



# Students' Politeness Principles and Academic Achievement: Theoretical Perspectives from Higher Education Contexts

Yessy Prima Putri<sup>1</sup>, Rahmadini Darwas<sup>2</sup>, Yopi Eka Anroni<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Faculty of Information Technology and Creative Industries, Universitas Metamedia, Padang, 25136, Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Language politeness plays an important role in academic communication because it influences how students interact with lecturers, peers, and the wider academic community. Effective and polite communication may contribute to creating a positive learning environment that supports students' academic success. This paper employs a conceptual and literature-based approach to explore the potential relationship between students' politeness principles and academic achievement in higher education. Drawing upon Leech's Politeness Principle, Brown and Levinson's Face Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, the paper examines how language politeness may contribute to academic success through social and educational mechanisms. The review suggests that politeness may facilitate positive academic relationships, social integration, student engagement, and learning motivation, which are important factors associated with academic achievement. The paper contributes to pragmatic and educational research by proposing a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between language politeness and academic achievement. The proposed framework may provide implications for character education, communication ethics, and future empirical research in higher education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays an important role in students' academic life. In higher education, language is used not only to convey information but also to build social relationships, express opinions, ask questions, discuss, and interact with lecturers and fellow students. Therefore, students' language ability should not be viewed only from the aspect of grammatical accuracy, but also from the aspect of politeness in communication.

Language politeness has long been recognized as a fundamental component of successful interpersonal communication. According to Leech (2014), politeness functions to maintain social harmony and minimize conflict during interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) further argue that politeness helps individuals manage face needs and maintain positive social relationships.

In educational settings, politeness may influence academic achievement through several mechanisms. First, polite communication encourages positive interactions between students and lecturers, creating opportunities for students to seek clarification, feedback, and academic guidance. Second, politeness supports collaborative learning by facilitating mutual respect and cooperation among peers. Third, polite students may experience greater social acceptance and academic integration, which are associated with higher engagement and persistence in learning activities (Tinto, 2017). Therefore, politeness can be viewed not only as a linguistic behavior but also as a social resource that indirectly contributes to academic success.

Beyond maintaining social harmony, politeness may influence academic achievement through several educational mechanisms. Students who communicate politely are more likely to establish positive relationships with lecturers and peers. Such relationships can increase access to academic support, constructive feedback, and collaborative learning opportunities. According to Social Capital Theory (Coleman, 1988), positive interpersonal relationships create resources that facilitate learning and academic development. In academic environments, polite communication may strengthen students' social capital by promoting trust, cooperation, and reciprocal support among members of the learning community.

Furthermore, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) suggests that supportive social interactions contribute to students' psychological needs for relatedness and competence. When students interact respectfully with lecturers and peers, they may experience greater academic engagement, motivation, and participation, which are important predictors of academic success.

Recent studies have demonstrated that language politeness contributes to the creation of positive learning environments. Polite communication encourages mutual respect, enhances classroom participation, and promotes collaborative learning among students (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). Furthermore, pragmatic competence enables students to appropriately adjust their language according to context, which is essential for effective academic interaction (Thomas, 1995; Yule, 2020).

Previous studies have examined language politeness in classroom interaction, teacher–student communication, and online learning environments (Fitriani & Andriyani, 2023; Abbas, 2021). However, most studies focus on identifying politeness strategies and linguistic forms rather than examining their relationship with academic achievement. Consequently, limited empirical evidence exists regarding whether students who demonstrate higher levels of politeness also tend to achieve better academic performance.

Considering this gap, investigating the relationship between politeness principles and GPA is important for both theoretical and practical reasons. From a theoretical perspective, such investigation may enrich pragmatic and educational research by demonstrating whether language behavior is associated with academic achievement. From a practical perspective, understanding this relationship may help educators recognize the importance of communication ethics in supporting students' learning experiences. If politeness contributes positively to academic outcomes, universities may consider integrating communication ethics, academic etiquette, and character education programs into student development initiatives. Furthermore, the findings may provide empirical evidence for policymakers and educators seeking to foster both academic excellence and positive interpersonal behavior in higher education institutions.

Several studies have demonstrated that communication competence contributes positively to academic outcomes. Credé and Kuncel (2008) found that non-cognitive factors, including communication skills, significantly influence students' academic performance. Likewise, Tinto (2017) emphasized that students who are socially integrated within academic environments tend to exhibit higher levels of persistence and achievement. Although these studies acknowledge the importance of interpersonal communication, limited attention has been paid to politeness as a specific pragmatic competence that may contribute to academic success.

In Asian educational contexts, politeness is often closely associated with respect toward authority, collaborative learning, and classroom participation. Students who employ appropriate politeness strategies are generally more willing to engage in academic discussions and seek assistance from instructors when necessary. Therefore, examining politeness from a pragmatic perspective may provide a broader understanding of the social factors that support academic achievement.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a conceptual paper approach based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature. Unlike empirical research, conceptual studies focus on the development of theoretical understanding by synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying relationships among concepts (Jaakkola, 2020). The purpose of this study was to explore the potential relationship between students' politeness principles and academic achievement by examining theories and previous studies from the fields of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, educational psychology, and higher education research.

The sources analysed in this study consisted of academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and scholarly publications discussing language politeness, communication competence, academic engagement, social capital, motivation, and academic achievement. Priority was given to seminal theories and recent studies that have contributed significantly to understanding communication behaviour in educational contexts. The selected literature provided both theoretical and empirical perspectives that support the development of the proposed conceptual framework.

The literature was examined through thematic analysis. This process involved identifying key concepts, comparing theoretical perspectives, and categorizing recurring themes related to language politeness and academic success. Particular attention was given to theories that explain the social and psychological mechanisms through which politeness may influence educational outcomes. These included Leech's Politeness Principle (2014), Brown and Levinson's Face Theory (1987), Social Capital Theory (Coleman, 1988), and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The findings from the literature review were synthesized to construct a conceptual framework illustrating the potential pathways linking language politeness and academic achievement. The framework emphasizes the role of positive academic relationships, social integration, academic engagement, and learning motivation as mediating factors. Through this approach, the study seeks to provide a theoretical foundation that may guide future empirical investigations into the relationship between students' politeness principles and academic performance in higher education.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Language Politeness in Academic Communication**

Language politeness is an essential aspect of communication in higher education because academic activities rely heavily on interaction among students, lecturers, and other members of the academic community. Communication in educational settings extends beyond the simple exchange of information; it also involves the development of interpersonal relationships, the negotiation of meaning, and participation in collaborative learning processes. Therefore, students are expected not only to demonstrate linguistic competence but also to communicate appropriately and

respectfully according to the norms of academic discourse.

According to Leech (2014), politeness functions to maintain social harmony by minimizing conflict and promoting mutual respect during interaction. Similarly, Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that individuals employ politeness strategies to protect both their own face and the face of others. In academic contexts, these strategies are particularly important because communication often occurs within hierarchical relationships where lecturers possess institutional authority and students occupy relatively subordinate positions. The use of appropriate politeness strategies helps students express opinions, ask questions, and seek clarification without threatening interpersonal relationships.

Language politeness also contributes to the creation of a positive learning environment. Polite communication encourages openness, trust, and cooperation among students and lecturers. When students feel respected and valued, they are more likely to participate actively in classroom discussions, engage in collaborative learning activities, and express their ideas confidently. Holmes and Wilson (2022) emphasize that effective communication promotes social integration and strengthens participation within educational communities. Consequently, politeness may serve as a facilitating factor that supports both social interaction and academic engagement.

Furthermore, language politeness has become increasingly important in contemporary higher education because communication now occurs across multiple platforms, including face-to-face interaction, email correspondence, learning management systems, and social media. Students are required to adapt their language according to different communicative contexts while maintaining professionalism and respect. The ability to communicate politely across various academic settings reflects pragmatic competence and interpersonal awareness, both of which are considered valuable attributes in higher education. Therefore, politeness should be viewed not merely as a linguistic convention but as an important communicative resource that contributes to effective academic participation and learning experiences.

### **3.2 Theoretical Relationship Between Politeness and Academic Achievement**

Although direct empirical evidence regarding the relationship between language politeness and academic achievement remains limited, several theoretical perspectives suggest that such a relationship is plausible. Academic achievement is not determined solely by cognitive ability; it is also influenced by social, psychological, and communicative factors that shape students' learning experiences. Within higher education environments, students continuously interact with lecturers, classmates, and academic staff. The quality of these interactions may influence access to information, learning opportunities, and academic support, all of which contribute to educational outcomes.

From the perspective of Social Capital Theory (Coleman, 1988), interpersonal relationships function as valuable resources that facilitate individual achievement. Students who consistently demonstrate politeness are more likely to establish positive relationships characterized by trust, cooperation, and mutual respect. These relationships may increase opportunities for receiving academic guidance, constructive feedback, and collaborative learning support. Consequently, politeness can be viewed as a communicative behavior that contributes to the development of

social capital within academic communities.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) provides another explanation for the potential relationship between politeness and academic achievement. The theory emphasizes that individuals are more likely to engage actively in learning when their psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy are fulfilled. Respectful and supportive communication may strengthen students' sense of belonging and connectedness within academic environments. As a result, students may become more motivated to participate in classroom activities, seek assistance when facing difficulties, and persist in achieving their academic goals.

Furthermore, politeness may indirectly influence academic achievement through its contribution to academic engagement and participation. Students who communicate politely often experience more positive interactions with lecturers and peers, reducing communication barriers and encouraging active involvement in learning activities. Such involvement may include asking questions, contributing to discussions, participating in group projects, and seeking clarification of course materials. Therefore, language politeness should not be understood merely as a linguistic or pragmatic phenomenon, but also as a social and educational resource that potentially supports academic success through multiple interconnected mechanisms.

### **3.3 Proposed Conceptual Framework**

Based on the reviewed literature, this paper proposes a conceptual framework explaining the potential relationship between language politeness and academic achievement in higher education. The framework is developed by integrating insights from pragmatics, sociolinguistics, educational psychology, and social theories. Rather than viewing politeness as merely a linguistic behavior, the framework conceptualizes politeness as a social and educational resource that may influence students' academic experiences through several interconnected mechanisms.

The first component of the framework is language politeness, which refers to students' ability to communicate respectfully and appropriately in academic settings. Drawing upon Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle and Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face Theory, politeness is assumed to facilitate harmonious interpersonal relationships by promoting respect, cooperation, and consideration for others. In higher education contexts, polite communication may strengthen interactions between students and lecturers as well as among peers, thereby creating a supportive academic atmosphere.

The second component involves positive academic relationships and social capital. According to Coleman (1988), social relationships constitute valuable resources that can facilitate individual achievement. Students who communicate politely are more likely to establish trusting and cooperative relationships with lecturers and classmates. Such relationships may increase access to academic information, feedback, mentoring, and collaborative learning opportunities. Consequently, politeness contributes to the development of social capital, which supports students' academic growth and integration into the learning community.

The third component of the framework concerns academic engagement and motivation. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) suggests that supportive social interactions enhance individuals' feelings of relatedness and competence,

which are essential for motivation and engagement. Through positive academic relationships, students may feel more comfortable participating in classroom discussions, seeking clarification, sharing ideas, and engaging in collaborative activities. Increased engagement and motivation may subsequently improve learning experiences and academic performance.

Based on these theoretical relationships, the framework proposes that language politeness influences academic achievement indirectly rather than directly. The effect of politeness is expected to operate through positive academic relationships, social capital, academic integration, and student engagement. Therefore, students who demonstrate higher levels of politeness may be better positioned to benefit from supportive academic interactions, which ultimately contribute to their academic success. This framework provides a theoretical foundation for future empirical studies seeking to examine the relationship between language politeness and academic achievement in higher education contexts.

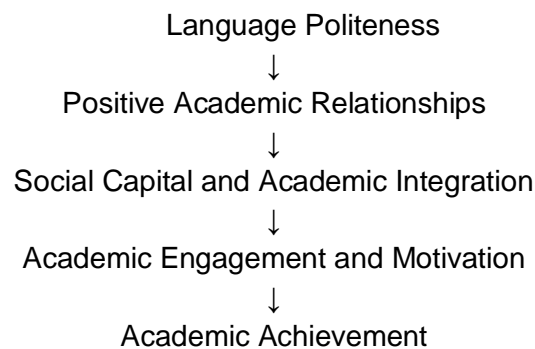


Fig 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework of the Relationship between Language Politeness and Academic Achievement

### 3.4 Discussion

The present conceptual analysis suggests that language politeness has the potential to contribute to academic achievement through various social and educational mechanisms. Although politeness is traditionally examined within the field of pragmatics, the reviewed literature indicates that its influence extends beyond linguistic interaction. In higher education contexts, politeness facilitates effective communication, supports relationship building, and promotes constructive academic engagement. Therefore, politeness may be understood not only as a communication strategy but also as a factor that contributes to students' academic experiences.

One important contribution of language politeness lies in its ability to strengthen academic relationships. The reviewed theories suggest that respectful communication encourages trust, cooperation, and mutual understanding between students and lecturers. Such relationships may create a supportive learning environment in which students feel comfortable seeking clarification, asking questions, and receiving feedback. This perspective is consistent with Social Capital Theory (Coleman, 1988), which emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships as resources that facilitate individual achievement.

The proposed framework also highlights the role of student engagement as a mediating factor between politeness and academic achievement. Through positive interactions with lecturers and peers, students may develop stronger feelings of belonging and academic integration. According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), supportive social environments enhance motivation by fulfilling individuals' psychological needs for competence and relatedness. Consequently, students who experience positive academic interactions may demonstrate higher levels of participation, persistence, and commitment to learning activities.

Furthermore, the discussion suggests that language politeness should be viewed as part of students' broader communication competence. In contemporary higher education, communication occurs not only in face-to-face interactions but also through digital platforms such as email, online learning systems, and social media. Students who possess strong pragmatic competence are better able to adapt their language to different contexts while maintaining professionalism and respect. Such competence may contribute to more effective academic participation and collaboration.

Another important implication of the proposed framework concerns the development of character education in higher education. Contemporary universities are increasingly expected to foster not only academic excellence but also ethical communication and interpersonal competence. Language politeness may serve as a practical indicator of students' ability to interact respectfully and responsibly within academic communities. Therefore, promoting politeness through classroom interaction, academic writing, and digital communication practices may contribute to the development of both academic and personal competencies that are essential for students' future professional lives.

Nevertheless, the proposed framework should be interpreted with caution because the relationship between language politeness and academic achievement may vary across educational, cultural, and institutional contexts. Norms of politeness differ among societies, and communication behaviors considered appropriate in one context may not be interpreted similarly in another. Consequently, the influence of politeness on academic experiences is likely to be shaped by contextual factors, including cultural values, classroom dynamics, and institutional communication practices. These considerations highlight the need for future empirical studies to examine the applicability of the proposed framework across diverse higher education settings.

Despite its theoretical contributions, this paper acknowledges that politeness alone cannot fully explain academic achievement. Academic performance is influenced by multiple factors, including cognitive ability, learning strategies, motivation, socioeconomic background, and institutional support. Therefore, language politeness should be regarded as a complementary factor that interacts with other determinants of academic success rather than as an independent predictor.

Overall, the discussion supports the view that language politeness functions as both a pragmatic and social resource within higher education. By facilitating positive relationships, strengthening social capital, encouraging academic engagement, and supporting character development, politeness may indirectly contribute to students' academic achievement. Future empirical studies are needed to test the proposed

conceptual framework and to examine the extent to which politeness influences academic outcomes across different educational contexts.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This paper has explored the potential relationship between students' politeness principles and academic achievement from a conceptual perspective. The reviewed literature suggests that politeness functions not only as a pragmatic competence but also as a social resource that supports academic interaction, social integration, and student engagement. Through these mechanisms, language politeness may contribute indirectly to academic success in higher education.

The discussion highlights that polite communication can foster positive relationships between students and lecturers as well as among peers. Such relationships create a supportive learning environment characterized by mutual respect, trust, and cooperation. In academic settings, students who communicate politely may be more willing to participate in discussions, seek academic assistance, and engage in collaborative learning activities, all of which can enhance their educational experiences.

Furthermore, the conceptual framework emphasizes the role of social capital and academic engagement as important mediating factors. Politeness may facilitate access to valuable academic resources, including feedback, mentoring, and peer support. These resources can strengthen students' sense of belonging within the academic community and increase their motivation to actively participate in learning processes. As a result, politeness may indirectly contribute to improved academic performance through enhanced engagement and integration.

The proposed conceptual framework provides a theoretical foundation for future empirical studies investigating the relationship between language politeness and academic achievement. Further quantitative and qualitative research is needed to test and refine the proposed model in diverse educational contexts. Future studies may also examine potential moderating variables, such as cultural background, institutional environment, and communication practices, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how language politeness influences academic outcomes in higher education.

#### **IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of this study provide several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study enriches pragmatic and educational research by demonstrating that language politeness may contribute to students' academic engagement and performance. The study extends Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle and Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face Theory into the context of higher education by highlighting the possible relationship between communication behavior and academic achievement.

Practically, the findings suggest that higher education institutions should integrate communication ethics and language politeness into character education programs. Universities may encourage students to develop not only cognitive competencies but also interpersonal communication skills that support academic success and collaborative learning environments.

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### Competing Interest

The authors declare that there are no competing interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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### Authors' Contributions

*Yessy Prima Putri* conceptualized the study, designed the research methodology, developed the research instruments, conducted data analysis, and prepared the original manuscript draft. *Rahmadini Darwas* contributed to data collection, data validation, literature review, and manuscript revision. *Yopi Eka Androni* contributed to the research supervision process, methodological refinement, interpretation of findings, and critical review of the manuscript. All authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

### AUTHORS' INFORMATION

**Yessy Prima Putri** is a lecturer at the Faculty of Information Technology and Creative Industry, Universitas Metamedia, Indonesia. Her research interests include pragmatics, sociolinguistics, language politeness, discourse analysis, and language education. Email: [yessy@stmikindonesia.ac.id](mailto:yessy@stmikindonesia.ac.id).

**Rahmadini Darwas** is a lecturer at the Faculty of Information Technology and Creative Industry, Universitas Metamedia, Indonesia. Email: [dini@metamedia.ac.id](mailto:dini@metamedia.ac.id).

**Yopi Eka Androni** is a lecturer at the Faculty of Information Technology and Creative Industry, Universitas Metamedia, Indonesia. Email: [yopiekaanroni@stmikindonesia.ac.id](mailto:yopiekaanroni@stmikindonesia.ac.id)

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