INVESTIGATING E-(IM)POLITENESS IN PAKISTANI STUDENTS' EMAILS TO FACULTY: A CORPUS-ASSISTED APPROACH

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ABSTRACT
The function of language extends beyond merely describing the world; it also serves to transform it through speech acts, necessitating careful selection of words. Politeness strategies play a crucial role in expressing solidarity and respect, thereby fostering and sustaining positive social relationships. In academic settings, positive relations between teachers and students are linked to improved academic performance. This study investigates linguistic politeness in computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the Pakistani academic context. More specifically, this study aims to identify the politeness strategies by Pakistani students in their email requests to faculty. Employing a sequential mixed-methods research design, a corpus of 32358 tokens was compiled from the emails received by four instructors from two public-sector universities between 2021 and 2023. The selected samples from the corpus were analyzed qualitatively using Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness model. The qualitative findings informed the development of a hypothesis, which was subsequently tested through a computer-assisted corpus-based analysis to triangulate the results. The study addresses a gap in the literature by examining politeness in the Pakistani academic context, contributes to the expanding field of corpus-based politeness research, and offers implications for educational policymaking in Pakistan.
Keywords: Politeness, email, request, corpus based analysis

1. Introduction

In interpersonal communication, speakers frequently avoid direct and explicit expression in order to mitigate potential face-threats and sustain harmonious social interaction. Within pragmatic research, this tendency has been extensively theorized under the rubric of politeness, particularly in the seminal framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, and later refined by scholars emphasizing positive social relations and the discursive construction of politeness (Locher, 2013; Locher & Watts, 2005, 2008). In academic settings, positive relations between teachers and students have been linked to better academic performance (Buka, 2013; Akram & Li, 2024; Ma et al., 2024). Besides face-to-face interaction in the classroom, students frequently communicate with their instructors through various forms of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) to submit assignments, ask questions, or make requests, etc (Akram et al., 2022, 2021a, 2021b; Chen & Ramzan, 2024; Ramzan et al., 2023, 2020). Among the numerous CMC channels, e-mail tends to be "one of the forms of communication consistently used in academia" (Savić, 2018, p. 52). Moreover, the power imbalance between students and faculty is self-evident and requires the former to adopt politeness strategies in email requests (Salazar-Campillo, 2023).

Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) approach aims to explain politeness as a universal strategy to mitigate potential "face-threatening acts" and to tend to the listener's perceived "face needs". A distinction is also drawn between positive face (i.e. one's desire to be

accepted and appreciated) and negative face (one's desire to be autonomous and free of imposition) through a systematic framework that presents different politeness strategies for the mitigation of face-threatening acts.

For instance,

(1)   Pass me the salt.

(2)   Could you please pass the salt?

As we can see, (1) is direct and would probably be considered impolite if one were talking to a distant relative at dinner, while (2) is more indirect and uses careful syntactic construction (in the form of a question rather than an order) and word choice (please) to avoid imposition (i.e., mitigating threat to the listener's negative face).

To put this study in context, Pakistan, as a former British colony, ranks the third-highest in the list of countries with the highest number of English speakers (after the United States of America and India). English is one of the official languages of the country, and as a second language, it is taught as a compulsory subject from elementary to graduate level. Most textbooks in Pakistani educational institutions are in English, and so the electronic communication between students and faculty also takes place in English.

To triangulate the findings, the current study utilizes a qualitative discourse analysis coupled with a corpus-based approach by analyzing the corpus of students' email requests to faculty, comprising 32,164 tokens, using the open-source software AntConc.

Research suggests that politeness affects teachers' perception of students and their abilities and helps cultivate positive relations between teachers and students, leading to better academic performance (Buka, 2013). Student-teacher communication is no longer limited to classrooms (Abdelrady, et al., 2025; Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025). There has been a radical shift towards CMC in academic circles after the COVID-19 pandemic (Urbanek et al., 2023). Students continue to use email to make queries, submit assignments, and request information from faculty, all of which contribute to determining the students' individual relationship with the instructor. However, there is a meager amount of literature available on CMC in the Pakistani academic context. The lack of guidance on exercising e-politeness causes students to struggle with writing effective emails to their faculty. This challenge is further compounded by the fact that such e-correspondence typically occurs in English, which is a second language for students. This study aims to explore and describe the phenomenon of e-(im)politeness within Pakistan's sociocultural context and provide insights into how students, as second-language speakers of English, can be trained to work on their politeness strategies for effective communication with their teachers, and thus cultivate more positive relations in academic settings, leading to improved academic performance.

The objective of this study is to identify the linguistic features and politeness strategies employed by Pakistani students in their email communication with faculty

The following research question guides the focus of this study: What are the politeness strategies employed by Pakistani students in their email requests to faculty?

This research aims to bridge the gap in the existing literature by exploring e-(im)politeness in the Pakistani academic context and providing insights into how Pakistani students communicate more politely and effectively with their faculty in order to achieve positive interpersonal relationships and improved academic performance.

The limitations of this research include its scope, sample size, and generalizability. Moreover, the study has a limited sample size, and a larger dataset may yield more nuanced findings.

Furthermore, this research has limited generalizability because the population under study is limited to public sector universities of Lahore, Pakistan, between 2021 and 2023 (before generative AI chatbots became commonplace), and its findings may not be reproducible in other geographical locations and industries.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Section I: Politeness Theory

Before presenting the review of previous studies that inform this research, it is pertinent to take a close look at the theory – or rather, the set of theories – that drive politeness research. An understanding of the theory is crucial for comprehending and synthesizing the findings and conclusions derived from previous research. Hence, as a first step in the literature review, some familiarity with politeness theory and its history throughout the decades was established.

2.1.1. Facework

A discussion of politeness theory and its development would be incomplete without mentioning the sociological theory of "face-work" by Erwin Goffman (1955). The concept of 'face' can be understood as the image one presents to the world. It is a crucial part of one's social identity: the mask that one wears to interact with others.

The concept of face can be further divided into positive and negative face. One's positive face is how one carries oneself in social interactions, while one's negative face is one's presupposed autonomy. In other words, a positive face is a carefully constructed persona that helps one 'fit in' within society, while a negative face is one's supposed right to be treated as a sovereign individual. According to Goffman, individuals have positive and negative face needs, which are the requirements that need to be fulfilled in order to manage and preserve one's face and maintain a positive self-image.

Face-threatening acts (FTAs) refer to such (speech) acts that tend to challenge or refuse to acknowledge the speaker's or the hearer's face. They can be positive FTAs or negative FTAs. For instance, one's refusal to address an elder with an honorific would be considered a positive FTA in some cultures, as it challenges the positive face of the elder as someone worthy of respect. Similarly, ordering someone to do something without any syntactic or lexical mitigation would be considered a negative FTA since it ignores the hearer's autonomy.

Face work, therefore, refers to the strategies that individuals divulge for smooth and positive social interactions in order to minimize threats to other's faces, as well as one's own. For instance, positive face-work includes expression of solidarity and respect. Negative face-work requires indirectness in one's communication in order to avoid imposition. There are several other kinds of face-work strategies, such as protective face-work, preventive face-work, and restorative face-work, which are employed in accordance with context and social norms.

2.1.2. Brown and Levinson's Framework

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) developed their theory of politeness on the basis of Goffman's (1955) face-work theory. It was one of the earliest models that aimed to study politeness in linguistics. In this theory, politeness is framed as a mitigating phenomenon that redresses face-threatening acts (FTAs). The purpose of politeness is, therefore, to take other's face needs into account and treat them how they want to be treated.

Some speech acts are inherently face-threatening acts. For example, requests threaten a negative face by imposing the speaker's will on the hearer. Similarly, criticism inherently threatens the positive face of the hearer. Other examples of such speech acts include apologies and refusals. Mitigation of such FTAs is carried out through politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson list 4 politeness strategies:

a) Bald on-record: It is when the FTA is carried out with no mitigation. The communication is direct and explicit (e.g., *bring me a glass of water.*).

b) Positive Politeness: It is when the speaker appeals to the hearer's positive face, for instance, by showing solidarity with the hearer (e.g., *hey, we are wearing the same color today!*).

c) Negative Politeness: It is when the hearer's negative face is acknowledged by the speaker, and the communication is carried out in an indirect manner (e.g., *I was wondering if I could borrow your pen for a minute*)

d) Off-record: It is when the intention is communicated implicitly, in the form of a hint (e.g., *I can't seem to find my pen*)

Three sociological variables that affect and determine the choice of politeness strategies, according to Brown and Levinson's framework, are as follows:

a) Social distance: The degree of familiarity between the interlocutors affects the choice of politeness strategy. For instance, what is polite for a friend may be impolite for a stranger.

b) Power difference: One talks differently to one's parents or boss than one does to one's subordinates. More negative politeness may be exercised in communication with a superior, while a bald on-record command may suffice when talking to an inferior.

c) Degree of imposition: The threat level of the FTA is also considered before choosing a suitable politeness strategy.

The weightage formula for an FTA is thus summarized as:

$$Weight = Social\ Distance + Power\ Difference + Rank\ of\ imposition$$

Despite criticism by later researchers (Haugh et al., 2011; Locher & Watts, 2005, 2008), universal application of the concept of face is asserted by Brown and Levinson (1987) to claim the universality of their politeness theory, although the researchers admit that face is subject to cultural elaboration and is thus realized differently in various cultures.

2.2. **Section II: Previous Research**

During the review of relevant literature, certain themes and/or perspectives were observed in politeness research on email communication in the academic context, which helped in shaping the organization of this section.

2.2.1. **Politeness and Computer-Mediated Communication**

Email communication belongs to the larger umbrella of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Literature was reviewed accordingly in order to establish a general background before moving on to the specific research in students' emails to faculty (SERF). Before landmark research by Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) which popularized a new topic of research, namely politeness in student emails to faculty; there were only a handful of studies on politeness in CMC.

CMC-focused politeness research received more attention from researchers in the 2000s. For instance, Duthler (2006) carried out a comparative study on voice notes and emails for properties of politeness from the perspective of communication studies in order to test the hyperpersonal model (1996), which theorized that low-bandwidth, asynchronous, text-based

CMC allowed for more "socially desirable communication." The findings confirmed the hypothesis that email would score higher in politeness since it allowed for careful planning, editing, and composition of the message, as opposed to voicemail. Emails varied in length, formality, and the number of adjunct phrases according to the degree of imposition of the sender's request, while voicemail requests showed no difference for the same variables.

Bremner (2006) performed a qualitative discourse analysis of 479 emails involving various personnel in a university having a back-and-forth discussion about designing and implementing a new curriculum, and explored the factors affecting linguistic choices in emails containing requests. An in-depth analysis reveals that the interlocutors demonstrated an intention to balance personal/professional relations with organizational expectations. The degree of imposition of the request and the relative power difference within the institutional hierarchy, as well as the possibility of multiple readers, appear to influence linguistic choices. After conducting a qualitative study on emails discussing taboo topics of varying severity, Pariera (2006) reported that email communication seems to be developing its own set of politeness norms. Moreover, Brown and Levinson's framework is criticized and deemed ineffective in predicting politeness in email, as the findings "reflect different politeness strategies than would be used in person." However, it must be noted that the study under review used a discourse completion task (DCT) questionnaire to elicit responses from the participants, which brings the findings into question. The use of DCT questionnaires has always been controversial in linguistic research, with much criticism from researchers. Critics assert that data collected through DCT does not accurately represent the use of language in the real world, i.e., naturally occurring linguistic data (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2013; Golato, 2003; Pfingsthorn & Floeck, 2016). Therefore, this research addresses this criticism and focuses on 'real' or 'authentic' emails as the object of this study.

2.2.2. Exploratory Research on Politeness Strategies in EFL Emails

Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) remains the most cited article related to this current study and should be credited with popularizing politeness research on SERF, especially for adding more categories to CCSARP (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). The findings showed that more direct strategies were employed in requests with lower imposition. However, non-native students lacked linguistic flexibility and appropriate use of lexical modifiers. It is suggested that pedagogical intervention is required to raise the pragmatic awareness of NNS.

EFL students tend to be more direct in their email requests to faculty. For instance, an analysis of 99 emails from a Saudi university using Brown and Levinson's framework revealed the preference for direct requests (Bulut & Rabab'ah, 2007). These findings were corroborated by studies in other countries, such as Cyprus (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2018), the Philippines (Briones & Liwanag, 2023), and China (Lee, 2004), Malaysia (Alafnan & Rudio, 2023), Turkey (Burgucu-Tazegul et al., 2016), Pakistan (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024; Ramzan et al., 2025, 2023, 2021), USA (Winans, 2020), Japan and Germany (Danielewicz-Betz, 2013), among others.

On the contrary, Trang (2019) claims that Vietnamese EFL students tend to use more indirect strategies, suggesting the role of culture and the possibility of pragmatic transfer of L1 norms. However, the study under review only analyzed a small corpus of 40 emails through AntConc, which may not have been a representative sample of the population under study. Furthermore, there is a tendency to prefer positive politeness over negative politeness by EFL students. (Briones & Liwanag, 2023) performed a qualitative analysis on 95 emails by

Filipino university students to determine the most common politeness strategies using Brown and Levinson's model. The results showed a marked preference for negative strategies, which were used by 39 students, compared to positive politeness used by only six students. This shows the cultural impact as well as the social distance and power asymmetry between students and faculty in Filipino institutions, since greater distance in power and rank seems to result in negative politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Another interesting observation was the recurrence of the Filipino politeness marker "po" in emails written in English without any regard to the politeness strategy in use.

In summary, exploratory research on politeness strategies reveals that EFL students prefer positive politeness in requests, with some exceptions. However, the research literature on this same topic is limited in the Pakistani context. The current study aims to fill this gap in the literature.

2.2.3. Similar Politeness Research in the Pakistani Context

As mentioned earlier, limited research has been found on politeness in student email requests to faculty in the Pakistani context. Haider and Zandi (2022) conducted a metapragmatic study on impoliteness in Pakistani SERFs. Six emails were rated by 152 professors (native and non-native English speakers) in a perception questionnaire. The findings revealed that non-native professors were more tolerant of the lack of acknowledgment of imposition in student requests. Moreover, senior faculty were found to be more tolerant of the lack of face enhancement than their junior counterparts.

The most similar research to this current research is a recent study (Shahzadi et al., 2021) that compared the politeness and request strategies of Pakistani students and Chinese students in a Pakistani university. The results suggest that Chinese students employ more indirect strategies, while Pakistani students use more direct strategies, incorporating different markers and terms of endearment to convey positive politeness. However, the study utilized the DCT method, along with a small sample size (n = 40), which are shortcomings that this current research aims to overcome.

2.2.4. Corpus-Based Politeness Research

Corpus-based politeness research seems to be an emerging trend, ranging from the historical corpora of Shakespeare's plays (Oliver, 2022), an ancient Egyptian king's letters (Ridealgh, 2016) Cicero's requests in ancient Rome (Dickey, 2016) to more contemporary corpora of Hilary Clinton's controversial emails (De Felice & Garretson, 2018), academic book-review articles (Diani, 2018), Twitter and the Chinese social media platform Weibo (Li et al., 2020), among others. However, corpus-based politeness in the context of SERFs remains limited.

In conclusion, the review of the previous literature reveals a dearth of politeness research on SERFs, a) in the Pakistani context in particular, and b) with the help of corpus linguistics tools in general, which are the gaps in the literature that the current study aims to address.

3. Methodology

The current study is rooted in an abductive approach to research, which combines the elements of deduction and induction. A deductive approach is theory-driven, meaning it takes an established theory and tests it against the data under specific conditions. An inductive approach, on the other hand, seeks to generalize the findings from the study of specific circumstances in order to establish a new theory or to add to an established theory. Therefore, the abductive approach moves back and forth between theory and data, with both playing an

equally significant role in informing the researcher's methodological choices throughout the study.

3.1. **Research Design**

The current study utilized a mixed-method research design. The same qualitative data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively to arrive at results and their interpretation. The rationale behind the choice of mixed-method design was the need to develop a holistic understanding of politeness in Pakistani student-teacher emails.

Linguistic research inescapably deals with qualitative data on one level or the other. Qualitative analysis alone, however, presents to us only one side of the picture. For an in-depth understanding grounded not only in theory but also in data, the current research used a
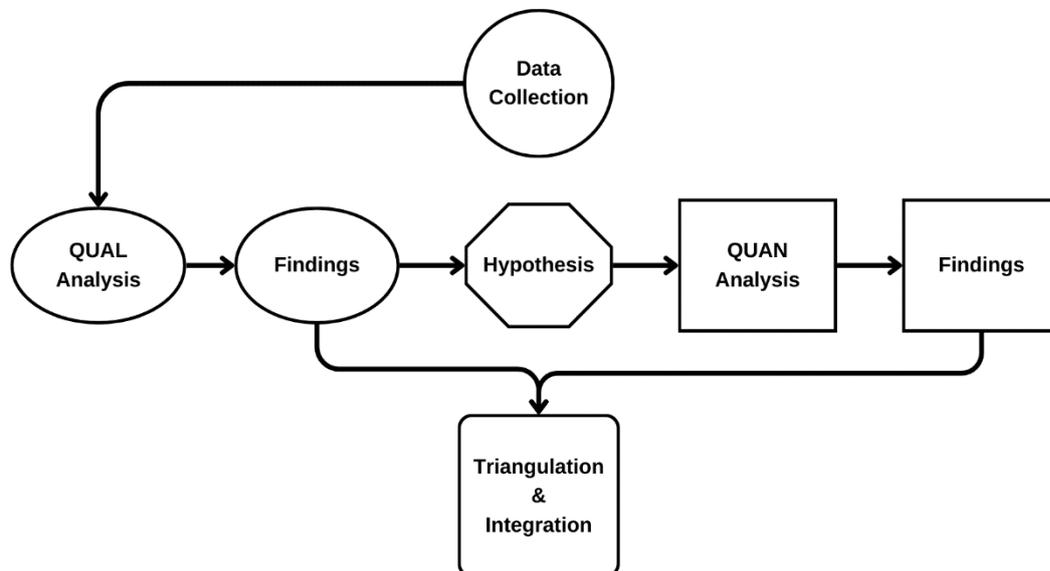

Figure 3.1 Sequential Mixed Methods Research Design

computer-assisted quantitative analysis of the specialized email corpus under study. Combining the two separate methods allowed the researcher not only to gain more insights into the dataset but also to triangulate our findings.

3.2. **Data collection**

A combination of convenience sampling and purposive sampling was employed for the collection of data, i.e., student emails to faculty. The original recipients were six lecturers from two public-sector universities of Lahore, chosen for convenience of access. Although the emails were anonymized before they reached the researcher, the lecturers described their students as undergraduates between 18 and 22 years of age with diverse cultural backgrounds. Lahore is the second largest metropolitan city in Pakistan and the provincial capital of the most populated province of Punjab. It is the city of choice for students pursuing higher education nationwide, especially in public-sector universities. Hence, their emails may be generalizable to the public sector universities in Lahore, Pakistan.

Purposive sampling was employed in the development of a specialized corpus, which (after concurrent qualitative analysis) reached a saturation point of around 30,000 tokens. The inclusion criteria for sampling were defined as the following:

a) The selected email must contain at least one speech act of request.

b) The emails must be sent/received between June 2021 and June 2023.

The rationale for the former criterion was that the request is not only the most commonly found speech act in student-faculty emails but is also face-threatening in itself since it seeks to influence the autonomy of the requestee while the choice for the specific time period mentioned in the latter criterion was the homogeneity of the sample since the time before the initial period was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic-induced lockdown and the subsequent online classes. However, a separate study into the email correspondence during the COVID-19 lockdown may have potential for exploration.

Initial sampling revealed some common keywords in the target emails, such as "help," "issue," "problem," and, of course, "request," which facilitated further data collection by the use of search engines within the contributing faculty's inboxes. The emails were anonymized by removing any and all personal information, including names, batch numbers, student IDs, etc. while tagging each email at the end by (M) or (F) to indicate the senders' genders.

3.3. **Corpus Customization**

Following data collection, a text file was created to hold the sum total or the entirety of the sub-corpora. Furthermore, an updated version of the target corpus (i.e. tailored corpus) was created by correcting the spelling mistakes found during qualitative analysis. The corrected emails were then separated into two sub-corpora based on the biological sexes of the senders. The rationale behind creating the corrected versions was the need for accuracy, consistency, and noise reduction during the software-assisted quantitative analysis.

Corpus customization included:

a) Correction of spelling mistakes (e.g., _attendence_ became _attendance_, _alot_ became _a lot_ etc.)

b) Standardization of spelling according to American English (e.g., _favour_ became _favor, organise_ became _organize_ etc.)

c) Standardization of variants of the same word (e.g., different versions of the Muslim greeting were standardized as _assalamualaikum,_ different spellings of the address form _madam_)

In summary, the following is a simplified inventory of the different versions of the target corpus and its sub-corpora:

Table 3.1 Details of Corpus and its Versions and Sub-Corpora

Name	No. of tokens	Description	Purpose
Raw Corpus	32,358	The authentic, unaltered sample in its entirety	Qualitative Analysis
Tailored corpus	32,164	The original corpus after spelling correction	Quantitative Analysis

3.4. **Data Analysis**

3.4.1. **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Multiple analytical frameworks had to be chosen out of necessity to address each research question. The first research question dealt with politeness strategies, hence Brown and Levinson's (1978) model seemed to be the optimal choice for analysis.
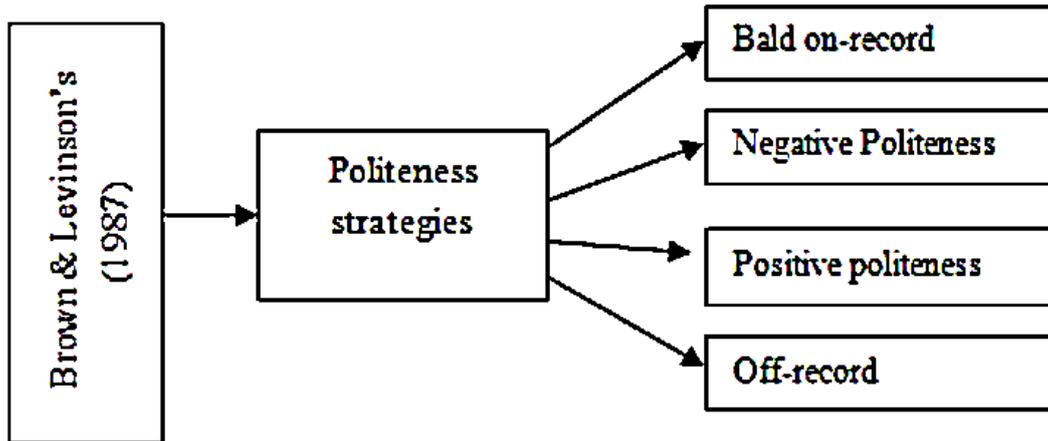

Figure 3.2 Politeness Strategies in Brown and Levinson's Model

3.4.2. **Computer-Assisted Corpus Analysis**

After correcting spelling mistakes and standardizing spellings in the raw corpus, the tailored corpus was imported into AntConc (an open-source corpus linguistics tool developed by Laurence Anthony) to explore the corpus quantitatively in accordance with the research objectives. Frequency counts of content words were used as a starting point. Grammatical words were largely ignored, except for modal verbs, as they were observed to be part and parcel of indirect requests using negative politeness. The top 30 most frequently occurring words were then explored in context through a concordance analysis using the keyword-in-context (KWIC) feature of AntConc in order to filter out irrelevant words and shortlist words that contributed to politeness. The process was repeated to further categorize the words into kinds of politeness to arrive at results.
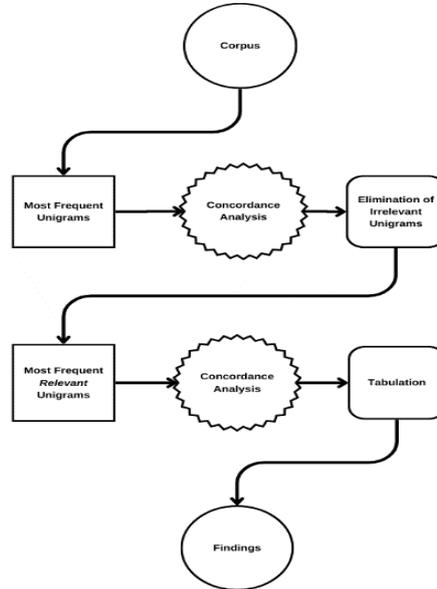
Figure 3.3 Concordance Analysis

4. Data Analyses & Results

Given the sequential mixed-method research design, this chapter is divided into two sections. Section I describes qualitative data analysis with examples from data, followed by the findings in tabular and graphic form. A hypothesis based on the qualitative findings is formulated in order to be tested by a subsequent corpus-based analysis. Section II recounts the step-by-step testing of hypotheses through the corpus-based analysis in detail. Examples from the corpus are presented, along with a number of KWIC/concordance screenshots.

4.1. Qualitative Data Analysis

A qualitative analysis of 100 emails revealed a total of 164 politeness moves (***Table 4.1***), comprising 92 and 65 moves of positive and negative politeness strategies, respectively. Bald on-record and off-record strategies were used only 4 and 3 times, respectively.

Table 4.1

Politeness Strategies (Number of Occurrences)

	Bald On-Record	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Off-Record**	**Total**
Male	3	45	35	1	84
Female	1	47	30	2	80
Total	4	92	65	3	164

To get a clearer understanding, the number of occurrences of each strategy was divided by the total number of occurrences and multiplied by 100 to obtain percentages for each category (***Table 4.2***)

Table 4.2

Politeness Strategies (percentage)

	Bald On-Record	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Off-Record**
Male	3.5	53.6	41.7	1.2
Female	1.2	58.8	37.5	2.5

Total	2.4	56.1	39.6	1.8

Results indicate that Pakistani students seem to prefer positive politeness strategies over negative politeness in their emails to faculty (Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2)
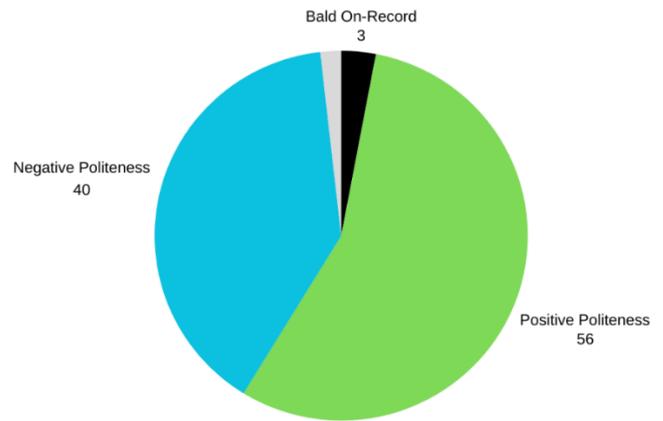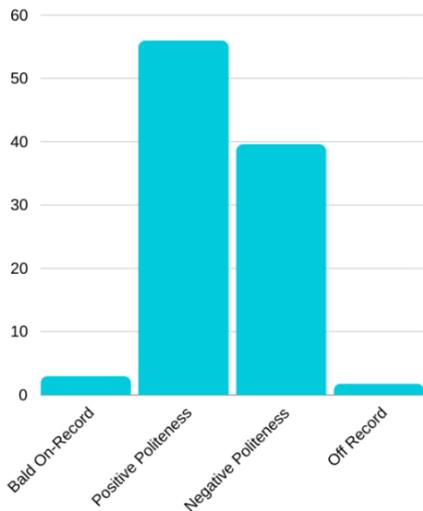

Figure 4.1 Politeness Strategies

Figure 4.2 Politeness Strategies

It was observed that most of the positive politeness moves were found in the form of what could be termed "ritual politeness," conveyed through formulaic utterances that constitute email openings and closings. For example:

(1) *Assalamualaikum Madam*

Hope this finds you in good health.

I got 84 marks and A- grade in Economics and by increasing only 1 number, my grade could be increased from A- to A. I request you to kindly increase my grade, which will help me in maintaining my CGPA.

I eagerly await your response and hope for a positive outcome.

Regards[Name]

In email (1), the students start with three positive politeness moves in the very beginning, namely the greeting (*Assalamualaikum*), the honorific (*Madam*), and the opening formula (*Hope this finds you in good health*). Similarly, the request head act (*I request you*) coupled with a lexical politeness marker (*please*) also contributes to positive politeness. The ending shows optimism (*...hope for a positive outcome*), which is also a sub-strategy of positive politeness. Finally, the ending formula (*regards*) also shows positive politeness by 'giving a gift' to the hearer.

4.2. Hypotheses Formulation

Based on the results of qualitative analysis, the following hypothesis was formulated (to be tested through a corpus-based analysis):

H1: Pakistani students prefer positive politeness strategies over negative politeness strategies in their email requests to faculty

4.3. Corpus-Based Analysis

After customization of corpus (as detailed in Methodology section), AntConc was used to find the top 30 most frequent words in the corpus (***Table 4.3***). The choice of the number 30

was arbitrary and yet it seemed like a suitable choice since the corpus consisted of 30,000 tokens in total.

Table 4.3

Most Frequent Unigrams

Rank	Word	Freq.
1	madam	407
2	request	242
3	will	222
4	assalamualaikum	214
5	marks	197
6	hope	186
7	please	172
8	kindly	158
9	well	144
10	would	128
11	can	126
12	regards	123
13	time	118
14	semester	111
15	course	102
16	thank	101
17	sir	100
18	email	96
19	class	88
20	exam	80
21	grade	80
22	student	76
23	help	71
24	quiz	71
25	finds	64
26	writing	63
27	doing	62
28	could	61
29	do	57
30	health	56

After running concordance for each word using KWIC (keyword-in-context) feature of AntConc (Figure 4.3, Figure 4.4, Figure 4.5, Figure 4.6, and Figure 4.7), the words that did not contribute to positive or negative politeness strategy were deleted from the list of 30 most frequent words in the corpus, and shortlisted words were tabularized (***Table 4.4***)

:end the deadline for the Lab task. Thank you for your understanding. (M) Sir,	can	you please replace my F grade with an I . It's a kind request i
(F) Madam what are your free hours for today. If you are not available today	can	you please share you availability for tomorrow? I have to get my general form
be held tomorrow(Friday),because i had not attempted the online exam. So,	can	you please share me the online exam, that was held on SEB.This will help
you. Regards (F) Assalamualaikum madam I hope this email finds you well.	Can	you please share dummy data file of hostelite students so that we can start m
ove 30 or so because my paper was went so well but on CMS I am seeing 23.	Can	you please again check my marks from the paper? I will be really obliged if
esday). That is not available. I have confirmed form one other student as well.	Can	you please check? Also, my humble apologies for the inconvenience being ca
emester and ask for compensation assignments from teachers. Dear Madam,	can	you please give me some time to complete any of the assignments and not fa
3 references for it. An email will be sent to you titled 'reference for Fulbright'.	Can	you please have a look into it? Thank you, madam. Regards (F) Assalamualail
MCQ's. Thanks in advance. (X) Respected Madam, I hope you are doing well.	Can	you please increase the time of submission of the Case Study? We were havin
of that I'm unable to attend today's lecture as no one was at home.	Can	you please mark my attendance for today's lecture I'll be very thankful to
(batch 2008-2012). . i want to apply for PhD. and i need a reference letter .	Can	you please provide me a reference letter so that I may apply for admission? I
nave applied in University of Alberta for Masters and I need 3 references for it.	Can	you please refer me, If I send you my transcript ? I will be very grateful
secondly due to the time shortage I had to finish my exam in a hurry. So	can	you please show some leniency in checking the exam. Moreover, there is anc
SUPARCO). I need a little career counseling regarding job and further studies.	Can	you please spare 15 minutes to guide me about it. Looking forward to your re
Assalamualaikum Madam, Madam other teachers have finalized my results.	Can	you please tell me my marks in economics after the sessional marks? Kindly I
lable. The last lecture (05-Apr-21, Monday) is also not uploaded yet. Madam,	can	you please upload both? Some teachers provide us with the link to the Googl
d I want to do specialization in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence mainly.	Can	you please write a recommendation letter for me as some unis require this let

Figure 4.3 Concordances of "can"

u. Please consider my request. Regards: (M) added Assalamualaikum Madam,	Hcpe	you are doing well. Madam I'm writing you to inform that there is some
ly appreciated. Thanks and regards, Yours sincerely, (M) Assalamualaikum,	Hcpe	you are doing well. Respectfully, Madam my grade is changing with two numl
tter, it'd be great favor to me! Regards (M) Assalamualaikum respect Madam,	Hcpe	you are doing well. This email is to request you for a favor. I lost
be you will put some considerations on my request. (M) Assalamualaikum Sir,	Hcpe	you are doing well. I have just received my result of EAD midterm and was
sy me in this mail so reset my password thanku (X) Assalamualaikum Madam!	Hcpe	you are doing well. Madam we want to request to you regarding midterm exai
t and I hope you will pass me in the course JazakAllah (X) Assalamualaikum! I	hcpe	you are fine and enjoying good health. Basically, I am absent that day i did
tion to my request. Yours sincerely, (F) Assalamualaikum! Respected Madam,	Hcpe	you are fine and doing well. Madam, I have a request for you regarding my
ll be satisfied with the reasons. Thank you! -- Regards, (M) Assalamualaikum!	Hcpe	you are fine and working well. Madam as I discussed with you in the class
ly thankful to you. (Allah Hafiz Fi Aman Allah) (M) AssalamuAlaikum Madam,	Hcpe	you are fine and doing well. Madam Alhamdullillah our semester went really w
bmission date for me. I'll be highly thankful to you. (F) Assalamualaikum Sir! I	hcpe	you are well. I am your former student -----, BSEF15M. Sir! Actually i need 2-3
ill be highly obliged. Thanking in anticipation! (F) Assalamualaikum Madam! I	hcpe	you are well. I am your former student __. Madam! Actually, i need 2-3 Referer
appreciate your time and consideration of my situation. Sincerely, (M) A.o.A! I	hcpe	you are well. Sir i study Digital Logic and Designing (DLD) from you in this
Your participation will be highly appreciated. Regards (F) Assalamualaikum! I	hcpe	you are enjoying good of your health. Madam just received your message via
earing about your kind response. -- Regards (M) Assalamualaikum. Madam! I	hcpe	you are enjoying Ramazan. Madam i need your help. I want to know our exam
SS of my attendance with this email. (M) Assalamualaikum Madam! I	hcpe	you are fine. As there will be the quiz of CS afternoon and i become
ay Allah bless you Ameen. Thanks in advance. (M) Assalamualaikum Madam,	Hcpe	you are fine. Madam, I'm Muhammad Anas, a student of BS-IT fall 2016-2020 a

Figure 4.4 Concordances of "hope"

cial approval for my leave from the administrative office. Thank you for your	time	and consideration. I look forward to a positive resolution. (M) Sir it is humbly
cial approval for my leave from the administrative office. Thank you for your	time	and consideration. I look forward to a positive resolution. (M) Sir it is humbly
reflect my overall comprehension of the course content. Thank you for your	time	and consideration of my request. I appreciate your guidance and am open to
equest you to consider it before that issue is solved, please. I appreciate your	time	and consideration of my situation. Sincerely, (M) A.o.A! I hope you are well.
equest you to consider it before that issue is solved, please. I appreciate your	time	and consideration of my situation. Sincerely, (M) A.o.A! I hope you are well.
e your willingness to assist me in this process. Thank you very much for your	time	and consideration. Best regards, (F) Dear Ms. Khan, I hope this email finds yo
ur attention to this matter. I eagerly await your response. Thank you for your	time	and consideration. Sincerely, (M) Assalamualaikum Hope you are doing wel
iligently and made sincere efforts to excel in my studies. Thank you for your	time	and understanding. Sincerely, (F) Dear Madam, I hope this email finds you in
iligently and made sincere efforts to excel in my studies. Thank you for your	time	and understanding. Sincerely, (F) Dear Madam, I hope this email finds you in
uld provide on this matter would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your	time	and assistance. I look forward to your response. Best regards, (F) ASSALAMU
ur consideration and assistance would mean a lot to me. Thank you for your	time	and attention to this request. -------- Warm regards, (M) Assalamualaikum! I
pter 10 slides total cost is not given instead ATC is given" Thank you for your	time	and attention. I look forward to hearing back from you soon. Sincerely, (F) R
that may arise due to the discrepancy. I understand the importance of your	time	and commitment to your students, and I genuinely appreciate your assistanc
ave the lectures. So could my attendance be a problem? Thank you for your	time	and consideration. BSEF21M544 (M) Dear Madam, I hope this email finds you
al information please do not hesitate to reach out to me. Thank you for your	time	and consideration. Warm regards, (X) Madam we cannot come to university
rade and better reflect my understanding of the subject. Thank you for your	time	and consideration. Sincerely, (M) I hope this email finds you in good health
completing survey, please contact: Thank you in advance for your precious	time	and cooperation. Your participation will be highly appreciated. Regards (F) A

Figure 4.5 Concordances of "time"

dness. Yours obediently, (M) Dear PROF. DR. _, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to respectfully request a review appeal regarding a recent decisi
natter. Sincerely, (M) Dear Madam Sadeeqa, I hope this message finds you	well.	I am writing to express my concern regarding the recent notification about t
ve long!!!!!! (M) added Assalamualaikum Madam, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to kindly request a scaling of 1 mark in my economics paper. I
nanks in anticipation (M) Dear Professor Madam, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to kindly remind you of our recent meeting regarding my final r
semester. (M) Dear madam, Assallam o allaikum I hope this letter finds you	well.	I am writing to sincerely apologize for my performance in the recent econon
eciated. Regards, (M) Assalamualaikum Madam, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to inform you of a recent diagnosis I have received. Unfortunate
you for taking the time to read my message. (M) I hope this letter finds you	well.	I am writing as the class representative for FA23-BCS-A regarding a concern
allow us . Thank you. (X) ASSALAMUALAIKUM , I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to inform you of an unforeseen circumstance that has affected
norrow at your office? (X) Dear Madam Sadeeqa, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am writing to request your assistance in providing me with a letter of recon
ttached document. Thank you! (F) Dear Madam, I hope this email finds you	well.	I am reaching out to request your assistance in providing a letter of recomm
you for your time. Best regards, (F) Respected Madam, I hope you are doing	well.	I am reaching out to request your permission to use you as a reference for
ny POM project. Thank You (M) Dear Madam, I hope this message finds you	well.	I am reaching out to request a small adjustment regarding the upcoming M
or me. I'll be highly thankful to you. (F) Assalamualaikum Sir! I hope you are	well.	I am your former student -----, BSEF15M. Sir! Actually i need 2-3 Reference L
iged. Thanking in anticipation! (F) Assalamualaikum Madam! I hope you are	well.	I am your former student __. Madam! Actually, i need 2-3 Reference Letters f
a positive outcome. Regards (M) Assalamualaikum Madam I hope you feel	well.	I am Afghan student Shershah From department of SE. Since we are facing S
is not available for Students. (X) Dear Madam, I hope this message finds you	well.	I am Hamad Munir, Roll No. BITF17M512. Unfortunately, I missed the comm
day. Regards, (F) Respected Madam, Assalamualaikum! I hope you are doing	well.	I am Khadija Parvaiz from mcsf19 morning. I final year student and I along w

Figure 4.6 Concordances of "Well"

. Regards (F) Assalamualaikum Madam. Hope you are doing well. I'm	writing	to you regarding the panel discussion. We are a team of 5 members. One of	
:cript ? I will be very grateful to you. Thank you. Regards (F) Dear Sir, I am __	writing	to you regarding my admission in pucit in evening program . I have comple	
writing to you multiple times on the same issue. I assure you I won't be	writing	to you regarding attendance in the future. (Allah Hafiz Fi Aman Allah) (M) A	
I that day. Today, nobody in the class could remind you about this and I am	writing	to you as a reminder to get my attendance marked. I'll be highly obliged	
I'll provide him with my medical reports tomorrow. Madam, The reason I'm	writing	to you is I was marked absent 4 times during this period and I humbly reque	
u to mark my attendance today. I am sorry for making you feel disturbed by	writing	to you multiple times on the same issue. I assure you I won't be	
aikum Madam, Hope you are doing well. I'm Ammara from the group no. 7	writing	to you on the behalf of my group members Zoha (47) and Bakhtwar (31). W	
ar Madam , I hope this email finds you in good health and high spirits. I am	writing	to you with utmost respect and a sincere request for your guidance and sup	
ration. Best regards, (F) Dear Ms. Khan, I hope this email finds you well. I am	writing	to bring to your attention a conflict that has arisen regarding tomorrow's ec	
ear Madam, I hope this email finds you in good health and high spirits. I am	writing	to bring to your attention a situation that has affected my academic perforn	
ear Madam, I hope this email finds you in good health and high spirits. I am	writing	to bring to your attention a situation that has affected my academic perforn	
iualaikum Sadeeqa Madam! I hope this email finds you in good health. I am	writing	to bring to your attention some concerns regarding my recent assessments	
iualaikum Sadeeqa Madam! I hope this email finds you in good health. I am	writing	to bring to your attention some concerns regarding my recent assessments	
Yours Sincerely, (F) Respected Madam! Hope this mail finds you well. I am	writing	to bring it to your notice that my Arabic Final Resit Marks haven't been	
hope you'll make a way out. (F) hope this email finds you well. I am	writing	to request your kind consideration to scale up add/drop students' marks for	
nshallah. Thanking you in advance. (F) I hope this email finds you well. I am	writing	to request your kind consideration to scale up add/drop students' marks for	
s I need Transcript .. Thank you ! (F) I hope this message finds you well. I am	writing	to request your understanding regarding the delay in submitting my assignr	

Figure 4.7 Concordances of "writing"

Table 4.4

Shortlisted Unigrams Relevant to Politeness Strategies

Rank	Word	Freq.
1	madam	407
2	request	242
3	will	222
4	assalamualaikum	214
6	hope	186
7	please	172
8	kindly	158
9	well	144
10	would	128
11	can	126
12	regards	123
13	time	118
16	thank	101
17	sir	100
18	email	96
23	help	71
25	finds	64
26	writing	63
27	doing	62
28	could	61
30	health	56

Subsequently, after a concordance analysis, the list was divided into two major columns corresponding to each politeness strategy. Words that largely contributed to either politeness strategy were then sorted into the corresponding columns (**_Table 4.5_**).The words that contributed to both positive and negative politeness were removed from the list, for further simplification of analysis.

For instance, the word _will_ showed mixed results. It appeared in negative politeness sub-strategy of 'incurring a debt' (e.g., "It _will_ be a great favor…" and "I _will_ be very thankful to you…"), positive politeness sub-strategy of 'attending to the hearer's interests/wants/needs' (e.g., "I hope you _will_ be at the best of your health" or "You will be happy to know that…"), or instances that included neither (e.g., "…my degree will be complete…"). Therefore, _will_ was not found to be a major contributor to either politeness strategy. Similarly, other words, such as time, email, help, etc., were found to be the same.

Positive politeness was inherent in many of the top frequent words. For example, the honorifics (_madam_ and _sir)_ are used to show respect and recognition towards the listener. The same is the case with the Muslim greeting _assalamualaikum_, closing formula _regards_, and the politeness markers _please, kindly,_ and _thank_ [_you_]. Other words were found – through concordance analysis – to be contributive towards positive politeness through formulaic utterances of greetings, such as _hope_ (e.g., "I hope you are doing well/fine"), _well_ and _finds_ (e.g., "I hope this email finds you well.")

Negative politeness strategies, on the other hand, were realized with the help of only 4 of the top frequent words i.e., _would, can, writing,_ and _could._

Table 4.5

Shortlisted Unigrams contributing to Negative or Positive Politeness

Negative Politeness			Positive Politeness		
Rank	**Word**	**Freq.**	**Rank**	**Word**	**Freq.**
			1	madam	407
			2	request	242
			4	assalamualaikum	214
			6	hope	186
			7	please	172
			8	kindly	158
			9	well	144
10	would	128			
11	can	126			
			12	regards	123
			16	thank	101
			17	sir	100
			25	finds	64
26	writing	63			
			27	doing	62
28	could	61			
			30	health	56

Hypothesis 1 was confirmed by comparing the abovementioned frequency counts of unigrams contributing to negative and positive politeness strategies.

5. Discussion

The present study focused on exploring the politeness strategies of Pakistani students in their email correspondence with faculty. The key finding of this research can be summarized as follows: Pakistani students prefer positive politeness strategies over negative politeness strategies in their email requests to faculty.

The abovementioned finding of Pakistani students' preference for positive politeness strategies is in line with that of Iranian students (Adel et al., 2016) and Filipino students (Briones & Liwanag, 2023), and in contrast with a comparative study on Malaysian and Filipino students (Alafnan & Rudio, 2023). Even though much of the positive politeness was realized through formulaic utterances (e.g., "I hope this email finds you well" or "I hope you are doing well"), greetings, honorifics, closing formulas ("thank you" and "regards"), Pakistani students have a general tendency to have a respectful yet friendly attitude with their faculty. This was especially observed during qualitative analysis in instances where requests were made in a very informal way while relying heavily on the politeness marker *please*, in a manner akin to children expressing their desires to their parents, echoing the observations about Saudi students in Danielewicz-Betz (2013).

5.1. Implications of the Study

Pakistani students' email requests to faculty seem to lack pragmatic competence required for exercising negative politeness and indirectness, which are acceptable in the given context but may result in pragmatic failure in communication with the native speakers of English. Since the world is shrinking every day, thanks to the ongoing growth of digital technology, especially in the last two decades, pragmatic competence in English appears to hold more and more importance in terms of successful international and intercultural communication. Pakistan (along with other countries where English is taught regularly as a compulsory subject and/or as a second language) needs to address the pragmatic side of English through informed policymaking in its school and college syllabi, which result in the formation of basic L2 habits for most students.

Moreover, the alarming rate of spelling and grammatical mistakes in the emails, as well as the students' heavy reliance on set formulas for requests, calls for a policy shift towards teaching English as a language rather than a subject, aided by an SLO-based examination system that rewards creative language production to replace the current system which rewards rote memorization.

5.2. Limitations

The limitations of this research include its scope, sample size, and generalizability, chiefly because of time and budget constraints. Apart from gender, this study does not consider the sociolinguistic aspects (social class, ethnicity) which may also impact politeness. Moreover, the study has a limited sample size, and a larger corpus may reveal more nuanced findings. Furthermore, this research has limited generalizability due to the delimitation of the population to public sector universities of Lahore, Pakistan, between 2021 and 2023, and a similar research in other geographical locations and industries may not lead to the same findings. It would be pertinent to mention that the current research has used only one out of many models of politeness, and using a different model may reveal a different perspective on the subject matter of this study.

5.3. **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on these conclusions, future research should consider experimental studies to determine the efficacy of pragmatics-focused pedagogical interventions on the pragmatic competence of ESL students. Moreover, quantitative metapragmatic studies of native English speakers' perception of politeness in Pakistani emails will make for an exceptional collaborative research project, especially when coupled with qualitative exploration. Furthermore, comparative research on Pakistani monolingual and/or bilingual speakers' realizations of politeness in Urdu (or other regional languages, such as Punjabi, Pashto etc.) and English in intracultural communication will lead to significant findings about the role of language in politeness.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to explore politeness strategies in context of Pakistani students' emails to faculty by using Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness theory coupled with a computer-assisted corpus-based analysis in a mixed-method sequential research design for triangulation and a better insight into the dataset. The analyses revealed Pakistani students' preference for positive politeness in such linguistic behaviors as the prevalence of the greeting *assalamualaikum*, the honorifics *sir* and *madam*, and the usage of code-switching as an expression of solidarity.

The current research bridges the gap in literature by investigating e-politeness in Pakistani context with a key view of gender and culture and contributes to the growing body of linguistic research in Pakistan, and politeness research in general. The findings provide an insight into the pragmatic competence of Pakistani students and have practical implications for educational policymaking in Pakistan.

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