



The Use of Politeness Strategies in Teacher-Student Interaction in a Postgraduate EFL Classroom

Asmida Yanti Siregar¹, Ratna Sari Dewi², Ismalianing Eviyuliwati³

^{1,2,3}English Education, Islamic State University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Jakarta

Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-08-25 Revised: 2026-09-05 Accepted: 2026-09-05 Keywords: EFL, undergraduate classroom, politeness strategy, teacher-student interaction DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.12431 Corresponding Author: Asmida Yanti Siregar Asmidayantisiregar889@gmail.com English Education, Islamic State University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Jakarta	<i>This study investigates the use of politeness strategies in teacher-student interaction in an online post-graduate EFL classroom. Employing a qualitative research design, the data were collected through classroom observation and audio recordings of presentation and discussion sessions conducted via Zoom in an English education program. The data were analyzed using Brown and Levinson's politeness framework, with factors influencing politeness use identified inductively from the interactional data and interpreted through the sociological variables of power, social distance, and degree of imposition. The findings reveal that positive politeness strategies were particularly salient in the teacher's speech, contributing to a supportive and inclusive learning atmosphere. In contrast, negative politeness strategies were used to mitigate face-threatening acts during questioning and clarification. Negative politeness strategies were particularly salient in student speech, reflecting an awareness of power relations and institutional roles, although positive politeness also appeared when students expressed engagement and agreement. The use of these strategies appeared to be shaped by teacher-student power relations, the online learning context, and the academic nature of the discussions. These patterns suggest that politeness strategies may contribute to a more supportive interactional environment in online EFL classrooms, though anxiety and learning outcomes were not directly examined in this study. By focusing on synchronous, online, postgraduate EFL academic interaction, particularly presentation and discussion activities, this study contributes to a still limited body of research on pragmatic competence in this specific instructional context.</i>

1. Introduction

Effective classroom interaction depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on pragmatic appropriateness, including how speakers express respect, authority, and consideration for others (Sari & Prasetyo, 2021; Wati et al., 2024). One central pragmatic resource for managing appropriateness is the use of politeness strategies, which speakers employ to preserve social harmony and manage interpersonal relationships. Brown and Levinson (1987) frame this in terms of face: positive face, the desire to be appreciated, and negative face, the desire for freedom from imposition. In classroom contexts, teachers and students routinely perform potentially face-threatening acts such as giving instructions, correcting errors, asking questions, or disagreeing, so politeness strategies are used to reduce tension and sustain smooth interaction. Although Brown and Levinson's framework is decades old, it continues to be widely applied in classroom discourse research for its strong explanatory value (Dewi et al., 2023; Haera et al., 2025).

In EFL classrooms, learners are still developing pragmatic competence alongside linguistic competence. Several studies indicate that inappropriate use of politeness can lead to misunderstanding, reduced participation, or learner anxiety (Rahmawati & Lestari, 2022; Sembiring & Sianturi, 2025), whereas appropriate politeness strategies can encourage students to speak, ask questions, and express opinions with less fear of losing face. Teachers' use of supportive and respectful language has, in turn, been linked to greater student motivation and willingness to communicate (Jayanti et al., 2024). Research shows that teachers tend to favor positive politeness strategies such as approval, inclusive expressions, and solidarity-building to create a supportive classroom atmosphere (Wati et al., 2024; Maslucha et al., 2025), while negative politeness strategies, such as hedging and indirect requests, are more often used when giving instructions or corrections to minimize imposition (Dewi et al., 2023).

In the Indonesian EFL context specifically, politeness is further shaped by cultural norms, institutional roles, and power relations. Teachers tend to use polite forms that maintain authority while still signaling respect toward students (Sari & Prasetyo, 2021; Haera et al., 2025), while students more often rely on negative politeness strategies when responding to teachers, reflecting an awareness of social distance and academic hierarchy. In online settings specifically, teachers have been found to compensate for the absence of physical co-presence by using more explicit politeness markers such as greetings, mitigators, and appreciation expressions (Rahman et al., 2023; Wati et al., 2024). These patterns point to the importance of examining politeness strategies within specific institutional and cultural settings rather than treating them as context-free.

Most existing research on classroom politeness focuses on secondary education or general classroom interaction; studies examining undergraduate, and especially postgraduate, EFL classrooms remain limited. At the tertiary level, students participate in more complex academic activities such as presentations, discussions, and critical responses that carry a higher risk of face threat and therefore call for more deliberate use of politeness strategies (Oktaviani & Nurkamto, 2022). This is compounded by the shift toward online learning, which changes the pragmatic conditions of interaction (Putri & Atmojo, 2021; Rahman et al., 2023).

However, platforms such as Zoom can support a range of multimodal resources such as video, facial expression, gesture, and text chat depending on how a session is configured; the online medium does not, by itself, eliminate nonverbal cues. In the present study, data collection relied on audio recordings of the observed sessions, and the analysis therefore centers on verbal politeness strategies rather than on the full range of multimodal resources that may have been available. Studies that examine politeness specifically in synchronous, online, postgraduate EFL classrooms remain rare.

Critics have argued that the model's notion of face reflects an individualistic, Western-oriented view of self and does not fully account for the collectivist, hierarchical norms found in many Asian societies (Eelen, 2001). In the Indonesian context, and in Javanese-influenced academic settings in particular, what counts as "polite" is shaped by local hierarchy, institutional role, and speech-level conventions that differ from the power-distance-imposition calculus Brown and Levinson propose. The present study therefore treats Brown and Levinson's framework as an analytical starting point and interprets the strategies identified in light of the specific institutional and cultural setting of an Indonesian postgraduate EFL program.

Despite the growing body of research on politeness in EFL classrooms, a clear gap remains: studies that specifically examine politeness strategies in synchronous, online, postgraduate EFL academic interaction, particularly in activities such as presentations, theoretical questioning, and critical discussion, are still scarce. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate how politeness strategies are used in teacher-student interaction in a postgraduate EFL classroom, with a focus on online presentation and discussion sessions. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) What politeness strategies are used by the teacher and students during online interaction? (2) What interactional functions do these strategies serve? (3) What contextual factors appear to influence their use? By addressing these questions, the study contributes to a still limited body of research on pragmatic competence in postgraduate EFL settings. Its contribution lies in situating that application within the specific demands of online postgraduate academic discourse such as presentations, theoretical questions, and critical discussion, where face-threat and politeness management take on distinctive institutional stakes.

2. Method

Research Design

This study aims to investigate the use of politeness strategies in teacher-student interactions in the classroom. Accordingly, a qualitative research design was employed to explore how politeness strategies are realized in naturally occurring classroom communication. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study focuses on understanding interactional meanings, language use, and social behaviors as they occur in context, rather than measuring variables or testing hypotheses. Qualitative research enables researchers to gain a deep and nuanced understanding of research phenomena by closely examining participants' language and actions within their natural settings (Lodico et al., 2010; Nassaji, 2015). This approach allows the researcher to analyze how politeness strategies are employed by both teachers and students to manage interpersonal relationships, maintain classroom harmony, and facilitate effective communication.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at the Magister of English Education Department, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia. The participants consisted of six students enrolled in the Second Language Acquisition course, aged between 23 and 33 years old. The classroom was purposively selected because English was actively used by the lecturer as the primary medium of instruction, and frequent interaction occurred between the lecturer and students throughout the learning process. The lecturer's substantial teaching experience (approximately 25 years) was considered relevant to this purposive selection, as it was associated with well-managed, interactionally dense discourse that offered a wider range of politeness phenomena for analysis, particularly in how the lecturer

mitigated face-threatening acts during questioning and correction. This study involved a small number of participants, which aligns with the nature of qualitative research that prioritizes depth over breadth.

Data Collection

Data were collected through classroom observation and audio recording during a single online class session (Zoom meeting) of the Second Language Acquisition course, held on 16 December 2025. The session lasted approximately 250 minutes in total; of this, 200 minutes of audio recording, covering the presentation and discussion segments, were obtained and analyzed, as the recording concluded when the relevant instructional activity ended. One student presentation followed immediately by a discussion segment was analyzed, treated as two related interactional episodes within the same session. The observation focused on naturally occurring teacher-student interactions in this online learning environment, particularly during instructional explanations, the student presentation, questioning, and the subsequent discussion.

Data Analysis

The audio recording was transcribed verbatim to produce an accurate written record of the teacher-student interaction. Transcribed utterances were then deductively coded into four predetermined categories derived from Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies, using the operational coding framework in Table 1.

Table 1. Coding Framework for Politeness Strategies

Category	Sub-strategy (illustrative)	Operational Indicator	Example from Data
Bald on-Record	Direct imperative / task-focused directive	Imperative mood, no hedging or mitigation, urgency marking	<i>"Next week, next presenters, create an engaging discussion like today."</i>
Positive Politeness	Attending to H's interests; seeking agreement	In-group address terms, compliments, tag questions seeking agreement, shared-knowledge markers ("we," "as we discussed")	<i>"Thank you ..."</i>
Negative Politeness	Hedging; conventional indirectness	Modal hedges ("maybe," "perhaps," "I think"), indirect question forms, pre-FTA apologies, deference markers	<i>"Maybe ..."</i>

Off-Record	Hints; rhetorical questions	Ambiguous/under-specified utterances requiring inference, rhetorical questions, understatement	-
------------	-----------------------------	--	---

Trustworthiness

To ensure the study's trustworthiness, strategies aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria were employed. Credibility was strengthened in two complementary ways: first, through audio recording and verbatim transcription, which ensured the accuracy of the interactional data; second, through intercoder checking, in which a second coder with a background in pragmatics/applied linguistics independently coded the transcribed excerpts using the framework in Table 1, with discrepancies discussed until consensus was reached. A code-recode procedure was also applied, in which the researcher re-coded a subset of the data after a two-week interval to check coding consistency. Dependability was supported by the clear description of the data collection and analysis procedures outlined above. Confirmability was addressed by grounding the analysis in recorded data and transcript excerpts, together with the reflexive procedures described below.

The researcher was also a participant-observer in the classroom under study, which offered close access to naturally occurring interaction but also introduced the possibility of insider bias and reactivity; familiarity with participants' speech norms could influence the interpretation of politeness phenomena, and participants' awareness of being observed could have shaped their interactional behavior. To manage this, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal noting analytic assumptions during coding, and interpretive claims were anchored as closely as possible to observable linguistic evidence in the transcripts rather than to the researcher's prior familiarity with participants.

Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, including the lecturer and the six students, for audio recording and academic use of the classroom interaction data. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any point without penalty, and the measures taken to protect their confidentiality, including the use of pseudonyms and removal of identifying information from transcript excerpts reported in the Findings. This study received institutional permission and was obtained from the Magister of the English Education Department, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, before data collection.

3. Result

Positive Politeness Strategies

Positive Politeness Used by the Teacher

The teacher's positive politeness strategies were realized through explicit appreciation and inclusive language, both of which worked to sustain a supportive interactional climate during the discussion. Excerpt 1 shows the teacher acknowledging a student's contribution immediately after she responded to a question:

T: "Thank you, Mida, for the answer."

Here, the appreciation token "thank you," combined with the direct address of the student's name, functions as an explicit act of praise that attends to the student's positive face by validating her contribution and, by extension, encouraging continued participation.

A second, more elaborate strategy appears when the teacher opens the discussion to the whole class:

T: "Maybe each of you can give any opinion based on your experiences, each of you."

This utterance illustrates how a single teacher turn can carry two politeness strategies at once. On one hand, the collective reference "each of you" and the appeal to students' own "experiences" claim common ground with the class and minimize social distance, positioning the teacher as a facilitator rather than an evaluator, a positive politeness move. On the other hand, the hedge "maybe" together with the modal "can" (discussed further in Section *Negative Politeness Used by the Teacher*) frames the invitation as optional rather than obligatory, which is a negative politeness strategy that reduces the imposition of the request. This co-occurrence suggests that, for the teacher, inclusion and mitigation were not mutually exclusive strategies but were often deployed together within the same turn.

Positive Politeness Used by Students

Students also drew on positive politeness, primarily to display alignment with the teacher and engagement with the discussion topic.

S1: "Yes, Prof."

Produced in response to a follow-up question about the student's experience of acquiring a second or third language, this brief turn combines an explicit agreement marker with the respectful address term "Prof." It signals cooperative alignment with the teacher's conversational move while simultaneously indexing the institutional hierarchy between the two participants.

S2: "Thank you!"

Produced after receiving feedback from the teacher, this short expression of gratitude maintains interactional harmony and reinforces solidarity, functioning as a reciprocal counterpart to the teacher's own appreciation strategy in Excerpt 1.

S2: "At the beginning, I didn't know why... However, at some point, I felt learning English was fun."

By volunteering this personal account of her own learning trajectory, the student moves beyond a minimal response and shares an evaluative, affect-laden narrative. This self-disclosure builds common ground with the teacher and the rest of the class, indicating a degree of comfort within the interaction consistent with the classroom's generally supportive climate.

Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative Politeness Used by the Teacher

Negative politeness on the part of the teacher was identified through hedged, indirectly phrased requests, particularly when asking students to produce personal or reflective responses.

T: "Maybe you can tell a story about what you see, for example where you were born."

As in Excerpt 2, the hedge "maybe" and the modal "can" reframe what is functionally a request as an optional suggestion, giving the student discretion over whether and how to respond and thereby respecting her negative face. The same mitigating pattern recurs in Excerpt 2 above, where an identical hedging structure accompanies an inclusive, class-wide invitation, suggesting that hedged modal constructions functioned as the teacher's default device for softening face-threatening requests, whether addressed to an individual student or to the group as a whole.

Negative Politeness Used by Students

Students relied heavily on negative politeness, a pattern consistent with their awareness of the power asymmetry between themselves and the teacher.

S3: "I'm not really sure whether it can be called acquiring or learning."

The explicit hedge "I'm not really sure" precedes and qualifies the student's substantive claim, framing her position as tentative rather than categorical before she commits to it, a strategy that mitigates the assertiveness of an academic claim made in front of the teacher and peers.

S3: "Is that correct, Prof?"

After elaborating on her response, the student seeks explicit confirmation from the teacher rather than asserting her answer as settled. This confirmation check reflects careful, face-sensitive turn management appropriate to an evaluative academic context.

Bald On-Record and the Absence of Off-Record Strategies

Although the coding framework applied in this study covers all four of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness categories, bald on-record strategies were only rarely observed, and no clear instance of off-record politeness was identified in the analyzed data.

T: "Next week, next presenters, create an engaging discussion like today."

Produced at the close of the session as an instruction to the students scheduled to present the following week, this turn uses an unmitigated imperative with no hedging or softening device. This directive is administrative and procedural rather than personal or evaluative in nature, which may explain why the teacher did not attend to face concerns here in the way she did when asking students to share opinions or personal experiences.

The absence of off-record strategies in the data does not indicate a lack of politeness on the part of either participant; rather, it suggests that both the teacher and the students tended to manage face concerns through relatively direct means such as appreciation, hedging, and confirmation-seeking, rather than through indirect hints or implicature.

Interactional Patterns in Teacher–Student Communication

Beyond the individual strategies described above, the data suggest a broadly collaborative and dialogic pattern of interaction. The teacher frequently used follow-up questions to extend rather than close the discussion, which appeared to function as an interactional affordance for participation: students tended to respond with longer, more elaborated answers and personal examples following such prompts. This is presented as an observable pattern in the data rather than as a directly measured psychological outcome. The reciprocal use of politeness strategies by both parties, the teacher's appreciation and hedged invitations met by students' alignment markers, hedges, and confirmation checks, contributed to a comparatively smooth flow of communication across the session.

Contextual Factors Associated with Politeness Strategy Use

Two contextual factors appear closely associated with the distribution of politeness strategies observed in the data. The first is the power asymmetry between the teacher and students, reflected in the teacher's control over turn allocation, topic development, and the direction of the discussion; students, in turn, more often responded to and elaborated on the teacher's prompts than initiated new topics themselves. This asymmetry is consistent with students' frequent use of hedged and tentative constructions, as in Excerpt 7, particularly when addressing theoretical or evaluative content.

The second factor is the academic and evaluative nature of the discussion itself, which centered on theoretical constructs of language acquisition, motivation, and exposure that students were asked to relate to their own experience. Because such questions required students to articulate positions on matters they were not always certain about, both parties made frequent use of mitigating language: students qualified their claims (Excerpt 7), and the teacher softened her invitations to elaborate (Excerpts 2 and 6).

Summary of Findings

Table 2 summarizes the excerpts discussed above, along with their politeness strategies, linguistic realizations, interactional functions, and associated contextual factors.

Table 2. *Summary of Politeness Strategies, Realizations, and Functions*

Excerpt	Speaker	Strategy	Linguistic Realization	Interactional Function	Contextual Factors
1	T	Positive politeness (appreciation)	"Thank you, Mida, for the answer."	Acknowledges student contribution	Pedagogical support; teacher–student relationship
2	T	Positive politeness (inclusion)	"Maybe each of you can give any	Encourages participation	Collaborative discussion

			<i>opinion based on your experiences ..."</i>		
3	S	Positive politeness (agreement/alignment)	"Yes, Prof."	Signals alignment with teacher's conversational move	Teacher-student interaction
4	S	Positive Politeness (appreciation)	"Thank you!"	Acknowledges the teacher's response	Teacher-student relationship
5	S	Positive politeness (sharing experience)	"At the beginning, I didn't know why... However, at some point, I felt learning English was fun."	Builds connection through personal experience	Personal/academic discussion
6	T	Negative politeness (hedging)	"Maybe you can tell a story..."	Softens the request	Personal experience question
7	T	Negative politeness (mitigation)	"Maybe..." / "can..."	Reduces directness of the request	Student participation
8	S	Negative politeness (hedging)	"I'm not really sure whether it can be called acquiring or learning."	Mitigates the assertiveness of the claim	Theoretical discussion
9	S	Negative politeness (confirmation-seeking)	"Is that correct, Prof?"	Reflects careful linguistic management of a face-sensitive academic	evaluative nature of classroom interaction

					interaction.	
9	T	Bald record	on-	<i>"Next week, next presenters, create an engaging discussion like today."</i>	Directly communicat es the teacher's expectation for the students' future presentatio n without hedging or other mitigating devices.	pedagogical/instruct ional context

Taken together, these findings show that both the teacher and the students in this online postgraduate EFL classroom drew primarily on positive and negative politeness strategies, with bald-on-record strategies confined to non-face-threatening administrative talk and off-record strategies absent altogether. The teacher's strategies, such as appreciation and hedged, inclusive invitations, worked to sustain a supportive interactional climate, while students' strategies, such as alignment markers, hedging, and confirmation-seeking, reflected careful management of an interaction shaped by institutional hierarchy and academic stakes. These patterns, discussed further in the following section, illustrate how politeness strategies functioned in this context not merely as courtesy markers but as interactional resources for managing face within a synchronous, online, evaluative academic setting.

4. Discussion

The findings reported above show a clear division of labor between the teacher and the students in how they managed face during this postgraduate online discussion: the teacher relied mainly on positive politeness, while the students relied mainly on negative politeness. Rather than simply reporting this pattern as consistent with prior EFL classroom research, this section considers what the pattern reveals about how authority, solidarity, and participation are jointly negotiated in a hierarchical yet collaborative postgraduate setting, what specific features of the Zoom-mediated interaction plausibly shaped it, and where Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework sits uneasily with the Indonesian academic context in which the data were produced.

The asymmetry between teacher and student strategy choice is, in itself, more theoretically interesting than the raw fact that both positive and negative politeness occurred. The teacher's appreciation tokens and inclusive, low-imposition invitations (Excerpts 1 and 2) worked to narrow social distance and position her as a facilitator rather than an evaluator. Students, by contrast, continued to mark institutional distance through hedging, confirmation-seeking, and the honorific address term "Prof," even in turns that were otherwise warm or engaged, such as the gratitude expressed in Excerpt 4. This suggests that the teacher's solidarity-oriented footing did not straightforwardly flatten the

hierarchy: students appeared to treat deference as a stable feature of the interaction, applied regardless of how informal or inclusive the teacher's immediate turn was.

Read this way, the two strategy types are not simply two options within the same repertoire but complementary halves of a single interactional system. The teacher's hedged, low-imposition invitations opened space for students to speak; students' hedges and confirmation checks then allowed them to fill that space substantively, without appearing to claim more authority than their institutional role permitted. Sari and Prasetyo (2021) describe Indonesian EFL teachers as balancing authority and approachability through polite language; the present data extend this observation by showing one mechanism through which that balance is achieved collaboratively rather than unilaterally: the teacher's approachability and the students' deference are produced in tandem, each strategy making the other interactionally sustainable. The result is a form of negotiated hierarchy, a classroom order that remains collaborative in content while staying hierarchical in form.

The recurring use of "*Prof*" by students also raises a question the Brown and Levinson (1987) framework does not fully resolve. Within their model, such an address term would typically be coded as a negative politeness strategy, "give deference," redressing a specific face-threatening act. Yet in the transcript, students used "*Prof*" consistently, across turns with very different face-threat profiles, including a simple expression of thanks. This pattern is closer to what Ide (1989) calls discernment: the use of polite forms as a socially prescribed convention tied to relative status, rather than a strategic choice recalculated for each utterance.

Because this study did not include interviews or stimulated-recall data on what students intended by these forms, it cannot determine whether "*Prof*" functioned strategically, conventionally, or as some blend of the two. What can be said is that Brown and Levinson's strategic, face-based account and Ide's discernment-based account make different predictions about how consistently an address term should appear across varied face-threat contexts, and the present data are more consistent with the latter. This suggests that applying Brown and Levinson's framework to a hierarchical, honorific-using Indonesian academic setting may obscure as much as it reveals about address-term use specifically, even where it accounts well for the hedged, mitigated requests discussed above.

Explicit attention to hedging, mitigation, appreciation tokens, softened disagreement, clarification requests, and respectful questioning could be built into postgraduate EFL coursework, both as academic-pragmatics content in its own right and as preparation for the international academic communication these students will need for conference presentations, publication, and peer review. The teacher's hedged, low-imposition invitations in this dataset ("*Maybe each of you can give any opinion...*") could themselves serve as an authentic instructional model, illustrating how a facilitator can invite participation without imposing on students' autonomy, a technique with clear relevance to these students' own future EYL and general EFL classrooms.

A related caution concerns causal interpretation. The teacher's hedged invitations were observably followed by longer, more elaborated student responses, such as the personal narrative in Excerpt 5, and this pattern is worth reporting as an interactional affordance. However, this study did not measure student anxiety, motivation, or critical thinking directly, so claims that the teacher's politeness strategies reduced anxiety or fostered critical thinking go beyond what the discourse data can support. Any connection between politeness strategies and these psychological or cognitive outcomes should be treated as a plausible interpretation requiring confirmation through self-report or interview data, not as a demonstrated effect of this study.

Several features of the study design constrain the scope of these interpretations. The data come from a single lecturer and a group of six students in one Second Language Acquisition course, recorded during one 200-minute segment of a single Zoom session. The recording was audio-only, so no multimodal evidence (gesture, gaze, camera status) could inform the coding. The researcher's own involvement as a participant in the session raises the possibility of positionality effects in both the interaction itself and its subsequent interpretation. Finally, because no interviews or stimulated-recall sessions were conducted, the interactional functions assigned to each strategy reflect the researcher's analytic reading of the transcript rather than confirmed participant intent.

Future studies could address these constraints by combining audio with video data to examine gesture, gaze, and camera-on/off dynamics alongside verbal politeness; by comparing online and face-to-face postgraduate classes to test whether the medium-specific patterns proposed here hold across settings; by sampling multiple lecturers and courses to assess whether the teacher-positive/student-negative asymmetry identified here is a stable feature of Indonesian postgraduate EFL discourse or particular to this lecturer; and by incorporating stimulated-recall interviews with teachers and students to clarify whether address terms and hedges are used strategically, conventionally, or both.

Taken together, these findings suggest that politeness in this postgraduate EFL discourse operates as more than a set of courtesy markers layered onto classroom talk. It functions as an active interactional resource through which the teacher and students jointly negotiate authority, solidarity, academic risk-taking, and participation, within an online, hierarchical, and evaluative postgraduate setting that existing, largely face-to-face-oriented politeness research has not yet examined in this combination.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the use of politeness strategies in teacher-student interaction in a postgraduate EFL classroom, drawing on naturally occurring online classroom discussions in a Second Language Acquisition course. Using Brown and Levinson's politeness framework, the study explored how teachers and students applied politeness strategies and identified factors that influenced their use within an academic EFL context. The findings demonstrate that politeness strategies are crucial in managing interpersonal relations, supporting pedagogical goals, and facilitating effective communication in higher education EFL classrooms.

The results indicate that the teacher predominantly employed positive politeness strategies, such as expressions of appreciation, encouragement, and inclusive language, to create a supportive and collaborative learning environment. At the same time, negative politeness strategies were used strategically when giving instructions, asking investigative questions, or guiding students toward a clearer understanding. Students, on the other hand, tended to rely more heavily on negative politeness strategies when interacting with the teacher.

These strategies reflected students' awareness of power relations and institutional roles within the classroom. By using hedging expressions, indirect responses, and cautious language, students managed face concerns and minimized the risk of appearing disrespectful or overly assertive. The study also found that several factors influenced the use of politeness strategies, including power relations between teacher and students, the online learning environment, and the academic nature of classroom discussion. The absence of physical presence in online interaction increased reliance on explicit verbal politeness markers, while the complexity of academic discourse heightened the need for careful face management. These findings highlight the importance of pragmatic

competence in EFL classrooms, particularly at the tertiary level, where students are expected to engage in critical and reflective interaction.

This study contributes to research on classroom pragmatics by providing empirical evidence of how politeness strategies function in an online postgraduate EFL classroom. The findings suggest that effective use of politeness strategies can foster student participation, reduce communicative anxiety, and promote harmonious teacher-student interaction. Pedagogically, the study underscores the importance of teachers' awareness of pragmatic aspects of language use and encourages the integration of politeness and pragmatic competence into EFL teaching practices. Future research may expand this investigation by examining different educational levels, face-to-face classroom settings, or comparative contexts to further explore the role of politeness strategies in diverse EFL learning environments.

6. References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2001). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dewi, N. R., Lestari, D., & Pratama, A. (2023). Politeness strategies in teacher talk in Indonesian EFL classrooms. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(1), 112–123. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v13i1>
- Eelen, G. (2001). *A Critique of Politeness Theories*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Haera, A., Nurkamto, J., & Drahati, N. A. (2025). Teacher politeness strategies in EFL classroom interaction. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 14(1), 85–97.
- Ide, S. (1989). Formal forms and discernment: Two neglected aspects of universals of linguistic politeness. **Multilingua**, 8(2–3), 223–248. <https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.1989.8.2-3.223>
- Jayanti, D., Pratiwi, E., & Rahman, F. (2024). Teacher support and students' willingness to communicate in EFL classrooms. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 11(1), 1–15.
- Lodico, M. G., Spaulding, D. T., & Voegtle, K. H. (2010). *Methods in educational research: From theory to practice* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Maslucha, R., Anam, S., & Widodo, H. P. (2025). Positive politeness strategies in EFL classroom discourse. *TEFLIN Journal*, 36(1), 62–78. <https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v36i1>.
- Nassaji, H. (2015). Qualitative and descriptive research: Data type versus data analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(2), 129–132. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815572747>
- Oktaviani, A., & Nurkamto, J. (2022). Politeness strategies in academic classroom interaction at the tertiary level. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 12(2), 310–321. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v12i2>.
- Putri, N. S., & Atmojo, A. E. (2021). Politeness strategies in online EFL classroom interaction. *Lingua Cultura*, 15(2), 123–131. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v15i2>.
- Rahman, F., Weda, S., & Sakti, A. E. F. (2023). Pragmatic challenges in online EFL classrooms. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 10(2), 356–371. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v10i2>.
- Rahmawati, D., & Lestari, S. (2022). Pragmatic competence and politeness in EFL classrooms. *Indonesian Journal of English Education*, 9(1), 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.15408/ijee.v9i1>.
- Sari, D. P., & Prasetyo, A. (2021). Politeness strategies and power relations in Indonesian EFL classrooms. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 15(3), 389–397. <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v15i3>

- Sembiring, L. D., & Sianturi, R. (2025). Students' politeness strategies in EFL classroom interaction. *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching*, 9(1), 22–34.
- Wati, R., Hidayat, D. N., & Alek. (2024). Politeness strategies in teacher–student interaction in EFL classrooms. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(3), 512–525.