

**Citation:** Aasi, F. S., Imtiaz, A., & Shahzad, A. K. (2023). Politeness in the Classrooms of the Visually Impaired Students: A Case Study. *Global Educational Studies Review*, VIII(II), 64-78. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2023\(VIII-II\).07](https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2023(VIII-II).07)

## Politeness in the Classrooms of the Visually Impaired Students: A Case Study

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**Abstract:** *The present study focuses on the use of politeness in teacher-student interaction in a Special Education institute in Pakistan. Using the concepts of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (2014), visually impaired students in grade 8th were observed using or flouting politeness strategies and maxims in the classroom. The results show that the students used both positive and negative politeness strategies. The students repeatedly used negative politeness strategies in order to maintain social distance and to avoid imposition on the teacher. Also, they used maxims of modesty and obligation more frequently than the other maxims. Moreover, it has been observed that these students usually remained quiet and asked fewer questions during class. This research is significant in providing future researchers with a framework to work specifically in the domain of Special Education not only in Pakistan but also globally and will facilitate the development of pedagogical methods for inclusive education.*

**Key Words:** Politeness, Interaction, Special Education, Visually-Impaired, Inclusiveness, Pakistan

### Introduction

Language plays an essential role in communication as it is the means through which ideas, knowledge and beliefs are shared and understood mutually; between the speakers. One important feature of our spoken language is politeness. Politeness has been defined differently by different linguists keeping in view the different aspects of its use; social, cultural and linguistic. Politeness, in its essence, means ‘polite behaviours (Culpeper, 2011). These behaviours can be linguistic and non-linguistic; depending upon how they vary in context and why they are ‘polite in that very

context. Culpeper (2011) argues that there is no fixed definition of Politeness rather it varies from culture to culture. According to Yule (2020), Politeness means showing awareness and consideration of the listeners face.

In the past two decades, many kinds of research had been conducted to investigate the use of these politeness strategies in classroom discourse (e.g. Adel et al., 2016; Bills, 2000; Peng, Xie, & Cai, 2014; Rauf, 2017; Jiang, 2010; Liu, 2017; Markus, 2011; Yrisarry et al., 2019). They have focused greatly on the use of politeness strategies by the teachers and students in schools, colleges and universities

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through multiple platforms, i.e. in the classroom, on text messages, during presentations or in online blogs etc. All of them have posited the notion that specifically in education, communication without politeness is a vague idea. However, research concerning the implication of politeness in special education discourse is relatively a newer area and literature produced in this field is quite scarce. It has not been much explored lately in the context of Pakistan and other developing countries and hence this area seeks to be investigated further.

Politeness is very much significant and relevant in education; classroom teaching and learning practice (Yoga, Ketut, & Hery, 2018). During the process of teaching and learning, the teacher makes use of different practices and utterances that show politeness, in order to make students learn in a better and more comfortable way. At the same time, students are automatically polite during their speech with the teacher to avoid any impolite interpretations and conflicts. However, in a setting different from a normal classroom, where the students are visually impaired and the teacher is well aware of their disability, politeness should be practised a little more. This very aspect of the use of politeness is explored through this research. It is a case study of a Special Education school in order to investigate the use of different politeness strategies given by Brown and Levinson (1987) and politeness maxims theorized by Leech (2014) in the classroom discourse, during the process of communication between the English teacher and visually impaired students.

The present study aims to answer the questions like How do the visually impaired students use Politeness strategies and maxims in classrooms, in Special Education schools? And what is the impact of the teacher's politeness on a visually impaired student's response in class? This study is significant; both theoretically and practically as it adds to the existing knowledge in Pragmatics and specifically in Politeness and the amalgamation of two different politeness theories will help future researchers to understand the intricate

concept of Politeness in a better way. It provides researchers with a framework to work in the area of Special Education and helps in adding to the existing body of knowledge on disability and specifically on visual impairment.

## Literature Review

Turnbull, et. al (2013) define Special Education as the specially designed instructions that meet a child's individual needs in school, at no cost to his parents. According to Vangun (2018), Special Education comprises teaching and learning strategies that are designed and delivered to individuals with difficulties in learning or some disability "who may or may not be enrolled in regular schools" (p. 1).

Among different disabilities, Visual Impairment is one major type, all over the world (Ali & Hameed, 2015). Visual impairment is a decreased ability to see, having problems with sight that are not fixed easily. Vision problem is the most significant public health issue currently prevailing in the country. It leaves significant socio-economic impacts on the affected person, his society and the nation at large (Awan et al., 2018).

Students with Visual Impairment can be categorized into three separate groups based on their educational needs and the severity of their disability (Ali & Hameed, 2015). The first group of students are those who actively participate in class and can easily overcome their blindness by using adaptive tools. Their impairment is very minor and does not affect their performance in the classroom. The second class of the visually impaired includes those students who have some additional disability along with low-sightedness. They need some modifications to the existing curriculum and special services and materials along with the existing one. The third category of visually impaired students is those who have severe impairment along with vision loss. They cannot adopt the pre-existing curriculum designed for sighted students. They need a different curriculum, specifically designed for them, by keeping their individual needs in mind (p. 4). The majority of the participants in the present

study are visually impaired students belonging to the second category.

### Visual Impairment and Special Education in Pakistan

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Education of people with disabilities is a huge debate and there has been observed remarkable progress in this domain in the early 1980s (Ali & Hameed, 2015). After technological advancements all across the world, the idea of “education for all” has gained much significance in third-world countries like Pakistan. Pakistan is now moving towards achieving this target of education for all, which includes the transgender community and people having different impairments.

Ahmed, Khan, & Nasem (2011) argue that the issue of providing education to children with visual impairment is a matter of serious concern for Pakistan because the social and communal approach, the current education system and the economic condition of their families are not satisfactory. However, the Federal Government has taken numerous steps to provide visually impaired students with a reputable position in their society and prevent them from suffering in school. In classrooms, partial or full-blind children are required to learn specialized abilities and practices from their teachers. These teachers are professionally trained to provide students with these special skills (Fatema, 2013). Similarly, Malik et al. (2018) talk about the fact that the need for Special Education in civilized and educated parts of Pakistan is considered the principal cause of all planning for providing rehabilitation services to children with special needs, specifically those with visual impairment.

The term “Special Education” itself explains that a number of practices are necessary for educating special children. These practices are specifically designed for special children along with currently prevailing services and techniques used for normal children (Khan et al., 2012). This can help learners to overcome their disabilities and adjust to their families and society.

### The Nature of Student-Teacher Relationship in Special Education Schools

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Language teaching in Special Education classrooms is a complex phenomenon in which a teacher uses specially designed instructions and techniques to make visually impaired students learn the underlying complex phenomena and meet their needs and abilities. Studies reveal that teachers can play a remarkable role in providing an effective learning environment to visually impaired students by actively engaging themselves in the classroom with students. This can help students adjust to their family, school and society (Khan, 1998; Khan et al., 2012; Khan & Jabeen, 2016; Malik et al., 2018).

Farrell (2005) argues that students with visual impairment require adaptation to their environment and guidance from their instructors for using learning materials inside the classroom. Farooq (2012) claims that teachers play a significant role in providing the right learning experiences to children with disabilities. However, Pakistani teachers who work in ordinary schools have little or no exposure to students with special needs. These teachers do not have an awareness of the needs and potential of special children. Fatima & Hussain (2016) in their study reveal that Special Education teachers put no extra effort into uplifting the academic conditions of special children in Pakistan, maybe because of a lack of resources and staff and a greater number of students in one class.

### Methodology

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This study falls under the paradigm of qualitative research design where we have collected data by observing students' behaviour and by interviewing the teacher and head of the institute. The present study implies the methodological approach of a case study, where the use of politeness in the social setting of visually impaired students has been explored and studied as a case.

The research setting for the present study is a semi-public sector institute, specifically

built for visually impaired children in Mirpur Azad Kashmir, Pakistan. A sample of Grade 8<sup>h</sup> students, their English teacher and the Head of the Institute were selected through the purposive sampling technique for the study. Among the students, there were few who belonged to the B1 category of blindness, having minimal or no light perception at all, while the rest of them were B2 and B3 students with partial and low visibility, respectively. Some of the students were both visually impaired and physically challenged as well. 16 classes were observed and each class was of 30 minutes, i.e. 480 minutes in total. All of these were English classes. As it is a case study, only one class i.e. Grade 8 was taken as a sample representative of the whole institute for in-depth analysis. The tools used to collect data in this research were non-participant observation, audio recording and semi-structured interviews. Informed consent was taken from the participants before conducting the research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The following theoretical framework was set based on the data obtained from two brief pilot studies.

### **Politeness Strategies Observed in Student-teacher Interaction**

It was evident from the two pilot studies that very few positive politeness strategies were actually practised by visually impaired students. They mostly used negative politeness strategies while communicating with their teacher. Therefore, politeness in student-teacher interaction in a special education classroom was observed using the following strategies:

**Table 1**

*Politeness Strategies*

<b>Positive Politeness</b>	<b>Negative Politeness</b>
Claim common ground	· Indirectness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Seek agreement</li> <li>▪ Jokes</li> </ul>	· Give deference
	· Apologize

### **Politeness Maxims Observed in Student-teacher Interaction**

The Politeness maxims used by the visually impaired students in the classroom were observed under the following headings:

**Table 2**

*Politeness Maxims*

<b>Maxim</b>	<b>Marker</b>
Modesty	Self- devaluation Degrading ones own self
Obligation	Apologizing Thanking
Agreement/ Opinion	Seeking agreement Avoiding disagreement Offering ideas Giving opinions/ approval
Feeling Reticence	Suppressing ones own feelings

All the other politeness strategies and maxims were either used merely by the teacher or not practised at all. Therefore, they are not a part of the framework of this study.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the use of politeness strategies by visually impaired students and the second section deals with the use of politeness maxims by visually impaired students. In the analysis, data has been presented using the following abbreviations: S for student, S1, S2... when more than one student is involved in the exchange, T for the teacher and Ss when the whole class speaks collectively.

### **Politeness Strategies**

The following positive politeness strategies were observed in the classroom, being used by the visually impaired students.

#### **Positive Politeness**

It is the redressive action taken to fulfil the desire of a hearer to have his face respected and

saved. Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that positive politeness is very much related to normal linguistic behaviour and the only thing that differentiates both is the use of exaggeration in communication. Very few positive politeness strategies were observed as being used by the visually impaired students and the main reason is that they constantly and deliberately try to avoid imposition on their teacher and maintain the social distance between them. They lack social skills and are reluctant to participate in classroom discussions because of their impairments. However, they are observed practising the following positive politeness strategies.

### Seek Agreement

This strategy suggests that the speaker attempts to satisfy the hearer's desire to be right and asks for his/her opinion over matters that he/she is likely to be involved in. It was observed that the visually impaired students sometimes use this positive politeness strategy in the classroom, not by simply giving their opinion but by giving the teacher authority to decide. They do this in order to avoid imposition on the teacher and to acknowledge the higher social rank of the teacher.

**Table 3**

*Use of Seek Agreement Strategy by Visually Impaired Students*

Extract	Teacher-Student Exchange in the Urdu Language	English Translation of the Exchange
1	S: (amicably) teacher aap btaen	[S: (amicably) Teacher you tell]
2	Ss: teacher jese aap ki marzi	[Ss: teacher as you wish]

### Jokes

Using jokes inside the classroom is also a positive politeness strategy which basically aims to put the H at ease and implies that both S and H have some shared background values

and beliefs. In the observed classroom, it was noticeable that the visually impaired students, as well as the teacher, used jokes inside the classroom to make the learning environment comfortable.

**Table 4**

*Use of Jokes by Visually Impaired Students*

Extract	Teacher-Student Exchange in the Urdu Language	English Translation of the Exchange
3	S: teacher puray 5 ho gaye hain ab stop kr den. T: acha ye aik sentence complete na kr len? S: G teacher kr len abhi itnay bhi puray 5 nai huye. T: (laughs loudly) Khawar boht funny bacha hai bs prhai main mastiyan karta hai!	[S: Teacher please stop the lesson, it's 5 pm sharp.] [T: Shall we not complete just this last sentence?] [S: Yes teacher you can, its not that sharp 5 yet!] [T: (laughs loudly) Khawar you are very funny, but you are not interested in studies.]

Extract	Teacher-Student Exchange in the Urdu	English Translation of the Exchange
4	<p>S1: teacher ye ek book extra bch gayi hai</p> <p>S2: yeh Raza ki hai</p> <p>T: Raza to ink main prhty hain unko to iski zaroorat hi nahi.</p> <p>T: (laughingly) bajaye is k k aap log bhi ink books pr aen aap un ko bhi braille pr lga den. (all laugh)</p>	<p>[S1: teacher this braille book is extra]</p> <p>[S2: It's Razas book.]</p> <p>[T: Raza uses an ink-book for studies, he doesnt need Braille.]</p> <p>[T: (laughingly) instead of progressing to an ink book yourselves, you all are urging Raza to use braille.] (all laugh)</p>
5	<p>T: (looking at a student's hand movement) aese lgta hai Sobia piano baja rahi hai. (all laugh)</p>	<p>[T: (looking at a students hands movement) it seems like Sobia is playing the piano] (all laugh)</p>
6	<p>T: (while giving dictation) bacho status kya hota ha?</p> <p>S: (mischievously) Teacher vo jo whatsapp pr lagatay hain</p> <p>T: shabash! Aese hi thora dhyan prhai pr bhi diya kren! (laughing)</p>	<p>[T: Children, do you know what the status is?]</p> <p>[S: (mischievously) Teacher, its something that we put on WhatsApp]</p> <p>[T: Very good! Try concentrating on your studies as you do on WhatsApp status.] (laughing)</p>
7	<p>S: teacher Corona itna barh raha hai aap ghar par raha kren na. (laughing)</p> <p>T: (laughing) main chahti hu k hum sab ikathy rahen jis b haal mein rahen isliye main to aun gi.</p>	<p>[S: Teacher Corona is spreading wildly, you should stay home and not come to school] (laughing)</p> <p>[T: (laughing) I want us all to be together in every thick and thin, so I will come to school.]</p>

It is evident from the above extracts 3-7 that jokes built a positive relationship between the teacher and the students and learning took place in a lively and relaxed environment. The teacher did not feel disrespected when students cracked jokes during the lesson, rather she manipulated them in her own favour which not only makes the learning environment fun but also conveys her message to the students in a polite way.

Later, the teacher in her interview claimed that: *“Jokes and humour have a very positive impact on my students. Very rarely, if a child behaves rudely or does some inappropriate act, we snub him but again very politely and very carefully. Personally, we enjoy the mischievous acts of these students (laughing) but of course discipline first! And I think, telling them politely or simply neglecting them is better than snubbing them. Because I feel, they are mischievous only around*

*the teacher where they are comfortable and to make them feel comfortable is our ultimate goal.”*

### Negative Politeness

It is the redressive action directed to the hearer's negative face, which is his want to have freedom of action and from imposition. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), negative politeness is the "heart of respect behaviour" (p. 129). Unlike Positive politeness, Negative politeness is specific and focused and aims to minimize the imposition on H by maximizing the social distance. Negative politeness strategies are greatly used when S wants to maintain a social distance from H. Following negative politeness strategies were practised by the visually impaired students during the English lessons.



## Indirectness

Following Brown and Levinsons (1987) strategy of being conventionally indirect, students were observed conveying their desire indirectly by using utterances that have contextually clear meanings but different or hidden literal meanings. They were making use of indirect speech acts and utterances that conveyed indirect meanings. In this way, the

utterances went on record and the students desires remained indirect.

In the following extracts, it is evident that students used this strategy every so often in the classroom to avoid offending the teacher and get their desire fulfilled without stating them directly. However, it was also observed that students more often stated their desire directly without any indirect utterance.

**Table 5**

*Use of Indirectness by Visually Impaired Students*

Extract	Teacher-Student Exchange in the Urdu Language	English Translation of the Exchange
8	S: (Nervously) Teacher thora to ahista bola kren na.	[S: (Nervously) teacher please dictate at a slow speed]
9	S: teacher yeh ap answer likhwa rahi hain na?	[S: Teacher, you're dictating the answer, isnt it?]

## Give Deference

By using this strategy students were using honorifics and expressions of respect while addressing the teacher, to fulfil her negative face wants and to indicate the social distance between the student and the teacher. The

students used this strategy repeatedly by making use of the terms “teacher”, “maam” and “miss” to show the social distance between them and their teacher, and to indicate that the teacher is of higher social status in their domain. Almost all the utterances by the students include these terms.

**Table 6**

*Use of Giving Deference Strategy by Visually Impaired Students*

Extract	Teacher-Student Exchange in the Urdu Language	English Translation of the Exchange
10	S: Teacher book nae bnay gi hmari?	[S: Teacher, will the book not be prepared for us?]
11	S: Teacher aik machine ka paper dy dain!	[S: Teacher, please give me the paper for the machine.]
12	Ss: G miss hm krwa den gy	[Ss: Yes miss, we will get it done.]

Moreover, the use of “g” in Extract 12 also shows respect in this context as in the Urdu language, for a person older than you or in a higher social position “g” (yes) is used and for

the person, equal/younger/in a lower social position than you “haan” (yes) is used.

## Apologize

It was observed that while using this strategy the students apologized for performing a face Threatening Act (FTA) and showed their reluctance to impose on the teacher. This was

either done by admitting the impingement, indicating a reluctance to use hedges, giving overwhelming reasons or begging for forgiveness. From extracts 13-18 below, it is obvious that students used this strategy in the classroom very often.

**Table 7**

*Use of Apology Strategy by Visually Impaired Students*

Extract	Teacher-Student Exchange in the Urdu Language	English Translation of the Exchange
13	S: Teacher aaj tabiyat nae theek. (showing reluctance to write) S: Teacher machine kharab ho jayegi	[S: Teacher, I am not well today. (showing reluctance to write)] [S: teacher, the machine will be damaged]
14	S: Sorry teacher main practice kr rhi thi	[S: sorry teacher I was practising]
15	S: teacher, sorry teacher aapko bura to nahi laga? S: sorry teacher Mazak kar rhi thi, please.	[S: teacher, sorry teacher I hope you didnt mind what I said.] [S: sorry teacher I was joking please.]
16	S: Excuse me teacher ek minute idhr aengi? [S: sorry teacher]	[S: Excuse me, teacher, can you please come here for a minute?] [S: sorry teacher]
17	S: sorry sorry teacher ap agay btaen	[S: sorry sorry teacher please carry on]
18	S: Oo sorry, main andr aa jaun?	[S: Oh sorry, may I come in?]

One of the reasons that students give overwhelming reasons very often is that they do not want to offend the teacher and state their incapability to write in a very indirect way. In extract 16, interestingly, the use of double sorry is proof that the student genuinely did not want to offend the teacher. Mahmud (2019) argues that apologies are used mostly by students to minimize the possible impact of impolite situations that they might have caused through their expressions like shouting and asking questions.

## Politeness Maxims

It was observed that the following maxims were used by visually impaired students in their English language classroom.

### Modesty Maxim

This maxim is Other-oriented and it was observed that it urged the students to give a low value to their own qualities and give more value to their teacher. Self-devaluation and degradation are often considered polite or humble in our culture and in the data, it was observed that this maxim was extensively used by visually impaired students inside the classroom. However, the teacher was generally seen denying these claims of self-deprecation by the students. Students, as claimed by Leech (2014), did not fish for compliments, rather they either did not value their worth or they were doing it out of pessimism.



**Table 8***Use of Modesty by the Visually Impaired Students*

Extract	Teacher-Student Exchange in Urdu Language	English Translation of the Exchange
19	S: Teacher mujhe kuch yaad e nahi rehta bhool jaati hai har baat!	[S: teacher I dont remember anything, I always forget everything!]
20	S: teacher me madrassa main na chala jau mujhsay prha to waise bhi nahi jata.	[S: Teacher, shall I not go to the Madrassa? I cannot study anyway!]
21	S: shayad qismat main yahi likha hai (in a melancholic tone)!	[S: Maybe that's written in my fate (in a melancholic tone).]
	S: teacher g jo bimari ho mujhay hi aake lagti hai!	[S: Teacher, every sickness out there, is only for me!]
22	S: teacher blind k liye b koi profession ho skta hai ya koi ni?	[S: Teacher, is there any profession for a blind person? Or not?]

In extract 20 the student dejectedly suggests that he should go and take admission to a Madrassa. Madrassas are religious seminaries, and a general impression in Pakistani society is that those students who are not good at regular education, are sent to a Madrassa. Similarly, in extract 19 the student was seen lamenting her memory only because she forgot something once but her exchange is full of disappointment. In extract 21 the student is unhappy with fate as he is mostly unwell. In extract no. 22, the student wonders if there is any profession for the visually impaired. All the above-quoted exchanges reveal the sensitivity in nature of these vulnerable strata of our society.

The special education instructors deliberately avoid using the maxim of modesty, as according to them, students are first and foremost, taught to value themselves and their worth. This cannot be done unless they do not acknowledge their efforts inside and outside the classroom. The teacher is of the view that these students are already going through a lot at home and an inferiority complex naturally

grows in them. Therefore, they must be encouraged and valued. Her stance on it was;

“..... And therefore, these children become hesitant and shy and may have an inferiority complex. So, we have to wipe this thing out, and many of the children here belong to families where they are cornered and are considered just a burden. And believe me, when I came here, I saw that even the basic manners of these children are taught here and their families send them to school only because they cannot raise them. They live here in hostels and many of our senior students are here from the Montessori classes and no one from most of their families even bothers to ask and inquire about how they are doing here. “

Talking about the nervous gestures of the students which, most probably, stemmed from the lack of confidence or from the need of seeking attention, she elaborated:

“There was a girl about 9 years old when she came here and she used to chew her shirt in her mouth all day to the extent that it got all wet but she used to do it and she couldnt stop doing it. Also, some students keep touching their eyes and

rub them habitually. Some of them nod unusually, and some of them keep on moving around unnecessarily. All of these are symptoms of an inferiority complex because of disability. We, as teachers, have to help them remove their fears and complexes.”

### Obligation Maxim

This strategy urges the speaker to give a high value to their obligations towards others and give low value to others obligations towards the speaker. It was observed that in the

classroom apologies and gratitude were common ways to depict ones obligation towards the other. Gratitude satisfied the positive face needs of the students and apologies satisfied their negative face needs. The teacher was found to readily accept gratitude and apologies to make her students feel comfortable. The visually impaired students were observed using this strategy very frequently inside the classroom. Some of the extracts including the terms of apologies and gratitude are discussed below.

**Table 9**

Use of Obligation Maxim by Visually Impaired Students

Extract	Teacher-Student Exchange in the Urdu Language	English Translation of the Exchange
23	Ss: G teacher thankyou	[Ss: yes teacher thankyou]
24	S: Sorry teacher main practice kr rhi thi	[S: Sorry teacher I was practising]
25	S: Welcome teacher	[S: welcome teacher!]

### Agreement Maxim

Agreement maxim is a pos-politeness strategy that gives a high value to others opinions. The same was observed in the class that the students used to readily agree in response to the teachers opinions and judgments and did not disagree with them. Opinion reticence maxim, on the other hand, is a neg-politeness strategy that gives a low value to the speakers opinion. It was observed that this maxim was

being followed in the class by using hedges or by asking the teacher for her opinions based on her expertise or knowledge of the subject matter. Moreover, the visually impaired students who were being observed frequently asked for approval from the teacher for the things they wanted to do inside the classroom, in response to which, agreement and disagreement from the teacher varied according to the situation.

**Table 10**

Use of Agreement by Visually Impaired Students

Extract	Teacher-Student Exchange in the Urdu Language	English Translation of the Exchange
26	Ss: Teacher g hm jaen? T: g g jaen	[Ss: teacher can we go?] [T: yes yes please go!]

In the above extract, the teacher's use of “g” i.e. “yes” twice shows that the question by the students was not required but they asked because they trusted the teachers approval, so

she readily gave her consent to the students to go home.

## Feeling Reticence Maxim

It was observed that these students were using this maxim quite frequently by giving low value to their own feelings. They usually did not express verbally how they felt and the teacher was frequently seen making them feel comfortable by repeatedly asking them if they have any problems. According to the teacher, these students remain unexpressive, shy and silent because of the lack of confidence and, in some cases, the inferiority complex that this disability has built in them.

To validate the results of our observation and the teachers claim that positive politeness has a very significant and positive impact on students learning, we asked the head of the institute who himself is visually impaired, to share his own learning experience and the difficulties he faced as a B1 child. He stated;

*“...So, I faced great difficulties as a blind student as far as my learning is concerned. And I still remember, on a couple of occasions, my teacher didn't even allow me to come inside the classroom thinking that a blind cannot study with “normal” students. So, a couple of times, I was discouraged but I ignored these things and left no stone unturned for my education. And of course, there were teachers who were very kind and positive and they encouraged me to work and that thing kept me going.”*

He further admitted;

*“... I don't think that this would have been possible without the motivation of my teachers and their help and courage. I am highly thankful to them for believing in me.”*

## Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the positive and negative politeness strategies by Brown and Levinson (1987) and pos- and neg-politeness maxims by Leech (2014) are almost indistinguishable and interrelated when it comes to the student-student and student-teacher communication in a Special Education context.

The first objective of the study was to find out the politeness strategies and maxims used by visually impaired students inside the

classroom. Findings revealed that the visually impaired students implied negative politeness strategies more frequently than positive politeness strategies. Likewise, neg-politeness maxims were more frequently used by visually impaired students as compared to pos-politeness maxims. The possible reasons for implying negative politeness in the classroom could be mainly to avoid imposition on the teacher. Visually impaired students continuously tried to maintain social distance from their teacher inside the classroom and usually remained silent or gave short responses. The use of indirectness by some of the students gave the idea that they were avoiding expressing their incapability of hearing or seeing and instead asked for the teachers help indirectly. They did not want to give the impression that they are “slow learners” as compared to the rest of the class. They distanced themselves and avoided imposition on their teacher and other fellows, thereby respecting their negative face. Similarly, some of the students gave overwhelming reasons to apologise, which indicates that they were embarrassed about their impairments and did not want to impinge on the teacher by stating their problems. It was further observed that these students tried to maintain the social and psychological distance between themselves and their teacher and did not open up frequently. They also implied negative politeness because they acknowledged the higher social status of their teacher and gave her respect by doing so.

However, some of the students took a very positive impact on the teachers use of politeness strategies and they tried to participate efficiently in the classroom activities. Such students were observed as using positive politeness strategies like seeking agreement and cracking jokes which indicate that they were comfortable with the teacher in the classroom. They willingly expressed their opinions when the teacher asked for them. Such students were observed as confident learners and the teacher also claimed that they do not let their physical or visual impairment become a hurdle in their progress.

The second objective of this research was to investigate the impact of the teachers politeness on students responses in class. Based on the results obtained from observations and interviews, it can easily be concluded that politeness impacts visually impaired students in a very constructive way. From the observations, it is obvious that students who performed better inside the classroom were those who were given care and affection by the teacher, in the first place. Many students who were either B1 or slow learners also strived to work hard and felt motivated by the teachers polite and generous remarks on their seemingly trivial attempts. The head of the institute, himself visually impaired, reminisced that being a B1 student, the teachers motivation and support were one of the many factors that kept him going and provided him with success, acceptance and respect in society when he was in school. Students were observed as confident and bold when the teacher appreciated them. In return, they participated more actively and enthusiastically in classroom discussions and activities. They worked energetically and willingly expressed their opinions in the classroom. Politeness creates a harmonious atmosphere in the classroom and students become self-confident. Their impairment does not restrict their performance when they are appreciated. This indicates that politeness, more specifically, attending to the needs of students, sympathy and appreciation are a few of the major factors that directly influence students learning and their response inside the classroom.

Another finding of this research revealed that many of the visually impaired students had no family support and they faced trouble inside the classroom in terms of their performance. The teacher claimed that those students who come off from supportive families tend to show better performance and participate actively in the classroom, whereas visually or physically challenged students having troubled relationships with their families experience a negative impact on their classroom progress. We also observed that most of the time such students were reluctant to ask for help and remained quiet during the learning process and

showed little or no participation in the classroom. The teacher, thus, motivated these students to express themselves and participate in the classroom by going overboard with her caring and empathetic verbal behaviour.

### **Recommendations**

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It is recommended that special education teachers should develop their knowledge of pragmatics and the use of politeness in the classrooms, and make it a part of their daily practice. Special education teachers should pay attention to their students physical and psychological needs and cater to them with the use of polite language. Apart from inside the classroom, a special education instructor must cater to students problems and needs outside the classroom as well. Special education instructors and administrators should counsel parents of differently-abled children about their emotional and psychological needs and ask them to cooperate in terms of raising them properly. The idea that physically and visually impaired children are no less than normal children, rather they are differently-abled, must be promoted in society and this can be done by the cooperation of not only the special education administrators and their staff but the media should also create such awareness in Pakistan.

### **Implications**

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In the case of Pakistan, sadly speaking, “the rights for disabled or differently-abled persons have never been a major talking political or policy point” (Ali, 2021, para 1). There has been a lack of laws, effective policies as well as any practical steps for this vulnerable section of the society ever since the inception of Pakistan. Ali (2021) states that reports suggest that the number of differently-abled people in Pakistan ranges from 3.3 million to 27 million in the country. “But this portion has never been part of political discussion, policymaking, or election promises of the major political parties”, until now (Ali, 2021, para 1).

In the year 2021, the then Government of Pakistan became sensitive towards the differently-abled in the country and started

taking serious measures to facilitate them, this study can also be helpful for the authorities in this regard. This study can be expanded and conducted on a bigger level, including more than one special education institute, to explore the practices that imply politeness inside the classroom. It can also be conducted in comparison of private and public domains having physically and visually impaired students, in order to explore if there is any difference in terms of using politeness. A study can also be conducted in mainstream schools having the majority of sighted children with a small ratio of visually impaired children to see the difference in practices that project politeness. For Pakistani researchers, it would also be interesting to conduct a similar study in our national language i.e. Urdu and see the use of politeness in that very language. Internationally, a similar study can be carried out not only in schools for the disabled but also in other institutes specifically designed for visually or physically impaired children. A comparative study between politeness practised in Pakistani special education schools and the schools abroad will also be interesting.

## **Conclusion**

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From the present study, it can be concluded that politeness is a very significant part of the teaching-learning process in the domain of education and its implication is further stressed when the students are other than normal, and have multiple impairments. Such students, being the vulnerable strata of society, have multiple psychological needs also. In this scenario, a teacher's politeness lays a very positive impact on their personal grooming and class performance. Teachers adequate use of politeness creates a euphonious atmosphere in the classroom and a respectful relationship is built between the teacher and visually impaired students so much so that they eventually try to give productive responses and feel motivated by the teacher's sympathy and interest in themselves. It is evident that the visually impaired children having support from their families showed better performance inside the classroom and in their daily lives as compared to those visually impaired children who had troubled relations with their families. Hence the constructive influence laid by the cooperative role families played in adjusting such children in their schools and society is undeniable.

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