

FOSTERING POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH COMMUNICATION: A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR HIGH SCHOOLERS

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ABSTRACT

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This community service program aims to foster pragmatic competence and linguistic ethics by training senior high school students in English politeness strategies. Preliminary observations at SMA Rancaekek revealed that students frequently encountered communication barriers, relying on overly direct linguistic forms due to a lack of situational awareness and explicit pragmatic instruction. To address this issue, the program implemented a participatory and applicative approach through the three-tiered Identify, Illuminate, and Integrate (3I) framework, combining the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) and Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL). The training actively engaged 50 eleventh-grade students in interactive lecturing, case analysis, and contextual role-playing simulations, while collaborating with local English teachers to ensure instructional sustainability. The empirical results demonstrated a significant increase in the students' communicative competence, evidenced by the mean score rising from 54.20 in the pre-test to 81.50 in the post-test. Qualitatively, students exhibited heightened pragmatic flexibility and reduced communication anxiety, successfully transitioning from blunt, face-threatening expressions to sophisticated positive and negative politeness strategies. Ultimately, this initiative establishes a sustainable learning ecology that enhances students' real-world socio-pragmatic preparedness for future academic and professional interactions.

Keywords:

Pragmatic Competence; Politeness Strategies; English Communication; Experiential Learning; High School Students.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly interconnected world, English is not just a global language, but also a crucial medium for academic, professional, and intercultural communication. As a result, English language education is supposed to equip students to communicate effectively and appropriately in a variety of social circumstances, in addition to mastering grammar rules and vocabulary. This broader goal is represented in the concept of communicative competence, which includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and pragmatic abilities. Among these components, pragmatic competence is especially significant because it allows language users to choose socially appropriate terms based on the interlocutor, the environment of contact, and the intended communicative aim. For senior high school students, the development of pragmatic competence is increasingly essential as they prepare for higher education, international collaboration, and future professional environments where communication success depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on interpersonal sensitivity and communicative appropriateness.

As a result, while many children can create technically accurate phrases, they struggle to convey requests, apologies, refusals, ideas, or arguments in manners that are socially and culturally appropriate. This instructional gap was also evident during the preliminary needs analysis conducted at SMA Rancaekek, the partner school involved in this community service program. Classroom observations and informal discussions with English teachers indicated that although students possessed adequate knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, they frequently encountered difficulties in selecting contextually appropriate expressions during spoken interaction. Many students tended to transfer Indonesian communication patterns directly into English without considering pragmatic variables such as social distance, relative power, or the degree of imposition associated with different speech acts. Consequently, their utterances often sounded overly direct, demanding, or unintentionally impolite despite their intention to communicate respectfully. Such communication patterns may lead to misunderstanding, reduce communicative confidence, and hinder students' ability to participate successfully in academic, professional, and intercultural interactions. These findings indicate that grammatical competence alone is insufficient to prepare students for authentic English communication.

Previous research has consistently highlighted the importance of pragmatic competence and civility tactics in English language learning. Similarly, many community service programs have attempted to increase students' English competence through activities centered on speaking skills, vocabulary building, pronunciation, or public speaking. However, few community service efforts have explicitly incorporated English politeness tactics into a structured and contextualized training model aimed at fostering communicative ethics and pragmatic awareness. As a result, children frequently have few opportunity to examine authentic communication situations, spot face-threatening behaviors, and practice selecting

acceptable linguistic tactics based on various social circumstances (Pakzad & Sarkhosh, 2022). This issue reveals a practical gap in present community service programs, emphasizing the necessity for an educational intervention that systematically mixes pragmatic instruction with authentic communication practice.

To fill these identified shortcomings, this community service program used a participatory and applicative learning paradigm that combined the Identify, Illuminate, and Integrate (3I) framework with the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) and Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL). Unlike traditional English instruction, which focuses primarily on linguistic accuracy, this program encourages students to understand the relationship between language, context, and interpersonal meaning through interactive lectures, authentic case studies, collaborative discussions, and contextual role-playing activities. These learning experiences help students notice distinct politeness tactics, consider the social implications of their linguistic choices, and use contextually appropriate terms in a variety of communicative circumstances. By integrating explicit pragmatic instruction and experiential learning, the curriculum provides meaningful chances for students to acquire communicative confidence and socio-pragmatic competence.

As a result, this community service program seeks to instill pragmatic competence and communication ethics in senior high school students through specific education in English politeness techniques. The curriculum aims to improve students' awareness of positive and negative politeness tactics, their ability to choose contextually acceptable language, and their confidence in interacting in English in a variety of social circumstances. Furthermore, the program adds to English language education by providing a practical and replicable instructional strategy that incorporates pragmatic competence into classroom practice through the combined use of the 3I framework, GBA, and IBL. Ultimately, this program is expected to bridge the gap between grammar-oriented English instruction and the communicative competence required for authentic interaction, thereby preparing students to communicate more effectively, appropriately, and confidently in academic, professional, and intercultural contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Politeness Theories in Language Communication

Politeness strategies are systematic linguistic choices used by speakers to show awareness of another person's public self-image, or "face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987) in (Widianingsih, 2022). In social interactions, certain speech acts, such as requests, commands, and disagreements, naturally threaten the listener's face. These are known as Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs). To minimize these threats and maintain harmonious communication, speakers employ specific politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987) categorize these into four primary strategies, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 : Types of Politeness

Types of Politeness	Core Definition	Example
Bald On-Record	Direct, blunt utterances without any mitigation or softening. Used in emergencies or between close relations.	Open the door right now
Positive Politeness	Strategies designed to minimize the threat to the listener's positive face (the desire to be liked and approved of).	Could you help me, buddy, and open the door?
Negative Politeness	Strategies oriented toward the listener's negative face (the desire to be autonomous and unimpeded).	I'm sorry to bother you, but could you possibly open the door?
Off-Record	Dropping hints or using ambiguous language, leaving the interpretation to the listener.	It's getting a bit stuffy in here. (Implying to open the door)

In an EFL context like Indonesia, high school students often rely heavily on the Bald On-Record strategy when speaking English. This happens not because they intend to be rude, but due to a direct translation from their native language habits and a lack of explicit exposure to Positive and Negative Politeness devices, such as modal auxiliaries (could, would) and hedging markers (Rahayuningsih et al., 2020).

Politeness and Pragmatic Development in High Schoolers

The high school years represent a critical developmental transition period where social interaction with peers and authority figures becomes highly complex. Linguistically, high schoolers are not just expanding their vocabulary; they are actively navigating their social identity and peer acceptance (Yang & Ren, 2019). In this stage, the choice of politeness strategies among high schoolers is heavily influenced by the psychological need to balance peer solidarity and social distance. According to (Nasution et al., 2019), these students often struggle with pragmatic competence because their linguistic choices are caught between the desire to show autonomy (negative face) and the need to belong to a peer group (positive face).

When communicating in a foreign language like English, this socio-psychological dynamic becomes even more challenging for high schoolers. They often experience what is known as "pragmatic transfer" or "interlanguage pragmatics" (Handriani et al., 2025). This occurs when high schoolers map the cultural norms of their native language directly onto English, or conversely, fail to recognize that English has its own distinct markers for softening face-threatening acts. For instance, a student might use a direct imperative because it is the easiest structural form they know, without realizing that in English culture, such an utterance can be perceived as an abuse of authority or a lack of respect. Furthermore, the social landscape of high schoolers

requires them to master shifts in register and politeness according to different interlocutors, as summarized in Table 2.

Interaction Context	Primary Interlocutor	Dominant Politeness Strategy Needed	Linguistic Objective
Academic / Institutional	Teachers, School Staff, Principals	Negative Politeness (Formal, Indirect)	To show respect, recognize authority, and maintain professional distance.
Peer Group / Social	Classmates, Friends, Club Members	Positive Politeness (Informal, Solidarity)	To build rapport, show inclusion, and minimize social barriers.
Public / External	Community Members, Future Interviewers	Balanced On-Record & Mitigation	To demonstrate communicative competence and social maturity.

Table 2. Interaction Contexts and Politeness Demands for High School Students

As shown in Table 2, high schoolers must possess the pragmatic flexibility to switch between positive politeness (to foster friendships) and negative politeness (to respect academic hierarchy). Providing explicit training on these strategies during this high school phase helps students avoid social friction and equips them with the "soft skills" necessary for their upcoming transition into higher education and the professional world (Mahmoud, 2025).

Community Development and Experiential Learning Framework

Community development in educational contexts stresses collaborative engagement, empowerment, and long-term sustainability in order to meet local educational requirements. Rather than simply conveying knowledge, community service programs are supposed to actively engage students, teachers, and schools in problem identification, solution implementation, and long-term educational progress. This technique in English language teaching allows students to develop not only linguistic knowledge but also communicative ability through meaningful interaction and authentic learning experiences. To achieve these goals, the current community service program uses Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) as its pedagogical base. According to Kolb (1984) in (Atikasari et al., 2025), learning is a continuous process in which knowledge is constructed through four interconnected stages: **Concrete Experience**, **Reflective Observation**, **Abstract Conceptualization**, and **Active Experimentation**. This cyclical process allows learners to translate direct

experiences into conceptual understanding before applying newly learned knowledge in a variety of settings, making experiential learning ideal for building pragmatic competence and English politeness tactics.

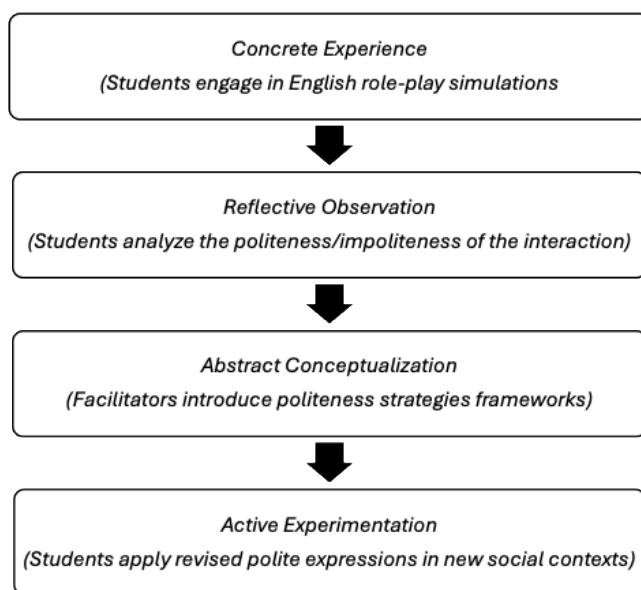


Figure 1. Experiential Learning Framework for Developing English Politeness Strategies in Community Service Programs (Adapted from Kolb, 1984).

As illustrated in Figure 1, The learning cycle begins with Concrete Experience, in which students engage in actual English communication activities such as role-playing and real-life interaction scenarios. These experiences are followed by Reflective Observation, in which students assess if their language choices are adequate for politeness, communication ethics, and interpersonal connections. In the Abstract Conceptualization level, facilitators clearly present the ideas of speech actions, pragmatic competence, and English politeness tactics to assist students comprehend the principles that underpin effective communication. Finally, during Active Experimentation, students apply these concepts to novel communicative settings using contextual role-playing and collaborative speaking exercises. This continuous cycle enables students to gradually build pragmatic awareness through repeated experience, reflection, conceptual understanding, and practical application, rather than solely through memory.

Building on the experiential learning cycle depicted in Figure 1, this community service program combines the Identify, Illuminate, and Integrate (3I) Framework with the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) and Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) to meet the learning needs of SMA Rancaekek. Preliminary observations revealed that, although having basic grammar skills and vocabulary, pupils struggled to identify contextually suitable terms during English communication. As a result, their primary learning need was for more opportunities to acquire pragmatic awareness through authentic communicative activity, rather than more grammar instruction. During the Identify stage, students identified communication issues and incorrect language use in daily conversations. The Illuminate stage taught civility skills, speech acts, and

communicative ethics using authentic language models from the Genre-Based Approach. Finally, during the Integrate stage, students were encouraged to apply these principles through collaborative role-playing and contextual communication activities. The integration of the 3I Framework, GBA, and IBL operationalizes Kolb's experiential learning cycle while also meeting students' identified learning needs by integrating grammatical knowledge with authentic communication, reflective learning, and socially acceptable language use. As a result, this integrated framework not only improves students' pragmatic ability, but it also provides a long-term instructional model that English teachers can continually employ in the classroom.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This community service program used a participatory and experiential learning strategy (Sakina et al., 2023) to improve students' pragmatic skill with English politeness strategies. The curriculum was implemented at SMA Rancaekek with 50 eleventh-grade students who had already learned basic English grammar and vocabulary but needed more exposure to actual communicative practice. The intervention was developed using the Identify-Illuminate-Integrate (3I) Framework and supported by the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) and Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) to promote active involvement, collaborative learning, and contextual language use. Rather of viewing pupils as passive users of knowledge, the program promoted active participation through authentic communication challenges, reflection, and collaborative problem-solving.

The empowerment events were conducted in three stages. During the Identify stage, students took a pre-test to measure their first comprehension of English politeness practices and engaged in interactive ice-breaking activities to promote communication. They were then shown actual English dialogues and short communication scenarios with examples of appropriate and improper language use. Students recognized communication issues, examined the causes of pragmatic failure, and discussed their own experiences talking politely in English via facilitator-guided inquiry and small-group conversations. Prior to formal education, these exercises helped students grasp the need of communication appropriateness.

During the Illuminate stage, facilitators gave interactive lectures about pragmatic competence, speech acts, positive and negative politeness tactics, and communication ethics. Instead of depending primarily on lectures, students engaged in case study, collaborative conversations, and inquiry-based learning activities to evaluate actual communication examples and determine suitable language choices for various social settings. Facilitators provided ongoing mentoring, clarification, and guided feedback to foster critical thinking and assist students in connecting academic concepts to real-world communication. During the Integrate stage, students used their newly gained knowledge in contextual role-playing games that mimicked ordinary communication in school and social settings. Working in small groups, they practiced making polite

requests, apologies, refusals, suggestions, and responses for various interlocutors and communicative circumstances. Peer feedback sessions and facilitator mentoring were used throughout the activities to improve students' communicative skills, while classroom reflection sessions enabled students to analyze their learning experiences and develop communication techniques for the future. Finally, students filled out a post-test and evaluation questionnaire to assess learning results and provide comments on the program's success.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The community service program conducted at SMA Rancaekek yielded significant positive outcomes in enhancing the students' pragmatic competence, particularly in their deployment of English politeness strategies. The empirical results obtained from the pre-test and post-test instruments demonstrated a substantial increase in the students' awareness of linguistic politeness. Prior to the training, the students' baseline pragmatic competence was relatively low, evidenced by a mean pre-test score of 54.20, where the majority of the 50 participating students relied heavily on blunt, direct requests (bald on-record strategies) regardless of social distance or power dynamics. Following the pedagogical intervention, the mean post-test score rose significantly to 81.50, indicating a marked improvement in their ability to select contextually appropriate language. To encourage meaningful participation throughout the intervention, the program used a variety of practical learning tools and interactive learning activities that promoted authentic English communication. These learning experiences pushed students not only to comprehend the foundations of English politeness tactics, but also to actively practise, reflect on, and improve their language use through collaborative and contextualized communication assignments.

Building on these learning activities, the intervention used a number of practical learning aids to encourage active involvement and authentic communicative practice. The training resources consisted of authentic dialogue worksheets, role-play scenario cards, conversation cue cards, case-analysis worksheets, reflection sheets, and simplified assessment rubrics. Rather than simply addressing politeness tactics theoretically, students were expected to apply these materials to examine true communication problems and practice contextually acceptable language in real-world scenarios such as the role-play activities presented everyday school communication scenarios such as requesting permission from a teacher, apologizing for arriving late to class, asking classmates for assistance, expressing disagreement politely during group discussions, and responding appropriately to school staff. This can be seen in the example given "Hey, friend, could we work on this project together?" or "Let's solve this problem together, mate." They also demonstrated a high proficiency in negative politeness strategies when interacting with individuals of higher social status, shifting from blunt commands like "Give me a permit" to heavily mitigated requests using modal hedges and indirect structures, such as, "Excuse me, Sir, I was wondering if I could borrow

the book for a moment." These practical examples clearly indicate that the 50 students exhibited lower communication anxiety and greater pragmatic flexibility when executing complex speech acts in English (Sa'idah & Toyyibah, 2022).

This scenario was designed to encourage students to consider how differences in social status, interpersonal distance, and communicative purpose influence the selection of appropriate politeness strategies. Through repeated practice and guided feedback, students gradually developed greater awareness of contextual language use rather than relying solely on literal translation from Indonesian. Throughout these activities, facilitators used observation checklists to monitor student performance and provide immediate guidance and feedback. The combination of these practical learning tools provided students with valuable chances to practice, evaluate, and improve their use of English politeness strategies in authentic communication scenarios.

Students exhibited a high level of participation throughout the training exercises. During small-group discussions, participants evaluated actual communication examples, recognized instances of incorrect language use, and negotiated more contextually suitable alternatives based on the social relationship and communicative aim of each scenario. During the role-playing sessions, students took on various interpersonal roles, such as classmates, teachers, and school personnel, allowing them to see how varied levels of social distance and authority affected language choice (Obidovna, 2022). Following each performance, peer feedback sessions allowed students to assess one another's politeness methods by analyzing the appropriateness of expressions, tone, and communicative intent. Facilitators supplemented this process by offering positive feedback and practical suggestions for improving students' language use. This finding is consistent with (Brown & Levinson, S, 1987) who argue that successful communication depends on speakers' ability to select politeness strategies according to social relationships and communicative contexts.

The reflection activities increased students' pragmatic awareness by asking them to compare their initial responses to their amended performances after receiving feedback. Many students realized that language they had previously regarded appropriate were frequently overly direct or insufficiently polite in English-speaking settings. Students increasingly became more aware of the link between linguistic forms, interpersonal relationships, and communicative objectives as they engaged in recurrent discussion, guided reflection, and contextual practice. This progressive learning process allowed students to not only increase the grammatical precision of their utterances, but also communicate more appropriately and confidently in a variety of social circumstances, confirming the intervention's goal of developing communicative competence (Ramdhani, 2014).

The success of the role-playing and case analysis phases further demonstrates that active, inquiry-

based participation is vital for internalizing linguistic politeness. When students analyzed discordant communicative scenarios, they engaged in critical inquiry regarding face-threatening acts (FTAs) and learned how blunt language can inadvertently damage an interlocutor's positive or negative face. Through the subsequent contextual simulations, the students applicatively practiced "face-saving" work, allowing them to experiment with language mitigation such as framing an apology before a disagreement, for instance, "I see your point, but I respectfully disagree" in a low-stakes environment. This outcome corroborates contemporary pragmatics literature which asserts that role-playing serves as an effective pedagogical bridge, enabling learners to internalize complex socio-pragmatic norms by simulating real-world power dynamics and social distance without fear of making social errors (Boux et al., 2023). These findings indicate that repeated exposure to authentic communication tasks enabled students to internalize English politeness strategies more effectively than grammar-oriented instruction alone.

The improvement observed in students' performance can be attributed to the experiential nature of the intervention. Through repeated cycles of authentic practice, reflection, conceptual understanding, and active experimentation, students gradually developed greater awareness of contextual language use and politeness strategies. This finding supports Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through meaningful experience and reflective practice.

These findings also show that combining the Identify-Illuminate-Integrate (3I) Framework with the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) and Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) creates a powerful pedagogical paradigm for developing English politeness practices in authentic learning settings. The mix of structured education, collaborative inquiry, contextual role-playing, and reflective learning allowed students to actively develop pragmatic knowledge rather than simply memorize language statements. This finding complements earlier research indicating that contextualized communicative practice is more successful at developing pragmatic competence than explicit grammar instruction alone. Furthermore, the program's practical learning tools, such as authentic dialogue worksheets, role-play scenario cards, reflection sheets, peer assessment rubrics, and facilitator mentoring, provide long-term instructional resources that can be incorporated into regular English classroom practices. Consequently, this community service program not only improved students' communicative competence during the intervention but also provides a practical instructional model that English teachers can continue to implement in fostering pragmatic competence and intercultural communicative skills.

Beyond enhancing students' immediate learning outcomes, the intervention has practical applications in English language education. The integration of the 3I Framework, GBA, and IBL gives teachers a systematic instructional strategy for infusing pragmatic competence into classroom practice. The learning resources developed in this program, such as authentic dialogue worksheets, role-play scenarios,

reflection sheets, and peer feedback activities, are easily adaptable for regular English education to build communicative skills in authentic circumstances.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The community service program at SMA Rancaekek effectively improved 11th-grade students' pragmatic ability and communication ethics in English. The Identify, Illuminate, and Integrate (3I) framework, which combines the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) and Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), successfully bridged the gap between structural grammar and context-appropriate language use. Statistically, the program resulted in a significant rise in students' mean scores, which rose from 54.20 in the pre-test to 81.50 in the post-test. Qualitatively, participants showed a strong shift from direct, face-threatening statements to contextually appropriate positive and negative politeness strategies. Furthermore, strong collaboration with local English instructors laid the groundwork for long-term implementation of these pedagogical outcomes in the classroom.

Beyond improving immediate student learning outcomes, this intervention provides practical, scalable applications in English language instruction. To ensure long-term sustainability by real and manageable follow-up actions, the following recommendations are made:

1. For English Teachers at Partner Schools: Teachers can use the 3I Framework when combined with GBA and IBL as a realistic instructional technique to incorporate politeness strategies into usual English speaking classes. The teaching tools created throughout this program, such as authentic dialogue worksheets, role-play scenarios, reflection sheets, and peer feedback activities, can be easily included into standard lesson plans to ensure continual classroom simulations.
2. For School Administration: The school can help to ensure the success of this program by hosting periodic follow-up workshops in partnership with the university team and supporting the incorporation of pragmatics-focused activities into existing extracurricular language clubs.
3. For Future Community Service Teams: Future projects should focus on expanding this practical framework to other grade levels within the school and conducting short-term follow-up assessments to assess students' continuous use of pragmatic skills in their daily interactions.

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