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Balancing cooperation and power: politeness strategies in parent-teacher interactions

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ABSTRACT

Analysing parent-teacher interactions from a linguistic perspective is crucial because revealing the underlying patterns of language choices provides significant insights into parent-teacher interactions by testing educational ideals against realities. The study investigates the perceived nature of parent-teacher interaction in Türkiye by analysing politeness strategies through teachers' and parents' written responses to interactional scenarios. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory was adopted to investigate interactional dynamics including self-positioning, social power and face-management strategies. To gain a comprehensive understanding of parent-teacher interaction, two different Written Discourse Completion Tasks for parents and teachers were designed. Each task included ten scenarios reflecting topics that could arise in these interactions. WDCTs were applied to 80 parents and 80 teachers. A total of 1,786 politeness strategies were identified, showing that both parties are willing to collaborate even in the most face-threatening situations. Teachers, who use more direct strategies, prioritize their professional roles and position themselves as the more powerful actors. Although they experience greater face loss, parents, who mostly use indirect strategies, acknowledge teachers' power. They also employ pseudo-agreements and use politeness strategies manipulatively to satisfy teachers' face needs. Lastly, both parties focus more on presenting themselves as 'good parents' and 'good teachers' than on issues concerning students.

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Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the harmonious relationship between parents and teachers still stands as a cornerstone of student success and proves the dramatic impact that collaborative relationships can have on fostering school climate. There have been a number of studies reporting the positive effects of parent-teacher collaboration on students' academic development (Englund et al., 2004; Epstein, 1991; Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Jeynes, 2005; Keith, 1991; Türe & Deveci, 2021; Wilder, 2014), school or activity attendance (Chenge et al., 2017; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Kağıtçıbaşı et al., 1993; Uzun & Bütün, 2015), psychological well-being (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986; Gibson & Jefferson, 2006), social skills (Ekici, 2017; El Nokali et al., 2010; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; McWayne et al., 2004), school climate (Akbaşlı & Diş, 2019), attitudes and behaviours of students (Çalık, 2007; Çayak & Ergi, 2015; Celep, 2008; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Genç, 2005; Semke et al., 2010) and competence of parents (Epstein, 1995).

Literature portrays a utopian ideal in which parents and teachers naturally collaborate to help students (de Oliveira Lima & Kuusisto, 2019) but it is important to point that not all forms of parental involvement positively impact the students' development (Boonk et al., 2018). The frequent use of terms such as conflict, problem, unsuccessful, barrier, obstacle, failure, inconsistency, and limit in the studies suggests that these interactions can result in frustration (see also Ardakoç, 2020; Baxter & Kilderry, 2022;

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Bilaloğlu & Arnas, 2019; Doğan, 1995; Epstein & Becker, 1982; Erdener, 2014; Flynn, 2007; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Koçyiğit, 2015). Additionally, a significant number of studies have demonstrated that both teachers and parents have negative attitudes towards parent-teacher interactions and both sides blame each other for avoiding responsibilities, being reluctant to participate in parent-teacher conferences and not devoting enough time to develop healthy relationships (Aktaş Arnas, 2017; Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Ertem & Gökalp, 2020; Lindberg, 2017; Özdoğru, 2021; Ramirez, 1997).

Despite the extensive literature, it is surprising that the nature of these interactions remains poorly understood. MacLure and Walker (2000, p. 5), characterize parent-teacher interactions as a 'black hole' in our understanding of educational procedures. Neither studies confirming the positive impact of parent-teacher interactions on students' performance adequately explain the mechanisms through which this effect occurs (Hill & Craft, 2003), nor do studies addressing conflicts clarify how they resolve these conflicts (Pillet-Shore, 2016). Similarly, little is known about the willingness of parents and teachers to establish and maintain relationships (Kim et al., 2013).

One of the reasons for these gaps is the lack of studies analysing the parent-teacher interaction which can reflect the relational dynamics of this interaction (Baker & Keogh, 1995; Bilton et al., 2017; Tveit, 2009). A few studies have examined the language used in parent-teacher interactions (Baker & Keogh, 1995; Bilton et al., 2017; 2018; Caronia, 2022; Caronia & Vandini, 2019; Conus & Fahrni, 2019; Davitti, 2013; Guo & Mohan, 2008; Howard & Lipinoga, 2010; Keogh, 1996; Özsöz, 2023; Pilliet-Shore, 2012; 2016; Seghers et al., 2021; Vignjević & Pavlović Pintarić, 2023; Wine, 2007). The research gap is mainly associated with the challenges of collecting data from parent-teacher conferences. While school-based data collection is already inherently difficult (Goertz, 1997; Kristjansson et al., 2013; Rasberry et al., 2018), the nature of parent-teacher interactions makes data collection even more difficult by posing methodological, ethical and practical constraints. These interactions include highly sensitive personal information which limits researchers' access to naturally occurring data. The blurred public-private boundary (Solberg, 2024) creates ethical concerns and that is why participants may be reluctant to be recorded or observed since they can code the process as an intrusion that breaches their professional and personal defenses (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). In addition, parent-teacher conferences are usually time-bound, institutionally regulated and sometimes conducted in crowded settings and under time pressure which makes the data collection process costly, lengthy and often beyond the researcher's control. Despite these challenges, Baker and Keogh argue that the scarcity of studies analysing language used in parent-teacher conferences prevents participants from solving problems and they suggest that future studies will help have a way of 'formatting the interaction and maintaining relationships' (1995, pp. 263–265). Much uncertainty about parent-teacher interactions and the recognized disparity between idealized and actual interactions (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) show the need for a deeper understanding of this interaction to address the gaps in the literature. To this end, the present study adopts a written scenario-based data elicitation method (WDCT) to investigate teachers' and parents' perceptions of parent-teacher interaction by focusing on politeness strategies.

Based on Goffman's (1967) concept of face which refers to an individual's public self-image and social value in interactions, Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguish between positive face and negative face. While positive face reflects the need to maintain a positive self-image and gain social approval, negative face reflects the need to maintain personal autonomy and protect personal rights. When these needs of speakers or hearers are challenged, face-threatening acts occur. Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) defines politeness as the linguistic strategies (namely positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on record, off-record) used to maintain the face of all interlocutors against face threats.

Table 1 presents Brown & Levinson's (1987) four main politeness strategies, their sub-strategies and representative examples from parent-teacher interaction.

These strategies reveal the tendencies of specific groups since there are three social variables determine speakers' strategy choice: 'social distance, power, and the rank of imposition' (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Social distance can be defined as familiarity degree between interlocutors such as distant or intimate relationships. Power which is 'an asymmetric social dimension of relative power' refers the degree to which hearer can impose their own communication goals and face wants at the expense of speaker's communication goals and face wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The definition implies that if

Table 1. Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies (1987).

Strategy	Definition	Sub-strategies	Example (parent–teacher interaction)
Positive Politeness	The speaker shows respect for the hearer's wants by emphasizing shared wants, values or solidarity and by signaling approval and closeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 101).	'Claim common ground; convey speaker and hearer are cooperators; fulfil hearer's wants' (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp.102-129).	During a parent–teacher conference about Ayşe's reading difficulties: <i>Teacher: We both want the best for Ayşe's progress, so let's work together to find a solution to this problem.</i>
Negative Politeness	The speaker respects hearer's autonomy and avoids unwanted impositions (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.129).	'Be direct; don't assume; don't coerce; communicate speaker's want without impinging on hearer; redress other wants derived from negative face' (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp.129-211).	During a parent–teacher conference about Ayşe's course selection: <i>Parent: If it's not too much trouble, could I ask which subjects you would recommend for Ayşe?</i>
Bald-on-record	The speaker prioritises own goals over hearer's face and may mitigate threat or ignore it (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.95).	'Cases of non-minimization of the face threat; cases of FTA-oriented bald-on-record usage' (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp.95-101).	During a parent–teacher conference about the field trip: <i>Teacher: Please sign the permission form and return it by tomorrow.</i>
Off-record	The speaker avoids commitment and communicates indirectly (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp.213–227)	'Invite conversational implicatures; be vague or ambiguous; hint triggered by Gricean Maxim violation' (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 213–227).	During a parent–teacher conference about the classroom being very noisy: <i>Parent: Ayşe seems to do better in quieter settings.</i>

the asymmetry between the powers of interlocutors increases, the less powerful interlocutor uses more face-saving strategies. Rank of imposition is considered as the degree to which impositions are perceived to interfere with the hearer's positive or negative face wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These variables become prominent in institutional interactions such as parent–teacher interaction where role-based power asymmetries (see also Addi-Raccah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008; Dahl, 2017; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014) and positioning practices (see also Allen et al., 1997; Crozier, 2000; Li et al., 2026; Munthe & Westergård, 2023) influence how politeness is displayed and interpreted. Examining politeness strategies in relation to power dynamics enables us to understand how parents and teachers manage authority, cooperation and roles in the interaction.

Also, emotions in social interactions are closely related to power. As Kemper et al. (1993) states that positive emotions are directly associated with gaining power whereas negative emotions tend to emerge from its loss. Within this framework, in parent–teacher interactions coded as emotional practices (Lasky, 2000), participants often manage multiple faces simultaneously which makes them experience a range of emotions. In this process, face-management strategies and emotions are engaged in cyclical relationship. It means that perceived threats to face trigger emotional responses while these emotions, in turn, shape subsequent face-management strategies and interactional choices. The great emotional demands on participants have been documented in previous researches (Prakke & Van Peet, 2023; Sabancı & Yücel, 2013; Şenaras & Çetin, 2018; Wiśniewska-Nogaj, 2025). In particular, some studies demonstrate that parent-teacher interactions expose teachers to high degree of emotional labor (see also Hochschild, 1983) as they are required to strategically display their emotions and regulate their language in order to maintain institutional expectations (Kang et al., 2023; Kariou et al., 2021; Kinman et al., 2011; Zhai & Guo, 2025). Additionally, existing literature on emotional geographies (see also Hargreaves, 2001) shows that sociocultural, moral, professional, physical, and political distances between parents and teachers create potential conflicts in parent–teacher interaction (Chen & Wang, 2011; Cross & Hong, 2012; Hargreaves & Lasky, 2004; Lasky, 2000; Winograd, 2003). In this aspect, teachers' emotional labor and emotional geographies regarding parent–teacher interaction increase the risk of face threats which makes the politeness framework a key analytical tool for examining the interaction. Recent studies in teacher education similarly show that teacher candidates experience emotional and relational difficulties during simulation-based parent-teacher interactions (Chen, 2020; Cil & Dotger, 2017; De Coninck et al., 2023; Dotger et al., 2011; Levin, 2024). Overall, these studies highlight the need for greater emphasis on how parents and teachers perceive and manage face-threatening and emotionally challenging parent–teacher interactions through politeness theory as it helps clarify the nature of interactional challenges and the strategies used to handle them.

Thanks to their strong explanatory power in explaining how people manage social interactions, satisfying the interlocutors' face needs, maintaining mutual understanding and preventing conflicts even in the most face-threatening situations, face and politeness frameworks have been widely used in educational research (Al-Badawi et al., 2025; Aspelin & Eklöf, 2023; Baiocchi-Wagner, 2011; Bjørndal, 2020; Cohen-Zamir & Vedder-Weiss, 2024; Kidd, 2016; Marshall & Chen, 2025; Mendler & Vedder-Weiss, 2023; Savić, 2018; Vedder-Weiss et al., 2019). Among these approaches, a few studies have applied Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to investigate politeness in educational settings. Some of these studies are related to teachers' politeness strategies (Ak, 2018; Estaji & Nejad, 2021; Pang, 2024; Peng et al., 2014; Sülü, 2015), students' politeness strategies (Aliakbari & Moalemi, 2015; Bolkan & Holmgren, 2012), politeness strategies in student-teacher interaction (Bills, 2000; Eshghinejad & Moini, 2016; Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020; Mulyono et al., 2019; Santamaría-García, 2017; Triyono et al., 2025; Zhang, 2022), educational materials (Bozkurt & Büyükkal, 2025; Fabian, 2024; Nuha, 2020) teacher candidates' politeness strategies (Kahraman, 2013; Utku & Çetin Koroğlu, 2020). Only two studies (Bilton et al., 2018; Wine, 2007) have adopted Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to investigate parent-teacher interaction. Wine (2007) reveals that the teacher uses politeness strategies to assert authority and gain parental alignment. Similarly, Bilton et al. (2018) demonstrate that both parties are careful to save each other's face. Together, these studies provide a strong rationale for applying politeness theory to parent-teacher interactions by demonstrating its effectiveness in understanding these interactions.

Turkish culture is predominantly collectivist (Hofstede, 2001; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1982; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996; Oishi et al., 1999), yet it also contains individualistic elements (Göregenli, 1995; İmamoğlu, 1998; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2000; Özdemir, 2014; Wasti & Erdil, 2007). It is characterized by strong group consciousness, assigned social roles, marked cordiality, closely knit social networks where loyalty, honour, and collective interests are often prioritised over individual wants (Zeyrek, 2001). In high power distance cultures such as Türkiye, social inequalities are generally perceived as tolerable. In this aspect, these cultures tend to associate power positively with concepts such as trust, supportiveness and generosity (Bisel et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2011; Patterson et al., 2006; Zeyrek, 2001), in contrast to Western cultures. In high-power distance culture, less powerful members of society tend to save the face of those with greater power thus they use mitigated and indirect forms of language (Koç, 2010; Manzur & Jogaratnam, 2007; Merkin, 2011).

In the Turkish context, these emotional and relational dynamics are further intensified by the collectivist culture which frames teachers not merely as educators but as quasi-parents tasked with the holistic development of children. Metaphor studies conducted in the Turkish context regarding teachers also show that teachers are commonly represented by family-related terms such as family, parent, mother, and father (Ertürk, 2017; Gencer, 2020; Yılmaz et al., 2013). Despite the gradual decline in the profession's societal status (Pişkin & Parlar, 2021), teachers in Türkiye are still respected and perceived as authority figures. Within this cultural framework, societal expectations often cross professional boundaries and teachers are expected to have a wide range of qualities such as being beneficial to society, ensuring its continuity, showing helpfulness, self-sacrifice, acting as a role model, etc. (Çubukçu et al., 2016; Taşkaya, 2012). Additionally, Turkish society attributes a sacred status to teachers (Polat & Ünişen, 2016) and expects them to devote themselves both to education and to the well-being of the community. This duality places teachers between two extremes: on one hand, it grants them significant authority, as expressed in the Turkish idiom used by parents, '*eti senin, kemiği benim*' (lit. 'flesh is yours, bones are mine') which means 'you can do whatever is necessary for the child's education; as a parent, I give you my full consent'; on the other hand, Turkish teachers are reported to be among those who experience the highest levels of parental pressure (Güven & Sezer, 2020). All these elements make parent-teacher interaction in Türkiye a complex and culturally rich topic to analyse.

By analysing scenario-based data, this study investigates parents' and teachers' perceptions of their interaction. It examines politeness strategies to reveal how they position themselves and manage power dynamics in this interaction.

The study aims to address the following questions:

Table 2. Characteristics of parents.

Characteristics		N	%
Gender	Female	46	57.5%
	Male	34	42.5%
Age	22–24	3	3.75%
	25–34	18	22%
	35–44	24	30%
	45–54	20	25%
	55–64	15	18.75%
Education level	Elementary	4	5%
	High school	37	46.25%
	Undergraduate	33	41.25%
	Postgraduate	6	7.5%
Socio-economic status	Low	23	28.75%
	Middle	41	51.25%
	High	16	20%

- Which politeness strategies are commonly employed by teachers and parents during parent-teacher interactions, and how do these strategies differ between these two groups?
- How do the distribution and frequency of politeness strategies and their associated linguistic markers reflect the underlying power dynamics and positioning strategies in parent-teacher interactions?

Method

A descriptive analysis was conducted to investigate how each party (parents-teachers) differed in realizing politeness strategies in elicited parent-teacher interaction scenarios, and the qualitative analysis was reinforced through statistical testing. Descriptive qualitative research is an interpretive, holistic, and naturalistic approach that provides authentic insights into previously unexplored subjects by examining them within their natural context (Creswell, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993; Gay et al., 2006; Mertens, 2010; Silverman, 1997).

Participants

The study included 160 Turkish participants, consisting of 80 parents and 80 teachers. To ensure a balanced sample, the study used maximum variation sampling. The study involved sixteen schools (eight schools for parent participants and eight different schools for teachers) in Mersin, Türkiye. These schools included elementary, middle, and high school levels to ensure a balanced distribution across all educational stages. Recruitment was conducted through school administrations for teachers and parent-teacher associations for parents. Two pre-set criteria were used for participant selection: (1) literacy was required for all participants, and (2) parents could not be teachers. Parents and teachers weren't paired with each other. There were no matched teacher-parent pairs (dyads) in the study. Also, parents were not recruited as couples. Instead, the parent who regularly attended parent-teacher meetings was included.

Following the approval of the study by the Mersin University Ethics Committee (Decision No. 127, dated 8 May 2024), participants were provided with an information sheet regarding the study, and they gave their consent for participation. Only participants who volunteered to take part were included.

Socio-demographic information was collected to avoid selection bias and to ensure a representative sample but was not included as a variable in the study. Participants were simply classified according to their institutional roles as teachers or parents.

Table 2 shows the socio-demographic information regarding the parents.

The table indicates a balanced demographic distribution with a minor tendency towards the middle socio-economic status. Possibly, the written participation requirement may have influenced the distribution of parents' education levels and socio-economic status.

Table 3 shows the socio-demographic information regarding the teachers.

As seen, the data on teacher characteristics is balanced. Although there are fewer teachers with 20–30 years of experience, this most likely reflects the current workforce distribution.

Table 3. Characteristics of teachers.

Characteristics		N	%
Gender	Female	42	52.5%
	Male	38	47.5%
Age	25–34	19	23.75%
	35–44	27	33.75%
	45–54	22	27.5%
	55–64	12	15%
Teachers' school	Elementary school	21	26.25%
	Middle School	32	40%
	Highschool	27	33.75%
Work experience	< 10 years	33	41.25%
	10 to 20	38	47.5%
	20 to 30	9	11.25%

Data collection tool

In this study, the Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) was used to elicit data. Kasper and Dahl (1991, p. 221) define WDCT as a type of written questionnaire that includes several brief contextual descriptions which are followed by a short dialogue with a blank space for the speech act being analysed. One key criticism of WDCTs is related to their limitations in generating authentic data (Cohen & Olshtain, 1994; Johnston et al., 1998; Kasper & Dahl, 1991). They may not reflect every facet of verbal interactions since they elicit shorter, simpler answers and often lack the elaboration, repetition, turn-taking and other pragmatic cues and organizational features found in real interactions (Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Golato, 2003; Kasper, 2000). Additionally, interpersonal, sequential, and contextual details that shape real-time interaction are therefore necessarily reduced (Cyluk, 2013) and WDCT responses only reflect what participants think they would say rather than what they actually say in situated interactions (Brown, 2001). All these limitations regarding WDCTs represent an important methodological constraint of the present study.

While WDCT may not capture all aspects of this interaction, it offers several advantages as data collection tool. Ogiermann (2018) states that they are one of the data collection tools capable of generating large, systematically varied and comparable corpora. In addition, WDCTs have administrative advantages as they are inexpensive, quick and easy to administer (Barron, 2003; Billmyer & Varghese, 2000; Kasper, 2000). They allow researchers to manipulate not only language but also situational and psychological factors (Beebe & Cummings, 1985; Rose et al., 2020). In this way, they eliminate the uncontrollable idiosyncrasies of real-life performance (Schneider, 2012) which makes the data easier to compare with across studies. Considering both the pros and cons, WDCT can be seen suitable to collect the target data since parent-teacher interactions present severe challenges related to accessibility and confidentiality (Weininger & Lareau, 2003), WDCT provides access to authentic language in such contexts where collecting natural data is hard to collect without privacy concerns (Wojtaszek, 2016). Moreover, in this study, WDCT enabled the controlled elicitation of comparable politeness data that may be difficult to capture consistently in naturally occurring interactions. Lastly, WDCT was therefore employed not as a representation of authentic interaction but as a controlled elicitation tool to access participants' politeness strategies used in scenario-based interactions, their perceptions of the interaction, and their role-based orientations.

Two parallel WDCTs were designed for parents and teachers to analyse politeness strategies in ten speech acts: warning, apology, refusal, thanking, raising objection, disagreement, reminder, complaint, request, and suggestion in Turkish. These speech acts imposing cost or benefit on the hearer and/or speaker necessitated politeness strategies. Both WDCTs consisted of ten different scenarios. To guarantee that the scenarios closely reflect real-life parent-teacher interactions, they were developed based on a literature review and feedback from five parents and five teachers. In Türkiye, parents and teachers usually interact through parent-teacher conferences once or twice a year, or they can arrange individual meetings if it is urgent. This aspect was also taken into account when designing WDCTs.

The literature suggests that teachers generally have more power than parents (Baker & Keogh, 1995; Macbeth, 1989; Matthiesen, 2016; Walker, 1998; Wine, 2007) due to factors such as interactions taking

Table 4. The summary of the written discourse completion task for teachers.

Item	Speech act	Scenario for teachers
1.	Request	Requesting something a parent previously rejected
2.	Refusal	Refusing a parent's unfair request for extra points
3.	Suggest	Suggesting to a parent that s/he should be more involved in his/her child's education
4.	Thanking	Thanking a parent for his/her significant contribution to his/her child's success
5.	Complaint	Complaining to a parent about his/her child's behaviour and performance
6.	Reminder	Reminding a parent about the school trip fee deadline
7.	Disagreement	Disagreeing with a parent about his/her child's elective choice
8.	Warning	Warning a parent about his/her child's repeated absences
9.	Apology	Apologizing for not informing a parent about the scheduled conference
10.	Objection	Objecting to a parent's interference in teaching methods

Table 5. The summary of the written discourse completion task for parents.

Item	Speech act	Scenario for parents
1.	Request	Requesting a higher grade for your child
2.	Refusal	Refusing a teacher's request that may negatively affect your child
3.	Suggest	Suggesting to a teacher that s/he should use visual aids to enhance your child's engagement and performance
4.	Thanking	Thanking a teacher for supporting your child's academic development
5.	Complaint	Complaining to a teacher for frightening your child and being harsh
6.	Reminder	Reminding a teacher to purchase missing items for the year-end show
7.	Disagreement	Disagreeing with teacher about your child's elective choice
8.	Warning	Warning a teacher about disruptive behaviour of your child's classmates
9.	Apology	Apologizing to a teacher for missing the conference
10.	Objection	Objecting to a teacher about your child's low grade

place in teachers' territory, parents viewing teachers as indispensable to their children's academic success, and feeling outdated after spending time away from school (Walker, 1998). However, MacLure and Walker (2000) underline that parents are not entirely powerless and Inglis (2012) states that consumerist policies shift the power balance toward parents. Given the predominant view on teacher-parent power differences, the rank of imposition in teacher scenarios was slightly raised to balance face-threatening acts in WDCTs. Brown and Levinson's formula (1987) was used to calculate the weight of the act. The formula is as follows:

$$\text{Weight of the act (overall face – threat level)} = \text{Social distance (degree of familiarity)} \\ + \text{Power difference (relative authority)} + \text{Rank of imposition (perceived difficulties of the act)}$$

Following Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, these variables used as scenario design principles. Social distance was kept constant as a formal institutional interaction. Power relations were determined based on the aforementioned literature which generally positions teachers as holding institutional authority. Due to this asymmetry, the rank of imposition in teacher scenarios was slightly increased to create a comparable level of face threat to that of the parent scenarios. This theoretically grounded WDCT design ensured that the scenarios systematically imposed comparable face demands on participants. Without such design, differences in the weight of the acts (face threats) between scenarios could influence participants' choices regarding strategies and misrepresent their perceptions of power and positioning. For example, a parent's request for after-school supervision and a teacher's similar request to a parent do not carry equal weight which makes participants employ different politeness strategies and cross-group comparisons less reliable.

After the WDCTs were prepared, expert opinion was sought from two linguists, and a pre-test session was conducted with 15 teachers and 15 parents. The WDCTs were then revised accordingly. Tables 4 and 5 give details related to these scenarios.

An example is provided to illustrate the DWCT more clearly:

4. sınıfa giden çocuğunuzun öğretmeniyle görüşmeye gittiğinizde, çocuğunuzun derslere ilgisinin azaldığını ve notlarının düştüğünü öğreniyorsunuz. Çocuğunuzun görsel zekasının iyi olduğunu göz önünde bulundurarak, derslerde resim, video gibi görsel araçlar kullanmanın faydalı olabileceğini düşünüyorsunuz ve bu konuda öğretmene öneride bulunmak istiyorsunuz. Öğretmen karşınızda ona ne dersiniz?

(During a meeting with your child's 4th-grade teacher, you have learnt that your child's interest in classes has decreased and their grades have fallen. Considering your child's strong visual intelligence, you want to suggest to the teacher use visual tools like pictures and videos that can be useful for your child. What would you say to the teacher?)

Data collection process

Data were collected during the 2024–2025 academic year. The timing of participation depended on the availability and preference of each participant. Participants completed the WDCT individually in a quiet room at their schools. The task was administered in written form and took approximately 20–30 minutes to complete. Each scenario provided a detailed context to immerse participants in the situation. To encourage spontaneous and natural responses, participants were instructed not to overthink their answers.

Data analysis

After data collection, each response was independently examined line by line by the authors and coded according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on record, and off-record. After the initial independent coding, the authors discussed any discrepancies in their coding decisions and resolved them through consensus. Then, two linguistics experts with expertise in pragmatics reviewed the coded responses. Only five responses were excluded due to unclear meaning. All other responses fitted within Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework which supports Wine's (2007) finding that this theory effectively explains linguistic strategies in teacher-parent interactions. Despite criticisms directed at Brown and Levinson's theory (Chen, 2001; Culpeper, 1996; Kasper, 1990) along with the presence of new approaches to politeness in the literature (Culpeper, 1996; Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Watts, 2003), the theory is widely regarded as the most influential and applied to various studies (Eelen, 2001; Fraser, 2005).

Additionally, it was found that some participants used more than one strategy in a single response, and these were examined separately. Some participants also added comments such as 'I am lying' or 'I am just kidding to take the sting out of the situation' and helped in categorizing the responses.

After classifying all the collected data for quantitative analysis, the data were quantified by using descriptive statistics. The chi-square procedure was employed to assess whether the obtained results were statistically significant. The frequency and distribution of politeness strategies used by both teachers and parents were compared. This comparative approach allowed identification of patterns regarding interactional tendencies and examination of how each party perceives their interactional roles and power dynamics. Linguistic structures, such as address forms, modal verbs, and hedges, which were used to identify politeness strategies also served as indicators of social roles, relational positioning, and power dynamics. All identified strategies and markers are supported with representative examples in the findings and discussion section to demonstrate the consistency of the coding process.

Findings and discussion

By taking advantage of the potential of the WDCTs to compile large corpora of politeness strategies (see also Ogiermann, 2018), 1786 politeness strategies used by parents and teachers were compiled.

Table 6 illustrates the distribution of politeness strategies used by parents and teachers.

The data reveals that teachers tend to use positive politeness and bald-on-record strategies more frequently while parents are more tend to use negative politeness and off-record strategies which suggests certain linguistic tendencies in their use of politeness strategies. Also, the chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 237.567$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.05$) indicates a significant difference in the distribution of politeness strategy preferences between parents and teachers.

Table 6. Frequency of politeness strategies used by parents and teachers.

strategies	Frequency		
Politeness Strategy	Parent (Observed freq.) n	Teacher (Observed freq.) n	Total (Observed freq.) N
Positive Politeness	264 (27.44%)	343 (41.61%)	607 (33.99%)
Negative Politeness	405 (42.09%)	189 (22.94%)	594 (33.26%)
Bald-on-record	103 (10.70%)	251 (30.46%)	354 (19.82%)
Off-record	190 (19.75%)	41 (4.98%)	231 (4.98%)
Total	962	824	1786

Politeness strategies used by teachers

Positive politeness: building common ground and cultural intimacy

A closer look at the findings regarding teachers reveals that they mostly use positive politeness strategies in parent-teacher interaction to avoid possible conflicts and enhance the collaboration between themselves and parents which is coherent with Wine's study (2007). The following examples illustrate how teachers use positive politeness strategies and the functions they serve.

1. Siz de hatırlarsınız bizim zamanımızda, biz öğretmene hayır demezdik. Biz o kültürle gördük geçirdik umuyorum ki siz de demezsiniz o yüzden. Efenin takıma girmesine izin verirsiniz değil mi? (T1-Request)¹

(You may remember that in our time, we wouldn't say no to teachers. We experienced this culture, so I hope you won't either. You will let Efe join the team, won't you?)²

The teacher asserts common ground by saying 'hatırlarsınız' (you may remember), 'bizim zamanımızda' (in our time), 'demezdik' (we wouldn't say) and positions the parent and herself as a part of the same community who has a shared background. The teacher also implies that if we are in the same community then you should obey the rules of this community by saying politely 'siz de demezsiniz' (you won't either). She also uses the pronoun 'biz' (we) to imply that we are collaborators on the same side. She uses the optimistic sub-strategy of positive politeness by uttering 'izin verirsiniz değil mi?' (you will let Efe, won't you?) to achieve her communicative goal easily. The teacher appears to align with the parent by saving his/her positive face and she somehow implies what is true.

2. Ablacığım, seni anladım ama başka çarem yok. (T2-Refusal)

(Dear sister, I understand you but I have no other option.)

In this example, the teacher rejects the request for an extra point and he employs a kinship term to address the parent which indicates that they are close enough not to offend each other despite their disagreement. By using this identity marker, the teacher positions the parent and himself as immediate family members. Secondly, by saying 'seni anladım' (I understand you), he shows sympathy to the parent which also means 'I am aware of your face wants.' Lastly, 'başka çarem yok' (I have no other option) is not a direct rejection of the request. The teacher minimizes the threat for the parent's positive face by implying 'I would do it if I could.'

Upon reviewing the data, it is observed that teachers frequently address parents using fictive kinship terms. Although kinship terms are typically viewed as a positive politeness marker that strengthens the interaction (Gusnawaty et al., 2022), it is also clear that they are generally not expected to be commonly used in institutional interaction. This tendency of teachers has also been proven in the booklet named as Öğretmen Veli İletişimi (Teacher-Parent Communication) (MEB, 2018) prepared by the Ministry of National Education, and teachers are warned as follows: 'Pay attention to the types of address you use

when communicating with parents! For example, avoid using expressions such as sister, brother.' However, such an outcome cannot be considered only related to the teacher-parent interaction. In the Turkish collectivist context, such a mixture of intimacy and deference is not perceived as contradictory, Turkish speakers often express warmth and respect simultaneously (Zeyrek, 2001). In line with this, the example shows an intersection of interpersonal closeness exists together with institutional constraints. The teacher's use of the kinship term (*dear sister*) signals intimacy, while the refusal reflects professional boundaries.

Another interesting finding regarding address terms is that, despite the scenarios not specifying any gender, most teachers assume that the parents are women. The tendency can be the reflection of the finding frequently repeated in the literature that fathers are less involved in their children's education compared with mothers (Amato & Dorius, 2010; Ertan, 2017; Güngörmüş, 1999; Kanbur, 2009; Tümkaya & Türkmenoğlu, 2021).

Bald-on-record: asserting professional authority and directness

Teachers prefer to use a lot of bald-on-record strategies which can be coded as less polite than the other strategies in scenario-based parent-teacher interactions. They seem to care more about delivering their messages than satisfying the parents' faces.

3. Çocuğunuzla daha çok ilgilenin. (T3-Suggest)

Pay more attention to your child.

4. İşime karışmayın. (T10-Objection)

Don't interfere with my work.

There are some possible reasons why teachers frequently use bald-on-record strategy. In these scenarios, both the speaker's and hearer's faces are threatened. For example, when a teacher (or parent) rejects an undesired request from parents (or teacher), their face has already been threatened by the imposition posed by the request and when it's their turn, they don't want to minimize the threat to the hearer's face in response to the threat directed at them.

Also, this tendency can be context-dependent. When there is no third party is present, teachers tend to be more straightforward, but when students attend conferences (Bilton et al., 2017) or as group size increases (Wine, 2007), it is observed that teachers use the bald-on-record strategy less frequently. For this reason, this factor may have influenced the teachers' choices in scenarios involving individual interactions.

Another key factor is that teachers' expert roles force them to be more direct and explicit in these interactions since parents typically seek clear explanations or solutions. In the Öğretmen Veli İletişimi (Teacher-Parent Communication) booklet (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2018) they advise 'Keep your answers short and to the point. Avoid long and unnecessary explanations. Ask if more details are needed!' Furthermore, the institutionally imposed constraints of traditional parent-teacher conferences or individual interviews, such as time limitations, crowd, and problem-solving-oriented context can lead them to use bald-on-record strategy.

There is a substantial body of research asserting that teachers feel professionally challenged by parents (Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Prakke & Van Peet, 2023; Ünal et al., 2010; Yıldız, 2020). Therefore, they try to set some limits for teachers by positioning themselves and the parents apart by the help of bald-on-record strategies. The example (4) is best to summarize this discussion. This conflict between teachers and parents is not only observed in the realizations of the bald-on-record strategies. Teachers frequently remind their professional roles and make a great effort to protect their positive faces through linguistic choices such as 'öğretmen olarak, uzman olarak, iyi bir öğretmen olarak, benim

uzmanlık alanım, pedagojik tecrübem' (as a teacher, as an expert, as a good teacher, my specialty, my pedagogical experience) in their interaction with the parents.

Doğancay-Aktuna and Kamışlı (1996, p. 13) conclude that Turkish people tend to be bald and Martı finds Turkish speakers use direct strategies and they do not think that the direct utterances are impolite (Martı, 2006, p. 1862) however, the tendency of the teachers cannot be explained by cultural norms because the parents display exactly opposite tendency. In this aspect, regardless of the possible reasons, by using the bald-on-record strategy, teachers seem to prioritize delivering their messages clearly, by protecting their position as experts, and preventing a threat to their faces over satisfying the parent's face and they ignore the face needs of parents.

Negative politeness: maintaining professional distance and respecting parents

Negative politeness strategies are the third most preferred strategy among teachers. It suggests that teachers try to create a respectful atmosphere during parent-teacher interactions. Teachers show their respect for parents' boundaries and avoid intrusion by saving their negative face. The following examples demonstrate how and why teachers use these strategies.

5. Telaş etmeyin lütfen ama sizinle paylaşmam gereken ufak bir şey var. Arda bu sıralar sınıfta birazcık fazla hareketli. Bazı zamanlar biraz fazla konuşuyor. Ne yapılabilir? (T5-Complaint)

(Please don't be alarmed, but there's something minor I need to share with you. Arda is a little bit active in class these days. Sometimes he talks a bit much. What can be done?)

It is difficult for parents to receive unfavourable news about their child. The data shows that teachers use a lot of hedges such as 'ufak, birazcık, biraz, bu sıralar, bazı zamanlar' (minor, a bit, these days, sometimes) in such contexts. Although the scenario provides detailed information regarding the student's disruptive behaviours, the teacher mentions them briefly by using more neutral language. By asking a question, she minimizes the imposition and as the question is in passive voice, it does not assign responsibility for solving the problem to anyone. The linguistic choices of the teacher indicate indirectness to save the face of parents by respecting the autonomy of decision-making and save the face of students by not blaming them directly.

In example (6), the speaker manages the face-threatening act by stating the desired act as a rule. In the realization of negative politeness strategies, teachers often refer to the institutional procedures of the school, education system and school administrators to fulfil face management. To avoid personal responsibility and face-threats, the teachers impersonalize themselves and the parents as in the following example:

6. Kusura bakmayın, e-Okula³ işlenen notların geri çekilmesi mümkün olmadığından bu işlem yapılamamaktadır. (T2-Refusal)

(Sorry, but since the grades entered into e-Okul cannot be withdrawn, this process cannot be carried out.)

Off-record: professional image and indirectness

As for the off-record strategy, teachers use it the least. This is likely because they are concerned about conveying messages. From the first day of their training, teachers are taught to use clear and understandable language in educational settings. Furthermore, the off-record strategy allows hearers to interpret the speakers' remarks subjectively (Nurmalasari et al., 2021). Teachers as professionals often tend to avoid using it in intuitional conversations to ensure that parents fully understand what they say. In this sense, it is understandable that teachers avoid using ambiguous language which can lead to misinterpretations.

7. İnsan beşer, kuldur şaşar. (T9-Apology)

(To err is human)

In example (7), the teacher employs a proverb instead of saying 'I am sorry' and accepting his mistake openly. By accepting his fault subtly, he saves his positive face. Thanks to the off-record strategy, he also minimizes the risk of conflict with the parents by preventing possible blame and criticism toward his professionalism. By maintaining his professional image, the teacher tries to preserve his position in power dynamics.

Politeness strategies used by parents

Negative politeness: maintaining harmony and respect

A closer look at the findings regarding parents shows that parents mostly use negative politeness strategies. The elicited data suggests that in order to reach their communicative goals maintain a harmonious relationship with teachers, parents often prefer negative politeness strategies. The following examples illustrate the negative politeness strategies used by parents.

8. Sayın hocam siz şimdi beni yanlış anlayacaksınız ama bizim çocuk sizin disiplininizden çekiniyor olabilir mi? (P5-Complaint)

(Dear Teacher, I think you might take it the wrong way, but could it be that our child is afraid of your discipline?)

In example (8), the parent tries to perform the face-threatening act without threatening the negative face of the teacher and uses some sub-strategies of negative politeness. Firstly, she maintains the distance by addressing the teacher 'sayın hocam' (dear teacher). With the help of this honorific, the parent shows that 'I don't intrude into your territory and I accept your power and respect you.' Secondly, she utilizes being pessimistic subcategory by stating 'siz şimdi beni yanlış anlayacaksınız' (you might take it the wrong way) which 'gives redress to H's negative face by explicitly expressing doubt that the conditions for the appropriateness of S's speech act obtain' (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 173). She also uses the word 'disiplin' (discipline) instead of using the words given in the scenario such as 'sert davranmak' (being harsh) to be more indirect. Lastly, rather than directly blaming the teacher, she asks a question to save the teacher's face.

In the realization of negative politeness strategies, parents mostly exhibit deference to teachers as shown in (9).

9. Öğretmenim siz bizlerden daha iyi bilirsiniz ama yine de kusura bakmazsanız İngilizce diyeyim. (P7-Disagreement)

(Teacher, you know better than us, but if you don't mind, I'll say English).

Negative politeness strategies are directly related to social distance and status differences between interlocutors. For example, in (9), the parent dishonours herself while she honours the teacher by saying 'siz bizlerden daha iyi bilirsiniz' (you know better than us). In Turkish culture, people tend to treat teachers as authority figures and respect their role and maintain a clear hierarchical distance which is seen as more effective and proper (Erkenekli, 2011). By showing deference to teachers, parents seem to accept their expert roles and they try to soften the potential threats to these experts to encourage them to maintain collaboration.

Positive politeness: strategic alignment and relationship maintenance

Under the title of positive politeness strategies, parents employ a lot of token agreements which means that the speaker hides his/her disagreement by pretending to agree with the other interlocutors. Parents tend to use this strategy to save both their faces (by avoiding direct conflicts) and the teachers' faces

(by respecting teachers' positive face wants and maintaining a cooperative approach). Some of the examples can be listed as follows: 'haklısınız ama' (you are right, but), 'çok doğru ama yine de' (that's very true, but still), 'size katılıyorum ama' (I agree with you, but), etc.

10. Evet evet, haklısınız ne güzel bizi spora yönlendiriyorsunuz ama bu sene katılamayacağız. (P2-Refusal)

(Yes, yes, you are right, it is great that you are encouraging us to do sports, but we won't be able to participate this year.)

Similarly, there are a lot of examples of parents trying to hide their disagreement by using different strategies such as white lies, token agreements, etc. The significant effort by parents to harmonize with the teachers carries the risk of resulting in what Goffman describes as a 'veneer of consensus' (1969) which is an insincere agreement used to hide the disagreements. MacLure and Walker (1999 as cited in Wine, 2007, p. 20) also conclude that parents habitually signal alignment with the teachers due to concerns about potential negative consequences. At this point, it can be concluded that parents may prioritize avoiding big problems that could arise from disagreements over addressing the current issues. Consequently, such agreements can prevent interaction from reaching its goals, lead to misalignment between parents and teachers, build mutual distrust and leave the problems unsolved.

A significant portion of positive politeness strategies used by parents involves making promises immediately after performing face-threatening acts. In this way, parents reassure the teachers that they are aware of their positive wants, and they are intended to enhance trust and cooperative climate. Promises function as mitigator showing goodwill of parents.

11. Değerli hocam, biliyorsunuz bizim oğlan biraz çekinmiş sizden. Ama sorun bizdeyse ben durumu bir şekilde çözeceğim hocam. (P5-Complaint)

(Dear teacher, you know our son is a bit scared of you. But if the problem is related to us, I will somehow resolve it.)

In example (11), the parent uses the personal-center switch subcategory by assuming that the hearer's knowledge related to this issue is equal to his by saying 'biliyorsunuz' (you know). By highlighting shared knowledge, the parent frames the teacher as a cooperator. Also, he minimizes the face-threats towards himself by subtly implying 'this is not just my idea, you also know it.' Immediately after he utters the face-threatening act softened by the mitigator 'biraz' (a bit) and the honorific 'değerli hocam' (dear teacher), he promises to take responsibility to resolve the problem which is also a direct indication that the parent wants to collaborate with the teacher. The parent shows his will to share the responsibility of the mentioned issue by uttering 'eğer sorun bizdeyse' (if the problem is related to us) to encourage the teacher to collaborate. Additionally, promising in such examples can be considered as a face repair strategy.

Especially for the thanking speech act which threatens the speaker's negative face, parents prefer to use exaggerate sub-category. As Brown and Levinson reveal, it is a way of saying 'I want your positive face to be satisfied.' (1987, p. 101) and it suggests parents prioritise the face needs of teachers even when their face is threatened. The following example shows that parents who show interest in the face want of the teachers even in more face-threatening situations need to use exaggeration to make their words more effective in less face-threatening situations.

12. Yedi dünya cihanda sizin gibi bir hoca gelir mi bilmem ama ben kulunuz köleniz olsam az gelir çocuğuma yaptığınıza. Allah sizden razı olsun. (P4-Thanking)

(I don't know if there will ever be another teacher like you in the seven worlds, but even if I were your servant, it would not be enough for what you have done for my child. May Allah be pleased with you.)

In example (12), the parent exaggeratedly thanks and praises the teacher by using theatrical utterances such as 'yedi dünya cihanda sizin gibi bir hoca gelir mi' (if there will ever be another teacher like

you in the seven worlds), 'kulunuz köleniz olsam az gelir' (if I were your servant, it would not be enough). The parent expects to receive a positive reaction from the teacher and reduce the social distance between himself and the teacher with the help of these exaggerative expressions. Lexical upgrading in such examples where even a more modest expression can be used is used to stress the good intentions of the speaker (check also Kuzhevskaya, 2019; Wiyanto et al., 2023).

Additionally, to achieve their goal more easily, parents employ 'assert or presuppose speakers' knowledge of and concern for hearers' wants' sub-strategy which is described as in which the speakers highlight s/he knows the hearers' desires to align themselves with those wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 125). However, the data illustrates parents manipulate this strategy by presenting their face wants as if they were the teachers' face wants rather than aligning with teachers' wants. It could be argued that through this strategy parents seek to convince teachers that they share the same desire in effort to reduce the imposition and protect both their faces and the teachers' faces.

13. Hocam biliyorum sınıf çok yaramazmış, yoruluyormuşsunuz. Bunları bir dizginlesek siz de rahat eder-seniz, dinlenirsiniz. Kendinizi yormayın diye uyarmak istedim. (P8-Warning)

(Teacher, I know the class is very naughty and you get tired. If we could just control them, you would be more relaxed and have a chance to rest. I want to warn you not to tire yourself.)

In example (13), the parent wants to warn the teacher about the classmates of his child since he desires his child can listen to the lesson without being distracted. The parent strategically frames her want as if it was the teacher's want without explicitly saying even a word regarding her true intention to achieve her goal and avoid face-threats.

Off-record: ambiguity and conflict avoidance

It is observed that parents who are unwilling to disagree with teachers occasionally use off-record politeness strategies. Thanks to this strategy, parents can perform face-threatening acts without appearing aggressive and directly imposing their desires on teachers. In this vein, the parents prefer avoiding conflicts, even if it means that their desires might not be fully understood by teachers. However, in a context interlocutors have power imbalances, and this tendency can lead to their desires being ignored.

14. Hocam, akıllı tahtalar da çok etkili oluyordur kesin (P3-Suggest)

Teacher, smart boards must also be very effective.

15. Hocam, derslerine hiç çalışmıyor. (P2-Refusal)

Teacher, s/he never studies.

In the examples (14) and (15), parents imply their messages without saying anything explicitly. To suggest that the teacher use visual aids to enhance his child's performance, the parent refers to the smart boards and to reject the teacher's suggestion about enrolling the basketball team, another parent only says 'derslerine hiç çalışmıyor' (s/he never studies). In this way, parents do not explicitly perform any face-threatening acts and provide many different interpretations of their messages for teachers. They find an opportunity to perform desired face-threatening acts while they do not take responsibility for it (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 211).

Bald-on-record: directness in highly critical situations

As to the bald-on-record strategies, it is seen that parents do not prefer this strategy until they face with a highly face-threatening act. This also indicates that unless the issues are highly critical, parents do not give up their efforts to cooperate with teachers. They use bald-on record strategies mostly in the

scenario 5 (complaining to a teacher for frightening your child and being harsh) which is highly face-threatening. It suggests that Turkish parents tend to avoid using bald-on record strategy since they generally prioritise showing respect which reflects the cultural norms in a high power distance society.

16. Çocuğa daha kibar davranın lütfen. (P5-Complaint)

Please, be more polite towards the child.

17. Hocam böyle sert olmayın. (P5-Complaint)

Teacher, do not be harsh like that.

Strategic positioning: constructing 'good' professional and parental roles

It can be said that both teachers and parents strictly adhere to the roles of 'good teacher' and 'good parent' during interaction (Pillet-Shore, 2001; Wine, 2007). Walker also states that during parent-teacher interactions both teachers and parents feel very anxious to appear responsible and caring (1998, p. 172). By reinforcing their own positive face, both teachers and parents desire to position themselves as good parents or teachers in the eyes of each other. The following examples can be taught as a reflection of this effort:

18. Hocam inanın o kadar emek verdim ki bir sürü soru kitapçığı aldım, oğlumla çözdüm ... (P10-Objection)

Teacher, believe me, I made a great effort, I bought a lot of test booklets and solved them with my son.

19. Ben öğrencilerim için en iyisini düşünürüm her zaman, o sebeple sizin kaygılanmanıza gerek yok. Ben zaten onun için en iyi notu vermişimdir. (T2-Refusal)

I always think about what is best for my students, so you don't need to worry. I have already given him/her the best grade.

It is also observed that role shifts occur while parents perform the role of a good parent. The parents tend to frame themselves and their child together. Therefore, participants have to deal with three-way face management dynamic during the parent-teacher interactions. In example (20), the parent borrows the identity and face of her child and repositions her child as 'biz' (we).

20. Kıymetli hocam, biz biraz çekingeniz. (P8-Warning)

Dear teacher, we are a little bit shy.

Parental agency: reclaiming the participatory role

The study's findings demonstrate that parents use slightly more politeness strategies compared to teachers, since they tend to employ multiple strategies within a single interaction. This suggests that when the face-threatening weight of the speech act increases, the parents combine the politeness strategies. It indicates that parents value their interaction with teachers so much that they do not want to risk it if one of these strategies is ignored. Instead of claims that parents have nothing to say during parent-teacher interactions (Guo, 2010; Walker, 1998), the finding indicates that they have a lot to say. In this way, it is possible that parents' higher level of involvement when compared to expectations in the literature is the result of the written data collection tool which gives parents active roles. It shows that parents can gain a much more participatory profile when parent meetings are held under appropriate conditions that give parents active role. Similarly, Matthiesen (2016) suggests that parents experience a

compulsory silence during parent-teacher interactions, while Gökçe (2000) asserts that parents are more willing to interact when given the opportunity.

Overall, this scenario-based perception study shows that both teachers and parents actively manage face in parent-teacher interactions, strategically using politeness strategies to balance authority, collaboration, and interactional goals. Key findings indicate that teachers predominantly employ positive politeness and direct (bald-on-record) strategies to assert authority while maintaining collaboration whereas parents mainly rely on negative and indirect (off-record) strategies to show respect and align with teachers' face wants. Teachers position themselves as powerful authority figures, and parents generally accommodate this positioning. Interestingly, parents sometimes appear deferential while manipulating the interaction for the sake of their own face wants. Finally, both parties try to manage their own face wants and social positioning while maintaining cooperation in the interaction.

Conclusion

The study, a written, scenario-based perception study, examines Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies in parent-teacher interactions to describe how parents and teachers position themselves, manage power dynamics and maintain collaboration in this highly face-threatening context. As a key result, the predominant use of positive and negative politeness strategies shows the participants' mutual interest and respect which highlights their great efforts to cooperate with each other. Although both parties are willing to maintain the relationship, sometimes both teachers and parents deal with their own success rather than students' success (Pillet-Shore, 2016, p. 265) by trying to portray themselves as 'good parents' and 'good teachers.'

Morand (1996) highlights that power is a license for using certain strategies. Brown and Levinson's framework (1987) also implies that more direct politeness strategies are typically used by more powerful speakers towards less powerful hearers, while more indirect and polite strategies are used by less powerful speakers towards more powerful hearers. Although some studies prove that the social variables proposed by Brown and Levinson do not provide a ready-made formula for choosing politeness strategies, (see also Doğançay-Aktuna & Kamışlı, 2001; Harris, 2003) the findings of the present study align with Brown and Levinson's implication. When the distribution of politeness strategies used by parents and teachers are compared, the high frequency of positive politeness strategies used by teachers and negative politeness strategy used by parents suggests that teachers perceive themselves as more powerful party while this positioning is accepted by parents. The phrases used by teachers like 'iyi bir öğretmen olarak, eğitimci olarak', (as a good teacher, as an educator) etc. and uttered by parents like 'işin ehli olarak, siz en iyisini bilirsiniz', (as an expert, you know best) etc. reflects that the teachers portray themselves as authority figures and it is legitimized by parents. By giving more importance to their occupational and institutional roles rather than the social contextual factors suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987), teachers try to gain a powerful position in these imaginary interaction (see also Coupland et al., 1988). Additionally, when comparing the two sets of data, it is seen that teachers more frequently use bald-on-record strategies (the most direct but the less polite), whereas parents tend to employ off-record strategies (the most indirect but the politest) which further suggests the influence of perceived power differences on interactional choices.

Additionally, parents who take on a team-member role to encourage teachers to align with them sometimes experience face loss because teachers are perceived to hold more powerful positions and may overlook the face-wants of parents by using more direct strategies. But teachers' power is not entirely exclusionary. While they portray themselves as leaders, they also position the parents as team members to maintain collaboration. All these findings reflects the perception of teachers in Türkiye, a collectivist and high power distance society, as both members of the community and authorities guiding community. Notably, teachers are sensitive to challenges to their professional authority and tend to save their positive face in such situations.

Contrary to previous research which has shown that parents often take a passive role in parent-teacher interaction, being reluctant to participate and mostly adopting a listener stance (Erdoğan & Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Nazlı et al., 2022), it is seen that they claim their right to have active roles in these scenario-based interactions. It suggests that parent-teacher conferences should be redesigned to

give parents more chances to express themselves. In this aspect, the time allocated to each parent should be extended, parents should have some rights to determine the subjects of the interactions, and individual interactions should be promoted. Considering teachers' workload, they should be encouraged to participate in conferences through supportive arrangements. Different modes of parent-teacher interaction such as remote connections and digital platforms that allow flexible meeting times, should be used, and more comfortable settings like isolated conference rooms in schools should be provided; however, these methods may also bring challenges such as technical problems, privacy issues, and less personal contact.

Although the importance of 'parent-teacher communication competences' is recognised worldwide in educational policies (De Coninck et al., 2018), there are typically no specific courses in education faculties that train teacher candidates on how to interact with parents in challenging situations and also in-service supports to promote collaborative interaction are inadequate (Epstein, 1995; 2013; Graham-Clay, 2005; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Güler, 2014; Hirsto, 2010; Symeou et al., 2012). To improve collaboration between parents and teachers, parent-teacher interactions should be included in teacher training and in-service programs (see also Symeou et al., 2012). Also, activities such as workshops, socio-drama, role-play can help improve parent-teacher interaction.

It should be noted that the focus on positive face and the high level of alignment found in the studies by Wine (2007) and Bilton et al. (2018) is consistent with the results of this study. However, this scenario-based study also finds that parents and teachers experience conflicts or prioritise their face wants over maintaining harmonious interactions more often when compared to previous studies. The difference can be attributed to norms related to Turkish culture and parent-teacher interactions in Turkish educational context. The difference may also result from WDCTs which are deliberately designed to elicit target linguistic units. As mentioned before, WDCTs cannot fully reflect the natural dynamics of parent-teacher interactions and may lead participants to respond more strategically. Additionally, the study relied on written responses from a relatively small group of participants and did not examine socio-demographic characteristics as a variable which limits exploration of how these factors might influence the results. The findings are context-specific and should be interpreted cautiously, and larger-scale quantitative studies would be needed to test their wider applicability. Notwithstanding the limitations, this study is the only one to analyse parent-teacher interactions in the Turkish context which reveals what actually happens in these interactions without relying on surveys and interviews. In this aspect, this study offers novel insights into parent-teacher interactions in the Turkish context by highlighting the participants' perceptions regarding power, positioning and politeness strategies that have not been systematically documented before.

The changing roles of parents, the emergence of new digital platforms and tools for maintaining parent-teacher interaction and the increasing need for parental involvement indicate the importance of further linguistic studies on parent-teacher interactions. Also, all these discussions highlight the need for future research on both naturally occurring data and controlled data to gain a deeper understanding of such complex interaction. It is believed that this study will raise questions for further studies regarding the parent-teacher interaction which have received relatively little specific academic attention.

Notes

1. These codes refer to the scenario that participants answered in the WDCTs.
2. The data analysis is based only on the original Turkish texts, so translation-related differences in strategies should not be considered.
3. e-Okul is an online educational management system used in Türkiye.

Author contributions

Nuriye Özer: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. Aygül Uçar: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, supervision, project administration, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Data availability statement

The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical considerations but are available from the authors on reasonable request.

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