

## Instilling Language Ethics: Strategies for Developing Polite Habits in Elementary Schools

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**ABSTRACT.** This study examines the implementation of polite language habituation in shaping students' character at SDN Sendang 1, Donorojo District, Pacitan Regency, with a focus on teachers' roles and its impact on students' appreciation of achievement and social care. Highlighting polite language habituation as a practical and context-based strategy, this study integrates language use, teacher role modeling, and character development in a primary school setting. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the research involved fifth-grade students, classroom teachers, and the school principal. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing with triangulation to ensure validity. The findings show that polite language habituation has been consistently implemented through teachers' role modeling in both learning activities and daily interactions. This practice significantly fosters students' appreciation of achievement and social care, reflected in respectful, empathetic, and polite communication. However, students' spontaneous initiative in demonstrating social care requires further strengthening through continuous habituation. The study concludes that polite language habituation is an effective character education strategy that should be reinforced through collaboration among schools, teachers, and parents.

**Keywords:** *polite language use, character education, appreciation of achievement, social care, elementary school*

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is the cornerstone of human civilization, inherently dynamic and extending across the lifespan as lifelong learning, enabling individuals to adapt to social change and develop essential competencies for personal and societal advancement (Thwe & Kálmán, 2024). As a fundamental human endeavor, education is integral to human existence, facilitating optimal development of human potential and dignity. In Indonesia, Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System states that education serves to develop capabilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation, not only through cognitive advancement but also by nurturing spiritual strength, self-discipline, mature personality, intellectual intelligence, noble character, and

practical skills for societal contribution (Fikri et al., 2023). Contemporary research underscores that character education has become fundamental within modern curricula to address moral challenges and reinforce national values amidst globalization and technological transformation (Setyowulandari et al., 2025). Thus, education should be understood as a deliberate, systematic orchestration by policymakers and educators to holistically cultivate learners' cognitive, affective, and social dimensions in response to evolving societal needs.

In practical terms, education is fundamentally oriented toward transforming students' behavior from less civilized patterns into conduct that reflects moral integrity and social responsibility. One of the most salient indicators of this transformation is language use, as language functions not only as a communicative medium but also as a core social instrument shaping attitudes, values, and interpersonal relations. As social beings, humans inherently rely on language to interact, negotiate meaning, and establish their identity and existence within society. Through both spoken and written forms, language continuously influences cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of human life (Mailani et al., 2022).

Language serves as a primary bridge connecting individuals in social contexts, enabling the transmission of messages, ideas, perspectives, and arguments effectively. Recent studies emphasize that communicative competence is closely linked to character formation, as polite, empathetic, and context-sensitive language use fosters mutual respect, social harmony, and moral awareness among learners (Sari et al., 2023; Kim & Lee, 2024). Therefore, effective communication requires not only linguistic accuracy but also pragmatic and ethical awareness from both communicators and communicants. In educational settings, the consistent use of appropriate language plays a strategic role in shaping students' personalities holistically, reinforcing positive character values through daily interaction and habituation.

Politeness is a crucial yet frequently overlooked aspect of language use, despite its fundamental role in shaping social harmony and reflecting national character. Language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a medium for transmitting values, norms, and ethical conduct within society. Recent studies emphasize that the cultivation of polite language from an early age is essential for fostering respectful social interaction and preventing communicative conflict (Locher & Larina, 2019). In this context, schools hold a strategic position as formal institutions responsible not only for cognitive development but also for systematic character formation. Educational institutions serve as social laboratories where values such as respect, empathy, and mutual appreciation are internalized through daily interactions (Lickona, 2020). Within the school environment, language becomes the primary instrument connecting teachers, students, and the broader educational community, making politeness principles inseparable from communicative practices. The realization of polite language use in schools is therefore closely linked to communicative competence and pragmatic awareness, which together shape students' social sensitivity and character development in a sustainable manner (Taguchi, 2024).

The assessment of language politeness involves at least two main parameters, namely how a person speaks (mode) and to whom a person speaks (speech partner). Essentially, language politeness is a manifestation of ethics in social interaction, demonstrated through appropriate and courteous diction, while considering variables such as place (where), time (when), interlocutor (to whom), and the purpose of the conversation. Politeness is an integral part of linguistic aspects expressed in daily communication. Psychologically, humans generally feel more comfortable receiving polite expressions than harsh or confrontational ones (Regina Permatadewi & Tantiany Gunawan, 2023). This indicates that politeness is a competence that must be possessed by every individual, encompassing behavior, attitudes, actions, and linguistic conduct. According to Yanti et al., (2020), politeness is a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate social interaction by minimizing potential conflicts and friction that often occur in human relationships. In line with this, Ratna (2021) defines politeness in interaction as a means of showing awareness

of others' "face" or self-esteem. This politeness is comprehensively reflected in ways of dressing, behaving, and speaking, all of which adhere to linguistic norms.

The ability to use polite language is widely recognized as a fundamental social skill that should permeate all facets of human interaction, including formal educational settings. In the context of classroom interactions, language serves not only as a medium for delivering content but also as a vehicle for establishing mutual respect, facilitating smooth communication, and fostering a positive learning environment. Research in classroom discourse indicates that politeness strategies employed by both teachers and students significantly influence the quality of interaction and the overall educational experience. These strategies, derived from pragmatic theories of politeness, include various forms such as positive politeness, and direct or indirect speech acts that help maintain respect among interlocutors (Pang, 2022).

In teaching and learning activities, reciprocal communication is central to the instructional process. Effective communication marked by respectful and polite language has been shown to support harmonious teacher student interactions and create inclusive classroom atmospheres that encourage participation, reduce anxiety, and enhance student engagement. Studies reveal that positive politeness strategies, in particular, are frequently used to build rapport and maintain constructive relationships within classrooms, enabling a respectful exchange of ideas and feedback between teachers and learners.

Despite this theoretical and empirical background, contemporary educational environments face considerable challenges in sustaining polite language use among students. The increasing influence of digital media and informal communication norms has contributed to patterns of interaction that may prioritize brevity or emotional expressiveness over formal politeness conventions, especially among younger learners. For example, anecdotal and observational evidence suggests that some students begin to adopt less polite forms of speech including inappropriate use of casual or low-register language when addressing teachers or peers, signaling a potential erosion of traditional politeness norms. While localized studies (Kusuma et al., 2022) have documented such phenomena in specific school contexts, analogous concerns are echoed in broader classroom discourse research that highlights variations in politeness strategy use and its impact on learning dynamics.

To address these challenges, educational interventions must be grounded in pedagogically sound practices that incorporate appropriate content, methodologies, and supportive media. Learning resources should not only facilitate cognitive development but also embed social-pragmatic competencies that reflect students' lived realities and cultural contexts. As Pamungkas (2023) argues, effective instructional materials are those that integrate students' real-life experiences and promote holistic engagement across disciplinary boundaries. Strengthening these materials with explicit attention to language ethics and politeness norms is crucial for character development and for orienting learners toward respectful social participation.

In the realm of character education, scholars contend that the cultivation of ethical conduct of which language politeness is an integral component is central to educational aims. Character education frameworks emphasize not merely cognitive or academic outcomes but the formation of moral values and interpersonal competencies. The consistent application and internalization of politeness in classroom discourse serve as both an indicator and a mechanism of character development, helping learners internalize respect, empathy, and social responsibility traits essential for navigating increasingly complex social environments. This underscores the rationale for investigating politeness-related behaviors in primary education, where early patterns of interaction can have enduring effects on students' social and moral growth.

Consequently, this study focuses on the efforts to habituate polite language use as a strategy for fostering student character at SDN Sendang I, Donorojo District, Pacitan Regency. By examining how politeness manifests in everyday interactions and how it correlates with

broader character traits, this research aims to contribute empirical insights into the role of language use in education and to inform more effective, culturally responsive pedagogical practices.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design aimed at obtaining an in-depth understanding of social phenomena as they naturally occur in the field. Qualitative research emphasizes the exploration of meanings, experiences, and interpretations constructed by individuals or groups in relation to a particular social context (J. W. & Poth, 2023). Through this approach, researchers seek to capture rich, contextualized data that reflect participants' perspectives, behaviors, and interactions without manipulation of the research setting. Descriptive qualitative design is particularly appropriate for studies focusing on educational practices and character development, as it allows researchers to portray phenomena comprehensively based on real conditions in schools (Miles et al., 2014)

This research was conducted at SDN 1 Sendang, Donorojo District, Pacitan Regency, during the 2022/2023 academic year. The research subjects consisted of five fifth-grade students selected randomly, two homeroom teachers, and the principal of SDN 1 Sendang. The selection of participants was intended to provide diverse perspectives on the implementation of polite language habituation, encompassing students as primary participants, teachers as facilitators of character education, and the principal as the policy maker at the institutional level.

Data collection techniques employed in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation, which are commonly used methods in qualitative educational research to ensure data richness and depth (Creswell & Poth, 2023). Observations were conducted to examine students' behavior during the learning process, particularly focusing on their ability to apply polite language in daily classroom interactions as part of character formation. This method enabled the researcher to directly capture authentic behaviors and interactions in natural classroom settings.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to obtain in-depth information from teachers, students, and the principal regarding their experiences, perceptions, and strategies related to the habituation of polite language in fostering students' character development. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in probing participants' responses while maintaining alignment with the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Documentation, including lesson plans, school regulations, and relevant records, was used as supporting data to strengthen and contextualize findings obtained from observations and interviews.

To ensure data validity and trustworthiness, this study applied technique triangulation and source triangulation by comparing data obtained from different methods and participants. Triangulation enhances the credibility of qualitative research by minimizing researcher bias and increasing the consistency of findings across data sources (Miles et al., 2020). Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative analysis following systematic stages, including data preparation, data familiarization through repeated reading, data coding, and thematic interpretation. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), coding and theme development are essential processes in qualitative analysis to identify patterns of meaning and construct a coherent interpretation aligned with the research focus

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

This section presents a comprehensive overview of the data collected during the research period through observation, interviews, and documentation at SDN Sendang 1. The focus of this description is on how the habituation of polite language use was implemented and the extent to

which it impacted the formation of students' character. The data obtained illustrate dynamic interactions between educators as role models and students as subjects who internalize these values.

### **Description of Teacher Observation Data**

Based on periodic observations conducted in the school environment, teachers at SDN Sendang 1 have demonstrated remarkable commitment in positioning language as an instrument of character education. Teachers play an active role in creating a learning atmosphere grounded in the values of politeness. This was identified in two main aspects, namely the development of the character of appreciating achievement and the character of social care. Teachers consistently use appreciative and interactive word choices in every learning interaction.

In efforts to cultivate the character of appreciating achievement, teachers actively provide positive verbal reinforcement for every progress shown by students. Not only focused on academic achievement, teachers also appreciate students' courage in expressing opinions or simply demonstrating hard work in the classroom. Evidence of this success can be seen in the observation sheets, where all indicators of achievement received check marks in the positive assessment column. Teachers do not merely give instructions, but also embed moral values through polite speech, so that students feel valued as unique and potential individuals.

In the aspect of cultivating the character of social care, teachers at SDN Sendang 1 demonstrate that politeness serves as a bridge of empathy. Teachers consistently use invitational and helpful expressions rather than issuing authoritarian commands. The use of key expressions such as politely asking for help with a gentle tone and expressing gratitude for every small assistance from students has become a daily routine. Observation results indicate that teachers have implemented the entire series of habituation activities very well, which automatically builds behavioral standards for students to emulate in their daily lives.

### **Student Observation Data**

The dynamics occurring among students at SDN Sendang 1 indicate a behavioral transformation aligned with the habituation carried out by teachers. Based on observations of students' behavior, it is evident that the character of appreciating achievement has begun to take firm root. This is documented in how students give positive responses to their peers' achievements. No expressions that demean or belittle others were found; instead, students have become accustomed to providing polite verbal appreciation as a form of moral support.

Regarding the aspect of social care character, the majority of students show significant development in the use of ethical language during social interactions. Students have been able to apply norms of politeness, such as asking permission before using others' belongings or offering apologies when minor frictions occur in social interactions. Although, in general, indicators of politeness have been met by most students, the researcher notes that the level of initiative in offering help still requires continuous stimulation so that it can develop into a behavior that emerges automatically without needing to be prompted by the surrounding environment.

### **Discussion**

The analysis of the findings in the field confirms that the habituation of polite language use at SDN Sendang 1 is a fundamental element within the ecosystem of character education. Polite language use is not viewed narrowly as merely a matter of linguistic etiquette, but rather as a reflection of emotional maturity and ethical depth. Through language, students learn to respect others, understand normative boundaries, and manage personal ego in order to create a harmonious learning environment.

The importance of this habituation is reflected in several crucial and interconnected points. First, polite language use represents a concrete form of respect for the dignity of fellow human

beings. At SDN Sendang 1, students are taught that every word they utter has a psychological impact on the listener. By habituating greetings and gentle speech, students train themselves to become humble individuals. Second, this practice serves as a means for students to manage their emotions. The ability to remain polite when feeling angry or disappointed is a form of high self-control, which directly shapes a stable and wise character.

Third, language politeness encourages the development of open and tolerant attitudes. Students learn to listen without interrupting and to respect differing opinions without feeling threatened. This is particularly important in fostering healthy dialogue amid the diversity of students' backgrounds. Fourth, the ability to communicate politely enhances the quality of broader social interactions, in which students learn to express their aspirations assertively while remaining respectful. Fifth, these positive impacts extend to the realm of academic achievement. An environment free from verbal bullying fosters students' confidence to actively participate in learning activities, which ultimately triggers the attainment of more optimal learning outcomes.

Philosophically, the success of habituation at SDN Sendang 1 aligns with Imam Al-Ghazali's perspective on the essence of character (*akhlaq*). According to his view, character or morality is not something that is deeply deliberated before being acted upon, but rather a spontaneity of the soul that has become an integral part of the individual. The continuous habituation process carried out by teachers aims to achieve this level of spontaneity. When students automatically behave politely without feeling instructed to do so, that is the point at which character education is considered to have successfully penetrated the depths of the students' inner selves.

The positive impacts experienced in students' daily lives, both within and beyond the school environment, demonstrate that language is a primary gateway to character formation. Therefore, synergy between educators at school and parents at home is essential to maintain the consistency of these values of politeness. By giving serious attention to the habituation of polite language use, SDN Sendang 1 has laid a strong foundation for students to grow into individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also graceful in behavior and noble in speech.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the entire series of data analysis and discussion presented in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that the implementation of the habituation of polite language use at SDN Sendang 1 plays a strategic and transformative role in shaping students' character. This study demonstrates that language is not merely a means of communication, but a fundamental foundation in building the moral structure of learners. Through consistent role modeling by teachers, students have successfully internalized values of politeness, which are subsequently manifested in two main character aspects, namely appreciation of achievement and social care.

Teachers at this school have effectively fulfilled their roles as behavioral models capable of transforming abstract values into concrete daily practices. The success of character education at SDN Sendang 1 is evident in the transformation of students' behavior from what may initially have been mechanical into behavior that is spontaneous and sincere. The character of appreciating achievement is reflected in the disappearance of unhealthy competitive practices, replaced by mutual support and polite verbal appreciation among students. Meanwhile, in terms of social care, polite language use has become an effective instrument of empathy, enabling students to interact by prioritizing ethics, respect, and concern for the feelings of others.

Theoretically, this achievement reinforces the principle that strong character emerges from habits that are continuously practiced until they become an inseparable part of students' inner selves, in line with the essence of moral character emphasized in classical educational thought.

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Based on the results of the research and discussion conducted, the habituation of polite language use needs to be continuously maintained and strengthened as an integrated culture within school life. Teachers play a central role as the primary role models in using polite, appreciative, and empathetic language, both in the learning process and in daily interactions. This consistency in role modeling should be accompanied by more intensive efforts to foster students' initiative in demonstrating social care spontaneously, so that values of politeness do not merely emerge due to instruction, but become ingrained habits within the students themselves.

On the other hand, institutional support from the school is essential through policy reinforcement, routine habituation activities, and the creation of a conducive school climate so that polite language use becomes a shared identity among all members of the school community. Synergy between the school and parents is also a crucial factor in maintaining the continuity of character formation, ensuring that the habituation of polite language instilled at school can be reinforced within the family and community environments. With the sustained involvement of all stakeholders, the habituation of polite language use is expected to shape students' character not only to excel academically, but also to possess social sensitivity, ethical awareness, and noble moral character.

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