

# Exploring Transactional Communication Processes in Student–ChatGPT Interactions: A Case Study of St. Paul University Manila Undergraduates’ Essay Writing on *Pakikisama*

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explored the transactional communication processes between undergraduate students and ChatGPT at St. Paul University Manila. Anchored in Transactional Communication Theory, the research shifts the focus from technical performance to meaning-centered interactions, viewing AI as an active communicative participant. The study utilized screen recordings of academic tasks, semi-structured interviews, and guided reflections to analyze how five female students interacted with ChatGPT version 5. The findings reveal that students encode learning intentions by seeking conceptual clarification, source validation, and writing assistance while preserving personal authorship. Participants interpreted AI-generated responses not as static data, but as simplified guides, cultural commentaries, and personalized feedback. Continuous feedback loops influenced subsequent messaging by encouraging deeper refinement and modeling structured analytical communication. To manage communication "noise" or ambiguity, students adjusted strategies by increasing prompt specificity, imposing instructional constraints, and contextualizing questions. Ultimately, the study indicated that student–AI interaction is an iterative meaning-making process that enhances writing confidence and research evaluation skills. The researchers argue that communication education must move beyond technical AI tool usage to develop critical communication literacy. This involves training students to strategically negotiate, evaluate, and critique AI-generated discourse to maintain intellectual agency and authentic rhetorical voice in an AI-mediated academic landscape.

**Keywords:** Transactional Communication Theory, Generative AI, Prompt Engineering, Student–AI Interaction, Higher Education, Meaning-Making.

## INTRODUCTION

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly influenced various sectors, particularly education, where its integration is becoming increasingly widespread (Alam, 2023). This technological evolution has shifted traditional teaching methods toward more personalized learning experiences and support for diverse educational requirements (Walter, 2024). Central to this interaction is the "prompt"—the specific input provided by users to elicit results from AI systems like ChatGPT (Melanie, 2024). The process of writing and optimizing these inputs, known as prompt engineering, has emerged as a vital technical skill that enhances instructional efficiency and fosters students' critical thinking and metacognition (Park & Choo, 2024; Gastineau, 2024).

However, a notable gap remains in understanding the communicative processes that define student–AI interactions (Marasigan et al., 2026). While existing scholarship often highlights AI's potential to personalize learning, few studies examine how the skill of crafting precise prompts directly supports cognitive load management (Marasigan et al., 2026). According to John Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (1988), human working memory is limited, necessitating well-regulated information design to avoid cognitive overload (Clark et al., 2023). In academic settings, students frequently use simplifying prompts to reduce cognitive strain, yet

the role of prompt specificity in improving academic comprehension has not been fully explored (Zhai et al., 2024; Marasigan et al., 2026).

This study addresses these gaps by framing student–AI interactions through the lens of Transactional Communication Theory. This theory conceptualizes communication as a simultaneous, reciprocal, and contextually situated process where meaning is co-constructed between participants (Barnlund, 2008; Craig, 1999). By viewing AI as an active communicative participant, researchers can investigate how learning emerges from iterative exchanges, shifting the focus from technical performance to meaning-centered interactions.

### **Encoding of Learning Intentions**

Transactional communication theory views encoding as a dynamic process where communicators translate intentions into symbolic messages based on goals, prior knowledge, and context (Barnlund, 1970/2025). In student–AI interaction, students translate cognitive needs—such as confusion or task requirements—into language they anticipate will solicit useful feedback. This encoding is not static; it is continuously reshaped by the student's assumptions about the AI's linguistic affordances and the outcomes of prior interactions (Littlejohn et al., 2021).

### **Interpretation and Meaning-Making**

Meaning does not reside within messages but is actively constructed by communicators (Barnlund, 2008). When students receive AI-generated responses, they decode and evaluate content based on their academic background, expectations, and situational context. This interpretive process is foundational to learning, as students must actively integrate AI feedback into their own knowledge structures (Weick, 1995).

### **Feedback and Mutual Influence**

Feedback is central to the transactional model and occurs simultaneously and continuously (Barnlund, 2008). AI responses serve as immediate communicative feedback that influences a student's subsequent moves, such as clarifying or reframing a query. This creates a state of mutual influence where each message alters the communicative environment and shapes the trajectory of the learning exchange (Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

### **Communication Noise and Adaptation**

"Noise" refers to any element that distorts message interpretation, such as ambiguous phrasing or misaligned expectations (Barnlund, 1970/2025). Transactional theory highlights that noise is intrinsic to communication, requiring students to navigate these disruptions by adjusting their strategies—modifying language, adding constraints, or recontextualizing questions—to clarify meaning (Littlejohn et al., 2021).

### **Learning as an Emergent Outcome**

From a transactional perspective, learning is not a static result but an emergent product of the ongoing, iterative cycle of encoding, interpretation, feedback, and adaptation. This continuous exchange shapes the student's overall learning experience, including their sense of agency, engagement, and confidence within the digital environment (Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

By examining these dimensions, this study seeks to identify how undergraduate students at St. Paul University Manila formulate prompts and manage interactions to optimize their learning experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of the study is anchored in **Transactional Communication Theory**, which conceptualizes student–AI chatbot interactions as dynamic, reciprocal, and meaning-centered processes rather than mere linear acts of message transmission (Barnlund, 2008). Unlike traditional linear models, this perspective posits that communication involves the simultaneous sending and receiving of messages where

participants—including algorithmic ones—act as both communicators and interpreters (Barnlund, 1970/2025; Guzman & Lewis, 2020).

Within this framework, learning is viewed as an emergent outcome co-constructed through iterative exchanges. This process is characterized by the **encoding of learning intentions**, the **active interpretation** of AI-generated responses based on a student's unique academic background, and **continuous feedback loops** that allow for strategic adaptation in the face of communication "noise" or ambiguity (Barnlund, 2008; Littlejohn et al., 2021). Ultimately, this transactional approach shifts the research focus from simple technical prompt performance to the deeper, meaning-making interactions that shape a student's overall learning experience.

### **Conceptual Framework: The Transactional Theory of AI-Mediated Meaning-Making**

Rooted in Transactional Theory, this conceptual framework reimagines prompt engineering as a dynamic, cognitive competency rather than a mere technical skill, centered on an **Iterative Meaning-Making Loop**. The process involves a continuous negotiation between student intention and AI interpretation within a digital transactional space, where students must bridge "instructional gaps" and resolve "noise" through constant refinement. By navigating phases of semantic encoding, machine output evaluation, and strategic re-prompting, students move past the inherent communicative constraints of AI to achieve instructional alignment. Ultimately, this framework suggests that the educational value of AI lies in this recursive cycle, which necessitates explicit articulation and forces students to critically clarify their own thinking and intentions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study aimed to explore the use of ChatGPT version 5 as a communicative and transactional partner. The study answered the following questions: (1) How do students encode their learning intentions when communicating with ChatGPT during academic tasks?; (2) How do students interpret and make meaning from AI-generated messages in learning interactions?; (3) How does feedback from ChatGPT influence students' subsequent messages during the same learning exchange?; (4) How do students adjust their communication strategies in response to perceived misunderstanding or ambiguity in AI responses?; and (5) How does the continuous exchange of messages between students and ChatGPT shape students' learning experiences?

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology of this study is rooted in a qualitative approach designed to explore the nuances of human–AI communication through the subjective experiences of students at St. Paul University Manila. By employing an interpretive framework, the research aims to uncover how meaning is co-constructed during academic tasks involving generative AI.

### **Research Paradigm and Design**

This study adopts an interpretive research paradigm, which prioritizes understanding the subjective perspectives and meaning-making processes of individuals within a specific context (Marasigan et al., 2026). This paradigm is particularly suited for this research as it focuses on the rich, contextualized experiences of how students communicate, interpret, and adapt messages rather than on numerical or statistical measurements (Marasigan et al., 2026).

The research utilizes a qualitative case study approach to conduct an in-depth investigation of a bounded system: undergraduate students at St. Paul University Manila interacting with ChatGPT (Marasigan et al., 2026). The case study design allows for a detailed examination of complex transactional processes—including encoding, interpretation, feedback, and adaptation—within a real-life academic setting (Marasigan et al., 2026).

### **Research Locale and Participants**

The study was conducted at St. Paul University Manila, providing a controlled environment where institutional context, such as faculty expectations and digital literacy levels, could be systematically analyzed.

The participants consisted of five (5) first-year undergraduate students from the College of Education and Liberal Arts. All participants were female, with one student enrolled in the Communication program and four in Visual Design and Communication. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, ensuring they had prior experience with ChatGPT and were readily accessible for the study. Demographic data revealed that ChatGPT was the most frequently used tool at 80%, followed by Gemini at 40% and Co-pilot at 20%. Notably, all participants reported using AI primarily for research (100%), followed by writing at 60%.

## Data Construction

To capture the iterative nature of transactional communication, the study employed a multi-method data construction approach using the following instruments:

**Screen Recording of AI Interactions.** Participants recorded their screens while performing assigned academic tasks using ChatGPT version 5. This allowed researchers to observe in real-time how students encoded learning intentions, interpreted AI responses, and adapted their messages.

**Semi-Structured Interviews.** Post-task interviews were conducted to delve into the participants' internal strategies. These sessions focused on how students co-constructed meaning and adjusted their communication when faced with feedback or ambiguity from the AI.

**After-Use Guided Questions.** A structured questionnaire followed the AI task, prompting students to reflect on their prompt formulation, interpretation of responses, and the challenges encountered during the exchange.

The research employed a multi-method data construction approach, beginning with screen recordings of students performing a reflective writing task on the Filipino value of *pakikisama* using ChatGPT version 5. This writing task required participants to define the concept, relate it to personal experiences, and connect it to contemporary issues using credible sources. Following the task, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and administered after-use guided questionnaires to delve into the participants' internal strategies. A post-task verbal follow-up interview—available in both Tagalog and English—further explored the students' thought processes regarding prompt engineering and their selection of AI-generated content.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). This process involved transcribing all screen recordings and interviews, followed by coding the data according to core transactional communication processes: encoding, interpretation, feedback, adaptation, and context. Patterns and themes were identified to illustrate the co-construction of meaning, with data triangulated across sources to ensure validity.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent and were aware of their right to withdraw at any time. Data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality, and activities were designed to ensure non-maleficence, avoiding any negative interference with the students' academic well-being or performance.

## RESULTS

Student essays produced using ChatGPT characterize *pakikisama* as a fundamental Filipino value rooted in the concept of "joining" to maintain social harmony and avoid interpersonal conflict. These writings present the value as a "dual-edged sword," highlighting its positive role in fostering camaraderie and emotional security while warning against its potential to trigger "people-pleasing" behaviors, peer pressure, and the suppression of individual identity. The essays modernize the concept by applying it to current issues like mental health and social media dynamics, often grounding these discussions in personal anecdotes regarding school arguments or family expectations. Structurally, the students followed a consistent pattern of defining the term, analyzing its societal importance and risks, and concluding that a healthy practice of *pakikisama* requires a careful balance

between group unity and personal integrity. Student essays produced using ChatGPT characterize *pakikisama* as a fundamental Filipino value rooted in the concept of "joining" to maintain social harmony and avoid interpersonal conflict. These writings present the value as a "dual-edged sword," highlighting its positive role in fostering camaraderie and emotional security while warning against its potential to trigger "people-pleasing" behaviors, peer pressure, and the suppression of individual identity. The essays modernize the concept by applying it to current issues like mental health and social media dynamics, often grounding these discussions in personal anecdotes regarding school arguments or family expectations. Structurally, the students followed a consistent pattern of defining the term, analyzing its societal importance and risks, and concluding that a healthy practice of *pakikisama* requires a careful balance between group unity and personal integrity.

The student-AI interactions functioned as a transactional process where learners utilized ChatGPT for instructional and conceptual guidance to build a foundational understanding of "pakikisama". By encoding learning intentions through specific prompts for academic tasks, students engaged in an iterative meaning-making loop, treating AI outputs as "simplified guides" that required continuous refinement. When encountering communicative "noise" or ambiguity, participants employed strategic adaptation by increasing prompt specificity and imposing constraints to align the AI's response with their goals. Crucially, the students preserved their intellectual agency by selectively integrating AI-generated content with their own personal narratives—such as reflections on family dynamics or school conflicts—ensuring their final essays maintained an authentic rhetorical voice.

### Research Question 1: Encoding of Learning Intentions

#### **How Students Encode Learning Intentions Through Requests for Conceptual Clarification.**

Students encode their learning intentions by asking ChatGPT to simplify, contextualize, and relate abstract concepts to lived experiences. Their prompts reveal a desire to transform theoretical ideas into understandable and socially relevant knowledge. For instance, Participant 1 asked ChatGPT to "relate *pakikisama* to one's behaviors, desire, or relationship with others" (Participant 1). This prompt demonstrates an intention to connect a Filipino cultural concept with observable human actions and interpersonal dynamics. Similarly, Participant 2 asked, "What is the understanding of *pakikisama* to the Filipinos today" (Participant 2), indicating a desire to situate the concept within contemporary Filipino society. These requests show that students communicate learning intentions through explanatory and interpretive questioning designed to deepen conceptual understanding.

#### **How Students Encode Learning Intentions Through Source Validation and Credibility-Seeking.**

Students also encode learning intentions through requests for academically credible and usable references. Rather than relying solely on AI-generated explanations, they seek external validation that can support formal academic requirements. Participant 3 explicitly requested, "Give me a source that works that defines *pakikisama*" (Participant 3). The phrase "that works" suggests prior experiences with inaccessible, unreliable, or academically weak references. This interaction demonstrates that students use AI not only as an information provider but also as a research assistant that helps them locate valid and citable materials. Their prompts reflect intentions related to evidence gathering, academic compliance, and research legitimacy.

#### **How Students Encode Learning Intentions Through Writing Improvement While Preserving Authorship.**

Students encode their learning intentions by seeking writing assistance that improves quality while preserving personal authorship and voice. Participant 4 asked ChatGPT, "Can you check what's wrong with my paragraphs but please don't change it all :( " (Participant 4). This request reveals both academic and emotional dimensions of learning. The student expresses a need for correction and guidance while simultaneously protecting ownership of the written work. The phrase "please don't change it all" reflects concern about maintaining authenticity, while the emoticon ":( " conveys vulnerability and anxiety regarding academic performance. This demonstrates how students frame AI as a supportive editor rather than a substitute author.

#### **How Students Encode Learning Intentions Through Efficient and Structured Knowledge Retrieval.**

Students encode learning intentions through concise prompts that request organized and assignment-ready information. Participant 5 simply asked, "Pros and Cons of *Pakikisama*" (Participant 5). The brevity of

the request indicates familiarity with AI interaction patterns and an expectation that the chatbot can immediately provide structured content. This form of communication reflects efficiency-oriented learning intentions in which students seek categorized summaries that can quickly support academic tasks such as essays, reporting, or classroom discussions. Their prompts demonstrate strategic use of AI to reduce cognitive and time-related demands during academic work.

**How Students Encode Learning Intentions Through Conversational and Emotionally Expressive Interaction.** Students encode their learning intentions using conversational language and emotionally expressive communication when interacting with AI chatbots. Their prompts often combine academic requests with relational or affective cues. For example, Participant 4's statement, "please don't change it all :)" (Participant 4), reflects both a technical request and an emotional appeal for respectful assistance. Likewise, Participant 3's wording, "Give me a source that works" (Participant 3), communicates frustration and urgency in a casual conversational manner. These interactions suggest that students perceive ChatGPT as approachable and nonjudgmental learning companions. Consequently, students communicate not only cognitive needs but also emotional and interpersonal expectations during academic tasks.

## Research Question 2: Meaning-Making and Interpretation

**How Students Interpret AI-Generated Messages as Simplified Explanations of Complex Concepts.** Students interpret AI-generated responses as tools for simplifying and clarifying abstract cultural concepts into understandable and relatable explanations. In Participant 1's interaction, the student asked ChatGPT to "relate *pakikisama* to one's behaviors, desire, or relationship with others" (Participant 1). In response, ChatGPT explained that "*pakikisama* influences how a person acts in social situations" and that people may "go along with the group even if they personally disagree, just to avoid conflict" (ChatGPT response to Participant 1). The detailed examples provided by the AI transform the abstract concept of *pakikisama* into observable behaviors and interpersonal situations. Students therefore appear to interpret AI-generated messages as explanatory guides that translate theoretical concepts into practical social meanings.

**How Students Interpret AI-Generated Messages as Contemporary Cultural Interpretations.** Students make meaning from AI-generated responses by treating them as interpretations of current social and cultural realities. Participant 2 asked, "What is the understanding of *pakikisama* to the Filipinos today" (Participant 2). ChatGPT responded that *pakikisama* "refers to getting along with others, maintaining harmony, and cooperating with the group" and explained that "many Filipinos today still see *pakikisama* as an important way to maintain good relationships and unity" (ChatGPT response to Participant 2). The student's interaction suggests that AI-generated messages are interpreted not merely as definitions, but as socially contextualized commentaries on Filipino values and contemporary behavior. Students therefore derive meaning from AI responses by connecting them to present-day societal experiences.

**How Students Interpret AI-Generated Messages as Academically Legitimate and Research-Oriented.** Students interpret AI-generated messages as credible academic support when the chatbot provides references and citations. Participant 3 requested, "Give me a source that works that defines *pakikisama*" (Participant 3). In response, ChatGPT provided "JobStreet Philippines - What is *Pakikisama*?" and described it as a "reliable source (not Wikipedia)" that "you can cite for your research or school work" (ChatGPT response to Participant 3). The student's request and the chatbot's framing indicate that meaning is constructed through perceptions of academic legitimacy and usability. Students appear to interpret AI-generated messages as trustworthy when they include identifiable external sources that can support formal academic tasks.

**How Students Interpret AI-Generated Messages as Personalized Corrective Feedback.** Students make meaning from AI-generated messages by interpreting them as individualized academic feedback that addresses specific weaknesses in their work. Participant 4 requested, "Can you check what's wrong with my paragraphs but please don't change it all :)" (Participant 4). ChatGPT responded by identifying a grammar issue: "'I've often told' is incorrect grammar because 'have' needs a past participle with 'been'" and suggested the corrected structure "I was often told or I have often been told" (ChatGPT response to Participant 4). The response is interpreted not as criticism, but as supportive correction that preserves the student's original writing. This

demonstrates that students construct meaning from AI feedback as a form of guided learning that improves competence while maintaining personal authorship.

**How Students Interpret AI-Generated Messages as Structured and Balanced Knowledge.** Students interpret AI-generated messages as organized academic summaries that help them evaluate multiple perspectives on a topic. Participant 5 asked for the “Pros and Cons of *Pakikisama*” (Participant 5). ChatGPT responded with categorized points such as “Promotes harmony,” “Builds strong relationships,” and “Encourages cooperation,” while also identifying disadvantages like “Peer Pressure,” “Suppressed opinions,” and “Limits individuality” (ChatGPT response to Participant 5). The balanced structure of the response allows students to interpret the concept from both positive and critical perspectives. Students therefore make meaning from AI-generated content by viewing it as structured knowledge that simplifies comparison, analysis, and academic discussion.

**Overall Interpretation.** The thematic analysis suggests that students interpret and make meaning from AI-generated messages by viewing them as:

1. simplified explanations of complex concepts,
2. culturally contextualized interpretations,
3. academically legitimate research support,
4. personalized corrective feedback,
5. and structured knowledge frameworks.

The transcripts indicate that students do not passively consume AI-generated content. Instead, they actively interpret chatbot responses according to their academic needs for understanding, validation, improvement, and organization. AI-generated messages become meaningful when students perceive them as relevant, credible, supportive, and adaptable to their learning goals.

### Research Question 3: Influence of AI Feedback on Subsequent Messages

**How AI Feedback Encourages Students to Refine and Extend Their Conceptual Understanding.** Feedback from ChatGPT influences students’ subsequent learning exchanges by providing expanded conceptual explanations that students can further process, adapt, or apply. Participant 1 initially requested ChatGPT to “relate *pakikisama* to one’s behaviors, desire, or relationship with others” (Participant 1). ChatGPT responded by explaining that *pakikisama* “influences how a person acts in social situations” and that individuals may “go along with the group even if they personally disagree, just to avoid conflict” (ChatGPT response to Participant 1). This type of detailed explanatory feedback guides the student toward a more nuanced understanding of the concept by connecting it to specific social behaviors. The chatbot’s elaboration likely shapes subsequent student thinking and messaging by encouraging more contextualized and behavior-oriented interpretations of *pakikisama*.

**How AI Feedback Shapes Students’ Framing of Social and Cultural Meanings.** AI-generated feedback influences students’ subsequent messages by framing cultural concepts within broader social interpretations. Participant 2 asked, “What is the understanding of *Pakikisama* to the Filipinos today?” (Participant 2). ChatGPT explained that *pakikisama* involves “getting along with others, maintaining harmony, and cooperating with the group” and emphasized that “many Filipinos today still see *pakikisama* as an important way to maintain good relationships and unity” (ChatGPT response to Participant 2). This feedback presents *pakikisama* as both a cultural value and a contemporary social practice. Such framing may influence subsequent student responses by encouraging them to discuss Filipino culture in terms of harmony, cooperation, and collective identity. The chatbot’s response therefore guides the direction and language of students’ continuing academic engagement.

**How AI Feedback Directs Students Toward Research Validation and Source-Based Inquiry.** AI chatbot feedback also influences students' subsequent exchanges by directing them toward source-based academic practices. Participant 3 requested, "Give me a source that works that defines *pakikisama*" (Participant 3). ChatGPT responded by recommending "JobStreet Philippines - What is *Pakikisama*?" and describing it as a "reliable source (not Wikipedia)" that could be cited for "research or school work" (ChatGPT response to Participant 3). This feedback reinforces the importance of external validation and credible sourcing. As a result, students are likely encouraged to continue interacting with AI in ways that prioritize citation, verification, and research legitimacy. The chatbot's response shapes future student messaging by modeling academically acceptable research behaviors.

**How AI Feedback Encourages Revision-Oriented and Reflective Communication.** Feedback from ChatGPT influences students' subsequent communication by encouraging revision and reflection on their own work. Participant 4 requested assistance by saying, "Can you check what's wrong with my paragraphs but please don't change it all :(" (Participant 4). ChatGPT responded by identifying a grammar issue, explaining that "'I've often told' is incorrect grammar because 'have' needs a past participle with 'been'" and suggesting the corrected structure "I was often told or I have often been told" (ChatGPT response to Participant 4). This targeted corrective feedback encourages the student to reexamine sentence structure and grammar while maintaining ownership of the text. The response likely shapes subsequent student messages by making them more revision-oriented, reflective, and attentive to language accuracy.

**How AI Feedback Encourages Structured and Analytical Responses.** AI-generated feedback influences students' later learning exchanges by modeling organized and balanced ways of presenting information. Participant 5 requested "Pros and Cons of *Pakikisama*" (Participant 5). ChatGPT replied with a categorized structure that included advantages such as "Promotes harmony" and disadvantages such as "Peer Pressure" and "Limits individuality" (ChatGPT response to Participant 5). This organized presentation encourages students to frame their subsequent academic responses analytically by considering multiple perspectives. The chatbot's structured feedback may therefore shape how students later organize essays, discussions, or reflections by modeling comparative and evaluative thinking patterns.

**Overall Interpretation.** The thematic analysis suggests that feedback from ChatGPT influences students' subsequent messages during learning exchanges by:

1. encouraging deeper conceptual refinement,
2. shaping cultural and social framing,
3. directing students toward research validation,
4. promoting revision-oriented reflection,
5. and modeling structured analytical communication.

The transcripts demonstrate that AI feedback does not simply provide answers. Instead, it actively shapes the direction, tone, organization, and academic orientation of students' continuing interactions. Students appear to adapt their subsequent communication based on the explanatory, corrective, and organizational patterns introduced by the chatbot during the learning exchange.

#### Research Question 4: Adjustment of Communication Strategies

**How Students Increase Specificity to Reduce Ambiguity in AI Responses.** Students adjust their communication strategies by making their prompts more specific when they anticipate possible ambiguity in AI-generated responses. Participant 1 asked ChatGPT to "relate *pakikisama* to one's behaviors, desire, or relationship with others" (Participant 1). Instead of merely asking for a definition, the student specified the relational dimensions—"behaviors," "desire," and "relationship with others"—to guide the chatbot toward a contextualized explanation. This indicates that students strategically expand the scope of their prompts to reduce

vague or overly general answers. The communication strategy reflects an awareness that AI responses improve when instructions contain clearer conceptual boundaries.

**How Students Contextualize Their Questions to Clarify Intended Meanings.** Students also adjust their communication by embedding social or cultural context into their prompts to avoid misunderstanding. Participant 2 asked, “What is the understanding of *Pakikisama* to the Filipinos today” (Participant 2). The inclusion of “to the Filipinos today” narrows the interpretive frame and signals that the student is seeking a contemporary cultural interpretation rather than a purely historical or dictionary-based definition. This suggests that students respond to the possibility of ambiguous AI outputs by situating their questions within a particular social context. By adding temporal and cultural qualifiers, they attempt to guide the chatbot toward more relevant and meaningful responses.

**How Students Explicitly Request Credible and Functional Information Sources.** Students adjust their communication strategies by directly specifying the type and quality of information they expect from AI systems. Participant 3 stated, “Give me a source that works that defines *pakikisama*” (Participant 3). The phrase “that works” reflects an adjustment based on prior experiences with unreliable, inaccessible, or academically weak references. Rather than simply asking for a definition, the student strategically clarifies the need for a usable and credible source. This demonstrates that students compensate for perceived ambiguity or uncertainty in AI-generated academic support by imposing explicit criteria for reliability and functionality in their prompts.

**How Students Use Instructional Constraints to Control AI Modification of Their Work.** Students adjust their communication by establishing boundaries that regulate how AI should respond to their academic writing. Participant 4 requested, “Can you check what's wrong with my paragraphs but please don't change it all :(” . The phrase “please don't change it all” functions as an instructional constraint designed to prevent excessive revision or loss of personal authorship. This adjustment suggests that students perceive potential risks in AI overcorrection or misinterpretation of their intentions. Consequently, they refine their communication strategies by specifying the degree and nature of assistance they are willing to accept. The emoticon “:(” further softens the request while emphasizing concern over preserving originality.

The communicative constraints identified in this study become more pronounced when viewed through a comparative lens. Unlike a **human tutor**, who can infer intent through prosodic cues or shared pedagogical context, the AI chatbot relies strictly on lexical input. Incorporating a comparative analysis between human-led and AI-led 'noise' resolution would further highlight the unique cognitive load placed on students when navigating the rigid, often literal, processing of a machine versus the intuitive feedback of a human educator.

**How Students Simplify Prompt Structures to Elicit Organized Responses.** Students also adjust their communication strategies by using short and direct prompts that encourage structured AI outputs. Participant 5 simply asked, “Pros and Cons of *Pakikisama*” (Participant 5). This concise format reflects a strategic reduction of linguistic complexity to avoid misunderstanding and elicit a predictable organizational structure. By framing the request through recognizable academic categories such as “pros and cons,” the student signals the exact format desired from the chatbot. This demonstrates that students adapt their communication to AI systems by using formulaic and task-oriented phrasing that minimizes interpretive ambiguity.

**Overall Interpretation.** The thematic analysis suggests that students adjust their communication strategies in response to perceived misunderstanding or ambiguity in AI responses by:

1. increasing prompt specificity,
2. contextualizing questions socially and culturally,
3. explicitly requesting credible and functional information,
4. imposing constraints on AI modification of their work,
5. and simplifying prompts to elicit organized outputs.

The transcripts indicate that students are not passive users of AI chatbots. Instead, they actively negotiate meaning and manage potential misunderstanding by refining the wording, scope, and structure of their prompts. Their communication strategies demonstrate growing awareness of how AI systems interpret instructions and how prompt design influences the quality and relevance of responses.

### Research Question 5: Continuous Exchange and Learning Experiences

**How Continuous AI Interaction Helps Students Connect Personal Experiences with Academic Ideas.** The continuous exchange of messages between students and ChatGPT shapes learning experiences by helping students connect academic concepts with their own lived experiences. Participant 1 explained that she selected only “*yung general na example na binigay like yung idea lang po*” (the general example that was given, like just the idea) and then “*ni-relate ko lang siya sa own experiences ko*” (I just related it to my own experiences). Similarly, Participant 2 shared that she searched for “understanding *ng* young Filipinos today” (understanding of young Filipinos today) and then “*inadd on ko nalang sa sarili kong words*” (I just added on using my own words). These responses suggest that students do not merely copy AI-generated content; instead, they engage in an interactive meaning-making process where AI provides conceptual scaffolding that students personalize through reflection and experience. The ongoing interaction allows students to negotiate between externally generated information and their own perspectives.

**How Continuous AI Interaction Encourages Guided and Goal-Oriented Learning.** Students’ learning experiences are shaped by the way AI interactions become anchored to teacher-provided guidelines and academic goals. Participant 3 explained that “*naka-base po yung mga questions ko sa guidelines na binigay niyo po*” (my questions were based on the guidelines you provided) and that “*sa mga answers na ibibigay ng ChatGPT doon po ako bumase ng sarili ko pong experiences*” (I based my own experiences on the answers ChatGPT would give). Participant 5 similarly stated that “*yung naisip ko for question is kung ano rin yung nasa guidelines*” (what I thought of for the question is also what was in the guidelines). These statements indicate that continuous exchanges with AI are not random or unrestricted but are strategically aligned with classroom expectations. The chatbot becomes an extension of structured academic instruction, enabling students to refine ideas while remaining focused on assessment requirements and learning objectives.

**How Continuous AI Interaction Develops Students’ Research and Information Evaluation Skills.** The repeated interaction between students and ChatGPT also shapes learning by encouraging research awareness and critical evaluation of sources. Participant 4 explained that she asked for “*kung saan galing yung mga information*” (where the information came from) and then visited “*yung link na yon*” (that link) to gather answers herself. Later, she described revising her prompt after noticing that the chatbot provided Wikipedia references: “*yung follow up question ko po is humingi po ako ng source na hindi galing sa Wikipedia*” (my follow-up question was to ask for a source that did not come from Wikipedia). This interaction demonstrates how ongoing exchanges with AI foster evaluative learning practices. Students learn to question the credibility of information, refine prompts, and seek academically acceptable references. Rather than passively consuming AI outputs, they develop skills related to verification and source discrimination.

**How Continuous AI Interaction Encourages Prompt Engineering and Strategic Communication.** The learning experience is also shaped through students’ growing awareness of how prompt wording affects AI responses. Students intentionally used keywords and instructional phrases to guide chatbot outputs. Participant 1 shared that she used the word “connect” in asking “how is mental health and *pakikisama* connect”. Participant 5 described using the phrases “positively and negatively” and “pros and cons” to obtain balanced explanations about *pakikisama*. Participant 4 requested “give me the source for this information” and even asked the AI to “create... APA style” references. These interactions show that students gradually learn how to strategically communicate with AI systems. Through repeated exchanges, students develop prompt-construction skills that shape the quality, structure, and relevance of AI-generated information.

**How Continuous AI Interaction Supports Reflective Selection and Adaptation of Ideas.** Continuous engagement with ChatGPT shapes students’ learning experiences by encouraging reflective decision-making about which ideas to retain, revise, or reject. Participant 1 explained that she selected “*yung answer na pinaka*

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**How Continuous AI Interaction Enhances Writing Confidence and Idea Development.** Students also described how sustained interaction with AI influenced their confidence, grammar, and ability to expand ideas. Participant 3 stated, “I’ve learned from the AI, so *mas gumaganda yung grammar ko*” (so my grammar is getting better) and that her essays were becoming “similar *na rin yung* from how I create my essays and grammars” (similar to how I create my essays and grammars). Participant 4 noted that AI “*nakatulong siya na magdagdag ka pa ng ibang ideas na hindi mo naiisip*” (it helped to add other ideas that you hadn't thought of) and that it “*nagsusuggest siya*” (it suggests) possible additions to the essay. Participant 5 likewise explained that AI “helped me know some aspects *ng pakikisama* and *ng effects niya*” (helped me know some aspects of *pakikisama* and its effects). These exchanges suggest that AI functions as an interactive learning companion that continuously supports idea generation, language improvement, and deeper exploration of concepts throughout the writing process.

**How Continuous AI Interaction Helps Students Connect Personal Experiences with Academic Ideas.** The continuous exchange of messages between students and ChatGPT shapes learning experiences by helping students connect academic concepts with their own lived experiences. Participant 1 explained that she selected only “*yung general na example na binigay* like *yung idea lang po*” (the general example that was given, like just the idea) and then “*ni-relate ko lang siya sa own experiences ko*” (I just related it to my own experiences). Similarly, Participant 2 shared that she searched for “understanding *ng* young Filipinos today” (understanding of young Filipinos today) and then “*inadd on ko nalang sa sarili kong words*” (I just added on using my own words). These responses suggest that students do not merely copy AI-generated content; instead, they engage in an interactive meaning-making process where AI provides conceptual scaffolding that students personalize through reflection and experience. The ongoing interaction allows students to negotiate between externally generated information and their own perspectives.

**How Continuous AI Interaction Encourages Guided and Goal-Oriented Learning.** Students’ learning experiences are shaped by the way AI interactions become anchored to teacher-provided guidelines and academic goals. Participant 3 explained that “*naka-base po yung mga questions ko sa guidelines na binigay niyo po*” (my questions were based on the guidelines you provided) and that “*sa mga answers na ibibigay ng ChatGPT doon po ako bumase ng sarili ko pong experiences*” (I based my own experiences on the answers ChatGPT would give). Participant 5 similarly stated that “*yung naisip ko for question is kung ano rin yung nasa guidelines*” (what I thought of for the question is also what was in the guidelines). These statements indicate that continuous exchanges with AI are not random or unrestricted but are strategically aligned with classroom expectations. The chatbot becomes an extension of structured academic instruction, enabling students to refine ideas while remaining focused on assessment requirements and learning objectives.

**How Continuous AI Interaction Develops Students’ Research and Information Evaluation Skills.** The repeated interaction between students and ChatGPT also shapes learning by encouraging research awareness and critical evaluation of sources. Participant 4 explained that she asked for “*kung saan galing yung mga information*” (where the information came from) and then visited “*yung link na yon*” (that link) to gather answers herself. Later, she described revising her prompt after noticing that the chatbot provided Wikipedia references: “*yung follow up question ko po is humingi po ako ng source na hindi galing sa Wikipedia*” (my follow-up question was to ask for a source that did not come from Wikipedia). This interaction demonstrates how ongoing exchanges with AI foster evaluative learning practices. Students learn to question the credibility of information, refine prompts, and seek academically acceptable references. Rather than passively consuming AI outputs, they develop skills related to verification and source discrimination.

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**Overall Interpretation.** The thematic analysis suggests that the continuous exchange of messages between students and ChatGPT shapes students' learning experiences by:

1. helping students connect academic concepts with personal experiences,
2. reinforcing goal-oriented and guideline-based learning,
3. developing research evaluation and source-validation skills,

4. encouraging strategic prompt construction and communication,
5. supporting reflective selection and adaptation of ideas,
6. and enhancing writing confidence and idea development.

The findings indicate that learning with AI is not a one-time transactional activity but an iterative and interactive process. Through continuous exchanges, students actively negotiate meaning, refine prompts, evaluate information, and integrate AI-generated insights into their own reflective and academic thinking.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the study have significant implications for the integration of AI in communication education, particularly in fostering stronger critical thinking skills among communication students. The data suggest that students are not merely passive consumers of AI-generated information. Instead, they actively negotiate meaning, refine prompts, evaluate sources, and adapt AI-generated content according to their academic and personal goals. These interactions demonstrate that AI use in communication education is fundamentally communicative and interpretive rather than purely technological. Consequently, communication education must move beyond teaching students how to use AI tools efficiently and instead focus on developing critical communication literacy that enables students to question, analyze, and strategically engage with AI-generated discourse.

The findings indicate that students already display emerging forms of evaluative and reflective thinking when interacting with AI chatbots. For example, students sought conceptual clarification, requested credible sources, revised prompts for specificity, and selectively integrated AI-generated ideas into their own reflections. However, these practices also reveal the risk of overreliance on AI-generated simplifications and structured summaries. Communication educators therefore need to ensure that AI use supports reflective thinking rather than cognitive outsourcing. Instead of simply encouraging students to generate quick answers or organized outputs, educators should design learning activities that require students to critique AI-generated explanations, identify missing perspectives, compare multiple interpretations, and justify why certain ideas were accepted, modified, or rejected. Such pedagogical approaches would strengthen metacognitive awareness and analytical reasoning.

The findings also suggest that AI literacy should be reframed as a component of critical communication literacy. Students demonstrated awareness that prompt wording influences AI responses, as shown by their use of keywords such as “pros and cons,” “connect,” and “what is the understanding of pakikisama to Filipinos today.” This indicates that students are already engaging in forms of rhetorical framing and strategic communication when constructing prompts. Communication education can build on this by teaching prompt engineering not simply as a technical skill but as a communicative act involving audience adaptation, framing, rhetorical precision, and dialogic negotiation. Students should learn that prompts shape the tone, direction, and ideological framing of AI-generated responses in the same way that communication strategies shape human interactions.

Another major implication concerns the development of students’ research evaluation and verification skills. Students frequently requested “sources that work,” rejected Wikipedia-based references, and sought APA-style citations, suggesting an emerging concern for academic credibility. However, the findings also reveal the danger that students may equate the mere presence of citations with legitimacy. Communication education must therefore emphasize source verification, cross-referencing, and critical evaluation of AI-generated information. Educators should train students to identify hallucinations, biases, inaccuracies, and ideological assumptions embedded in AI-generated responses. Assignments can include exercises where students compare AI-generated content with scholarly literature, analyze the quality of suggested references, and evaluate how AI systems frame social and cultural issues.

The findings further highlight the importance of preserving authorship and intellectual identity in AI-assisted writing. Students expressed concern about maintaining originality, particularly in statements such as

“please don’t change it all :(.” This suggests that students value AI as a supportive editor or guide but remain cautious about losing their authentic voice. Communication education should therefore establish clearer ethical frameworks regarding AI-assisted writing, emphasizing the distinction between assistance and substitution. Students should be encouraged to reflect critically on how AI influences their writing style, reasoning processes, and communicative identity. Since communication disciplines place high value on perspective, rhetorical voice, and authenticity, maintaining intellectual ownership becomes an essential component of critical thinking development.

Moreover, the findings suggest that AI can function as a productive dialogic learning partner when integrated thoughtfully into communication education. The continuous exchange between students and ChatGPT encouraged prompt revision, reflective adaptation, source evaluation, and idea expansion. These interactions demonstrate that AI-supported learning is iterative and conversational rather than merely transactional. As such, educators can maximize the critical thinking potential of AI by designing activities where students debate AI-generated interpretations, critique chatbot responses, compare AI reasoning with human reasoning, and reflect on how AI shaped their thinking during the writing process. The educational value of AI therefore lies less in its ability to provide answers and more in its ability to stimulate reflective intellectual dialogue.

Overall, the findings suggest that AI is transforming communication education from a model centered primarily on information acquisition toward one focused on communicative negotiation, interpretive judgment, and reflective interaction with machine-generated discourse. The challenge for communication educators is not simply whether students should use AI, but how students can remain critically conscious communicators while engaging with AI systems. Critical thinking in AI-supported communication education will depend on students’ ability to question, evaluate, contextualize, and strategically negotiate AI-generated knowledge rather than merely consume it.

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A transactional rubric for prompt engineering is proposed below. This rubric allows educators to assess the *process* of AI interaction rather than just the final output.

Table 1

*Proposed Transactional Rubric for Prompt Engineering for Frequent Users of ChatGPT Only*

Criteria	Developing (1)	Proficient (2)	Exemplary (3)
<b>Instructional Constraints</b>	Provides vague goals with no parameters.	Sets basic parameters (e.g., length, tone).	Provides sophisticated constraints (e.g., persona, target audience, negative constraints).

Criteria	Developing (1)	Proficient (2)	Exemplary (3)
<b>Resolution of "Noise"</b>	Accepts AI errors or irrelevant info without correction.	Identifies errors but struggles to articulate the fix.	Strategically pivots prompts to clarify misconceptions and eliminate noise.
<b>Iterative Refinement</b>	Single-turn interaction; "one and done" approach.	Two or three turns; basic follow-up questions.	High-level iteration; uses previous AI output to narrow the scope and increase specificity.

While this study provides a snapshot of initial interactions, future research should adopt a **longitudinal approach**, tracking student-AI dyads over a full semester. Such an extension would allow researchers to observe whether 'transactional strategies'—the specific ways students negotiate meaning with the bot—evolve or solidify as students become more attuned to the AI’s specific linguistic limitations and 'hallucination' patterns.

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