

Language politeness in EFL student-lecturer interactions through technology-assisted communication

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ABSTRACT

Politeness is essential to human interaction, particularly in the context of lecturer-student communication in Indonesia. This study aims to investigate the use of politeness in technology-assisted communication on WhatsApp by examining the politeness strategies employed by lecturers and students in their interactions via WhatsApp. The study adopts Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as the analytical framework, extended by Faerch and Kasper (1989). It employs a qualitative field research design, analyzing 141 WhatsApp text messages exchanged between three English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers and 111 students at one Indonesian public university over an academic year. Data were collected with informed consent and pseudonymized for privacy. Findings indicate that students exhibit greater politeness than lecturers in their written communication via technology. Students predominantly initiated messages (137 of 141), using positive politeness strategies and greetings, while lecturers more often employed bald-on-record strategies. This tendency is attributed to hierarchical relationships and age differences. Religious influences also shaped interactions, often prompting double greetings. While most Indonesian EFL learners show respect toward their lecturers, the study suggests that politeness should be reciprocal. Lecturers are encouraged to serve as role models. Limitations include the absence of interview data, which future studies could address by integrating speaker intent and deeper social variables like power and distance.

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INTRODUCTION

"Be polite, please!" is a common expression used in various contexts, such as when requesting considerate behavior from drivers or urging people to maintain order in queues. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), researchers (e.g., Syarif & Zaim 2021) have observed that both students and lecturers frequently use direct expressions, prompting a study on politeness in WhatsApp interactions between the two parties. Politeness is commonly agreed as a habitual practice

essential for reducing conflict and fostering social harmony (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Politeness is essential, especially in digital communication, where technology mediates daily interactions. Many studies have sought to examine politeness in various digital communication platforms. For instance, Faraba et al. (2018) explored language politeness within the Arek culture on Instagram, finding that politeness is vital for maintaining relationships and minimizing conflict. Huang (2008) compared Chinese and

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Western societies, emphasizing how cultural norms shape both the expression and interpretation of politeness. Park (2008) similarly highlighted that social media communication demands heightened awareness of tone and intent due to the lack of nonverbal cues. Rahmawati (2022) found that Facebook users employ various politeness strategies to minimize misunderstandings, illustrating the adaptability of politeness norms across technological platforms. Zainurrahman and Kofau (2020) further underscored the centrality of politeness in virtual communication on platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram, demonstrating its importance in both formal and informal contexts.

Politeness strategies are not confined to social or casual digital interactions; they are also crucial in professional and academic settings. Al-Afnan (2014) highlighted the role of politeness in business interactions among employees from diverse backgrounds, while Abdurahman et al. (2018) identified translanguaging as a politeness strategy among university students. Purba et al. (2023) analyzed Joe Biden's speech and identified the use of positive and negative politeness, as well as off-record strategies, demonstrating the versatility of politeness in public discourse. Locher and Larina (2019) emphasized that understanding politeness strategies is key to successful communication, while Li et al. (2016) showed the universality of politeness across English Twitter and Mandarin Weibo, reinforcing its role in cross-cultural understanding. Guodong and Jing (2005), as cited by Sadeghoghi and Niroomand (2016), supported the universality of politeness across cultures, genders, and power relations, highlighting its preventative role in misunderstandings.

In educational contexts, the importance of politeness is further amplified. Hobjilä (2018) explored positive and negative politeness in didactic communication, revealing that teachers and students employ a range of strategies to maintain classroom harmony. Adel et al. (2016) found that positive politeness was prevalent among Iranian EFL learners, indicating close relationships and friendships. Hafid et al. (2022) identified three primary strategies among students at different educational levels: bald-on-record, positive politeness, and negative politeness. Fitriyani (2020) and Sülü (2015) showed that teacher politeness strategies foster positive feelings and motivation among students, while Selgas (2022) examined online student-teacher communication in the Philippines and found that politeness mitigates the challenges of digital learning environments. Daulay et al. (2022) and Yuliawati et al. (2019) reported that politeness strategies reduce rudeness and promote harmony in student-lecturer interactions, while Haratikka and Hutaeruk (2021) and Yulia (2016) highlighted the negative consequences of

lacking sociolinguistic competence. Other studies, such as Latrech and Alazzawie (2022), Febriansyah and Anam (2020), Nugrahanto and Hartono (2019), Mahmud (2019), and Wangia and Ontode (2020), further emphasized the importance of politeness in classroom and societal interactions, often noting the influence of cultural background.

The rise of online learning and digital collaboration has brought new dimensions to the study of politeness. Fitriani (2023) investigated politeness strategies in an international online classroom and found that positive and negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record strategies were all employed, influenced by the learning contract and the collaborative nature of tasks. Li (2012) found that students used positive, negative, and bald-on-record strategies in wiki-based interactions to foster solidarity and mutual respect. Chandra (2021) and Algiovani (2022) highlighted the importance of politeness in managing power dynamics in social media interactions, while Chung and Tang (2022) argued that politeness is crucial for minimizing conflicts in multicultural online environments.

Despite this extensive literature, certain gaps remain. For example, Mulyono et al. (2019) found that EFL students tend to exhibit higher levels of politeness toward teachers due to age and social standing, but their study did not address teacher politeness or the reciprocal dynamics of politeness in technology-mediated communication. This points to the need for research that considers both students' and lecturers' perspectives, especially in platforms like WhatsApp, which is now the most popular messaging app in Indonesia, used by over 90% of internet users (Annur, 2024).

The evolution of communication technologies, from telephone calls to computer-mediated platforms and now to ubiquitous messaging apps like WhatsApp, has transformed how students and lecturers interact. Baruah (2012) and Syarif and Zaim (2021) found WhatsApp to be widely used by students and teachers for educational purposes, supporting its role in developing communication skills. Worku (2022) and Escobar-Mamani and Gómez-Arteta (2020) also highlighted WhatsApp's effectiveness in enhancing communication skills. Sapitri et al. (2019) focused on both verbal and non-verbal politeness, citing Mujiyanto (2017) for verbal elements like speech length and expression, and Brown and Levinson (1987) for non-verbal aspects such as positive and negative face.

Research specifically on WhatsApp interactions has yielded important insights. Adel et al. (2016) found that positive politeness in blog interactions indicated close relationships, while Pratiwi and Anindyarini (2021) observed that students often overlooked social distance and power dynamics when messaging lecturers on WhatsApp. Amanda et al. (2021) found that positive politeness

was the most prevalent strategy in WhatsApp group communications, with students using bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Maharani et al. (2022) identified four forms of politeness in thesis consultations: prominence sentences, indirect sentences, opening sentences, and words of appreciation, with opening and appreciation words being most common. Halil et al. (2021) found that both lecturers and students adhered to politeness principles in WhatsApp interactions, employing maxims such as wisdom, generosity, appreciation, simplicity, compatibility, and sympathy. Santoso and Indriani (2021) noted that WhatsApp messages between teachers and students often included greetings, gratitude, questions, and opinions, in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework.

Saritza and Natsir (2022) found gender differences in politeness strategies, with males using three main strategies and females four. Shalihah and Zuhdi (2020) and Sembiring and Sianturi (2021) found that students frequently used greetings, self-introductions, apologies, and expressions of gratitude to minimize conflicts with lecturers. Kusmanto and Widodo (2022) identified six types of strategies—paying attention, using identity markers, seeking agreement, avoiding conflict, creating humor, and showing optimism—as essential for character development in online learning. Pasaribu et al. (2022) found that lecturers predominantly used bald-on-record strategies, while students favored positive politeness, especially greetings. Rahmi (2020) also noted the frequent use of bald-on-record strategies, particularly greetings, by students when texting lecturers.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that politeness is a universal and crucial phenomenon in both spoken and written communication, fostering positive interactions and minimizing conflicts. However, despite the burgeoning literature on student-lecturer interactions, no study in Indonesia has specifically examined the “fostering effect” of politeness in WhatsApp-mediated communication between lecturers and students. While previous research has identified various strategies and their functions, the mutual, relationship-building aspect of politeness in this context remains underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing the politeness strategies employed by both EFL lecturers and students in their WhatsApp interactions. By examining how politeness is enacted and reciprocated, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how polite communication in technology-assisted interactions fosters respectful relationships and facilitates effective written communication in academic settings.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative field research design to explore the use of politeness strategies among EFL lecturers and students in their interactions through WhatsApp. These interactions were voluntarily given by participants. Written consents were obtained from lecturers and students whose messages were used in this manuscript. The focus is on both classroom and non-classroom settings, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the communication dynamics between lecturers and students. To increase the trustworthiness of the analysis, we applied interrater reliability as conducted by Abdurahman and Rizqi (2021). Through this approach, the researcher classified the themes according to Brown and Levinson's (1986) main and sub-politeness strategies. Afterward, we discussed the themes that each researcher classified together. Different themes that we were not in consensus on were removed to avoid ambiguity.

Participants and Data Collection

The respondents of this study comprise EFL lecturers and students. The primary data consists of 141 WhatsApp text messages exchanged between 3 lecturers and 111 students in one academic year in one public university in Indonesia. These respondents were chosen because of easier access and contact with the researchers. To reduce bias in participation selection and data analysis, all the names were pseudonymized before analysis.

As both the students and lecturers are part of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) studies, the messages were already composed in English. There might be several instances of communication employed in one text message. Consent was obtained before data analysis for each text message. The data collection instruments include the transcription of these text messages. The transcriptions capture the politeness expressions both parties utilized in their WhatsApp communications.

Data Analysis

It is important to note that this study attempts to identify the model of politeness as suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Farida and Yuliana (2018). There are two main classifications of this model, namely main strategies (Table 1) and sub-strategies (Table 2) of politeness. The first table explains the main strategies related to politeness strategies: bald on-record strategy, off-record strategy, positive politeness strategy, and negative politeness strategy. Table 2 further demonstrates the subclassification of politeness strategies.

The politeness strategies identified in the WhatsApp messages were categorized and analyzed based on this theoretical framework. The analysis aimed to determine the various politeness strategies

employed by lecturers and students both inside and outside the classroom.

This study acknowledges that factors such as power, social distance, and imposition are not considered, as the focus is solely on the types of politeness strategies employed. The majority of

lecturer-student interactions analyzed in this paper reflect an asymmetrical power dynamic, a predominantly distant social relationship, and a relatively low degree of imposition from lecturers to students. For further discussion of this framework, see Brown and Levinson (1987).

Table 1

Brown and Levinson (1987) Politeness Strategies

No	Politeness Strategies	Examples in the Context of Asking Someone to Buy an Apple.	Trigger
1	Bald on-record	“Buy me an Apple.”	Imperative or direct instruction
2	Off-record	“Ah, I forget to buy you an Apple.”	Giving unpleasant respond
3	Positive-Politeness	“Hi, guys I would like to appreciate you if you would like to buy me an apple.”	Intimate relationship between the speakers

Table 2

Brown and Levinson's (1987) Sub-Strategies of Politeness Strategies

No	Sub-Strategies of Politeness			
	Positive	Negative	Bald on-Record	Off-record
1	Notice, attend to hearer/reader (his/her interest, wants, needs, good)	Indirectness	Urgency/desperation	Give hints
2	Exaggerate (interest, approval, and sympathy with hearer/reader)	Question, hedge	Channel noise	Give associations/ clues
3	Intensify interest to hearers/readers	Be pessimistic	Task-oriented	Presuppose
4	Use in-group identity markers	Minimize imposition	When the speaker/writer wants to satisfy the hearer's/writer's face needs	Understate
5	Seek agreement	Give deference	Speaker/ writer is intentionally rude	Overstate
6	Avoid disagreement	Apologize	Sympathetic advice/warning	Use tautologies
7	Presuppose/raise/assert common ground	Impersonalize speaker and hearer/writer and reader	Grant permission for something the hearer /reader has requested	Use contradiction
8	Joke	Starting the FTA as a general rule	Welcoming	Be ironic
9	Assert/presuppose knowledge and concern for the hearer's/reader's wants	Use nominalization	Farewell	Use metaphor
10	Offer, promise	Go on record as incurring a debt	Make offers	Use rhetorical questions
11	Be optimistic	-	-	Be ambiguous
12	Include both speaker and hearer/writer and reader in the activity	-	-	Be vague
13	Give or ask reason	-	-	Over-generalize
14	Assume or assert reciprocity	-	-	Displace the hearer/reader
15	Give gifts to hearer/reader (goods, sympathy, or understanding).	-	-	Be incomplete; use ellipsis

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the underlying question of this study, we divide this section into three main points. In the first subsection, we will present communications initiated by both students and lecturers. We will

summarize the number of utterances given by each party (lecturer and student) by counting the strategies used in each exchange. We counted utterances where students started the communication and the lecturer's responses to the text. The second

subsection will discuss emerging moves commonly initiated when starting the conversation. In the final subsection, we will discuss these findings and their implications for politeness strategies in tertiary education in Indonesia.

Student-Initiated and Lecturer-Initiated Communication

This section describes the politeness strategies lecturers and students employ in written communication via WhatsApp, both inside and outside the classroom. To present the data analysis findings clearly, the researchers provide the results in a tabular format.

Politeness strategies are utilized by both students and lecturers in WhatsApp communication

(see Table 3 and Table 4). The data analysis reveals that lecturers employ two types of politeness strategies: positive politeness (see Table 3) and bald-on-record (see Table 4). Bald-on-record strategies include feedback greetings (e.g., *Walaikumsalam, wr.wb, // ok it is at 09.00 am //, - Wassalamualaikum, wr.wb, // insya Allah //*) and instructional or command expressions (e.g., *Please send it to DPL // if there is a problem, // take a break first, // I will take a rest, // Please tell your story about your experience teaching in Thailand, // be careful please*). Positive politeness, particularly greetings, is the only strategy utilized in student-initiated conversations via WhatsApp.

Table 3

Students' Politeness Strategies in Texting to Lecturers through WhatsApp

No	Types of Students' Politeness Strategies	Types of Utterances	Number of Utterances	Examples of utterances
1	Bald –on Record	-	-	-
2	Off-Record	-	-	-
3	Positive-Politeness	Opening/greeting: 1. Single greeting	122 utterances	<i>Assalamualaikum wr.wb, // . . . I am sorry to interrupt you Sir // I am Marsha Febiana, // I want to ask about KM 3, // can I join it? // I am from the 3rd semester? // Thank you // well // thank you Sir.</i>
		2. Double greeting	17 utterances	<i>Assalamualaikum wr.wb. // Good morning, sir. // I am Rua Zipa from PBI 4A, // . . .</i>
		Self-introduction	108 utterances	<i>I am Rua Zipa from PBI 4A, // . . .</i>
		Apologizing	86 utterances	<i>I am sorry to interrupt you Sir// . . .</i>
		Main message	98 utterances	<i>I want to ask about KM 3, // . . .</i>
		Question	76 utterances	<i>Can I join it? // I am from the 3rd semester? //</i>
		Thankful closing	96 utterances	<i>Well // thank you Sir.</i>
4	Negative –Politeness	-	-	-

Note: ‘//’ indicates a boundary between separate utterances

On the other hand, when lecturers responded to their students' initiation, both Bald-on Record and Positive politeness were used interchangeably. The other two strategies (off-record and negative politeness) were not utilized. This may indicate that politeness strategies were utilized positively in student-initiated communication between students and lecturers.

Positive politeness strategies consist of expressions of agreement (e.g., *Ya . . . // Ya, it is Ok... // Yes, Ok, // it is doing now, // Yes, your score is good, // Yes, Ok. // Ya, mba [sister]*) and questions (e.g., *What is the topic? // Is it about the problem and supervision? // Who will present today?*).

Table 5 outlines the politeness strategies employed by lecturers when initiating texts to their students. Lecturers initiated text interactions in four instances, using bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies. Bald-on-record strategies

included expressions of opening greetings, instructions or commands, messages, and thankful greetings. Positive politeness strategies involve expressions of intimacy and agreement. Similar to when the lecturers responded, they initiated the communication using Bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies.

Table 6 presents the politeness strategies employed by students when responding to their lecturers' texts. The findings indicate that students exclusively used positive politeness strategies without employing other types. These strategies were expressed through feedback, greetings, agreements, and thankful greetings, aiming to minimize conflict and ensure smooth communication between students and lecturers. Based on the above tables, students and lecturers employed politeness strategies differently. However, more data is needed, particularly in teacher-initiated exchanges, to see further how students responded to their lecturers' WhatsApp messages.

Table 4

Lecturers' Politeness Strategies in Texting to Respond to Students' WhatsApp Messages

No	Types of Lecturers' Politeness' Strategies	Types of Utterances	Number of Utterances	Examples of Utterances
1	Bald –on Record	1. Return greeting 2. Instruction or command	83 utterances 29 utterances	- <i>Walaikumsalam, wr.wb, // ok it is at 09.00 am //</i> . . . - <i>Wassalamualaikum wr.wb, // insya Allah//</i> . . . - Please you send it to DPL // if there is a problem. // . . . - take a break first, // . . . I will take a rest. // - Please tell your story about your experience teaching in Thailand, - be careful please . . .
2	Off-Record	-	-	-
3	Positive-Politeness	1. Agreement 2.Question	98 utterances 15 utterances	- Ya . . . - Ya, it is Ok . . . - Yes, Ok, // / it is doing now. // - Yes, your score is good. // . . . - Yes, Ok . . . - Ya, <i>mba</i> .// . . . - What is the topic? // . . . - it is about problem and // - Supervision?// . . . - Who will present today? //
4	Negative Politeness	-	-	-

Note: ‘//’ indicates a boundary between separate utterances

Table 5

Lecturers' Politeness Strategies in Texting Their Students

No	Types of Lecturers' Politeness' Strategies	Types of Utterances	Number of Utterances	Examples of Utterances
1	Bald –on Record	1. Opening/ greeting 2. Instruction or command 3. Main message 4. Thanking	4 utterances 5 utterances 6 utterances 2 utterances	<i>Assalamualaikum wr.wb. mba</i> .// Please hurry up yaa. // . . . Please tell your story about your experience teaching in Thailand, // . . . And also send me just 3 photo yaa. // . . . it is about a unique moment or //when you go anywhere. . . . // I want put your story in website // . . . Thank you//
2	Off-Record	-	-	-
3	Positive-Politeness	5. Intimacy agreement	2 utterances	OK. . . it is a good . . .
4	Negative Politeness'	-	-	-

Note: ‘//’ indicates a boundary between separate utterances

Table 6

Students' Politeness Strategies to Respond to Their Lecturers

No	Types of Lecturers' Politeness' Strategies	Types of Utterances	Number of Utterances	Examples of utterances
1	Bald-on Record	-	-	-
2	Off-record	-	-	-
3	Positive-Politeness Strategies	- Return greeting - Agreement - Thankful closing	2 4 1	<i>Walaikumsalam. Wr.wb. //</i> . . . Ok, sir. // . . . Thank you very much, Sir . . .
4	Negative –Politeness	-	-	-

Note: ‘//’ indicates a boundary between separate utterances

Politeness Patterns When Initiating Communication

This subsection presents examples of utterances that initiated the moves (Table 7) and the politeness formula in student-initiated communication (Table

8). Table 7 illustrates the formulas for initiating texts on WhatsApp. The first formula, SI → LR, indicates that students initiate texting with their lecturers, who then respond. The second formula, LI → SR, shows that lecturers sometimes initiate texts,

with students responding. These formulas demonstrate mutual respect and the positive impact of politeness strategies on communication via WhatsApp. Table 8 provides the formula for politeness in texts addressed to lecturers or older individuals by students. The significant findings highlight the novelty of this research, focusing on WhatsApp interactions between students and lecturers, which has not been extensively explored in previous studies.

There are six minimal utterances (see table 8) of being polite when student-initiated communication with their lecturers: opening greeting (single and double greetings, self-introduction, asking for an apology, the message

itself, questions, and a thankful greeting. The first greeting is one of the common linguistic phenomena, and it is used in both written and spoken language and formal and informal contexts. In a formal context, it is usually used in contexts; for example, in the morning, the greeting can be “good morning,” in the afternoon, “good afternoon,” and “good evening” in the evening. Conversely, in an informal context, there are many types of greetings, such as “hey” or “hi,” “What is up?” “What is going on?” “Nice to see you,” “Long time no see,” etc. Based on the findings, students used formal greetings via WhatsApp when communicating with their lecturers.

Table 7

The Formula of Initiating Moves in Using WhatsApp by Students and Lecturers

No	Students and Lecturers' Initiations and Their Responses to Each Other	Number of Moves	Examples of Moves	Examples of Utterances Initiated by students	Examples of Lecturers' Responses
1	SI-----→ LR	137	- 1 ---- 39, - 41 ---- 119, - 121 ---- 124, - 126 ---- 136, - 138 ---- 141	<i>Assalamualaikum wr.wb. //</i> Good morning, sir. // I'm Nea Vera, from PBI 5A. // Permission to ask: // can the Second Language Acquisition course in the 7 th semester be taken in the 5 th semester? //	<i>Waalaikumsalam, this week. //</i> <i>Insya Allah, // it is before entering the dzuhur //</i>
2	LI-----→SR	4	40, 120, 125, and 137	<i>Assalamualaikum, wr.wb. mba. //</i> Please tell your story about your experience teaching in Thailand, // it is about a unique moment or //when you go anywhere. // I want put your story in website // and also send me just 3 photo yaa. // Thank you// Ok, I am waiting your story. // Please hurry up yaa. //	<i>Waalaikumsalam. Wr.wb. //</i> Ok, sir. // Let me detail my story first. //
Note: SI: Student's Initiations LR: Lecturer's Responses LI: Lecturer's Initiations SR: Student's Responses		Total number of Moves 141			

Note: ‘//’ indicates a boundary between separate utterances

Table 8

The Formula of Politeness for Student-Initiated Communication

Minimal Standardized Utterances of Being Polite	Examples of Utterances
Opening Greeting	Single Opening Greeting Double Opening Greeting <i>Assalamu'alaikum wr.wb.</i> <i>Assalamu'alaikum wr.wb.,</i> Good morning, Good afternoon, Good evening, Good night, Sir, mom, I am Maria Ferana, I am from the 3 rd semester
Self-Introduction	I am sorry to interrupt you Sir,
Asking for an Apology	I want to ask about KM 3, //
Message Itself	Can I join it? //
Questions	Thank you // well // thank you Sir.
Thankful closing	

Note: ‘//’ indicates a boundary between separate utterances

The data analysis revealed that EFL students often use Islamic greetings such as “*Assalamu'alaikum wr. wb.*” in both formal and

informal contexts, including meetings, government discussions, and conferences. EFL students prefer to use these greetings before texting classmates or

lecturers, utilizing both Islamic and common greetings.

The next politeness strategy involves self-introduction. This practice helps prevent misunderstandings and identify the sender, thus reducing the likelihood of deception. Self-introduction is essential for maintaining politeness in written communication. The third step is apologizing. Although simple, apologies are often tricky to implement in daily life. Apologizing when texting lecturers helps smooth communication and minimize conflicts. Examples include “I am sorry” and “I apologize.” The fourth step involves stating the message itself. Messages addressed to lecturers should be clear and concise, often preceded by an apology. For example, “I am sorry, I want to ask about KM3.”

The fifth step is asking questions. Questions naturally arise in text messages and clarify the student’s purpose in texting the lecturer. For example, “Can I join it?” The final step is expressing gratitude. Thankful greetings show appreciation and serve as a closing for the text message. These six steps can serve as a model for polite texting, minimizing conflict and deception in digital communication, particularly via WhatsApp. These steps will also allow the lecturer to identify the writer, their purpose, and the relationship to help understand the sender’s identity and intentions.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine the politeness strategies employed by EFL students and lecturers in their WhatsApp interactions, focusing on both the forms and functions of these strategies in student- and lecturer-initiated communication. The findings reveal several important patterns that both affirm and extend previous research, while also highlighting unique features of the Indonesian tertiary context.

A central finding is that students overwhelmingly relied on positive politeness strategies when initiating or responding to lecturers via WhatsApp. These strategies included formal greetings (often Islamic, such as “*Assalamu’alaikum wr. wb.*”), self-introductions, apologies, clear statement of purpose, questions, and expressions of gratitude. This six-step formula for polite communication reflects a strong adherence to social and cultural norms, as well as a recognition of the hierarchical relationship between students and lecturers.

This pattern is consistent with findings from Mulyono et al. (2019), who reported that Indonesian EFL students tend to be more polite toward teachers due to age and social status. Similarly, Maharani et al. (2022) found that students frequently used opening and appreciation words in WhatsApp thesis consultations, while Sembiring and Sianturi (2021)

and Shalihah and Zuhdi (2020) observed frequent use of greetings, apologies, and gratitude to minimize conflict in student-lecturer digital exchanges. The preference for formal greetings, especially religious ones, also echoes the findings of Fitriyani (2020) and Hafid et al. (2022), who noted the role of cultural and religious norms in shaping politeness in Indonesian classrooms.

In contrast, lecturers employed a combination of bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies, both when initiating and responding to messages. Bald-on-record strategies included direct instructions, feedback greetings, and explicit requests, while positive politeness was evident in expressions of agreement, encouragement, and questions designed to maintain rapport. This mix reflects the lecturers’ dual role as authority figures and facilitators of student learning. This finding aligns with Pasaribu et al. (2022), who noted that lecturers tend to use more direct, bald-on-record strategies in WhatsApp communication, particularly when giving instructions or feedback. At the same time, the use of positive politeness to build solidarity and reduce social distance is in line with the observations of Halil et al. (2021) and Amanda et al. (2021), who found that both students and lecturers employ strategies to foster harmonious relationships in digital academic settings.

Notably, neither students nor lecturers made significant use of negative politeness or off-record strategies in the WhatsApp exchanges studied. The absence of negative politeness (which typically involves indirectness or hedging to avoid imposition) suggests that both groups perceive WhatsApp as a space for relatively direct, yet respectful, communication. This may reflect the platform’s informal, immediate nature, as well as the established trust and familiarity between students and lecturers in this context.

This contrasts with findings from Fitriani (2023) and Li (2012), who observed the use of negative and off-record strategies in more multicultural or less familiar online learning environments, where greater social distance or uncertainty may prompt more indirect forms of politeness. In the current study, the shared cultural background and established relationships may have reduced the perceived need for such strategies.

The frequent use of Islamic greetings and formal address terms underscores the influence of religious and cultural norms in shaping digital politeness. As Indonesia is a majority Muslim country, the preference for religious greetings is both a marker of respect and a means of reinforcing group identity, as also noted by Rahmawati (2022) and Zainurrahman and Kofau (2020). This finding highlights the importance of considering local sociocultural context when analyzing digital communication practices.

Overall, the findings support the argument of Brown and Levinson (1987) that politeness strategies serve to maintain social harmony and manage power dynamics. However, the specific patterns observed—students' exclusive use of positive politeness and lecturers' combination of directness and positive engagement—reflect the unique interplay of hierarchy, cultural norms, and platform affordances in Indonesian higher education.

Unlike some previous studies (e.g., Fitriani, 2023; Li, 2012) that reported a wider range of strategies in international or multicultural online classrooms, this study found a narrower repertoire, likely due to the shared linguistic and cultural background of participants. The findings also extend those of Maharani et al. (2022) and Kusmanto and Widodo (2022) by providing a more detailed account of the formulaic steps students use to enact politeness in WhatsApp messages, and by highlighting the reciprocal nature of politeness in lecturer-student digital communication.

These results have several implications for practice and future research. First, the six-step politeness formula identified in student messages can serve as a model for effective digital communication in similar educational contexts, helping to minimize misunderstandings and foster positive relationships. Second, the findings suggest that training for both students and lecturers on digital politeness could further enhance communication, especially as online platforms become increasingly central to academic life.

Finally, by focusing on the “fostering effect” of politeness in WhatsApp-mediated lecturer-student exchanges, this study addresses a gap in the Indonesian literature and provides a foundation for future comparative or intervention studies in other cultural and institutional contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how politeness strategies applied by lecturers and students facilitate communication in written form through WhatsApp. The findings revealed that students mainly utilized positive politeness while lecturers employed it with the bald-on-record strategy. Religious influence also played a role during WA interaction, often resulting in double greetings in SI-LR interactions.

The study observed that students initiated 137 out of 141 moves, while lecturers initiated only four moves, reflecting the superior authority of lecturers. Students generally employed several steps, mainly starting and closing with greetings to be polite. Lecturers

The consistent use of politeness strategies contributed to harmonious and peaceful relationships between students and lecturers. It is important to note, however, that some limitations

exist in this study. In particular, it will be more beneficial to interview the lecturer and students to explore their actions in-depth, underlining their rationale in the interaction.

Politeness strategies remain relevant for both formal and informal contexts, as they help minimize misunderstandings leading to conflicts and social chaos. The researchers suggest implementing these strategies broadly in human interactions to foster effective communication and societal harmony.

One other suggestion for future research is to examine lecturer-student and student-to-student interactions through Brown and Levinson's other frameworks such as face-threatening speech act (i.e. how power, distance and imposition) which influences how interlocutors interact.

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