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Teacher's Politeness Strategies in EFL Classroom Interaction at Junior High School

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Abstract

Teacher–student interaction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms entails not only the delivery of instructional content but also the strategic use of politeness to facilitate effective communication and sustain interpersonal relationships. This study aimed to identify and analyze the politeness strategies employed by an English teacher during classroom interactions at MTSS Al-Falah. Using a descriptive qualitative design, the study involved one English teacher and Grade IX-1 students. Data were collected through classroom observations, video recordings, and field notes and analyzed using Brown and Levinson's politeness framework, with the interactional context examined through Hymes' SPEAKING model. The analysis identified 21 teacher utterances containing politeness strategies: 17 instances of bald-on-record, three of positive politeness, and one of negative politeness; no off-record strategy was observed. The predominance of bald-on-record strategies indicates that the teacher prioritized directness to ensure instructional clarity and facilitate classroom management. These findings demonstrate that teachers' politeness strategies constitute context-dependent pragmatic choices shaped by instructional purposes and classroom conditions. The study contributes to EFL

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classroom pragmatics by highlighting the importance of strengthening teachers' pragmatic awareness and their capacity to adapt communication strategies to specific pedagogical and interactional contexts.

Keywords: Classroom Interaction; EFL Teaching; Politeness Strategies; Pragmatic Awareness; Teacher–Student Communication

INTRODUCTION

Classroom interaction is not merely a medium for transferring instructional materials but also a space in which teachers and students continuously negotiate meaning, roles, and relationships through language. This aspect is particularly important in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, where students have relatively limited opportunities to use English outside formal learning environments. In such circumstances, teacher talk becomes an important part of the learning process because teachers use language not only to explain materials but also to give instructions, ask questions, correct students' responses, provide feedback, and regulate classroom activities. These communicative acts may potentially affect students' face, particularly when teachers need to exercise their authority while maintaining students' willingness to participate. The issue becomes more significant at the junior high school level because students are entering early adolescence and may be relatively sensitive in their interactions with authority figures such as teachers (Prasetyaningsih, 2026). Therefore, the manner in which teachers formulate and deliver their utterances is an important consideration in creating effective classroom communication. Politeness strategies can support this process by helping teachers maintain interactional relationships while accomplishing instructional objectives (Luthfi & Sofyawati, 2022). Appropriate politeness can also contribute to students' motivation, more effective communication, and cooperative relationships between teachers and students (Yoga et al., 2018).

From this perspective, teacher politeness should not be determined solely from whether an utterance sounds direct, indirect, formal, or informal. Its meaning and interactional effect are closely related to the situation in which the utterance is produced. An instruction, for instance, may need to be expressed directly when the teacher is managing classroom activities and requires students to respond efficiently. However, the same linguistic form may carry a different interactional meaning when it is delivered in a situation involving a student who is experiencing difficulty or requires greater consideration. This contextual

dimension was also evident in the preliminary observation at MTSS Al-Falah, where the teacher produced various utterances related to instructions, corrections, questions, and feedback. Although such utterances may contain potential face-threatening acts, their interpretation cannot be separated from the surrounding classroom circumstances. Accordingly, the present study takes the position that examining politeness in EFL classroom interaction requires more than classifying linguistic expressions; it requires an analysis of how teachers' communicative choices operate within particular instructional situations and interactional relationships.

This position is supported by a number of previous studies concerning politeness in EFL classrooms. Intan Marpaung, (2019) examined the politeness strategies used by teachers and students and reported that positive politeness was the dominant strategy, particularly in establishing good interaction and relationships between classroom participants. (Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020), meanwhile, identified positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald-on-record strategies in teacher-student interaction and showed that factors such as age, institutional position, authority, and social distance were related to the strategies employed. (Rahayuningsih et al., 2020) identified four politeness strategies bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record in EFL teacher-student interaction. Similarly, (Unaina et al., 2021) found that bald on record was the strategy most frequently employed by the teacher, particularly in activities involving instructions and classroom management. Taken together, these studies demonstrate that politeness strategies have been investigated across different EFL classroom settings and that teachers may employ different strategies according to their interactional purposes. Nevertheless, the existing studies remain situated within particular classroom contexts, participants, and research settings. The literature identified in the present study also suggests that factors such as participant characteristics and age can influence the realization of politeness, while studies conducted within limited contexts may not adequately capture the complexity of EFL classroom interaction (Hieng et al., 2025; Mahmud, 2019). (Jayanti et al., 2024)likewise highlight the need for research with more specific contextual orientations. Thus, a gap remains in explaining how the strategies identified through politeness theory are realized in relation to the concrete situational characteristics of a junior high school EFL classroom.

To address this gap, the present research combines Brown and Levinson's politeness theory with Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model. Brown and Levinson's framework provides the principal basis for identifying the politeness strategies expressed in teachers' utterances,

namely Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off Record. The framework views interaction in relation to the concept of face, encompassing individuals' desire to be appreciated and accepted as well as their desire to maintain freedom from unwanted imposition. However, identifying a strategy alone does not fully explain why a particular strategy is selected in a specific classroom situation. For this reason, Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model is employed as a supporting framework through its consideration of Setting, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre. The combination of the two frameworks enables the study to examine not only the types of politeness strategies present in teacher utterances but also the contextual conditions surrounding their realization. This integration constitutes the novelty of the study because it provides a more context-oriented examination of teacher politeness strategies in a junior high school EFL classroom, particularly at MTSS Al-Falah, rather than treating politeness strategies as isolated linguistic forms.

On the basis of these considerations, this study focuses on the politeness strategies realized in the English teacher's verbal utterances toward Grade IX-1 students during EFL classroom interaction at MTSS Al-Falah. The teacher is positioned as the primary subject of analysis, while students' utterances are considered as contextual information for interpreting the teacher's communicative choices rather than as the main object of politeness analysis. Therefore, the objective of this research is to identify and analyze the types of politeness strategies employed in the teacher's utterances and to examine how those strategies are realized within the contextual conditions of classroom interaction. Through this focus, the study seeks to provide a more contextualized account of teacher politeness in EFL classroom communication and to contribute to understanding how teachers balance instructional effectiveness, classroom management, and interpersonal considerations through their use of language.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the politeness strategies used by an English teacher during classroom interaction at MTSS Al-Falah Grade IX-1. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on interpreting naturally occurring teacher utterances and their meanings within the classroom context rather than measuring the phenomenon statistically. The research focused on teacher

politeness strategies as the main analytical phenomenon, with Brown & Levinson, (1987) politeness theory serving as the primary theoretical framework.

The research design used four main indicators derived from Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off Record. These four categories were used to identify and classify the teacher's utterances according to their communicative characteristics. Bald on Record refers to direct and explicit expressions, Positive Politeness emphasizes solidarity and attention to the hearer's positive face, Negative Politeness seeks to minimize imposition and respect the hearer's autonomy, while Off Record involves indirect expressions in which the intended meaning is not stated explicitly. The indicators were further supported by relevant sub-indicators contained in the observation checklist. Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model was used as a supporting framework to interpret the contextual aspects of the utterances, including setting, participants, communicative purposes, interactional sequence, tone, instrumentalities, norms, and genre.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling and consisted of one English teacher and 23 Grade IX-1 students at MTSS Al-Falah. The teacher was selected as the primary participant because the research specifically examined politeness strategies in the teacher's utterances. The students participated as hearers whose responses and classroom behavior were used as contextual information to assist the interpretation of the teacher's utterances. This selection was consistent with the qualitative orientation of the study, which emphasized an in-depth examination of a specific classroom interaction rather than statistical generalization.

Data were collected using an observation checklist, video recording, and field notes. The observation checklist was based on Brown and Levinson's politeness strategy indicators and was used to document the teacher's utterances, their classroom contexts, and their interpreted meanings. Classroom interactions were observed and recorded during three meetings on 3, 4, and 6 August 2026 at MTSS Al-Falah. The first observation lasted approximately 42 minutes, the second 48 minutes, and the third 35 minutes, resulting in approximately 125 minutes of classroom observation. The research preparation began with requesting an observation permit on 29 July 2026 and obtaining permission from MTSS Al-Falah on 1 August 2026.

The data analysis was conducted by first transcribing the recorded classroom interactions and identifying teacher utterances directed toward students as the primary units

of analysis. The identified utterances were then classified according to the four politeness strategy categories proposed by Brown and Levinson. Each utterance was examined in relation to the relevant indicators and sub-indicators in the observation checklist. After classification, the contextual meaning of each utterance was interpreted using Hymes' SPEAKING model by considering the circumstances in which the utterance occurred. This process enabled the researcher to connect the linguistic form of the teacher's utterances with their communicative purposes and classroom contexts.

The analysis subsequently organized the findings according to the identified politeness strategies and interpreted their use within the classroom interaction. The results showed 17 data categorized as Bald on Record, 3 data as Positive Politeness, and 1 datum as Negative Politeness, while no Off Record data were identified. This analytical procedure was consistent with the purpose of the study, which was to identify and analyze the politeness strategies realized in the English teacher's utterances during EFL classroom interaction at MTSS Al-Falah.

RESULTS

The analysis of teacher–student interaction in the EFL classroom at MTSS Al-Falah identified 21 teacher utterances containing politeness strategies. The data were obtained from three classroom observations conducted in Grade IX-1 during English lessons on report text. Classroom interactions were recorded through video and supported by field notes, while the teacher's utterances directed toward students were transcribed and analyzed. (Brown & Levinson, 1987) politeness framework was used to classify the strategies, while Dell Hymes, (1974) SPEAKING model was used to interpret the strategies according to their interactional context.

The findings revealed that the teacher employed three of the four politeness strategies proposed by (Brown & Levinson, 1987), namely Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, and Negative Politeness. Bald on Record was the most frequently used strategy, with 17 occurrences (80.95%), followed by Positive Politeness with three occurrences (14.29%) and Negative Politeness with one occurrence (4.76%). Off Record was not identified in the observed interactions.

Table 1. Distribution of Teacher's Politeness Strategies

Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Bald On Record	17	80,95%
Possitive Politeness	3	14,29%
Negative Politeness	1	4,76%
Off Record	0	0%
Total	21	100%

source: Compiled by the researcher (2026)

The predominance of Bald on Record indicates that direct communication was the teacher's primary strategy for achieving instructional purposes. The strategy occurred mainly when the teacher gave instructions, regulated students' participation, organized classroom activities, corrected behavior, and directed students to complete learning tasks. Expressions such as "Raise your hand!", "Oji duduk di situ nya," and "Coba baca activity 12" demonstrate that direct utterances were closely associated with immediate classroom actions.

Positive Politeness occurred three times, with one occurrence in each classroom meeting. The strategy was found mainly in interactions intended to create rapport, appreciate students' participation, and encourage their involvement in learning. For example, "How are you today?" demonstrated attention to students before the lesson, whereas "Okay, very good. Give applause." functioned as an expression of appreciation. These findings indicate that the teacher occasionally shifted from task-oriented communication to relationship-oriented interaction.

Negative Politeness was identified only once through the utterance "May I borrow your LKS?" The teacher used a conventionally indirect expression when requesting a student's worksheet. The utterance indicates recognition of the student's autonomy and ownership, showing that the teacher adjusted her communication when the interaction involved a potential imposition on the student.

In contrast, Off Record did not occur during any of the three observations. The teacher generally communicated instructions, explanations, corrections, and classroom-management directions explicitly rather than through hints or ambiguous expressions. The absence of Off Record suggests that indirect implication was not a prominent communicative resource in the observed classroom.

Overall, the distribution of strategies demonstrates that the teacher's politeness practices were strongly oriented toward instructional clarity and classroom management, while interpersonal and autonomy-oriented strategies appeared selectively. The findings therefore indicate that politeness in the observed EFL classroom was realized through different degrees of directness according to the immediate communicative purpose.

DISCUSSION

The dominance of Bald on Record is the central finding of this study. The high frequency of direct utterances indicates that the teacher prioritized clarity and efficiency when communicating instructional requirements. This finding should not be interpreted simply as a lack of politeness because the appropriateness of an utterance depends on its communicative context. Brown & Levinson, (1987) provide the framework for identifying face-related strategies, while Lakoff, (1973) and Leech, (1983) emphasize that politeness is related to appropriate interpersonal communication.

The finding is also consistent with the nature of teacher–student classroom interaction. Adaba (2017) emphasizes the importance of teacher–learner interaction in supporting classroom participation and language learning. In the present study, direct teacher utterances were frequently used to initiate activities, request responses, and regulate students' behavior. Thus, Bald on Record functioned as an instructional resource that enabled the teacher to maintain the flow of classroom interaction.

The EFL context further helps explain the frequent use of direct communication. (Si, 2019) and Iwai, (2011), as discussed in the thesis, emphasize the importance of classroom interaction in EFL learning. When English is used as a foreign language, students may require clear instructions to understand what they are expected to do. Consequently, the teacher's preference for explicit expressions can be understood as a pragmatic response to the instructional demands of the classroom.

Dell Hymes, (1974) SPEAKING model provides further support for this interpretation. The interaction occurred in a formal classroom involving a teacher and Grade IX students, with instructional activities as the primary communicative purpose. The teacher possessed institutional authority, while students were expected to respond to instructions and participate in learning activities. Under these circumstances, direct communication was compatible with the setting, participant roles, ends, and norms of classroom interaction.

The finding of Bald on Record dominance is consistent with Unaina et al., (2021), who also found Bald on Record to be the most frequently used strategy in EFL classroom interaction. Their findings associated direct strategies with the need for effective classroom communication. The similarity suggests that directness may become particularly important when teachers need to communicate instructions and manage classroom activities efficiently.

However, the present findings differ from Intan Marpaung, (2019), who reported Positive Politeness as the dominant strategy. Rahayuningsih et al., (2020) also emphasized the importance of Positive Politeness for maintaining solidarity and close relationships in classroom interaction. These differences indicate that the dominant strategy is not necessarily universal but may depend on the characteristics of the classroom, the teacher's communicative purposes, and the interactional relationship between teachers and students.

The three occurrences of Positive Politeness nevertheless demonstrate that interpersonal considerations remained part of the teacher's communication. Expressions such as "How are you today?" and "Okay, very good. Give applause." show that the teacher used language to recognize students, encourage participation, and create a supportive atmosphere. This interpretation corresponds with Fitriyah et al., (2020), which are discussed in the thesis in relation to politeness and teacher–student interaction.

The limited frequency of Positive Politeness should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that the teacher lacked concern for students' interpersonal needs. Rather, the strategy appeared when the communicative purpose required encouragement, appreciation, or rapport. (Jayanti et al., 2024) and Lesiana et al., (2023)similarly highlight the importance of classroom interaction in supporting effective communication and student participation. The present study extends this perspective by showing how interpersonal politeness appears alongside predominantly instructional communication.

Negative Politeness provides another example of contextual strategy selection. The utterance "May I borrow your LKS?" demonstrates that the teacher recognized the student's autonomy when making a request. This finding is consistent with Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020), who identified conventionally indirect expressions as strategies for reducing threats to negative face. It is also consistent with Rahayuningsih et al. (2020), who associated Negative Politeness with reducing pressure on students.

The absence of Off Record differs from findings reported by Rahayuningsih et al., (2020), Unaina et al., (2021), and (Intan Marpaung, 2019), who identified Off Record in their

respective classroom data. The difference may be related to the instructional demands of the present setting. Because many classroom activities required students to understand specific instructions, indirect hints may have been less functional than explicit expressions. Thus, the absence of Off Record represents a contextual difference rather than evidence that the strategy is inappropriate for classroom communication.

The findings are also relevant to (Sembiring & Sianturi, 2019), who discuss politeness in relation to maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict in EFL classrooms. The present study demonstrates that maintaining classroom harmony does not necessarily require teachers to avoid direct communication. Instead, harmony can be achieved through the strategic combination of direct, positive, and negative politeness according to the situation.

The study further contributes to the discussion of pragmatic identity. (Chen, 2015)conceptualizes pragmatic identity as dynamic and constructed through language use, while Wu, (2025) emphasizes the strategic use of linguistic choices in relation to contextual demands. In the present study, Bald on Record constructed the teacher's identity as an authority figure and classroom manager, Positive Politeness reflected the identity of facilitator and motivator, and Negative Politeness reflected a more respectful and autonomy-oriented teacher identity.

This interpretation represents an important contribution of the study because the findings are not limited to identifying which strategy occurred most frequently. By combining Brown & Levinson, (1987) framework with Dell Hymes, (1974) SPEAKING model and the pragmatic-identity perspective discussed in Chen, (2015), the study explains why the teacher selected different strategies in different interactional circumstances. The findings therefore support a contextual understanding of classroom politeness.

The findings also have practical implications for EFL teachers. Teachers should not simply avoid direct communication in an attempt to appear polite. Bald on Record may be appropriate for instructions, classroom management, and situations requiring immediate action, while Positive Politeness can be used to provide encouragement and recognition. Negative Politeness can be useful when requests involve students' autonomy or personal possessions. This approach is consistent with the thesis recommendation that teachers balance direct and indirect strategies according to classroom circumstances.

The findings have implications for teacher education and professional development. Pragmatic awareness should be incorporated into teacher preparation so that future teachers

understand that politeness involves contextual appropriateness rather than simply using indirect or formal expressions. Harmia (2024) Luthfi & Sofyawati, (2022), and Mahmud, (2019), all included in the thesis, provide relevant perspectives for understanding politeness within EFL and classroom interaction. The present findings reinforce the need for teachers to recognize the relationship between linguistic choice, instructional objectives, interpersonal relations, and classroom norms.

Finally, the study has several limitations. It involved one English teacher and one Grade IX classroom at MTSS Al-Falah, and the data were collected during only three classroom observations. The analysis also focused primarily on teacher utterances, with students' responses used mainly as contextual information. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as a context-specific account rather than generalized to all EFL classrooms. Future research could involve more teachers, more classrooms, longer observation periods, and analysis of both teacher and student politeness strategies to provide a broader understanding of politeness in EFL classroom interaction.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the English teacher at MTSS Al-Falah employed three of the four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson, namely Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, and Negative Politeness, while Off Record was not identified. Bald on Record was the dominant strategy, indicating that direct communication was the teacher's primary means of delivering instructions, managing classroom activities, and maintaining instructional clarity. Positive Politeness was used selectively to build rapport, encourage participation, and appreciate students' contributions, whereas Negative Politeness appeared when the teacher needed to make a request while respecting a student's autonomy. These findings directly answer the research focus by demonstrating how the teacher used different politeness strategies according to the communicative demands of EFL classroom interaction.

The study contributes to the understanding of classroom pragmatics by demonstrating that politeness cannot be interpreted solely from the degree of directness or indirectness of an utterance. The findings show that a direct strategy can be pragmatically appropriate when it supports instructional objectives, while positive and negative strategies become meaningful when interpersonal relationships or students' autonomy require greater consideration. The integration of politeness strategies with contextual interpretation also

highlights that teachers' linguistic choices are closely related to their roles as classroom managers, facilitators, and motivators. This provides a more contextual understanding of teacher politeness in a junior high school EFL classroom.

Practically, the findings suggest that teachers and teacher educators should develop pragmatic awareness in classroom communication. Teachers do not need to avoid direct expressions entirely; instead, they need to recognize when directness is necessary for clarity and when a more supportive or autonomy-oriented strategy is appropriate. For MTSS Al-Falah, the findings may serve as a reference for strengthening teachers' classroom communication practices by balancing instructional efficiency with positive teacher–student relationships. More broadly, the study demonstrates the value of examining naturally occurring classroom interaction when developing an understanding of effective and context-sensitive teacher communication.

Future research is recommended to examine politeness strategies across a larger number of teachers, classrooms, and educational contexts and to employ longer observation periods to capture a wider range of interactional situations. Further studies may also analyze students' politeness strategies and non-verbal aspects of interaction alongside teacher utterances. Such research would provide a broader understanding of how politeness, classroom interaction, and pragmatic identity operate together in EFL learning environments.

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