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Negotiating Face and Morality in Cross-cultural WhatsApp and Campus Interactions: Politeness among University Students and Implication for Inclusive Education (SDG 4)

Muhammad Yusi Kamhar*, Kisyani Laksono, Mulyono

State University of Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Objective: *To examine how university students from diverse ethnic backgrounds negotiate face and moral expectations through politeness responses in WhatsApp and related campus interactions, and what these practices imply for inclusive education supporting SDG 4.* ***Method:*** *We used a qualitative descriptive design with sociopragmatic discourse analysis on 107 interaction excerpts from students at universities in Malang, covering WhatsApp chats and face-to-face talk among peers, between students and lecturers, and between juniors and senior organization members. We coded speech acts, politeness strategies, and moral evaluations.* ***Results:*** *Politeness responses varied with the relationship between interlocutors. Peers relied on positive politeness, humor, and regional address terms to build solidarity. In contrast, students writing to lecturers combined religious greetings, self-identification, regional deference markers such as Tabe, and apologies for imposing. They mitigated face threats through explanations, circumstance-based refusals, and repair. These choices reflected moral evaluations of respect, reluctance to impose, solidarity, inclusiveness, and conditional honesty.* ***Novelty:*** *The study integrates face and moral order in one analytic frame for Indonesian cross-cultural digital and campus talk and links pragmatic competence to SDG 4 (targets 4.7 and 4.a), with supporting relevance for SDG 10 and SDG 16.*

INTRODUCTION

Universities are among the few places where people from many regions and cultures interact daily, and the 2030 Agenda expects education to prepare learners for this diversity. Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for inclusive and equitable quality education. Target 4.7 stresses global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity, and Target 4. a stresses safe, inclusive, and effective learning environments (United Nations, 2015). Communicative competence, and specifically the ability to be polite in ways that others recognize as appropriate, is a practical part of intercultural competence, and interest in developing students' intercultural pragmatic competence is growing (Kecskes & Dinh, 2025).

In Indonesian universities, this diversity is highly visible. A single class in Malang may include students from Java, Madura, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, and Papua, each bringing regional languages, address terms, and expectations about how to request, refuse, and show respect. Much of the coordination of academic life, from asking a supervisor for a meeting to borrowing notes from a classmate, now takes place on WhatsApp, where written messages carry the social work that intonation, gesture, and physical distance carry in speech.

Politeness is not only a set of linguistic strategies. It is also a judgment about what is proper, respectful, or fair in a given relationship (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Haugh, 2015). Face-based accounts explain how speakers protect their self-image and others' (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967). Rapport management adds sociality rights and interactional goals to face (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), and research on linguistic

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