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Requesting Favours from AI: A Comparison of Saudi University Students' Politeness Strategies Toward ChatGPT and Human Instructors

Majdah M. Aseeri
Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia
mmasiri@kku.edu.sa

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3819-7104

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الملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق مما إذا كان طلاب الجامعات السعودية يستخدمون نفس استراتيجيات اللباقة مع منصة شات جي بي تي كما يفعلون مع مدرسيهم عند طلب الخدمات من كليهما. اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج المختلط) كمي ونوعي) .في الجزء الكمي، وزعت 480 استمارة بيانات على شكل مهمة إكمال الحوار على 60 طالبًا في جامعة الملك خالد (30 طالبة و30 طالبًا، من تخصصين أكاديميين: العلوم والآداب) تتضمن مهمة إكمال الحوار أربعة سيناريوهات مختلفة وحالتين: سياق المدرس وسياق شات جي بي تي. أما الجزء النوعي، فقد تضمن مقابلات شبه منظمة مع 16 طالبًا (8 طالبات و8 طلاب، 8 طلاب من تخصصات العلوم الإنسانية و8 طلاب من تخصصات العلوم). في سياق المدرس، كشفت النتائج عن استخدام استراتيجيات اللباقة التالية: "الحفاظ على الهوية" (32.6%)، و"الحفاظ على المظهر اللائق" (32.8%)، و"الحفاظ على الحقوق المتساوية" (24.9%)، و"الحفاظ على حقوق التواصل" (9.7%). أما في سياق برنامج شات جي بي تي، فقد وُجد أن معظم الطلاب يستخدمون استراتيجية "التصريح الصريح" (84.8%). علاوة على ذلك، فحصت النتائج الفروق الإحصائية في استخدام استراتيجيات اللباقة، وفقًا لكل من متغيري الجنس والتخصص الأكاديمي. ب 'رر الطلاب اختيارهم لاستراتيجيات اللباقة بالقول إن هناك فرقًا اجتماعيًا وأكاديميًا جوهريًا بين سياق المدرس وسياق برنامج شات جي بي تي. وخلصت الدراسة إلى اقتراح إجراء بحوث مستقبلية تتناول تأثير العامل الثقافي على اختيار استراتيجيات اللباقة، من جهة، وتتبنى منهجيات جديدة كالمناهج الطولية، والعابرة للثقافات، والعلاقات، من جهة أخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجيات اللباقة، طلب الخدمات، طلاب الجامعة، المدرس، شات جي بي تي.

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate whether Saudi university students employ the same politeness strategies with the ChatGPT platform as they do with their instructors when they request favours from both. A mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) methodology was adopted in this study. For the quantitative part, a total of 480 data sheets, in the form of Discourse Completion Task (DCT), were distributed to 60 students at King Khalid University (30 females and 30 males, with two academic specializations: science/humanities). The DCT consists of four different scenarios and two situations: Instructor context and ChatGPT context. The qualitative part consisted of semi-structured interviews with 16 students (8 females and 8 males/ 8 humanities students and 8 science students). In the instructor context, findings revealed the use of politeness strategies of "Face Identity" (32.6 %), "Face Quality" (32.8 %), "Equity Rights" (24.9 %), and "Association Rights" (9.7 %). In the ChatGPT context, it was found that most students used the "Bald-On-Record" politeness strategy (84.8%). Furthermore, the study examined the statistical differences in the use of politeness strategies, according to both gender and academic specialization variables. The students justified their choice of politeness strategies by arguing that there is a significant social and academic difference between the context of an instructor and that of ChatGPT. The study concluded by suggesting future research that addresses the impact of cultural factor on politeness strategies' choices, from one hand, and that adopts new methodologies such as longitudinal, cross-cultural, and relational approaches, on the other hand.

Keywords: *politeness strategies, requests for favours, university students, instructor, ChatGPT.*

Introduction

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies into higher education has fundamentally transformed teaching and learning models globally. Among these tools, ChatGPT has emerged as a highly influential technology, providing students with instant access to information, grammar support and writing assessments (Lo et al., 2024; Sok & Heng, 2024). Reported research indicates that ChatGPT enhances student competence, aids in language acquisition, and offers personalized learning support (Firaina & Sulisworo, 2023; Moradi, 2025). The increasing adoption of generative AI in higher education reflects a broader recognition that these tools can improve upon traditional teaching methods, particularly in large classrooms where individual attention from the instructor is limited (Strzelecki, 2024). However, the rapid integration of interactive AI tools raises important practical questions about how students will adapt their interaction styles with machines rather than humans.

Politeness plays a pivotal role in effective educational communication, particularly in situations where there are power imbalances between students and instructors (Fashina, 2025; Khoshnaw, 2022). In higher education, students are expected to use appropriate politeness strategies when requesting favours from their instructors (Al-Eer et al., 2025; Almoabdi, 2022; Anugrawati & Syam, 2024; Khoshnaw, 2022; Latrech & Alazzawie, 2023; Maqableh et al., 2025; Shariq, 2025). In Saudi Arabia, politeness is heavily influenced by cultural traditions and religious values that emphasize respect for social harmony, authority, and hierarchy (Albawardi & Alqahtani, 2022). The cultural environment in Saudi Arabia is characterized by significant power imbalances (Alshahrani, 2016), meaning that individuals are expected to show clear respect for those in positions of authority, such as instructors, elders, and leaders. Religious values reinforce these norms, encouraging polite language, avoiding direct conflict, and using respectful titles when addressing those of higher status (Al Mufarreh, 2024; Khalid Alsalem, 2024).

In the digital era, studies have shown how Saudi students use ChatGPT for educational purposes. For example, Alsaedi (2025) found that Saudi undergraduate students use ChatGPT for writing, grammar review, and understanding concepts. Alharbi and Hassan Al-Ahdal (2025) observed that Saudi English as a Second Language (ESL) students use ChatGPT to learn vocabulary, translation, and participate in practical exercises. Almusharraf and Bailey (2025) found that the continued use of generative AI by Saudi students is influenced by perceived benefits and social implications. The widespread adoption of ChatGPT by Saudi students highlights its importance as a practical AI tool. However, despite several studies examining Saudi students' views on ChatGPT use (Aldossary et al., 2024; Alsaedi, 2025; Sobaih et al., 2024), no study has analyzed whether students alter their strategies for using polite language when communicating with ChatGPT instead of human instructors.

The difference between human interaction and AI communication is fundamental. Human instructors possess social identity, status, and authority, and expect respect, as Rapport Management Theory and culture suggest (Spencer-Oatey, 2005, 2008). ChatGPT, on the other hand, lacks all of these attributes, whereas Media Equation Theory indicates that people instinctively

employ human social norms, such as rules of politeness, when interacting with computers (Reeves & Nass, 1996). However, it remains uncertain whether Saudi students, raised in a culture characterized by a strong awareness of authority and deeply rooted religious traditions, abandon these politeness rules when using ChatGPT or whether they routinely apply them. Lumer and Buschmeier (2022) found that people feel more socially distanced and exert greater control over robots than humans do, suggesting that politeness may be eliminated with AI. Brummernhenrich et al. (2025) showed that the politeness of chatbots when providing feedback affects users' perceptions of their trustworthiness, indicating that politeness remains of great importance in human-AI interactions.

Therefore, it is crucial to investigate whether Saudi students employ the same politeness strategies when interacting with ChatGPT as they do with their university instructors. This study systematically examines the politeness strategies used by undergraduate students at King Khalid University when requesting favours from their instructors, specifically within the ChatGPT platform. The study focuses on: (1) the types of politeness strategies used in each context, (2) the influence of gender and academic specialization on strategy choice, and (3) the reasons students give for their strategy choices.

Problem Statement

The rapid integration of ChatGPT into Saudi higher education has fundamentally transformed students' access to academic support, which is demonstrated by Saudi studies (Aldossary et al., 2024; Alharbi & Hassan Al-Ahdal, 2025; Almusharraf & Bailey, 2025; Alsaedi, 2025). This technological advancement aligns with the ambitious goals of Saudi Vision 2030 for digital transformation and educational advancement (KSA, 2016). However, a fundamental question remains largely unexplored, as students increasingly rely on AI resources like ChatGPT for academic support instead of instructors: Will their interpersonal behavior change as a result?

This study is particularly relevant in the Saudi cultural context, where politeness rules are deeply rooted in customs, traditions, and religious principles that emphasize respect for authority, social structure, and harmonious relationships (Albawardi & Alqahtani, 2022; Alshahrani, 2016). Saudi students learn to use specific politeness strategies, such as honorific titles, indirect requests, apologies, and polite religious phrases like "May God bless you الله يسعدك" (Khalid Al Salem, 2024; Shariq, 2025), when interacting with authority figures like university instructors. These established cultural norms of politeness are reinforced by institutional conventions and are essential for fostering positive social relationships in educational settings.

The shift from human to AI-driven communication raises a fundamental dilemma. Spencer-Oatey's (2008) Rapport Management Theory suggests that politeness strategies are influenced by social identity, status, and authority—qualities that ChatGPT lacks. Media Equation Theory, developed by Reeves and Nass (1996), and further expanded by the Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) model (Nass & Moon, 2000), suggests that users may unconsciously apply human social norms to interactive technologies. This theoretical contradiction raises an interesting

empirical question: Do Saudi students retain, abandon, or modify their culturally ingrained politeness when using ChatGPT compared to communicating with their professors?

Despite the growing body of research on politeness in educational contexts in the Middle East (Khoshnaw, 2022; Latrech & Alazzawie, 2023; Maqableh et al., 2025) and on Saudi students' views and interactions with the ChatGPT platform (Alsaedi, 2025; Aseeri, 2021; Sobaih et al., 2024), no study has explicitly compared the politeness strategies students use when requesting favours from their human instructors versus those used on the ChatGPT platform. Accordingly, the present research attempts to address this gap through these points: (1) Investigating students' practical skills as they navigate AI-enhanced learning environments; (2) Highlighting whether culture-specific politeness norms are applicable to human-AI interactions; and (3) Enriching the broader theoretical debate on the suitability of current politeness models for AI-managed dialogue.

Therefore, this study presents a systematic analysis of the politeness strategies used by Saudi undergraduate students at King Khalid University when requesting favours from their instructors compared to the ChatGPT platform, and explores both the choice of strategies and the factors that influence these choices.

Significance of the Study

This research offers valuable insights into pragmatics and the study of human-AI interactions. It theoretically extends Rapport Management Theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), Media Equation Theory (Reeves & Nass, 1996), and CASA theory (Nass & Moon, 2000) to the context of student interactions with the ChatGPT tool, and examines whether these theoretical models predict politeness strategies in these interactions. Practically, the findings will help King Khalid University faculty understand how students use AI tools effectively, enabling the more efficient integration of ChatGPT into teaching methods. Furthermore, understanding whether Saudi students maintain culturally ingrained politeness rules while using ChatGPT will affect the sustainability of pragmatic competence in an increasingly AI-driven learning environment.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following main question: Do Saudi university students, at King Khalid University, use the same politeness strategies with ChatGPT as with human instructors? The following sub-questions emerged:

1. What politeness strategies do Saudi students, at King Khalid University, use when requesting favours from their instructors?

2. What politeness strategies do Saudi students, at King Khalid University, use when requesting favours from ChatGPT?

3. Do gender and academic specialization variables (science/humanities) influence students' choice of politeness strategies?

4. How do Saudi students, at King Khalid University, justify their choice of politeness

strategies depending on whether they are requesting favours from their instructors or ChatGPT?

Literature Review

Previous Studies

Politeness in Interpersonal Learning

Cross-cultural analyses underscore the distinctiveness of politeness norms. Maqableh et al. (2025) examined positive politeness strategies in applications submitted by students from Jordan and Oman, identifying methodological differences despite shared regional and religious backgrounds. Al-Eer et al. (2025) studied the agreement strategies employed by Jordanian ESL learners and their instructors, revealing that these students utilize specific positive politeness strategies to maintain cordial relationships with reference figures.

Gender is a significant factor in the study of politeness. Shariq (2025) examined the politeness strategies employed by Saudi female students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) through a linguistic-pragmatic analysis of their writing, providing direct evidence of the politeness strategies' use in academic settings. Alsaedi (2025) noted that Saudi female students exhibited more positive attitudes toward the ChatGPT program compared to their male counterparts, suggesting that gender may influence human-AI interaction patterns. These findings support the inclusion of gender as a factor in this research. Latrech and Alazzawie (2023) investigated politeness strategies in ESL classrooms in Oman, demonstrating that instructor-student interactions incorporate face-work strategies. Overall, these studies demonstrate that politeness practices in Arab educational settings are not uniform and cannot be predicted solely through broad cultural generalizations, highlighting the need for empirical research on specific population groups. Almoabdi (2022) explored the politeness awareness of EFL students at Jeddah University and found that explicit training in politeness strategies enhanced their pragmatic abilities.

Research on politeness in educational settings has reported abundant empirical data across diverse cultural contexts. Khoshnaw (2022) used the Rapport Management Framework to examine politeness strategies in interactions between ESL instructors and students in Iraq. The results showed that instructors relied primarily on the Equity Rights strategy (62.7%), while students primarily relied on Face Identity strategy (63.2%). This finding is significant because it demonstrates that students in Middle Eastern educational settings place greater importance on acknowledging their instructors' social roles and authority compared to other aspects of politeness. Similarly, Albawardi and Alqahtani (2022) studied politeness in Saudi educational settings, showing that a high distance of authority figures significantly influences student-instructors' communication behaviors. These findings provide a basis for understanding how Saudi students generally interact with authority figures. Furthermore, Aseeri (2021) explored intercultural communication in Saudi higher education by analyzing the linguistic and pragmatic features of email interactions between Saudi students and their instructors. Email writing patterns were

explored in relation to the language used (Arabic or English) and the sender's gender. Given the gender-segregated nature of the Saudi educational system, differences emerged in the application of relational communication strategies (such as friendly dialogue and compliments). Differences in the motivations behind requests were also observed. However, it was found that learners of both genders sought to build relationships with their instructors, albeit in different ways.

Politeness in Human-AI Communication

The rise of AI has prompted researchers to explore whether standards of politeness shift from human-to-human communication to human-AI tools interaction. Brummernhenrich et al. (2025) investigated the impact of chatbot politeness on users' perceptions of trustworthiness. They demonstrated that polite chatbots were rated higher for friendliness and communicativeness, while outspoken chatbots were rated higher for persuasiveness. Similarly, Park et al. (2025) examined the empathic understanding of Large Language Models (LLMs) among Korean language learners using a pragmatically oriented DCT, which focuses on interpretive rather than generative evaluation. Their research showed that LLMs often struggle to understand subtle relational cues and tend to rely on basic politeness strategies instead. These combined research efforts underscore the relational and practical constraints associated with human-AI interactions, while providing methodological support for the use of direct communication strategies to explore politeness in AI-facilitated communication.

Studies on human-AI interaction suggest that politeness behavior tends to be less sophisticated when interacting with non-human partners. Khelloufi and Hammoudi (2025) found that Algerian ESL students often simplify compliments when using ChatGPT, a phenomenon they attributed to a lack of genuine social interaction. Similarly, Ribino (2023)'s systematic review of politeness in human-machine communication found that while users still adhere to certain social norms when interacting with machines, they typically reduce their efforts to save face compared to human-to-human interactions. Overall, these studies suggest that although AI tools are still capable of inferring certain types of socially appropriate behavior, users often perceive these interactions as having less personal and relational significance, resulting in a decrease in practical complexity and politeness. Lumer and Buschmeier (2022) studied perceptions of power and distance in role-based relationships between humans and robots, comparing them to interactions between humans. Their research revealed that people often perceive a greater social gap and grant themselves more authority when interacting with robots compared to human conversation partners. This finding supports the current study's hypothesis that Saudi students may view ChatGPT as a somewhat ineffective and non-authoritarian tool, potentially leading to their reduced use of politeness strategies.

Although Rapport Management theory has been used in a limited number of communication studies (Culpeper et al., 2010; Khoshnaw, 2022; Sadri et al., 2018), current findings suggest that politeness in human-AI interaction involves both transfer and reduction. In other words, individuals continue to use established social norms when interacting with AI tools,

while simultaneously reducing their efforts to manage their social image and politeness. In this context, Media Equation Theory suggests that people instinctively perceive computers as social entities (Reeves & Nass, 1996). Furthermore, research using the CASA framework has shown that when computers provide social cues—such as using polite language or engaging in dialogue—users respond socially, unintentionally adopting social norms typically associated with human interactions (Nass & Moon, 2000).

The Research Gap

Despite the growing body of research on politeness in education and the rapid development of studies on human-AI interaction, significant and interconnected gaps remain unaddressed.

First, and most importantly, no study has directly compared the politeness strategies Saudi students employ when seeking help from their instructors with those used when interacting with chatbots. While some research has examined politeness in Saudi and neighboring educational settings (Albawardi & Alqahtani, 2022; Khoshnaw, 2022; Shariq, 2025), these studies have focused solely on human interaction, neglecting to explore whether and how students apply or modify these culturally ingrained strategies when interacting with AI programs. This disparity is noteworthy, especially given the widespread use of ChatGPT by university students in Saudi Arabia (Alharbi & Hassan Al-Ahdal, 2025; Alsaedi, 2025; Sobaih et al., 2024) and the cultural significance of politeness in Saudi culture (Alshahrani, 2016; Khalid Alsalem, 2024).

Second, current research on politeness in human-AI interactions has been conducted primarily in Western settings (Brummernhenrich et al., 2025; Lumer & Buschmeier, 2022; Reeves & Nass, 1996), raising serious concerns about the applicability of its findings to non-Western collective cultures with established hierarchical structures and deeply rooted religious traditions. Saudi Arabia embodies a cultural framework characterized by significant power inequalities, where respect for influential figures is not merely a social choice, but a fundamental cultural and religious obligation (Albawardi & Alqahtani, 2022; Alshahrani, 2016). It remains unclear whether the patterns of reduced politeness observed in human-AI interactions in the West are present in this unique cultural context, thus limiting the applicability of current theoretical models.

Third, most studies on politeness in human-AI interactions have focused either on users' perceptions of AI politeness (Alharbi & Hassan Al-Ahdal, 2025; Alsaedi, 2025) or on how AI systems understand and produce polite language (Park et al., 2025), rather than exploring the politeness strategies users actually employ when requesting favours. This user-centered perspective is crucial because it encompasses the strategic decisions individuals make in real-world communicative situations, revealing their core cultural values, social awareness, and practical abilities. Understanding these strategies is particularly vital in educational settings, where the effectiveness of student-instructor communication significantly impacts learning outcomes and academic relationships.

Fourth, while Aldossary et al. (2024) and Sobaih et al. (2024) documented the acceptance

of chatbots by Saudi students, and Khalid Alsalem (2024) noted the culturally embedded literary cues of Saudi women, there is a lack of research that integrates these perspectives to investigate whether these cultural indicators of politeness are transmitted, modified, or abandoned in AI-assisted communications. This integration is crucial because it addresses the fundamental theoretical question of whether politeness is an essential feature of human social interactions or whether it can also be applied to non-human entities through conventional inheritance (Reeves & Nass, 1996; Ribino, 2023).

Theoretically, this research addresses a significant gap in the application of Spencer-Oatey's (2008) Rapport Management Theory, the Media Equation Theory (Reeves & Nass, 1996), and CASA Theory (Nass & Moon, 2000) in non-Western group settings. While these frameworks are widely used in Western contexts, their ability to explain phenomena in different cultural environments, where courtesy is deeply rooted in religious and social norms, has not been adequately studied. This theoretical gap limits our understanding of whether these frameworks are universally applicable or culturally specific.

This study specifically addresses these interconnected gaps through a systematic analysis of the politeness strategies used by undergraduate students at King Khalid University when requesting favours from their instructors, compared to the ChatGPT platform. In addition, this research enhances our understanding of how cultural politeness standards are applied in AI-assisted educational communication by examining strategy choices and the factors influencing these decisions, such as gender, academic specialization, and the explanations provided by the students themselves.

The Theoretical Framework

This research draws on three complementary theories: Rapport Management Theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), Media Equation Theory (Reeves & Nass, 1996), and CASA theory (Nass & Moon, 2000).

Spencer-Oatey (2008) argues that politeness encompasses two interconnected domains: “Face Management” and “Sociality Rights.” Face Management includes Face Quality —the desire for positive evaluation of others’ abilities—and Face Identity—the desire for recognition of social roles. Sociality Rights include Equity Rights—the principle of fair treatment—and Association Rights—the expectation of appropriate participation in interactions (Khoshnaw, 2022). In cultures with strong hierarchies, such as Saudi Arabia (Alshahrani, 2016), students are expected to demonstrate clear respect for instructors through the use of honorific titles and apologies (Albawardi & Alqahtani, 2022). This theory suggests that Saudi students will use facial identifiers (such as "Doctor") and association indicators (such as "Sorry for the inconvenience.") along with apologies. However, since ChatGPT lacks a social identity or intimidating appearance, these strategies should be less likely to occur.

Reeves and Nass (1996) demonstrated that people instinctively perceive computers as social

entities and apply human social norms, such as politeness, to their interactions with them. Lumer and Buschmeier (2022) found that individuals perceive a greater social gap and grant themselves more power over bots than humans do. Brummernhenrich et al. (2025) showed that chatbot politeness influences users' perceptions of trust. This theory suggests that Saudi students will exhibit a certain level of consistent politeness with chatbots, using phrases like " من فضلك please," "Thank you شكرًا," and introductory questions (" هل من الممكن؟ Is it possible? ") out of habit, despite abandoning the more traditional forms of respect associated with their culture.

This central idea evolved into the CASA framework (Nass & Moon, 2000), which suggests that people automatically use social rules, norms, and expectations derived from human relationships in their interactions with computers. CASA asserts that computers need only exhibit basic social cues—such as using language or participating in conversation—to trigger these innate social responses. While the Media Equation Theory provides the overarching theoretical assertion that "Media Equals Real Life," CASA offers a more nuanced framework for understanding how and why users perceive computers as social actors, particularly through a mindlessness process—that is, the automatic application of human social constructs to non-human entities. Taken together, these theories suggest that Saudi students may instinctively use culturally embedded norms of politeness when interacting with ChatGPT, even while cognizant of its non-human nature.

These three theories predict a dual pattern when combined: some aspects of personal identity are suspended during interaction with chatbots, while other aspects of politeness continue to be used due to cultural practices.

Methods

Study Design

This research employed a mixed-sequential approach (Plano-Clark, 2017), integrating quantitative data from the DCT and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. The DCT is an effective method for collecting information about speech acts and is widely used and validated in pragmatics studies (Altamimi, 2026). This design is appropriate, because the quantitative phase reveals the politeness strategies students use in different scenarios (human instructor versus ChatGPT), while the qualitative phase examines how students interpret their choices of politeness strategies. This triangulation addresses one of the major limitations of the Discourse Completion Task—its artificial nature—by incorporating reflective interview data (Cyluk, 2013).

Participants

This research included Saudi undergraduate students aged 18 to 23 at King Khalid University. Eligibility requirements include being currently enrolled in a university program, having knowledge of ChatGPT for academic use, and providing informed consent. The population size is estimated to be about 62,000 students (KKU, 2026).

Sample Size for the Quantitative Part (DCT)

According to the literature (Alharbi & Hassan Al-Ahdal, 2025; Almoabdi, 2022; Alsaedi, 2025; Khoshnaw, 2022; Nguyen, 2005; Shariq, 2025), the sample size (n = 60), equally divided between genders and academic specialization (science/humanities), is appropriate for identifying politeness strategies and determining frequencies, percentages, and significant differences among the subgroups.

Sample Size for the Qualitative Part (interviews)

Based on the published literature (Almoabdi, 2022; Guest et al., 2006; Nguyen, 2005; Wutich et al., 2024), the sample size (n = 16 participants, consisting of 8 males and 8 females) is sufficient to achieve data saturation and allows for variation across gender and academic specialization.

Instruments

The DCT Test

The DCT test, consisting of four scenarios, was designed based on the Rapport Management Theory described by Spencer-Oatey (2008) and later developed by Khoshnaw (2022). Each scenario activates one of Rapport Management Theory's four domains: Face Quality, Face Identity, Equality Rights, and Association Rights as follows. The four requesting scenarios are: re-explaining a difficult concept, extending the assignment deadline, granting an exception to the lecture and exam policy, and providing feedback on academic work. Each scenario is presented twice—first to a human instructor and then to the ChatGPT tool—resulting in eight items. A total of 480 tasks related to politeness strategies were examined. The DCT test was administered in Arabic (Appendix 1).

Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview protocol, consisting of open-ended questions, was designed to explore participants' motivations in their responses to the DCT test, as well as aspects of the Media Equation Theory, including habitual transmission and embodiment (Appendix 2). The identities of the participants were kept confidential.

Validity and Reliability

A two-stage validation process was conducted before primary data collection to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments. Initially, four academic experts in applied linguistics, pragmatics, and research methodology evaluated the initial versions of the DCT scenarios and interview questions. Their evaluation was based on their suitability to the research questions, their clarity, their cultural appropriateness to the Saudi context, and their alignment with the theoretical framework. In light of their feedback, two DCT scenarios were revised to improve clarity and better cover the targeted politeness strategies, and instructions were added to encourage

participants to respond naturally. Three interview questions were modified to minimize the use of directed language, and two additional exploratory questions were added to encourage deeper insights. The pilot study included ten students (five males and five females; five from the sciences and five from the humanities) for the DCT and four students (two males and two females; two from the sciences and two from the humanities) for the interviews. The pilot study indicated that some students were not sufficiently familiar with how to interact with the ChatGPT tool, necessitating the addition of clearer instructions. The Arabic wording of two DCT test questions was simplified to facilitate understanding, and one interview question related to "fairness" was reworded to clarify whether it pertained to the assessment or the application itself. The pilot study also estimated an average interview duration of 15-20 minutes to simplify scheduling.

Data Analysis and Results

Data Analysis

Sixty participants completed the DCT online. Then, a subset of 16 participants was selected for individual interviews in Arabic. They were selected based on their clear responses to the DCT questions, taking into account the diversity in gender and specialization.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for statistical analysis. The DCT responses underwent content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018). Each response was categorized based on the four politeness strategies identified by Spencer-Oatey (2008). The frequency and percentage of each politeness strategy were assessed for each scenario and for each situation (Instructor vs. ChatGPT). In addition, a Chi-Square test for independence was conducted to assess whether differences in the use of politeness strategies, according to both gender and academic specialization variables, were statistically significant. Furthermore, the interview transcripts underwent reflective thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Codes were extracted from the theoretical framework, as well as inductively from the data. Common themes among participants were identified and compared with the DCT results.

Prior to the presentation of the specific results for each research sub-question, it is helpful to consider the overarching main question: Do Saudi university students, at King Khalid University, use the same politeness strategies with ChatGPT as with human instructors? The following subsections demonstrate that students use different strategies in each context.

Results of the Quantitative Part

Using content analysis, 480 tasks related to politeness strategies, used by 60 students from King Khalid University, were examined. The sample consisted of 30 males (22 of science and 8 humanities students) and 30 females (9 science and 21 humanities students). Based on Rapport Management Theory, Media Equation theory, and CASA Theory, the identified politeness strategies were distributed across five strategies: Face Identity, Face Quality, Equity Rights, Association Rights, and Habitual Transmission/Embodiment.

Politeness Strategies Used When Requesting Favours from Instructors

Table 1 shows the identified politeness strategies used by students when requesting favours from their instructors.

Table 1

Politeness strategies used by students for requesting favours in the instructor context.

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Example
Face Identity	165	32.6	" السلام عليكم دكتوره" "Peace be upon you, Doctor."
Face Quality	166	32.8	" لو سمحت يا دكتور هل يمكنك شرح الجزئية هذه" "Please, Doctor, could you explain this part?"
Equity Rights	126	24.9	" تغيبت عن محاضرتين ولديَّ عذر رسمي لغياباتي آملًا منك قبوله وشكرا" "I missed two lectures and I have an official excuse for my absences. I hope you will accept it. Thank you."
Association Rights	49	9.7	" دكتور عادي تشوف المسودة وتعطيني ملاحظاتك" "Doctor, can you look at the draft and give me your feedback?"

Table 1 illustrates the widespread use of politeness strategies, with "Face Identity" (32.6 %) and "Face Quality" (32.8 %) being the most frequently employed, involving expressions of respect for the instructor, such as greetings, indirect requests, and apologies. "Equity Rights" (24.9 %) strategies also emerged, with students using polite language like acknowledging the instructor's

time and asking for permission. "Association Rights" strategies, while less frequently used (9.7 %), reflect positive relational communication between students and their instructors. In addition, DCT analysis revealed that some students (12.5 %) employed politeness devices rooted in their religious culture, such as "وجزاك الله خير الجزاء May God reward you with the best of rewards".

Politeness Strategies Used When Requesting Favours from ChatGPT

Table 2 illustrates the identified politeness strategies that used by students when requesting favours from ChatGPT.

Table 2

Politeness strategies used by students for requesting favours in the ChatGPT context.

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Example
Face Identity	15	6.2	" شات ممكن تصمم لي جدول" "Chat, can you design a schedule for me?"
Habitual Transmission/Embodiment	22	9.0	"أتمنى شرح الفكرة بطريقة مبسطة" "I hope to explain the idea in a simple way."
Bald-on-Record	207	84.8	" سو لي جدول مرتب" "Make me a tidy schedule."

Table 2 shows a very clear difference in the methods of requesting favours from ChatGPT by students compared with requests made to their instructors. Most students communicate directly and clearly with ChatGPT as revealed by the high percentage of the emergent "Bald-On-Record" politeness strategy (84.8%). However, the Habitual Transmission/Embodiment strategies emerged in their communication with the tool (9.0 %). Furthermore, students did not demonstrate a desire to positively evaluate or acknowledge ChatGPT's identity, as revealed by the low percentage of "Face Identity" (6.2 %). However, DCT analysis revealed that some students (2%) retained their habitual transmission strategy related to politeness styles rooted in their religious culture when requesting favours from ChatGPT, as in the example "بالله شوف للمسوده حقتي Please look at my draft."

Influence of Gender and Academic Specialization on Politeness Strategies

Gender Effect

Tables 3 and 4 present the impact of gender variable on students' choices of politeness

strategies in both contexts of instructor and ChatGPT, respectively.

The Chi-Square test for independence was performed to analyze whether differences in the use of politeness strategies between male and female students in the instructor context were statistically significant, with the significance level set at $\alpha = 0.05$ (Table 3).

Table 3

Differences in politeness strategies used by students when requesting favours from the instructor, according to the gender variable.

Strategy	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	χ^2	df	p-value
Face Identity	77 (32.9)	89 (32.7)			
Face Quality	86 (36.8)	79 (29.1)			
Equity Rights	52 (22.2)	74 (27.2)			
Association Rights	19 (8.1)	30 (11.0)			
Total	**234 (100)**	**272 (100)**	**4.64**	**3**	**0.199***

**Significant at 0.05 level*

The results showed no statistically significant relationship between gender and strategy choice ($\chi^2 = 4.64$, $p = 0.199 > 0.05$). Descriptive differences were observed (e.g., male students used the "Face Quality" strategy at 36.8% compared to 29.1%, while female students showed greater use of the "Equity Rights" strategy at 27.2% compared to 22.2%), but these differences were not statistically significant and may be attributed to chance.

Chi-Squared test for independence was conducted to determine whether differences in the use of politeness strategies between male and female students in the context of ChatGPT were statistically significant (Table 4).

Table 4

Differences in politeness strategies used by students when requesting favours from ChatGPT, according to the gender variable.

Strategy	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	χ^2	Df	p-value
Face Identity	12 (9.7)	3 (2.5)			
Habitual Transmission/Embodiment	5 (4.0)	17 (14.2)			
Bald-on-Record	107 (86.3)	100 (83.3)			
Total	**124 (100)**	**120 (100)**	**12.12**	**2**	**0.002***

**Significant at 0.05 level*

The results presented in Table 4 showed a significant relationship between gender and strategy choice ($\chi^2 = 12.12$, $p = 0.002 < 0.05$). Both genders primarily used the "Bald-on-Record" strategy (males: 86.3%; females: 83.3%), but female students showed greater use of the Habitual Transmission/Embodiment strategy (14.2% vs. 4.0%), while male students used the "Face Identity" strategy more than female students (9.7% vs. 2.5%).

Academic specialization Effect

Tables 5 and 6 present the impact of Gender variable on students' politeness strategies choices in both contexts of instructor and ChatGPT, respectively.

The Chi-Square test for independence was conducted to examine whether differences in the use of politeness strategies between science and humanities students in the context of the instructor were statistically significant, with the significance level set at $\alpha = 0.05$ (Table 5).

Table 5

Differences in politeness strategies used by students when requesting favours from the instructor, according to the academic specialization variable.

Strategy	Science n (%)	Humanities n (%)	χ^2	df	p-value
Face Identity	79 (31.7)	87 (33.8)			
Face Quality	91 (36.6)	74 (28.8)			
Equity Rights	58 (23.3)	68 (26.5)			
Association Rights	21 (8.4)	28 (10.9)			
Total	**249**	**257**	**3.80**	**3**	**0.284***

**Significant at 0.05 level*

The results showed no statistically significant correlation between academic specialization and strategy choice ($\chi^2 = 3.80$, $p = 0.284 > 0.05$). Descriptive differences were observed (e.g., science students used the "Face Quality" strategy at a rate of 36.6% versus 28.8%, while humanities students used the "Face Identity" strategy at a rate of 33.8% versus 31.7% and the "Equality Rights" strategy at a rate of 26.5% versus 23.3%), but these differences were not statistically significant and could be attributed to chance.

Chi-Square test for independence was conducted to assess whether differences in the use of politeness strategies between science and humanities students in the ChatGPT context were statistically significant (Table 6).

Table 6

Differences in politeness strategies used by students when requesting favours from ChatGPT, according to the academic specialization variable.

Strategy	Science n (%)	Humanities n (%)	χ^2	df	p-value
Face Identity	13 (10.5)	2 (1.7)			
Habitual Transmission/Embodiment	9 (7.2)	13 (10.8)			
Bald-on-Record	102 (82.3)	105 (87.5)			
Total	**124 (100)**	**120 (100)**	**8.78**	**2**	**0.012***

**Significant at 0.05 level*

At a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, the results indicated a statistically significant relationship between academic specialization and strategy choice ($\chi^2 = 8.78$, $p = 0.012 < 0.05$). Humanities students showed significantly higher use of the "Bald-on-Record" strategy (87.5% vs. 82.3%) and the "Habitual Transmission/Embodiment" strategy (10.8% vs. 7.2%) compared to science students. Conversely, science students used the "Face Identity" strategy significantly more than humanities students (10.5% vs. 1.7%).

Results of the qualitative part

To ensure transparency and accuracy in the qualitative analysis, the six-stage thematic analysis framework was strictly adhered to. Initially, all interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to become familiar with the data, through recorded initial observations and potential patterns in analytical notes. Subsequently, initial codes were systematically generated across all data using both deductive coding (based on the theoretical frameworks of Rapport Management Theory, Media Equation Theory, and the CASA model) and inductive coding (which allowed themes to emerge directly from the data). For example, codes such as “titles for instructors,” “no titles for ChatGPT,” and “shyness without titles” were categorized under the theme “The importance of formal titles”. Similarly, codes such as “anxiety about appearing disrespectful,” “review requests,” and “indifference to ChatGPT” contributed to the theme “Awareness of social image.” Eighty-seven primary codes were identified. Second, the codes were grouped into potential themes through thematic mapping, where relevant codes were arranged into broader thematic categories. Third, the themes were evaluated and refined by comparing them to the coded

extracts and the complete dataset to ensure coherence and uniqueness. Fourth, the themes were defined and labeled, resulting in the five main themes discussed in this section: (1) The importance of formal titles when requesting favours from Instructor/ChatGPT, (2) Awareness of social image in front of an Instructor/ChatGPT, (3) Establishing the fairness of the request to an Instructor/ChatGPT, (4) Mitigating the burden of the request and appreciating the Instructor/ChatGPT's busyness, and (5) The necessity of using polite language with ChatGPT. This thematic analysis answers the fourth research question.

Rationale for Politeness Strategy Selection in Requests to Instructors and ChatGPT

Theme 1: The importance of formal titles when requesting favours from Instructor/ChatGPT

All participants emphasized the importance of using titles like "Doctor" and "Professor" when addressing university instructors, linking this to respect, politeness, appreciation, and academic standing. Some even indicated they would feel embarrassed if they forgot to use the title. However, with ChatGPT, participants asserted that there was no need to use titles because it is non-human, as revealed in the following three excerpts:

Participant #1: "لان الدكتوره لازم اكون محترمه معاها واكلمها بلقبها الي هو دكتوره بس شات لا لان مو انسان"

"Because I have to be respectful to the instructor and address his/her by his/her title, which is 'Doctor,' but not with ChatGPT because it's not a human being."

Participant #3: " هذه الألقاب تدل على اللباقة والإحترام. لكن تشات جي بي تي ليس بالضروري استعمال ألقاب معه"

"These titles show politeness and respect. But in ChatGPT, it is not necessary to use titles."

Participant #8: " اللقب هو احترام لدكتور او الاستاذ لان احنا ف بيئه عمل ويجب ع الكل الاحترام اما شات ف هو ذكاء اصطناعي"

"The title is a sign of respect for an instructor because we are in a work environment and everyone should show respect, while ChatGPT is AI."

Theme 2: Awareness of social image in front of an Instructor/ChatGPT

Participants' responses revealed that interacting with a university instructor was strongly associated with social image awareness. A significant number of students expressed concern about being misunderstood or appearing disrespectful or unserious. Some participants also indicated that they rewrote their requests multiple times before submitting them to the instructor, a concern that was absent when interacting with ChatGPT, as illustrated in the following three excerpts:

Participant # 4: " شوي مع الدكتوره خفت اقلل احترام شات لا أبدا بالعكس"

"With the instructor, I was afraid of being disrespectful, but with ChatGPT, no way, quite the opposite."

Participant#9: "ايوه وجوب اللباقه واحترام الطرف الاخر على عكس استخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي"

"Yes, politeness and respect for the other party are essential, unlike the use of AI."

" مع الدكتور اكون لبق ورسمي بطلبي عكس شات عادي جدا" :Participant #13

"With the instructor, I am polite and formal in my request, unlike ChatGPT."

Theme 3: Establishing the fairness of the request to an Instructor/ChatGPT

Many participants provided justifications for their requests when addressing the instructor, particularly in situations concerning appointments or requesting additional assistance. Participants felt that justifying the request makes the instructor more receptive and presents the student as logical and respectful. As can be seen in the following three excerpts:

" ممكن تعطي بعض التبريرات لتذكير الدكتور او إقناعه " :Participant #5

"You could give some justifications to remind or convince the instructor."

" اكيد ب اظهر احترامي للاستاذ لانه مشغول ومو فاضي عكس الذكاء الاصطناعي" :Participant#8

“Of course, I'll show respect to the instructor because he/she's busy and not free, unlike AI.”

" يفضل ان اوضح ان الطلب يكون عادلا ، نعم حاولت استخدام الجانب الافضل في الحوار علشان يوافق" :Participant #15

"It is preferable to clarify that the request should be fair. Yes, I tried to use the best approach in the dialogue so that he/she would agree."

However, one participant believed that as a student, he has the right to understand the course material without fear of having to ask the instructor for help: " لا يوجد مخاوف لان من حقي اعرف المقرر وافهمهThere are no concerns because it is my right to know and understand the curriculum. ".

Theme 4: Mitigating the burden of the request and appreciating the Instructor/ChatGPT's busyness

The interviews revealed that most students were more inclined to use euphemisms when communicating with their instructors, such as apologizing, offering justifications, and using phrases like "if you have time" or "if you don't mind." Participants attributed this to the instructor's busy schedule and numerous academic responsibilities, as illustrated in the following three excerpts:

" نعم ، بعبارة (شاكرين ومقدرين وقتك). السبب لان الطلب يستلزم مجهود من الدكتور":Participant#6

"Yes, with the phrase (Thanking you and appreciating your time), the reason is that the request requires effort from the instructor."

" طبعاً اني اخذ وقت الدكتور له كل الاحترام" :Participant#9

"Of course, I take my time. The instructor has my utmost respect."

”نعم حاولت استخدام الجانب الافضل في الحوار علشان يوافق :Participant#15 اما شات جي تي لا لانه ذكاء اصطناعي وليس لديه اي مشاعر"

“Yes, I tried to use the best approach in the dialogue to get him/her to agree, but not with ChatGPT because it's AI and doesn't have any feelings.”

Theme 5: Necessity of using polite language with ChatGPT

Most participants disagreed with the obligation to use polite language with ChatGPT, arguing that it is not human and lacks feelings or social awareness. This is illustrated in the following three excerpts:

Participant#11: " وجوب اللباقه واحترام الطرف الاخر على عكس استخدام الذكاء الاصطناعي"

"The need for politeness and respect for the other party, unlike the use of AI."

Participant#12: " مع شات اعامله ك اداه صناعيه لا اقدر تاخيره ولا تعبه"

"I treat the chat as a manufactured tool and I don't appreciate its delay or its effort."

Participant#16: "لا اعتقد انه يجب استخدام صيغ مهذبه ولا صيغ سيئه اكيد ولاكن الامر اشبه ب اكواد البرمجه او الاوامر البرمجيه فقط اعطه الامر ويجاوبك"

"I don't think we should use polite or bad language, but it's more like programming code or programming commands; just give it the command and it will answer you."

However, it was revealed that some participants communicate with ChatGPT as a social entity. They stated that they automatically thanked ChatGPT or used polite language with it, despite recognizing that it was not human. This is illustrated in the following three excerpts:

Participant#3: " الصيغ المهذبة تخرج لا إرادي، على سبيل المثال بعد مساعدته لي، لا إرادي اشكره"

"Polite phrases come out involuntarily, for example, after it helped me, I involuntarily thank it."

Participant#7: " مع شات جي بي تي ممكن استخدم لو سمحت و الله يسعدك و كذا شكرا"

"With ChatGPT, it's possible to use 'please, may God bless you,' and so on. Thank you."

Participant #10: " الحيا نوعا ما لما تكلم شخصي طبيعي او شي غير حقيقي"

“Shyness is somewhat understandable when speaking to a normal person or something unreal.”

Discussion

This research was conducted with the primary objective of investigating whether Saudi students at King Khalid University employ the same politeness strategies with the ChatGPT platform as they do with university instructors when they request favours from both. Data were collected through a DCT and semi-structured interviews with 60 students from King Khalid University (males and females, from both science and humanities specializations). In total, 480 data sheets of questionnaire in the form of DCT consisting of four different discourse scenarios and two situations: Instructor context and ChatGPT context, were distributed to the students. The study answered the main research question and the four sub-questions. First, the study identified the politeness strategies students use when requesting favours from their instructors. Second, it examined the politeness strategies students use when requesting favours from the ChatGPT

platform. Third, it investigated the effect of gender and academic specialization (science/humanities) variables on students' choice of politeness strategies. Finally, it explored the students' justifications for their choice of politeness strategies when requesting favours from both their instructors and the ChatGPT platform.

Findings showed that students, when requesting favours from their instructors, used the face management strategies to a large extent compared to social interaction rights strategies. While, when they requested favours from ChatGPT, they used a direct and clear politeness strategy, as evidenced by the high percentage of the "Bald-On-Record" strategy. The emergence of "Bald-On-Record" strategy supports the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), although it was not adopted in the present study. Th emergence of this strategy indicates that students consider ChatGPT as one of their close friends with whom they can communicate without social constraints. The students use of the "Face Quality" and Habitual Transmission/Embodiment strategies with ChatGPT supports Media Equation Theory, as people tend to apply human social norms to digital devices through Habitual Transmission/Embodiment strategies (Reeves & Nass, 1996). In this context, Alharbi and Hassan Al-Ahdal (2025) noted that Saudi students consider the ChatGPT application to be an emotionally supportive and academically contextualized medium, demonstrating an effective ability to use the tool strategically to provide support, build meaning, and manage learning anxiety while fully aware of its limitations. In the context of social interaction with digital tools, Ribino (2023) found that when people interact with digital devices that send social signals, they adopt the basic social rules and norms that they also adopt in their interactions with humans, and thus unconsciously treat AI tools as social entities, adding that maintaining one's positive reputation is a motive for adopting politeness in dealing with digital platforms in social contexts. The findings also align with CASA's focus on mindlessness as a key driver of social responses to technology. The students who used Habitual Transmission/Embodiment strategies with ChatGPT often unintentionally, as noted in the interviews demonstrate the mindless application of social scripts to a non-human entity. However, the relatively small percentage of students exhibiting this behavior (9%) suggests that the mindlessness may be influenced by contextual elements such as the user's perception of human-like qualities in technology or their level of digital literacy. This subtle distinction expands CASA theory by indicating that while automatic social responses are possible, they are not universal and may be shaped by personal and cultural factors.

According to the Rapport Management Theory of Spencer-Oatey (2008), the key politeness strategies used by Saudi students at King Khalid University with their instructors, are "Face Identity", "Face Quality" and "Equity Rights". This indicates the students' eagerness to appreciate and maintain the social image and academic position of the instructors, as well as maintaining a balanced and fair social relationship with them, which is consistent with the social culture in the Saudi context (Khalid Alsalem, 2024; Shariq, 2025). This result is also consistent with the study of Khoshnaw (2022), which was conducted in a nearby cultural context (Iraq), where it was found that high school students widely use the "Face Identity" strategy (63.2 %), the "Face Quality"

strategy (21%), and to a lesser extent the "Equity Rights" strategy (15.8 %), with an absence of the "Association Rights" strategy. However, our finding differs from studies in other cultural contexts. For example, Culpeper et al. (2010) investigated cross-cultural differences in the impoliteness strategies used by university students in England, China, Finland, Germany, and Turkey, finding that the key politeness strategies that were violated by students were Face Quality (46%), Equity Rights (23%), and Association Rights (22%). Moreover, the present study findings are consistent with other literature regarding students' use of negative politeness strategies with their instructors, such as using formal language and being cautious with their instructor, reflecting respect for authority and a preference for maintaining hierarchical boundaries (Albawardi & Alqahtani, 2022; Almoabdi, 2022; Anugrawati & Syam, 2024; Umayah et al., 2018).

The depth of this finding is best understood through the qualitative narratives provided by the students, which explain the reasons behind these obtained statistics that reflect their choices of politeness strategies in the Instructor/ChatGPT context. The thematic analysis revealed that students use academic titles to acknowledge the instructor's social standing through the use of "Face Identity" strategy, whereas the scarcity of titles with ChatGPT reflects a difference in students' perceptions of the interactive relationship. In addition, they realize that the instructor has a social status that they must take into account when dealing with him/her, which prompts them to use the "Face Quality" strategy to preserve the social image of both parties, unlike dealing with ChatGPT, where they have no concerns about its view of them since the relationship is human and one-sided, which reveals an awareness among some students of the distinction between human interaction and interaction with AI tools, indicating that the concept of embodiment is not uniform among all students as users of ChatGPT.

Thematic analysis also provided further insight into the statistical findings related to the "Sociality Rights" strategies used by students when they request favours from their instructors. Their responses indicated that they seek to achieve balance in their relationship with the instructor by demonstrating the fairness and legitimacy of their requests, which aligns with the concept of "Equity Rights" in Rapport Management Theory (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Regarding their use of ChatGPT, most participants emphasized that they do not need to justify their requests because it is simply a digital tool, which does not support the Media Equation theory (Reeves & Nass, 1996). Furthermore, their statements reflected the use of the "Association Rights" strategy aimed at minimizing obligation and pressure on the other party, and respecting their right to manage their own time and commitments. However, most participants lacked appreciation for the effort and time required by ChatGPT.

The study results also addressed the impact of both gender and academic specialization variables on students' choices of politeness strategies when dealing with the instructor and ChatGPT for requesting favours from both. The Chi-Square test results revealed a nuanced pattern regarding gender differences. In the context of instructors, the relationship between gender and the choice of politeness strategies was not statistically significant. This suggests that Saudi university students use similar politeness strategies with their instructors, which is likely due to shared

cultural expectations and institutional norms that uniformly affect all students (Albawardi & Alqahtani, 2022). However, within the ChatGPT framework, a significant relationship was revealed. Female students demonstrated greater use of Habitual Transmission/Embodiment strategies, while male students used the "Face Identity" strategy more frequently. This suggests that gender-based differences in politeness are more pronounced when students interact with AI tools rather than human instructors (Lumer & Buschmeier, 2022; Reeves & Nass, 1996). These results confirm that students in general, of both genders, seek to maintain a good relationship with their instructors, but in different ways (Aseeri, 2021). In contrast, the results contradict those of Altamimi study's (2026), which did not reveal the effect of gender on request behavior among Saudi English as a Foreign Language learners and native English speakers. These findings also indicate that male students tend to use direct and explicit request methods, while female students tend to use politeness expressions when interacting with others, whether it be an instructor or ChatGPT, which is supported by recent studies (Bích, 2025; Mahdjoub & Saihi, 2023; Sikder, 2021).

Similarly, the effect of academic specialization was statistically significant only in the context of the ChatGPT test. In the context of the instructor, the relationship was not statistically significant, indicating that science and humanities students do not differ significantly in their choice of politeness when interacting with instructors. However, in the context of the ChatGPT test, a significant correlation was identified. Humanities students used the "Bald-on-Record" strategy more frequently than science students, while science students used the "Face Identity" strategy significantly more frequently than humanities students. This suggests that learners from different academic fields may view and interact with AI tools in distinct ways, which may reflect differences in communication styles, problem-solving strategies, or perceptions of technology across disciplines (Al Kayed et al., 2024; Thanh et al., 2022).

Several other explanations outside of theoretical frameworks deserve further consideration. First, students' prior experiences with ChatGPT and their familiarity with AI tools may influence their use of politeness strategies. Students who regularly interact with AI may adopt routine interaction strategies that prioritize direct, command-like language and view ChatGPT as a practical tool rather than a social entity (Reeves & Nass, 1996; Ribino, 2023). On the other hand, less experienced users may unintentionally adhere to human-centered standards of politeness. Second, the habits of prompt engineering—the method of creating specific inputs to elicit the best responses—may promote the use of clear language to improve efficiency (Alharbi & Hassan Al-Ahdal, 2025). Third, levels of digital literacy are likely to influence students' interactions with AI. Fourth, task-related factors, such as the urgency or importance of the task, can influence politeness regardless of the conversation partner. Ultimately, cultural elements that transcend authority, such as religious beliefs and collective principles, can influence polite behaviors in indirect ways (Khalid Alsalem, 2024). While the current study did not rigorously assess these variables, it points to important areas of research that warrant further investigation.

The generalizability of findings is limited for different reasons. First, the research was conducted at King Khalid University in the Aseer region of Saudi Arabia, where institutional

cultures, student demographics, and regional customs vary across the Kingdom. Second, regional cultural differences suggest that courteous customs in Aseer may differ from those in other regions of Saudi Arabia, such as the Hejaz, Najd, and the Eastern Province (Al Mufarreh, 2024). Third, the sample consisted of undergraduate students aged 18–23, excluding graduate students, international students, and individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, who might exhibit different behaviors. Fourth, the research focused exclusively on the ChatGPT software, and the results may not apply to other AI systems or voice assistants. Fifth, the rapid development of AI technologies suggests that students' comfort levels and interaction styles may change over time. Therefore, generalizations regarding Saudi university students should be treated with caution, and further studies involving diverse samples are needed.

Conclusion

This study explored the politeness strategies employed by Saudi students at King Khalid University for requesting favours from both their instructors and the ChatGPT platform. The study was based on the Rapport Management, Media Equation and CASA theories. The findings revealed that students primarily use "Face Management" strategies, and to a lesser extent, "Sociality Rights" strategies in their interactions with instructors. In contrast, in their online interactions with ChatGPT, they tend to overuse direct commands, with "Sociality Rights" strategies largely absent from their choices. However, a small percentage of the students considered ChatGPT as social entity and communicated with it through Habitual Transmission/Embodiment strategies, sometimes involuntarily, adhering to the politeness methods inherent in their culture. Some students also used the “Face Identity” strategy, but in a very small percentage. It is worth noting that the statistically significant effects of gender and academic specialization emerged only within the context of the ChatGPT program. This suggests that as Saudi students interact with AI tools, their individual characteristics become more pronounced, likely due to the absence of the human social interaction that typically imposes strict normative controls in formal educational settings. Further research is needed to explore why these effects specifically occur in human-AI interactions.

This research expands theoretically on Media Equation Theory and the CASA Theory regarding human interactions with AI in a collective cultural environment with a clear hierarchy. Media Equation Theory describes social responses to ChatGPT, while CASA provides a more detailed explanation of the mindlessness process through which these responses occur. The observation that only a small percentage of students showed consistent politeness towards ChatGPT program indicates that spontaneous social responses are not innate, but are influenced by cultural norms, personality traits, and surrounding circumstances.

Limitations

This research is limited in terms of the generalizability of its findings. On the one hand, it addressed the Saudi context only as a context of Arab social culture, and on the other hand, it focused on King Khalid University. Students’ geographical distribution across Saudi Arabia may

influence how they request favours from the instructor or from AI tools. Furthermore, although Chi-Square tests were used to assess statistical significance, measures of effect size (such as Cramér's V) were not calculated. This limits the understanding of the practical importance of the observed differences. Future studies should include measures of effect size to strengthen inferential analysis.

Future Research Directions

Future research should explore the cultural influence on the politeness strategies employed by Saudi university students when interacting with their instructors or chatbots. This could be achieved by expanding the sample to encompass the entire Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as well as including international students residing there. Future longitudinal studies and cross-cultural comparisons are also recommended. Furthermore, a future study should analyze how politeness strategies relate to the quality of AI-generated responses.

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Bio

Dr. Majdah M. Aseeri is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics in the Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia. She earned her PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Queensland, Australia. Her scholarly work and research interests encompass sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, intercultural and intracultural communication, e-learning, and AI-assisted language teaching and learning.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. DCT tool

سيناريو **Scenario**	المدرس **Instructor**	شات جي بي ت **ChatGPT**
1: إعادة شرح مفهوم صعب **Re-explaining a difficult concept**	تريد من المدرس أن يشرح مرة أخرى مفهومًا صعبًا على انفراد بعد انتهاء الحصة. You want the instructor to explain a difficult concept again privately after the class has ended.	تريد من شات جي بي تي أن يشرح مرة ثانيةً مفهومًا صعبًا بطريقةٍ مختلفةٍ عما زودك به اول مرة. You want ChatGPT to explain a difficult concept a second time in a different way than it did the first time.
2: تمديد الموعد النهائي للمهمة **Task deadline extended**	تحتاج إلى وقت إضافي لإنجاز تكليف من المدرس على النحو الأمثل. لذا قررت أن تطلب منه تمديداً. You need extra time to complete the assignment from your instructor perfectly. So, you decided to ask him for an extension.	تريد من شات جي بي تي إنشاء جدول دراسي مُفصّل يُساعدك على إنجاز مشروع رئيسي بحيث يوفر لك المزيد من الوقت للدراسة لاختباراتك. You want ChatGPT to create a detailed study schedule that helps you complete a major project so that you have more time to study for your exams.

3: طلب استثناء من سياسة المحاضرات و الامتحانات. **Request for an exception to the lecture and exam policy.**	تغيبتَ عن محاضرتين بسبب عذر رسمي موثق. وأنت مواظب عادة على الحضور والمشاركة. وترغب أن يقبل منك المدرس العذر الرسمي وألا يعتبر غيابك بلا عذر. You missed two lectures due to a documented official excuse. You are usually a regular attendee and participant. You would like the instructor to accept your official excuse and not consider your absence unexcused.	أنت تستخدم شات جي بي تي للتحضير لامتحان نهائي في مقرر دراسي صعب. تريد منه أن يخمن ويقدم لك عشرة أسئلة محتملة للامتحان. You are using ChatGPT to prepare for a final exam in a difficult course. You want it to guess and present you with ten possible exam questions.
4: طلب ملاحظات على العمل الأكاديمي **Requesting feedback on academic work**	أنجزتَ مسودةً لمهمةٍ دراسيةٍ لمقرر المدرس والتسليم بعد أسبوع. ترغب في أن يقرأ المدرس مسودتك ويبدي ملاحظاته. You have completed a draft of a course assignment for your instructor, due in a week. You would like your instructor to read your draft and provide feedback.	انتهيت من إعداد مسودة للمهمة. تريد من برنامج شات جي بي تي قراءة مسودتك وتقديم ملاحظاته قبل إرسال النسخة النهائية. You have finished preparing a draft for the task. You want the ChatGPT chat program to read your draft and provide feedback before you send the final version.

Appendix 2. Interview questions

1- عندماكتبت طلبك للمدرس، هل فكرت في كيف ستبدو له كطالب؟ هل انتابتك أي مخاوف؟ ومع تطبيق شات جي بي تي، هل كفت لديك أي مخاوف؟ ولماذا؟

When you wrote your request to the instructor, did you think about how you would appear to him/her as a student? Did you have any concerns? And with the ChatGPT application, did you have any concerns? And why?

2- لماذا من المهم استخدام لقب مثل "دكتور/ة"؟ أو "أستاذي/أستاذتي" عند التحدث إلى مُدرّسك؟ ماذا يعني لك هذا اللقب؟ ما شعورك لو نسيت استخدامه؟ هل ستستخدم لقبًا مثل "أستاذ" مع شات جي بي تي؟ولماذا؟

Why is it important to use a title like "Doctor" when speaking to your instructor? What does this title mean to you? How would you feel if you forgot to use it? Would you use a title like "Professor" with ChatGPT? And why?

3- هل حاولت إظهار احترامك للمدرس عند طلب الخدمة منه بسبب انشغاله؟كيف؟ ولماذا؟ وهل حاولت إظهار احترامككذلك لـ شات جي بي تي عند طلب الخدمة منه؟ هل استخدمت أي عبارات تُظهر تقديرك لانشغاله أو للجهد الذي يبذله في إنجاز المهمة؟كيف؟ ولماذا؟

Did you try to show respect to the instructors when requesting their help because they were busy? How? And why? Did you also try to show respect to ChatGPT when requesting its help? Did you use any phrases that showed appreciation for its busy schedule or the effort it was putting into completing the task? How? And why?

4- هل تعتقد انه من المهم اثبات ان طلبك عادل عند طلب شيء من المدرس. وطلب شيء من شات جي بي تي. هل حاولت اثبات ان طلبك لهم كان عادلاً؟كيف ولماذا؟

Do you think it's important to prove your request is fair when asking an instructor for something, or when asking ChatGPT? Have you tried to prove your request to them was fair? How and why?

5- هل تعتقد أنه يجب استخدام صيغ مهذبة مع شات جي بي تي سواء بشكل تلقائي أو بوعي وتفكير رغم أنه ليس إنساناً؟ ولماذا؟

Do you think polite language should be used with ChaGPT, whether automatically or consciously and deliberately, even though it is not a human being? And why?