

EFFECTS OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES ON ESL LEARNERS' ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS AT BS LEVEL

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Abstract

The purpose of current study was to investigate the Effect of Politeness Strategies on Students' Communication Skills at BS Level. To achieve study objective quantitative research method was used. BS students of KFUEIT were selected as a population. Three departments were selected through Cluster random sampling techniques. A questionnaire was developed after review of related literature. Fourteen statements out of sixteen were finalized after CVR and CVI test. Data was collected personally by researcher. About 360 students were responses properly and accurately. Data was computed in SPSS-23 and screened. Simple percentage, mean, T.test, One-Way ANOVA were applied for data analysis. Study results revealed that; mostly respondent agreed that politeness strategies have significant effect on their communication skills. Mean results of ANOVA reveals that Computer Science (COSC) has strong effects on politeness strategies than other five programs. ANOVA reveals that politeness strategies have significant effect on students' learning English communication skills of three programs Mathematics, COSC and DASC than other three programs. Study recommended that students of English, TEXTD and Physics need more attention towards politeness strategies for their better English communication skills.

Key Words: Politeness Strategies, Students' communication Skills, BS Level

Introduction:

Effective communication skills are crucial for individuals in various aspects of life, including education, professional settings, and personal relationships. In the realm of English language education, the ability to communicate effectively in English is of paramount importance. However, communication skills are not limited to mere grammatical accuracy and vocabulary proficiency; they also encompass the appropriate use of politeness strategies.

Politeness strategies refer to the linguistic and non-linguistic techniques individuals employ to maintain positive social interactions and show respect towards others. These strategies play a significant role in shaping the overall effectiveness of communication, as they contribute to the establishment of rapport, the mitigation of conflict, and the creation of a positive communication environment. To prevent students from misinterpreting their pleasant approach intended to improve the teaching and learning process, teachers must establish clear boundaries. In order to avoid miscommunication, it is necessary for students to utilize civility techniques when speaking with their teachers (Dedović-Atilla & Dubravac, 2022). All assert that being courteous increases interpersonal respect and reduces the likelihood of conflict in social groupings, (Mezbache & Merrouche, 2022). The manners used in social interactions differ in nations with various language and cultural traditions, (Makhmudov, 2020). Positive manners are preferred over impolite manners in some cultures. All nations are impacted by this circumstance (Hillekens et al., 2020).

Indirection and ambiguity in speech are perceived as more polite in Asian cultures. Straightforward speaking is considered more polite in some countries like Polish and Russian (Pravichai & Ariyabuddhipongs, 2018). University students employed politeness strategies to preserve a cordial and respectful atmosphere during a class presenting exercise (Wangia & Otonde, 2020). This emphasizes the value of employing politeness approaches in educational settings since they can enhance the teaching-learning process and students' attitudes towards language (Calcagni & Lago, 2018).

Politeness is crucial for maintaining positive relationships with others in everyday life. It demonstrates respect and helps to prevent aggression by modifying our language. In academic settings, politeness is needed to ensure a successful learning experience. Politeness strategies are part of pragmatics research, which aims to determine what is appropriate behavior to show courtesy (Kuzhevskaya, 2019). During question and answer sessions, guests usually strive to make a good impression and project a positive image while being kind to others to gain acceptance. Hosts who oversee the school may not express their self-representation freely as they are in a position of authority or superordinate in that setting.

This study focuses specifically on the effect of politeness strategies on the communication skills of BS English students. The Bachelor of Science (BS) in English program is designed to equip students with a comprehensive understanding of the English language, literature, linguistics, and communication. By exploring the impact of politeness strategies, this research aims to shed light on how these strategies can enhance the communication skills of BS English students, who are likely to use English as a medium of instruction, both academically and professionally.

Literature Review:

Politeness

Politeness is a type of sociolinguistics. It is because politeness is related to sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics is a study of relationships that exist above language and society. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the language structure and how language functions in society. The purpose of sociolinguistics is to understand the social structure of a language while studying it. Politeness, as a type of sociolinguistics, is one method of analyzing how to make students understand the subject during conversation by using politeness as an element of communication without compromising the learning goals. Typically, students avoid using politeness because they believe that their classmates who are not fluent in English were struggling to understand the subject (Yu, 2005).

People represent their faces to others in social interactions. It is also used in class discussions because the class consists of both students and teachers. Because the classroom is a social setting, courtesy is expected in all situations, particularly during discussions. Politeness is defined as the use of an acceptable word or phrase in the proper situation. The norms and limitations that exist within their community influence how people talk. This means that the common rules and expectations of the culture in which they are employed shape linguistic patterns. Maintaining politeness in social interaction is maintaining peaceful and simple social interaction and avoiding the use of potentially face-threatening or destructive speech behaviors (Cummiskey & Donnelly, 2022).

The principle is founded on the usage of politeness, intimacy, closeness, and relationships, as well as the speaker-hearer social distance. People pick and execute particular ideals on a pragmatic scale based on their culture and the current context in social interaction. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory divides five techniques into five categories: - to do exactly what it says, bald on record - to execute speech activities with positive politeness (refers to the positive face) - use negative politeness in speech acts (refers to the negative face) - off-the-record indirect speech act - Do not perform any speaking acts or say anything (do not perform the FTA) (Cummiskey & Donnelly, 2022).

The Concept of Using Politeness during Communication

In the classroom, English serve a double duty as both the medium of instruction and the subject of study. However, the teacher continues to dominate classroom interaction by offering orders, explanations, and demonstrating gratitude, while students play a minimal role, frequently only using English when necessary and occasionally mixing it with their mother tongue, Pakistan. In class, the teacher often speaks politely, using phrases such as "Class" rather than "students" or "children," and pupils address their teacher as "Ma'am" or "Sir" to show respect. When presenting, however, students frequently fail to follow these formal language conventions, forgetting to utilize titles such as "Ms." or "Mr." for themselves or others. While some may assume that speaking fluently is sufficient for language learning, understanding how to talk effectively in various settings is critical. Students take turns expressing spoken assertions, known as utterances, during discussion sessions (Msimanga & Lelliott, 2014).

Effects of Politeness Strategies

On the positive side, employing politeness strategies can assist students in developing respectful and constructive connections with their professors and peers, which can promote learning and academic success. Additionally, being polite might help students communicate their ideas and perspectives more clearly, particularly during discussions and arguments in the classroom. Students are more likely to participate actively in the class and take part in collaborative learning when they feel respected and valued. The use of politeness techniques can have both beneficial and detrimental consequences on undergraduate communication education (Prayitno et al., 2021). On the negative side, overly polite behavior can occasionally impede efficient communication, especially when directness and clarity are required. Overly worried students may refrain from disagreeing or seeking clarification, which might result in misunderstandings and confusion. Sometimes, being polite is used to cover up criticism or unfavorable comments, which keeps students from getting useful criticism that may help them get better at communicating. Overall, striking a balance between politeness and directness is the key to effective communication.

Gender differences in language

Women tend to use positive and conflict-mitigating politeness methods rather than face-threatening ones. Language variants are closely related to society. "Gender differences in language arise because language as a social phenomenon is closely related to social attitudes". Men and women are socially distinct in that society assigns them different social roles and anticipates them to behave in various ways.

In order to understand how both men and women convey their own behavior, which may be seen especially in contradictory speech, gender in the language of politeness has thus been, regarded a promising issue for inquiry. For instance, in a gender study, investigated the Iranian EFL learners' politeness displays of disagreement (Esfahlan & Boroumand, 2020). 'According to the study's findings, females primarily employ indirect methods including hedges, tag questions, and mitigation. Males tend to employ straightforward methods such as direct and unequivocal declarations. A gender research was conducted by (Heidari, Rasekh, & Simin, 2014) to investigate how young Persian male speakers express this behavior. According to the study, there is a connection between gender and the politeness techniques used in speech acts of dispute.

In three semesters, the researcher identified politeness strategies in the students' responses. The responses from the students used four politeness techniques: positive, negative, bald-on-record, and off-the-record. Gratitude is a statement of a good politeness strategy. This was mostly said by the kids in response to the teacher's online statement. This strategy is in line with the hypothesis of Brown and Levinson theory, which claims that saying "thank you" is a polite method to prevent face-threatening behaviors. According to (Mahmud, 2019) shows that thankfulness also denotes solidarity over power. The teacher was the object of gratitude in this study. The statement may have been used by the students to indicate that they welcomed and did not view the duties or assignments included in the online notice as burdens.

Methodology

The methodology section consist of the research design, the study area, the target population, sample and sampling procedure, research instruments, pilot study, data collection procedure, methods of data analysis and ethical considerations.

Research Design

Research designs can be classified as experimental, quasi-experimental, correlational, or descriptive. Each design has its own advantages and disadvantages and is suitable for various research issues and goals. The research question, the type of data and the study's resources all influence the choice of research design. (Trujillo, 2010) divided research design into three categories: mixed methods, qualitative, and quantitative. A descriptive research design, a subset of quantitative research, was used in the current investigation. Current study was to describe numerous politeness strategies that were discovered and noted in the data that had been gathered. The basic framework for the study was the theory of Brown and Levinson, which was also used to determine the kinds of politeness strategies used on America's Got Talent (Marthasari, 2021).

Population and Sample

A population is any collection of people, things, or events that fit particular characteristics and are relevant to the researcher in terms of quantitative research methodology. Researchers frequently choose a smaller subset, or sample, to study because this group is typically too big to examine in its whole (Gautam, 2021). All students of Khawaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology, District Rahim Yar Khan were the population of this study. Multistage cluster random sampling techniques were used, at first stage three faculties were selected randomly from eight faculties. At second stage, two programs were selected from each faculty. At third stage three semesters were selected from each program. At fourth stage, ten

students (5 male, 5 female) were selected randomly from each semester. Total 360 students were selected as the sample of this study.

Research Instruments

This study was conducted by using quantitative research method. Objective of the study was to discover the effects of politeness strategies on learning English communication skills based on demographic variables such as rural and urban, male and female.

After looking over the available literature and compiling pertinent data, a questionnaire was constructed to be used in the study. The first section of this questionnaire collected demographic information, and the second section was made up of closed-ended questions. To ensure the questionnaire's efficacy as a research tool, the development procedure was meticulously planned and carried out. This required a detailed analysis of the pertinent literature and the selection of the most important metrics. After that, the questionnaire was created and put to the test to guarantee its reliability and validity. The produced tool was utilized to gather information from the study subjects. The detail of the instrumentation process is as follows.

For content validity; 12 experts of English and Education department, eight experts from English and 4 expert from education department were selected, with test of content validity Ratio (CVR), content validity Index (CVI) analysis. The results of these tests are as under;

Content Validity Ratio

The Content Validity Ratio (CVR), a statistic used to determine whether to reject or keep a certain item, is widely recognized as the approach for determining content validity (Ibrahim, Aung, Oo, Abas, & Kamudin, 2022). The minimum allowed CVI value for a panel of 12 is 0.51 (Ibrahim et al., 2022). By applying the formula $CVR = ne - (N/2) / (N/2)$

Questionnaire was developed to measure the effectiveness of tool by 12 subjects experts which was initially developed with 16 statements against 2 factors however; 2 statements were excluded which were showing the value of CVR less than 0.51. The CVR Calculation for Questionnaire is given below:

Table-1 Content Validity Ratio (CVR) of Questionnaire for Educational Experts

Factor	Item Number	Total No. Experts	Total No. of Essentials	CVR
	1	12	10	0.83
	2	12	12	1.00
	3	12	10	0.83
	4	12	05	0.41
	5	12	11	0.92
	6	12	11	0.92
	7	12	10	0.83
	8	12	11	0.92
	9	12	12	1.00
	10	12	11	0.92
	11	12	11	0.83
	12	12	11	0.92
	13	12	10	0.83
	14	12	11	0.92

	15	12	12	1.00
	16	12	11	0.92

Content Validity Index (CVI):

The mean CVR for each item included in the final instrument is the Content Validity Index (CVI) (DeVon et al., 2007). The SCVI (Universal Agreement) measures the percentage of an instrument's items that all of the panel's experts were able to agree on. The average SCVI, also known as the Scale Validity Index, is calculated using the average CVI.

Item level CVI was calculated the questionnaire and all the statements in the questionnaire having value of CVI > 0.78 or higher with the panel of experts of 12 were ensured as relevant, and considered to achieve the excellent content validity of the questionnaire to measure the effectiveness of Educational experts. After calculating the CVI researcher calculated the S-CVI/Ave of the Questionnaire. The minimum acceptable SCVI/Ave is the value between 0.80 to 0.90. The Calculation of CVI is given below.

Table-2 Content Validity Index (CVI) of Questionnaire for Educational Experts

Factors	Item Number	Total number of Experts	Total number of Essentials	CVI
Politeness Strategies	1	12	10	0.83
	2	12	12	1.00
	3	12	10	0.83
	4	12	05	0.41
	5	12	11	0.92
	6	12	11	0.92
	7	12	10	0.83
	8	12	11	0.92
	9	12	12	1.00
	10	12	11	0.92
	11	12	05	0.41
Learning English communication skills	12	12	12	1.00
	13	12	11	0.92
	14	12	10	0.83
	15	12	11	0.92
	16	12	10	0.83

After calculation of CVR and CVI, total 14 valid and reliable statements out of 16 were finalized for questionnaire. Overall reliability of the questionnaire is .91.

Data Collection Procedure

For data collection; researcher personally visited each department of KFUEIT RYK. Total 370 questionnaires were distributed in BS 1st, 2nd, and 3rd semesters. Total 360 questionnaires were returned timely with correct forms. Overall response rate was 97%.

Data Analysis Procedure

Results

In table shows that descriptive statistics for each item about the respondents' views regarding different politeness strategies. Near (39+23) 63% respondents agreed that cultural differences affect the use of polite communication. Approximate (42+16) 58% respondent agreed that they use the polite communication in different situations for better recognition. Near about (34+25) 59% respondent agreed that since starting their undergraduate studies for improving their academic skills they use the polite communication. About (33+35) 69% respondent agreed that it is necessary to be successful in their academic/personal life they prefer to use the polite communication. Roundabout (34+21) 56% respondent agreed that even if cultural/societal norms discourage it they prefer to use politeness strategies in certain setting.

Table-3 Effect of Politeness Strategies on learning English communication skills

Sr . No .	Statement	Level of Agreement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Std. Deviation	Mean
1	I understand the cultural differences affect the use of polite communication.	F	40	24	70	142	84	1.23	3.57
		%	11.1	6.7	19.4	39.4	23.3		
2	I use polite communication in different situations for recognition.	F	26	34	90	152	58	1.09	3.50
		%	7.2	9.4	25.0	42.2	16.1		
3	I use polite communication since starting my undergraduate studies for improving academic skills.	F	24	40	82	124	90	1.16	3.60
		%	6.7	11.1	22.8	34.4	25.0		
4	I prefer to use polite communication is necessary to be successful in my academic/personal life.	F	22	18	72	122	126	1.13	3.86
		%	6.1	5.0	20.0	33.9	35.0		
5	I use polite communication in certain setting even if cultural/societal norms discourage it.	F	30	26	101	125	78	1.15	3.54
		%	8.3	7.2	28.1	34.7	21.7		

Note: Only the most frequently used values are taken into analysis when interpreting the data.

In table shows that descriptive statistics for each item about the respondents' views regarding different politeness strategies. About (32+42) 75% respondents agreed that for better learning outcomes they prefer to use good communication. Roundabout (28+50) 78% respondent agreed that they succeed in their career with the help of polite English communication skills that improve their understandings. Nearly (31+26) 58% respondents agreed that they consider direct communication reflects than polite language. Almost (41+24) 66% respondents agreed that they improve their English communication skills through polite language to enhance their knowledge. Approximate (42+31) 74% respondents agreed that they receive effective feedback on their polite communication from their teachers and peers to be skillful.

Table-4 Effect of Politeness Strategies on learning English communication skills

Sr · N o.	Statement	Level of Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Std. Deviation	Mean
6	I prefer to use good communication for better learning outcomes.	F	14	22	54	118	152	1.08	4.03
		%	3.9	6.1	15.0	32.8	42.2		
7	I understand that improving my English communication skills help me to succeed in my career.	F	18	14	46	102	180	1.10	4.14
		%	5.0	3.9	12.8	28.3	50.0		
8	I consider direct communication reflects than polite language.	F	30	24	96	114	96	1.18	3.61
		%	8.3	6.7	26.7	31.7	26.7		
9	I improve my English communication skills through polite language to enhance knowledge.	F	12	24	88	148	88	1.00	3.76
		%	3.3	6.7	24.4	41.1	24.4		
10	I receive effective feedback on my polite communication from my teachers and peers to be skillful.	F	8	24	60	154	114	.974	3.95
		%	2.2	6.7	16.7	42.8	31.7		

In table outputs provides descriptive statistics for each item about the respondents' views regarding different politeness strategies. About (38+22) 61% respondent agreed that they provide feedback to others in polite manner psychomotor learning at undergraduate level. Almost (38+27) 66% respondent agreed that for clear understanding they use direct communication. Nearly (41+16) 57% respondent agreed that to resolve the conflicts in academic settings they use direct and assertive communication. Roundabout (44+22) 66% respondent agreed that to increase their speaking skills they learn to use direct and assertive communication.

Table-5 Politeness Strategies and Learning English communication skills

Sr. No.	Statement	Level of Agreement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Std. Deviation	Mean
11	I provide feedback to others in a polite manner for psychomotor learning at undergraduate level.	F	12	30	96	140	82	1.01	3.69
		%	3.3	8.3	26.7	38.9	22.8		
12	I use direct communication for clear understanding.	F	20	18	84	140	98	1.07	3.77
		%	5.6	5.0	23.3	38.9	27.2		
13	I use direct and assertive communication to resolve the conflicts in academic settings.	F	38	30	84	148	60	1.17	3.45
		%	10.6	8.3	23.3	41.1	16.7		
14	I learn how to use direct and assertive communication to increase my speaking skills.	F	12	32	76	160	80	1.01	3.73
		%	3.3	8.9	21.1	44.4	22.2		

Table shows that there is no significant difference between the mean score of male respondents ($M=79.18$, $SD=17.73$) and female respondents ($M=79.71$, $SD=11.90$) about the effect of politeness strategies. The difference is not significant because the p-value .743 is greater than 0.05 which explains that both the male and female respondent have the same opinions about the effect of politeness strategies ($N=180$, $t= -.328$).

Table-6 Gender wise effect of Politeness Strategies

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t- value	p- value
Male	180	79.18	17.73	1.32	-.328	.743
Female	180	79.71	11.90	.888		

Table shows that there is no significant difference between the mean score of first age group respondents ($M=78.78$, $SD=13.50$) and second age group respondents ($M=80.43$, $SD=17.14$) about the effect of politeness strategies. The difference is not significant because the p-value .327 is greater than 0.05 which explains that both the first and second age group respondent have the same opinions about the effect of politeness strategies ($N=214$, $t= -.982$).

Table-7 Age wise effect of politeness strategies

Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t- value	p- value
16-20 Years	214	78.78	13.50	.923	-.982	.327

21-25 Years	146	80.43	17.14	1.41		
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Table 4.24 shows that program wise politeness strategies have significant effect on students' learning English communication skills (DF=5,354, F=10.36). Degree of freedom in between 5 and 354 and sig. p value ($p > .000$) exposes strong variances within groups and between groups. Mean results reveals that politeness strategies have significant effect on students' learning English communication skills of three programs Mathematics, COSC and DASC ($M=24.30, C=24.66, D=24.16$) than other three programs. Study recommended that students of English, TEXD and Physics need more attention towards politeness strategies for their better English communication skills.

Table-8 Program wise effect of politeness strategies on Students learning English communication skills

Program	N	M	SD	SEM	SQ	DF	MS	F	Sig
English	60	23.8667	3.57708	.46180	960.222 6559.333 7519.556	5	192.044 18.529	10.364	.000
TEXD	60	20.6000	5.03277	.64973		354			
Physics	60	21.0667	5.09525	.65779		359			
Mathematics	60	24.3000	4.33472	.55961					
COSC	60	24.6667	3.89118	.50235					
DASC	60	24.1667	3.62742	.46830					

Table 4.28 shows that respondent have no significant difference (DF=2, 357, F=.978, $P > .377$) concerning semester about the politeness strategies and learning English communication skills. Degree of freedom is between 2 and 357, and significant value ($p > .377$) represent that there is not strong variances within groups and between groups.

Table-9 Semester wise effect of politeness strategies on Students learning English communication skills

Semester	N	M	SD	SEM	SQ	DF	MS	F	Sig
1st Semester	120	22.9333	4.54988	.41535	40.9567	2	20.478	.978	.377
2nd Semester	120	22.8167	4.57429	.41757	7478.600	357	20.948		
3rd Semester	120	23.5833	4.60650	.42051	7519.556	359	20.948		

Discussion, conclusion and recommendation

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the “Effect of Politeness Strategies on Students’ Communication Skills at BS Level”. Two factors were focused; politeness strategies and Students learning English communication skills.

The final results, which were derived using inferential analysis and descriptive statistics, offer insightful information about the respondents' perspectives on a range of politeness strategy-related topics. The majority of respondents acknowledged that cultural variations play a significant impact in the usage of polite communication, according to the findings. They understand how critical it is to use polite communication in a variety of contexts to develop understanding and foster a positive learning environment. In addition, a significant segment of participants mentioned that they had been employing polite communication since the start of their undergraduate studies with the intention of enhancing their intellectual abilities and obtaining triumph in their personal and professional domains.

Moreover, the study's respondents indicated that using polite language was essential to improving learning outcomes and increasing their fields of study. Overall, respondents stated that using polite language improves their English communication skills and increases knowledge and understanding, even though a small number of respondents said direct communication was more reflective than polite language. Furthermore, respondents emphasized their ability to offer constructive feedback to others in a polite way, specifically with psychomotor learning in undergraduate education.

Mostly respondent agreed that politeness strategies have significant effect on their communication skills. Current study is in line with Mulyono, Amalia, and Suryoputro (2019) who found that Indonesian EFL learners perceived teachers to be of a higher social class where students were required to highly respect them. The mean score of male and female respondents showed that the politeness strategies have same effect on both male and female respondents’ communication skills. But opposite with the study of Karimkhanlooei and Vaezi (2017) who found that females used more negative politeness strategy compared to the male counterparts, but this finding was not much enough to bring about statistically significant difference. As a result, generally, females used more polite language.

The results of this study have several aspects for our comprehension of how politeness strategies function in undergraduate students' acquisition of English communication skills. The findings emphasize the impact of cultural inequalities on communication methodologies and demonstrate the value of taking cultural norms into account when utilizing polite language. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the beneficial connections between polite communication and a number of learning outcomes, such as comprehension of lectures, career success, and academic abilities. This indicates that including politeness strategies in a language learning curriculum can improve students' language skills.

Additionally, the study reveals program-wise differences in the effect of politeness strategies on learning English communication skills. Specifically, the programs of Mathematics, COSC, and DASC demonstrated a more significant effect, while students in English, TEXTD, and Physics programs need additional attention to politeness strategies to enhance their communication skills.

There is no significant difference between the mean score of urban respondent and rural respondent which explains that both the urban and rural respondent have the same views about the effect of politeness strategies. There is no significant difference between the mean score of 16-20 years respondent and 21-25 years respondent about the effect of politeness strategies. The effect of politeness strategies also has same effect on both age groups. Mean results of ANOVA reveals that Computer Science (COSC) has strong effects on politeness strategies than other five programs. ANOVA results showed that the effects of politeness strategies have almost same effects on all the three semester as there is not strong variance within groups and between groups. Study recommended that students of English, TEXTD and Physics need more attention towards politeness strategies for their better English communication skills.

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