 2023). While ChatGPT offers perceived efficiencies in text generation, brainstorming support, and grammatical refinement, its pervasive utilization raises pertinent pedagogical concerns regarding the trajectory of English language skill development (Barrot, 2023). A key worry centers on the potential for over-reliance on AI-generated content to impede the autonomous development of students'

conceptualization abilities, the cultivation of an individual authorial voice, and the acquisition of nuanced English grammatical and stylistic competence (Khup & Bantugan, 2025). This situation underscores the importance of understanding not just the literal output of ChatGPT, but also the pragmatic implications of its use on students' developing sense of appropriate and effective communication in academic contexts.

The apparent high trust Indonesian students place in ChatGPT is evidenced by their repeated use of the AI tool when tackling argumentative writing tasks (Susanto et al., 2023). This reliance suggests a perceived utility in generating supporting points, structuring arguments, and even formulating persuasive language, potentially streamlining the often-demanding process of constructing well-reasoned essays in English.

However, this pattern of repeated use also highlights the critical need to understand the implications for students' independent development of argumentation skills, critical thinking, and the capacity to articulate their perspectives effectively without AI assistance (Mulenga & Chisanga, 2024).

The growing integration of AI writing assistants like ChatGPT into academic workflows introduces novel dynamics in how students approach meaning-making, particularly concerning the pragmatic dimensions of language in argumentative writing (Caiman & Jakobson, 2024). While ChatGPT offers sophisticated text generation capabilities, its understanding and conveyance of implied meanings and contextual nuances may not always align with the socio-cultural frameworks of its users, such as Indonesian university students (Fhitri & Yalmiadi, 2025). This study directly addresses this crucial aspect by exploring students' responses to the pragmatic meaning conveyed by ChatGPT when engaged in argumentative writing. By investigating their perceptions, interpretations, and adaptations of the AI's suggested language, this research aims to illuminate the extent to which students effectively navigate and integrate the pragmatic subtleties offered by ChatGPT into their own meaning-making in academic writing. Ultimately, this contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the AI's role in shaping student writing and linguistic comprehension within a specific cultural and educational context (Attanasio et al., 2024).

While existing research has examined ChatGPT's capacity to facilitate various aspects of writing, including content generation and structural organization (Memarian & Doleck, 2023; Sue et al., 2023), a notable gap exists concerning the quality and reception of pragmatic meaning conveyed by these AI tools, especially within the demanding realm of argumentative writing. Current evaluation frameworks for AI-generated text often prioritize metrics like textual coherence, linguistic fluency, and factual accuracy (e.g., Nazar et al., 2025), often overlooking the intricate dimensions of pragmatic competence, elements vital for effective argumentation (Marni et al., 2024). Given that persuasive discourse inherently relies on the strategic deployment of pragmatic meaning to engage and influence an audience (Qin et al., 2024), a more rigorous academic examination of the pragmatic quality embedded within ChatGPT-generated argumentative text, and students' interaction with these pragmatic cues, is essential to fully comprehend the implications of AI integration in writing pedagogy.

Therefore, this study seeks to address the gap in understanding Indonesian tertiary students' experiences with ChatGPT in the context of

argumentative writing, specifically focusing on their perception and engagement with the pragmatic suggestions offered by the AI. By exploring their interpretations and adaptations of ChatGPT's linguistic subtleties, this research aims to answer the following question: "How do Indonesian tertiary students perceive and engage with ChatGPT's pragmatic suggestions within argumentative writing tasks?" The findings of this study hold significant implications not only for Indonesian educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers navigating the integration of AI writing tools in English language education, but also for the broader international community grappling with similar challenges. Understanding how students in a specific cultural and linguistic context like Indonesia, interact with the AI's pragmatic cues can offer valuable insights into the nuanced ways AI is shaping language learning and use globally. These findings can inform pedagogical approaches and curriculum design in diverse educational settings worldwide, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of AI on the development of critical linguistic awareness and pragmatic competence in a digital age.

METHOD

The qualitative phase of this study aimed to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences with ChatGPT. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, serving as the primary instrument (Quintela, Do Carmo, Vinuesa, Dembélé, & Ayotte-Beaudet, 2024), with a subset of participants comprising fifteen (n=15) Indonesian university students enrolled in Argumentative Writing courses at a private university in Garut, West Java, Indonesia. The demographic profile of the participants included EFL undergraduate students who were required to complete argumentative essays in English as part of their coursework. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 22 years, and the sample included both male and female students to ensure a diverse range of perspectives. These interviews explored their perceptions of ChatGPT's ability to convey and suggest pragmatic meaning, the challenges they faced in interpreting and adapting these cues, and their perceived impact on understanding and applying pragmatics in their English argumentative writing.

The procedures involved conducting and recording the semi-structured interviews (Junnier, 2024). Subsequently, the interview data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and nuanced perspectives regarding the participants' interactions with

ChatGPT's pragmatic cues in the context of English argumentative writing (Arifin, Rahman, Balla, Susanto, & Pratiwi, 2025). This qualitative approach allowed for a more robust understanding of how Indonesian students interacted with and responded to the pragmatic cues offered by ChatGPT (Werdiningsih, Marzuki, Indrawati, Rusdin, Ivone, Basthomi, & Zulfahreza, 2024).

Applying the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to the qualitative findings reveals key factors influencing participants' engagement with

ChatGPT's pragmatic cues (Limna, Kraiwanit, & Chumwatana, 2024). Themes related to perceived usefulness highlighted how students saw potential benefits in ChatGPT's suggestions for argumentative writing, though this was qualified by their ability to judge the AI's pragmatic appropriateness (Van Poucke, 2024). Regarding

perceived ease of use, participants reported varying levels of comfort in understanding and adapting ChatGPT's pragmatic output for their writing (Quan, & Chen, 2025). These differing perceptions of usefulness and ease of use were crucial in shaping their inclination to adopt and integrate the AI's pragmatic cues into their academic discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings derived from the semi-structured interviews conducted with university students are discussed, focusing specifically on their responses when considering pragmatic meaning within the argumentative writing process facilitated by ChatGPT. The analysis delves into how students perceive, interpret, and adapt the pragmatic cues suggested by the AI as they engage in constructing reasoned arguments in English.

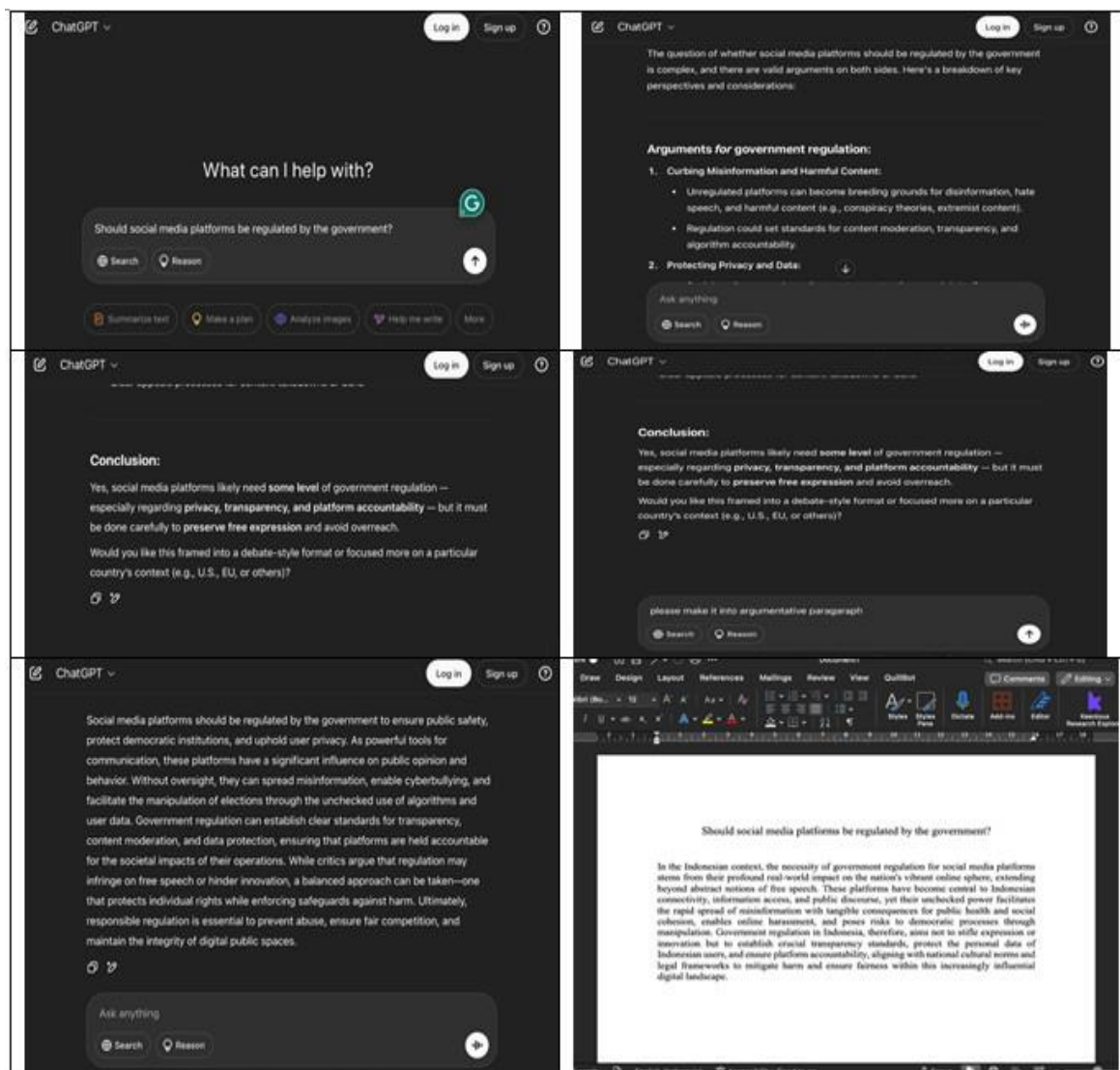


Figure 1. *Students' process in creating an argumentative paragraph from the prompt to the final editing by considering the pragmatic meanin*

Usefulness

The perceived usefulness of ChatGPT in argumentative writing, as highlighted by students' appreciation for its time efficiency, idea generation, and structural assistance, also permeated their initial engagement with the pragmatic meaning conveyed by the AI. The readily available and seemingly coherent language produced by ChatGPT often led to an initial perception of usefulness in understanding its intended pragmatic force. For instance, when ChatGPT offered suggestions for softening a counter-argument, students might have readily adopted the phrasing without deeply analysing the specific pragmatic devices employed or their cultural appropriateness in a given context. As S2 noted, ChatGPT could "produce fast, precise and quality writing," which might have been interpreted by students as encompassing not only grammatical correctness but also appropriate pragmatic choices, leading to a surface-level acceptance of the AI's output.

However, while the initial access to AI-generated pragmatic suggestions was perceived as easy, students' responses also hinted at a more complex reality regarding true pragmatic comprehension. Some students, while appreciating the speed and structure provided by ChatGPT, implicitly acknowledged the potential for a disconnect between the AI's output and nuanced pragmatic understanding. For example, S1's comment about ChatGPT providing "new ideas that I hadn't thought of before" primarily focused on content generation rather than the subtle pragmatic implications embedded within those ideas. Similarly, S5's appreciation for "relevant, creative and engaging results" speaks to the overall quality of the output but doesn't explicitly address the depth of their pragmatic understanding or their ability to discern the AI's intended communicative nuances.

Furthermore, the very ease with which ChatGPT provided solutions might have, in some instances, pre-empted a more critical engagement with pragmatic meaning-making. The readily available structured arguments and rephrased sentences, while enhancing efficiency, could have reduced the cognitive effort required for students to independently consider the most pragmatically appropriate language for their specific argumentative goals and audience. As S4 mentioned, "with the help of ChatGPT I can find more new ideas and also many references," indicating a reliance on the AI for content and potentially overlooking the need to deeply analyze

the pragmatic implications of the suggested language within the broader rhetorical context of their writing. This suggests that while ChatGPT offers an initial ease of access to and interaction with seemingly pragmatically sound text, the development of a student's nuanced understanding and effective application of pragmatic meaning might require a more critical and less passive engagement than simply adopting the AI's suggestions (Alam & Mohanty, 2023).

While the perceived usefulness and ease of use of ChatGPT facilitate its adoption for argumentative writing, leading to an initial acceptance of its linguistic output, including pragmatic cues, a deeper investigation reveals a more intricate reality. Students' reliance on the AI for efficiency and idea generation does not automatically translate to a nuanced understanding of the subtle pragmatic implications embedded within its suggestions (Walton, 2023). The ease of access to ChatGPT's seemingly coherent text may even inadvertently discourage the critical cognitive engagement necessary for students to independently develop their pragmatic competence in academic discourse (Ozer, 2024). Therefore, educators must cultivate a pedagogical approach that encourages students to move beyond a surface-level acceptance of AI-generated content and actively engage in the critical analysis of its pragmatic meaning to foster a more profound and autonomous mastery of effective argumentative writing (Creely, 2024; Hyland & Jiang, 2023; Khampusaen, 2025).

The ease of use

The ease of access and use of ChatGPT, as highlighted by Indonesian university students, presents a complex relationship with their understanding and interpretation of pragmatic meaning within the AI-generated text. The intuitive interface and multilingual capabilities of ChatGPT, as noted by S4 ("The features provided are also very easy to use") and S3 ("ChatGPT has been built to understand all the languages we use for commands"), lower the initial barrier to interacting with the tool. This ease of access might lead students to readily input prompts related to argumentative writing and receive immediate textual output, potentially including elements intended to convey pragmatic nuances such as politeness or emphasis. The straightforward nature of the interaction could foster an initial perception that understanding the pragmatic meaning embedded within these suggestions is equally effortless.

However, the students' experiences also reveal a crucial caveat: while using ChatGPT is generally easy, formulating effective prompts to elicit pragmatically nuanced and contextually appropriate responses proves to be a significant challenge. As S1 pointed out, "easy, but sometimes difficult if you want a more specific answer. When I gave questions/commands that were too general, the answers were not what I wanted." This suggests that the AI's ability to generate pragmatically sound text is heavily dependent on the user's ability to articulate their needs with precision. Vague prompts are unlikely to yield responses that effectively demonstrate or explain subtle pragmatic cues relevant to the specific argumentative context. Consequently, while students might find it easy to obtain text from ChatGPT, the ease of understanding the intended pragmatic meaning and, more importantly, learning how to elicit pragmatically sophisticated responses remains a significant hurdle (Janiaud & Hemkens, 2024; Maurya, 2024).

Furthermore, the diverse features of ChatGPT, such as translation and information retrieval, while enhancing its overall utility, do not directly address the complexities of pragmatic understanding. While ChatGPT can translate a sentence, the pragmatic implications of that sentence in a different cultural or linguistic context might be lost or misinterpreted if the student lacks the underlying pragmatic competence. Similarly, while the AI can provide information relevant to an argument, it does not inherently teach students how to strategically employ pragmatic devices to present that information persuasively. Therefore, the ease of accessing ChatGPT's diverse features does not automatically equate to an ease in understanding or effectively utilizing the often subtle and context-dependent nature of pragmatic meaning in argumentative writing. Students may readily use the tool for various purposes, but mastering the pragmatic dimensions of academic discourse requires a more nuanced understanding that goes beyond the tool's basic ease of use. The ease of access and user-friendly nature of ChatGPT have facilitated its initial uptake among Indonesian university students for argumentative writing, potentially leading to a surface-level engagement with its pragmatic output (Sain et al., 2024). However, the challenge students face in formulating specific prompts to elicit nuanced pragmatic meaning (Marni et al., 2024), and the inherent limitations of AI in fully understanding

context-dependent communication (Dorotic, Stagno, & Warlop, 2024) suggest that mastering the pragmatic dimensions of academic discourse requires more than just ease of use. While ChatGPT offers readily available text, achieving a deep understanding and effective application of pragmatic meaning necessitates a level of linguistic competence and critical awareness that extends beyond the tool's intuitive interface (Attanasio et al., 2024). Therefore, educators should focus on developing students' pragmatic literacy alongside their ability to utilize AI tools effectively, ensuring that the ease of access does not overshadow the complexities of meaningful academic communication (Hyland & Jiang, 2023).

Attitude toward the use

Students' attitudes toward using ChatGPT for academic writing reveal a nuanced understanding that extends to their perception and manipulation of pragmatic meaning. While they appreciate the efficiency and idea-generation capabilities of the AI, their conscious effort to modify ChatGPT's output to align with their own writing style and academic requirements suggests a recognition that AI-generated text may not inherently capture the desired pragmatic nuances. S1's practice of changing "ChatGPT language a bit into my own language" and S2's emphasis on ensuring the "writing style suits me" imply an awareness that effective communication, particularly in argumentative writing, involves more than just conveying literal information; it requires a personal voice and stylistic choices that carry pragmatic weight. This proactive modification suggests that students are not passively accepting the AI's linguistic output but are actively engaging with it to imbue their writing with their own intended pragmatic force.

Furthermore, students' understanding of ChatGPT as a tool, as evidenced by S1's definition of it as "artificial intelligence technology designed to understand and generate text based on commands or questions given by users," and S4's recognition of its NLP foundation, indicates a level of metacognitive awareness regarding the AI's capabilities and limitations. This understanding likely informs their approach to the pragmatic elements present in ChatGPT's suggestions. Knowing that the AI operates based on algorithms and pattern recognition, rather than genuine socio-cultural understanding, may prompt students to critically evaluate the pragmatic appropriateness of

generated text for their specific audience and context. Their recognition that effective use requires specific prompts (as highlighted in the "Challenges in Prompt Formulation" section of the original text) further underscores their understanding that eliciting pragmatically sound responses is not an automatic outcome of using the AI.

The mixed opinions on ChatGPT's impact on creativity also indirectly relate to their attitude towards its representation of pragmatic meaning. While some students found ChatGPT helpful in "opening up new horizons" (S1) and "encouraging to think more creatively" (S2), the necessity for modification, as noted by S3 ("If we don't modify it, we can't improve our skills"), implies a recognition that the AI's initial output, including its pragmatic choices, might serve as a starting point but requires human intervention to achieve genuine originality and context-sensitive communication. This active role in refining the AI's suggestions suggests that students are not blindly adopting the pragmatic cues presented by ChatGPT but are instead filtering and adapting them through their own understanding of effective and appropriate communication in academic argumentative writing. Their attitude, therefore, is one of cautious adoption, recognizing the tool's utility while maintaining their agency in shaping the final output, including its crucial pragmatic dimensions.

The university students exhibit a nuanced attitude towards employing ChatGPT in academic writing, extending to their engagement with pragmatic meaning. Their proactive modification of AI-generated text (S1, S2) indicates a critical awareness that effective communication transcends literal conveyance, necessitating a personal and contextually appropriate pragmatic dimension (Fenuku, 2024; Hyland & Jiang, 2023). This metacognitive understanding of ChatGPT's capabilities and limitations prompts a cautious adoption, where the AI is viewed as a tool requiring human refinement to achieve desired pragmatic outcomes (Friederich & Symons, 2023; Nurjamin & Fajriah, 2024). While students appreciate the AI's potential for ideation and efficiency, they actively filter and adapt its pragmatic cues through their own developing understanding of effective academic discourse, highlighting their agency in shaping the final communicative impact of their argumentative writing (Attanasio et al., 2024).

Behavioral intention to use

Students' behavioral intention to continue using ChatGPT for academic writing tasks, driven by its perceived efficiency and quality (S1, S2, S4), suggests a potential reliance on the AI's representation of pragmatic meaning. If students believe ChatGPT enhances the "quality" of their writing, they may implicitly trust its pragmatic choices as well, potentially leading to a continued adoption of its linguistic suggestions without deep critical evaluation. This reliance could stem from the ease with which ChatGPT generates seemingly appropriate phrasing, leading students to incorporate these pragmatic cues into their own writing with the expectation of similar positive outcomes. The expressed desire to recommend ChatGPT to peers (S3, S5, S1) further reinforces this positive attitude and the potential for widespread adoption of the AI's pragmatic style, even if the nuances are not fully understood. However, this strong behavioral intention to use ChatGPT does not automatically equate to a nuanced understanding of the AI's representation of pragmatic meaning. Students may continue to use the tool for its efficiency in generating text and ideas, without necessarily developing a deeper awareness of the subtle pragmatic implications embedded within that text (Jiang, Vetter, & Lucia, 2024; Lang, 2024; Tu, 2024). Their focus on "improving efficiency and quality" might be primarily directed towards surface-level features like grammar and coherence, with less conscious attention paid to the appropriateness and effectiveness of the AI's pragmatic choices in specific argumentative contexts. The ease with which ChatGPT provides solutions might inadvertently reduce students' motivation to independently analyze and refine the pragmatic dimensions of their writing, leading to a passive acceptance of the AI's pragmatic style as inherently "quality" (Lee, 2024; Wei & Zhao, 2024; Wieczorek, 2025).

Furthermore, the willingness to recommend ChatGPT to others, particularly those "often involved in writing assignments" (S1), suggests a belief in its general utility for academic writing (Alharbi, 2023; Malik, 2024). However, S2 argued that this recommendation might be based more on the perceived time-saving and idea-generating benefits (Mack, 2024) rather than a thorough understanding of how ChatGPT handles the complexities of pragmatic meaning, a domain where AI still faces significant challenges in accurately interpreting context and nuance (Bekouche, 2024; Nurjamin, Gunawan, Sudana,

2023; Waywithwords.net, 2024). Students might be recommending the tool for its ability to produce text quickly, assuming that the pragmatic aspects are adequately addressed, without necessarily possessing the metacognitive awareness to evaluate the AI's pragmatic competence critically (Friederich & Symons, 2023). Therefore, while the strong behavioral intention to use and recommend ChatGPT indicates a positive attitude towards its overall

contribution to academic writing (Acosta-Enriquez, Arbulú Ballesteros, Jordan, Roca, & Tirado, 2024). It doesn't inherently guarantee a corresponding depth of understanding regarding its representation and implications for pragmatic meaning in argumentative discourse, a crucial aspect of effective communication in academic settings (Darmawansah, Rachman, Febiyani, & Hwang, 2025; Truba, Khrapatyi, Harashchuk, Shvets, & Proskurnia, 2024).

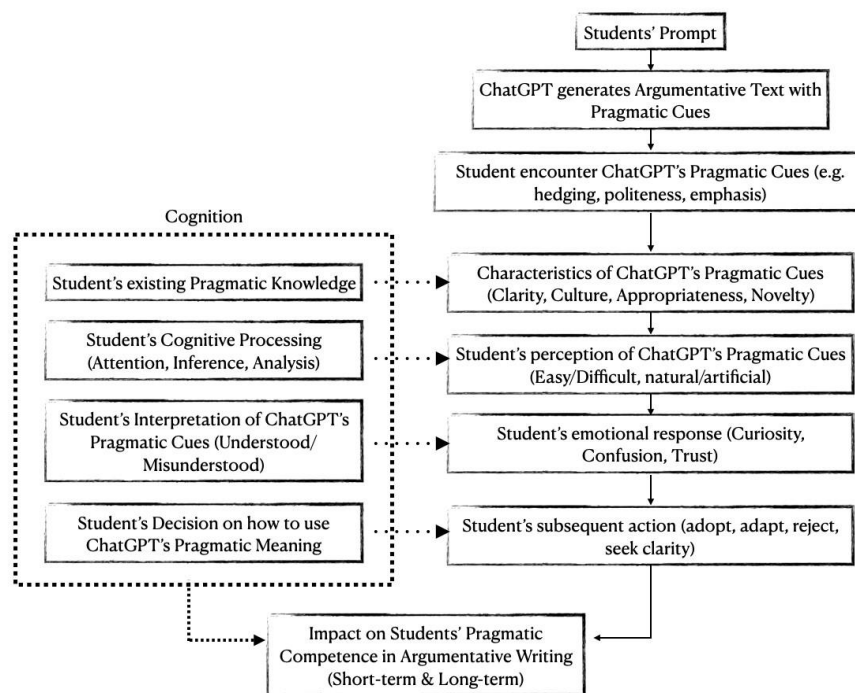


Figure 2. Student's cognitive representation in processing ChatGPT's pragmatic cues

Drawing together the threads of this investigation, the study illuminates a nuanced relationship between Indonesian university students' adoption of ChatGPT for argumentative writing and their processing of its pragmatic underpinnings (Elsayed, 2024; Jo, 2025). The perceived utility and user-friendliness of the AI have undoubtedly fostered its integration into students' academic workflows, streamlining tasks related to ideation, organization, and time management (Kayaalp, Durnali, & Gökbulut, 2025). However, the findings suggest that students approach the pragmatic dimension of ChatGPT-generated text with a discerning eye (Attanasio, 2024). Their active revision of the AI's linguistic output, driven by a desire for stylistic alignment and perceived academic appropriateness (Usher & Amzalag, 2025; Zhai & Wibowo, 2023) signals an awareness that computational language models may not inherently encapsulate the subtle contextual and relational nuances crucial for effective argumentation (Ziems, Held, Shaikh,

Chen, Zhang, & Yang, 2024). While the efficiency and accessibility of ChatGPT cultivate a strong inclination towards its continued use and recommendation among peers (Tiwari, Bhat, Khan, Subramaniam, & Khan, 2024), this enthusiasm does not necessarily equate to a deep-seated comprehension of the AI's pragmatic representations. Indeed, the very ease with which ChatGPT offers solutions may, paradoxically, diminish the cognitive engagement required for students to independently cultivate a sophisticated understanding of pragmatic meaning in academic discourse (Lin, 2023; Ye, Zhang, Nong, Wang, & Yang, 2025). Consequently, the study underscores the imperative for educators to foster critical evaluation skills and explicit pragmatic awareness (Fathi, Kafipour, Kashefian-Naeeni, & Shahsavari, 2025; Sitorus, Siregar, Aulia, Zahra, Parinduri, Lubis, & Wardiah, 2025) to ensure that students leverage the benefits of AI without

compromising their own developing mastery of nuanced academic communication.

The findings strongly suggest that relying solely on ChatGPT without explicit instruction and the cultivation of critical evaluation skills is more likely to limit rather than improve students' pragmatic competence. The ease of use and perceived utility can lead to passive acceptance and reduced cognitive engagement with the nuanced aspects of pragmatic meaning-making. Therefore, educators must play a crucial role in guiding students to interact with AI tools like ChatGPT in a way that fosters, rather than hinders, their development of independent pragmatic competence in academic writing. This involves teaching them how to critically evaluate AI-generated content, understand the context-dependent nature of pragmatics, and develop their own ability to make effective pragmatic choices in their writing.

These findings carry significant weight, revealing a nuanced interaction between Indonesian students and ChatGPT in argumentative writing. While students readily adopt the AI for drafting, their critical engagement with its pragmatic suggestions, often leading to modifications, indicates that AI adoption does not automatically translate to pragmatic competence. This underscores a critical imperative for educators, particularly to intentionally cultivate students' critical evaluation skills and explicit pragmatic awareness. Such pedagogical focus is essential to ensure students develop independent mastery of sophisticated academic communication in an AI-integrated learning environment.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the findings reveal a complex interplay between Indonesian university students' engagement with ChatGPT for argumentative writing and their understanding of pragmatic meaning. While students readily acknowledge the tool's usefulness in enhancing efficiency, generating ideas, and structuring their essays, and appreciate its ease of use, their interaction with the pragmatic nuances embedded in ChatGPT's output demonstrates a more critical and adaptive approach. The students' inclination to modify the AI's language to better suit their writing styles and perceived academic requirements underscores a metacognitive awareness of the limitations of AI in fully capturing context-sensitive communication. Despite a strong behavioral intention to continue using and recommending

ChatGPT, driven by its perceived benefits, this does not automatically translate to a deep and nuanced understanding of the AI's pragmatic representations. The ease of access to seemingly coherent text might even inadvertently hinder a more profound engagement with the subtleties of pragmatic meaning-making. Ultimately, while ChatGPT offers valuable support in the argumentative writing process, the development of students' pragmatic competence necessitates a critical and active engagement with the AI's suggestions, highlighting the enduring importance of explicit instruction and conscious reflection in mastering the art of effective and contextually appropriate academic discourse.

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