INTERNATIONAL PREMIER JOURNAL OF LANGUAGES & LITERATURE (IPJLL)
VOLUME 3, ISSUE 2, 2025 p-ISSN: 3007-2336 e-ISSN: 3007-2344

FROM PROMPT TO POLITE: THE EFFICACY OF GENERATIVE AI IN FOSTERING DIGITAL PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE FOR ENGLISH REQUESTS AMONG PAKISTANI UNDERGRADUATES

Aftab Hussain sunswabi@gmail.com	PhD Scholar, Department of English and Applied Linguistics, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Dr. Ubaid Ullah Ubaid ubaidwahid@gmail.com	Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Wah, Wah Cantt, Punjab, Pakistan.
Zakir Ali uoszakirali@gmail.com	MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Northern University Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Abstract

Pragmatic competence is crucial for digital communication, yet many Pakistani ESL undergraduates exhibit pragmatic failure in making requests due to traditional pedagogy. This paper investigates the efficacy of a generative AI (GenAI) intervention designed to foster this competence. A mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design was employed. Quantitative data from a pre and post-test Discourse Completion Task (DCT) were analyzed using paired and independent samples t-tests to measure changes in request strategies between an experimental and control group. Qualitative data from a questionnaire with open-ended and Likert-scale items captured learner perceptions. Results show the AI intervention led to a statistically significant improvement in the ability of the experimental group to modulate directness and use politeness markers. Thematic analysis revealed the AI tool, framed within a plurilingual pedagogy, enhanced confidence, reduced anxiety, and fostered critical metapragmatic awareness. This research offers a model for modernizing English curricula, demonstrating how technology can be used for critical linguistic inquiry and learner empowerment.

Keywords: *CALL, Digital Pragmatics, ESL Learners, Generative AI, Plurilingualism, Pragmatic Competence, TESOL.*

Corresponding Author: Aftab Hussain (PhD Scholar, Department of English and Applied Linguistics, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan).
Email: sunswabi@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The field of language education has long been intertwined with technological innovation. This relationship is formally studied under the umbrella of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), defined as "the exploration and study of computer applications in language teaching and learning" (Levy, 1997, p. 1). The history of CALL reflects a broader pedagogical evolution, transitioning from early behavioristic drill-and-practice programs of the 1960s and 1970s to more sophisticated, integrative, and communicative approaches facilitated by the advent of personal computers, multimedia, and the internet (Warschauer & Healey, 1998; Bax, 2003). This evolution has consistently aimed to create more interactive, individualized, and authentic learning experiences for students (Levy, 1997; Warschauer & Healey, 1998).

The recent emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), particularly large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, represents a paradigm shift within CALL, a development some have positioned as a 'game-changer' (Van Dis et al., 2023). These systems, educated on large datasets, are able to produce text that appears human-like, simulate conversation, provide personalized feedback, and generate individualized learning materials which provide unparalleled opportunities for language practice (Kohnke et al., 2023; Warschauer et al., 2023; Kahlifa & Albadawy, 2024). The capabilities of these systems arrive at a time when the communication of people globally is becoming ever more digital, a transition that has made visible the new research area of 'digital pragmatics.' This sub-discipline of linguistics examines how language is used to meet communicative goals in online contexts (Scott, 2022; Hoffmann & Bublitz, 2017). Given a world in which a significant portion of professional and social exchanges occur through text-based media, the ability to navigate these interactions appropriately, in other words, to be pragmatically competent online, is not just a peripheral skill but an essential aspect of communicative competence.

1.1.The Pakistani Context: Pragmatic Challenges in Higher Education

In the global context of English Language Teaching, Pakistan demonstrates a unique and noteworthy situation. English occupies a paradoxical place within the

educational system of the country. It serves as an official language, the medium of instruction in the majority of universities, and a significant gatekeeper for higher study, professional opportunities, and social mobility (Leghari, 2023; HEC, 2010). Despite this institutional position, the pedagogical context of English Language Teaching (ELT) pedagogies are misaligned with communicative demands in the 21st century (Leghari, 2023).

The ELT system in Pakistan, particularly within public sector institutions, continues to be affected by reversion to form-focused teaching methods, namely the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) (Leghari, 2023). This method emphasizes the explicit teaching of grammar rules, the memorization of vocabulary, and also translation, while failing to address functional and communicative aspects of language learning (Leghari, 2023; Dar & Khan, 2015). As a result, university students have been shown to have a well-documented persistent deficit in pragmatic competence. Many studies have established that in Pakistan, learners often possess a significant range of linguistic knowledge after over a decade of formal study, but they are unable to produce or comprehend meanings as intended in real communicative contexts (Ali & Ashraf, 2021; Khan, 2019). This leads to the notion of 'pragmatic failure,' where a grammatically well-formed utterance is nonetheless socially or culturally inappropriate (Thomas, 1983; Ali & Ashraf, 2021). Pragmatic failure happens not simply by virtue of having a linguistic deficit, but due to the systemic lack of exposure to sociocultural norms and conventions which govern language use in context (Ali & Ashraf, 2021). The implications of pragmatic failure are exacerbated in digital communication contexts where the absence of non-verbal communication elements such as vocal tones, or facial expressions, place a greater requirement upon linguistic choice to express politeness, respect, and intention (Scott, 2022). An ill formed request within digital communication can be simply labeled as rude or demanding, with serious consequences in an academic or professional landscape.

1.2.Problem Statement

Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners, educated within a system that prioritizes grammatical accuracy over communicative function, lack the digital pragmatic competence required for effective and appropriate online interactions, particularly in performing face-threatening speech acts like requests. While generative AI offers a potential avenue for scalable, interactive pragmatic practice, its efficacy within this specific sociocultural and pedagogical context remains uninvestigated.

1.3.Research Objectives

i. To evaluate the efficacy of a structured generative AI intervention in improving the pragmatic appropriateness of English request-making among Pakistani undergraduates.
ii. To investigate Pakistani undergraduate learners' perceptions of using generative AI as a pedagogical tool for developing pragmatic competence.

1.4.Research Questions

i. To what extent does a structured intervention using generative AI improve the pragmatic appropriateness of English request-making strategies among Pakistani undergraduates?
ii. What are Pakistani undergraduate learners' perceptions regarding the use of generative AI as a tool for developing their pragmatic competence?

1.5.Significance and Scope of the Study

This research is significant as it operates at the critical intersection of pragmatics, CALL, and the specific challenges of the Pakistani ELT context. It addresses a persistent pedagogical problem by proposing a technologically innovative solution that is both scalable and accessible. The study contributes to the nascent but rapidly growing body of literature on the use of GenAI for developing higher-order language skills, moving beyond simple vocabulary or grammar drills. The findings have direct implications for curriculum design, instructional practices, and teacher training within Pakistan and other ESL contexts facing similar challenges. Furthermore, this research engages with the decolonizing turn in TESOL by exploring how technology can be harnessed to empower learners and validate their linguistic identities, rather than merely reinforcing the hegemony of a standardized, monolingual English (Suraweera, 2022; Phyak et al., 2023; Galante & dela Cruz, 2024).

The scope of this study is intentionally focused. It centers on undergraduate ESL learners within the Pakistani higher education system. The pragmatic investigation is delimited to the speech act of *requesting*, performed in a digital, text-based format. The intervention employs a widely available generative AI chatbot. The primary outcome measure is the development of pragmatic competence in this specific skill, not overall language proficiency.

2. Literature Review

This study is grounded in a theoretical framework that views language learning as a socially mediated and holistic process, drawing on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the principles of plurilingualism.

2.1.1 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT)

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory posits that learning is fundamentally a social process, not an isolated cognitive journey. Higher mental functions, including complex language use, originate in social interaction and are mediated by cultural tools, with language being the most critical of these tools (Vygotsky, 1978; Eun & Lim, 2009). Central to SCT is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), defined as the conceptual space between what a learner can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guidance and support (Vygotsky, 1978; Heritage et al., 2017). Learning is most effective when it occurs within this zone. This guidance is provided by a 'More Knowledgeable Other' (MKO), a teacher, a peer, or, in the context of this study, a technological tool, that provides the necessary support, or 'scaffolding,' for the learner to progress (Vygotsky, 1978). A well-designed generative AI chatbot, capable of providing examples, offering corrections, and simulating interaction, can be conceptualized as a digital MKO. It can create a personalized ZPD for each learner, offering scaffolded practice in pragmatic skills that might be too complex for them to master unaided. However, this conceptualization is not without its complexities. A human MKO possesses authentic sociocultural understanding and can adapt their scaffolding based on empathy and shared context. An AI MKO, in contrast, is a statistical model that simulates understanding based on patterns in its training data (Vaswani et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2020). It can effectively model *pragmalinguistic forms* (the linguistic structures used to perform an action) but may struggle to authentically explain the underlying *sociopragmatic reasoning* (the social and cultural norms governing those choices). This distinction necessitates a pedagogical approach where the human teacher guides learners in critically evaluating the AI's output, transforming the interaction into a reflective learning experience.

2.1.2 Plurilingualism and Pluricultural Competence (PPC)

The second pillar of the theoretical framework is plurilingualism. Distinct from multilingualism, which describes the coexistence of multiple languages in a society, plurilingualism refers to an individual's unique, dynamic, and holistic linguistic repertoire,

which encompasses all the languages and language varieties they know to varying degrees of proficiency (Council of Europe, 2020; Piccardo, 2016; Coste et al., 2009). This perspective, advanced by the Council of Europe, rejects the notion that languages are stored in separate mental compartments and instead views them as an interconnected system (Council of Europe, 2020; Coste et al., 2009).

This notion gives rise to Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence (PPC), the ability to utilize this entire repertoire to engage in communication and intercultural contexts (Coste et al., 2009). The main pedagogical realization of plurilingualism is translanguaging, which refers to the thinking and intentional use of a learner's entire language repertoire as a resource for learning and making meaning (García, 2009; Otheguy et al., 2015; Vogel & Garcia, 2017). It directly confronts the monolingual ideologies and English-only policies that many TESOL programs have relied on, often to the learners' detriment, in terms of confidence and identity (Piccardo, 2013; Suraweera, 2022). Likewise, plurilingual pedagogy fits well with a decolonizing agenda by positioning the learners' native languages and backgrounds as an asset rather than a barrier to be eliminated (Suraweera, 2022). This framework also gives a strong lens to consider using GenAI. Rather than using the AI to do drills of 'correct' English forms, plurilingualism encourages learners to utilize their first language (L1), if they have one, to analyze, critique, and mediate the AI suggestions. This process of cross-linguistic comparison can foster deeper metalinguistic and metapragmatic awareness, transforming the AI from a simple tutor into a tool for critical cultural and linguistic investigation.

2.2 Digital Pragmatics: Navigating the Speech Act of Requesting

To investigate request-making competence, this study draws on two foundational theories in pragmatics: Speech Act Theory and Politeness Theory.

2.2.1 Speech Act Theory (Austin & Searle)

Developed by philosophers J.L. Austin and John Searle, Speech Act Theory posits that in uttering words, we are also performing actions (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). An utterance operates on three levels: the locutionary act (the literal meaning of the words), the illocutionary act (the speaker's intention in uttering the words, e.g., to promise, warn, or request), and the perlocutionary act (the effect the utterance has on the hearer) (Austin, 1962). This study focuses on the illocutionary act of *requesting*, which Searle (1976) classifies as a 'directive', an attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to perform an action. Request strategies exist on a continuum of directness, ranging from highly direct forms

like imperatives ("Give me your pen") to conventionally indirect forms ("Could you lend me your car?") and non-conventionally indirect hints ("My car has broken down") (Trosberg, 1995; Houck, 1992). The selection of strategy is a significant factor in pragmatic appropriateness, and is greatly influenced by the socio-cultural context.

2.2.2 Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson

The framework provided by Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory provides a compelling rationale for why speakers would select one strategy over another. The theory begins with the concept of 'face', which is defined as the speaker's public self-image. Face has two facets: positive face (the wish to be liked, approved of, and included), and negative face (the desire for freewill and not feeling imposed on) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Many speech acts, specifically requests, are inherently Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) since they demonstrate a threat to the interlocutor's negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

To mitigate this threat, speakers employ politeness strategies (e.g., indirectness, hedging, apologies). The choice of strategy is determined by the speaker's assessment of the social context, based on three key variables: the relative Power (P) of the hearer over the speaker, the Social Distance (D) between them, and the culturally determined Rank of Imposition (R) of the request (Brown & Levinson, 1987). For example, a request with a high R-value (e.g., asking to borrow a large sum of money) made to a person with high P-value (e.g., a boss) will require significantly more elaborate politeness strategies than a low-R request to a person with low D-value (e.g., asking a close friend for the time). These P, D, and R variables provide the analytical framework for designing the data collection instrument in this study.

2.3 The Role of Generative AI in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

The integration of GenAI into language education is a recent but rapidly expanding area of research.

2.3.1. Affordances of Generative AI for Language Learning

Within the literature, many advantages exist to the use of GenAI tools such as chatbots (Moorhouse & Wong, 2025). They can give learners feedback that is personalized and immediate, which is often absent in larger classroom with a teacher front and center (Jeon, 2021; Lin & Mubarok, 2021). As conversational partners that are nonjudgmental, these tools can lower affective filters, which may reduce the anxiety associated with

practicing language, and therefore lead to increased motivation and engagement (Kohnke, 2022; Ayedoun et al., 2019). Moreover, GenAI can present a wide variety of communicative contexts, using everyday language in each, and contributing to the exposure of language in information exchanges (Kohnke et al., 2022; Kwon et al., 2023). Research on perceptions of learners indicate students view these tools as positive, and value them as effective learning partners who can contribute to learner autonomy (Jeon, 2021; Aliakbari & Mardani, 2022).

2.3.2 Challenges and Limitations of Generative AI

While GenAI has the potential to transform education, the application of this technology is not without its drawbacks. A significant point of concern is the propensity of the technology to provide inaccurate, biased or nonsensical information, what has been termed 'hallucinations' (Verga et al., 2024). The training data that feeds most of the major LLMs are heavily weighted toward western countries and English-speaking sources, making it possible that the output reflects cultural and linguistic bias (Smith, 2020). This raises ethical issues alongside questions of academic integrity and plagiarism and concerns regarding the risk of over-reliance which could impede learners' development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities (Al-khresheh, 2024; Haung & Li, 2023).

Most critical for this study, AI systems demonstrates significant limitations in terms of pragmatic processing. LLMs can perform reasonably well with explicit, formulaic speech acts, but struggle to interpret or generate language characterized by implicit meaning, ambiguity, irony, or layers of cultural nuance (Hohenstein et al., 2023; Pinhanez, 2020). The pragmatic limitation highlights the importance of scaffolded pedagogy; however, using AI as a means of learning and practice and not as an unquestioned authority on appropriate language use is vital.

2.4 Synthesis and Identification of the Research Gap

There is a strong evidence in the literature that undergraduate learners in Pakistan demonstrate a significant need for explicit instruction in pragmatics, which is generally neglected or poorly addressed in the current education system (Ali & Ashraf, 2021; Khan, 2019). Generative AI presents a technologically advanced and scalable tool that could potentially fill this gap by providing interactive practice (Kwon et al., 2023). However, the inherent limitations of AI, particularly its pragmatic shortcomings and potential for cultural bias, mean that its application cannot be a simple matter of unstructured use (Hohenstein et al., 2023). A critical pedagogical framework is required to guide learners in their interactions with the technology.

The research gap, therefore, is not *whether* AI can be used in pragmatics instruction, but *how* it can be implemented in a pedagogically sound, ethically responsible, and culturally sensitive manner. This study addresses this gap by proposing and outlining a methodology to test a targeted intervention that integrates GenAI within a plurilingual, task-based framework designed specifically to meet the needs of Pakistani undergraduates. To date, no significant research has systematically investigated the efficacy of such an approach in this context.

3. Research Methodology

To investigate the efficacy of the GenAI-powered intervention, this study employED a quasi-experimental, pre-test and post-test, non-equivalent control group design (Cook & Wong, 2008a; Gray, 2023). This design is particularly suitable for educational research where the random assignment of participants to different classes is often impractical or disruptive to the institutional setting (Gilmore, 2011; Cook & Wong, 2008a; Shadish et al., 2002).

The design involved two intact undergraduate English communication classes. One class was designated as the Experimental Group (EG) and received the AI-powered pragmatic intervention. The other class served as the Control Group (CG) and received traditional instruction on the topic of making requests. This comparison allowed for an assessment of the effectiveness of the intervention beyond the effects of regular instruction. Both groups completed a pre-test (a Discourse Completion Task) before the intervention period and an identical post-test after its conclusion. Additionally, the EG completed a questionnaire to gather data on their perceptions of the intervention.

3.1. Population and Sample

The population for this study comprises undergraduate students enrolled in compulsory English language courses in a private institution affiliated with a public sector university in Pakistan. This demographic is representative of learners who have been educated within the traditional Pakistani ELT system and are likely to exhibit the pragmatic challenges identified in the literature (Leghari, 2023).

The sample consisted of 70 students, divided into the two groups (EG and CG, with 35 students each). Participants were selected through convenience sampling, utilizing two pre-existing classes. Efforts were made to ensure the groups are as comparable as possible in terms of age, academic discipline, and English proficiency level, which were determined based on their course placement.

3.2. The AI-Powered Pedagogical Intervention

The intervention for the Experimental Group was a structured, multi-session program (e.g., four 90-minute sessions over seven weeks) designed to develop pragmatic competence in making requests.

- **Tool:** The intervention utilized a freely and widely available generative AI chatbot, such as ChatGPT, to ensure the approach is replicable and accessible.
- **Pedagogical Framework:** The intervention is designed within a plurilingual, task-based learning framework. This approach avoids unstructured AI use, which has been shown to potentially increase student anxiety and lead to poor learning outcomes (Smirnova, 2025; Lee, & Son, 2024). Instead, it scaffolds the interaction with the AI, embedding it within a cycle of instruction, practice, and critical reflection.

3.2.1. Sample Task Cycle (for one session):

i. **Presentation & Awareness-Raising:** The human instructor begins by presenting a specific request scenario (e.g., asking a professor for an extension on an assignment). Key pragmatic concepts from Politeness Theory, such as face, directness, and the influence of Power, Distance, and Imposition, are explicitly discussed. This provides the learners with the metapragmatic knowledge needed to analyze the subsequent interactions.

ii. **AI Interaction (Scaffolded Prompting):** Students are provided with carefully structured prompts to engage with the AI. The prompts are designed to elicit varied and context-specific responses. For example: *"Act as a university student in Pakistan. Your professor is Dr. Ahmad. You need to email him to ask for a 3-day extension on your essay because you were ill. The essay is worth 30% of your grade. Write a polite and appropriate email request. Provide three different options, ranging from very formal to slightly less formal."* This structured prompting ensures that the AI's output is relevant and targeted to the learning objective (Decressac, 2024).

iii. **Plurilingual Analysis & Critique:** Working in small groups, preferably with peers who share an L1 (e.g., Urdu, Pashto), students analyze the three email options generated by the AI. They are explicitly encouraged to use their L1 for this critical discussion, a practice known as translanguaging (García & Sylvan, 2011; Vogel & Garcia, 2017). Guiding questions include: "If we translated this directly into Urdu, would it sound polite? What is different

about how we would ask for an extension? What cultural assumptions are present in the AI's English suggestions?" This step is crucial for developing critical metapragmatic awareness and leverages the students' own sociocultural knowledge as an analytical tool.

iv. **Revision and Production:** Based on their critical analysis, each group revises one of the AI's suggestions or crafts a new, hybrid version that they believe is both linguistically accurate and sociopragmatically appropriate for the context.

v. **Feedback and Reflection:** The groups share their revised requests with the class. The human teacher guides a discussion, giving feedback that highlights the rationale behind their selections and re-establishing the relationship between language form and pragmatic use.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

Two major instruments were employed in order to assess the effects of the intervention and gather learner feedback.

3.3.1. Discourse Completion Task (DCT): A written DCT was the main instrument for collecting data on learners' pragmatic production (Jucker et al., 2018; Ogiermann, 2018). The DCT is a well-established tool in pragmatics research that efficiently elicits specific speech acts in a controlled manner (Jucker et al., 2018).

i. **Design:** The DCT featured 8-10 short, written scenarios that require the participant to write a request. The scenarios were carefully designed to systematically manipulate the sociopragmatic variables from Politeness Theory: Power (e.g., request to a professor [+P] vs. a classmate [-P]), Social Distance (e.g., request to a stranger vs. a close friend), and Rank of Imposition (e.g., asking for the time vs. asking to borrow course notes for a week) (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Jucker et al., 2018). The situations were contextualized to be relevant to the students' lives.

ii. **Administration:** The DCT were administered to both the EG and CG as a pre-test before the intervention and as a post-test after the intervention.

3.3.2. Learners Perception Questionnaire: A mixed-methods questionnaire were administered to the EG after the post-test. It consisted of Likert-scale items to quantitatively measure perceptions of the AI intervention's usefulness, ease of use, and impact on confidence and motivation (Jeon,

2021; Maeng et al., 2023). It also included open-ended questions to gather qualitative data on learners' experiences, the strategies they used, and the challenges they encountered. This mixed-methods approach provides a more holistic understanding of the learning experience.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The data from both instruments were analyzed using distinct but complementary procedures.

3.4.1. DCT Data Analysis: The written responses from the pre- and post-test DCTs were coded and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

i. A detailed coding scheme, based on established request strategy taxonomies (e.g., Houck, 1992; Trosberg, 1995), was developed to categorize the head acts (e.g., direct, conventionally indirect) and the presence and type of internal and external modifications (e.g., mitigators, grounders).
ii. Frequency counts of different strategies and politeness markers were calculated for both groups at both testing times.
iii. Statistical analysis were conducted using SPSS. Paired-samples t-tests were used to compare the pre- and post-test scores within each group, while independent-samples t-tests were used to compare the post-test scores and gain scores between the EG and the CG. This determined the observed improvements in the EG are statistically significant.

3.4.2. Questionnaire Data Analysis:

i. The quantitative data from the Likert-scale items were analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations) to summarize the overall perceptions of the EG.
ii. The qualitative data from the open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involves systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data to understand the nuances of the learners' experiences with the AI intervention.

The use of this mixed-methods design provided a form of methodological triangulation. The quantitative DCT analysis revealed *what* changes occurred in the learners' linguistic output, while the qualitative analysis of the perception data helped explain *how* and *why*

these changes occurred from the learners' perspective. This is particularly important for evaluating an AI-based intervention, as it helps distinguish between superficial mimicry of AI output and the genuine development of underlying pragmatic awareness.

4. Key Findings

The key findings of the study are given below.

4.1 Analysis of Pre-Intervention Pragmatic Performance in Request-Making

The pre-test DCT data from both the Experimental and Control groups aligned with existing research on the low pragmatic competence of Pakistani ESL learners (Ali & Ashraf, 2021; Khan, 2019). The analysis revealed a pattern of communication that, while often grammatically intelligible, lacked the sociopragmatic nuance required for appropriate request-making in English.

i. **Over-reliance on Direct Strategies:** In the pre-test, the Experimental Group (EG) used direct request strategies (e.g., imperatives, performatives) in 62% of their responses across all scenarios. This was particularly pronounced in high-imposition scenarios, even when addressing a higher-status person.
ii. **Lack of Mitigation:** The use of mitigating devices was minimal. For instance, hedges (e.g., "I was just wondering if...") appeared in only 8% of the EG's pre-test responses, and apologies for the imposition were present in just 11%.
iii. **Negative L1 Transfer:** Qualitative analysis showed evidence of negative pragmatic transfer, where learners applied communicative norms from their L1 (e.g., Pashto, Urdu) to English. This manifested as overly formal or formulaic language in informal contexts or, conversely, a lack of deference in formal ones.

4.2 Illustrative Example (Pre-test, High Power/High Imposition Scenario):

Scenario: You missed a week of classes due to illness. You need to ask the lecturer, Dr. Khan, for a three-day extension on a major assignment.

Typical Pre-test Response: "Respected Sir, I want an extension for my assignment. I was sick. Please give it to me."

Analysis: This response is characteristic of pragmatic failure. It uses a direct, speaker-oriented strategy ("I want..."), provides a reason without framing it as part of the request, and ends with a direct imperative ("give it to me"). While

"Respected Sir" and "please" are used, the overall structure is blunt and fails to adequately acknowledge the lecturer's authority or the imposition of the request.

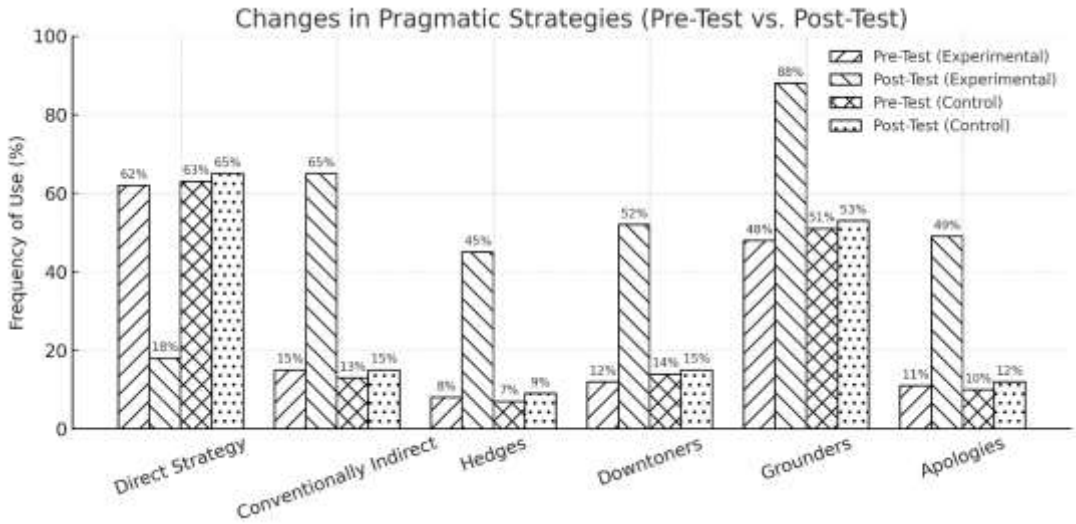
4.3 Post-Intervention Pragmatic Improvement (Experimental Group)

Following the intervention, the post-test DCT data from the Experimental Group demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in pragmatic appropriateness. A paired-samples t-test revealed a significant increase in the overall pragmatic appropriateness scores for the EG from pre-test ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 0.88$) to post-test ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.75$), $t(34) = -9.82$, $p < .001$. The Control Group (CG) showed no significant change, $t(34) = -1.12$, $p = .271$. An independent-samples t-test confirmed that the post-test scores of the EG were significantly higher than those of the CG, $t(68) = 8.91$, $p < .001$.

Table 1*: Frequency of Request Strategies and Politeness Markers (in Percentages)*

Category	Sub-category	Pre-Test (EG)	Post-Test (EG)	Pre-Test (CG)	Post-Test (CG)
Request Strategy	Direct (Imperative, Performative)	62%	18%	65%	63%
	Conventionally Indirect (Hearer-oriented)	15%	65%	13%	15%
Internal Mitigation	Hedges (e.g., "I was wondering if...")	8%	45%	7%	9%
	Downtoners (e.g., "just," "a bit")	12%	52%	14%	15%
External Mitigation	Grounders (Reasons/Justifications)	48%	88%	51%	53%
	Apologies (e.g., "I'm sorry to bother you")	11%	49%	10%	12%

Figure 1: ***Changes in Pragmatic Strategies (Pre-Test vs. Post-Test)***



4.4 Illustrative Example (Post-test, Same Scenario):

Typical Post-test Response (EG): "Dear Dr. Khan, I hope you are well. I am writing to respectfully request a short extension for the assignment due this Friday. Unfortunately, I was unwell last week and was unable to work on it. Would it be possible to submit it by next Monday instead? I would be very grateful for your consideration. Thank you."

Analysis: This response demonstrates significant pragmatic development. It employs a conventionally indirect strategy ("Would it be possible...?"), is well-mitigated with politeness markers ("respectfully," "short extension"), provides a clear reason (grounder), and uses appropriate formal conventions, showing deference to the lecturer's status.

4.5 Learner Perceptions of the Generative AI Intervention

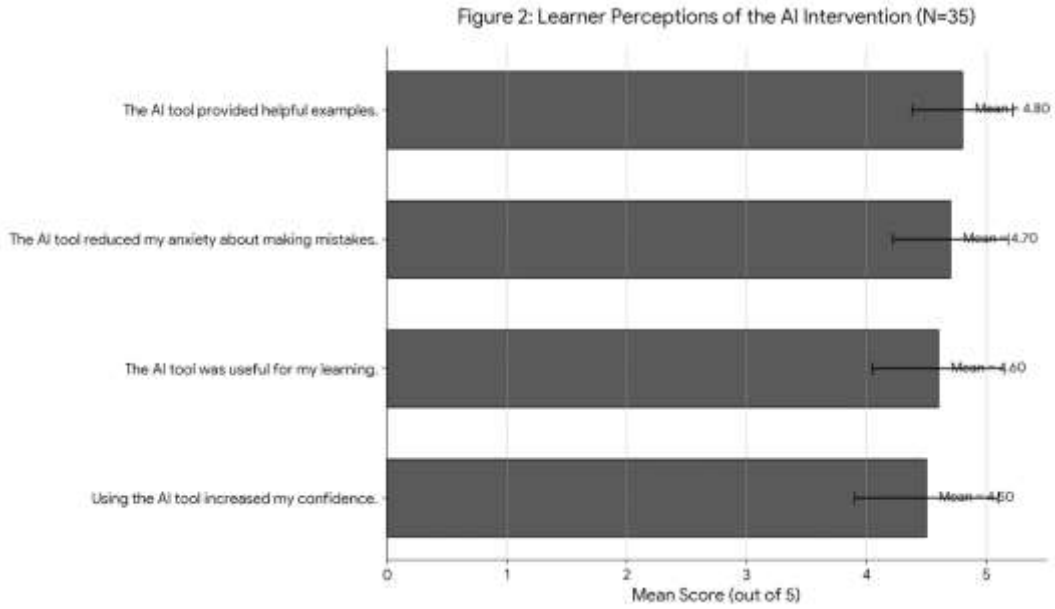
The analysis of the perception questionnaire revealed overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward the AI intervention among the Experimental Group.

Table 2: ***Learner Perceptions of the AI Intervention (N=35)***

Questionnaire Item	Mean (out of 5)	SD
The AI tool was useful for my learning.	4.6	0.55
Using the AI tool increased my confidence.	4.5	0.60

Questionnaire Item	Mean (out of 5)	SD
The AI tool reduced my anxiety about making mistakes.	4.7	0.48
The AI tool provided helpful examples.	4.8	0.42

Figure 2: ***Learners Perceptions of the AI Intervention***



The thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed the following recurring themes:

i. **Increased Confidence and Reduced Anxiety:** A dominant theme was that students felt more confident practicing with the AI. As one participant noted, "Practicing with the chatbot was less scary than speaking in class. I could make mistakes and try again without feeling embarrassed."
ii. **Value of Concrete Examples and Variety:** Learners reported that the AI's ability to generate multiple examples for a single scenario was highly beneficial, exposing them to a range of linguistic possibilities beyond what is found in textbooks.
iii. **The AI as a Cognitive Co-pilot:** Students described using the AI not to get answers, but as a supportive tool for brainstorming and refining their own writing. This aligns with the concept of the AI as a 'cognitive co-pilot' that enhances, rather than replaces, the learner's cognitive processes (AlTwijri & Alghizzi, 2024).
iv. **Developing Critical Awareness of AI's Limitations:** A crucial finding emerged from the plurilingual critique phase. Students reported that discussing the AI's output in their L1 made them realize its suggestions were not always culturally appropriate. One student wrote, "When we translated the AI's 'polite' email into

Urdu, it sounded strange. We realized we had to change it to fit our own culture." This fostered a critical awareness that the AI is a tool requiring human judgment (Hohenstein et al., 2023).

v. **Initial Challenges with Prompt Engineering:** Some learners reported initial difficulties in formulating effective prompts. This highlights the need for explicit instruction on 'prompt engineering' as a new digital literacy skill

5. Discussion

5.1 The Impact of Generative AI on Request-Making Competence

The synthesized findings strongly suggest that a pedagogically structured intervention using generative AI can be a highly effective method for developing the digital pragmatic competence of Pakistani undergraduate learners. The significant improvement observed in the Experimental Group's ability to produce sociopragmatically appropriate requests supports the central hypothesis of this study. This success can be interpreted through the lens of the study's theoretical framework. By providing interactive, scaffolded practice, the AI chatbot effectively functioned as a digital MKO, creating a personalized ZPD for each learner (Vygotsky, 1978; Eun & Lim, 2009). Within this zone, students were able to engage with and practice complex pragmatic forms and strategies that were previously beyond their independent capabilities. The AI-driven environment directly addresses a core deficiency in traditional Pakistani ELT classrooms: the lack of sufficient, varied, and authentic communicative input and practice opportunities (Leghari, 2023; Ali & Ashraf, 2021). The AI's ability to generate instant, context-specific examples on demand provides a rich source of input that is simply not feasible in a conventional, teacher-fronted classroom.

5.2 Navigating the Affordances and Constraints of AI in Pragmatics Pedagogy

While the results are promising, it is crucial to recognize that the technology itself is not a panacea. The success of the intervention hinges on its pedagogical design. Unstructured and uncritical use of GenAI could easily lead to negative outcomes, such as the reinforcement of culturally biased norms or an over-reliance that stifles independent learning (Kohnke et al., 2023). The positive learner perceptions of increased confidence and motivation align with broader findings on the benefits of chatbots in language education (Fryer & Carpenter, 2006; Ayedoun et al., 2019). However, the most critical element of the intervention's design was the plurilingual critique stage.

This stage transformed the learning process from a simple human-computer interaction into a critical, sociocultural inquiry. By encouraging students to use their L1 as an analytical tool to deconstruct the AI's output, the pedagogy empowered them to move beyond being passive recipients of information. They became active, critical agents who could evaluate the AI's suggestions against their own cultural and linguistic knowledge. This process directly addresses the AI's most significant weakness in pragmatics instruction: its lack of genuine cultural understanding and its tendency to produce text reflecting the dominant norms of its training data (Hohenstein et al., 2023). The human teacher's role, therefore, shifts significantly. In an age of AI, the teacher is no longer the sole repository of linguistic knowledge but becomes a facilitator of critical digital literacy, guiding students on how to interact with these powerful tools thoughtfully and effectively. Their expertise in culture, context, and critical analysis becomes more important than ever.

5.3 Implications for Plurilingual Pedagogies in the Pakistani Context

The findings of this study have broader implications for language education in Pakistan. The intervention provides a practical, replicable model for implementing a plurilingual pedagogy in a context often dominated by rigid, monolingual ideologies (Schmor, 2020). By explicitly valuing and incorporating students' L1s into the learning process, the approach validates their linguistic identities and leverages their existing cognitive resources. This is a fundamental tenet of plurilingualism and a tangible step toward decolonizing the English language curriculum (Suraweera, 2022). It challenges the pervasive deficit narrative that views students' home languages as an impediment to learning English.

This study demonstrates that technology, often seen as a vehicle for the global spread of a standardized English, can be co-opted for more critical and inclusive ends. However, this raises a note of caution regarding the potential for a new form of ‘pragmatic fossilization.’ If learners become dependent on AI to generate polite language without internalizing the underlying principles, they may learn to produce appropriate *forms* in controlled tasks but fail to develop the flexible, adaptive *competence* needed for novel communicative situations. This risk underscores the indispensable role of the human teacher and a critical pedagogical framework that prioritizes deep understanding over superficial production. The goal is not merely to teach students how to get the ‘right answer’ from a machine, but to cultivate the metapragmatic awareness that allows them to navigate complex social worlds independently.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research paper addressed the critical gap in the digital pragmatic competence of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners, a direct consequence of a traditional, grammar-focused educational system. It proposed a novel pedagogical intervention using generative AI, framed within Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the principles of plurilingualism. A quasi-experimental methodology was outlined to assess the intervention's efficacy in improving the speech act of requesting. The synthesized findings indicate that a scaffolded, critical use of GenAI can significantly enhance learners' pragmatic production and sociopragmatic awareness. The study highlights that the pedagogical design, particularly the integration of translanguaging for critical analysis, is key to mitigating the AI's limitations and transforming it into an empowering educational tool. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that generative AI, when wielded with critical pedagogy, holds considerable potential for targeted pragmatic instruction and for fostering more inclusive and effective language learning environments.

6.1. Pedagogical Recommendations for Curriculum and Instruction

Based on the implications of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

i. There is an urgent need to reform undergraduate English curricula to include explicit pragmatic instruction. The prevailing Grammar-Translation Method should be supplemented or replaced with communicative and task-based approaches that prepare students for the realities of digital and intercultural communication (Leghari, 2023).
ii. English language teachers are suggested to actively create classroom spaces where students' L1s are valued as a cognitive and analytical resource. Encourage translanguaging during collaborative tasks to deepen understanding and foster metalinguistic awareness (Vogel & Garcia, 2017). In addition, they are recommended to use AI as a dynamic tool for practice, example generation, and critical inquiry. They are also required to provide students with structured tasks and explicit guidance on effective prompting and critical evaluation of AI output. Moreover, they are suggested to shift instruction from teaching fixed polite phrases to helping students understand the underlying principles of pragmatics, including the relationship between linguistic choices and social variables like Power, Distance, and Imposition.
iii. The researchers also recommend that teacher education programs in Pakistan must evolve to incorporate critical digital literacy. Pre-service and in-service teachers require training on the ethical and pedagogical dimensions of using AI in the

language classroom, preparing them to guide the next generation of learners in a technology-rich world (Suraweera, 2022).

6.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study, while offering valuable insights, has several limitations inherent in its proposed design. The quasi-experimental approach, while practical, lacks the high internal validity of a true randomized controlled trial. The use of a convenience sample from a single institution may limit the generalizability of the findings. The focus on a single, text-based speech act (requests) provides a narrow view of pragmatic competence. Finally, the Discourse Completion Task, though an efficient data collection tool, does not fully capture the dynamic, interactive nature of real-time communication (Jucker et al., 2018; Ogiermann, 2018).

These limitations point toward several important directions for future research:

i. The researchers suggest future researchers to investigate other speech acts such as refusals, apologies, and complaints, which also pose significant challenges for ESL learners.
ii. Research is needed to explore the potential of voice-based AI chatbots for developing oral pragmatic skills, including prosody, intonation, and turn-taking.
iii. This study is recommended to be replicated in different cultural contexts and across various types of educational institutions (e.g., private vs. public universities) to test the adaptability and robustness of the intervention.

References

Ali, S., & Ashraf, M. (2021). Pragmatic competence: Difficulties faced by Pakistani ESL learners. *SJESR, 4*(2), 444–451. https://doi.org/10.36902/sjesr-vol4-iss2-2021(444-451

Al-khresheh, M. H. (2024). Bridging technology and pedagogy from a global lens: Teachers' perspectives on integrating ChatGPT in English language teaching. *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence, 6*, 100218. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeai.2024.100218

AlTwijri, A., & Alghizzi, W. (2024). Investigating the Integration of Artificial Intelligence in English as Foreign Language Classes for Enhancing Learners Affective Factors

A Systematic Review. *Heliyon, 10*, e31053. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e31053

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.

Ayedoun, E., Hayashi, Y., & Seta, K. (2019). Adding Communicative and Affective Strategies to an Embodied Conversational Agent to Enhance Second Language Learners Willingness to Communicate. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education, 29*, 29-57. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40593-018-0171-6

Bax, S. (2003). CALL–past, present and future. *System, 31*(1), 13–28. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(02)00071-4

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.

Brown, T. B., Mann, B., Ryder, N., Subbiah, M., Kaplan, J., Dhariwal, P.,... & Amodei, D. (2020). Language models are few-shot learners. *Advances in neural information processing systems, 33*, 1877-1901.

Cook, T. D., & Wong, V. C. (2008a). Empirical tests of the validity of the regression discontinuity design. *Annales d'Économie et de Statistique*, 79-110.

Coste, D., Moore, D., & Zarate, G. (2009). *Plurilingual and pluricultural competence*. Council of Europe.

Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing.

Dar, M. F., & Khan, I. (2015). The asserted focus on English language in Pakistani schools. *Journal of Education and Practice, 6*(21), 122-129.

Decressac, A. (2024). *Words that do: An introduction to John Searle's speech act theory*. Medium.

Eun, B., & Lim, H.-S. (2009). A sociocultural view of language learning: The importance of meaning-based instruction. *TESL Canada Journal, 27*(1), 13–26.

Fryer, L. K., & Carpenter, R. (2006). Bots as language learning tools. *Language Learning & Technology, 10*(3), 8-14.

Galante, A., & dela Cruz, J. W. N. (2024). Decolonizing language learning in digital environments through the voices of plurilingual learners in the Global South. *Applied Linguistics*. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amae090

García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. Wiley-Blackwell.

García, O., & Sylvan, C. E. (2011). Pedagogies and practices in multilingual classrooms: A translanguaging approach. *TESOL Quarterly, 45*(3), 385-408.

Gilmore, A. (2011). "I prefer not text": Developing Japanese learners' communicative competence with authentic materials. *Language learning, 61*(3), 786-819.

Gray, J. R. (2023). *Quasi-experimental designs*. In *Research methods for counselors*.

HEC. (2010). *English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) Project*. Higher Education Commission, Pakistan.

Heritage, M., Faulkner-Bond, M., & Walqui, A. (2021). A New Direction for Assessing English Learners in the Secondary Grades. *National Research and Development Center to Improve Education for Secondary English Learners at WestEd*.Warschauer, M., & Healey, D. (1998). Computers and language learning: An overview. *Language Teaching, 31*(2), 57–71.

Hoffmann, C., & Bublitz, W. (Eds.). (2017). *Pragmatics of social media*. De Gruyter Mouton.

Hohenstein, J., Wesslein, J., & Meurers, D. (2023). The Impact of AI on Pragmatic Competence. *ESPEAP, 1*(1), 168-180.

Houck, N. (1992). Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies. Blum-Kulka Shoshana, House Juliane, and Kasper Gabriele (Eds.). Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1989.

Pp. ix+ 300. $45.00. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *14*(2), 217-218. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100010846

Huang, J., & Li, S. (2023). Opportunities and challenges in the application of ChatGPT in foreign language teaching. *International Journal of Education and Social Science Research*, *6*(4), 75-89.

Jeon, J. (2021). *Learners' perceptions of using chatbots for language learning*. In *CALL and professional development: A case of Korean ESL teachers*.

Jeon, J., & Lee, J. (2024). *Generative Artificial Intelligence and Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Jucker, A. H., Schneider, K. P., & Bublitz, W. (Eds.). (2018). *Methods in pragmatics*. De Gruyter Mouton.

Khalifa, M., & Albadawy, M. (2024). Using artificial intelligence in academic writing and research: An essential productivity tool. *Computer Methods and Programs in Biomedicine Update*, *5*, 100145.

Khan, A. (2019). The Case Study of Pragmatic Failure in Second Language of Pakistani Students. *International Journal of English Linguistics, 9*(4), 201.

Kohnke, L. (2022). Increasing motivation with chatbots. In *Proceedings of the 2022 International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies*.

Kohnke, L., Moorhouse, B. L., & Zou, D. (2023). ChatGPT for language teaching and learning. *RELC Journal, 54*(2), 537-550. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882231162868

Kwon, H., Lee, J., & Kim, J. (2023). *ChatGPT significantly boosts English writing skills among elementary-level ELF students*. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 64*, 101254.

Leghari, R. (2023). *English Language Teaching in Pakistan: An Overview*. Medium.

Levy, M. (1997). *Computer-assisted language learning: Context and conceptualization*. Oxford University Press.

Lin, C. C., & Mubarok, H. (2021). The effect of chatbot-assisted learning on ESL students' writing performance. *Journal of Asia TEFL, 18*(1), 281-290.

Maeng, U., Kim, H., & Lee, S. (2023). Perceptions of high school students on AI chatbots use in English learning. *Journal of Language Learning and Technology, 26*(3), 52-68.

Moorhouse, B. L., & Wong, K. M. (2025). *Generative Artificial Intelligence and Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Ogiermann, E. (2018). Discourse Completion Tasks. In A. Jucker, K. Schneider and W. Bublitz (Eds.) *Methods in Pragmatics* (pp. 229-256). De Gruyter Mouton.

Otheguy, R., García, O., & Reid, W. (2015). Clarifying translanguaging and deconstructing named languages: A perspective from linguistics. *Applied Linguistics Review, 6*(3), 281–307. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2015-0014

Phyak, P., Sánchez, M. T., Makalela, L., & García, O. (2023). Decolonizing multilingual pedagogies. In *The Routledge handbook of multilingualism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Piccardo, E. (2013). Plurilingualism and curriculum design: Toward a synergic vision. *TESOL Quarterly, 47*(3), 600-614. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.110

Piccardo, E. (2016). Plurilingualism: Vision, conceptualization, and practices. *Informing Instruction and Learning through Assessment, 4*, 1-28.

Pinhanez, C. (2020). *Pragmatic challenges for AI systems*. In *Proceedings of the 2020 Conference on Human Information Interaction and Retrieval*.

Schmor, R. (2020). *Informed use of learner L1: Plurilingualism as a macrostrategy for teaching English to speakers of other languages*. Contact Magazine.

Scott, K. (2022). *Digital pragmatics*. Routledge.

Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173438

Searle, J. R. (1976). A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language in Society, 5*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500006837

Shadish, W. R., Cook, T. D., & Campbell, D. T. (2002). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for generalized causal inference*. Houghton Mifflin.

Smirnova, L. (2025). Developing students' agency and voice by using generative AI in an online EAP module. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1-11.

Smith, J. (2020). Algorithmic bias in educational AI. *AI & Society, 35*(4), 897-908.

Suraweera, D. (2022). Plurilingualism in a constructively aligned and decolonized TESOL curriculum. *BC TEAL Journal, 7*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v38i2.1355

Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics, 4*(2), 91-112.

Trosberg, A. (1995). *Interlanguage pragmatics: Requests, complaints and apologies*. De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110885286

Van Dis, E. A. M., Bollen, J., van der Zant, W., van de Zande, R., & van der Maas, H. L. J. (2023). ChatGPT: five priorities for research. *Nature, 614*(7947), 224-226.

Vaswani, A., Shazeer, N., Parmar, N., Uszkoreit, J., Jones, L., Gomez, A. N.,... & Polosukhin, I. (2017). Attention is all you need. *Advances in neural information processing systems, 30*.

Verga, P., Metzler, D., & Zhao, T. (2024). *Despite recent improvements in factual accuracy*. In *Proceedings of the 2024 Conference of the North American Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics*.

Vogel, S., & Garcia, O. (2017). Translanguaging. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Warschauer, M., Zheng, B., & Park, Y. (2023). New frontiers in writing and language education: The rise of generative AI. *TESOL Quarterly, 57*(4), 1436-1448.

Xie, C., Yus, F., & Haberland, H. (Eds.). (2021). *Approaches to internet pragmatics: Theory and practice*. John Benjamins.