

## Students' Perceptions on Politeness and Respect in Teacher-Student Interaction

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i5.2890>

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### ABSTRACT

Politeness and respect in teacher-student interaction are important to create a supportive learning environment, yet students' perspectives about this issue is still underexplored. The aim of this study is to explore how high school students perceive politeness and respect in daily classroom interactions. This study uses a qualitative approach with narrative inquiry method. The data were collected through interviews of five high school students. The findings show that polite teacher behaviors, such as giving praise, providing clear instructions, and not forcing participation, can create a safe environment that builds students' confidence to speak. In contrast, impolite actions like scolding students in public cause high anxiety and make them stay silent to protect their feelings. This study shows that the way a teacher speaks is an important tool that shapes student emotions. In conclusion, teachers must choose their words carefully to protect student dignity and encourage active speaking.

**Keywords:** Classroom Interaction, Education, EFL Classroom, Student Perspective

#### Article History:

Received 29<sup>th</sup> June 2026

Accepted 02<sup>nd</sup> September 2026

Published 10<sup>th</sup> September 2026



## INTRODUCTION

The interaction between teachers and students plays as the main driver for successful language learning in the EFL classroom. Many educators face challenges in keeping students engaged when the classroom environment feels too formal or scary for the learners. Study by Al-Afnan (2020) suggested that the use of polite language can help to close the social gap between teachers and students. Respectful communication creates a safe place where students feel comfortable to practice their English skills. Mwinlaaru, (2022) stated that this sense of security is important because language learning often involves a high risk of making mistakes in front of peers. Teachers need to balance their classroom authority while still showing appreciation for students' effort.

The concept of face also plays a big role in how students respond to a teacher's instructions. Every student have a positive face, which represents their desire to be liked and appreciated by the teacher (Gao, 2023). When teachers use positive politeness, students feels that they are valuable. Culpeper (2021) stated that when a teacher uses positive politeness, they are importantly validating the student's identity as a valuable member of the academic community.

Students also have a negative face, which is their need for autonomy and freedom from pressure. A negative face refers to the student's need for autonomy and freedom from unnecessary imposition Terkourafi (2023). Polite teachers use indirect requests or hedges to respect this boundary and reduce student anxiety. Students who feel that their pride is being protected tend to show higher levels of intrinsic motivation. Understanding these basic linguistic needs helps educators build a more cooperative learning environment.

The psychological impact of teacher politeness is closely linked to the Affective Filter hypothesis in second language acquisition (Dewaele, 2022; Krashen, 1985). When students feel

respected and emotionally supported, their anxiety levels decrease, allowing the brain to absorb linguistic input more effectively. Oppositely, a harsh or disrespectful communication style triggers a mental block that prevents meaningful learning from occurring.

Many researchers argue that the emotional well-being of a student is just as important as the academic content being taught. Therefore, [Pishghadam et al. \(2021\)](#) stated that politeness acts as a protective shield that keeps the affective filter low throughout the duration of the lesson. Teachers can transform a high stress environment into a productive space for language exploration by prioritizing a respectful dialogue. This emotional foundation can lead to a long-term academic success for EFL learners.

In secondary education, the power act between teachers and students often complicate the communication process. Students frequently feel afraid to speak or ask questions due to the perceived social distance between themselves and the instructor. [Kádár & House \(2021\)](#) found that politeness strategies serve as a bridge to minimize this distance without undermining the teacher's professional authority. By using inclusive language and minimizing intimidation, professors can boost a more democratic exchange of ideas.

This approach is particularly effective in language classrooms where active participation is a requirement for skill development [Sydenham \(2021\)](#). As students start to feel that their voices matter, they become more willing to engage in critical thinking and complex discussions. Thus, the language of respect is important for breaking down the barriers of traditional classroom hierarchies ([Haugh, 2020](#)).

This research combines linguistic pragmatics and psychological aspects of language acquisition to analyze classroom speech acts. [Yule \(1996\)](#) explained that politeness refers to the practical actions that taken by a person to show awareness and consideration for another's face. Teachers constantly show dynamic linguistic actions that can either threaten or save this fragile self-image during daily tasks.

When a teacher uses supportive expressions and soft language markers, they directly satisfy the learner's positive face needs by making them feel appreciated. On the other hand, the implementation of polite indirect requests by avoiding harsh intimidation serves to protect the student's negative face. As the consequence, classroom communication is never a neutral exchange because every teacher utterance carries a specific relational weight that shapes students' comfort.

The way teachers handle students' feelings changes how much students want to speak up in class. ([Dewaele, 2022](#); [Krashen, 1985](#)) argued that specific emotional variables can either facilitate or completely obstruct the process of new linguistic data. A supportive instructional environment filled with polite speech acts effectively lowers the learner's affective filter and opens their mind to receive input.

This low filter allows foreign language input to reach the brain efficiently and encourages spontaneous verbal output without the fear of judgement. So, when a teacher completely ignores interpersonal politeness, the student experiences a sudden spike in situational anxiety. This heavy psychological barrier prevents effective language acquisition, damages self autonomy, and causes students to remain completely silent during discussions.

Many researchers have studied similar topic in recent years. [Wati et al. \(2025\)](#) investigated the use of politeness strategies in EFL classroom interactions at a senior high school in Indonesia. The researchers identified three primary strategies such as bald-on record, positive politeness, and negative politeness, which serve various communicative functions, including expressive, directive, and representative roles. The study concludes that these polite interactions are highly influential in motivating students and developing a more meaningful teaching and learning process.

A similar study by [Kayyali \(2025\)](#) explored how politeness strategies are not just simple communication tools, but important systems for managing power relations and social hierarchies in academic institutions. The study shows how these strategies help sustain social order without hindering the learning process. The findings highlight that both professors and students need high pragmatic awareness to successfully navigate the complex classroom interactions. Moreover, [Jayanti et al. \(2024\)](#) reported that positive politeness was the dominant

strategy used in EFL classroom interactions because it helped establish respectful communication, strengthen teacher-student relationships, and create an inclusive learning environment that supports better learning outcomes.

Teacher communication heavily influences both classroom management and students' learning experiences. According to [Suroso \(2024\)](#), supportive communication demonstrated a significant positive relationship with student motivation, whereas excessive reprimands showed only a weak negative relationship. These findings suggest that teachers should combine appropriate discipline with supportive communication to foster positive classroom interactions and enhance students' engagement in learning.

[Sarimsakova \(2024\)](#) also argued that employing effective communication techniques fosters a culture of mutual respect and empathy, which significantly boosts student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement. Politeness strategies contribute to establishing respectful interactions between teachers and students in EFL classrooms, where positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald-on-record strategies are commonly used during classroom communication, with teachers leading most interactions. An awareness of these politeness strategies can enhance teacher-student communication and support the development of a welcoming and conducive learning environment ([Haera et al., 2025](#)).

A study by [Obana & Haugh \(2023\)](#) studied politeness as a complex practice deeply shaped by cultural intimacy. Their analysis showed that managing social distance was crucial for stabilizing teacher-student communication patterns. The research highlights that politeness is not just a set of linguistic rules, but a complex social practice deeply rooted in the relationship between the speaker and the listener.

Teacher care and politeness are also seen as vital contributors to the academic well-being of students [Xie & Derakhshan \(2021\)](#). They proved that positive teacher communication supported the mental well-being of instructional participants. Kind language served as an emotional shield that helped students face academic stress. As a result, students can absorb the lessons much more naturally because they are not worried about being judged or scolded.

[Fitriyanti & Andriyanti \(2020\)](#) studied the practical use of politeness strategies during English classroom interactions in an Indonesian Senior High School. They revealed that regional socio-cultural hierarchies heavily influenced classroom talk. The research highlight that these strategies are important tools for managing the power acts between the teacher and the students involved. Their findings suggest that understanding these linguistic choices is key to creating a more balanced and respectful classroom environment.

An analysis by [Rahayuningsih et al. \(2020\)](#) explained that politeness was strictly mandated by the national curriculum to build student solidarity due to the character education mandates in the Indonesian Curriculum, proving that sociological factors such as social distance, power, and the degree of imposition heavily influence these linguistic choices.

Beside the clear benefits of polite interaction demonstrated by these recent literatures, there is still a critical gap in understanding how students personally experience and internalize these strategies. While past research mostly focused on macro observational data or the teacher's perspective, few studies asked high school students to share the personal, chronological stories of how teacher talk shapes their emotions over time. To understand how these communication choices directly shape student behavior and affect, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature. This study fills that gap by exploring high school students' perspective through a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, capturing their lived experiences through individual in-depth interviews. Understanding the student's personal stories is crucial for developing better pedagogical training, reflective teaching practices, and empathetic classroom management techniques.

## METHOD

This study applied a qualitative approach with a specific focus on narrative inquiry design to capture the lived experiences and classroom stories of high school students regarding teacher politeness. As explained by ([Clandinin, 2006](#)), narrative inquiry is highly

appropriate when a researcher aims to understand a social phenomenon through the personal histories, reflections, and voices of individual participants. In this research, the researcher acted as the primary instrument who was directly responsible for selecting participants using purposive sampling, gathering narrative descriptions, and interpreting the raw transcripts.

## Respondents

The participants of this study were five senior high school students in Pekalongan, Central Java, who were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. According to [Patton \(2015\)](#), purposive sampling allows the researcher to select information-rich cases that can thoroughly answer the core research questions. To maintain the quality of the narrative data, specific inclusion criteria were established: (a) students who were currently in their final year of senior high school, (b) students who had consistently taken English as a Foreign Language (EFL) courses for at least two years, and (c) students who volunteered to share their personal interaction stories openly.

## Instruments

In this research, the researcher acted as the primary instrument who was directly responsible for selecting participants, gathering narrative descriptions, and interpreting the raw transcripts. A semi-structured interview guide was used to support the data collection. The development of the interview guide was adapted from the politeness framework by Levinson which was translated into casual, open ended questions to allow the students to tell their stories comfortably without feeling intimidated.

## Procedures

Data collection relied on semi-structured narratives interviews. The data collection involved a total of five individual interview sessions. Each session lasted approximately thirty minutes and was held individually outside of class hours, resulting in around two to three hours of total recorded interview data across all participants.

## Data analysis

The raw audio recordings were transcribed for data analysis. The data analysis process followed the thematic and narrative restructuring procedures outline by [Creswell & Poth \(2018\)](#), which involved three main phases: data reduction, restorying (*penceritaan kembali*), and thematic coding. The researcher read the transcripts multiple times to extract meaningful clauses and statements.

## Data Trustworthiness

To protect participants' privacy and maintain strict confidentiality, pseudonyms like Rara, Fani, Rian, Dita, and Bimo were used throughout the report. To guarantee the trustworthiness and validity of the findings, a member-checking procedure was conducted, as suggested by [\(Birt et al., 2016\)](#). The complete interview transcripts and the narratives were shown back to the five students to verify that the texts accurately represented their original voices and classroom experiences before the final report was written.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we will explain the results and discussion of this study that separated into two sections: (1) polite, and (2) impolite teacher behaviors. All of questions were using Bahasa Indonesia to make the interview process easier.

### Polite Teacher Behaviors

#### *Providing Possitive Reinforcement and Praise*

The students shared detailed stories about how their teachers used nice words to build a comfortable classroom. When students gave a wrong answer, polite teachers did not blame

them, but smiled and said comforting words like “nice try.” This kind behavior made the students feel happy, and they became more eager to try again next time.

One student, Rara remembered a moment when the teacher praised her vocabulary choice during a talk in front of the class, “*aku ngerasa berani-berani aja sih buat nyoba ngomong bahasa Inggris di kelas. Soalnya gurunya tuh sering muji kayak “good job, Rara” gitu pas aku bisa jawab, jadi gak takut salah.*”

Translation: “I just feel brave, to try speaking English in class. It's because the teacher often praises me, like “good job, Rara” you know, when I can answer, so I'm not afraid of making mistakes.” (Rara, Interview 2026).

This praise removed her fear of making grammar mistakes in front of her friends. The interview proved that saying good things works as a quick way to build students' confidence. It showed that praise from the teacher works as an effective psychological stimulus in building students' self-confidence within the EFL classroom environment. Students feel that a welcoming voice helps their minds get ready to speak and practice more English during the lesson.

This story shows that kind praise successfully takes away the fear of making mistakes from the classroom. Therefore, the student feels safe and wants to speak up more often. Fraser (2010) explained that politeness is like a continuous agreement between teachers and students to keep the class comfortable. In line with (Yule, 1996), these kind words act as face-saving actions that satisfy the students' desire to be liked and accepted by others. This friendly style brings a good psychological change for the language learners. As a result, students want to speak more because they are no longer afraid of being rejected or laughed at in class.

#### *Using Clear and Direct Instructions*

Students also explained that they liked clear, direct instructions when doing hard tasks in class. For example, when a teacher stood up and gave firm directions like “*open your books and read page ten,*” students did not think it was rude. They explained that this clear style helped them understand what to do without any confusion. The clarity of the command gave them confidence because they knew exactly what the teacher wanted. Fani shared her reflection on this instructional style, “*Menurutku kalau instruksi gurunya jelas tuh malah bikin makin percaya diri pas ngerjain tugasnya. Gak bingung harus ngapain, jadi ya langsung paham aja gitu.*”

Translation: “In my opinion, if the teacher's instructions are clear, it actually makes me more confident when doing the assignment. I don't get confused about what to do, so I just understand it right away, like that.” (Fani, Interview 2026).

The interview shows that students like quick and clear directions rather than teachers who talk in a confusing or roundabout way. The student's answer showed that unclear directions actually make students more worried than direct and honest commands. Students feel that clear words show respect for their time and help them focus on the lesson. Therefore, direct commands do not ruin the good relationship as long as they help students understand the task.

The positive view of direct instructions shows that speaking straight to the point does not mean a teacher is being rude. Bardovi-Harlig (2020) argued that older students often prefer clear directions so they do not get confused during hard tasks. Students like clear structures because it sets easy rules and saves class time. This idea matches the view on speech acts, which shows that direct words work well when teachers and students understand their roles in school. Therefore, a teacher can speak directly while still keeping a respectful relationship. This clear style helps reassure students rather than making them afraid.

#### *Framing Directives as Polite Choices*

The interviews showed that students felt very respected when teachers changed hard commands into polite choices. Instead of pointing fingers directly at a student, polite teachers used soft phrases like “would you mind sharing your thought?” This language choice allowed students to prepare their notes and thoughts before speaking out loud. The participants felt

they were treated like grown-ups rather than little kids who were forced to obey. This respectful distance reduced the pressure of the classroom and made them speak more naturally.

Rian expressed his perspective regarding this behavior, "*aku ngerasa dihargai banget pas guru nanyain dulu aku bersedia atau gak, bukan yang kayak malah nunjuk terus maksa gitu loh.*"

Translation: "I feel deeply respected when the teacher asks first whether I'm willing to participate or not, instead of, like, just forcing me right away." (Rian, Interview 2026).

The interview shows that adult students care a lot about their freedom and do not like to be forced in class. Modern language classes need to shift from strict teacher control to friendly and open interactions (House, 2021). By asking nicely, teachers bring students closer without losing their professional authority.

### Offering Scaffolding

Last, students highlighted that getting small hints when they were stuck was a great way to save their confidence. When a student forgot an English word, a polite teacher did not give the answer right away or jump to another student. Instead, the teacher provided small clues or synonyms to help the student find the word by themselves. This patience made the student feel smart and capable of finding the right answer.

The strategy successfully maintained their engagement in the conversation, shielding them from the embarrassment of a mental block. Dita recalled her experience, "*pas aku lupa kata-kata Inggris, gurunya bakal ngasih petunjuk misal huruf atau suku kata depannya gitu. Mungkin kalau langsung diganti ke temen lain aku bakal malu karena keliatan gak bisa jawab, tapi kalau di spill dikit gini malah bikin aku mikir lagi sampai ketemu jawabannya.*"

Translation: "Whenever I forgot an English word, the teacher would give me a hint, like the first letter or syllable. Maybe if she'd just passed the question on to my friend, I would've been embarrassed because it would've looked like I couldn't answer, but when she gave me a little hint like that, it actually made me think it over until I figured out the answer." (Dita, Interview 2026).

The interview shows that giving small hints helps students keep thinking and stay active in class. The student noted that getting hints allowed them to feel proud because they could correct their own mistakes. This patient style saved the student from feeling embarrassed in front of the whole class. Thus, giving hints works in two good ways. It keeps the class polite and helps students develop their thinking skills.

### Impolite Teacher Behaviors

#### Public Scolding and Harsh Corrective Feedback

The students shared bad memories about times when teachers humiliated them or corrected them too harshly in class. They described situations where a teacher stopped the lesson just to scold a student loudly for a small pronunciation mistake. This angry behavior instantly destroyed the friendly vibe of the classroom and replaced it with fear. Students explained that when they saw a classmate get scolded, they decided to stay quiet for the rest of the semester. The fear of being targeted by the teacher's sharp words created a big emotional wall. They emphasized that they can only study well when the teacher shows true love and care.

Bimo explained how this behavior forced him to be still silent, "*pastinya bakal malu banget kak. Jujur aku kadang milih-milih gitu, kalau gurunya baik ya pasti aku aktif di kelas. Tapi kalau gurunya sukanya ngejudge dan ngejelek-jelekin ya aku gak mau aktif, diem aja karena males dihujat.*"

Translation: "I'd definitely be really embarrassed. Honestly, I'm kind of picky, if the teacher is nice, I'll definitely participate in class. But if the teacher likes to judge and put people down, I don't want to participate; I'll just stay quiet because I don't want to get criticized." (Bimo, Interview 2026).

The interview shows that rude talking styles act as a dangerous wall that stops students from speaking up. The bad effects of rude behavior show how dangerous it is to ignore students' feelings. Bousfield (2018) noted that mean language ruins the good bond and breaks

the communication between teachers and students. Harsh public scolding makes students protect themselves by choosing to stay completely quiet. From a linguistic view, these mean words are face-threatening actions that hurt the student's self-image and confidence. This choice to stay quiet proves that students cannot learn a language when they feel scared and sad. Therefore, teachers must always control their words to keep students active and happy in class.

In Indonesia, balancing authority and kindness fits what students expect from their university lecturers. (Gunawan, 2023) observed that Indonesian students naturally respect older teachers but also expect a warm and friendly voice. When a teacher combines clear rules with true kindness, they satisfy both school rules and local culture perfectly. This good mix creates an ideal class where students feel brave enough to practice speaking English. Ultimately, being polite is not just an extra luxury, but a core part of being a good and effective teacher.

Global research always connects teacher behavior with student feelings. Amirhassemi & Rahimi (2024) argued that kind language is the best tool to lower student worry in hard speaking classes. Their data showed that teacher support works like a regular booster that keeps student confidence stable. Similarly, (Suhandoko & Mujiyanto, 2023) noticed that in Asian schools, being corrected in public is seen as a major threat to a student's social face. Therefore, local teachers must learn smooth ways to correct mistakes so students do not become quietly angry and silent.

Moreover, the way teachers and students talk determines how active a language class can be. Nambiar et al. (2022) emphasized that when teachers show true empathy, students become 50% more active in trying to speak up. This proves that making students talk cannot be done by force, but must be done by building a good relationship. Additionally, Syafryadin et al. (2021) highlighted that using soft words like "maybe" or "perhaps" empowers students to share different ideas. By removing arrogant claims, the teacher invites students into a safer and more open academic talk.

Removing mean or angry words from the classroom should be a basic standard for all professional teachers. Mustafa et al. (2024) discovered that facing rude words for a long time causes extreme stress and language anxiety for university students. This anxiety permanently ruins the students' desire to practice English and makes them want to skip class. On the other hand, Pratama & Setyawati (2022) concluded that a respectful school environment builds high confidence. When students feel that they are cared for, they put their best mental effort into mastering the English language.

## CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, this study shows that politeness and respect are essential for creating a supportive English learning environment. Based on the students' interviews, teacher praise builds confidence, clear instructions reduce confusion, and public scolding decreases student participation. The findings answer the research question by demonstrating that students perceive politeness as an encouraging support system, while impoliteness creates a psychological barrier to participation. Theoretically, this research contributes to educational linguistics by showing how protecting students' face is directly connected to reducing foreign language anxiety. Practically, teachers should integrate positive reinforcement, replace public scolding with private corrective feedback, and present tasks as choices rather than forced directives. Furthermore, schools and academic institutions should provide professional development and pedagogical training focused on classroom pragmatics and empathetic communication to promote sustained student engagement.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are deeply grateful to all participants who trusted this research with their personal experiences and honest classroom stories. Heartfelt thanks also go to the mentors, peers, and everyone who provided insightful feedback, encouragement, support, and

guidance on the development of this article. Without their kindness and cooperation, this study would not have been possible.

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