

From Digital Interaction to Academic Literacy: Punctuation Use in EFL Academic *WhatsApp Group*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the orthographic and pragmatic landscapes of mobile-mediated academic discourse by examining how undergraduate EFL students utilize punctuation marks in institutional *WhatsApp Group* when communicating with their lecturers. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive design grounded in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, a corpus of 1,150 text messages compiled from an academic WhatsApp thread was structurally and pragmatically analyzed. The structural findings reveal that despite the pervasive trend of "punctuation dropping" in casual digital communication, students demonstrated a remarkably high adherence to standard orthography. *Full stops* (.) and *commas* (,) dominated the corpus (accounting for 45.2% and 30.0% of total usage, respectively), indicating that students consciously engage in genre-switching to fit the institutional nature of the interaction. Pragmatically, the analysis demonstrates that punctuation marks function as dynamic semiotic resources to navigate asymmetrical power dynamics and manage professional impressions. Full stops and commas serve as cognitive scaffolding devices to guarantee meaning clarity and establish an appropriate academic tone. Meanwhile, *question marks* (?) are strategically deployed as hedging devices to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs), and exclamation marks (!) are highly calibrated as positive politeness markers to amplify corporate gratitude without breaching professional decorum. Ultimately, this study reconceptualizes academic instant messaging not merely as a logistical tool, but as a supportive, low-stakes transitional space that actively fosters metalinguistic writing awareness and digital academic identity among EFL learners.

KEYWORDS

Academic Socialization, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Digital Politeness, EFL Writing, Punctuation Awareness, WhatsApp Discourse

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1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital communication technologies has significantly transformed academic interaction in higher education. Based on (Kumar & Nanda, 2022), communication that was once confined to formal classroom settings has increasingly shifted to an online platform; enabling continuous interaction beyond institutional boundaries. Among these platforms, the *WhatsApp Messenger* has emerged as one of the most widely used mobile applications for academic communication; especially in contexts where instant, low-cost, and accessible interaction is essential (Lee *et al.*, 2023). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, *WhatsApp Group* are commonly



used by lecturers and students to share information, clarify academic tasks, and negotiate meaning related to educational or academic sector (Baishya & Maheshwari, 2020).

While *WhatsApp Messenger* is often perceived as an informal communication tool, its use in academic contexts suggests a more complex linguistic function (Alazzawie, 2022). Lecturer–student interactions in *WhatsApp Group* frequently involve academic instructions, clarification of assignments, and responses to academic inquiries. These interactions require students to make linguistic choices that balance informality with the academic appropriateness (Aizawa *et al.*, 2020). As a result, *WhatsApp Group* can be viewed as a transitional space where students begin to develop awareness of academic language conventions in a less rigid environment than formal academic writing (Norwanto & Risdianto, 2022).

In the context of English language education, writing competence remains a critical yet challenging skill for EFL students. Based on (Miller & Hulcup, 2025) about academic writing, particularly at the undergraduate level, demands not only grammatical accuracy but also clarity of meaning, appropriate tone, and adherence to academic conventions. One often overlooked but essential component of writing competence is the use of punctuation properly and appropriately (Tavşanlı & Kara, 2021). The elaboration from (Raheem & Ghafar, 2024) explains, in writing as the context, punctuation plays a crucial role in structuring meaning, signaling emphasis, and maintaining coherence in written discourse. However, many EFL students struggle with punctuation usage; especially when transitioning from everyday communication to formal academic writing such as essays and undergraduate theses.

Regarding to the previous paragraph, the extensive literature suggests that EFL students' punctuation difficulties in shifting from casual digital communication to academic discourse stem from two primary factors. First, taken from (Mirzayev, 2024) first-language (L1) interference plays a significant role; syntactic and stylistic conventions in the students' native language often overlap with English rules, leading to the negative transfer of punctuation habits from informal vernacular writing into professional contexts. Second, which is derived from (Wang & Xu, 2026), there is a pervasive lack of explicit instruction regarding digital academic writing. While students are routinely trained in traditional, paper-based academic composition, they are seldom taught how to navigate the nuances of academic politeness and formal discourse markers within digital learning management systems or instant messaging platforms. Consequently, students often display a discursive ambiguity when communicating with faculty online. By identifying these underlying causes, this study frames instant messaging not merely as a source of distraction, but as a crucial transitional space where students can consciously negotiate these linguistic interferences and bridge the gap between casual expression and formal academic literacy.

Previous studies in applied linguistics have explored punctuation primarily within formal written texts, including essays, academic papers, and examination scripts. Less attention has been given to punctuation use in digital academic communication, particularly in mobile-mediated platforms such as *WhatsApp Messenger*. For instance (Nejad *et al.*, 2021) describes that, the existing research on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) has largely focused on discourse features, identity construction, and interactional patterns; often emphasizing informality, emoticons, or code-switching. Consequently, the pedagogical potential of digital academic interaction as a space for developing early academic writing awareness remains underexplored.

In EFL higher education contexts, *WhatsApp Group* between lecturers and students offer a unique opportunity to observe learners negotiating academic meaning through written interaction in real time. Although the language used in the group platform may not fully conform to formal academic standards, students' choices in punctuation use are able to reveal emerging awareness of clarity, politeness, and academic tone (Cronje & Izak, 2022). Massively, (Apuhin *et al.*, 2023) points that, the frequent use of punctuation marks such as *full stops*, *commas*, and *question marks* may indicate attempts to structure messages more carefully, signal respect toward lecturers, and avoid ambiguity in academic communication.

Understanding how punctuation is used in academic *WhatsApp Group* is, therefore, relevant to applied linguistics and English education. Rather than viewing *WhatsApp Messenger* in communication as merely informal or non-academic, this study positions it as a pedagogical space for academic socialization. Academic socialization refers to the process through which students gradually acquire the linguistic and communicative practices valued in academic communities (Kurniawati *et al.*, 2025). In digital environments, this process may begin with simple written interactions that encourage students to reflect on how meaning, tone, and politeness are conveyed through language.

This study aims to explore the use of punctuation in lecturer–student *WhatsApp Group* interactions within an EFL context. Specifically, it examines the types of punctuation marks most frequently used by students and analyzes their functions in relation to meaning clarity, academic tone, and politeness. By adopting a qualitative descriptive case study approach, this research seeks to move beyond mere frequency counts and provide an interpretive understanding of how punctuation functions as part of students' developing writing awareness.

"Within digital academic interactions, the strategic placement or the omission of punctuation directly shapes textual dynamics. For instance, the systematic use of standard punctuation establishes meaning clarity by preventing syntactic ambiguity in asynchronous threads (Bekturova *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, (Kaya & Yağız, 2023) explain that the adherence to prescriptive punctuation conventions projects a formal, professional persona, thereby establishing an appropriate academic tone. Conversely, a lack of punctuation or the misapplication of informal markers (such as multiple exclamation points) can alter the perceived text velocity and volume, potentially undermining academic politeness and face-saving strategies between students and faculty (Bowden & Moore, 2025). Therefore, understanding punctuation as a pragmatic tool for managing tone and decorum is essential for assessing students' digital literacy.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to applied linguistics by highlighting the role of digital academic interaction in early writing development. Pedagogically, the study offers insights for EFL lecturers on how *WhatsApp Group* can be intentionally used as a supportive space for teaching writing fundamentals, particularly punctuation awareness, before students engage in more formal academic writing tasks. Ultimately, this research argues that *WhatsApp Group* should not be dismissed as informal communication channels but recognized as meaningful environments for developing academic literacy in English education. Based on these multifaceted dynamics, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of punctuation marks are most frequently used by students in a lecturer–student academic *WhatsApp Group*?
2. How do these punctuation marks function in terms of meaning clarity, academic tone, and politeness in digital academic interaction?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design framed within a single-case study methodology (Sonday *et al.*, 2020). The selection of a qualitative framework was necessitated by the study's objective to elicit a nuanced and granular understanding of punctuation usage within authentic digital academic discourse, moving beyond mere frequency counts to explore contextual meanings (Lim, 2024). Unlike quantitative paradigms that prioritize statistical generalizability, this qualitative inquiry prioritizes interpretive depth and ecological validity, capturing the subtleties of linguistic choices in situ. Furthermore, the case study approach facilitated a focused investigation of a specific academic *WhatsApp Group*, conceptualized as a 'bounded system'. This approach allowed for an intensive, multi-dimensional exploration of punctuation practices within the unique socio-educational environment of an English education program. By treating this digital space as a bounded entity, the

researcher was able to scrutinize the interplay between institutional norms and individual agency, thereby providing a comprehensive account of how digital orthography is negotiated in a high-stakes academic setting.

2.2. Research Context

The research was situated within an undergraduate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at a prominent higher education institution in Indonesia. This specific sociocultural setting provides a rich backdrop for investigating linguistic etiquette, given the high-power distance typically observed in Indonesian academic hierarchies. The focal point of the inquiry was a *WhatsApp Group* officially designated as a primary communication conduit between a lecturer and students enrolled in a core writing-intensive course. Far from being a mere informal chat space, the group functioned as a synchronous and asynchronous extension of the physical classroom, effectively blurring the boundaries between formal instructional spaces and mobile-mediated interaction. It served as a multifaceted pedagogical tool, facilitating critical academic functions such as official administrative announcements, the clarification of complex assignment rubrics, and the negotiation of student inquiries regarding course-related activities. By examining this *digital hallway*, the study captures the real-time evolution of academic discourse as it transitions from traditional face-to-face modalities to persistent digital environments.

2.3. Participants and Data Source

The participants of this study consisted of ten undergraduate EFL students at a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia, who were actively enrolled in an academic course. The primary data source for this research was a naturalistic linguistic corpus derived from the written interactions within the students' official academic *WhatsApp Group*, which included the lecturer. Data collection spanned a specific timeframe of three months, precisely from January to March 2026. The final size of the compiled linguistic corpus comprised a total approximately of 1,150 spontaneously written chat messages. This corpus excluded media files, links, and emojis, focusing exclusively on textual data to ensure a rigorous and manageable qualitative analysis of punctuation practices in digital academic communication.

2.4. Data Collection

Data collection was executed through a systematic process of archiving and digital documentation of *WhatsApp Messenger* exchanges within the designated academic group. To ensure a robust and representative dataset, a purposive sampling of messages was conducted over the specified observation period. The selection was governed by stringent inclusion criteria, focusing exclusively on communicative acts that constituted formal academic discourse, such as pedagogical inquiries, scholarly responses, requests for clarification, and instructional statements. Conversely, a systematic exclusion protocol was applied to non-academic tangential conversations and system-generated notifications (*e.g.*, for *contact added* or *media omitted*) to preserve the analytical purity of the data. Adhering to the ethical mandates of digital ethnography, several precautionary measures were implemented to ensure participant protection. All data underwent a rigorous anonymization process, wherein pseudonyms replaced real names and any identifying metadata were excised. Furthermore, informed consent was secured, and participants were assured that the data corpus would be utilized strictly for scholarly inquiry, ensuring full compliance with institutional ethical standards for human-subject research.

2.5. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis (Lochmiller, 2021). The analysis followed several systematic steps. First, all collected chat messages were read repeatedly to gain an overall understanding of the interactional context. Second, instances of punctuation marks used by students were identified and categorized based on their types, such as full stops, commas, question marks, and exclamation marks. Third, the identified punctuation marks were analyzed in terms of their functions within the interaction, focusing on three main aspects: clarity of meaning, academic tone, and academic politeness. Rather than merely counting frequency, the analysis examined how punctuation contributed to message interpretation and communicative intent in digital academic discourse. Finally, the findings were interpreted pedagogically by relating students' punctuation practices to their emerging writing awareness and academic literacy development in an EFL context. This interpretive process allowed the study to move beyond surface-level description and highlight the educational implications of punctuation use in academic *WhatsApp Group*.

2.6. Trustworthiness of the Study

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher employed prolonged engagement with the data and careful documentation of the analytical process. Clear descriptions of the research context, participants, and data analysis procedures were provided to allow transparency and enable readers to evaluate the credibility of the findings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the qualitative analysis of the 1,150 compiled *WhatsApp* text messages. To ensure maximum structural clarity and direct alignment with the study's objectives, the results are organized systematically according to the two guiding research questions. Section 3.1 delineates the specific types and frequencies of punctuation marks employed by the undergraduate EFL students (addressing RQ1). Subsequently, Section 3.2 unpacks the pragmatic functions of these punctuation marks in terms of shaping meaning clarity, establishing an academic tone, and maintaining politeness in lecturer–student digital discourse (addressing RQ2). Meanwhile, deeper analytical interpretations regarding students' writing awareness have been relocated to the Discussion section to maintain a rigorous presentation of raw textual evidence here.

A. Types of Punctuation Marks Used by Students

The findings reveal that several types of punctuation marks were utilized by the undergraduate EFL students within the academic *WhatsApp Group*. The most frequently used punctuation marks were *full stops* (.), *commas* (,), and *question marks* (?), while exclamation marks (!) appeared less frequently. Full stops were commonly used to end declarative statements, particularly when students responded to the lecturer's instructions or provided academic information in a direct and concise manner. This usage indicates the students' baseline awareness of structural sentence boundaries in written communication. Commas were mainly used in short explanations or to separate clauses within a single message, suggesting an ability to organize structural elements within digital texts. Question marks were predominantly deployed in clarification requests and academic inquiries addressed to the lecturer, reflecting the students' interactional engagement. Meanwhile, exclamation marks were used sparingly, appearing almost exclusively in messages expressing formal appreciation or structural emphasis, which underscores the students' selective deployment of these markers in an academic environment. Overall, the findings suggest that students

relied primarily on these four basic punctuation marks to structure their written messages, demonstrating foundational punctuation awareness in digital academic communication.

Table 1. Frequency and Distribution of Punctuation Marks in the Student *WhatsApp* Corpus

No.	Punctuation Marks	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)	Primary Syntactic/Interactional Distribution
1.	Full Stop (.)	520	45.2%	Ending declarative statements, acknowledgments, and task confirmations.
2.	Comma (,)	345	30.0%	Separating clauses, listing academic points, and managing text pacing.
3.	Question Mark (?)	210	18.3%	Marking direct academic inquiries, guidance requests, and clarifications.
4.	Exclamation Mark (!)	75	6.5%	Expressing formal gratitude, appreciation, and structural emphasis.
Total		1.150	100%	

B. Pragmatic Functions of Punctuation Marks in Digital Discourse

The data show that punctuation use was not random but patterned according to This section addresses the second research question by unpacking the pragmatic functions of punctuation marks utilized by undergraduate EFL students in their digital interactions with the lecturer. Based on a qualitative analysis of the corpus, three primary pragmatic functions emerged: (1) maintaining meaning clarity, (2) establishing an academic and professional tone, and (3) enacting digital politeness.

1. Maintaining Meaning Clarity and Message Boundary

In the digital communication, where non-verbal cues are absent, students utilized punctuation as a critical tool to prevent ambiguity and ensure that their messages were decoded accurately by the lecturer. Full stops and commas were not merely syntactic markers, but pragmatic devices used to chunk information into digestible semantic units. For instance, consider the following excerpt:

Student 4: *"Good afternoon, Sir. I have sent the group assignment file via email, but the attachment size is quite large. Should we also upload it to the campus portal?"* [D14/S4/C1].

In the of excerpt [D14/S4/C1], the strategic placement of commas and full stops allows the student to separate the greeting, the status report, and the immediate academic inquiry. The

punctuation marks function as structural anchors that guarantee meaning clarity, ensuring the lecturer can comprehend the problem and the question without cognitive strain.

2. Establishing a Professional and Academic Tone

Unlike casual peer-to-peer instant messaging where punctuation is often dropped, the students demonstrated a strong awareness of audience by deploying punctuation to project a formal persona. The systematic use of full stops at the end of short confirmations serves to signal seriousness and respect. An example of this professional positioning is observed below:

Student 7: "*Understood, Sir. We will gather the revision notes and present the progress next week.*" [D32/S7/C3]

The compliance with standard punctuation in [D32/S7/C3] signals that the student recognizes the asymmetrical power dynamic between lecturer and student. By avoiding punctuation dropping (*e.g.*, leaving sentences completely open without a final period), the student successfully establishes an appropriate academic tone within a mobile instant-messaging environment.

3. Enacting Digital Politeness and Softening Directives

The pragmatic analysis revealed that question marks and exclamation marks were frequently deployed to mitigate the directness of requests and express corporate gratitude, acting as digital politeness markers. Question marks softened potential *Face-Threatening Acts* (FTAs) when students requested extensions or clarifications, while exclamation marks were used strictly to amplify politeness rather than expressing anger. This is exemplified in the following data:

Student 2: "*Excuse me, Sir. Is it possible to consult about our project topic after the class tomorrow?*" [D08/S2/C2]

Student 9: "*Thank you very much for the feedback, Sir! We will revise it immediately.*" [D45/S9/C5]

In the excerpt of [D08/S2/C2], the question mark functions as a hedging device that transforms a direct request into a polite, indirect question, thereby protecting the lecturer's negative face. Meanwhile, in other excerpt of [D45/S9/C5], the exclamation mark pragmatically serves as an indicator of enthusiasm and sincere gratitude, preventing the message from sounding flat or indifferent.

To conclude, the pragmatic distribution of these marks underscores that punctuation in student-lecturer *WhatsApp* discourse goes far beyond mechanical correctness; it is actively negotiated to manage relationships, clarity, and institutional professional standards

3.2. Discussion

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that punctuation marks in digital academic discourse are not merely mechanical tools for syntactic correctness, but active pragmatic resources used by EFL students to navigate interpersonal relations. While the

baseline data in the previous section outlined the specific types and pragmatic functions of these markers, this section offers a broader, theoretical interpretation of these results. Specifically, it contextualizes the findings within the frameworks of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), digital literacy practices, and linguistic politeness theories, while exploring how the mobile-mediated environment shapes students' metalinguistic awareness and professional socialization.

A. Punctuation as a Tool for Meaning Clarity and Academic Tone

The findings corroborate the assertions of (Bahari, 2025), suggesting that punctuation serves as a fundamental pillar for semantic density and clarity within digital academic interactions. The strategic deployment of full stops and commas functions as a cognitive scaffolding mechanism, allowing undergraduate EFL students to segment complex ideas into digestible textual units and significantly mitigate lexical ambiguity. This precision is paramount in an academic milieu, where the stakes of miscommunication extend beyond social friction to potentially jeopardizing pedagogical task comprehension and academic performance. Furthermore, the deliberate retention of these final punctuation marks contrasts sharply with casual, peer-to-peer digital communication where punctuation dropping is ubiquitous. In this synchronous environment, the adherence to sentence boundaries serves as a vital semiotic resource to establish an appropriate academic tone. These observations align with broader tenets of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), which posit that orthographic and typographic features in digital discourse are not merely mechanical constraints but are context-dependent semiotic resources used to negotiate social distance and institutional identity (Martinez-Buffa & Safont, 2021). Consequently, the meticulous use of basic punctuation in this context is reconceptualized not as a passive habit, but as an active tool for professional impression management in an increasingly digitized scholarly environment.

B. Punctuation and Academic Politeness in EFL Contexts

Within the hierarchical structure of higher education, interactions between students and lecturers are fundamentally shaped by asymmetrical power dynamics. The findings of this study demonstrate that the functional use of question marks within the student *WhatsApp* corpus transcends simple inquiry; it acts as a crucial pragmatic hedging device that enables students to navigate this inherent academic hierarchy. By framing requests and clarifications as interrogatives rather than imperatives, students actively perform deference and linguistic humility when addressing lecturers. This typographic cushioning serves as a negative politeness strategy designed to mitigate the indirect force of their communicative acts, thereby protecting the lecturer's professional face and ensuring compliance without institutional friction. In tandem with this interrogative hedging, the sparse deployment of exclamation marks within these interactions suggests that students exercised significant linguistic caution, deliberately modulating their emotional expression during academic *WhatsApp Group* exchanges. This restraint is not merely a stylistic preference but can be interpreted as a strategic endeavor to uphold academic politeness and professional decorum. Excessive emotionality—conveyed through redundant punctuation—runs the risk of being perceived as overly informal, textually aggressive, or pragmatically inappropriate (Triyono *et al.*, 2025). By consciously limiting such markers to brief, formal expressions of gratitude, students effectively regulated their digital paralanguage to align with established academic norms, thereby softening potential face-threatening acts. In this context, punctuation transcends its role as a mechanical orthographic feature, functioning instead as a sophisticated pragmatic resource for navigating interpersonal power dynamics in digital academic spaces. Furthermore, this selective and highly calibrated use of punctuation underscores a heightened sensitivity to the socio-pragmatic expectations inherent in lecturer–student communication. Such findings reinforce the contention that digital academic discourse is a site of socially informed linguistic negotiation, challenging the misconception that

instant messaging is inherently casual or spontaneous. Instead, it reveals a deliberate performance of digital academic identity, where typographic choices are carefully managed to maintain appropriate social distance and mutual respect.

C. *WhatsApp* Group as a Space for Academic Socialization and Writing Development

From an applied linguistics perspective, the findings demonstrate that academic *WhatsApp* Groups can serve as meaningful spaces for academic socialization in higher education contexts. Through repeated written interactions with lecturers, students gradually engage with institutional communication norms, including the appropriate use of punctuation to convey meaning clearly and politely. This finding supports the argument proposed by (Tremblay-Wragg *et al.*, 2021) that writing development in EFL contexts does not occur exclusively through formal writing tasks, such as essays or examinations. Instead, early stages of academic literacy development can emerge through routine written interaction in digital academic environments. In this sense, *WhatsApp* Groups function as transitional spaces where students begin to practice academic writing conventions in a low-stakes and supportive setting. Such digital environments allow students to experiment with written academic language without the pressure typically associated with formal assessment, thereby facilitating a gradual internalization of register awareness. This developmental process directly reflects a heightened state of students' metalinguistic writing awareness within mobile-mediated communication. Rather than treating instant messaging as a space for shorthand texting, students' meticulous calibration of punctuation marks proves that they actively monitor their orthographic choices. They recognize that digital typography carries social consequences. Consequently, this micro-level rhetorical vigilance in daily chat groups acts as a functional precursor to macro-level academic writing proficiency, highlighting how digital socialization actively shapes contemporary EFL writing practices.

D. Pedagogical Implications

The empirical insights gained from this study highlight the significant pedagogical potential of leveraging academic *WhatsApp* Groups to teach critical dimensions of digital literacy, particularly punctuation and register awareness in online scholarly contexts. Within the framework of contemporary EFL instruction, writing pedagogy must extend beyond traditional essay structures to encompass the pragmatics of digital professional communication. Through regular interaction in institutional chat groups, lecturers can intentionally model appropriate written communication by meticulously demonstrating correct punctuation usage in their daily instructions, clarifications, and feedback. This constant exposure allows students to implicitly observe how typographic choices directly influence meaning clarity, academic tone, and interpersonal politeness in written discourse. Consequently, integrating structured digital academic interaction into writing curricula can effectively bridge the existing gap between students' informal vernacular texting habits and formal academic writing expectations. This approach yields profound benefits for EFL learners preparing for advanced academic genres—such as research reports, proposals, and undergraduate theses—where precision, structural organization, and professional stance are paramount. Rather than dismissing instant messaging as a pedagogical distraction, educators should re-conceptualize platform-mediated communication as a supportive, low-stakes preparatory space. By fostering early rhetorical vigilance and metalinguistic awareness through daily digital socialization, educators can better equip students to navigate the complex sociocultural and typographic demands of both digital and conventional academic writing (Al-Khresheh, 2024).

4. Conclusion

This study investigated the typographic and pragmatic landscapes of digital academic discourse by examining how undergraduate EFL students utilize punctuation marks in institutional *WhatsApp* Group communication with their lecturers. The structural analysis (RQ1) reveals that despite the

pervasive trend of punctuation dropping in contemporary mobile communication, students display a remarkably high adherence to standard orthography, with full stops and commas dominating the corpus. This behavioral pattern demonstrates that students do not conceptualize academic instant messaging as a purely casual, speech-like space. Instead, they actively engage in genre-switching to fit the institutional nature of the interaction.

Pragmatically (RQ2), punctuation marks in student-lecturer digital interactions transcend their traditional grammatical constraints, functioning as dynamic semiotic resources to manage professional relationships. Full stops and commas serve as cognitive scaffolding devices to guarantee meaning clarity and project a formal academic tone. Meanwhile, question marks and exclamation marks are systematically deployed as socio-pragmatic cushions. Question marks act as strategic hedging tools to mitigate face-threatening acts within the asymmetrical power dynamics of higher education, while exclamation marks are highly calibrated to enact positive politeness and amplify corporate gratitude without breaching professional decorum.

Ultimately, this research reconceptualizes the academic *WhatsApp Group* not merely as a convenient logistical tool, but as a transitional pedagogical space. It is a digital environment where routine interaction actively fosters metalinguistic writing awareness and shapes the development of contemporary digital academic identity among EFL learners.

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