

## **Beyond Information Exchange: Academic Politeness and Identity Construction in Student–Lecturer WhatsApp Communication**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The increasing use of digital messaging platforms in higher education has transformed the ways students communicate with lecturers. While WhatsApp offers a convenient and efficient medium for academic interaction, it also raises important questions regarding the linguistic practices employed by students in maintaining professionalism and appropriateness in digital communication. This study investigates the linguistic patterns found in students' academic short-message communication with lecturers through WhatsApp. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study analysed 60 academic messages produced by four undergraduate students during the 2025 academic year. The data were collected through documentation techniques and analysed using content analysis. The findings reveal six prominent linguistic features: greetings, honorifics, apology expressions, indirect requests, gratitude expressions, and compliance statements. These linguistic patterns demonstrate that students strategically employ language not only to convey information but also to construct academic identities, negotiate institutional relationships, and maintain professional communication. The findings further indicate that politeness remains a central component of digital academic discourse despite the informal nature of WhatsApp as a communication platform. Drawing on Politeness Theory, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Academic Discourse, and Critical Discourse Analysis perspectives, the study argues that students' linguistic choices are shaped more strongly by institutional norms and sociocultural expectations than by technological affordances. The study contributes to the growing body of research on digital academic communication by providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian higher education context and highlighting the interaction of language, identity, authority, and technology in academic messaging practices. The findings offer insights for students, lecturers, and educational institutions seeking to promote effective and professional digital communication..*



## Introduction

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has significantly transformed interaction practices in higher education. Communication between students and lecturers, which traditionally occurred through face-to-face meetings, is now frequently conducted through digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, email, and other instant messaging applications. These technologies provide greater accessibility, flexibility, and efficiency, enabling academic communication to occur beyond temporal and spatial constraints. Consequently, digital messaging has become an integral component of academic interaction in contemporary universities.

In academic settings, communication serves not only as a means of exchanging information but also as a mechanism for maintaining professional relationships and institutional norms. The language choices employed by students when communicating with lecturers may influence how messages are interpreted and evaluated. Elements such as greetings, honorifics, lexical choices, sentence structures, and politeness strategies contribute to the effectiveness of communication and reflect students' awareness of academic expectations. Therefore, the study of language use in student–lecturer communication represents an important area of inquiry within applied linguistics and digital discourse studies.

Recent research has highlighted the increasing role of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in educational contexts. Studies have demonstrated that digital communication platforms often encourage brevity, immediacy, and informality. Nevertheless, academic communication remains governed by expectations of professionalism, clarity, and respect. As a result, students frequently need to balance the efficiency afforded by digital media with the formality required in academic environments. This tension creates a unique communicative context in which linguistic choices become particularly meaningful.

Previous studies have examined various aspects of digital academic communication, including politeness strategies, communication effectiveness, and students' perceptions of online interaction. Many scholars have reported that students tend to employ greetings, apologies, and expressions of gratitude when communicating with lecturers through digital platforms. Other studies have emphasized the role of politeness in maintaining harmonious academic relationships and minimizing potential misunderstandings. However, most existing studies focus primarily on communication outcomes or pragmatic functions rather than providing a detailed description of the linguistic patterns that characterize authentic student–lecturer short-message exchanges.

Despite the growing body of research on digital communication in education, relatively limited attention has been devoted to identifying recurring linguistic patterns in students' academic short messages. Specifically, there remains a lack of descriptive studies that systematically examine how students organize their messages linguistically through greetings, requests, apologies, lexical choices, and sentence structures within authentic

academic interactions. Understanding these patterns is important because they provide insight into students' communicative competence, their awareness of institutional norms, and the ways in which language reflects social relationships in academic settings.

This study addresses this gap by examining linguistic patterns in students' academic short-message communication with lecturers. Drawing on perspectives from Computer-Mediated Communication and linguistic politeness, the study aims to provide an empirical description of the language features that frequently occur in student–lecturer digital interactions. Unlike previous studies that focus primarily on communication effectiveness or politeness outcomes, the present study contributes to the literature by identifying recurring linguistic patterns and demonstrating how these patterns reflect academic norms, institutional roles, and communicative purposes in digital environments.

Accordingly, the research question guiding this study is: How are linguistic patterns realized in students' academic short-message communication with lecturers? The objective of the study is to describe the linguistic forms employed by students in academic communication through digital messaging and to explore how these forms reflect the characteristics of contemporary academic discourse.

### **Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)**

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) refers to communication that occurs through digital technologies and networked platforms. The development of messaging applications, social media, and online learning systems has significantly expanded the role of CMC in educational settings. According to CMC scholars, digital communication environments influence not only the speed and accessibility of interaction but also the linguistic choices made by users. Features such as a synchronicity, message permanence, and reduced physical cues shape how individuals construct messages and manage interpersonal relationships.

In higher education, CMC has become increasingly important as students and lecturers rely on digital platforms for academic consultation, assignment submission, schedule clarification, and administrative communication. Although digital messaging applications are generally associated with informal communication, academic interactions remain influenced by institutional norms and expectations. Consequently, students are often required to adapt their language to ensure that messages remain appropriate within academic contexts.

### **Politeness Theory and Academic Communication**

Politeness Theory provides an important framework for understanding language use in academic interactions. The theory suggests that speakers employ various linguistic strategies to maintain harmonious social relationships and minimize potential threats to interpersonal face. In communication between students and lecturers, differences in institutional status create a context in which politeness becomes particularly significant.

Students commonly use greetings, apologies, honorifics, and expressions of gratitude as linguistic resources to demonstrate respect and acknowledge lecturers' authority. Such strategies help reduce the perceived imposition of requests and contribute to maintaining positive academic relationships. In digital communication, where non-verbal cues are limited, linguistic markers of politeness become even more important because they help clarify the speaker's intentions and attitudes.

### **Digital Academic Discourse**

Academic discourse refers to language practices associated with educational and scholarly environments. Traditionally, academic discourse has been characterized by formality, precision, and adherence to institutional conventions. However, the emergence of digital communication technologies has created new forms of academic discourse that combine elements of formal and informal communication.

Digital academic discourse differs from traditional academic writing because it often occurs in real-time or near real-time interactions. Nevertheless, students are generally expected to maintain professional language practices when communicating with lecturers. This expectation influences the selection of vocabulary, sentence structures, and discourse organization within academic messages.

Research has shown that students frequently employ hybrid communication styles in digital academic settings. On the one hand, messaging platforms encourage concise and efficient communication. On the other hand, institutional expectations require students to demonstrate respect and professionalism. As a result, academic short messages often contain both conversational and formal linguistic features.

### **Previous Studies on Student–Lecturer Digital Communication**

Previous studies have examined various aspects of communication between students and lecturers through digital media. Several researchers have reported that students commonly begin messages with greetings and conclude them with expressions of gratitude. Other studies have identified apology strategies, indirect requests, and honorific forms as important features of digital academic communication.

Research on WhatsApp communication in higher education has demonstrated that students are generally aware of the importance of maintaining politeness when interacting with lecturers. However, differences in linguistic competence and digital communication experience often result in variation in message quality and appropriateness. Some students produce highly structured and formal messages, whereas others employ more informal language patterns.

Although previous studies have contributed valuable insights into digital academic communication, much of the existing literature focuses on communication effectiveness, politeness strategies, or students' perceptions of online interaction. Comparatively fewer studies have provided detailed descriptions of recurring linguistic patterns in authentic student–lecturer short messages. Therefore, further investigation is needed to understand

how linguistic features are realized in everyday academic communication through digital messaging platforms.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The present study is based on the assumption that linguistic patterns in academic short messages are influenced by three interrelated factors: communication context, institutional roles, and communicative goals. Communication context refers to the academic environment in which interactions occur. Institutional roles refer to the hierarchical relationship between students and lecturers. Communicative goals refer to the purposes underlying messages, such as requesting information, seeking permission, or responding to academic instructions.

These factors are expected to influence the linguistic resources selected by students, including greetings, honorifics, apologies, requests, gratitude expressions, lexical choices, and sentence structures. By examining these linguistic features, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive description of how students construct academic relationships through digital communication.

### **Method**

This study employed a qualitative design because the study aimed to describe and interpret linguistic phenomena occurring in natural communication contexts. The qualitative approach was selected because the objective of the study was to identify, classify, and describe linguistic patterns occurring in students' academic short-message communication with lecturers. According to Creswell (2024), qualitative research is appropriate when researchers seek to understand meanings, patterns, and social interactions from participants' perspectives. Similarly, Moleong (2019) argues that qualitative inquiry is particularly useful for examining language behaviour in its natural setting. Rather than testing hypotheses or measuring statistical relationships, the study focused on understanding how language is used in authentic academic interactions conducted through digital messaging platforms.

The data consisted of 120 academic short messages sent by undergraduate students to lecturers through WhatsApp during the 2025–2026 academic year. The messages were related to academic matters, including requests for permission, consultation requests, assignment inquiries, schedule clarification, and responses to lecturers' instructions.

The students were selected purposively because they had engaged in regular academic communication with lecturers through digital messaging platforms. The collected messages addressed various academic matters, including requests for consultation, assignment-related inquiries, permission requests, and responses to lecturers' instructions.

WhatsApp was selected as the data source because it is one of the most widely used communication platforms in Indonesian higher education. To ensure ethical compliance, all personal identifiers, including names, phone numbers, and institutional references, were

removed prior to analysis. The study focused exclusively on the linguistic characteristics of the messages rather than the identities of the participants.

Data were collected through documentation techniques. The researcher gathered screenshots of academic messages and converted them into textual data for analysis. Only messages that fulfilled the following criteria were included:

1. The message involved communication between a student and a lecturer.
2. The message concerned academic matters.
3. The message was written through a digital messaging application.
4. The message contained sufficient linguistic content for analysis.

Messages that were incomplete, duplicated, or unrelated to academic communication were excluded from the dataset.

The data were analysed using content analysis. According to Krippendorff (2024), content analysis enables researchers to systematically identify patterns and meanings within textual data. Likewise, Kimberly A. Neuendorf emphasizes that content analysis provides a rigorous framework for categorizing recurring linguistic features within communication data. The study employed content analysis as the primary analytical method. The analysis was conducted through the following stages:

1. Reading all collected messages repeatedly.
2. Identifying recurring linguistic features.
3. Coding linguistic features according to predetermined categories.
4. Classifying messages into linguistic pattern groups.
5. Interpreting findings within the framework of digital academic communication.

The coding process followed the principles of qualitative categorization proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), who suggest that coding serves as a systematic procedure for identifying meaningful patterns and relationships within qualitative datasets. The coding process focused on six major linguistic categories:

Table 1  
Coding Categories for Linguistic Analysis

Code	Linguistic Category	Indicators
GRT	Greetings	Assalamualaikum, Good Morning, Good Afternoon
HON	Honorifics	Sir, Madam, Lecturer
APO	Apology Expressions	I apologize, Sorry for disturbing
REQ	Requests	May I, Could I, I would like to
GRAT	Gratitude Expressions	Thank you, Thanks for your attention
COMP	Compliance Expressions	Yes, Sir; Understood, Sir
FOR	Formal Lexical Choices	Standard academic vocabulary

To enhance trustworthiness, the coding process was conducted repeatedly to ensure consistency across categories. The researcher reviewed all coded messages several times to minimize classification errors and improve analytical reliability.

## Results and Discussion

### *Results*

#### *Results Overview of Linguistic Features*

The analysis of 60 academic WhatsApp messages exchanged between four undergraduate students and their lecturers revealed several recurring linguistic patterns. Six major categories were identified, namely greetings, honorifics, apology expressions, requests, gratitude expressions, and compliance expressions. These linguistic features demonstrate how students construct academic relationships and negotiate institutional expectations through digital communication.

Although WhatsApp is generally associated with informal interaction, the findings indicate that students consistently employed formal and polite linguistic forms when communicating with lecturers. This suggests that academic norms continue to influence language use despite the informal characteristics of digital messaging platforms.

#### Finding 1: Greetings and Honorifics as Markers of Academic Respect

One of the most prominent linguistic patterns identified in the dataset is the use of greetings and honorifics at the beginning of messages. Expressions such as “Assalamualaikum,” “Good Morning,” and “Good Afternoon” frequently appeared before students communicated their primary purpose. Similarly, honorific forms such as “Sir” were consistently used throughout the messages.

Examples include:

“Assalamualaikum Sir, may I ask about tomorrow’s presentation schedule?”

“Good afternoon Sir, I would like to consult my assignment.”

The frequent use of greetings and honorifics indicates that students recognize the hierarchical nature of academic communication. Rather than immediately presenting their requests, students first establish interpersonal rapport through respectful openings. Such linguistic behavior reflects awareness of lecturers’ institutional authority and demonstrates adherence to academic communication norms.

This finding strongly supports Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory, which proposes that speakers employ linguistic strategies to preserve social harmony and acknowledge status differences. Greetings function as positive politeness strategies because they help establish a cooperative relationship between interlocutors. Likewise, the use of honorifics reflects students’ efforts to recognize lecturers’ higher institutional position.

The finding is also consistent with Haugh (2023), who argues that politeness practices remain significant in digital communication despite the reduced presence of non-verbal cues. In online interactions, greetings and honorifics often compensate for the absence of face-to-face social signals. Similarly, Locher and Graham (2022) suggest that digital communication users actively employ interpersonal strategies to maintain relational appropriateness in institutional contexts.

Furthermore, the result challenges the assumption that digital messaging platforms inevitably promote informality. Although WhatsApp encourages rapid and conversational communication, the students in this study maintained formal interactional conventions. This observation supports Herring's perspective that language use in computer-mediated communication is shaped not only by technological affordances but also by social and institutional expectations.

#### Finding 2: Apology Expressions as Face-Saving Strategies

Another recurring linguistic pattern involves the use of apology expressions. Students frequently employed phrases such as:

"I apologize for disturbing your time."

"Sorry for bothering you, Sir."

These expressions typically appeared before requests or questions and served to mitigate the imposition associated with contacting lecturers through private messaging platforms.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), requests inherently constitute face-threatening acts because they impose upon the recipient. Consequently, speakers often employ mitigation strategies to reduce potential threats to interpersonal relationships. In the present study, apology expressions function as negative politeness strategies designed to minimize intrusion and demonstrate awareness of lecturers' time and responsibilities.

The finding is further supported by Leech's Politeness Principle, which emphasizes the importance of minimizing costs and maximizing benefits for others. By apologizing before presenting requests, students symbolically acknowledge the inconvenience that their messages might cause. This linguistic behaviour reflects sensitivity toward academic hierarchy and professional boundaries.

From a digital communication perspective, the use of apologies is particularly significant because asynchronous communication may interrupt lecturers' activities at unpredictable times. As noted by Herring (2021), users of digital communication platforms often develop compensatory linguistic strategies to manage interpersonal relationships in the absence of immediate contextual feedback. The apology expressions identified in the present study appear to serve precisely this function.

The result also aligns with previous studies on student–lecturer communication, which consistently report apologies as one of the most common politeness markers in academic messaging. Therefore, the findings reinforce existing evidence that politeness remains a central component of digital academic discourse.

#### Finding 3: Request Strategies and Academic Goal Orientation

Requests constitute one of the most frequent communicative functions in the dataset. Students employed a variety of request forms, including:

"May I ask about the assignment deadline?"

"Could I submit my task tomorrow?"

“I would like to request permission to attend the consultation online.”

These examples demonstrate that students generally preferred indirect request forms rather than direct commands. The predominance of modal expressions such as “may I,” “could I,” and “would like to” indicates a strong orientation toward politeness and deference.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), indirectness serves as an important politeness strategy because it allows speakers to reduce the force of potentially imposing acts. Rather than demanding action, students frame requests as possibilities that lecturers may accept or reject. This linguistic strategy helps maintain respectful academic relationships.

The findings also support previous research on digital academic discourse, which suggests that requests represent the primary communicative purpose of student–lecturer interactions. Because students often seek information, clarification, permission, or academic guidance, requests naturally occupy a central position within academic messaging practices.

Interestingly, the students did not simply formulate requests; they often embedded them within broader politeness structures consisting of greetings, apologies, and gratitude expressions. This pattern suggests that requests are not isolated linguistic acts but components of a larger discourse strategy designed to achieve communicative goals while preserving interpersonal harmony.

#### Finding 4: Gratitude and Compliance Expressions as Indicators of Academic Professionalism

Another important pattern concerns the frequent use of gratitude expressions and compliance statements. Examples include:

“Thank you for your attention, Sir.”

“Thank you for your guidance.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Understood, Sir.”

These expressions commonly appeared at the end of messages or in response to lecturers’ instructions.

The prevalence of gratitude expressions demonstrates students’ efforts to acknowledge lecturers’ assistance and reinforce positive interpersonal relationships. According to Leech’s Politeness Principle, expressions of appreciation contribute to social harmony by emphasizing respect and recognition. In academic contexts, gratitude serves not only as a politeness marker but also as an indicator of professional communication etiquette.

Compliance expressions such as “Yes, Sir” and “Understood, Sir” reveal another dimension of academic discourse. These responses indicate students’ willingness to accept instructions and conform to academic expectations. From a sociolinguistic perspective, such expressions reflect the institutional hierarchy inherent in educational settings.

The finding resonates with Fairclough’s view that discourse both reflects and reproduces social structures. By consistently employing compliance expressions, students linguistically enact their role within the academic institution. The language used therefore

functions not merely as communication but also as a symbolic representation of institutional relationships.

#### Finding 5: Linguistic Patterns and Power Relations in Digital Academic Communication

Beyond individual linguistic features, the overall message structure reveals the influence of power relations on communication practices. Students' messages typically followed a recognizable sequence:

Greeting → Honorific → Apology (optional) → Request/Information → Gratitude → Closing.

This organizational pattern reflects students' awareness of lecturers' authority and their desire to maintain respectful relationships.

### *Discussion*

#### **Linguistic Patterns as Indicators of Academic Identity Construction**

The findings reveal that students consistently employed greetings, honorifics, apology expressions, indirect requests, gratitude expressions, and compliance statements when communicating with lecturers through WhatsApp. At a surface level, these linguistic features may simply appear to reflect politeness. However, a deeper examination suggests that they perform broader social functions related to identity construction, institutional positioning, and relationship management.

One of the most salient findings concerns the frequent use of greetings and honorifics. Expressions such as Assalamualaikum, Good Morning, and Sir appeared repeatedly across the dataset. These findings suggest that students deliberately frame their messages within a respectful interactional structure before introducing their communicative purpose.

From an identity perspective, this linguistic behaviour reflects what James Paul Gee describes as the enactment of socially recognizable identities through language. Gee argues that language does not merely communicate information but also enables individuals to perform particular social identities. In the present study, students appear to use greetings and honorifics as linguistic resources for presenting themselves as respectful, responsible, and academically competent members of the university community.

This interpretation is further supported by Ken Hyland, who emphasizes that academic communication is not solely concerned with the transmission of information but also involves the construction of professional and disciplinary identities. By employing conventional academic politeness markers, students demonstrate their awareness of the behavioral expectations associated with academic environments.

The findings therefore suggest that linguistic patterns in student–lecturer communication function not only as politeness strategies but also as identity markers through which students negotiate membership within the academic community.

### **Politeness as a Strategy for Managing Academic Relationships**

The recurring use of greetings, apologies, gratitude expressions, and indirect requests strongly supports the relevance of Politeness Theory in explaining students' communicative behaviour.

According to Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, communication frequently involves face-threatening acts, particularly when speakers make requests, seek favors, or interrupt others. Because academic messages often contain requests for information, consultation, permission, or assistance, students must employ linguistic strategies that minimize potential threats to lecturers' face.

This tendency is clearly evident in the frequent use of apology expressions such as:

"I apologize for disturbing your time."

"Sorry for bothering you, Sir."

These expressions illustrate students' awareness that contacting lecturers may impose upon their time and attention. Such findings align with Brown and Levinson's concept of negative politeness, which involves demonstrating respect for the recipient's autonomy and minimizing imposition.

Similarly, the findings support the politeness principles proposed by Geoffrey Leech. Leech argues that polite communication involves minimizing costs to others while maximizing expressions of respect and consideration. The apology expressions identified in the dataset appear to serve precisely this purpose by acknowledging the inconvenience that academic requests may create.

The prevalence of gratitude expressions further reinforces this interpretation. Statements such as "Thank you for your guidance" and "Thank you for your attention" function as relational strategies that strengthen positive interpersonal connections between students and lecturers. These findings suggest that students actively employ language to maintain harmonious academic relationships rather than simply transmitting information.

### **Digital Communication and the Persistence of Academic Formality**

One of the most significant findings of the study concerns the persistence of formal linguistic practices despite the use of WhatsApp, a platform generally associated with informal communication.

Early discussions of digital communication often suggested that online environments encourage linguistic simplification, informality, and conversational styles. However, the findings of the present study challenge such assumptions.

The consistent use of complete sentence structures, honorifics, formal vocabulary, and politeness markers indicates that students maintain a relatively high degree of linguistic formality even within technologically informal settings.

This observation supports the work of Susan C. Herring, who argues that communication practices in digital environments are shaped not only by technological affordances but also by social and contextual factors. While WhatsApp enables rapid and

casual communication, users adapt their language according to the expectations of the interactional context.

A similar argument is advanced by Naomi S. Baron, who suggests that technological platforms do not automatically determine linguistic behaviour. Instead, users frequently transfer existing social norms and communicative conventions into digital environments. The findings of the present study strongly support this perspective.

Rather than allowing technological informality to dominate communication practices, students appear to prioritize academic norms and institutional expectations. Consequently, the findings indicate that institutional context exerts a stronger influence on language use than the technological characteristics of the communication platform itself.

This finding represents an important contribution to contemporary Computer-Mediated Communication research because it demonstrates that digital academic discourse remains deeply embedded within existing social structures.

### **Indirect Requests and the Recognition of Institutional Authority**

The predominance of indirect request forms provides further evidence of the role of institutional hierarchy in shaping communication practices.

Expressions such as:

“May I ask...”

“Could I submit...”

“I would like to request...”

occurred frequently throughout the dataset.

According to Shoshana Blum-Kulka, indirectness functions as a pragmatic strategy that allows speakers to balance communicative goals with interpersonal considerations. Indirect requests reduce the force of imposition and provide recipients with greater freedom to accept or reject a request.

The findings suggest that students intentionally employ indirectness to acknowledge lecturers’ authority and maintain appropriate academic relationships. Rather than issuing direct demands, students formulate requests in ways that recognize the lecturers’ institutional position.

This observation also aligns with Hyland’s perspective on academic discourse, which emphasizes that academic communication is inherently shaped by institutional expectations and social relationships. The indirect request strategies observed in the present study demonstrate that students are not merely communicating information; they are simultaneously negotiating academic authority and interpersonal distance.

The findings therefore indicate that linguistic choices are influenced by both communicative objectives and institutional structures.

### **Compliance Expressions and the Reproduction of Power Relations**

Another noteworthy finding involves the repeated appearance of compliance expressions such as:

“Yes, Sir.”

“Understood, Sir.”

“Okay, Sir.”

At first glance, these expressions may appear to represent routine acknowledgments. However, from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, they carry broader social significance.

According to Norman Fairclough, discourse simultaneously reflects and reproduces social relationships. Language is not merely a neutral medium of communication; it also serves as a mechanism through which institutional structures are maintained and reinforced.

The repeated use of compliance expressions suggests that students recognize and accept the hierarchical relationship between themselves and lecturers. Through these linguistic practices, students position lecturers as legitimate academic authorities while simultaneously positioning themselves as learners who are expected to comply with institutional expectations.

This finding does not imply coercion or inequality. Rather, it demonstrates how institutional roles become visible through everyday linguistic choices. The language used by students reflects the broader organizational structure of higher education and contributes to its ongoing reproduction.

Consequently, academic WhatsApp communication can be understood not only as information exchange but also as a site where institutional identities and authority relationships are continuously negotiated and reaffirmed.

### **Cultural Values and Religious Identity in Academic Communication**

An additional dimension emerging from the data is the frequent use of the Islamic greeting Assalamualaikum.

Unlike many international studies of academic communication, the present findings indicate that students frequently integrate religious greetings into academic interactions. This pattern suggests that academic communication in the Indonesian context is influenced not only by institutional norms but also by cultural and religious values.

From the perspective of intercultural pragmatics, linguistic expressions are often shaped by local sociocultural traditions. The use of Assalamualaikum appears to function simultaneously as a greeting, a politeness marker, and a cultural identity signal.

This finding suggests that academic discourse should not be interpreted exclusively through universal theories of politeness. Instead, local cultural contexts must also be considered when examining communication practices. The results therefore contribute to a more culturally grounded understanding of digital academic communication in Indonesian higher education.

### **Theoretical Contribution of the Study**

The findings contribute to the literature in three important ways.

First, the study extends Politeness Theory by demonstrating how politeness strategies operate within WhatsApp-mediated academic communication.

Second, the findings contribute to Computer-Mediated Communication research by showing that institutional norms may exert a stronger influence on linguistic behavior than technological affordances.

Third, the study expands existing discussions of academic discourse by illustrating how students use language to construct academic identities, negotiate authority relationships, and maintain professional relationships within digital environments.

Overall, the findings indicate that student–lecturer communication through WhatsApp should be understood as a socially meaningful practice shaped by the interaction of politeness, identity construction, institutional hierarchy, technological mediation, and cultural values. Rather than merely exchanging information, students employ linguistic resources to navigate complex academic relationships and to position themselves as legitimate participants within the university community.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the linguistic patterns employed by undergraduate students in academic short-message communication with lecturers through WhatsApp. Based on the analysis of 60 messages collected from four undergraduate students during the 2025 academic year, the findings revealed that students consistently employed greetings, honorifics, apology expressions, indirect requests, gratitude expressions, and compliance statements as prominent linguistic features in their digital academic interactions.

The findings demonstrate that students' linguistic choices extend beyond the simple exchange of information. Rather, these linguistic practices function as mechanisms through which students negotiate academic relationships, construct professional identities, and manage institutional expectations. The frequent use of politeness markers indicates that students are highly aware of the hierarchical nature of student–lecturer communication and actively employ language to maintain respectful and socially appropriate interactions.

The study further reveals that academic communication through WhatsApp remains strongly influenced by institutional norms despite occurring within a platform commonly associated with informal communication. This finding suggests that technological affordances alone do not determine linguistic behaviour. Instead, students adapt their language according to the social, cultural, and institutional expectations of academic environments. Consequently, academic norms appear to exert a stronger influence on communication practices than the informal characteristics of the digital platform itself.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support and extend the relevance of Politeness Theory, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Academic Discourse, and Critical Discourse Analysis in explaining digital academic interaction. The study demonstrates that linguistic patterns in WhatsApp communication simultaneously reflect politeness strategies, identity construction processes, institutional authority relationships, and sociocultural values. Therefore, digital academic discourse should be understood not

merely as technology-mediated communication but as a socially situated practice shaped by the interaction of language, culture, and institutional structures.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on digital academic communication by providing empirical evidence from an Indonesian higher education context, particularly regarding the ways students utilize linguistic resources to navigate academic relationships in online environments. The findings highlight the continuing importance of politeness, professionalism, and relational work in technology-mediated academic interactions.

However, this study is not without limitations. The analysis was based on a relatively small dataset consisting of 60 messages from four students within a single institutional context. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as contextual insights rather than generalizable representations of all university students. Future research is recommended to examine larger datasets involving participants from multiple universities and disciplinary backgrounds. Further studies may also explore lecturers' communication strategies, intercultural variations in academic messaging, and the influence of emerging communication technologies on academic discourse practices.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that academic WhatsApp communication serves not only as a medium for exchanging information but also as a space where students construct academic identities, negotiate institutional authority, express sociocultural values, and maintain professional relationships. Through these linguistic practices, students actively position themselves as legitimate and responsible participants within the academic community.

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