LANGUAGE POLITENESS PRACTICES ON SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

by Jana Publication & Research

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the practice of language politeness on social media among students from the Faculty of Education, Language, and Communication (FELC), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). The widespread use of social media among students has raised concerns regarding the need to uphold polite language, particularly in the context of digital communication. This study adopts a quantitative research design, utilizing a questionnaire as the primary instrument to collect data on language politeness practices, levels of social media usage, and the impact on students' communication. The demographic findings provide a clear overview of the respondent profile. A total of 106 respondents participated in the study, all of whom were FELC students. The majority were female students (73.6%), while male students accounted for only 26.4%. This composition suggests a predominance of female participants, which may reflect a greater interest or sensitivity among female students toward issues related to language politeness. The findings indicate that UNIMAS students demonstrate a high level of awareness regarding the importance of maintaining polite language on social media, although variations in practice exist depending on the context. It is hoped that the results of this study can serve as a guide for the university to develop appropriate programs aimed at fostering polite language practices among the younger generation.

Keywords: Language Politeness, Social Media, Communication Etiquette, Student Behavior, Digital Communication.

INTRODUCTION

Language politeness is an important aspect of communication that involves the use of appropriate, polite language while respecting social norms. In daily communication, language politeness influences how individuals interact with others and

how social relationships are formed and maintained. Concepts related to language politeness include language registers, communication ethics, and the role of social media in shaping polite language attitudes.

Language register refers to the variations or styles of language used to depend on the context, situation, and purpose of communication. Abdullah Hassan (1997) emphasizes that language register is crucial in determining how language is used in specific fields, such as technical language, law, and social communication. In language politeness, the proper use of language registers is vital to ensure smooth communication and avoid offending others. For example, the formal register used in workplace discussions differs from the informal register used in casual interactions between peers on social media (Zainal et al., 2020). Knowledge and mastery of different language registers allow individuals to communicate more effectively while respecting social norms.

Communication ethics refers to the rules and principles that govern how individuals interact using language in different social situations. In this context, language politeness involves choosing the right words, avoiding harsh language, and using language that demonstrates respect and courtesy. Therefore, polite communication not only involves the correct selection of words but also awareness of the situation and the social background of the recipient (Izzah, 2018). With the growing use of social media among young generations, the issue of language politeness in digital platforms has received increasing attention. Social media has become a space where many individuals, particularly teenagers, use language to interact, share opinions, and express feelings. However, social media is also frequently used to display impolite language, such as insults, provocations, and hate speech. A study by Maslida (2018) shows that the use of inappropriate personal pronouns and language forms in digital communication can diminish language politeness and cause tension in social relationships.

For example, peer influence, cultural norms, and the values held by social media users can shape their language use. Research by Azhar et al. (2021) shows that teenagers who are more exposed to social media are often influenced by trends that promote coarser or more impolite language, without realizing the negative effects on their social relationships. Therefore, it is essential to promote language politeness through digital ethics education among the younger generation.

Education plays a crucial role in shaping language politeness among individuals. In this context, education on communication ethics and language politeness should be emphasized at both school and university levels. A study by Hussin (2021) indicates that education focused on politeness values can help foster better language attitudes among students. Educational programs that highlight language politeness, particularly on social media, are expected to improve language usage among young people and promote more positive and productive communication.

Language politeness not only affects individual interactions but also plays a role in building harmonious social relationships. According to Zainudin and Hasan (2020), the use of polite and respectful language can help reduce conflicts, strengthen social

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bonds, and improve an individual's credibility in society. Language politeness is also crucial in building trust and mutual respect in social interactions, which can positively impact society.

In conclusion, language politeness is an essential aspect of communication that involves using appropriate and respectful language in various social contexts. In the digital era, language politeness faces increasing challenges, especially among the younger generation who interact frequently on social media. Therefore, it is vital to understand concepts such as language registers, communication ethics, and the importance of education on language politeness to improve communication practices within society, particularly in the digital context.

Methodology

Research methodology is a critical component of any study to ensure the validity and accuracy of the results. In this study, the methodology will be employed to gather the necessary evidence to support the arguments related to language politeness among the younger generation. The data collection methods used include interviews, surveys, and observations. The purpose of these methods is to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of language politeness in digital communication, particularly regarding social media use among Malaysia's youth. According to Asmah Hj Omar (1986), research should proceed through three main stages: data collection, data analysis, and drawing conclusions. These stages are essential for ensuring that the research is systematic and effective. This study follows the same approach, using a fieldwork method that involves gathering data through surveys and observations among the target respondents. This approach is expected to provide a clearer picture of the phenomenon of language politeness in the context of social media. The research methodology is defined as a system of methods and principles used to carry out a study or research in a specific field. The methods used in this study are important because they ensure the accuracy and transparency of data collection. Therefore, the methods employed must be reliable and valid. The success of a study largely depends on the researcher's ability to collect relevant data and analyse it effectively to obtain valid and trustworthy results (Rahim, 2020). Data collection is an essential process in research, involving the steps the researcher takes to gather information relevant to the study's objectives. This process requires systematic and standardized procedures to ensure the data obtained is accurate and can support the arguments made in the study. Despite challenges such as research location and access to respondents, the researcher ensures that the methods used are appropriate for gathering valid and precise data. In this study, the researcher uses a field research method that involves surveys to gather direct information from respondents about their perceptions of language politeness. The survey will provide a detailed picture of the understanding and practices of language politeness among youth who use social media. Additionally, observation is used to study actual behaviour in digital communication, particularly in situations involving online social interactions. Library research is also used to review existing literature on theories and previous studies related to language politeness and digital communication. Overall, the

methodology used in this study is integrated, combining fieldwork methods, surveys, observations, and literature research to collect valid and comprehensive data. This approach is expected to provide a deeper understanding of language politeness among Malaysia's youth, particularly in the context of social media use.

This study aims to examine the perception of language politeness on social media among students at the Faculty of Education, Language and Communication (FELC), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). Social media has become the primary communication medium for young people, including university students, to interact and express their opinions. This change in communication methods raises the issue of politeness, which needs further investigation, especially in the context of education and professional character development. UNIMAS was chosen as the research site because of its diverse student body, representing various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, who actively use social media. The Faculty of Education, Language and Communication (FELC) is the focus of this study because it emphasizes language, communication, and education, areas closely related to language politeness. This study is also conducted to understand how students adapt to the principles of language politeness on social media, based on theories such as Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) and Leech's Politeness Theory (1983). With technological advancements and the rapid growth of social media, it is crucial to ensure that students understand the importance of maintaining politeness and decorum in language, even in digital communication. The findings from this study are expected to raise awareness among students about the importance of communication ethics on social media and provide guidance to the university in developing educational programs to foster language politeness among the younger generation.

The study will be conducted at the Faculty of Education, Language and Communication (FELC), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). FELC was selected because it has a diverse student population, with many students who are young and exposed to the open world through social media and technological advancements. UNIMAS, located in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, was established in 1992 by the government to enhance the level of higher education in Sarawak. Since its establishment, many indigenous students have become leaders or heads of departments and are now recognized as successful alumni. FELC is one of the main faculties at UNIMAS. As an academic institution, FELC focuses on English and Malay languages, communication programs, and has produced graduates up to the doctoral level. Today, UNIMAS is considered a respected public university for its contributions to improving educational opportunities for people with low incomes and for conducting research on the culture of the community in Sarawak. The university's vision to become a world-class institution has also received full support from the Sarawak government, helping UNIMAS remain relevant and competitive with other universities. FELC conducts research in education and communication fields and actively establishes partnerships with the industry to ensure that the curriculum offered meets current job market needs. UNIMAS has grown rapidly in various academic and research fields, providing quality educational opportunities to the local community. FELC has produced educators,

linguists, and communication professionals who are highly skilled and have made significant contributions to society and the country.

Results

Study Program

Based on the findings regarding the study programs, it was found that 57 respondents were from the Linguistics Program, making it the largest respondent group in this study. The Islamic Education Program had the second-largest number of respondents, with 38 participants. The Strategic Communication Program recorded only 7 respondents, while the Global Communication English Program had the smallest number of participants, with only 4 respondents. This data reflects that the Linguistics and Islamic Education Programs are the dominant programs in the faculty, while the Global Communication English Program had lower involvement in this study.

Year of Study

Regarding the breakdown of respondents by year of study, most respondents were first-year students, with a total of 53 respondents. This indicates that first-year students were more active or more willing to participate in this study. Third-year students were second with 28 respondents, followed closely by second-year students with 25 respondents. The findings show a balanced participation between second and third-year students, with a noticeable higher proportion from first-year students. In terms of year of study, the data shows that half of the respondents, or 50%, were first-year students. This may indicate that first-year students were more involved in this study. Second-year students represented 26.4% of the total respondents, while third-year students accounted for 23.6%. Although the study was conducted involving fourth-year students, none responded to the survey.

Gender

In terms of gender, the respondents were predominantly female, comprising 73.6% of the total. Male students made up only 26.4%. This clearly shows that the female respondents far outnumbered the male respondents in this study. This situation may reflect the student composition in this faculty or the tendency of female students to participate in studies on language politeness. Overall, this demographic finding provides a clear profile of the respondents, with the majority being female students from the Islamic Education and Linguistics programs, predominantly in the early stages of their university studies. These findings are important because each of these demographic factors may influence language politeness practices among respondents when communicating on social media platforms. At the beginning of this study, the researcher sought assistance from the Deputy Dean of Student Affairs and Alumni in the faculty to distribute the survey conducted via Google Forms.

Demographic Data Analysis

Overall, the demographic data provides a clear picture of the respondent profile in this study. Many of the respondents are female students from the Islamic Education and Linguistics programs, with the largest number of respondents in their first year of

study. This is important because demographic factors such as study program, year of study, and gender may influence the way respondents interact and communicate, particularly in terms of language politeness in the digital world. At the initial stage of the study, the researcher obtained assistance from the Deputy Dean of Student Affairs and Alumni in the faculty to help distribute the survey using Google Forms. This ensured that the survey was conducted more easily and widely, allowing for a more representative sample from the faculty's student body.

Table 1

Respondent's Profile

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Study Program	Linguistics	57	53.8
	Islamic Education	38	35.8
	Strategic Communication	7	6.6
	Global Communication English	4	3.8
Year of Study	Year 1	53	50.0
	Year 2	28	26.4
	Year 3	25	23.6
	Year 4	0	0.0
Gender	Female	78	73.6
	Male	28	26.4

Language Politeness Practices Analysis

In Section B, which focused on language politeness practices on social media among students from the Faculty of Education, Language, and Communication at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), it was found that students showed a high level of awareness about the importance of maintaining politeness in online communication. Students tended to practice polite and cautious communication, especially when interacting openly on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Student Communication in Class

According to the study's findings, most students tend to use formal and polite language when interacting with lecturers or older individuals on social media. They show respect by carefully selecting their words and using polite expressions such as "thank you," "sorry," and "please note."

Student Communication Outside Class

When communicating with lecturers both in and outside the classroom, respondents consistently maintained politeness, with an average score above 4.8 out of a maximum of 5. This indicates that the social hierarchy plays a role in influencing students' communication politeness on digital platforms.

Asking Questions

The average score for politeness when asking questions was 4.89, suggesting that students are very careful about using polite language in this context. This shows that they are aware of the importance of maintaining proper conduct when seeking clarification or additional information from lecturers.

Answering Questions

Meanwhile, the average score for politeness when answering questions was 4.87, also high, indicating that students generally maintain politeness when responding to questions. This reflects a strong sense of respect towards lecturers, even though there is some variation with a minimum score of 3.

Communicating with Senior/Junior Students

In interactions between students, although the level of language politeness was still high, there was a slight decline compared to communication with lecturers. The average score was 4.43, showing a slight decrease in politeness compared to interactions with lecturers. The lower minimum score of 1 suggests that a small number of respondents were more casual in communication with their seniors or juniors, but the majority still consistently practiced politeness. The average score for communication with same-gender peers was the lowest at 4.37, indicating that respondents were more relaxed and less formal when interacting in this context, which reflects that closer social contexts influence the level of formality in language.

Communicating with Same-Gender Peers

Most respondents were more likely to use relaxed, simple, and informal language when communicating with friends. The use of emoticons, abbreviations, and casual phrases like "hey," "bro," and "sis" were common in informal interactions. However, politeness was still maintained when dealing with sensitive issues or situations that required more careful communication.

Communicating with Counter Staff

Regarding students interacting with university staff at counters, the findings showed a high average score of 4.85, indicating that respondents prioritize politeness when dealing with university staff, whether formally or informally. This reflects their understanding of the need to maintain good relationships with university staff.

Participating in University Programs

When participating in university programs, respondents showed an average score of 4.81, reflecting that they maintained a high level of politeness during official or semi-official university activities. This demonstrates their sense of responsibility towards their image and the university.

Table 2

Language Politeness Practices Analysis

Context	Average Score (out of 5)
Communicating with Lecturers (in class)	4.80
Communicating with Lecturers (outside class)	4.80
Asking Questions	4.89
Answering Questions	4.87
Communicating with Senior/Junior Students	4.43
Communicating with Same-Gender Peers	4.37
Communicating with Counter Staff	4.85
Participating in University Programs	4.81

Social Media Usage Level

In Section C of the survey, the study examined the level of social media usage among students. The results showed that students obtain more information through social media compared to traditional channels like television, with an average score of 4.65. The score range of 3 to 5 indicated that while some respondents still consider television important, the majority clearly rely more on social media for their daily information.

Obtaining Information

This finding shows that social media is the primary channel for obtaining information. This reflects a trend among the younger generation, especially students, who tend to prefer digital channels as their main source of information. Social media's speed, accessibility via smartphones, and diverse content compared to traditional media like television contribute to this trend.

Confidence in News

On average, respondents showed moderate trust in news shared through social media, with a score of 2.61 out of 5. This reflects a reasonable level of critical awareness among students about the authenticity and reliability of information shared on social media platforms. There was also considerable variation in responses, with some respondents being highly sceptical, while others trusted social media news very much. This suggests an important need for the university to improve students' digital literacy so they can better assess the authenticity of information in an increasingly challenging digital world.

Inappropriate Feedback

Additionally, a small number of respondents admitted to providing inappropriate feedback on social media, with a higher average score for male students (2.43) compared to female students (1.92). Students also use social media for online business, with an average score of 3.68, indicating that its use goes beyond just socializing but also extends to economic activities. Students also acknowledged spending more time on social media than with their families, with a moderate average score of 2.68, suggesting the need to balance social media use with family time. Regarding inappropriate

feedback on social media, the average score was 2.06, showing that most respondents rarely give negative or inappropriate feedback on these platforms. This reflects their awareness of the negative consequences of such behaviour.

Table 3

Social Media Usage Level

Aspect Assessed	Average Score (out of 5)
Obtaining Information via social media	4.65
Confidence in News on social media	2.61
Inappropriate Feedback (Overall)	2.06
Inappropriate Feedback (Male Students)	2.43
Inappropriate Feedback (Female Students)	1.92
Use of social media for Online Business	3.68
Spending More Time on social media than with Family	2.68

Effects of Language Politeness

In analyzing the impact of language politeness, the study recorded an average score of **4.63**, indicating that many respondents agreed that practicing language politeness helps enhance their communication competence while on campus.

Becoming More Competent

Although the average score is high, the score ranges from 2 to 5 reflects that while most respondents believe this practice has benefitted their social skills, a small number of students felt its impact was only moderate. This may be due to individual differences in experience or background when adapting the concept of politeness in daily campus life.

Time Spent on Social Media

In the second item of the questionnaire, the average score was **4.57**, proving that respondents believe practicing politeness boosts their confidence when interacting with others, whether in formal or informal contexts. A score range from 3 to 5 shows that while most students experienced increased confidence, a few did not feel its impact as significantly. This highlights the need for more self-development programs and interactive activities that help build communication confidence through wider practice of language politeness. Prior to this study, youth were often stereotyped as self-centered and blunt in speech.

Being Considerate and Protecting Others' Dignity

However, this study shows that many respondents are still sensitive and considerate of others. This item recorded a high average score of **4.64**, indicating that students not only practice politeness for their own benefit but are also aware of the importance of maintaining others' dignity and feelings when communicating. A minimum score of 3 suggests that almost all respondents possess high social sensitivity, although some may be less aware in specific situations. To ensure this practice

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continues, language politeness should be seen not just as a grammatical skill, but also as a reflection of a student's social maturity.

Encouraging Others to Be Polite

In terms of encouraging others to practice politeness, this item recorded an average score of **4.65**, showing that students not only apply polite behavior themselves but also actively promote it among peers. This demonstrates a positive level of social awareness among respondents—that good behavior should not only be practiced but also shared with others to create a more harmonious communication environment.

Shaping Oneself as a Courteous Student

In the final survey item, which focused on shaping oneself into a polite and well-mannered student, the highest average score of **4.77** was recorded. This high score reflects respondents' strong belief that language politeness can shape their character into becoming courteous members of society. It is also the clearest indicator of the effectiveness of language politeness practices among all items assessed. This suggests that students recognize the long-term importance of language politeness in developing their personal character. The item also provides a positive indication of the effectiveness of current educational approaches in nurturing a culture of politeness among students.

Table 4

Effects of Language Politeness

Aspect Assessed	Average Score (out of 5)
Becoming More Competent in Communication	4.63
Increased Confidence Through Politeness	4.57
Being Considerate and Protecting Others' Dignity	4.64
Encouraging Others to Be Polite	4.65
Shaping Oneself as a Courteous Student	4.77

Conclusion

Overall, this study shows that students from the Faculty of Education, Language, and Communication at UNIMAS generally value the practice of language politeness, especially in formal and academic communication. Although there are differences in how they communicate depending on context and social relationships, students tend to maintain polite language on social media. However, the study also highlights the need for further intervention in the form of education and awareness programs to ensure that language politeness continues to be preserved in the rapidly evolving digital world.

This study presents several important implications that can serve as guidelines for universities, researchers, and the public, particularly in the context of practicing language politeness on social media among university students. The implications of this study include educational, social, and technological aspects, as well as how it may

influence character development and digital communication among students. The study indicates that university students are highly aware of the importance of language politeness, particularly in academic settings and formal interactions with lecturers. However, there is a need to raise awareness about the importance of polite communication in informal contexts, especially when interacting with peers or engaging on social media platforms.

The study identifies that polite language has a significant impact on students' character development, especially in nurturing values of respect, social sensitivity, and effective communication across various social and professional situations. Language politeness is not only essential in formal interactions but also plays a role in social contexts, helping to establish harmonious and respectful relationships. The increasing use of social media among students, particularly in information gathering and communication, further highlights this need. Who practice polite language are more likely to form better relationships in both social and professional contexts. These students are often more empathetic and capable of communicating in ethical and professional ways. Universities can use this approach to help students develop mature and responsible personalities.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to improve and enhance the practice of language politeness among students, particularly in social media communication. Universities should introduce or strengthen courses and modules focused on communication ethics in digital spaces. These can be part of the formal curriculum or included as compulsory co-curricular activities. Such courses should emphasize the importance of polite language online, the consequences of impolite communication, and emotional regulation while interacting on social media.

Since social media is the main communication channel among students, universities and educational agencies should implement more active awareness campaigns to promote language ethics on digital platforms. These campaigns can be held online or physically, educating students on the negative impacts of rude or inappropriate language on social media. Collaborations with influencers or celebrities with large followings can help amplify these messages. Universities can also offer counseling or guidance sessions for students struggling to manage their communication during times of stress or anger. Universities should organize more comprehensive communication skill-building programs that focus on language politeness and personal development. These programs can train students to communicate more effectively in both professional and social contexts, including how to interact respectfully in both formal and informal situations.

Given students' heavy reliance on social media for information, they must be equipped with stronger digital literacy skills. Universities can offer digital literacy sessions to teach students how to assess and verify the authenticity of information obtained through social media. This includes identifying reliable news sources and detecting misinformation. Students should be encouraged to use social media for more constructive purposes, such as sharing academic articles, joining scholarly discussions, or participating in volunteer projects. Universities can also organize activities that promote smart and cautious online interactions, including challenges or contests that foster positive social media behavior.

Further studies should be conducted to assess the influence of social and cultural backgrounds on the practice of language politeness on social media among university students. This research can also involve students from other universities or conduct comparative studies between university and secondary school students to gain a broader understanding of digital communication behavior among younger generations.

Lastly, the recommendations aim to raise awareness and improve the practice of polite language among students, particularly in social media communication. Universities should provide more focused education on language ethics through courses and workshops and implement active awareness campaigns. Technology can also assist students in managing their language use in digital communication. Moreover, communication and personality development programs can help strengthen students' professionalism and responsibility. Improving digital literacy is equally important to help students evaluate information critically and communicate ethically. These recommendations are intended to support students in becoming more courteous and building harmonious relationships in the online world.

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