# EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF IMPOLITE LANGUAGE: A CASE OF GENDER DIFFERENCES

## WA ODE SITTI WARDANI

*Universitas Halu Oleo*
Waodesittiwardani@uho.ac.id

**Abstract**

This study investigates EFL students' perceptions of impolite language, focusing on gender-based differences in communication. A mixed-methods design was employed, involving 40 EFL learners (20 males and 20 females) from Bandung and Kendari, Indonesia. Data were collected through both closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires, adapted from a Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT), which presented eight scenarios in formal and informal contexts. The quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics to assess the frequency and distribution of responses, while the qualitative analysis examined themes in students' open-ended answers to understand their deeper perceptions of impolite language. The findings showed that both male and female students generally share negative perceptions of impolite language, viewing it as socially inappropriate and emphasizing the importance of politeness in fostering respect, harmony, and positive interpersonal relationships. Gender-based differences were observed which female students reported feeling more emotionally impacted by impolite expressions, while male students tended to view impolite language as informal, humorous, or contextually acceptable. Despite these variations, the study concludes that gender does not significantly influence overall perceptions of impoliteness. These results highlighted the importance of integrating politeness awareness into language education and suggest that educators should model respectful, culturally sensitive, and ethically responsible communication to align with both academic and social norms.

**Keywords:** Gender differences, Impoliteness language, Students' perception.

## INTRODUCTION

Language is more than a tool of communication; it is a mirror of social interaction, identity, and culture. How people speak—whether politely or impolitely—carries meanings that extend beyond the literal level, reflecting social attitudes, values, and relationships among interlocutors. In today's world, particularly in the digital era, impolite or offensive language has become increasingly visible in both spoken and written discourse. The boundaries between politeness and impoliteness have become increasingly blurred, making it difficult to determine what constitutes appropriate behavior in various contexts. Within applied linguistics, this issue is especially relevant for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, whose understanding of politeness norms is closely tied to linguistic competence and intercultural awareness.

The study of impoliteness as a linguistic phenomenon has evolved significantly. Fathi (2024) updated politeness theory, which consolidates traditional strategies into broader, more efficient categories. Currently, positive politeness focuses on strategies like interest, co-identity, and agreement, while negative politeness is streamlined into indirectness, hedging, and dissociation, that aimed in respecting autonomy and avoiding imposition. These updated

strategies are particularly relevant in the context of digital media, where traditional politeness theories are reshaped by new media affordances such as anonymity, asynchronous communication, and emoji usage (Barus et al., 2024). Moreover, the influence of media usage on how face-threatening acts and face-saving strategies unfold in online platforms is significant. The reduced non-verbal cues in digital spaces, replaced by more textual and emoji-based cues therefore it is different in manifestation of politeness and impoliteness, as seen in aggressive comment sections and other online interactions (Yusuf & Resha, 2025). Therefore, understanding politeness and impoliteness today requires adapting traditional frameworks to the dynamics of digital communication, highlighting the evolving nature of social interaction in the modern era.

The dynamic between politeness and impoliteness is deeply influenced by social and cultural contexts, as emphasized by Hu and Olmen (2025) which the "second wave" of impoliteness theory underscored that definitions of polite and impolite behavior were not universal but were shaped by the unique norms and expectations of different communities, cultures, and situations. Yanuar (2022) highlighted how politeness behavior in written feedback, despite fewer non-verbal cues, still reflects the cultural values of face, respect, and teacher-student power dynamics. Similarly, Gatlabayan (2025) demonstrated that non-verbal behaviors, such as tone of voice and encouragement, significantly impact student motivation in virtual learning environments, further illustrating how politeness was negotiated and enacted through both verbal and non-verbal cues within specific cultural and contextual frameworks.

From a pragmatic standpoint, impoliteness is often analyzed through the lens of speech act theory, which examines how communicative acts such as requests, apologies, and refusals function in social contexts. Requests are particularly sensitive to perceptions of politeness because they inherently impose on the listener. This paper adapted the theory of impoliteness strategies from Culpeper et al (2025) which proposed four impoliteness strategies, they were bald-on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, and sarcasm or mock politeness. These strategies highlighted the diverse ways in which impoliteness could manifest depending on situational and relational factors. In addition, they provided valuable insights into how EFL learners interpret and react to different pragmatic cues, helping to enhance their understanding of communication nuances and improve their ability to navigate social interactions effectively.

In the other hand, gender plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of impoliteness and influences communication styles across various contexts. Research by Farooq (2024) and Syafrizal and Putri (2020) highlighted that women were generally more likely to employ polite strategies in both online and classroom settings, contrasting with men who might adopt more direct or assertive approaches. It aligned with Elmahdi et al. (2024) who observed that women often focus on building rapport, while men were more information-oriented. However, as contemporary studies showed, these patterns were not fixed and could vary depending on factors such as profesional, situation, and medium, with women adjusting their communication style when in positions of authority. The findings from Hamzah (2025) and subsequent research by Elmahdi et al. (2024) and Marchito (2025) reinforced the idea that communication styles were dynamic and context-dependent, challenging traditional binary views of gendered language. Ultimately, both men and women adapted their linguistic behaviors to align with contextual demands, such as power dynamics or institutional norms,

reflecting a more nuanced understanding of sociolinguistic behavior. However, the relationship between gender and impoliteness is complex and influenced by various intersecting factors beyond gender alone. As Higgins et al. (2025) pointed out, gendered speech patterns were shaped by intersectional influences, including race, class, and cultural context. Therefore, the evaluation of politeness or impoliteness cannot be generalized, as it varies across individuals' social experiences and power dynamics. For example, assertive speech may be perceived as impolite for a woman of color in a corporate setting, but as confident in a more egalitarian environment. The contextual setting, whether patriarchal or egalitarian, plays a crucial role in how speech is evaluated. Additionally, the rise of digital communication has brought greater flexibility in gendered expression, allowing individuals to challenge traditional gender boundaries. Hamzah (2025) suggested that online platforms blur these distinctions, offering opportunities for more fluid and diverse interpretations of politeness. Cross-cultural contexts further complicate these perceptions, as different cultures may interpret gendered communication in varying ways. Overall, the evolving nature of gendered language, shaped by societal norms, power dynamics, and technological advances, underscores the need to understand politeness and impoliteness as socially constructed, context-dependent phenomena.

The complexity of gendered communication in educational and professional settings is shaped by various factors such as cultural expectations, organizational norms, and power dynamics. Women tend to prioritize interpersonal harmony, while men often favor directness to assert competence or authority. However, Liu et al. (2024) and Marsden et al. (2025) highlighted these communications pattern were not universal, as they could be influenced by specific industries, cultural contexts, and social hierarchies. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), understanding these gendered communication norms is crucial for educators, as it enables them to better support students in navigating cross-cultural communication challenges. Educators should tailor their teaching approaches to address these differences, providing explicit instruction on politeness strategies and contextualizing directness or indirectness according to various cultural and professional contexts. Furthermore, promoting the use of gender-neutral language in EFL classrooms, as suggested by Hudson et al. (2024), could help mitigate the impact of gendered norms, fostering a more inclusive environment. This approach empowered students of all genders to navigate complex communicative situations with confidence, allowing them to focus on language learning without the constraints of traditional gender expectations.

Empirical studies on gender differences in impoliteness perception has yield diverse findings, suggesting that gender alone does not determine the expression or interpretation of impoliteness. Putri and Sayogie (2024) challenged the common assumption that men were typically more impolite, revealing that female speakers may use impoliteness strategies more frequently, particularly in certain contexts such as podcast settings, where roles and dynamics between speakers influence communication. Similarly, Shahrokhi (2023) explored how male and female EFL learners perceived impolite disagreement speech acts, emphasizing that both the use and interpretation of impoliteness in second-language academic contexts were shaped by gender and second language pragmatic norms. These studies underscored the importance of considering context, social dynamics, and cultural factors in understanding gendered communication, suggesting that the perception and use of impoliteness were more fluid and context-dependent than traditionally assumed.

Although, cross-cultural pragmatics research has consistently supported the idea that gender interacts with sociocultural norms to shape perceptions of politeness. Hamzah (2025) examined how male and female students in EFL contexts exhibit differing levels of politeness when interacting with instructors. The study found that male learners often use more direct strategies, while female learners tend to employ more indirect forms, aligning with perceived politeness norms. Similarly, Johnson and Leung (2025) observed that women in online forums adopted more direct communication styles than in face-to-face interactions, indicating a shift in how gender influences politeness based on the context. In hierarchical cultures, speakers are more likely to use indirectness when addressing authority figures, while in egalitarian societies, directness may not be perceived as impolite. Gender further influences these tendencies, as male and female learners may exhibit distinct preferences for either directness or mitigation in their communication.

Understanding impoliteness from a socio-pragmatic perspective provides insights into broader moral and educational implications. Language use reflects social attitudes, and the growing normalization of impolite expressions in media and daily communication has raised concerns about civility and respect. Students, in particular, may imitate impolite expressions they encounter online or in informal contexts without recognizing their social impact. By examining how students perceive impolite language, educators and linguists can assess learners' pragmatic awareness and ethical stance toward communication. Encouraging learners to differentiate between playful teasing and harmful language can cultivate empathy and responsible linguistic behavior.

The Indonesian context offers a particularly interesting site for exploring these dynamics. As a collectivist society that values respect, hierarchy, and social harmony, Indonesia promotes politeness as a moral and cultural principle. The Indonesian language employs various honorifics and indirect strategies to convey deference, especially toward elders or authority figures. When Indonesian EFL learners communicate in English—a language characterized by more directness—they may experience pragmatic dissonance in identifying what constitutes politeness or impoliteness. Gender norms further compound these perceptions, as Indonesian women are typically socialized to speak modestly and courteously, whereas men may enjoy greater latitude for assertive or blunt speech. Investigating EFL students' perceptions of impolite language through this lens thus provides insights into how cultural and gendered values influence linguistic interpretation in intercultural contexts.

Despite extensive research on politeness, studies focusing on impoliteness among EFL learners, particularly in Southeast Asian settings, remain limited. Most existing research has concentrated on Western populations or native English speakers, leaving a gap in understanding how non-Western learners perceive and evaluate impolite discourse. Moreover, prior studies have largely examined language production rather than perception. Investigating perception is crucial because it reveals learners' underlying attitudes and sensitivity to social cues—factors that directly affect communicative competence and intercultural adjustment. Therefore, the present study aims to explore EFL students' perceptions of impolite language, focusing on gender differences. Specifically, it examines how male and female learners interpret impolite expressions in both formal and informal request situations. This study draws on Fathi (2024) adaptation of Culpeper et al (2025) in impoliteness framework to examine how students interpret face-threatening acts, with a particular focus on how gender influences these interpretations. Additionally, it explored whether contextual factors, such as

social status, affected how learners assess instances of impoliteness. In summary, this study contributes to the understanding of how gender and context shape EFL learners' perceptions of impoliteness, offering valuable insights for enhancing intercultural communication and fostering more effective language learning environments.

## METHOD

This study employed a mixed method research design to explore EFL students' perceptions of impolite language and examine the influence of gender differences on their interpretations. The descriptive qualitative approach was selected to allow for an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions without manipulating variables. The research focused on describing how male and female learners evaluate impoliteness in both formal and informal contexts, based on their interpretations of language use in specific social situations.

The participants consisted of 40 EFL learners, including twenty males and twenty females, drawn from undergraduate and postgraduate programs in two Indonesian cities, Bandung and Kendari. The participants' ages ranged from nineteen to thirty-eight years old. They were selected using convenience sampling, as they were accessible and had adequate English proficiency to comprehend the questionnaire. The balanced gender distribution and diverse educational backgrounds provided a representative overview of EFL learners' perceptions of impoliteness in communication.

Data were collected using a questionnaire adapted from a Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) to investigate politeness strategies based on the revised framework proposed by Fathi (2024). The WDCT examined how participants evaluated and responded to face-threatening requests across formal and informal contexts. The instrument comprised fourteen items, including eight closed-ended and six open-ended questions. The closed-ended items required participants to rate the politeness or impoliteness of utterances using a four-point Likert scale ranging from "mostly polite" to "mostly impolite." The open-ended items invited participants to explain their perceptions regarding the influence of gender and social status on impoliteness and to describe their verbal or nonverbal responses to each situation. The questionnaire presented eight scenarios reflecting various communicative contexts: two interactions between high- and low-status speakers, two between low- and high-status speakers, and four between interlocutors of equal status in both formal and informal settings. These situations were designed to assess how social power relations and contextual factors affect students' judgments of impoliteness.

The data collection process was conducted over two weeks using both printed and digital formats. Participants were instructed to read each situation carefully and respond based on their perceptions and experiences. Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality of responses.

The data were analyzed through a combination of quantitative and qualitative procedures. The closed-ended responses were analyzed descriptively using frequency and percentage distributions, while open-ended responses were examined thematically to identify patterns in perceptions and reasoning. It integrated approach allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of how gender and context influence EFL students' perceptions of impolite language in communication.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**
**Findings**
**Male EFL Students' Perceptions of Impolite Language in High- and Low-Status Situations.**
**Table 1. Male EFL Students' Perceptions of Politeness Levels in High- and Low-Status Request Situations (R1 and R7)**

| | Requests | Mostly polite | Slightly polite | Mostly impolite | Slightly impolite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | You are in class, and your teacher wants a pen and says, "Hey, give me your pen." | 1 (5 %) | 5 (25 %) | 8 (40 %) | 6 (30 %) |
| R7 | You are an employee in an office, and your boss needs an extra chair in the meeting room and tells you, "Bring one extra chair to the meeting room." | 6 (30 %) | 13 (65 %) | - | 1 (5 %) |

The findings revealed that male students' perceptions of request speech acts vary depending on the social status of the speaker. In Situation 1, where a teacher made a direct request in a classroom setting ("Hey, give me your pen"), most students (70%) perceived the utterance as impolite, with only a small percentage (5%) considering it mostly polite. It suggested that students expect teachers, as authority figures, to use a higher standard of politeness, as reflected in their responses like "Yes, sir" and "Here it is," indicating an awareness of politeness norms. In Situation 7, however, where a boss asked an employee to bring a chair ("Bring one extra chair to the meeting room"), most students (95%) found the request slightly or mostly polite, reflecting an acceptance of less formal expressions in professional settings. These results suggested that while teachers were expected to be more polite due to their educational role, superiors in professional settings are given more leeway in their requests, as long as the tone does not appear offensive. Overall, the study concluded that perceptions of politeness and impoliteness are influenced by both the social role of the speaker and the context in which the request is made.

**Table 2. Male EFL Students' Perceptions of Politeness Levels in Low- and High-Status Request Situations (R2 and R8)**

| | Requests | Mostly polite | Slightly polite | Mostly impolite | Slightly impolite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R2 | You are explaining a grammatical point in the class as a teacher. Your student has a problem in understanding that point and says, "Repeat this point." | 3 (15 %) | 7 (35 %) | 6 (30 %) | 4 (20 %) |
| R8 | You go to a restaurant. The waiter comes to take your order and tells you, "Order the food." | 2 (10 %) | 3 (15 %) | 9 (45 %) | 6 (30 ) |

Table 2 illustrated participants' perceptions of politeness in two request scenarios: R2 ("Repeat this point") and R8 ("Order the food"). In R2, 35% of participants considered the request slightly polite, while 30% found it mostly impolite, and only 15% viewed it as mostly polite. In contrast, R8 received more negative feedback, with 45% rating it mostly impolite and 30% slightly impolite. The analysis showed that male students tend to interpret these utterances negatively, with a high percentage of impolite responses (50% for R2 and 75% for R8). These findings suggested that students were sensitive to hierarchical and contextual factors in language use. In educational settings, students expected teachers to be addressed with more polite and deferential language, as shown by the students' awareness of social norms. Similarly, in service interactions like R8, students felt that politeness was essential for creating a positive atmosphere, and a direct command like "Order the food" was seen as inappropriate. Their responses indicated an understanding of the need for softened, polite expressions in such contexts. Overall, the study highlighted that perceptions of politeness were shaped by the social roles of the speakers, with greater politeness expected when addressing individuals in higher positions to maintain respect and social harmony.

**Table 3. Male Students' Perceptions of Politeness in Request Speech Acts in a Formal Setting**

| | Requests | Mostly polite | Slightly polite | Mostly impolite | Slightly impolite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R3 | You are at a conference. The presenter is thirsty and wants some water. He tells you, "Bring a glass of water for me." | 1 (5 %) | 3 (15 %) | 7 (35 %) | 9 (45 %) |
| R5 | You are in the office. The phone is ringing. Your colleague is too busy and says, "Can't you hear? Answer the phone." | 1 (5 %) | 3 (15 %) | 9 (45 %) | 7 (35 %) |

The data in Table 3 highlighted male students' perceptions of request speech acts based on the social status of the speaker. In Situation 1, where a teacher requested a pen with the direct statement, "Hey, give me your pen," the majority of students (70%) perceived the utterance as impolite, indicating that students expect teachers, as authority figures, to use more polite language. The informality of "Hey" and the directness of the imperative likely contributed to this perception. Students' responses such as "Yes, sir" and "Here it is" show their recognition of the teacher's authority but their desire for more respectful language. In contrast, Situation 7, where a boss asked an employee to "Bring one extra chair to the meeting room," indicated in more positive perceptions, with 95% of respondents viewing the request as polite. It suggested that students were more accepting of direct speech from superiors in professional contexts, recognizing the appropriateness of such requests within hierarchical structures. Overall, the findings emphasized that perceptions of politeness were influenced by social status and the context in which the request was made, aligning with the idea that politeness norms vary depending on power relations and situational expectations.

**Table 4. Male Students' Perceptions of Politeness in Request Speech Acts in an Informal Setting**

| | Requests | Mostly polite | Slightly polite | Mostly impolite | Slightly impolite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R4 | Your new neighbor needs some money to buy something and tells you: "Lend me some money." | 1 (5 %) | 3 (15 %) | 12 (60 %) | 4 (20 %) |
| R6 | You are in class and your classmate needs an eraser. Your classmate tells you: "Give me your eraser." | 4 (20 %) | 3 (15 %) | 9 (45 %) | 4 (20 %) |

Table 4 presented male students' perceptions of request speech acts made by individuals of equal social status in informal settings, such as neighbors and classmates. The findings revealed that most students had negative perceptions of direct or impolite language, even when used among peers. In Situation 4, where a new neighbor requested money with the phrase "Lend me some money," 60% of students found it mostly impolite, indicating that the direct, commanding tone violated social norms in sensitive matters like borrowing money. Students' responses, including "Of course" and "No," reflected mixed reactions, with some complying and others refusing. In Situation 6, where a classmate asked for an eraser by saying "Give me your eraser," 45% of students rated it mostly impolite. However, their actual responses—such as "Ok, here it is"—showed a relaxed and cooperative tone, suggesting that while informal exchanges were accepted, politeness was still valued. Overall, the data indicated that male students consistently viewed impolite language negatively, regardless of the speaker's equal social status or informal context. The findings highlighted that politeness was crucial for maintaining social harmony and respect, even in casual interactions. These results emphasized that politeness remains a key communicative norm, underscoring its cultural and moral importance in everyday conversations.

**Female EFL Students' Perceptions of Impolite Language in High- and Low-Status Situations**

**Table 5. Female EFL Students' Perceptions of Politeness Levels in High- and Low-Status Request Situations (R1 and R7)**

|  | Requests | Mostly polite | Slightly polite | Mostly impolite | Slightly impolite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R1 | You are in class and your teacher wants a pen and says, "Hey, give me your pen." | - | 5 (25 %) | 4 (20 %) | 11 (55 %) |
| R7 | You are an employee in an office, and your boss needs an extra chair in the meeting room and tells you, "Bring one extra chair to the meeting room." | 2 (10 %) | 4 (20 %) | 6 (30 %) | 8 (40 %) |

Table 5 showed the female students' perceptions of politeness in request speech acts used by individuals of higher social status in formal settings, such as classrooms and workplaces. The results revealed that female students tend to view direct or impolite requests negatively, especially when made by authority figures like teachers and supervisors. In Situation 1, where a teacher said, "Hey, give me your pen," 75% of the students considered it impolite. It high perception of impoliteness suggested that female students were sensitive to tone and expect more respectful language, particularly from educators. Qualitative responses like "Here you are, Sir" reflect that students still responded politely, despite feeling uncomfortable with the teacher's expression. In Situation 7, where a boss instructed an employee to "Bring one extra chair to the meeting room," 70% of the students viewed the request as impolite, emphasizing that politeness markers such as "please" are necessary for maintaining professional respect. Overall, female students associated politeness with comfort and respect, showing a lower tolerance for direct requests. The findings suggested that female students expected higher levels of politeness from authority figures and believed that teachers and leaders should serve as role models for polite communication. In conclusion, these results highlighted a cultural and gender-related tendency for female students to prioritize harmony, empathy, and respect in linguistic interactions, reinforcing the importance of politeness in formal contexts.

**Table 6. Female EFL Students' Perceptions of Politeness Levels in Low- and High-Status Request Situations (R2 and R8)**

| | Requests | Mostly polite | Slightly polite | Mostly impolite | Slightly impolite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R2 | You are explaining a grammatical point in the class as a teacher. Your student has a problem in understanding that point and says: "Repeat this point." | 2 (10 %) | 4 (20 %) | 6 (30 %) | 8 (40 %) |
| R8 | You go to a restaurant. The waiter comes to take your order and tells you, "Order the food." | 2 (10 %) | 1 (5 %) | 9 (45 %) | 8 (40 %) |

Table 6 presented EFL students' perceptions of request speech acts between speakers of different social statuses, specifically in situations where lower-status individuals address higher-status ones (Situation 2) and where service providers address customers (Situation 8). The findings showed that students generally view direct or impolite requests negatively, particularly in hierarchical or service-oriented contexts. In Situation 2, where a student told a teacher, "Repeat this point," 70% of students perceived it as impolite, indicating that they expect teachers to be addressed with more respectful language. The direct command was seen as inappropriate due to the lack of softening strategies, such as "Could you" or "Would you mind." Similarly, in Situation 8, where a waiter told a customer, "Order the food," 85% of students found the utterance impolite, reflecting their expectation that service encounters should be characterized by politeness and friendliness. These findings suggested that students were sensitive to the social hierarchy and expect language to reflect appropriate levels of politeness and respect. The results also highlighted that female students were particularly attuned to the discomfort caused by impolite language, underscoring the emotional and relational impact of communication. In conclusion, the study emphasized that status differences significantly shape students' perceptions of politeness, with polite language being essential in both teacher-student and service-provider-customer interactions.

**Table 7. Female Students' Perceptions of Politeness in Request Speech Acts in a Formal Setting**

|  | Requests | Mostly polite | Slightly polite | Mostly impolite | Slightly impolite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R3 | You are at a conference. The presenter is thirsty and wants some water. He tells you, "Bring a glass of water for me." | 1 (5 %) | 3 (15 %) | 7 (35 %) | 9 (45 %) |
| R5 | You are in the office. The phone is ringing. Your colleague is too busy and says, "Can't you hear? Answer the phone." | 1 (5 %) | 3 (15 %) | 9 (45 %) | 7 (35 %) |

Table 7 highlighted EFL female students' perceptions of politeness in request speech acts between individuals of equal social status in formal settings like conferences and workplaces. In Situation 3, where a presenter requested, "Bring a glass of water for me," 80% of students perceived the utterance as impolite, with many finding it overly direct and lacking refinement, especially in a formal context. Participants expressed discomfort with such imperatives, preferring more polite expressions like "Could you please bring me a glass of water?" This suggests that students associate politeness with both linguistic formality and social sensitivity. Similarly, in Situation 5, where a colleague said, "Can't you hear? Answer the phone," 80% again viewed the request as impolite, perceiving the tone as angry and commanding, which created tension. Students felt that colleagues should use more courteous language to maintain a positive working atmosphere. Overall, the findings indicated that female students place significant importance on politeness in equal-status, formal settings, recognizing that even in peer relationships, requests should be softened to maintain professionalism and respect. These perceptions reflected a strong understanding of politeness norms, emphasizing that politeness is situational and context-dependent, influenced by tone, formality, and interpersonal dynamics.

**Table 8. Female Students' Perceptions of Politeness in Request Speech Acts in Informal Setting**

|  | Requests | Mostly polite | Slightly polite | Mostly impolite | Slightly impolite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| R4 | Your new neighbor needs some money to buy something and tells you, "Lend me some money." | - | 2 (10 %) | 7 (35 %) | 11 (55 %) |
| R6 | You are in class, and your classmate needs an eraser. Your classmate tells you, "Give me your eraser." | 6 (30 %) | 5 (25 %) | 2 (10 %) | 7 (35 %) |

Table 8 presented female EFL students' perceptions of request speech acts in informal, equal-status contexts, such as interactions between classmates and neighbors. In Situation 4, where a new neighbor asked, "Lend me some money," 90% of the students found the request impolite, citing its abrupt and commanding tone as socially inappropriate, particularly when the speaker and listener were unfamiliar. Despite this, many students expressed willingness to help, showing empathy but emphasizing the need for polite language in such requests. In Situation 6, where a classmate asked, "Give me your eraser," responses were more mixed, with 45% viewing the request as impolite and 55% finding it polite. It suggested that familiarity between the speakers influenced perceptions, as students were more accepting of direct requests among friends or peers. Overall, the data showed that female students value politeness, even in informal settings, associating abrupt language with rudeness, while showing greater tolerance for directness in closer relationships. These findings highlighted that female students were particularly sensitive to emotional and social dynamics in communication, recognizing politeness not only as a linguistic feature but also as a social tool to maintain respect and harmony.

**Gender-Based Perceptions of Impoliteness in EFL Communication**

The findings of the open-ended responses revealed distinct patterns in how male and female EFL students perceive impolite language in various contexts. Both male and female students generally expressed negative perceptions toward impolite language, regardless of whether the interaction occurred in formal or informal settings. However, gender differences were evident in their emotional responses to impoliteness. Female students tended to be more emotionally affected by impolite expressions, often describing them as uncomfortable or disrespectful. It was particularly noticeable in formal contexts or when interacting with authority figures, such as teachers or bosses, where direct or abrupt requests were perceived as inappropriate. In contrast, male students were more likely to interpret impolite language in informal settings, such as peer interactions, as acceptable or even humorous. Male students showed a tendency to view direct language as a sign of familiarity or casualness rather than

impoliteness. In both groups, perceptions of impoliteness were strongly influenced by social status and context, with students emphasizing that politeness should be maintained in interactions with authority figures, while more leniency was observed in informal peer-to-peer exchanges. Despite the differences in emotional response, both male and female students agreed on the importance of politeness in communication, particularly in formal settings, to maintain respect and harmony in relationships.

**Discussion**

The findings from this study align with Culpeper et al (2025) in impoliteness framework, which has suggested that impolite language could manifest in various ways depending on context and the relationship between interlocutors. Both male and female students in this study demonstrated negative perceptions of impolite language, indicating a shared understanding of politeness as a social norm. However, the gender differences observed in emotional responses to impoliteness underscore the role of gendered communication patterns, as highlighted in previous studies (Farooq, 2024; Syafrizal & Putri, 2020). Female students were more likely to associate impolite language with emotional discomfort, reflecting a heightened sensitivity to relational dynamics, particularly in formal contexts. It supports the idea that women are generally more attuned to relational harmony and emotional considerations in their communication. In contrast, male students interpreted impolite language in informal settings as more acceptable, viewing directness as a sign of familiarity rather than disrespect. It aligns with findings from Farooq (2024), who noted that men often adopted a more task-oriented communication style, which may prioritize efficiency over relational concerns.

Additionally, the results of the study indicate that social context—such as the formality of the situation and the status of the speaker—greatly influenced perceptions of impoliteness. It is consistent with Fathi's (2024) adaptation of Culpeper's framework, which categorizes impoliteness strategies according to the social distance and power dynamics between interlocutors. The data suggest that both male and female students expected higher levels of politeness from authority figures, such as teachers and bosses, and were more tolerant of impoliteness in peer interactions, reflecting a situational fluidity in the perception of politeness (Yusuf & Resha, 2025). These findings further reinforce the notion that perceptions of impoliteness are not fixed however they are instead shaped by contextual factors such as social roles, hierarchy, and relational proximity.

Ultimately, the study suggests that while gender influences emotional responses to impoliteness, both male and female students share a common understanding of the importance of politeness in fostering respect and harmonious social interactions. It emphasizes the need for educators to incorporate gender-sensitive approaches in teaching politeness strategies, particularly in intercultural settings, where different norms of politeness and impoliteness may exist. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for a broader exploration of how digital

communication and other modern contexts, such as online platforms, may further reshape these perceptions in the future (Hamzah, 2025; Marchito, 2025).

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study investigated EFL students' perceptions of impolite language, focusing on gender differences in how impoliteness is interpreted across various social contexts. The findings revealed that both male and female students generally viewed impolite language negatively, emphasizing the importance of politeness in communication. However, gender differences were observed in emotional responses: female students were more sensitive to impolite expressions, particularly in formal settings and interactions with authority figures. In contrast, male students were more likely to accept directness in informal settings, perceiving it as a sign of familiarity or humor rather than disrespect. Additionally, perceptions of impoliteness were found to be influenced by contextual factors such as social roles, power dynamics, and relational proximity, highlighting the fluid and context-dependent nature of politeness norms. Overall, the study underscores the significance of politeness in fostering respectful and harmonious social interactions, regardless of gender.

Based on the findings, it is suggested that language educators incorporate gender-sensitive approaches into teaching politeness strategies, particularly in intercultural settings, to help students navigate diverse social contexts. Teachers should encourage students to recognize and adapt to the varying expectations of politeness in different situations, emphasizing the importance of contextual factors such as social status and relational closeness. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for further research on how digital communication impacts perceptions of politeness and impoliteness, especially in the context of gendered communication. Future studies could also explore how cultural norms influence students' interpretations of impolite language, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamic and evolving nature of politeness in both offline and online interactions.

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