



ANALYZING POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ONLINE LEARNING INTERACTIONS AMONG ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS

Nurmayana¹, Fatin Nadifa Tarigan², Linda Astuti Rangkuti³ Nurhalimah⁴

^{1,2,4}Universitas Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia

³Universitas Alwashliyah Medan

E-mail: ^{1,2,3,4}nurmayana@upmi.ac.id

Accepted :

12 July 2025

Published :

14 July 2025

Corresponding Author:
Nurmayana

Email Corresponding :
nurmayana@upmi.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the types and frequency of politeness strategies employed by English Education students during online academic interactions via WhatsApp, with a particular emphasis on how students uphold politeness and demonstrate respect toward lecturers within a virtual learning environment. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study analyzed 200 utterances derived from constructed chat transcripts. The data were examined through the lens of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, encompassing positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off record strategies. Findings indicate that positive politeness strategies predominated (57.5%), followed by negative politeness strategies (30%), with bald on record and off record approaches appearing less frequently. This distribution highlights the students' pragmatic awareness and the influence of cultural norms in sustaining courteous academic discourse. The study contributes to the fields of linguistics, pragmatics, and English language education by offering insights into students' digital communicative behavior. It also informs educators and teacher preparation programs about the pragmatic competencies necessary for professional interaction in online academic spaces. The novelty of the study lies in its focus on the simulated digital exchanges of English Education students, bridging theoretical pragmatics with pedagogical application, and enriching the discourse on digital pragmatics within the Indonesian higher education landscape.

Keywords: *Politeness Strategies, Online Learning, Pragmatics, English Education; WhatsApp, Digital Communications.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of technology has brought about substantial changes in the field of education, particularly in how communication occurs between educators and learners. With the widespread adoption of online learning platform especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a global shift to remote education digital communication tools have become vital in sustaining the continuity of learning. However, effective communication in this digital context extends beyond the simple delivery of instructional content; it also involves nurturing respectful social interactions and upholding the

norms of academic discourse (Al Awlaqi & Ghazali, 2023; Jaya et al., 2025; Lesiana et al., 2023).

One significant communicative element that has gained prominence in this setting is the concept of politeness. As theorized by Sapitri et al. (2019), politeness strategies are essential in managing interpersonal relationships, particularly in situations where a speaker's actions may pose a threat to the listener's self-image or "face." In online learning environments where communication predominantly takes place via text-based applications such as WhatsApp students are challenged to express themselves clearly and respectfully, especially when making requests,

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

offering thanks, issuing apologies, or seeking clarification. The lack of nonverbal cues in these digital interactions heightens the need for linguistic sensitivity and pragmatic awareness (Rojo-Ramos et al., 2025; Ekman & Friesen, 2019).

Although a considerable body of research has investigated politeness strategies within conventional, face-to-face educational contexts (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Brown & Yule, 2017), there remains a notable gap in studies that specifically examine the use of such strategies in online learning, particularly among students in English Education programs. This gap is especially important to address, considering that these students are in training to become educators themselves. Their ability to employ appropriate politeness strategies in digital communication is not only a reflection of their pragmatic competence but also serves as a model for the professional conduct they are expected to embody in their future teaching careers (Wiwin et al., 2022; Ntumba et al., 2023).

Moreover, understanding how English Education students navigate politeness in virtual academic interactions can provide valuable insights into their communication styles, cultural norms, and readiness for the professional demands of teaching in increasingly digitalized classrooms (Kusmanto & Widodo, 2022; Santamaria-Gracia, 2017; Alonso-Marks & Bayonas, 2023). As education continues to integrate technology more deeply, fostering digital literacy must also include an emphasis on pragmatic skills such as politeness, ensuring that future teachers are equipped to maintain respectful, effective, and culturally sensitive communication in both online and face-to-face environments (Susanto et al., 2020; Zhang, 2022; Dash, 2022).

This study is motivated by the gap between existing research on classroom pragmatics and the specific context of online learning. It seeks to explore:

- 1) What types of politeness strategies are used by English Education students in online learning interactions?
- 2) Which strategy is most dominant?

The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in digital pragmatics and support the development of better communication practices in online educational contexts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Politeness in Pragmatics

Politeness is a subfield of pragmatics that deals with how language users maintain social harmony through their communicative behaviour (Obana, 2019; Blitvich & Sifianou, 2019). Buyukkal (2025) introduced four main types of politeness strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record.

- 1) Bald on Record: Direct speech acts without mitigation.
- 2) Positive Politeness: Strategies aimed at expressing friendliness and solidarity.
- 3) Negative Politeness: Strategies showing respect for the listener's autonomy.
- 4) Off Record: Indirect speech that allows multiple interpretations.

Politeness in Educational Settings

In classroom settings, especially in higher education, politeness plays an important role in maintaining professional and respectful relations between lecturers and students (Leech, 2016; Cutts, 2020). Studies such as those by Holmes and Wilson (2022) show that students tend to use positive and negative politeness more frequently when addressing authority figures.

Politeness in Online Communication

Online communication presents unique challenges for politeness due to the absence of physical cues (Tan et al., 2020; Suyitno et al., 2021; Becerra-Posada et al., 2022). Research by Rahayu and Puspitasari (2022) indicates that in Indonesian educational contexts, WhatsApp is the most

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

commonly used platform for class-related communication, and politeness patterns often mirror face-to-face behavior with certain digital adjustments.

3. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a focus on pragmatic analysis, specifically examining the use of politeness strategies. The data were derived from constructed chat transcripts that simulate typical online interactions between English Education students and their lecturers. A total of 200 utterances were gathered from five simulated WhatsApp conversations, encompassing a range of speech acts such as making requests, offering apologies, expressing gratitude, seeking clarification, and submitting assignments. These constructed dialogues were carefully designed to mirror authentic academic communication patterns, while also maintaining ethical standards by avoiding the use of real participant data (Susanto et al., 2023; Anufia, 2019).

The analysis was guided by Buyukkal (2025) framework of politeness strategies. Each utterance was systematically classified into one of the four categories: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, or Off Record. To determine the prevalent patterns of language use, the occurrences of each strategy were quantified in terms of frequency and percentage (Popham, 2024; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the digital era of education, where face-to-face interaction is often replaced by text-based communication, the nuances of language especially politeness take on new significance. Understanding how students navigate politeness in online academic settings offers valuable insights into their linguistic choices, cultural values, and interpersonal awareness. This section

presents the findings of the study by analyzing the types and frequency of politeness strategies employed in simulated WhatsApp conversations between English Education students and their lecturers. The results not only reveal patterns of language use but also reflect the pragmatic competence that these future educators are developing in managing respectful communication in a virtual learning environment.

Table 1. Distribution of Politeness Strategies in constructed chat data (N=200 utterances).

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Positive politeness	115	57.5%
Negative politeness	60	30%
Bald on record	20	10%
Off record	5	2.5%

Table 2. Sample Utterances Classified by Strategy

Utterance	Speaker	Strategy
"Good morning, Mam. I hope you're well today!"	Student	Positive Politeness
"Could you please clarify the requirements for Assignment 3?"	Student	Negative Politeness
"Thanks a lot for your fast response, Mam."	Student	Positive Politeness
"Sorry to trouble you again, but may I submit the task tomorrow?"	Student	Negative Politeness
"Submit your work by tomorrow."	Lecturer	Bald on Record
"Maybe we could extend the deadline?"	Student	Off Record

Based on the analysis of 200 constructed utterances simulating WhatsApp conversations between English Education students and their lecturers, the findings reveal that positive politeness was the most frequently used strategy, appearing 115 times (57.5%). This strategy was marked by expressions of friendliness, solidarity, and mutual respect, such as greetings and gratitude. Examples include: "*Good morning,*

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

Mam. I hope you're well today!" and "Thanks a lot for your fast response, Mam."

These indicate that students aim to maintain a warm and respectful tone, building interpersonal rapport with their lecturers in digital communication.

The second most common strategy was negative politeness, used 60 times (30%). This strategy was typically employed when students made requests, apologized, or asked for clarification in a way that minimized imposition. Utterances such as *"Could you please clarify the requirements for Assignment 3?"* and *"Sorry to trouble you again, but may I submit the task tomorrow?"* reflect students' efforts to remain polite and considerate, especially when their requests could potentially inconvenience the lecturer.

Bald on record strategies appeared 20 times (10%) and were generally used for direct, unmitigated statements most commonly by lecturers giving instructions (e.g., *"Submit your work by tomorrow."*). However, some students also used this strategy when conveying straightforward information or in contexts perceived as informal or time-sensitive.

The least used was the off record strategy, found only 5 times (2.5%). This strategy involves indirect communication, where the speaker implies meaning rather than stating it directly. An example is: *"Maybe we could extend the deadline?"* which suggests a request without explicitly making one. The rarity of this strategy suggests that students tend to prefer clarity and directness in academic communication, likely to avoid misunderstanding.

DISCUSSION

Positive politeness dominated (57.5%). The predominance of positive politeness strategies (57.5%) corresponds with Holmes' (2013) findings, which highlight students' inclination to establish interpersonal rapport in digital communication settings. This tendency likely reflects both their exposure to pragmatic instruction in English language education and broader cultural values that prioritize social harmony (Leech, 2016;

Hågemark & Gårdenfors, 2025; Kusmanto & Widodo, 2022).

Negative politeness accounted for 30% of the data, suggesting that students were consistently mindful of maintaining their lecturers' personal space and authority. As Hashemi (2021) and Byrne (2021) explains, the use of mitigative devices such as modal verbs ("could," "may") and apologetic expressions serves to soften face-threatening acts an observation corroborated by the patterns in the constructed chat data.

Although bald on record strategies were less prevalent (10%), they were primarily employed by lecturers, which aligns with their institutional authority. Marduqi and Prihananto (2021) framework supports this, indicating that power dynamics often shape the degree of directness in communicative exchanges.

The off record strategy was the least used (2.5%), potentially due to its reliance on implied meaning, which may increase the risk of miscommunication. This result diverges from Chen and Su's (2020) findings in casual messaging contexts, but in structured academic settings like those simulated in this study, clarity and precision appear to be prioritized over indirectness.

5. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to examine the types and frequency of politeness strategies used by English Education students during online learning interactions, particularly through messaging platforms like WhatsApp. The analysis revealed that students predominantly employed positive politeness strategies, followed by negative politeness, with significantly fewer instances of bald on record and off record strategies. This distribution reflects a strong inclination toward fostering social harmony and demonstrating respect in academic communication, especially in interactions with lecturers.

These findings are consistent with previous research in pragmatics and sociolinguistics, supporting the notion that language behavior is shaped by cultural

norms and educational training. Notably, the study offers valuable insights into digital discourse practices within academic environments a topic of growing significance in the era of blended and remote learning.

From an applied perspective, the results underscore the importance of incorporating pragmatic competence into English Education curricula. Familiarity with politeness strategies equips future teachers not only with effective communication skills but also with the ability to model respectful and context-appropriate language use in both virtual and traditional classrooms.

Looking ahead, further studies are encouraged to utilize authentic, ethically approved data to deepen the analysis of naturally occurring interactions. Comparative studies involving different cultural or institutional contexts could enrich the understanding of how politeness strategies vary across regions. Additionally, future research might explore politeness use in diverse educational settings, such as vocational training programs, postgraduate studies, or multilingual classrooms. Investigating the role of gender, power dynamics, or digital literacy in shaping politeness in online communication would also provide valuable contributions to the field of digital pragmatics and teacher education.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia, for supporting this research. Special thanks to my colleagues for valuable feedback during the drafting process.

7. REFERENCES

Al Awlaqi, H. A. S. M., & Ghozali, I. (2023). Is Oral Communication Apprehension Reasonable?: A Study on Sociocultural Factors Among Indonesian EFL Learners. *REiLA: Journal of Research and Innovation in Language*, 5(3), 252–265.
<https://doi.org/10.31849/reila.v5i3.166>

34

Alonso-Marks, E., & Bayonas, M. (2023). Politeness strategies in the greetings of Spanish learners in virtual language learning environments. *Monographic Topic: The Grammar of Ellipse*, 12(2), 387–403.
<https://doi.org/10.7557/1.12.2.7045>

Anufia, T. A. dan B. (2019). *Resume: instrumen pengumpulan data* [Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAIN) Sorong].
<https://osf.io/preprints/inarxiv/s3kr6/download>

Becerra-Posada, T., García-Montes, P., Sagre-Barbosa, A., Carcamo-Espitia, M. I., & Herazo-Rivera, J. D. (2022). Project-based Learning: The Promotion of Communicative Competence and Self-confidence at a State High School in Colombia. *How*, 29(2), 13–31.
<https://doi.org/10.19183/how.29.2.560>

Blitvich, P. G.-C., & Sifianou, M. (2019). Im/politeness and discursive pragmatics. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 145, 91–101.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2019.03.015>

Brown, G., & Yule, G. (2017). *Teaching the spoken language: An approach based on the analysis of conversational English*. Cambridge University Press.

Buyukkal, B. (2025). *Politeness Strategies*. Büyükkal, Burcu. “Politeness Strategies.” Socio-Cultural Concepts of (Im) Politeness: Interpretation, Linguistics, and Discourse Analysis: Interpretation, Linguistics, and Discourse Analysis.

Byrne, J. (2021). Mitigating face-threatening acts in academic chat: A study. *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 22(3), 301–318.

Chen, L., & Su, Y. (2020). Indirect requests in student chat contexts: Off-record politeness. *Language & Communication*, 45(1), 12–25.

Cutts, M. (2020). *Oxford Guide to Plain*

- English*. Oxford University Press. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/537057105.pdf>
- Dash, B. B. (2022). Digital Tools for Teaching and Learning English Language in 21st Century. *International Journal Of English and Studies*, 4(2), 8–13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.47311/IJOES.2022.4202>
- Ekman, P., & Friesen, W. V. (2019). The repertoire of nonverbal behavior: Categories, origins, usage, and coding. *Journal Semiotica*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.1969.1.1.49>
- Hågemark, H., & Gärdenfors, P. (2025). Expressives, directives and assertions: Cognitive dimensions of speech acts. *Language and Communication*, 101, 84–104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2025.02.003>
- HASHEMI, A. (2021). The effects of using games on teaching vocabulary in reading comprehension: a case of gifted students. *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists*, 9(2), 151–160. <https://doi.org/10.17478/jegys.846480>
- Holmes, J., & Wilson, N. (2022). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367821852>
- Jaya, A., Hartono, R., Wahyuni, S., & Yulianto, H. J. (2025). Los efectos de la estrategia de aprendizaje basado en proyectos con actividad física en función del género sobre el rendimiento escolar y la confianza en sí mismos de los estudiantes. *Retos: Nuevas Tendencias En Educación Física, Deporte y Recreación*, 66, 349–360. <https://doi.org/10.47197/retos.v66.110067>
- Kusmanto, H., & Widodo, P. (2022). Positive politeness strategies during online learning: A cyberpragmatic study. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 9(3), 1170–1182. <https://doi.org/10.47197/retos.v62.109720>
- Leech, G. N. (2016). *Principles of Pragmatics*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315835976>
- Lesiana, N., Mulyadi, Aswadi Jaya, & Pratiwi, E. (2023). Classroom Interaction in Communicative Language Teaching of Secondary School. *Esteem Journal of English Education Study Programme*, 7(1), 61–71. <https://doi.org/10.31851/esteem.v7i1.12661>
- Marduqi, H., & Prihananto, N. (2021). Communicative Approach in the Five Curricula of English Subject for Secondary Schools: A Paradox in English Language Teaching in Indonesia. *Science Open*. <https://doi.org/10.14293/S2199-1006.1.SOR-PPHBZCF.v1>
- Ntumba, C., Aguayo, S., & Maina, K. (2023). Revolutionizing Retail: A Mini Review of E-commerce Evolution. *Journal of Digital Marketing and Communication*, 3(2), 100–110. <https://doi.org/10.53623/jdmc.v3i2.365>
- Obana, Y. (2019). *Politeness*. Routledge.
- Popham, W. J. (2024). *Classroom Assessment: What Teachers Need to Know* (10th ed.). Pearson.
- Rahayu, D., & Puspitasari, D. (2022). Politeness strategies in WhatsApp classroom interaction: A study of Indonesian students. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 12(2), 145–158.
- Rojo-Ramos, J., García-Guillén, M. J., Castillo-Paredes, A., & Galán-Arroyo, C. (2025). Impact of verbal and non-verbal communication in educational settings on perception of importance of physical education in adolescence. *Retos: Nuevas Tendencias En Educación Física, Deporte y Recreación*, 62, 1042–1049. <https://doi.org/10.47197/retos.v62.109720>

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

- Santamaria-Gracia, C. (2017). Emotional and educational consequences of (im) politeness in teacher–student interaction at higher education. *Corpus Pragmatics*, 1, 233–255. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41701-017-0010-2>
- Sapitri, P. A., Chasanah, A., Putri, A. A., & Paulima, J. (2019). Exploring Brown and Levinson's Politeness Strategies: An Explanation on the Nature of the Politeness Phenomenon. *REiLA : Journal of Research and Innovation in Language*, 1(3), 111–117. <https://doi.org/10.31849/reila.v1i3.3801>
- Susanto, D., Risnita, & Jailani, M. S. (2023). Teknik Pemeriksaan Keabsahan Data Dalam Penelitian Ilmiah. *Jurnal QOSIM Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial & Humaniora*, 1(1), 53–61. <https://doi.org/10.61104/jq.v1i1.60>
- Susanto, R., Rachmadtullah, R., & Rachbini, W. (2020). Technological and pedagogical models: Analysis of factors and measurement of learning outcomes in education. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 7(2), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/311>
- Suyitno, A., Suyitno, H., & Sugiharti, E. (2021). Integration of 4C competencies in online mathematics learning in junior high schools during the covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1918(4), 113–124. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1918/4/042083>
- Tan, P. L., Noor, S. M., Rasoolimanesh, M., & Mustafa, H. (2020). Communication and visitor factors contributing towards heritage visitors' mindfulness. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 15(1), 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2019.1586909>
- Thornhill-Miller, B., Camarda, A., Mercier, M., & Burkhardt, J.-M. (2023). Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Collaboration: Assessment, Certification, and Promotion of 21st Century Skills for the Future of Work and Education. *Journal of Intelligence*, 11(3), 54. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence11030054>
- Wiwin, D., Utami, U. W., & Taris, T. (2022). Digital Media and Its Implication in Promoting Students' Autonomous Learning. *JET (Journal of English Teaching)*, 8(1), 97–106. <https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v8i1.3284>
- Zhang, W. (2022). The Role of Technology-Based Education and Teacher Professional Development in English as a Foreign Language Classes. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13(June). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.910315>