Original Research

Teacher Licensure and the Implementation of (Im)Politeness Strategies in Iranian EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate teacher licensure and the implementation of (Im) politeness strategies in Iranian EFL classrooms. To this end, 20 female Iranian EFL teachers working at private language institutes in Tehran were selected using convenience sampling. Participants, with varying levels of education (BA, MA, Ph.D.) and teaching experience (5-25 years), were categorized into upper-intermediate and advanced English proficiency groups based on their performance on the Cambridge English: Proficiency (C2 Proficiency) test. A written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) comprising 15 scenarios was used to elicit teacher responses in various social interaction situations. Culpeper's Impoliteness Taxonomy (1996) provided the framework for analyzing the elicited data. Data analysis revealed that Iranian EFL teachers predominantly employed positive politeness strategies across various speech acts, particularly in requests, apologies, and offers, highlighting their commitment to fostering a positive and harmonious classroom environment. Negative politeness was more prevalent in refusals, indicating a desire to mitigate potential face threats. Statistical analysis using a Chi-Square test for independence revealed a significant association between proficiency levels and the use of politeness strategies, with advanced teachers employing a wider range of strategies, particularly those related to positive politeness. These findings suggest that higher levels of education may contribute to greater pragmatic competence, enabling teachers to adopt a more nuanced and flexible approach to communication. The study underscored the importance of incorporating pragmatic competence training, particularly focusing on politeness strategies, into EFL teacher education programs. This will equip teachers with the skills to navigate complex classroom interactions effectively, thereby fostering a positive and supportive learning environment conducive to student success.

Keywords: Classroom interaction, EFL teachers, Impoliteness strategies, Politeness theory, Pragmatic competence

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1. Introduction

Teacher-student interaction facilitates the learning process and establishes a dynamic learning atmosphere. In this interaction, various manners of interpersonal communication and different modes of expression can convey the same message. Social factors, including collaboration, gender, age, and authority, can significantly influence the outcome of interactions. Furthermore, one's communication style can either reinforce or challenge power dynamics. Therefore, understanding these social and cultural factors is essential for maintaining politeness when interacting with others. In interpersonal discourse, words are utilized to make requests, express gratitude, or offer apologies (Jaafar & Ageli, 2022). Disagreement arises when one expresses dissatisfaction with the person they are conversing with. Disagreeing with someone can strain a relationship, but using polite language can mitigate potential harm. Such instances of disagreement are commonplace in interpersonal communication (Chaqmaqchee & Jasim, 2022).

Politeness is a crucial element in human interaction and plays a vital role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. The use of (im)politeness strategies by EFL teachers can greatly affect classroom dynamics, student engagement, and overall learning outcomes. In this regard, Speech Act Theory is a significant domain in linguistics and the philosophy of language that examines how words can not only convey information but also perform actions.

A growing body of literature recognizes the importance of employing (im)politeness strategies to foster pragmatic competence among language learners and teachers. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, Iranian EFL teachers play a crucial role in modeling language use for their students (Mirzaei Jegarlooei & Allami, 2018). However, research has shown that even advanced language learners may struggle to fully grasp the nuances of (im)politeness in the target language. This is particularly relevant for Iranian EFL teachers, who need to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication in their teaching practices (Taguchi, 2019).

The concept of (im)politeness refers to how speakers use language to convey respect, deference, or even disrespect towards others. In the context of EFL teaching, (im)politeness strategies can significantly impact the effectiveness of communication between teachers and students (Chaqmaqchee & Jasim, 2022). Studies over the past decades by Muntigl and Turnbull (1995) have identified four types of impoliteness

strategies: Irrelevancy Claims (IC), Challenges (CH), Contradictions (CT), and Counterclaims (CC). These strategies can be used to convey impoliteness in various contexts, including in speech acts such as requests, apologies, offers, and refusals. Recently, Eshghinejad and Moini (2016) examined the use of appropriate (im)politeness strategies, which can help build rapport and establish a positive learning environment, while misusing these strategies can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunication. In the context of Iranian EFL learners, understanding these impoliteness strategies is crucial for effective communication. Iranian EFL teachers may struggle to use these strategies appropriately due to differences in licensure and cultural norms and expectations regarding politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that the selection of politeness strategies in communication is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including power dynamics, social distance, and cultural norms. These factors dictate the degree of formality and deference in interactions, shaping how messages are conveyed and received. Additionally, the teacher's level of education and teaching experience play a vital role (Jaafar & Ageli, 2022). Teachers with higher levels of education may be more likely to use sophisticated (im)politeness strategies, while those with more teaching experience may be more adept at adapting their strategies to different contexts (Wijayanto et al., 2017).

One important variable to consider in this context is licensure, the certification process that teachers undergo to demonstrate their qualifications and readiness to teach effectively. Licensure can significantly influence teachers' pedagogical approaches, including their use of (im)politeness strategies. It has previously been observed that licensed EFL teachers tend to be more adept at employing varied politeness strategies tailored to their students' cultural backgrounds (Zhang & Liu, 2023). This ability is crucial for maintaining effective communication and fostering a supportive learning environment. Furthermore, Kim and Park (2023) found that licensed teachers are more likely to engage in reflective teaching practices, thereby continually assessing and adapting their use of (im)politeness strategies to meet their students' needs better.

The realm of politeness strategies in the EFL classroom assumes a unique dimension when the teacher's level of experience is taken into account. Novice EFL teachers, navigating the complexities of language teaching for the first time, often rely on more explicit and direct politeness strategies, reflecting their desire to establish clear boundaries

and ensure student understanding (Allami, 2012). They may frequently apologize for mistakes, hedge their requests, and use indirect language to avoid appearing overly authoritative (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999). This cautious approach stems from a need to build rapport and establish trust with students while simultaneously managing their own anxieties about classroom control. Experienced EFL teachers, on the other hand, tend to employ a more nuanced and context-dependent approach to politeness. Their years of experience have equipped them with a deeper understanding of student needs and classroom dynamics, allowing them to tailor their politeness strategies accordingly (Kasper, 2000).

This study holds significant importance in the fields of language education and intercultural communication, as it addresses the nuanced dynamics of (im)politeness strategies within the Iranian EFL context. Understanding how Iranian EFL teachers navigate politeness across various speech acts and contexts is crucial for fostering effective communication and creating inclusive learning environments. By highlighting these differences, the research can provide educators with valuable insights to tailor their teaching approaches, enhance classroom interactions, and ultimately improve language-learning outcomes among Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, the significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to a broader understanding of the cultural influences on communication strategies within educational settings.

2. Literature Review

Teachers' success in teaching depends on various factors, among which are teacher licensure and the application of different politeness strategies in the classroom context with diverse cultural backgrounds.

Speech Act Theory is a significant domain in linguistics and the philosophy of language that examines how words can not only convey information but also perform actions. Developed primarily by the philosopher J.L. Austin in the 1950s (Austin, 1962) and later expanded by John Searle (1969), the theory proposes that when people speak, they perform acts beyond mere utterance. Austin introduced this concept in his book "How to Do Things with Words," where he distinguished between constative utterances — statements that describe the world and can be deemed true or false — and performative utterances, which do not merely describe the world but act upon it (Austin, 1962).

Some empirical studies concerning politeness strategies in EFL classroom interactions have been conducted in various Indonesian contexts. Surono (2021) conducted a study on kindergarten teachers regarding directive speech acts in parenting and the politeness implications based on the schools' missions. The study found that teachers employed different politeness strategies, which were influenced by several factors, including institutional missions, the number of classes taught, teachers' creativity, and cultural factors.

At the junior high school level, Haryanto et al. (2018) investigated the application of the politeness principle by teachers during classroom interactions in the English teaching and learning process. The interview results showed that politeness principles created togetherness between the teacher and students, built students' respect, and helped students develop a positive attitude toward the lesson, which obviously motivated them to participate more actively in the learning process. Thus, it was important to apply politeness strategies in teaching and learning.

A substantial body of literature supports the view that politeness strategies significantly contribute to students' achievement. In this line, Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020) conducted a descriptive qualitative study in Magelang, exploring politeness strategies in a 90-minute English lesson. The politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson were analyzed from video recordings of two different classes. The data included three politeness strategies: positive, negative, and bald-on-record. They were mainly used to give instructions, encourage, request, ask for confirmation, and address, influenced by age differences, institutional position, power, and social distance between teacher and students. This study indicated that Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies were suitable for classroom interactions in English lessons. Second, similar to Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020), Senowarsito (2013) explored politeness strategies used by teachers and students in two 90-minute English lessons in Semarang. The additional finding was that the factor influenced politeness strategies: the limitation of the student's linguistic ability. In a pedagogical context, the findings shed light on an indispensable tool for examining politeness as a character-building aspect of classroom interaction.

Jaafar and Ageli (2022) investigated politeness strategies employed by university EFL learners and American native speakers when expressing disagreement. They found that native speakers adapted their strategies to the situation, whereas EFL learners

employed similar strategies due to their limited English competence. Female EFL learners employed more positive politeness strategies than males, and gender was a more significant factor than social status in determining the use of these strategies.

Chaqmaqchee and Jasim (2022) investigated the politeness strategies used by Iraqi EFL undergraduate students when expressing disagreement in online asynchronous discussions. The findings showed that both male and female students tended to disregard others' faces and social status when expressing disagreement, indicating a lack of consideration for politeness. The study offers valuable insights for teachers and curriculum designers, underscoring the need for pedagogical interventions to foster effective and polite communication in EFL contexts.

Farashaiyan and Muthusamy (2017) examined the L2 pragmatic knowledge of Iranian intermediate learners of English through the performance of the speech act of refusals in English across diverse situations. The results showed that most respondents tended to use more indirect strategies (55.5%) to refuse another speaker's suggestion or request, regardless of the power or social distance between them. They utilized direct strategies with 24.1% and adjuncts to refusals with 18.9% respectively. The findings illustrate that variations in the use of different strategies are less evident in the data. In other words, learners used almost the same semantic formulas or pragmalinguistic forms to refuse offers in most situations.

Data from several studies has highlighted differences in politeness strategies across proficiency levels and communication platforms, such as virtual versus face-to-face interactions (Allami & Boustani, 2017). These studies revealed a range of politeness strategies employed by Iranian EFL teachers, including positive and negative politeness, as well as off-record and bald-on-record tactics. Additionally, Khakzad Esfahlan and Boroumand (2020) offer insights into how these strategies are employed in the Iranian EFL context, thereby contributing to an understanding of the dynamics of language learning environments. Their research suggests that cultural norms and social hierarchies significantly influence the choice of (im)politeness strategies, with teachers often adapting their language to conform to these norms.

Considering all of this evidence, some gaps in the literature can be identified that the proposed study on Iranian EFL Teachers' Use of (Im)politeness Strategies across Licensure could potentially address. Firstly, there is a notable lack of research specifically examining

the politeness strategies used by Iranian EFL teachers. As reported previously, most of the studies mentioned focus on Indonesian or other non-Iranian contexts. This geographical and cultural gap presents an opportunity to explore how factors unique to Iran influence the use of these strategies. Secondly, none of the reviewed studies explicitly consider how teacher licensure or certification levels may affect the use of politeness strategies, an aspect that could yield valuable insights into the development of pragmatic competence among EFL teachers. Lastly, while the majority of the studies focus primarily on politeness strategies, there is limited attention given to impoliteness strategies, suggesting that a more comprehensive examination of both politeness and impoliteness could contribute significantly to the field. By addressing these gaps, the study on Iranian EFL teachers' use of (im)politeness strategies across licensure levels could make a significant contribution to the existing literature and provide valuable insights for teacher training and development in Iran.

By examining the most common (im)politeness strategies employed by Iranian EFL teachers in requests, apologies, offers, and refusals, the research can provide valuable insights into how cultural norms influence communicative behaviors. This study is motivated by three research questions.

1. Do Iranian EFL teachers differ in their use of (im) politeness strategies in various speech acts (request, apologies, offers, and refusals)?

2. What are the most common (im) politeness strategies used by Iranian EFL teachers in request, apologies, offers, and refusals?

3. Does level of education have any significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' use of (im) politeness strategies?

In order to address the questions outlined above, we posit the following null hypotheses:

H01. Iranian EFL teachers do not differ in their use of (im)politeness strategies across speech acts (requests, apologies, offers, and refusals).

H02. The level of education has no significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' use of (im)politeness strategies.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and Context of the Stduy

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, aiming to describe the impoliteness strategies employed by Iranian EFL teachers in classroom interactions at a private language institute in Tehran.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 20 female EFL teachers working in private language institutes in Tehran. The age range of the selected sample was 24 to 42 years. The participants were selected using convenience sampling. These teachers varied in their educational backgrounds, holding Bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees, and some Ph.D. degrees. The teaching experience of the sample ranged from 5 to 25 years. The purpose of selecting EFL teachers with varying levels of education and teaching experience was to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and expertise in the study.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Cambridge English: Proficiency (C2 Proficiency)

To measure participants' language proficiency, Cambridge English: Proficiency (C2 Proficiency) was used. For BA, PhD, and MA-level EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers, the proficiency test should be rigorous, comprehensive, and reflective of advanced academic and pedagogical skills.

3.3.2. Written Discourse Completion Test (DCT)

A written Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used to elicit participants' responses to various social interaction scenarios. This DCT consisted of 15 scenarios, meticulously designed to explore different aspects of communication. Ten of these scenarios focused on target-request situations, while the remaining five focused on non-target situations. The request scenarios, adapted from the work of Takahashi (2001), Jalilifar (2009), and Taguchi (2006), were carefully selected to encompass a range of social status dynamics and levels of imposition. This ensured that the DCT elicited a diverse range of responses reflecting the complexities of real-world communication.

Although the reliability of the written DCT had been previously established in studies by Takahashi (2001) and Jalilifar (2009), an inter-rater reliability analysis was conducted in this study to enhance the trustworthiness of the data.

3.3.3. Culpeper's Impoliteness Taxonomy (1996)

To identify the impoliteness strategies employed by the selected teachers, Culpeper's Impoliteness Taxonomy (1996) was adopted. Culpeper (as cited in Amaliah, E, & Muslim, A., 2021) classified the impoliteness strategies as follows:

Table 1.
Culpeper's Impoliteness Taxonomy (1996)

Impoliteness Strategies	Description
1. Bald on record impoliteness	This strategy is clearly designed and realized to attack the hearer's face because the speaker doesn't want to maintain the harmony relationship between them.
2. Positive impoliteness	It is formulated to attack the hearer's positive face such as give inappropriate name, ignoring the hearer, excommunicate to the hearer, etc.
3. Negative impoliteness	It is a strategy to undermine the hearer's negative face like insulting the hearer, criticize the hearer, and disparage the others.
4. Mock politeness	It is the impoliteness strategy which is realized in polite way. However, it is obviously politeness in pretense to mock the hearer.
5. Withhold politeness	It happens when the speaker consciously or unconsciously doesn't want to realize politeness to the hearer as commonly applied.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was methodically structured into two distinct phases to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the impoliteness strategies employed by EFL teachers across varying proficiency levels. Initially, 20 EFL teachers were selected from private language institutes using convenience sampling. These selected teachers were then administered the Cambridge English: Proficiency (C2 Proficiency) test to determine their English language proficiency levels. The C2 Proficiency test, recognized for its rigor and comprehensive coverage of advanced English skills, was chosen for its ability to gauge

participants' proficiency accurately. The results of this test provided a reliable basis for categorizing the teachers into two distinct proficiency levels: upper-intermediate and advanced.

Following the initial assessment, the selected teachers were presented with the Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT). The WDCT served as the primary instrument for collecting data on the teachers' impoliteness strategies. Once the responses were collected, the second phase of the analysis commenced. This phase involved a meticulous examination of the collected responses to identify recurring patterns and trends in the impoliteness strategies utilized by the EFL teachers across the two proficiency levels.

To facilitate systematic and consistent data categorization, Culpeper's Impoliteness Taxonomy (1996) was employed as the analytical framework. This taxonomy provides a detailed classification of impoliteness strategies, including bald on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, and withheld politeness. The use of this established framework ensured that the analysis was grounded in a well-recognized theoretical model, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

All data were coded according to the taxonomy of (im)politeness developed by Beebe et al. (1990). The responses of Iranian EFL teachers were then evaluated for the presence and quality of the speech act components. Semantic formulas were used as units of analysis. The number of semantic formulas employed by each teacher in response to each DCT situation was calculated and tabulated. The obtained frequencies were converted into percentages. The shift in the frequencies of semantic formulas relative to teachers' positions was also considered. In addition to the frequency of the semantic formulas, any difference in the content in which the semantic formulas were expressed was also investigated. Specifically, the researchers employed the Beebe et al. taxonomy to categorize the linguistic features that contribute to politeness or impoliteness in teachers' responses. The researchers analyzed teachers' responses to identify the presence and quality of key speech act components and to examine how effectively they used language to achieve their communicative goals within the DCT scenarios. Semantic formulas,

representing the underlying meaning structures conveyed through language, served as the primary units of analysis. The frequency of each semantic formula used by each teacher in each DCT scenario was counted and tabulated, then converted into percentages for comparative purposes. The researchers also examined shifts in the frequency of specific semantic formulas across teachers' roles and positions within the classroom. Furthermore, beyond the frequency analysis, the researchers examined the content and phrasing used to convey the semantic formulas, investigating any variations in how teachers expressed similar meanings.

4. Results

The first research question asks whether Iranian EFL teachers differ in their use of (im)politeness strategies across speech acts (requests, apologies, offers, and refusals).

The following tables and figures present the frequency of various politeness strategies employed by the teachers.

Table 2.

Frequency of (IM)Politeness Strategies Used by Iranian EFL Teachers

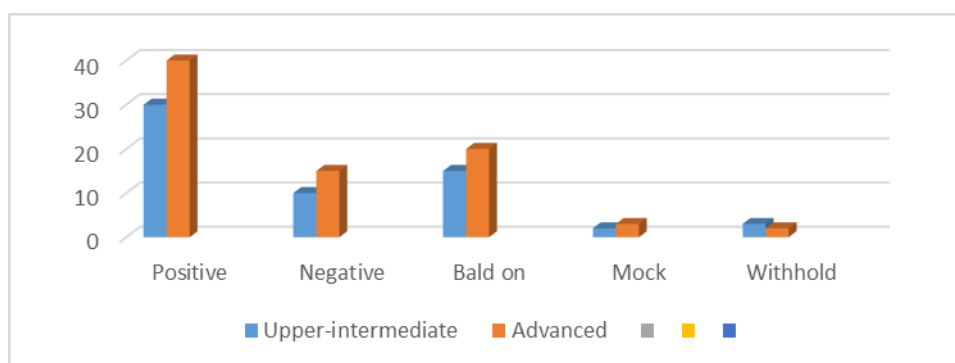| Speech Act	Positive Politeness	Negative Politeness	Bald On Record	Mock Politeness	Withhold Politeness	Total Responses
Requests	40	15	25	5	5	85
Apologies	30	10	10	2	3	55
Offers	35	5	10	3	2	55
Refusals	20	25	10	0	0	55
Total	125	55	55	10	10	250

Figure 1.
Frequency of (IM)Politeness Strategies Used by Iranian EFL Teachers

With respect to the first research question, the results in Table 2 and Figure 1 suggest that differences in the implementation of (im)politeness strategies across speech acts (requests, apologies, offers, and refusals) are significant. Requests had the highest total number of responses (85), with positive politeness being the most common strategy (40 instances). Apologies, offers, and refusals each had 55 total responses, with positive politeness again being the predominant strategy for apologies (30 instances) and offers (35 instances). For refusals, negative politeness was the most frequently used strategy (25 instances), indicating a more indirect and face-saving approach. The data also revealed that the use of bald on-record strategies was relatively common across the speech acts, with a total of 55 instances. The use of mock politeness and withholding politeness was less frequent, with only 10 instances each across all speech acts. The results revealed a significant association between the speech acts and the use of politeness strategies ($\chi^2(12)$ = 34.56, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that the choice of politeness strategies varies significantly across speech acts. Specifically, positive politeness was most frequently used in requests and offers, while negative politeness was more prominent in refusals. Bald on record was used moderately across all speech acts, and mock politeness and withheld politeness were less common.

Table 3
Chi-Square Test Result

Speech Act	Strategy	O	E	χ^2
Requests	Positive Politeness	40	31.25	2.820
Requests	Negative Politeness	15	13.75	0.111
Requests	Bald On Record	25	13.75	8.571
Requests	Mock Politeness	5	2.5	2.5
Requests	Withhold Politeness	5	2.5	2.5
Apologies	Positive Politeness	30	24.375	0.911
Apologies	Negative Politeness	10	10.625	0.031
Apologies	Bald On Record	10	10.625	0.031
Apologies	Mock Politeness	2	1.875	0.035
Apologies	Withhold Politeness	3	1.875	0.184
Offers	Positive Politeness	35	24.375	5.166

Offers	Negative Politeness	5	10.625	2.556
Offers	Bald On Record	10	10.625	0.031
Offers	Mock Politeness	3	1.875	0.283
Offers	Withhold Politeness	2	1.875	0.184
Refusals	Positive Politeness	20	24.375	0.748
Refusals	Negative Politeness	25	10.625	6.195
Refusals	Bald On Record	10	10.625	0.031
Refusals	Mock Politeness	0	1.875	1.875
Refusals	Withhold Politeness	0	1.875	1.875

The contributions to the Chi-Square statistic (shown in Table 3) highlight the significant differences in the use of politeness strategies. For example, the high contribution for Bald On Record in requests (8.571) and negative politeness in refusals (6.195) indicates that these strategies were used more frequently than expected, given the overall distribution. Conversely, the low contributions for mock politeness and withheld politeness suggest that these strategies were used less frequently than expected. The Chi-Square test confirms significant differences in the use of politeness strategies across speech acts among Iranian EFL teachers. As a result, the null hypothesis corresponding to the first research question was rejected.

The second research question was what are the most common (im)politeness strategies used by Iranian EFL teachers in requests, apologies, offers, and refusals?

To determine the most common (im)politeness strategies used by Iranian EFL teachers across different speech acts, the researchers conducted a Chi-Square test (Table 4).

Table 4.
Most Commonly Occurred Strategy of Each Speech Act

Speech Act	Most Common Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Requests	Positive Politeness	40	47.06
Apologies	Positive Politeness	30	54.55
Offers	Positive Politeness	35	63.64
Refusals	Negative Politeness	25	45.45

The analysis of the data (Table 4) showed that Iranian EFL teachers predominantly used positive politeness strategies across various speech acts, particularly in requests, apologies, and offers. In requests, the most common strategy was positive politeness, with a frequency of 40 and a 47.06% share. Similarly, in apologies, positive politeness was also the most common strategy, with a frequency of 30 and a percentage of 54.55%. In offers, positive politeness was again the predominant strategy, with a frequency of 35 and a percentage of 63.64%. In refusals, the most common strategy was negative politeness, with a frequency of 25 and a percentage of 45.45%.

The last research question is: Does the level of education have any significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' use of (im)politeness strategies?

The data presented in Table 5 provides an overview of the frequency and percentage of (im)politeness strategies used by Iranian EFL teachers at different proficiency levels (upper-intermediate and advanced) based on the Cambridge English: Proficiency (C2 Proficiency) test.

Table 5

Frequency And Percentage of (IM)Politeness Strategies by Proficiency Level

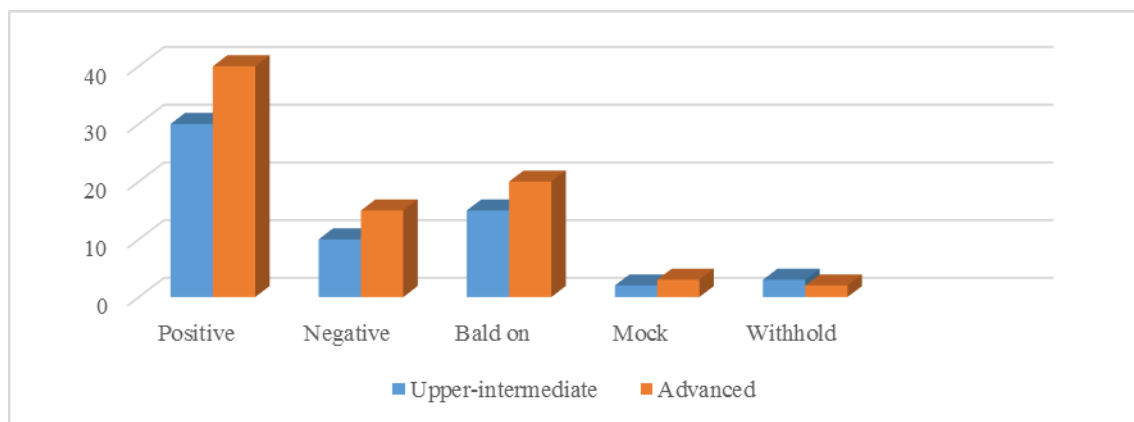| Proficiency Level	Positive Politeness	Negative Politeness	Bald On Record	Mock Politeness	Withhold Politeness	Total Responses
Upper-Intermediate	30 (50%)	10 (16.67%)	15 (25%)	2 (3.33%)	3 (5%)	60
Advanced	40 (50%)	15 (18.75%)	20 (25%)	3 (3.75%)	2 (2.5%)	80
Total	70	25	35	5	5	140

Figure 2.

Column Chart of Frequency of (IM)Politeness Strategies by Proficiency Level

Overall, Table 5 and Figure 2 show that the most frequently used (im)politeness strategy across both proficiency levels was positive politeness, accounting for 50% of the responses in both the upper-intermediate and advanced groups. Negative politeness was the second most common strategy, with 16.67% of responses in the upper-intermediate group and 18.75% in the advanced group. Bald-on-record strategies were used by 25% of the teachers in both the upper-intermediate and advanced groups, suggesting that a quarter of the teachers opted for more direct, unmitigated forms of communication in certain situations. The use of mock politeness and withholding politeness was relatively low, with each strategy accounting for less than 5% of the responses across both proficiency levels.

To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the use of (im)politeness strategies across proficiency levels, the researchers conducted a Chi-Square test for independence. The observed frequencies of each politeness strategy across proficiency levels are presented in Table 6.

Table 6.
Chi-Square Test for Independence

Proficiency Level	Strategy	O	E	χ^2
Upper-Intermediate	Positive Politeness	30	30	0
Upper-Intermediate	Negative Politeness	10	10.71	0.048
Upper-Intermediate	Bald On Record	15	15	0
Upper-Intermediate	Mock Politeness	2	2.14	0.009
Upper-Intermediate	Withhold Politeness	3	2.14	0.306
Advanced	Positive Politeness	40	30	3.333
Advanced	Negative Politeness	15	10.71	1.714
Advanced	Bald On Record	20	15	1.667
Advanced	Mock Politeness	3	2.14	0.306
Advanced	Withhold Politeness	2	2.14	0.009

The Chi-Square test results suggest a significant association between proficiency levels and the use of politeness strategies ($\chi^2(4) = 7.08$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that the choice of politeness strategies varies significantly across proficiency levels. Specifically, positive politeness was used more frequently by advanced teachers (40 vs. 30), contributing significantly to the Chi-Square statistic (3.333). Negative politeness and bald

on record also showed significant differences, with advanced teachers using these strategies more frequently than expected. Mock politeness and withholding politeness contributed less, indicating that these strategies were used less frequently and did not differ significantly across proficiency levels. Therefore, the null hypothesis," Level of education has no significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' use of (im) politeness strategies," was hereby rejected.

5. Discussion

The study's findings for the first research question revealed that Iranian EFL teachers differ predominantly in their employment of (im)politeness strategies across various speech acts, particularly in requests, apologies, and offers. In requests, positive politeness was the most frequently used strategy, accounting for 40 instances (47.06% of all instances). Similarly, in apologies, positive politeness was the most common strategy, with a frequency of 30, accounting for 54.55% of all cases. In offers, positive politeness was again the predominant strategy, accounting for 35 instances (63.64% of all instances).

Several accounts can be proposed for such results. The frequent use of positive politeness in requests, apologies, and offers underscores the teachers' commitment to fostering a supportive and respectful learning environment. By employing positive politeness, teachers not only maintain a good relationship with their students but also create a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning and mutual respect. This can be interpreted as an effort to reduce the perceived imposition on students and to encourage compliance through a more collaborative and less authoritative approach. For example, a teacher might say, "Would you mind helping me with this?" rather than a direct command, thereby showing consideration for students' feelings and autonomy. By using positive politeness, teachers not only acknowledge their mistakes but also reaffirm their respect and care for their students. This can help restore trust and ensure that students feel valued and respected, which is crucial for a positive learning environment. By offering help in a way that emphasizes their willingness to assist and their respect for the students, teachers can enhance their perception as caring and supportive figures. This can positively impact student motivation and engagement, as students are more likely to feel supported and encouraged in such an environment.

In contrast, in refusals, the most common strategy was negative politeness, with a frequency of 25 (45.45% of all instances)—this careful approach to declining requests aimed to minimize the potential for offense and maintain students' self-esteem.

These findings align with Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, which posits that speakers use positive and negative politeness strategies to manage their interlocutors' face. Positive politeness strategies create a sense of solidarity and show that the speaker is concerned with the addressee's positive face, while negative politeness strategies avoid imposing on the addressee and protect their negative face. The high use of positive politeness in requests, apologies, and offers, as well as the use of negative politeness in refusals, supports this theoretical framework. Other studies have also found similar patterns in the use of politeness strategies in educational contexts. For example, Kasper (1990) noted that teachers often use positive politeness to create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. Similarly, Holmes (1995) found that positive politeness is frequently used in educational settings to foster a sense of community and mutual respect. These findings are consistent with the current study, which highlights the importance of positive politeness in maintaining a positive and respectful relationship between teachers and students.

Considering the second research question — what are the most common (im)politeness strategies used by Iranian EFL teachers — the results revealed that Iranian EFL teachers predominantly employed positive politeness strategies across various speech acts, particularly in requests, apologies, and offers. It can be argued that cultural norms in communication influence the choice of politeness strategy. In this regard, Scollon and Scollon (2001) argue that the use of politeness strategies can vary significantly across cultures, and what is considered polite in one culture may not be considered polite in another. In the context of Iranian EFL teachers, it is important to consider the cultural values and norms that influence their communication styles. In the context of Iranian culture, collectivism is highly valued, where maintaining social harmony and respect is highly valued, which may explain the high use of positive politeness observed in this study.

Furthermore, the use of negative politeness in refusals can be seen as a reflection of the need to strike a balance between assertiveness and sensitivity. As noted by Goffman (1967), refusals are inherently face-threatening acts; however, the use of negative

politeness can help mitigate their potential negative impact. This finding is consistent with the results of this study, which demonstrate that teachers employ negative politeness to carefully decline requests while minimizing the risk of offending their students.

The last research question aimed to examine whether the level of education has a significant effect on Iranian EFL teachers' use of (im)politeness strategies. The findings suggest that educational level has a significant impact on the use of (im)politeness strategies among Iranian EFL teachers. The high frequency of positive politeness across both proficiency levels indicates that teachers, regardless of their educational background, prioritize maintaining a positive and respectful relationship with their students. This is consistent with Iran's cultural values, where social harmony and respect are highly valued. However, significant differences in the use of positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald-on-record strategies between upper-intermediate and advanced teachers suggest that higher levels of education may influence the choice and application of these strategies. Advanced teachers, who possess higher levels of education, may be more adept at employing a wider range of politeness strategies, particularly those of positive politeness, to foster a supportive and inclusive classroom environment. The gained results can be justified from two perspectives. Firstly, this could be due to their greater exposure to and understanding of pragmatic competence, which is often enhanced through advanced education and professional development. Secondly, the use of negative politeness and bald-on-record strategies by advanced teachers also suggests that they are more strategic in their communication, combining indirect and direct strategies to achieve their communicative goals. This aligns with the idea that higher education can foster a more nuanced and flexible approach to communication, enabling teachers to adapt their strategies to the context and needs of their students.

Several theoretical frameworks and empirical studies support these findings. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness posits that speakers use positive and negative politeness strategies to manage their interlocutors' face. The high use of positive politeness in this study is consistent with this theory, as it reflects teachers' efforts to maintain a positive, harmonious relationship with their students. Other studies have also found that higher levels of education and proficiency can influence the use of politeness strategies. For example, Kasper (1990) noted that more proficient speakers tend to use a wider range of politeness strategies, including both positive and negative politeness, to manage their

interactions more effectively. Similarly, Bardovi-Harlig and Dörnyei (1998) found that advanced English learners were more likely to use a variety of politeness strategies, suggesting that higher proficiency leads to greater pragmatic competence.

In contrast, some studies have found that the use of politeness strategies can be influenced by cultural factors rather than educational level. For instance, Scollon and Scollon (2001) argue that politeness strategies can vary significantly across cultures, and what is considered polite in one culture may not be considered polite in another. Among Iranian EFL teachers, the high use of positive politeness may reflect cultural norms and values rather than educational level. However, the significant differences in the use of specific strategies between upper-intermediate and advanced teachers suggest that education does play a role in shaping communication styles. Furthermore, the use of bald-on-record strategies by both proficiency levels, but especially by advanced teachers, can be interpreted in light of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, which suggests that speakers aim to be clear and concise in their communication. Advanced teachers may be more confident in their ability to use direct strategies without offending, reflecting a higher level of pragmatic competence.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the impact of educational level on the use of (im)politeness strategies by Iranian EFL teachers. The widespread use of positive politeness across both proficiency levels highlights the importance of maintaining a positive and respectful relationship with students. The significant differences in the use of specific strategies between upper-intermediate and advanced teachers suggest that higher levels of education can enhance pragmatic competence and foster a more flexible, strategic approach to communication. These findings have important implications for language teacher training and professional development, highlighting the need to develop a wide range of pragmatic skills to improve effective communication in the classroom.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the intricate landscape of politeness strategies employed by Iranian EFL teachers. The central aim was to investigate how these teachers navigate the complexities of social interaction in English, specifically examining their use of politeness and impoliteness strategies across a range of speech acts – requests, apologies, offers, and

refusals – and considering the potential influence of proficiency level. The findings of this research paint a compelling picture of the communicative practices of Iranian EFL teachers. A clear preference for positive politeness emerged as a dominant theme, permeating interactions across various speech acts. This overarching tendency towards rapport-building and maintaining positive face underscores the importance placed on harmonious teacher-student relationships within the Iranian cultural context. The consistent use of positive politeness strategies suggests a deliberate effort by teachers to create a supportive and collaborative learning environment where students feel valued and respected.

While positive politeness served as the cornerstone of their communicative approach, the teachers also demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the face-threatening potential of different speech acts. In refusals, a noticeable shift towards negative politeness strategies signaled a heightened awareness of the need to mitigate potential offense and preserve the student's autonomy. This careful balancing act between positive and negative politeness strategies highlights the teachers' pragmatic competence and their ability to adapt their language to the specific demands of different communicative situations.

The study also revealed subtle yet significant variations in strategy use across proficiency levels. Advanced teachers exhibited a greater tendency towards negative politeness and bald-on-record strategies, suggesting that increased linguistic fluency and a broader pragmatic repertoire may empower them to navigate more complex communicative scenarios with greater confidence and precision. This finding reinforces the notion that pragmatic competence develops alongside linguistic proficiency, enabling more sophisticated and contextually appropriate language use. The insights gleaned from this research contribute to a broader understanding of politeness phenomena in cross-cultural communication. The findings underscore the importance of considering cultural values and norms when interpreting communicative behavior, highlighting how these factors can shape the preferred strategies for managing face and navigating social interaction. The study sheds light on the specific ways in which Iranian EFL teachers employ politeness strategies to construct and maintain positive relationships with their students, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of the EFL classroom. Moreover, the study's findings underscore the complex interplay between language, culture, and context in shaping communicative practices.

The findings of this study have some important pedagogical implications for language teacher training and classroom practice. First, the predominant use of positive politeness strategies by Iranian EFL teachers underscores the importance of fostering a supportive and respectful learning environment. Second, teacher training programs should emphasize the value of positive politeness in building and maintaining strong teacher-student relationships. Finally, the study highlights the significance of cultural awareness in employing (im)politeness strategies.

Future research could explore the use of (im)politeness strategies in different cultural contexts. The current study focused on female EFL teachers. Future research could investigate whether there are significant differences in the use of (im)politeness strategies between male and female EFL teachers.

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