Polite Character from a Multicultural Perspective: A Systematic Literature Review

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

The rise of globalization and increasing cultural diversity in modern societies pose complex challenges in shaping polite character, which is considered universal but varies significantly across cultures. This study aims to explore the characteristics of polite behavior from multiple cultural perspectives, evaluate its application in multicultural education, identify factors influencing its development, and investigate the integration of universal politeness with local cultural values. A qualitative approach was employed through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA protocol. Literature was sourced from Scopus and Google Scholar, focusing on Q1–Q4 journals published between 2020 and 2025 in Indonesian and English. The review of ten cross-cultural studies revealed diverse politeness strategies across regions—from East Asia to Africa—highlighting ten influential factors, including cultural orientation, social status, relational closeness, and pragmatic competence. The findings show that politeness is not a fixed construct but a culturally contextual phenomenon, necessitating holistic and adaptive strategies in multicultural education. This study concludes that integrating universal values with cultural particularities requires intercultural pragmatic competence and culturally responsive pedagogy. These findings offer both theoretical and practical contributions to character education, emphasizing the importance of balancing global standards with local wisdom in fostering social harmony.

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Introduction

The dynamics of globalization and cultural diversity in modern societies have created complex challenges in shaping individual character, particularly regarding the value of

politeness, which is considered universal but manifests in diverse ways across cultures. The strengthening of multicultural phenomena in the contemporary era demands a deep understanding of how polite character is perceived, articulated, and implemented within the cultural diversity that exists in global society (Chen et al., 2025; Mayrita et al., 2025; Badri & Malik, 2024; Maddux et al., 2021). This reality highlights the urgency of conducting research that examines the intersection between the development of polite character and multicultural perspectives as a foundation for fostering individuals capable of interacting harmoniously within heterogeneous societies. Empirical findings from various studies indicate that the implementation of character education in multicultural contexts still faces a significant gap between theoretical concepts and practical application in the field. A study conducted by (Ward et al., 2025; Mariyono, 2024) revealed that an integrated multicultural education approach can enhance understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. However, there remains a gap in the implementation of politeness values that are universally acceptable without diminishing local cultural identities. For instance, Azhari et al., (2024) conducted a survey involving 356 students and 42 teachers in four multicultural schools in Medan, Indonesia, which revealed that although 72% of respondents recognized the importance of integrating politeness into multicultural education, only 41% reported that classroom practices adequately reflected both universal politeness and local cultural norms. Their findings highlight that the development of polite character in multicultural contexts requires a holistic approach that is sensitive to the nuances of diverse cultural backgrounds. This evidence underscores the necessity of identifying universal patterns in the manifestation of polite character that can be consistently applied across various cultural contexts.

A noticeable gap in the existing academic literature is the absence of systematic studies that comprehensively integrate multicultural perspectives into the discussion of polite character. While several studies have examined politeness and character education in relation to cultural practices, most have addressed them in isolation rather than in synthesis (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021; Kádár & House, 2021). Research on intercultural pragmatics has shown that politeness is context-dependent and often influenced by cultural norms and situational expectations (Hu, 2021; Kádár & House, 2021; Kecskes, 2017). However, much of this work remains at the theoretical level, offering limited insights into the practical implementation of politeness in multicultural education. This highlights the need for more systematic efforts to identify both universal and context-specific dimensions of polite character that can be applied across diverse cultural settings (Ackermann, 2023; Virtanen & Lee, 2022). Furthermore, although there has been growing attention to teaching pragmatics and intercultural competence in language education (Taguchi, 2015), the integration of these insights into broader character education frameworks is still lacking. Recent reviews emphasize that intercultural competence is essential for navigating diverse educational environments and fostering respectful communication (Sarwari et al., 2024; Mamat et al., 2021). Against this backdrop, the novelty of this study lies in systematically synthesizing politeness and multicultural perspectives into a unified analytical framework. By employing a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review, this research not only identifies shared and distinctive patterns of politeness but also contributes to both theoretical discourse and practical strategies for advancing character education in multicultural contexts.

Based on the aforementioned background, this study aims to examine polite character from a multicultural perspective through a systematic literature review (SLR) of ten relevant scholarly articles. This research seeks to identify and comprehensively analyze the characteristics and dimensions of polite character as conceptualized across various cultural perspectives. The novelty of this study lies in its systematic synthesis of politeness and multicultural education, two domains that have previously been examined mostly in

isolation, thereby offering an integrated framework that has not been adequately explored in prior research. Unlike earlier studies that tended to focus either on theoretical discussions or single cultural settings, this review provides a cross-cultural comparison supported by PRISMA-guided rigor, highlighting both universal and context-specific politeness strategies. The significance of this study is that it contributes not only to advancing theoretical discourse on intercultural pragmatics and character education but also to offering practical insights for educators and policymakers in designing culturally responsive pedagogy that balances universal politeness norms with the preservation of local cultural identities.

Furthermore, this study evaluates the implementation approaches of politeness values within multicultural education contexts and identifies factors that influence the effectiveness of polite character development in culturally diverse environments. It also aims to explore the challenges and opportunities in integrating universal politeness values with local cultural diversity. By conducting a thorough synthesis of the literature, this study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of character education based on multicultural principles. Based on this framework, the research questions of this study are: (1) how are the characteristics and dimensions of polite character conceptualized across different cultural perspectives? (2) how are politeness values implemented in multicultural education? (3) what factors influence the effectiveness of polite character development in multicultural environments.

Method

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol, chosen for its rigor and transparency in identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant literature (Asar et al., 2016). The "participants" of this review were scholarly articles that met the inclusion criteria. From an initial pool of 309 records retrieved from Scopus (primary database) and Google Scholar (secondary database), only 10 articles were included in the final synthesis. These studies, published between 2020 and 2025 in English or Indonesian and indexed in Q1–Q4 Scopus or reputable national journals, represented diverse cultural contexts across Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and North America. The inclusion criteria required articles to discuss politeness, character education, or multicultural perspectives, while exclusion criteria eliminated studies without clear methodology or insufficient relevance.

Data collection was conducted using Boolean operators with keywords such as "politeness character" OR "politeness strategies" AND "multicultural education" OR "character education" OR "cultural diversity." The selection process followed the PRISMA stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion: 309 records were identified, 102 duplicates removed, 207 screened, 56 full texts reviewed, and 10 articles included in the synthesis. Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, with coding focused on three dimensions: cross-cultural politeness strategies, factors influencing the development of politeness character, and implications for multicultural education. The process ensured replicability and credibility, and the flow of article selection is summarized in **Figure 1**.
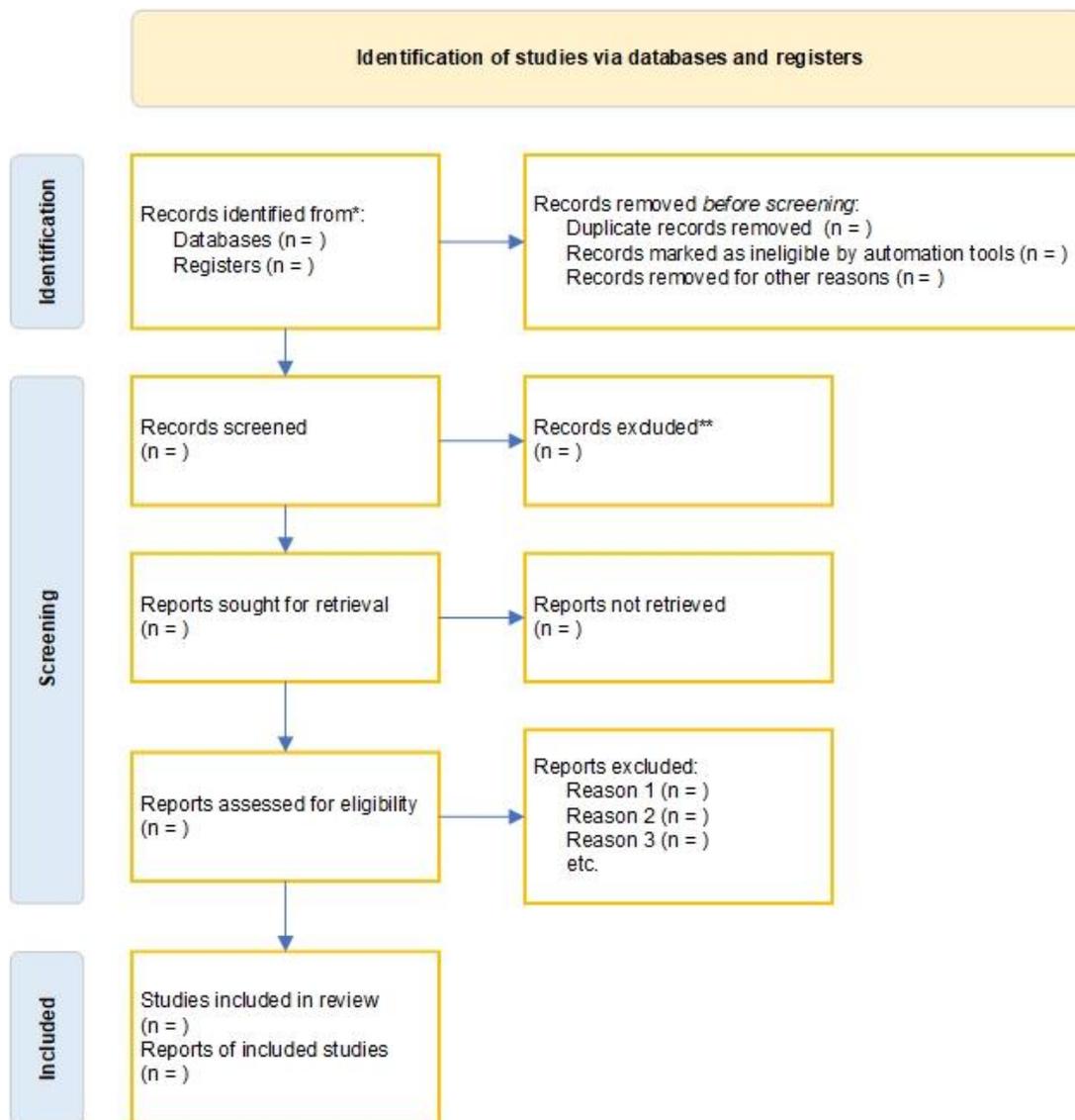
Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram

Results and Discussion

Finding of Ten Intercultural Communication in Education

A comprehensive analysis of ten cross-cultural studies reveals significant variations in the manifestation of politeness strategies across diverse global cultural contexts. The reviewed studies encompass a broad geographical spectrum, including East Asia (China, South Korea, Hong Kong), Southeast Asia (Vietnam), South Asia (Pakistan), the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Algeria, Iraq), Europe (France, Lithuania, the United Kingdom), North America (the United States, Canada), and Africa (South Africa). This diversity of contexts enables the identification of politeness patterns that reflect the fundamental cultural values of each society. Each identified politeness strategy demonstrates the unique ways in which cultural communities manage interpersonal relationships, maintain social harmony, and express respect. These findings highlight the complexity of intercultural communication and underscore the importance of a deep understanding of local pragmatic norms in the contemporary era of globalization **(Table 1)**.

Table 1. Ten Intercultural Communications in Education

No	Author & Year	Cultural Context	Identified Politeness Strategies	Key Characteristics	Multicultural Implications
1	(Ying & Hong, 2020)	Tiongkok, Korea Selatan, Prancis	Query preparatory, Mood derivable	Chinese and Korean speakers tend to be more direct; French speakers prefer indirectness	Differences in hierarchical-collectivist vs. egalitarian-individualist orientations influence request strategies
2	(Culpeper & Pat, 2021)	Hong Kong	Compliment acceptance strategies, expressions of gratitude	Dominance of acceptance strategies through expressions of thanks	The Maxim of Obligation plays a crucial role in compliment responses in the Hong Kong context
3	(Jakučionytė, 2020)	Amerika, Lithuania	Positive politeness vs. negative politeness	USA: direct and creative; Lithuania: indirect and less expressive	Gender differences influence the level of politeness and creativity in communication
4	(Soomro & Larina, 2024)	Pakistan (Bahasa Inggris Pakistan)	Hybrid greeting forms, kinship terms	Combination of English and local forms of address	Linguistic-cultural identity is reflected in address forms indicating social status
5	(Kirner-Ludwig & Fadhil Alsaedi , 2021)	Amerika-Irak	Imperatives and command speech acts	Lack of intercultural pragmatic competence	Biased language use can result in face-threatening acts in military contexts
6	(Sikhwari, 2025)	Tshivenḓa (Afrika Selatan)	Verbal appreciation, expressions of joy	Expressions of gratitude influenced by relational closeness	Age and gender factors affect gratitude expressions during gift-giving
7	(Alqahtani, 2024)	Arab Saudi, Inggris	Positive and negative politeness strategies	Social distance impacts politeness strategy choices	Cultural differences shape polite offer realizations between Arab and British speakers
8	(Revita et al., 2025)	Minangkabau	Pre-request speech acts, Kato nan Ampek	Indirect strategies to maintain harmony	Cultural values such as respect and social harmony shape pre-request strategies
9	(Benyakoub et al., 2022)	Aljazair, Yordania	Counterclaims, contradictions	Similar preference for disagreement strategies	Social status influences the choice of disagreement strategies in Arabic dialects
10	(Tran, 2022)	Vietnam, Kanada	Hearer-oriented vs. speaker-oriented modality	Vietnam: direct with appealers; Canada: conventionally indirect	Collectivist vs. individualist orientation influences permission request strategies

An in-depth exploration of the factors shaping polite character in multicultural contexts reveals ten fundamental dimensions that interact in forming communicative behavior **(Table 2)**. These factors include cultural orientation (collectivism vs. individualism), social dynamics (social distance, status, gender, age), relational context (degree of closeness, formal-informal situations), and linguistic aspects (language transfer, pragmatic competence). Each factor exerts a distinct influence on the manifestation of politeness, depending on the specific cultural background in which it operates. The complex

interplay among these factors creates a unique politeness system within each cultural community, while also revealing universal patterns of human communication. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing effective intercultural communication competence, particularly in increasingly heterogeneous multicultural societies in the contemporary era.

Table 2. Synthesis of Factors Affecting Politeness Character in Multicultural Contexts

No	Key Factor	Influence on Politeness	Cultural Context	Linguistic Manifestation	Key Findings
1	Cultural Orientation	Hierarchical-collectivist vs. egalitarian-individualist	China/Korea vs. France	Directness in speech acts	Collectivist cultures tend to exhibit more hierarchical communication styles
2	Social Distance	Level of formality and politeness strategies	Saudi Arabia, UK, Pakistan	Choice of address forms and modality	Social distance determines the degree of politeness employed
3	Social Status	Power asymmetry in interaction	Algeria, Jordan, Pakistan	Disagreement strategies and address forms	Social hierarchy is reflected in linguistic strategy choices
4	Gender	Differences in politeness levels	USA, Lithuania, Vietnam, Canada	Use of politeness markers	Female speakers tend to be more polite and creative than male speakers
5	Age	Respect for seniority	Vietnam, Tshivenḓa	Use of honorifics and expressions of gratitude	Age influences the intensity and form of politeness
6	Relationship Closeness	Intimacy vs. formality	Hong Kong, Tshivenḓa, Minangkabau	Acceptance strategies and emotional expressions	Close relationships allow for more intense emotional expressions
7	Situational Context	Formal vs. informal situations	Pakistan, Minangkabau	Use of language register	Context dictates the appropriate politeness strategy
8	Language Transfer	Influence of L1 on L2	China (L2), Pakistan (English variety)	Hybridized linguistic forms	Pragmatic transfer from the mother tongue affects L2 politeness
9	Local Cultural Values	Harmony, respect, kinship	Minangkabau, Tshivenḓa	Indirect strategies and face-saving acts	Local cultural values shape unique politeness norms
10	Pragmatic Competence	Intercultural awareness	USA-Iraq (military context)	Use of imperatives and face-threatening acts	Lack of pragmatic competence can lead to misunderstandings

Characteristics and Dimensions of Politeness Character across Cultural Perspectives

A comprehensive analysis of the literature shows that the characteristics and dimensions of politeness character vary across cultures, shaped by local values, norms, and social orientations. Cross-cultural findings indicate that politeness cannot be treated as a universal construct but as a culturally embedded phenomenon reflecting each community's communicative philosophy (Kádár & House, 2021; Waddington et al., 2021). In Asian contexts, for instance, Ying & Hong (2020) found that Chinese speakers and Korean learners demonstrate hierarchical and collectivist tendencies through the use of "query preparatory" and "mood derivable" speech acts, reflecting a preference for harmony and respect for authority. In contrast, French speakers tend to be more egalitarian and individualistic, emphasizing indirectness and autonomy. Similarly, (Sikhwari, 2025) identified that gratitude

expressions in Tshivenḓa culture are not mere acknowledgments but acts that reinforce social cohesion and respect, illustrating the deep relational meaning of politeness. Such findings affirm that politeness is context-dependent and culturally negotiated, aligning with the notion that intercultural communication requires sensitivity to shared and divergent pragmatic norms (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021; Hu, 2021).

A comparative analysis between Lithuanian and American cultures by Jakučionytė (2020) further highlights these cultural distinctions. American speakers tend to employ direct, explicit forms of negative politeness, while Lithuanian speakers favor indirect, positive politeness, revealing differences in underlying communication philosophies. Likewise, Revita et al., (2025) demonstrated that in Minangkabau culture, politeness is rooted in the local value system, especially through the principle of Kato nan Ampek, which emphasizes indirect communication, harmony, and respect. These cultural nuances echo findings in intercultural pragmatics, where linguistic politeness serves as both a reflection of social structure and a tool for maintaining relational balance (Sikhwari, 2025; Virtanen & Lee, 2022). Collectively, the evidence underscores that politeness dimensions intertwine linguistic behavior with moral and social systems, revealing that polite character is not static but dynamically constructed across cultural boundaries (Mamat et al., 2021; Kecskes, 2017).

The Implementation of Politeness Values in Multicultural Educational Contexts

The implementation of politeness values in multicultural education is complex, requiring sensitivity to cultural diversity and pragmatic variation among learners. Effective practice demands that educators understand how cultural orientations influence communication strategies and classroom interaction (Taguchi, 2015). The study by Ying & Hong (2020) provides practical evidence that teachers must address students' pragmatic awareness by correcting inappropriate request forms and teaching the underlying cultural logic of politeness. Such integration strengthens both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence, aligning with recommendations to blend language instruction with intercultural awareness (Valiandes et al., 2018; Barany, 2016). Moreover, Culpeper and Pat's (2021) research on digital compliment responses in Hong Kong demonstrates that using familiar technological platforms can increase authenticity and contextual relevance in pragmatic learning. This finding supports pedagogical designs that simulate real-life multicultural communication. Consequently, successful implementation of politeness instruction relies on connecting linguistic form, social meaning, and culturally appropriate use in dynamic classroom contexts.

Similarly, the study by Soomro and Larina (2024) on greeting practices in Pakistani higher education shows that learners use hybrid address forms that mix local and English expressions to convey both closeness and respect. This phenomenon reflects the bicultural identity of multilingual learners and underscores the need for teaching models that honor local values while fostering global communication competence. Kirner-Ludwig and Fadhil Alsaedi (2021) further caution that inadequate intercultural pragmatic training can lead to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns. Therefore, educators must adopt culturally responsive pedagogies that promote tolerance toward errors and emphasize mutual understanding (Nurramadhani et al., 2025; Guberina, 2023; Arvanitis, 2018). The design of instructional materials should also accommodate students from diverse cultural backgrounds, integrating examples of real-world politeness across societies (Sarwari et al., 2024). When politeness education combines theoretical understanding with contextual practice, it strengthens learners' ability to engage ethically and effectively in multicultural interactions. Ultimately, such adaptive approaches bridge linguistic competence and intercultural empathy within character education.

Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Politeness Character Formation in Multicultural Settings

The effectiveness of politeness character development in multicultural environments is shaped by the interplay of social, cultural, linguistic, and contextual variables. Studies show that L2 transfer and reasoning patterns are fundamental, as learners often rely on their L1 pragmatic competence when learning an L2, which can either facilitate or hinder the acquisition of politeness strategies (Ying & Hong, 2020; Kecskes, 2017). Social distance and power relations also play a crucial role, with findings from Alqahtani (2024) demonstrating that imposition levels strongly affect Saudi speakers' use of negative politeness, while British speakers' choices are more influenced by social distance. These dynamics underscore the importance of intercultural pragmatic awareness in navigating culturally specific determinants of politeness (Hu, 2021). Moreover, gender and age differences significantly influence politeness expression, as women in American, Lithuanian, Vietnamese, and Canadian contexts displayed greater emotionality and creative linguistic use than men (Tran, 2022; Jakučionytė, 2020). Such findings highlight the need for differentiated pedagogical approaches that recognize individual learner variables in multicultural education.

In addition to gender and power relations, broader socio-cultural orientations such as collectivism versus individualism and hierarchical versus egalitarian values substantially affect politeness development. Revita et al., (2025) found that indirect language use in hierarchical contexts reflects a cultural emphasis on harmony and avoidance of confrontation, aligning with prior research on mitigating strategies in intercultural interaction (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021). Similarly, Sikhwari (2025) demonstrated that relational proximity shapes gratitude expressions, with closer ties yielding more intense emotional politeness. These findings suggest that politeness development is most effective when educators and learners are sensitive to both contextual and relational variations. By integrating pragmatic competence with awareness of intercultural norms, character education can cultivate adaptive politeness that respects cultural diversity while promoting mutual understanding (Sarwari et al., 2024; Mamat et al., 2021). Thus, systematic attention to these multidimensional factors is essential for ensuring the effectiveness of politeness character formation in multicultural environments. that shape the intensity and form of polite expressions.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical, offering a significant contribution to the fields of intercultural pragmatics, character education, and multicultural pedagogy. The findings challenge monolithic and universalist approaches to politeness instruction by demonstrating that politeness character is culturally situated, dynamically constructed, and influenced by sociopragmatic variables such as power relations, social distance, gender, and local value systems. Consequently, this study provides a robust conceptual framework for integrating intercultural pragmatic competence into character education curricula, particularly in increasingly globalized and multicultural educational settings. By synthesizing cross-cultural empirical evidence and linking it with pedagogical strategies, the study advances a culturally responsive model of politeness education that bridges linguistic competence, moral development, and intercultural empathy. This integrated perspective not only enriches theoretical discourse but also offers actionable guidance for curriculum designers, teacher educators, and policymakers seeking to foster ethical communication and social harmony in diverse classrooms. Therefore, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how culturally grounded politeness instruction can strengthen learners' global communicative competence while sustaining local identities—an issue of growing relevance in international educational scholarship.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review demonstrates that politeness is a culturally contextual phenomenon shaped by diverse values and orientations rather than a universal construct. The ten studies reviewed reveal significant variations in politeness strategies, from hierarchical-collectivist norms in Asian and African societies to egalitarian-individualist tendencies in Western contexts, influenced by factors such as cultural orientation, social distance, status, gender, and pragmatic competence. These findings underscore the need for multicultural education to adopt holistic and culturally responsive approaches that balance universal values of respect and harmony with local traditions. By fostering intercultural pragmatic competence, educators and policymakers can promote communication that reduces misunderstandings, counters stereotypes, and strengthens social cohesion in increasingly diverse societies. Future research is recommended to move beyond literature-based synthesis by conducting empirical investigations in diverse educational settings to validate how culturally grounded politeness instruction impacts learners' intercultural competence and character development. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine how politeness character evolves over time within multilingual and multicultural classrooms. Additionally, comparative experimental designs could explore the effectiveness of different pedagogical models in integrating intercultural pragmatics into character education curricula. Such research would provide stronger empirical grounding for the development of globally relevant yet locally responsive politeness education frameworks.

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