

## Politeness strategies in children's English learning media: A pragmatic analysis of VOA learning English video

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### ABSTRACT

Politeness is an essential aspect of pragmatic competence that enables learners to use language appropriately in different social contexts. While previous studies have primarily focused on politeness strategies in classroom-based teacher–student interactions, research on politeness within digital learning environments for children remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the use of politeness strategies in children's English learning media through the VOA learning English (Let's Learn English - Level 1 series), with particular attention to their functions in supporting instructional interaction in a digital learning context. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed using a pragmatic analysis framework grounded in politeness theory. Spoken utterances were transcribed, categorized into the four types of politeness strategies, and interpreted in terms of their contextual meanings. The findings indicate that all four politeness strategies are present in the videos, with positive politeness being the most dominant, followed by bald on-record, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The frequent use of positive politeness reflects the instructor's efforts to foster closeness, encouragement, and emotional support, which support children's motivation and confidence in learning English. Although this study is limited to beginner-level VOA episodes, it demonstrates that politeness strategies in digital media can model social communication skills. Practically, integrating pragmatic elements into multimedia language instruction can enhance character building and polite communication behaviors. Future research could explore politeness strategies in other digital learning platforms, learners at intermediate and advanced levels of English proficiency, or cross-cultural contexts to further investigate pragmatic competence in online language education.

**Keywords:** children's language learning; digital learning; politeness strategy; pragmatics; VOA learning English

| First Received:                  | Revised:                        | Accepted:                       | Published:                      |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| September 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2025 | January 12 <sup>th</sup> , 2026 | January 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2026 | January 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2026 |

### How to cite (in APA style):

Putri, N. N., & Sofiana, N. (2026). Politeness strategies in children's English learning media: A pragmatic analysis of VOA learning English video. *Journal of Research on English and Language Learning (J-REaLL)*, 7(1), 90–105. <https://doi.org/10.33474/j-reall.v7i1.24498>

## INTRODUCTION

Effective communication in language learning requires not only the transmission of messages but also sensitivity to context and social norms. Communication involves more than conveying ideas; it also

requires speakers to adjust their messages according to the audience and situational context (Lan et al., 2021; Samosir et al., 2023). Therefore, message delivery and message development are inseparable elements that work together to achieve effective communication (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021). However, ensuring appropriateness in communication demands not only linguistic accuracy but also contextual and interpersonal understanding (Fox et al., 2025). To explain how context shapes and interprets meaning, scholars have turned to the field of pragmatics (Yule, 1996; Levinson, 1983).

In foreign language learning, pragmatic competence enables learners to communicate appropriately across diverse social situations (Sapoyevna, 2025). One essential pragmatic element is politeness, which plays a key role in maintaining social harmony and interpersonal interaction (Zhao & Lai, 2023). Goffman (1967) conceptualizes face as one's public self-image, which later became the foundation of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. Building on this concept, Brown and Levinson (1987) explain how politeness strategies are employed to mitigate face-threatening acts in interaction. Similarly, Leech (2014) emphasizes that polite language minimizes conflict and maximizes social harmony. Politeness thus functions to maintain respect and social relationships (Gusnawaty et al., 2022), prevent misunderstandings in intercultural communication, and foster empathy and effective interaction (Machino et al., 2025). These perspectives indicate that politeness is an integral component of pragmatic competence in language learning contexts.

In cases where it relates to studying English, politeness is particularly important for maintaining harmonious relationships between teachers and students (Prasatyo et al., 2023). In instructional settings, polite language also functions as a pedagogical tool that encourages participation, reduces anxiety, and creates a supportive learning atmosphere. Such interactional practices help learners feel respected and more willing to engage in classroom communication. Beyond grammatical and lexical competence, politeness supports communicative effectiveness, especially when addressing sensitive topics or managing instructional discourse (Bowman et al., 2024). In this sense, politeness contributes to communicative competence by shaping how meaning is negotiated and how interactional norms are modeled in learning contexts.

In today's digital era, English language teaching increasingly extends beyond traditional classrooms through technology-mediated instruction. Digital learning environments allow English language teaching to take place anytime and anywhere through various technological platforms (Medina et al., 2016). The integration of digital tools enables (Mayer, 2009; Pegrum, 2014). Recent studies indicate that technology-mediated learning environments influence interactional patterns, instructional discourse, and pragmatic exposure in EFL settings (Dewi et al., 2023; Fitriani & Hardjanto, 2023; Mujiati & Ifianti 2024). Despite this growing body of research, politeness in interaction, particularly in children-oriented digital language learning media, remains underexplored in a systematic manner.

One prominent example of digital English learning media is VOA Learning English, a platform developed by Voice of America that provides instructional videos for beginner-level learners, particularly children. Although VOA Learning English has been widely used as a pedagogical resource in EFL contexts, empirical studies that specifically examine its pragmatic dimensions, especially politeness strategies, are still limited in number. This platform presents daily conversational content with clear pronunciation, supportive visuals, and teacher-led explanations that foster a comfortable learning atmosphere. Through teacher-learner instructional interaction mediated by video; the host demonstrates various politeness strategies while delivering learning materials. This makes VOA Learning English a relevant site for pragmatic analysis, particularly in examining how politeness strategies are employed to model socially appropriate language use in digital learning environments.

Previous studies on politeness have predominantly focused on face-to-face classroom interaction between teachers and students (Jayanti et al., 2024; Latrech & Alazzawie, 2023). More recent research has begun to investigate politeness strategies in online and digital learning environments, highlighting their role in shaping instructional interaction and learner engagement (Fitriani & Hardjanto, 2023; Sudeni, 2022). However, these studies have largely concentrated on adult or general EFL contexts, leaving a gap in research from a pragmatic interactional perspective on how

politeness strategies are represented and function in digital English learning media specifically designed for children.

Based on this gap, the present study focuses on examining how politeness strategies are embedded and realized in audiovisual English learning content for children through VOA Learning English. Rather than claiming direct measurement of character building or communicative competence, this study positions politeness strategies as interactional resources that potentially support the modelling of respectful behavior and pragmatic awareness in digital learning contexts. Accordingly, this study attempts to examine the types of politeness strategies used in VOA Learning English videos and to explain their interactional functions within instructional discourse. The research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What politeness strategies are used in the VOA Learning English videos?
2. What interactional functions do these politeness strategies serve within English learning videos for children?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Pragmatics in communication*

Pragmatics is a field of linguistics that studies how people interpret language in relation to its usage environment (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Yule, 1996). Pragmatic understanding not only involves comprehending what is written or spoken literally but also enables speakers and listeners to grasp the implied meanings within communication. This requires the capacity to employ language correctly in specific social contexts, a skill known as pragmatic competence (Sinha, 2021). In the context of language learning, pragmatic competence becomes an essential element in creating effective, polite, and misunderstanding-free interaction (Nazar et al., 2022). Without adequate pragmatic competence, language users may produce grammatically correct utterances that are socially inappropriate. Therefore, developing pragmatic awareness is crucial for achieving successful and meaningful communication across different communicative situations.

From a broader perspective, pragmatics plays a crucial role in explaining how meaning is negotiated beyond grammatical structures. It highlights the dynamic relationship between language users, context, and social conventions, which shapes how utterances are produced and interpreted in real communicative situations. As a result, pragmatic analysis provides an important foundation for understanding interactional behavior in both everyday communication and instructional contexts. In educational settings, this perspective helps explain how instructional language is shaped by social roles and communicative goals. Moreover, pragmatic awareness allows educators and learners to interpret intentions, attitudes, and relational meanings embedded in classroom discourse. Therefore, pragmatics becomes essential for analyzing how interactional norms are constructed and maintained within language learning environments.

### *Politeness strategies*

In communication, politeness is required as an essential aspect, especially in relation to the speaker's effort to maintain the listener's feelings, dignity, or face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) classify politeness strategies into four types: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Bald on-record strategies do not attempt to minimize face-threatening acts and are commonly used in situations where speakers share close relationships or when urgency overrides politeness concerns. Reducing risk to the listener's positive face is the goal of positive politeness techniques by emphasizing solidarity, friendliness, and shared interests. Negative politeness strategies reflect respect for social distance and the listener's autonomy by minimizing imposition. Off-record strategies rely on indirectness and allow speakers to avoid direct responsibility for potentially face-threatening acts.

All four strategies function as interactional resources that allow speakers to manage interpersonal relationships by expressing closeness, maintaining distance, or mitigating threats to face (Goffman, 1967; Leech, 2014). In educational settings, politeness strategies contribute to creating safe,

respectful, and cooperative learning environments (Zhao & Lai, 2023; Gusnawaty et al., 2022). Previous studies have demonstrated that politeness is not limited to grammatical accuracy but constitutes a crucial component of sociopragmatic competence (Gumartifa, 2022). Similarly, Hayyin et al. (2025) and Pratiwi et al. (2024) highlights that politeness strategies facilitate effective interaction and social harmony, highlighting the importance of pragmatic knowledge in everyday communication.

### ***Politeness in English language learning***

The application of politeness strategies has been widely examined in classroom-based English language learning contexts, particularly in teacher–student interactions (Latrech & Alazzawie, 2023). Empirical studies show that the use of politeness strategies helps maintain positive interpersonal relationships, supports learners' motivation, and encourages confidence in speaking (Santoso & Yulianti, 2022). Evidence from classroom discourse studies indicates that teachers frequently employ positive and negative politeness strategies to manage instructional interaction and classroom atmosphere (Al-Abbas, 2023; Ayu et al., 2025; Hartini & Febryanto, 2024). Furthermore, research by (Jayanti et al., 2024; Latrech & Alazzawie, 2023) empirically demonstrates that teacher–student interaction patterns, including politeness strategies, significantly influence communicative effectiveness and classroom dynamics.

Those findings underscore the teacher's role in modeling polite communication, which learners may internalize through repeated exposure. While these studies focus mainly on face-to-face classroom interactions, technological advancements have significantly expanded the scope of English language learning beyond traditional classrooms. Within language learning contexts, politeness strategies function not only as interactional tools but also as pedagogical models that shape learners' pragmatic development. Repeated exposure to polite instructional discourse may support learners in acquiring socially appropriate language use and interactional norms. Therefore, examining politeness strategies in instructional settings contributes to a deeper understanding of how pragmatic competence is fostered through language learning processes.

### ***Politeness in digital language learning media***

Recent studies have begun to explore politeness strategies in digital and online learning environments, such as video-based instruction, online classrooms, and multimedia platforms. Research suggests that politeness strategies in digital instructional discourse play a role in shaping interactional norms, maintaining learner engagement, and modeling socially appropriate language use (Fitriani & Hardjanto, 2023; Sudeni, 2022). In technology-mediated contexts, politeness is often realized through instructional language, feedback expressions, and interactional cues embedded in audiovisual content, which may support learners' pragmatic awareness even in the absence of direct interaction. However, most existing studies focus on adult learners or general EFL contexts, leaving children-oriented digital learning media relatively underexplored from a pragmatic perspective.

As digital learning environments increasingly become part of children's language learning experiences, understanding how politeness is represented within these media becomes more relevant. The absence of direct teacher–learner interaction in digital contexts places greater importance on instructional discourse as a model of appropriate communication. Consequently, further investigation is needed to examine how politeness strategies function within digital English learning media designed specifically for young learners. In this context, instructional videos and audiovisual materials serve as primary sources of pragmatic input for children. Such media not only convey linguistic knowledge but also implicitly model interactional norms and social values through language use.

### ***VOA learning English as digital media***

VOA Learning English is a multimedia English-learning platform developed by Voice of America that provides news-based and instructional English materials for learners worldwide. Originally launched as Special English in 1959, the program was designed to deliver English content using simplified vocabulary and slower speech rates to support non-native (VOA Learning English - About Us, n.d.).

The platform organizes its instructional content into three proficiency levels: beginning, intermediate, and advanced, while integrating authentic topics such as news, health, science, culture, and everyday communication. In addition, VOA Learning English offers pedagogical series including *Let's Learn English*, *Ask a Teacher*, *English in a Minute*, and *Everyday Grammar*, which combine explicit instruction with contextualized language use.

As a digital learning medium, VOA Learning English emphasizes multimedia-based instruction through captioned videos, audio programs, and online texts, which support comprehension, learner engagement, and repeated exposure to spoken English in communicative contexts (Soleimanifard, 2021). Previous empirical studies indicate that the use of VOA Learning English contributes to improvements in learners' linguistic competence, including vocabulary development, listening comprehension, reading skills, and speaking fluency (Al Mardhiyyah & Rahmaningtyas, 2020; Clara et al., 2023; Fitriwati et al., 2022). These outcomes are connected with the platform's engaging audiovisual presentation, contextualized language input, and flexible access across learning environments (Bahnar et al., 2025; Liana & Aminatun, 2025; Lisma et al., 2023). Nevertheless, research has emphasized linguistic outcomes, while the pragmatic dimensions of VOA Learning English, particularly politeness strategies within discourse, remain underexplored.

## METHOD

### *Research design*

This study aims to analyze the types and interactional functions of politeness strategies employed in instructional videos from the VOA Learning English series. In line with this objective, the study employed a qualitative descriptive research design with a pragmatic orientation. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting meaning, context, and interactional functions in naturally occurring discourse rather than measuring variables statistically. Previous studies in pragmatics and discourse analysis indicate that qualitative descriptive designs are suitable for examining language use in context and explaining how meanings are constructed in interaction (Furidha, 2024). Therefore, a qualitative descriptive design combined with pragmatic discourse analysis was utilized to examine how politeness strategies are realized in digital-based English learning media. The analytical framework was grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which provides a systematic classification of politeness strategies and their interactional purposes.

### *Research instrument*

The research instruments used in this study consisted of an observation guideline and an analytical coding table developed based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategy framework. The observation guideline was used to identify utterances containing politeness strategies, while the coding table was employed to classify the utterances into four categories: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The table included columns for utterance excerpts, type of politeness strategy, contextual explanation, and interactional function.

### *Data and source of data*

The data of this study consisted of spoken utterances containing politeness strategies produced by the host (Anna) and other interlocutors in instructional videos from the VOA Learning English platform. For the purpose of this study, the data were purposively selected from the Let's Learn English – Level 1 program, which is part of the beginning-level materials on the VOA Learning English platform. Although the platform provides 52 videos in the Let's Learn English – Level 1 series, only 10 videos were selected as the data source. The selection was based on purposive sampling, considering data saturation, consistency of instructional format, and the recurrence of interactional patterns relevant to politeness strategies. These videos represent teacher-led instructional discourse featuring daily conversational topics, role-play dialogues, and repeated interactional routines commonly used in beginner-level English instruction. All selected videos were accessed through the official VOA

Learning English website (<https://learningenglish.voanews.com/p/5644.html>), which serves as the primary and authoritative source of the data. Screenshots and video metadata were documented to support data source verification (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Website Link of VOA Learning English*

| No | Video Title                                        | Link                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Screenshot                                                                            |
|----|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Let's Learn English Lesson 1 – Welcome!            | <a href="https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-one/3111026.html">https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-one/3111026.html</a>                                   |    |
| 2  | Let's Learn English Lesson 2 – I'm Anna!           | <a href="https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-2-hello/3113733.html">https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-2-hello/3113733.html</a>                           |    |
| 3  | Let's Learn English Lesson 3 – I'm Here!           | <a href="https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-3-i-am-here/3126527.html">https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-3-i-am-here/3126527.html</a>                   |    |
| 4  | Let's Learn English Lesson 4 – What is it?         | <a href="https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-4/3168920.html">https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-4/3168920.html</a>                                       |   |
| 5  | Let's Learn English Lesson 5 – Where Are You?      | <a href="https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-5-where-are-you/3168971.html">https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-5-where-are-you/3168971.html</a>           |  |
| 6  | Let's Learn English Lesson 6 – Where Is the Gym?   | <a href="https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-6-where-is-the-gym/3225958.html">https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-6-where-is-the-gym/3225958.html</a>     |  |
| 7  | Let's Learn English Lesson 7 – What Are You Doing? | <a href="https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-7-what-are-you-doing/3240468.html">https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-7-what-are-you-doing/3240468.html</a> |  |
| 8  | Let's Learn English Lesson 8 – Are You Busy?       | <a href="https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-8-are-you-busy/3253185.html">https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-8-are-you-busy/3253185.html</a>             |  |

| No | Video Title                                           | Link                                                                                                                                                                                              | Screenshot                                                                          |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9  | Let's Learn English Lesson 9 – Is It Cold?            | <a href="https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-9-is-it-cold/3261789.html">https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-9-is-it-cold/3261789.html</a> |  |
| 10 | Let's Learn English Lesson 10 – Come Over to My Place | <a href="https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-10/3285228.html">https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/lets-learn-english-lesson-10/3285228.html</a>                     |  |

### *Data collection procedures*

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques. The selected videos were repeatedly watched and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then carefully reviewed to identify utterances that met the theoretical criteria of politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. Only utterances containing politeness strategies were extracted for further analysis.

### *Data analysis procedure*

Data analysis followed a qualitative pragmatic discourse analysis framework adapted from Brown and Levinson (1987) and Miles and Huberman (1984). The analysis was conducted through the following stages.

1. Data Identification  
Only utterances that met the theoretical criteria of politeness strategies were considered as data. Utterances without politeness elements were excluded at this stage and were not treated as data.
2. Categorization and Coding  
The identified utterances were categorized into four types of politeness strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. This categorization constituted the core analytical process rather than a preliminary data collection step, ensuring that no double analysis occurred.
3. Thematic Interpretation  
Each politeness strategy was interpreted thematically based on its interactional function, such as expressing solidarity, mitigating imposition, maintaining social distance, or indirectness. Theme categorization was applied to explain recurring functional patterns across the data.
4. Frequency Indication (Descriptive Support)  
Although the study is qualitative in nature, simple frequency counts were used only as descriptive support to indicate tendencies, not as statistical measurements. The counting of occurrences did not transform the study into quantitative research but served to highlight dominant patterns qualitatively.
5. Conclusion Drawing  
Conclusions were drawn by synthesizing patterns of politeness strategy use and their interactional functions across the dataset, ensuring alignment with the research objectives.

### *Trustworthiness of the data*

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, analyst triangulation was employed. The classifications and interpretations were discussed with a linguistics expert specializing in pragmatics, who reviewed the coding scheme and sample data. The triangulator's role was limited to validating the consistency, plausibility, and theoretical alignment of the classifications, rather than reanalysing the entire dataset.

## FINDINGS

This section displays the results of the analysis of politeness strategies identified in the VOA Learning English videos. Based on the analysis of 10 beginner-level videos, a total of 194 utterances containing politeness strategies were identified. The findings show that all four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), including positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on-record, and off-record, are employed in the instructional videos.

### *Types of politeness strategies*

Table 2 displays the frequency and percentage distribution of the politeness strategies identified in the data.

**Table 2**

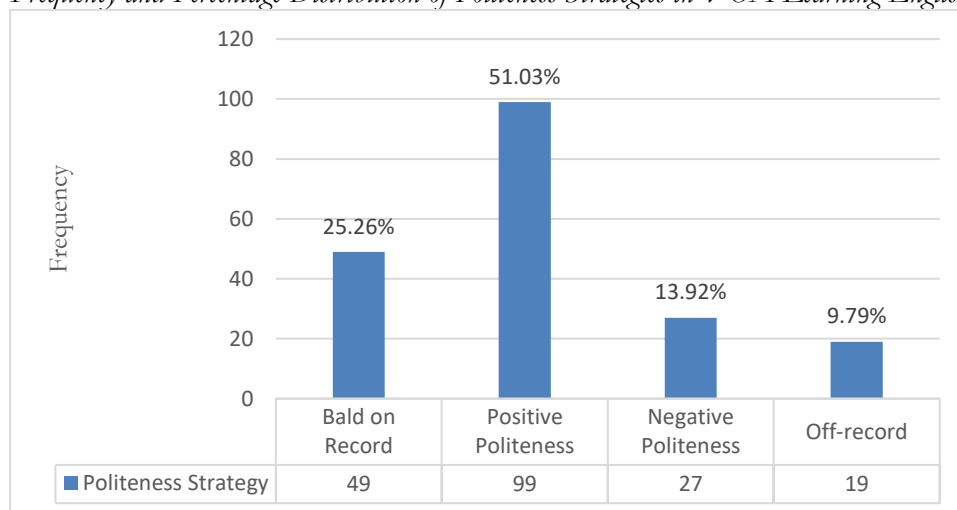
*Distribution of Politeness Strategies*

| Type of Politeness Strategy | Frequency | Percentage | Example of Utterance                                              |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bald on Record              | 49        | 25,26%     | "Speak and say your name" and "Listen. Where is the gym?"         |
| Positive Politeness         | 99        | 51,03%     | "Let's learn English," "Great job," and "We can do it together."  |
| Negative Politeness         | 27        | 13,92%     | "Is there a supermarket near here?" and "Please repeat after me." |
| Off-record                  | 19        | 9,79%      | "People in Washington like to work out,"                          |

As shown in Table 2, positive politeness is the most frequently used strategy, accounting for 51.03% of the total utterances. This is followed by bald on-record strategies (25.26%), negative politeness strategies (13.92%), and off-record strategies (9.79%). Figure 1 illustrates the frequency of each politeness strategy identified in the VOA Learning English videos. Percentages are displayed above each bar to indicate the proportional distribution of the strategies across the dataset

**Figure 1**

*Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Politeness Strategies in VOA Learning English*



The findings reveal that four types of politeness strategies are employed in the videos, each serving distinct interactional purposes within instructional discourse.

#### 1. Positive Politeness

Positive politeness strategies are the most dominant type identified in the data. These strategies are realized through expressions of encouragement, inclusive pronouns, compliments, greetings, and collaborative invitations, such as "Let's learn English," "Great job," and "We can do it together." These utterances explicitly signal solidarity and involvement between the instructor

and the learners, consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) description of positive politeness as an effort to emphasize common ground and reduce social distance.

2. Bald on-record

Bald on-record strategies are used primarily to deliver clear instructions and direct guidance, such as *"Speak and say your name"* or *"Listen. Where is the gym?"* These utterances are direct and unmitigated, reflecting the instructional need for clarity and efficiency in guiding learners' actions.

3. Negative Politeness

Negative politeness strategies appear in contexts where the speaker makes requests or inquiries that potentially impose on the listener, for example, *"Is there a supermarket near here?"* or *"Please repeat after me."* These utterances include linguistic markers such as indirect questions, modal verbs, and polite expressions, which function to acknowledge the listener's autonomy and minimize imposition, as described in Brown and Levinson (1987) framework.

4. Off-record

Off-record strategies are the least frequently observed. They are realized through indirect statements or general remarks, such as *"People in Washington like to work out,"* which allow the speaker to convey meaning without making a direct request or command. These utterances require contextual interpretation and provide flexibility in meaning construction.

The findings reveal that all four politeness strategies are used in the videos, with positive politeness being the most dominant as it builds engagement and a supportive learning environment. Bald on-record strategies ensure clarity in instruction, negative politeness minimizes imposition, and off-record strategies appear least frequently due to their indirect nature in instructional contexts.

### Functions of politeness strategies

Table 3 presents selected examples of politeness strategies identified in the dataset, along with their functional descriptions

**Table 3**

*Examples of Utterances Politeness Strategy*

| No. | Video Title                                    | Utterance                                                       | Type of Politeness Strategy | Function                                                                                      |
|-----|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Let's Learn English<br>Lesson 1 –<br>Welcome!  | "Let's learn English."                                          | Positive Politeness         | Showing inclusiveness; building a sense of togetherness between the speaker and the listener. |
|     |                                                | "Anna. Is that A-N-N-A?"                                        | Negative Politeness         | Showing respect toward the interlocutor.                                                      |
|     |                                                | "No. A-N-N-A."                                                  | Bald on-record              | A direct corrective response without mitigation; suitable because of the neutral context.     |
|     |                                                | "Well, Anna with two N's."                                      | Off-record                  | An indirect correction delivered in a light and casual tone.                                  |
| 2   | Let's Learn English<br>Lesson 2 –<br>I'm Anna! | "Hi. Are you Anna?"                                             | Positive Politeness         | The greeting "Hi" and polite question reflect goodwill and help establish social closeness.   |
|     |                                                | "Remember to call Marsha at work. Tell her you're here, right?" | Negative Politeness         | The request is softened by using a tag question, which reduces imposition.                    |
|     |                                                | "Speak and say your name."                                      | Bald on-record              | Direct command; efficient for guiding learners.                                               |
|     |                                                | "Apartment C2, here I come!"                                    | Off-record                  | Indirect expressive utterance, conveying enthusiasm without direct instruction.               |
| 3   | Let's Learn English                            | "Hey Pete, who's your friend?"                                  | Positive Politeness         | Repeated friendly greeting with informal tone.                                                |

| No. | Video Title                                              | Utterance                                                      | Type of Politeness Strategy | Function                                                                                                                                       |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | Lesson 3 – I'm Here!                                     | "Is there a supermarket near here?"                            | Negative Politeness         | Indirect request; showing politeness and respect for the freedom of the person.                                                                |
|     |                                                          | "I want to cook dinner."                                       | Bald on-record              | A direct but casual utterance between friends                                                                                                  |
| 4   | Let's Learn English<br>Lesson 4 – What is it?            | "I am great. You know, Pete, I am new to DC. The city is big." | Positive Politeness         | Showing a desire to connect and create a friendly atmosphere                                                                                   |
|     |                                                          | "Let's get coffee."                                            | Bald on-record              | A direct but casual invitation                                                                                                                 |
| 5   | Let's Learn English<br>Lesson 5 – Where Are You?         | "Marsha, I am in the kitchen. It is a beautiful kitchen."      | Positive Politeness         | Expresses admiration and shares an experience with a friend (Marsha), reinforcing social bonding.                                              |
|     |                                                          | "I wash in the bathroom. Now you try it. Say where you are."   | Bald on-record              | A direct instruction given in a learning context; it remains polite because the situation justifies clarity rather than being a harsh command. |
| 6   | Let's Learn English<br>Lesson 6 – Where Is the Gym?      | "I'm Anna and I live in Washington DC."                        | Positive Politeness         | Anna introduces herself in a friendly manner to build rapport with the audience.                                                               |
|     |                                                          | "Listen. Where is the gym?"                                    | Bald on-record              | Explicit instructions without politeness markers, used to maintain learning focus.                                                             |
|     |                                                          | "Oh Pete, this is not the gym."                                | Off-record                  | Indirectly pointing out a mistake without placing blame.                                                                                       |
| 7   | Let's Learn English<br>Lesson 7 – What Are You Doing?    | "Hello everyone, today I start my new job! Awesome!"           | Positive Politeness         | A cheerful greeting that builds closeness and enthusiasm toward the audience.                                                                  |
|     |                                                          | "No, no, that's okay, that's okay. I'm sorry, really."         | Negative Politeness         | Repeated apologies indicate guilt and intention to maintain good relations.                                                                    |
|     |                                                          | "Come in."                                                     | Bald on-record              | A direct instruction from a superior, appropriate in a formal context.                                                                         |
|     |                                                          | "I am excited, but nervous. Here I go!"                        | Off-record                  | Expresses personal emotions indirectly to show honesty and humility.                                                                           |
| 8   | Let's Learn English<br>Lesson 8 – Are You Busy?          | "Hello everyone, here I am at my new job."                     | Positive Politeness         | Self-reintroduction to build rapport with the audience.                                                                                        |
|     |                                                          | "Hi, Ann. Are you busy?"                                       | Negative Politeness         | Friendly greeting to attract listeners' attention and build rapport.                                                                           |
|     |                                                          | "Maybe another time. Right now, I am busy."                    | Off-record                  | An indirect rejection to avoid impoliteness                                                                                                    |
| 9   | Let's Learn English<br>Lesson 9 – Is It Cold?            | "Thank you, phone."                                            | Positive Politeness         | Expression of gratitude strengthens a positive relationship with the conversational partner.                                                   |
|     |                                                          | "Excuse me phone, is it windy today?"                          | Negative Politeness         | signals a polite request for information.                                                                                                      |
|     |                                                          | "Phone, it is not warm and sunny..."                           | Bald on-record              | Direct statement expressing dissatisfaction without mitigation.                                                                                |
|     |                                                          | "Oh, I see, Mexico."                                           | Off-record                  | Subtle response to a previous error, without directly blaming.                                                                                 |
| 10  | Let's Learn English<br>Lesson 10 – Come Over to My Place | "I love having my friends over."                               | Positive Politeness         | Expresses positive feelings toward social relationships; builds closeness.                                                                     |
|     |                                                          | "Is it near the Columbia Heights Metro?"                       | Negative Politeness         | Indirect confirmation to avoid mistakes or sounding demanding.                                                                                 |
|     |                                                          | "Over here!"                                                   | Bald on-record              | Direct exclamation showing urgency or excitement.                                                                                              |

Table 3 provides illustrative examples of utterances from Lessons 1 to 10 of VOA Learning English, classified according to their types of politeness strategies and communicative functions. Each numbered lesson in the table represents selected utterances that exemplify how politeness strategies are realized in different interactional contexts.

As shown in the table, Lessons 1 to 10 demonstrate varying combinations of politeness strategies. Some lessons, such as Lesson 1, include a complete set of the four politeness strategies; positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on-record, and off-record within a single episode. Meanwhile, other lessons present only certain types of politeness strategies, indicating that not all four strategies are necessarily employed in every video.

Across the ten lessons, positive politeness frequently appears in utterances related to greetings, introductions, expressions of enthusiasm, and shared experiences. Bald on-record strategies are commonly used in instructional or directive utterances, where clarity and efficiency are required. Negative politeness occurs in contexts involving requests, questions, or apologies, while off-record strategies are used in selected utterances that convey meaning indirectly, such as expressing emotions, correcting information subtly, or avoiding direct refusal. Overall, the table illustrates that each lesson contains different patterns of politeness strategy usage, depending on the communicative goals and situational context of the interaction, rather than demonstrating uniform or complete use of all politeness types in every video.

## DISCUSSION

This discussion section focuses on interpreting the findings by explaining how each politeness strategy identified in the VOA Learning English videos functions within children's digital English learning interactions and how these findings address the research gap identified in previous studies. The analysis reveals that politeness strategies are not only linguistic choices but also pedagogical tools that structure interaction, manage social distance, and support children's engagement in digital learning contexts.

The findings demonstrate that four types of politeness strategies, positive politeness, bald on-record, negative politeness, and off-record, are systematically employed in the videos, with positive politeness emerging as the dominant strategy. This dominance can be explained through [Brown and Levinson' \(1987\)](#) theory, which posits that positive politeness is frequently used in contexts where speakers aim to reduce social distance and emphasize solidarity. In children's learning environments, especially digital ones, such strategies are particularly relevant because learners require emotional reassurance and a sense of inclusion to remain engaged.

In the context of digital English learning for children, a supportive and approachable communication style plays a crucial role in sustaining learners' engagement and participation. Previous studies have empirically shown that teacher discourse characterized by encouragement, inclusiveness, and politeness contributes to learners' motivation and willingness to interact ([Haera et al., 2025](#); [Sutyrajmi et al., 2025](#)). These studies explicitly link polite instructional language with increased learner confidence, reduced anxiety, and sustained engagement, rather than merely assuming such effects. [Dewi et al. \(2023\)](#) further argue that digital learning environments intensify the importance of interpersonal communication, as the absence of physical presence requires instructors to rely more heavily on linguistic strategies to build rapport.

The predominance of positive politeness in the findings can therefore be understood as a pedagogical response to the affective needs of child learners. Utterances such as *"Let's learn English,"* *"Nice to meet you,"* and *"Hello everyone, today I start my new job! Awesome!"* linguistically encode inclusion through collective pronouns, shared actions, and expressions of enthusiasm. These utterances position the instructor and learners as collaborators rather than as authority figures and subordinates, thereby minimizing hierarchical distance. This finding extends previous classroom-based research by showing that similar interactional patterns are embedded in asynchronous, video-based learning media for children.

Building on the predominance of positive politeness discussed in the previous section, this study demonstrates that positive politeness in digital learning videos functions as an affective scaffold by modeling supportive and inclusive interaction. Through the repeated use of praise, encouragement, and inclusive expressions within character-to-character interactions, the instructor constructs a friendly and non-threatening learning atmosphere for the intended child audience. Although children are positioned as viewers rather than direct interlocutors, such interactional patterns may reduce anxiety and support the development of communicative confidence through observational learning. This interpretation is consistent with findings from recent studies in digital EFL contexts, which report that positive politeness enhances learner engagement, particularly among young and beginner learners (Jayanti et al. 2024).

The method that is employed the most commonly is the bald on-record strategy, particularly in instructional sequences that require clarity and efficiency. As illustrated in the findings, utterances such as *"Speak and say your name," "Listen. Where is the gym?"*, *"Come in,"* and *"Over here!"* are delivered as direct commands or directives. Although these utterances are explicit and lack mitigation, within the pedagogical context they function as instructional cues rather than face-threatening acts. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), bald on-record strategies are appropriately employed when the communicative goal prioritizes efficiency over face redress. In this study, such directives are embedded within clear learning contexts and supportive situational cues, which help reduce potential imposition and ensure instructional effectiveness.

This finding is consistent with Culpeper's (2011) argument that directness in institutional discourse does not automatically indicate impoliteness. In educational settings, particularly in instructional media for beginner-level learners, explicit directives help organize activities, guide attention, and reduce ambiguity, thereby supporting task completion. Sudeni (2022) similarly reports that bald on-record strategies in online EFL classrooms serve organizational and pedagogical functions rather than interpersonal ones.

Negative politeness strategies occur less frequently and are typically used in contexts involving requests, confirmations, or potential imposition. As shown in the findings, utterances such as *"Are you Anna?"*, *"Is there a supermarket near here?"*, and *"It is near the Columbia Heights Metro?"* exemplify negative politeness because they are formulated as questions that minimize imposition and acknowledge the interlocutor's autonomy. Additionally, the use of softening devices such as tag questions, as in *"Tell her you're here, right?"*, further reduces the force of the request. These utterance consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) definition of negative politeness, which emphasizes respect for the hearer's freedom of action and the avoidance of coercion.

From a pedagogical perspective, the use of negative politeness in the analyzed videos functions as a model of respectful requesting and confirming behavior for the intended child audience. By employing indirect question forms and softening devices, negative politeness demonstrates how speakers can express needs or seek information while acknowledging the interlocutor's autonomy and minimizing imposition. Although children are positioned as viewers rather than direct participants, repeated exposure to such interactional patterns may support the socialization of learners into polite communicative norms without undermining instructional authority. This interpretation supports the findings of Mujiati and Ifanti (2024), who argue that negative politeness is used by teachers to guide learners toward respectful communication practices in educational contexts.

Off-record strategies constitute the least frequent category and are mainly used in moments involving indirect clarification and subtle correction. Utterances such as *"Well, that's not a gym"* function as indirect corrections that allow learners to infer meaning without explicit confrontation. This indirectness contributes to a relaxed interactional tone and reduces potential embarrassment for learners. Goffman's (1967) concept of facework explains that such strategies help speakers maintain both their own and their interlocutors' positive face.

In addition, off-record strategies occasionally incorporate a light or casual tone through indirect remarks or subtle observations, which contribute to interactional naturalness. Although such instances are limited in number, this indirectness helps maintain attention and supports a more conversational

learning atmosphere without relying on explicit humour. Cutting (2002) notes that off-record strategies often function to soften discourse and enhance relational work, a claim supported by Fitriani and Hardjanto's (2023) findings in online EFL classrooms.

Overall, the data indicate that the communication style employed in VOA Learning English is systematically designed to balance clarity, politeness, and learner engagement. The dominance of positive politeness reflects an instructional emphasis on emotional support and inclusiveness, while bald on-record and negative politeness strategies ensure instructional clarity and respectful interaction. Off-record strategies, although limited in number, contribute interpersonal nuance through indirectness and a light interactional tone.

These findings contribute to filling the research gap by demonstrating how politeness strategies function as interactional scaffolding tools in children's digital English learning materials, an area that has received limited empirical attention. Rather than measuring character-building outcomes directly, this study shows how specific linguistic strategies model respectful, supportive, and cooperative communication, which are foundational to socio-pragmatic development.

## CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes the central role of politeness strategies as interactional resources in children's digital English learning media, functioning not merely as linguistic choices but as pragmatic tools that shape instructional tone, foster approachability, and support child-friendly communication in online learning contexts. The dominance of positive politeness demonstrates how children-oriented digital instructional discourse prioritizes solidarity, encouragement, and emotional safety to sustain learner engagement, while the complementary use of bald on-record and negative politeness strategies ensures instructional clarity and respect for learner autonomy, with off-record strategies adding flexibility and naturalness to interaction. Theoretically, these findings extend Brown and Levinson's politeness framework by confirming its relevance within asynchronous, multimedia-based learning environments for children, an area that remains underexplored. Practically, the study underscores the importance of designing digital English learning materials that model polite, supportive, and socially appropriate language use, providing children with exposure to both linguistic forms and pragmatic norms. However, as this study focuses solely on instructors' utterances, future research is encouraged to examine learners' perceptions and responses to politeness strategies and to explore variations across proficiency levels, platforms, and cultural contexts to deepen understanding of pragmatic development in digital language learning environments.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are eager to express their sincere gratitude to all the individuals and institutions that contributed to the completion of this study. We would especially like to express our gratitude to the academic adviser for their insightful counsel, constructive criticism, and persistent support throughout the research process. The authors further express their gratitude to Universitas Islam Nahdlatul Ulama (UNISNU) Jepara's Department of English Education and Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teaching Sciences for providing academic assistance and a favorable research environment. Additional gratitude is given to the proofreaders, the professional validator who verified the information, the linguistic help, and the moral support. No particular grant from public, private, or nonprofit funding organizations was received for this study.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT:

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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