

Face-Saving Strategies in the Libyan EFL Preparatory Classroom: A Discourse Analysis of Teacher-Student Interaction

Maram Masoud Abdullah ¹
Hiba Salah Adeen Morghum ²
Hamed Alahirsh ³

¹ Department of English, School of Languages, The Libyan Academy for Postgraduate Studies, Libya

² Department of English, School of Languages, The Libyan Academy for Postgraduate Studies, Libya

³ Department of English, University of Sebha, Libya

Corresponding Author: Hiba Morghum | Email: hebamurghom.hsm@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated teachers' use of face-saving strategies and their influence on classroom interaction in an English as a Foreign Language EFL classroom. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with four students. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The findings revealed that teachers frequently employed face-saving strategies such as praise, encouragement, respectful communication, and indirect error correction. These strategies enhanced students' confidence, reduced embarrassment, encouraged active participation, and promoted positive classroom interaction. The classroom observation findings supported the interview data, demonstrating that face-saving strategies contribute to creating a supportive and interactive learning environment. The study concludes that integrating face-saving strategies into EFL teaching can foster effective classroom communication, support students' emotional well-being, and encourage greater participation in the language learning process.

Keywords: Face-saving strategies, politeness theory, classroom interaction, EFL classrooms, teacher–student interaction, qualitative research

1. Introduction

Classroom interaction plays a crucial role in the teaching and learning process. There is a broad consensus among researchers that a supportive classroom environment increases students' confidence and promotes their engagement in classroom interaction. In the EFL context, the positive classroom atmosphere is largely influenced by the extent of politeness strategies applied by teachers and students, including face-saving strategies (Humaero, 2019; Fitriyani and Andriyanti, 2020; Latrech and Alazzawie, 2022). As defined by Brown and Levinson (1987, p.61), face is “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”. Brown and Levinson further explain that generally face-saving strategies are applied by speakers to protect the listeners' positive face during communication. In the EFL context, interaction between EFL teachers and students encompasses several communicative acts such as inquiries, ideas exchange, providing feedback or asking for clarification. Therefore, without applying positive politeness

strategies, supportive environment cannot be maintained in the EFL classroom. In this respect, several researchers have investigated communication strategies used in the language classroom (such as Steve Walsh). Among other strategies politeness has been highlighted as one of the most effective strategies in EFL classroom communication. Studies demonstrated that both teachers and students use politeness strategies to maintain their respectful and cooperative interactions. These strategies are often influenced by social factors such as age, social distance, and learners' linguistic competence.

While Brown and Levinson explain how politeness and face-saving strategies help maintain interpersonal relationships, there is still insufficient understanding of how these strategies work in real classroom discourse and how they influence students' confidence, participation and classroom communication. Moreover, various studies worldwide have used Brown and Levinson's concept of "face" in investigating politeness strategies in the EFL classroom. However, to the researchers' best knowledge, hardly any research has been carried out to explore the use of face-saving strategies in the Libyan EFL contexts in general and the classroom at the preparatory level in particular.

Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by exploring face-saving strategies used in the Libyan preparatory school while teachers and students are engaged in classroom interaction. Specifically, this study seeks to identify the types of face-saving strategies applied by teachers during classroom communication and examine how these strategies influence students' participation, confidence, and classroom interaction. This study also aims to explore whether EFL teachers frequently use face-saving strategies such as praise, indirect correction, encouragement, polite requests, and supportive feedback during classroom interaction. These strategies may help reduce students' anxiety, increase their confidence and encourage active participation in classroom activities. The following research questions guide the objectives of this study: (1) What are the types of face-saving strategies used by teachers during teacher-student interaction in Libyan preparatory schools? (2) How do face-saving strategies influence students' confidence and participation?.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2-1 Classroom Interactions

Classroom interactions is considering as a fundamental aspect of the teaching and learning process, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. According to Steve Walsh (2011, p, 158), "interaction is the heart of effective classroom practice ". This perspective highlights the important role of interactions in creating learning opportunities and supporting students' engagement in the classroom conversational activities. Walsh further explains that teacher talk, teaching techniques, feedback, scaffolding and turn-taking patterns influence the quality of classroom communication and learner participation. Similarly, in an early recognized work, Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) examined classroom discourse and introduced the IRF model (Initiation-Response-Feedback) which explains how classroom communication is structured through teacher initiation, student response, and teacher feedback. Their framework has been widely used in analyzing teacher-student interaction in educational settings.

2-2 Politeness Theory:

Politeness is generally defined as the use of language and communicative behavior to maintain harmonious social relationships and show consideration for others during interaction. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness serves as a mechanism for minimizing conflict and protecting individuals' social self-image, which they refer to as **face**. Their theory is one of the most influential frameworks in pragmatics and has been widely applied to the study of classroom and interpersonal communication.

Politeness theory, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), is based on the concept of "face," which was originally introduced by Erving Goffman (1955). Goffman defined it as an individual's public self-image that they attempt to maintain during social interaction. Building on Goffman's work, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) defined face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself." Expanding on this concept, Brown and Levinson argued that communication often involves face-threatening acts (FTAs). Such as criticism, this argument, correction or direct requests, which may threaten the listener's social image.

To reduce these threats, speakers use politeness strategies, also known as face-saving strategies, which protect both their own face and the face of others. Brown and Levinson identified two types of face:

Positive Face refers to an individual's desire to be appreciated, approved of, respected, and accepted by others. People want their opinions, values, and contributions to be recognized positively. In the classroom context, a student's positive face may be supported when a teacher provides praise, encouragement, or positive feedback.

Negative Face refers to an individual's desire for autonomy, freedom of action, and freedom from imposition. Individuals prefer not to be pressured, interrupted, or forced into actions against their wishes. In educational settings, teachers may protect students' negative face by making polite requests, offering suggestions rather than commands, or using indirect forms of correction.

Brown and Levinson proposed four main politeness strategies, arranged from the most direct to the most indirect.

- 1- **Bald on-record strategy:** this is the most direct strategy, where speakers express their intentions clearly without attempting to minimize the threat to the hearer's face. It is commonly used when efficiency is more important than politeness. For example, a teacher may say, "Open your books" or "Answer the question."
- 2- **Positive politeness strategy:** This strategy aims to satisfy the hearer's positive face by expressing friendliness, approval, solidarity, or encouragement. Speakers seek to reduce social distance and create a sense of cooperation. Examples include praise, compliments, and expressions of support such as "Good job" or "That's a very good answer."
- 3- **Negative politeness strategy:** This strategy focuses on respecting the hearer's negative face by minimizing imposition and showing deference. Speakers often use indirect language, hedges, apologies, or polite requests. For example, a teacher may say, "Could you try answering that question?" rather than giving a direct command.

- 4- **Off-record strategy:** this is the most indirect strategy. Speakers hint at their intentions without explicitly stating them, allowing the hearer to interpret the intended meaning. For example, instead of saying, "Close the window," a speaker may say, "It's rather cold in here."

Brown and Levinson argue that speakers do not choose politeness strategies randomly. Rather, the choice of strategy depends on the perceived seriousness of the face-threatening act. This assessment is influenced by three important social variables: **power (P)**, which refers to the relative authority between speakers; **social distance (D)**, which refers to the degree of familiarity or closeness between interlocutors; and **ranking of imposition (R)**, which refers to how burdensome or intrusive a particular act is perceived to be within a given culture. The greater the power difference, social distance, or level of imposition, the more likely speakers are to use indirect and polite strategies to protect face and maintain harmonious interaction. These considerations are particularly relevant in EFL classrooms, where teachers and students continuously negotiate interpersonal relationships through language.

2-3 Face-saving strategies in EFL classroom

Previous studies have shown that politeness and face-saving strategies play a crucial role in classroom communication. Research suggests that when teachers use polite and supportive language, students feel more comfortable, confident and motivated to participate in classroom activities. Face-saving strategies help reduce learner anxiety, maintain positive interpersonal relationships, and create a supportive classroom environment.

However, although many studies have explored classroom discourse and politeness strategies separately, limited research has specifically investigated how face-saving strategies are employed in authentic teacher-student interaction in the EFL classroom; therefore, the present study aims to fill this gap by investigating face-saving strategies through discourse analysis.

3. Previous studies:

Russel J. Aporbo¹, Judy Marie C. Barabag¹, Bernadette U. Catig¹, Christine Maybelle P. Claveria¹(2024) conducted a study in title Face-threatening and Face-saving Speech Acts of Teachers: A Discourse Analysis of Classroom Interactions. This study aimed to investigate teachers' strategies during classroom interactions. Using a qualitative design, the researchers adopted a discourse analysis to examine naturally occurring classroom communication. Data were collected through classroom observations, video recording, and field notes focusing on spoken interactions between teachers and learners during classroom discussions. The findings revealed that teachers frequently used positive face-threatening acts, including criticism, approval, sarcasm, threats and expression of negative emotions which may influence students' confidence, self-image, and participation. The study also found that negative face-threatening acts, such as reminders, suggestions, and instructional directives, occurred less frequently. In addition, teachers applied several politeness strategies to reduce threats, including negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record strategies and bald on-record strategies. The researchers concluded that face-threatening and face-saving acts play a significant role in shaping teachers-students interaction and classroom communications.

Sembiring et al.(2023) conducted study entitled Politeness in the EFL Classroom Interaction: Strategies in Avoiding Face Threatening Act (FTA), the study aimed to investigate how lectures use politeness strategies to avoid face-threatening acts and maintain harmonious during a teaching and learning process, using a qualitative research design, the researchers observed classroom interactions between lecturer and students, recorded their communications, and transcript the lecturers' utterances for analysis. The study focused on the use of politeness strategies in naturally occurring classroom discourse analysis and examined how lecturers manage interpersonal communication through language. The findings showed that lecturers used three politeness strategies during classroom interaction, including bald on-record, positive politeness, and negative politeness strategies. Bald on-record strategies were used when lecturer gave direct instructions or commands, reflecting their power in the classroom. Positive politeness strategies were used to reduce social distance. Negative politeness strategies, such as apologies and indirect expressions, were used to avoid positioning themselves as superior, instead presenting themselves as approachable and considerate.

Manuel Padilla Cruz conducted a study entitled Phatic utterances as face threatening/saving acts or politeness strategies: A pragmatic reflection for their teaching in the L2 class. The study aimed to investigate when and why phatic utterances may either threaten or save face during social interaction in order to draw some implications for their teaching in the L2 class. The study adopted a qualitative approach and concentrated on face-saving utterances and examined how the use or avoidance of phatic utterances may have negative and positive consequences in social interaction. The findings revealed that teachers should not always present phatic utterances as a positive politeness strategy. It also observed that the use of phatic utterances in the UK and USA depends on the social relationship between interlocutors. Furthermore, based on Brown and Levinson (1987), speakers may use different strategies in managing face-threatening acts, including bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record strategies, or avoiding face-threatening acts. In addition, the study showed that interlocutors tend to use neutral phatic utterances and avoid more personal expressions.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design:

This study employed a qualitative research design using a discourse analysis approach. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to investigate the use of face-saving strategies in naturally occurring teacher-student interaction in an EFL classroom. Discourse analysis was used to examine how language is employed during in classroom communication and how teachers use face-saving strategies to maintain interpersonal relationships and support classroom interaction. In addition, thematic analysis was used to analyze students' interview responses regarding their perceptions of these strategies.

4.2 Participants:

The study was conducted in an EFL classroom at a public preparatory school in Libya. The classroom consisted of one teacher and 18 students. Classroom observations involved the teacher and the entire class to examine the use of face- saving strategies during classroom interaction. Following the observation, four students were selected through purposive sampling to participate in interviews. The interviews explored

students' perceptions of how teachers' face-saving strategies influenced their confidence, participation, responses to error correction and classroom interaction.

4.3 Data sources:

The data of this study were based on a single classroom transcription documenting a twenty-minute English language lesson for grade 9 at a local school. The lesson is about (present perfect & past simple), using examples such as (I have enjoyed my holiday in London; I enjoyed my holiday in London.) it obtained from audio-recorded between the teacher and students in an EFL classroom. The recording captured naturally occurring classroom discourse during the teaching and learning process. In addition, classroom observation was used to support the understanding of interaction content. The researcher listened carefully to the audio data several times in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of classroom interaction. The recorded conversations were then transcribed into written form for further analysis.

Data analysis: The collected data were analyzed using a discourse analysis approach. First, the researcher read the transcript carefully to become familiar with the data. Second, utterances containing face-saving and face-threatening strategies were identified. Third, the identified utterances were classified based on the politeness strategies proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987), including positive and negative politeness strategies. Finally, the data were interpreted to examine how face-saving strategies contributed to classroom interaction and interpersonal communication.

The interviews were conducted with the students after the classroom observation to explore their perceptions of teachers' use of face-saving strategies and the influence of these strategies on their confidence, participation, and classroom interaction. The interviews involved open-ended questions and were audio-recorded with the participants. The interviews were conducted in Arabic to allow participants to express their views comfortably and their level and then translated into English for analysis.

After that, the recordings were transcribed to ensure accurate representation of the participants' responses. The interview data were then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. First, the researchers became familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. Next, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful words, phrases, and ideas related to the research objectives, such as confidence, encouragement, participation, embarrassment, respectful correction, and teacher support. These codes were grouped into themes; then, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately represented the data and addressed the research questions. Afterward, the themes were clearly defined and named. Three major themes emerged from the analysis: face-saving strategies and student confidence, face-saving strategies and error correction, and face-saving strategies and participation. Finally, the themes were interpreted and discussed according to the research questions and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Representative quotations from the participants were included to support the analysis and enhance the credibility of the findings.

5. FINDINGS

After observing the class, this is the result that was witnessed. A class was attended with Grade 9, including 18 students. The first interaction between the teacher and students:

Extract (1)

Transcript

T: Good morning, sunshine.

S: Good morning, teacher.

T: How are you?

S: We are fine, thank you.

This extract occurs at the beginning of the lesson and demonstrates the use of a positive politeness strategy to show friendliness or closeness. The teacher initiates the interaction with the greeting “good morning, sunshine,” which conveys warmth and friendliness toward the students. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness strategies are used to minimize social distance. In this extract, the teacher’s choice of the word “sunshine” expresses friendliness and creates a welcoming environment. It also made the students feel valued and appreciated.

The teacher’s question “How are you today” also serves as a face-saving strategy it shows interest in the students’ feelings and well-being. Such expressions help establish positive teacher-student relationships and contribute to a supportive classroom atmosphere.

The students’ responses “Thank you” show appreciation and respect toward the teacher, creating positive politeness interactions.

Extract (2)

Transcript

T: Pay attention, please!

T: Open your book to page 76. We are going to answer exercise C.

S: Ok, teacher.

This extract demonstrates the teacher’s use of negative politeness strategy and bald-on-record strategy during a classroom management and interaction. The teacher’s use “pay attention please” to attract students’ attention although it is a command. The inclusion of the word “please” softens the instruction and reduces its force. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the use of politeness such as “please” can be considered a negative politeness strategy because it shows respect for the hearers and minimizes the imposition of the request.

In the teacher’s second utterance, “Open your book to page 76, we are going to answer exercise C,” the teacher gives clear instructions without using polite words such as “could you” or “please” to show authority which is common in classrooms. This can be classified as a bald-on-record strategy, as the teacher communicates the instruction directly and unambiguously.

Extract (3)

Transcript

T: Do you understand how to answer the questions?

S: Yes. (Most students didn't reply)

This extract was used to check the students' understanding and learning needs; the teacher's role is as a guide. In addition, the strategy used here is a positive politeness strategy. The student's response "yes" is used to show engagement and participation in the interaction, while the silence of others may suggest uncertainty, lack of attention or reluctance to respond. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the positive politeness strategy is used to show concern for the hearer's needs and maintain cooperative relationships.

Extract (4)

Transcript

T: number one: My brother _____ in Egypt for two years. (be).

S1: Has been.

T: Who agrees with this answer?

S: (most of them agree)

T: That's the right answer, great job.

T: number two, When _____ you _____ to Kenya? (go) Who can answer this guy?

S2: The answer is (did) you (went).

T: "did" "went" (facial expression).

S: Sorry, teacher, I mean did you go.

T: Very good (smiling expression)

This extract demonstrates the teacher's use of face-saving strategies during error correction. The teacher asked students who agreed with this answer in order to make sure that they understood and to engage them in the interaction. "That's the right answer, great job" the teacher is praising and giving positive feedback; the main strategy used is positive "that's right to confirm that the answer is correct, "great job to encourage and motivate the students.

Extract (5)

Transcript

S2: the answer is (did) you (went).

T: "did" "went" (questioning tone and facial expressions).

S: Sorry, teacher, I mean did you go.

The main strategy is elicitation (prompting the learner to find the correct answer). The students give an answer and the teacher repeats the same answer with facial expression to indicate that there is an error

without directly correcting it, to encourage the students to correct the sentence independently. This can be interpreted as an off-record strategy.

Extract (6)

Transcript

T: In this question which tense do we have to use: past simple or present perfect?

T: number three, _____ your pen-friend ever _____ you? (visit)

S: Present perfect.

T: How do you know it is present perfect?

S: Because there is ever”.

T: Excellent.

The teacher is trying to check the students' understanding. The teacher checks whether the students understand the tense rather than giving random answers. To encourage the students to justify their answers. The utterance “Excellent” is used to praise students and support their positive face by showing approval of a correct answer, and creates a supportive classroom atmosphere.

Extract (7)

Transcript

T: where _____ you _____ your car last night? (leave)

T: In this question, there is last night. “Which tense do we have to use: past simple or present perfect?

S: past simple.

T: Exactly.

S: Can I answer the question teacher?

T: Sure, you can.

S: Did you leave?

T: Well done.

This extract demonstrates the teacher’s use of a positive politeness strategy during a classroom interaction. The teacher encourages students' participation by asking guiding questions. The utterance “exactly functions as a positive politeness strategy because it expresses agreement and approval of the student’s answer. Similarly, the expression “well done serves as praise and encouragement, supporting the student’s positive face by making the student feel appreciated and successful. According to Brown and Levinson (1987).

In addition, the teacher’s response “Sure, you can demonstrates friendly interaction, rather than ignoring the student's request. The teacher grants permission in a polite way. This response helps maintain a positive classroom atmosphere and encourages students to participate without fear of embarrassment. The

interaction also reflects effective classroom communication and described by Steve Walsh. The teacher creates opportunities for students' involvement through questioning and supportive feedback, which promotes engagement and active participation in the lesson, for example, "Can I answer the question, teacher".

Extract (8)

Transcript

T: Who can read the last point and answer?

S: (most students raise their hands)

T: You in the middle, please.

S: I _____ never _____ a crocodile. There is "never so we use the present perfect!"

T: Yes, amazing.

S: have and seen.

This extract illustrates the use of a positive politeness strategy the teacher encourages students' participation by inviting students to read and answer the questions. The teacher's "yes, amazing" represents a positive politeness strategy, because it expresses approval, praise and encouragement. In this extract, the teacher praises the student's correct answer and promotes the student's confidence. The interaction also shows a supportive classroom atmosphere. The fact that most students raised their hands indicates willingness to participate in the lesson. From the perspective of classroom interaction, the teacher creates opportunities for learner involvement by asking an open question and selecting a student to respond. This supports Steve Walsh's view that effective classroom interaction provides learners with opportunities to participate actively and engage in the learning process.

Interviewing Data

The findings obtained from the interviews conducted with four students to explore their perceptions of teachers' face-saving strategies in the EFL classroom. The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, which involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The analysis resulted in four major themes: (1) Face-saving strategies and students' confidence, (2) Face-saving strategies and error correction, (3) Face-saving strategies and students' participation, and (4) Face-saving strategies and classroom interaction. Each theme is presented below and supported by extracts from participants' responses.

Theme One: Face-saving strategies and students' confidence

The interview findings revealed a clear and consistent pattern regarding the positive influence of teachers' face-saving strategies on students' confidence in the EFL classroom. All four participants described teacher encouragement, praise, and supportive language as important factors that strengthened their self-confidence and motivated them to participate in classroom activities. The participants consistently indicated that positive comments from teachers made them feel appreciated, capable, and more willing to

express their ideas during lessons. These findings suggest that positive face-saving strategies contribute to creating a supportive learning environment in which students feel respected and emotionally secure. A recurring pattern across the interviews was the positive effect of teacher praise and motivational expressions on students' confidence. Participants explained that words of encouragement such as "excellent" and "amazing" increased their confidence and encouraged them to respond more actively during classroom discussions. One participant stated:

"العبارات التحفيزية مثل ممتاز ومذهل تخلييني نتجاوب بشكل أفضل وتزيد ثقتي بنفسي."

Similarly, another participant explained

"نعم العبارات التحفيزية تجعلني أشعر بأني ذكية ومجتهدة"

These responses indicate that praise serves as more than simple positive feedback; it reinforces students' beliefs in their own abilities and helps develop a more positive self-image. When teachers acknowledge students' efforts through encouraging language. Students become more confident in answering questions and participating in classroom activities. Such findings demonstrate that positive face-saving strategies satisfy students' need for appreciation and recognition, thereby strengthening their confidence and willingness to engage in learning.

Another important pattern identified in the interviews was the relationship between encouragement and emotional comfort. Participants emphasized that kind and supportive words made them feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of making mistakes. One participant commented:

"العبارات التحفيزية تخلييني نحس بثقة في روحي، والكلمات الحلوة تفرحني هلبا، تخلييني نبي نشارك أكثر."

Likewise, another participant stated:

"نعم، العبارات التحفيزية تزيد من ثقتي بنفسي وتشجعني على الإجابة."

These responses suggest that supportive teacher communication creates an emotionally safe classroom atmosphere where students feel valued rather than judged. When students perceive that their teachers appreciate their efforts, they experience less anxiety and become more willing to express their opinions and answer questions. Consequently, face-saving strategies not only strengthen students' confidence but also reduce the fear of negative evaluation that often limits classroom participation.

The findings of this theme are consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which argues that individuals have a positive face, the desire to be appreciated, respected, and valued by others. By using praise and encouraging language, teachers support students' positive face, helping them feel accepted and competent within the classroom. The finding also supports Walsh (2011), who emphasizes that supportive teacher talk contributes to learning confidence and creates opportunities for greater classroom engagement. Therefore, positive face-saving strategies appear to be an essential element of effective teacher-student interaction in the EFL classroom.

Theme Two: Face-saving strategies and error correction

The interview findings revealed that students generally viewed error correction as an essential part of the learning process. However, participants consistently reported that their emotional responses to correction

depended largely on how teachers delivered corrective feedback. While students accepted that making mistakes was a natural aspect of language learning, they also indicated that direct or public correction often caused feelings of embarrassment and discomfort. In contrast, respectful and indirect correction, particularly through the use of hints, helped preserve their confidence and encouraged continued participation. These findings suggest that teachers' face-saving strategies play a significant role in reducing the emotional impact of error correction while supporting students' learning.

Subtheme 2.1: Feeling of embarrassment during error correction

A clear pattern emerging from the interviews was that students experienced varying degrees of embarrassment when their mistakes were corrected publicly. Although none of the participants objected to being corrected, they emphasized that the teacher's manner of correction determined whether the experience was perceived as supportive or discouraging. One participant explained:

"أشعر بالإحراج قليلاً عندما أخطئ."

Similarly, another participant stated:

"لما نغلط ننحرج لكن عادي نتعلم من الغلط، الأفضل يصحح بهدوء ويحكي وين الغلط."

These responses demonstrate that students generally accept making mistakes as part of the learning process. However, they prefer correction to be delivered calmly and respectfully. Rather than rejecting corrective feedback, participants expressed a desire for feedback that guides improvement without damaging their self-esteem. This indicates that supportive correction helps students focus on learning rather than on the embarrassment associated with making errors.

Another participant highlighted that the emotional impact of correction depended more on the teacher's behavior than on the mistake itself. She explained:

"عندما أخطئ أشعر بالأحراج عندما يكون أسلوب المعلم سيئ."

Likewise, another participant commented:

"نحس بالأحراج عندما يكون التصحيح أمام الجميع خاصة إذا كان بأسلوب مباشر."

These responses suggest that students' embarrassment is influenced primarily by the way teachers communicate corrective feedback. Public correction delivered in a harsh or overly direct manner threatens students' positive face by exposing their mistakes in front of classmates. As a result, students may experience anxiety, reduced confidence, and hesitation to participate in future classroom interactions. Conversely, when correction is delivered respectfully and sensitively, students are more likely to accept feedback positively and remain actively engaged in learning.

Overall, the findings indicate that students do not perceive error correction itself as a negative classroom practice. Instead, they distinguish between supportive correction that promotes learning and corrective practices that threaten their dignity or self-confidence. Therefore, the effectiveness of error correction depends not only on correcting linguistic errors but also on preserving students' emotional well-being throughout the learning process.

Subtheme: 2.2 Teacher hints as an effective face-saving strategy

Another prominent pattern identified in the interviews was students' strong preference for indirect corrective feedback, particularly through the use of teacher hints. All participants described hints as an effective strategy that enabled them to identify and correct their own mistakes without experiencing embarrassment. Rather than immediately providing the correct answer, teachers' hints encouraged students to think independently, recall previously learned information, and arrive at the correct response themselves. One participant explained:

"نعم، التلميحات تساعدني جداً لأنني مرات نكون نسيتهما وأتذكرها بنفسني ونشغل دماغني."

Another participant similarly stated:

"أي، التلميحات تساعدني أكثر لأنه ما يحسننيش أني غلطانة بطريقة محرجة."

These responses indicate that hints encourage students to participate actively in the learning process while maintaining their confidence. Instead of feeling criticized, students perceive hints as supportive guidance that helps them discover the correct answer independently. Consequently, indirect feedback protects students' positive face by reducing the possibility of embarrassment during classroom interaction.

Participants also emphasized the cognitive benefits of teacher hints. One student commented:

"نفضل التلميحات لأنها تساعدني نفهم أكثر."

She further explained:

"أي، لأنها تخليني تفكر ونوصل للإجابة بروحي."

Similarly, another participant stated:

"نعم، التلميحات تساعدني أن نوصل للإجابة."

These responses demonstrate that hints not only reduce emotional discomfort but also promote deeper learning. By encouraging students to reflect on their own knowledge and identify their mistakes independently, indirect feedback supports critical thinking and strengthens long-term understanding. Rather than relying solely on the teacher's explanations, students become active participants in constructing their own learning.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that hints represent an effective face-saving strategy in the EFL classroom. They enable teachers to correct errors while protecting students' self-esteem, preserving their confidence, and encouraging continued participation. Unlike direct correction, which may increase anxiety, hints provide students with opportunities to recognize and correct their own mistakes in a respectful and supportive manner. Consequently, indirect feedback contributes to both students' emotional well-being and their academic development. The findings of this theme support Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which argues that individuals seek to maintain their positive face and avoid situations that threaten their social image. Public and direct correction may constitute a face-threatening act because it exposes students' mistakes before others. In contrast, indirect feedback through hints minimizes this threat by allowing students to maintain their dignity while correcting their errors. These findings are also consistent with Walsh (2011), who emphasizes that supportive classroom interaction and

sensitive teacher feedback create opportunities for learning while encouraging students to remain actively engaged in classroom communication.

Theme three: Face-saving strategies and students' participation

The interview findings showed that face-saving strategies played a significant role in promoting students' participation in the EFL classroom. A consistent pattern across all the participants was that teacher encouragement, respectful communication, and positive classroom behaviour increased their willingness to answer questions, express their opinions, and engage in classroom activities. Participants explained that when teachers create a supportive and non-threatening learning environment, they felt more confident and less afraid of making mistakes. These findings suggest that positive face-saving strategies encourage active participation by fostering students' confidence, reducing anxiety, and strengthening their motivation to contribute during classroom interaction.

Subtheme 3.1: Teacher encouragement increases students' participations

One of the strongest patterns identified in the interviews was the positive influence of teacher encouragement on students' willingness to participate. All participants described encouragement as an important factor that motivated them to become more actively involved in classroom activities. Rather than feeling pressured or afraid of making mistakes, students reported that supportive comments increased their confidence and motivated them to answer questions and participate in classroom activities.

One participant explained:

"التشجيع يخليني نتجاوب بشكل أفضل ويأثر هلبا على راحتي ورغبتني في الدراسة"

Another participant similarly stated:

"لأنه كلام المعلم مشجع فيخلي الفصل يتفاعل ويتجاوب معه، ويجعلني أحب المادة واستمتع بها من حيث دراستها والمشاركة"

These responses indicate that teacher encouragement creates a positive emotional atmosphere that enhances students' enjoyment of learning. When students receive praise and encouragement, they feel more comfortable participating in classroom activities and become more motivated to contribute to discussion. Consequently, encouragement functions as an effective face-saving strategy by reinforcing students' positive self-image and reducing hesitation during classroom interaction.

Subtheme3.2: Respectful teacher behaviour promotes active engagement

Another recurring pattern was the importance of respectful teacher behaviour in encouraging students' participation. Participants emphasized that they were more willing to interact when teachers communicated respectfully, appreciated their contributions, and avoided criticism or hurtful remarks.

One participant's response:

"أي لان التشجيع يخليني نحس ان الأستاذ مقدرني ومانخافش من المشاركة، ولما يكون أسلوبه مشجع ومافيش انتقاد او كلام يجرح"

Similarly, another participant stated:

"التشجيع المستمر ويكون جو المعلم حلو، وطريقة حديث المعلم تؤثر بشكل كبير فكلما كان محترما ومشجعا"

كانت التجربة أفضل".

These responses suggest that students value respectful teacher-student relationships as an essential condition for active participation. Feeling appreciated and respected reduces students' fear of negative evaluation and encourages them to express their ideas more confidently. Participation is associated with supportive communication with greater emotional comfort, which increases their willingness to answer questions, share opinions, and engage in classroom interaction. Furthermore, the interviews indicate that participation is influenced by the classroom atmosphere created by the teacher. When teachers use encouraging language, acknowledge students' efforts, and communicate respectfully, students perceive the classroom as a safe environment where mistakes are accepted as a part of learning. This supportive atmosphere encourages students to participate more actively without fear of embarrassment or criticism.

The findings demonstrated that face-saving strategies enhance students' participation through encouragement, respect, and emotional support. Across all participants, there was a shared perception that teachers' positive communication increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and motivated participation in classroom activities. This indicates that students are more likely to participate when their positive face is maintained through supportive teacher behaviour rather than criticism or negative evaluation.

Theme Four: Face-saving strategies and classroom interaction

The interview findings demonstrated that face-saving strategies contributed significantly to improving classroom interaction in the EFL classroom. All participants indicated that teachers' supportive communication, respectful behaviour, and continuous encouragement created a positive classroom atmosphere that promoted meaningful interaction. Participants explained that when teachers treated students respectfully, encouraged participation, and listened to their ideas, they felt more comfortable interacting during lessons. These findings suggest that face-saving strategies strengthen classroom interaction by increasing students' confidence, creating opportunities for active teacher-student communication, and fostering mutual respect.

Subtheme 4.1: Teacher encouragement creates a positive interactive classroom environment

A prominent pattern identified in the interviews was the role of teacher encouragement in promoting classroom interaction. Participants described encouraging language as an important factor that motivated students to communicate more actively during lessons. Teacher encouragement created an atmosphere in which students felt comfortable interacting with their teachers.

One participant stated:

"لأنه كلام المعلم مشجع فيخلي الفصل يتفاعل ويتجاوب معه، ويجعلني أحب المادة واستمتع بها من حيث المشاركة والدراسة".

Another participant responded:

"أحب تفاعل المعلم مع الطلاب عندما يشجع على المشاركة ويعامل الجميع بعدالة".

These responses indicate that teacher encouragement contributes to the classroom environment. Students perceived encouraging communication as creating a positive atmosphere where interaction occurred naturally rather than through pressure or obligation. Furthermore, participants emphasized that equal treatment and fairness encouraged all students to contribute, thereby increasing the overall level of classroom interaction. These findings suggest that encouragement positively influences students' attitudes

towards learning. When students feel appreciated and supported by their teachers, they become more motivated to communicate, ask questions, and respond during classroom interaction.

Subtheme 4.2: Respectful teacher-student communication enhances classroom interaction

Another important pattern in the interviews was the significance of respectful communication in promoting effective classroom interaction. Participants emphasized that teacher who listened to students' opinions, responded to their questions, and communicated calmly created an environment where students felt comfortable expressing themselves.

One participant stated:

"نتمني ان يخصص وقت أكبر للاستماع لأراء الطلاب والاجابة عن استفساراتهم، لان ذلك يزيد من التفاعل والفهم"

Another participant

"إذا كان هادئ ومحترم نحس براحة أكثر وتفاعل معاه"

These responses demonstrated that classroom interaction strengthened when the teacher actively involved students in the learning process. Providing opportunities for students to express their opinions, ask questions, and receive respectful responses encourages meaningful communication between teachers and students. Participants viewed interaction as a collaborative process in which teachers and students exchange ideas within a supportive learning environment. Moreover, the interview indicated that respectful communication reduces students' fear of negative evaluation and increases their willingness to engage in classroom interaction. Students reported feeling more relaxed and confident when teachers communicate calmly and respectfully, enabling them to participate more freely without fear of criticism. The findings demonstrated that face-saving strategies contribute substantially to improving classroom interaction by establishing a learning environment based on encouragement, fairness, and respectful communication.

The findings of this theme are consistent with Brown and Levinson (1987) Politeness theory, which proposes that individuals are more willing to communicate when their positive face is respected and supported. By using encouraging language, treating students fairly, and responding respectfully to their contributions, teachers create conditions that facilitate meaningful interaction. The findings also support Walsh (2011), who argues that successful classroom interaction depends on supportive teacher talk that encourages learners to participate actively and collaboratively. Therefore, the interview findings suggest that face-saving strategies are essential for establishing an interactive, student-centered EFL classroom in which communication and learning develop simultaneously.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study are consistent with those of Aporbo et al.(2024), who reported that teachers employed various face-saving strategies to manage classroom communication and enhance teacher-student interaction. Both studies highlight the important role of face-saving strategies in creating a supportive classroom environment that facilitates effective communication and encourages positive interaction between teachers and students. The similarity may be attributed to shared emphasis on maintaining students' positive face through supportive teacher behaviours that promote respect,

confidence, and active engagement in the classroom. However, the two studies differ in their focus. While Aporbo et al.(2024), identified the different types of face -threatening and face- saving acts used by teachers during classroom interaction, the current study focused on students' perception of these strategies and their influence on their confidence, participation, error correction, and classroom interaction. The findings of this study revealed that teachers' use of praise, encouragement, respectful communication, and indirect error correction reduced students' fear of making mistakes and increased their willingness to participate actively in classroom activities. In contrast, Aporbo et al. (2024) focused on the teachers' communicative behaviours without examining how they influenced students' emotional responses. Therefore, the present study extends previous research by demonstrating the positive impact of face-saving strategies from the learners' perspective.

The findings of this study are also consistent with those of Sembiring et al. (2023), who found that lecturers employed various politeness strategies to avoid face-threatening acts and maintain harmony in classroom interaction. Similarly, the present study revealed that teachers' face-saving strategies, including praise, encouragement, respectful communication, and the use of hints during error correction, created a supportive learning environment that encouraged students to participate more actively in classroom activities. Both studies emphasize that maintaining students' positive face through supportive communication strengthens teacher-student relationships and promotes effective classroom interaction. However, the two studies differ in their focus and context. Sembiring et al. (2023) investigate the types of politeness strategies employed by lecturers during classroom discourse, whereas the current study explored students' perception of teachers' face-saving strategies and their influence on their confidence, participation, responses to error correction, and classroom interaction. Furthermore, Sembiring et al. (2023) focused on teachers' linguistic behaviour during classroom communication, whereas this study considered student experiences and emotional responses to these strategies. These differences are likely due to the different research objectives, educational contexts, and sources of data used in the two studies. Nevertheless, both studies demonstrated that respectful and supportive communication contributes to creating a positive learning environment that encourages students to engage more confidently in classroom interaction.

The findings of the present study are also consistent with those of Padilla Cruz (2004) who emphasized the importance of face-saving strategies in promoting effective communication and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships; both studies support Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, highlighting the importance of protecting individuals' positive face during communication. Padilla Cruz argued that phatic utterances function as positive politeness strategies by creating solidarity and a relationship between interlocutors; similarly, the present study found that teachers' use of praise, encouragement, supportive feedback, and indirect error correction enhances students' confidence, reduces feelings of embarrassment, and increases their willingness to participate in classroom interaction. Therefore, both studies demonstrate that face-saving strategies contribute to creating a supportive communicative environment and encourage greater interaction among participants. Despite these similarities, several differences can be identified. Padilla Cruz's study focused on the role of phatic utterances in social interaction and L2 communication, whereas the current study examined the influence of teachers' face-saving strategies on students' participation, confidence, error correction and classroom

interaction in EFL classrooms. Furthermore, Padilla Cruz concluded that the effectiveness of phatic utterances depends on contextual factors such as social distance, power relations, and cultural norms. In contrast, the present study specifically revealed that supportive teacher behaviour, including praise, encouragement, and indirect error correction, helped reduce students' anxiety, preserved their positive face and encouraged classroom engagement. Although the two studies differ in their research focus, both studies confirm the significance of face-saving strategies in facilitating communication, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and contributing to creating a supportive learning environment.

Limitations:

The study has some limitations. First, the small number of participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, although data were collected through both classroom observation and student interviews, the findings were limited to a specific educational setting and may not reflect practices in other classrooms or institutions. Third, the observational data were restricted to a limited number of classroom interactions. Finally, the study examined face-saving strategies within a specific period of observation and did not investigate their long-term effects on students' participation and language development.

Recommendations

Future research could involve large samples, multiple classrooms, and longitudinal designs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of face-saving strategies in EFL classrooms.

Pedagogical implications:

The findings of this study have several pedagogical implications for EFL teachers. The results suggest that teachers should employ face-saving strategies, such as praise, encouragement, supportive feedback, and the use of hints during error corrections, to create a supportive classroom environment. These strategies can enhance students' confidence, increase their willingness to participate in classroom activities, and reduce their fear of making mistakes. Furthermore, teachers should avoid harsh criticism and embarrassing students in front of their classmates by using respectful and encouraging comments; teachers can reduce students' anxiety, maintain their self-image and promote engagement in classroom interactions.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role of face-saving strategies in promoting students' participation in EFL classrooms through classroom observations and student interviews. The findings revealed that teachers' use of praise, encouragement, supportive feedback, and indirect error correction contributed to creating a positive and supportive learning environment. These strategies enhanced students' confidence, reduced feelings of embarrassment, and increased their willingness to participate in classroom interactions. The study also found that students preferred indirect correction techniques because they allowed them to recognize and correct their mistakes while maintaining their self-esteem. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of face-saving strategies in fostering positive teacher-student relationships and encouraging active classroom participation. Furthermore, the results support Brown and Levinson's

(1987) politeness theory, demonstrating that protecting students' positive face can facilitate effective communication and engagement in educational settings.

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