Linguistic Politeness while Exercising Teacher-power in the English Language Classrooms in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to understand the impact of politeness principles used by the teachers while exercising certain powers in their classes. In a language classroom, a teacher has to perform several roles, e.g. instructional, motivational, evaluative, and managerial. These roles associate a teacher in the milieu of exercising power (i.e. legitimate, referent, expert, reward, and coercive) in his/her classes. A teacher exercises powers through interactions. Effective interaction depends on appropriate use of politeness strategies. In this study, a mixed method approach has been used for collecting data. Four undergraduate level English classes of two teachers in two different universities within Dhaka city have been observed. The utterances of teachers have been scrutinized in order to identify teachers' linguistic behaviour. The researcher recorded teachers' utterances as qualitative data. Reduced data from classroom observations has been translated with a view to locating different types of powers exercised by the teachers. Questionnaire surveys have been used to collect quantitative data. This study has identified different types of power exercised by the teachers in their classes. Besides, it has provided a glimpse to what extent politeness strategies are being used by the teachers intentionally or unintentionally in order to save their students' faces. Finally, the study has tried to show students' perceptions towards teachers' politeness and power exercise.

Key Words: *Politeness, Power Exercise, Face, Interaction, Classroom Environment*

Background of the Study

Several factors can affect a language classroom, e.g. classroom management, students' motivation, teacher's professionalism, classroom behaviour, medium of instruction etc. In a classroom, a teacher has to perform four key roles, i.e. instructional, motivational, evaluative, and managerial (Sulu, 2015). However, French and Raven (1968) proposed five types of powers that a teacher exercises in his or her classes and they are: legitimate power, referent power, expert power, reward power, and coercive power. When a teacher exercises the power in

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his or her class, he or she needs to use the language. With a view to ensuring the appropriate use of language, a teacher must have the knowledge of politeness. Teacher's politeness can make the medium of instruction effective and student friendly. It can also determine the success of pedagogical process.

Since politeness is one of the most effective processes of maintaining a sound interpersonal communication, it can be applied in the field of education. Through the use of politeness, a teacher can ensure an effective educational environment. This study will provide guideline about proper classroom behaviour to the teachers. The findings of the present research will make the teachers understand how they are threatening their students' faces. The teachers need to be aware of their language which includes face threatening acts (FTA) since it may deactivate students in the process of learning. We know that language classrooms are different from the classrooms of other subjects. A language classroom demands a lot of interactions. For this reason, this study will have a great impact on the language teachers. Besides, teachers can understand students' desire regarding teachers' linguistic behaviour. This study will also suggest a guideline of approaching the students by which the teachers will be able to ensure an anxiety free teaching-learning environment.

With this background, the study has made an attempt to answer the following research questions:

- What types of power do the teachers exercise in English language classrooms?
- To what extent do the teachers maintain politeness during power exercise in there classrooms?
- What perceptions do the students have about teachers' politeness and power exercise?

Power exercise in English language classroom

The process of education has changed over time. Now, education demands a friendly environment which does not burden students with pressure, fear and anxiety. The old-fashioned image of a teacher as a lecturer or a dictator is not appreciated by the stockholders of education. Nowadays, a teacher is considered a supporter, motivator, instructor, activator, assessor, feedback provider, manager and model (Ur, 2012). It's important to note that a teacher performs all the acts through the use of language. As we know, a teacher usually exercises some powers while performing his or her academic activities in the class. Powers are functioned according to the demand of relationship. Five bases of power can be identified (French & Raven, 1968). They are:

1. Legitimate power: It refers to the authoritarian power of a teacher. Through the use of legitimate power, a teacher instructs his or her students. Legitimate power deals with instructional utterances.

2. Referent power: This kind of power indicates the closeness of teacher-student relationship. A teacher usually exercises referent power by asking for assistance from his or her students.

3. Expert power: Expert power promotes a teacher as the most skilled and knowledgeable person in his field from whom the students can get effective class materials and feedback. Sometimes, the teacher provides knowledge according to the demand of the lesson. It is also considered as one of the expert power exercises.

4. Reward power: In a class, the teacher motivates and encourages his or her students by appreciating their performance and participation. Sometimes teachers offer gifts to his or her students if they can meet his or her expectations. These exercises are considered as reward power.

5. Coercive power: It is just opposite to reward power. Sometimes the teacher gives punishment to the students. In many cases, a teacher humiliates his or her students. These are the coercive powers.

Most of the teachers exercise these powers in their classes. But in a class, we may not find all of the five powers. It depends on a teacher's attitude and personality. Relationship between teacher and students is also a very dominant factor in this issue. A language class room is very vibrant and interactive. Proper outcomes of a language class depend on effective interaction (Dornyei & Murphey, 2003). Apart from that the teacher's power will not endure without interaction. Absence of interaction, to a great extent, can be a reason for teacher's power loss in the class (Agustina & Cahyono, 2016). However, during power exercise, politeness strategies should be kept in mind by a language teacher.

Politeness principles and language teaching

Politeness is a very significant code of interaction in human society. Politeness has been considered as a term for the combination of interpersonal considerations and linguistic choices that affect the form and function of linguistic interactions. Grundy (2013) states, "Politeness is the exercise of language choice to create a context intended to match the addressee's notion of how he or she should be addressed." Politeness is a paradigm of pragmatic usage of language. It is a part of the large concept of etiquette. Linguistic politeness implies appropriate speaker addressee relationship. One of the most significant contribution on 'politeness' is Brown and Levinson's *Politeness: Some universals in Language Usage (1987).* In this book, they proposed a universal theory of cross-cultural politeness phenomena based on Goffman (1967)'s notion of 'face'. Face is self-esteem or the public self-image. It refers to the respect that every person has for himself or herself. Basically politeness strategies work with a view to saving hearer's 'face'. Politeness refers to showing awareness of another person's face (Jiang, 2010). In most

of human interactions, our face is at a risk to be threatened. There are two types of face: positive and negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Basically, these are the two levels of face on the basis of a person's basic needs as a member of society and a person's desires. Negative face refers to the very basic rights of a person that he or she is supposed to have from the society. Every person wants to be appreciated by other members of the society in case of his or her desires. The attitude of being perceived by the other members of the society represents a positive face. The major purpose of integrating politeness in language use is preserving hearer's face whether it is negative or positive. In a broader sense, there are two kinds of speech. One kind of speech offends the face and the other kind defends the face (Agustina & Cahyono, 2016). There are some acts which damage the hearer's face by neglecting his or her rights and desires. These acts are considered as Face saving acts. Face is very venerable in a sense that both participants of an interaction always try to preserve their faces from being threatened. When face threatening acts are obvious, politeness strategies can be employed for saving the face. Brown and Levinson proposed four politeness strategies. They are:

1. Bald on record (doing nothing to reduce threats to the hearer's face)
2. Positive politeness (seeking solidarity)
3. Negative politeness (giving freedom and right not to be imposed by others)
4. Off record (avoiding the threats using indirect questions and implications)

Brown and Levinson (1987: 103-131) prescribed a plethora of strategies regarding positive and negative politeness. Some of them are:

Table 1.

A plethora of Strategies Regarding Positive and Negative Politeness

Positive politeness	Negative politeness
Intensify interest	Be pessimistic
Offer promise	Nominalize
Assert common ground	Apologize
Use in-group identity marker	Minimize imposition
Avoid disagreement	Impersonalize
Use joke	Use hedges
Be optimistic	Question
Show sympathy or apathy	Be indirect

With proper knowledge of politeness strategies, a person can avoid or reduce the threats to his or her addresses. These politeness strategies increase the expression of polite beliefs and deteriorate the expression of impolite beliefs (kurdghelashvili, 2015).

Politeness plays an important role in the English language classroom. In an English language class, English is the target language. Besides, it is the medium of instruction too. According to language pedagogy, a teacher is considered as an ideal model who can be followed by the students. So, the teacher's language is one of the most significant sources for the students to have the standard form of the target language. Besides, it also works as a medium for enhancing students' knowledge acquisition (Peng, Xie & Cai, 2014). As a role model, a teacher should have politeness in his or her utterances. Manik and Hotagaol (2015) think, "Teacher's politeness has an indirect effect on student compliances and intention so as to enhance desired outcomes in the classroom." Politeness can ensure a harmonious relationship and mutual understanding between students and teacher.

Literature Related to this Research

Although the context, sample, and objectives vary, linguistic politeness and instructors' power exercises are two of the major research issues that scholars from all around the world have examined. In a study, "Analyzing the lecturer's politeness strategies in teaching-learning interaction," Waziana, Andewi, and Putra (2021) found that while negative politeness methods were infrequently employed, professors tended to utilize the bare on-record strategy.

A study on "Politeness and Power Relation in EFL Classroom Interactions: A Study on Indonesian Learners and Lecturers" was carried out in 2016 by Agustina and Cahyono. The study's conclusions revealed how most of the lecturers produced more face-saving than face-threatening utterances, how lecturers' classroom discourse choices can be used as an excessive means of exercising legitimate power, and how students expect their professors to act politely.

A pragmatic analysis of teachers' linguistic politeness in the classroom was done by Syting and Gildore in 2022 sought to identify the many language politeness structures that instructors employed in their classroom interactions. The study's findings were as follows: First, the verbal manifestations of politeness included agent avoiders, downtowners, committers, hesitators, consultative devices, and politeness markers. Second, there were four different politeness strategies: bald-on-record, off-record, negative, and positive politeness. Finally, the agreement, modesty, tact, and approval maxims were included in the politeness maxims. Although politeness is a non-value-laden language reality, there are always customary ways to show it in a given social situation. It does not always imply what people in the moment interpret it to mean. Although politeness is a non-value-laden language reality, there are always customary ways to show it in a given social situation. It does not always imply what people in the moment interpret it to   m e a n .

Additionally, Muliadi et al. (2023) looked at the politeness methods used by students in a vocational school, as well as how teachers and students implement them and how they relate to the development of the students' excellent character.

Methodology

The researcher followed a mixed method approach in this study according to the demand of research questions. The researcher collected qualitative data with a view to answering the first two questions and the third question was answered through the use of quantitative data. Mixed method has made the study more valid and reliable with the aim of having holistic findings. In this study, four undergraduate English language classes of two teachers (Teacher A and Teacher B) were observed. The classes belonged to two public universities in Dhaka city. Duration of each class was two hours. In the first class, there were twenty-seven students. In the second class, twenty-three students were present. So, the study had fifty participants.

This study was subject to probability sampling. In this study, there were two distinctive populations: teachers and students. Participants from teachers were selected through convenience sampling. The researcher attended four classes in order to observe the interactions between teachers and students focusing on the teachers' linguistic behaviour. The researchers used a classroom observation checklist to categories teachers' utterances based on teacher-power. The classes were recorded through a mobile phone during the classroom observation. In this step, the researcher reduced the data to sort out only those parts of the utterances that contain the power exercise of the teachers in the classrooms. Besides, the data was used in order to analyse to what extent teachers' speeches save or threat the face of the students while the teachers exercise power in the English language classrooms. At the end of the study, the researcher tried to understand the perception of students toward teacher's politeness used in the classroom. The perceptions of students were jotted down by the use of a questionnaire. Students were selected as participants though purposive sampling. Every student presented in those four classes was given a questionnaire. Total fifty students gave their opinion or expressed their thoughts through the questionnaire. This questionnaire particularly has disclosed what students expect from their teachers and what they think about the power exercise of their teachers in classrooms.

Findings and Discussion

Powers exercised by the teachers in English Language classrooms

After analysing the teacher's utterances, the researcher has found several speeches which contain exercise of power. In the first two classes of teacher A as wel as teacher B, the researcher has noticed legitimate power, referent power, expert power, reward power, and coercive power in the following speeches, as shown in the table 2 to table 6:

Table 2.

Teachers excercising legitimate power

Legitimate Power	
Teacher A	**Teacher B**
▢ If you come late, please sit without making noises. ▢ Try to guess who is talking and where you think the conversation is taking place. ▢ Can you be a little bit louder, please? ▢ Why are you talking? ▢ Can I go to the second row and begin with you, no. 4? ▢ Late, no attendance. ▢ You need to write down who they are, what they are talking about. ▢ Could you tell me the words that you could identify? ▢ Excuse me, (clap). Time's up. Now listen carefully.	▢ Yeah… let's start. ▢ I'm thinking of arranging a confession session now and you have to confess. ▢ Now we'll be listening to everyone's confession very carefully. ▢ Work with a partner, choose one of the situations and make up a conversation using the words. ▢ I am naming row 1 as group 1, row 2 as group 2, row 3 as group 3. ▢ I'm giving you 5 minutes. Make a good script, practice well and randomly I will choose and ask you to give a demonstration. ▢ Can you tell this in English?

Table 3.

Teachers excercising referent power

Referent Power	
Teacher A	**Teacher B**
☐ Have you seen Salman khan's movie? What's the popular dialogue? "When I talk, you don't talk. When you talk, I will talk."	☐ We are very sorry Sadia for your loss. You know, this is very common in our human beings. So, we have to keep up the pace.
☐ Let's say, I'm Gabbar Singh and you two are Basantis (Gabbar Singh and Basati are two famous character in the movie Sholay). If you can make me happy, I can consider.	☐ Ajke Jodi amake chhere dao, er por theke ami aro 10-minute kore barabo (If you leave me for today, I will extend the time to 10 minutes more).
☐ Moharanider jonno apnara ektu poth banaye den (Kindly make a path for the queens).	☐ You are a very suitable candidate for BCS (Bangladesh Civil Service). Tumi emon ekjon mohilare sir bolteso kivabe!! (How can you address such a lady sir!) Tomar BCS vaggo suproshonno (Your luck about BCS is great).
☐ Ratna hochchhe durvikkho ar Sabrima hochchhe durvikkher karon (Ratna is the famine and Sabrina is the cause of famine).	☐ You are just a Mofiz. Both of you.

Table 4.

Teachers excercising expert power

Expert Power	
Teacher A	**Teacher B**
☐ You should practice more.	☐ Ok but you know as you are stating in the past tense, it would be better that in the quotations, you are also using the past tense.
☐ In Chinese language there is no past tense ………. Form of the verb doesn't change. And again what about articles? The Chinese didn't have article. It's very difficult to teach articles to the Chinese.	☐ A few corrections need to be addressed that you missed some past markers. As this is the past narrative event, everything has to be done in the past.
☐ Keya, you need to practice more.	
☐ Teacher's talk on report writing	☐ Nice… Thanks for those onomatopoeic words……. the words that represent sound.
☐ Ok. Your sentence structures are not good ones. You do take care of some of the things such as the construction of verbs and the use of preposition.	☐ If you want to make your English good, you have to read a lot. No, alternatives are there.

Table 5.

Teachers excercising reward power

Reward Power	
Teacher A	**Teacher B**
▫ If you and Payel, you two can dance, I can consider. Make me convinced. ▫ It's a good consideration. Thank you. Ok. ▫ Good. Good team work. Good.	▫ The rest is fine. It's a nice story. ▫ The story was very nice. It was a feminist story. You got a lady killer. Wow!! That's great. ▫ You narrated it without a script. I liked that very much. ▫ You're doing well. Very good. I'm very happy for you. Prothome kotha e bolto na o (At the beginning, she used keep silent.). Now she is talking. Thank you.

Table 6.

Teachers excercising coercive power

Coercive Power	
Teacher A	**Teacher B**
▫ No, not now. It's over. I chose them but at that time, they were not.	▫ Any speech that expresses coercive power was not found.

In the classes of teacher A, the teacher exercised all the five powers but the quantity was not the same for every power. The teacher instructed a lot and was continuously asking for students' opinions and participation. Legitimate and referent powers are exercised more than the other powers. It means that the class was guided, controlled and to some extent authoritarian. There was a sound balance between legitimate and referent power. A language class demands a lot of exercise of reward power. As a means of reward, it can be a gift, positive reinforcement or praise. The teacher made an attempt to build up a rapport with the students by exercising reward power though the existence of referent power was not enough. A teacher provides knowledge in the form of constructive feedback to the students through expert power. Some effective attempts to exercise expert power were found in the class. We can notice that in Bangladeshi classrooms, it is a very common teachers' practice to give students punishment for their classroom behaviour or poor performance (Malak et al., 2015; Farooqui, 2020). Despite a common trend in Bangladeshi classrooms, the teacher tried to avoid this power in his class. He

just used this power for once in the whole class.

In the classes of teacher B, the researcher found an abundance of expert power. On the other hand, legitimate power was noticed a little. Actually, due to the demand of the lesson, the teacher had to give less instruction. However, reward power was also exercised in the class but it was not practiced up to the maximum level. Referent power was exercised a little. It was not enough for creating rapport with the students and an anxiety free environment for them. From an observer's perspective, the researcher can claim that lack of referent power made the class a little bit boring. But one thing was very praiseworthy that it was a class without coercive power. The teacher was completely able to avoid this power.

In all the four classes, teachers were aware of avoiding coercive power. This kind of teachers' attitude can motivate and encourage the students in participating in classroom activities. Besides, absence of coercive power reduces students' anxiety level. The teacher should have exercised reward power more because reward always works in a positive way in a language classroom. But always giving gifts in the name of reward to the students is not a good idea. This practice might make them greedy to some extent. So, in order to avoid this kind of consequence, rewards like praise, appreciation, positive feedback, and positive reinforcement can be used.

Politeness strategies used while exercising powers

In this study, the researcher has got almost every power proposed by French and Raven (1968). The study also focused on teachers' linguistic behaviour. It aimed at identifying the politeness strategies used by the teachers while exercising powers. Here are the strategies that *were used by the teacher:*

Table 7.

Teachers; Strategies

Strategy	Speech
Positive politeness	☐ Yeah… let's start.
	☐ We are very sorry Sadia for your loss. You know, this is very common in our human beings. So, we have to keep up the pace.
	☐ Now we'll be listening to everyone's confession very carefully.

Strategy	Speech
Negative politeness	☐ Can you be a little bit louder, please?
	☐ Can I go to the second row and begin with you, no. 4?
	☐ Could you tell me the words that you could identify?
	☐ Can you tell this in English?
	☐ Could you tell me the words that you could identify?)
	☐ Can you tell this in English?
	☐ Could you please come in front of the class?
Off record	☐ Have you seen Salman khan's movie? What's the popular dialogue? "When I talk, don't talk. When you talk, I can talk."
	☐ Okay, but you know as you are stating in the past tense, it would be better that in the quotations, you are also using the past tense.

Rest of the powers exercised by the teachers contained Bald on record strategy.

As we know, there are four strategies of politeness. These strategies determine teachers' utterances whether they are saving students' faces or not. After giving a close look on teachers' power exercise, the researcher found all of the four strategies of politeness that the teachers used in their classes. The teachers tried to utilize positive politeness. For example: "Now we'll be listening to everyone's confession very carefully." Here the teacher included himself with the students. Teacher tried to prove himself as a part of them that promoted solidarity in the class. It was a successful use of positive politeness. Negative politeness strategy was also noticed like, "Could you tell me the words that you could identify?" Here the teacher gave freedom to the students to refuse. He tried not to impose anything upon the students. This is an ideal example of negative politeness. From the two class observations, the researcher found only one expression of off-record politeness. It would be better to explain with reference from the class. In the first class, the teacher said, "Have you seen Salman khan's movie? What's the popular dialogue?" The dialogue is, "When I talk, you don't talk. When you talk, I don't talk." By using a pun, the teacher actually asked the students not to talk in the class while he was talking. Rest of the powers exercised by the teachers represented bald on record politeness. In this particular case, the teacher did nothing to save his students' faces.

In this study, the researcher found forty-five utterances that indicated power exercise. Among them, only eleven utterances were able to save students' faces. 24.44% utterances could ensure face saving acts (FSA) for the students. This percentage should be increased. If students' faces are threatened by teachers' utterances, affected filters of language learning will be activated and

it is not expected in a language classroom.

Students' perceptions towards teachers 'power exercise and politeness in English Language classrooms:
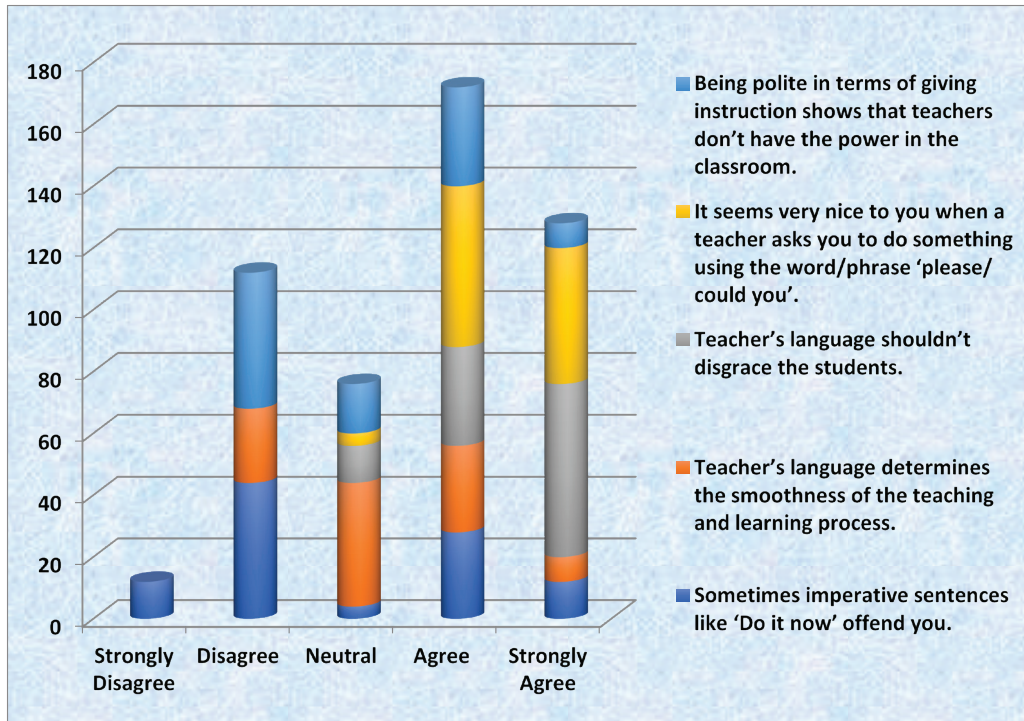
Fifty students were given questionnaires. They contributed to this study by giving their response. The number of their responses for each statement has been converted into percentage (%). The graphical presentation of that is here:

Figure-1.
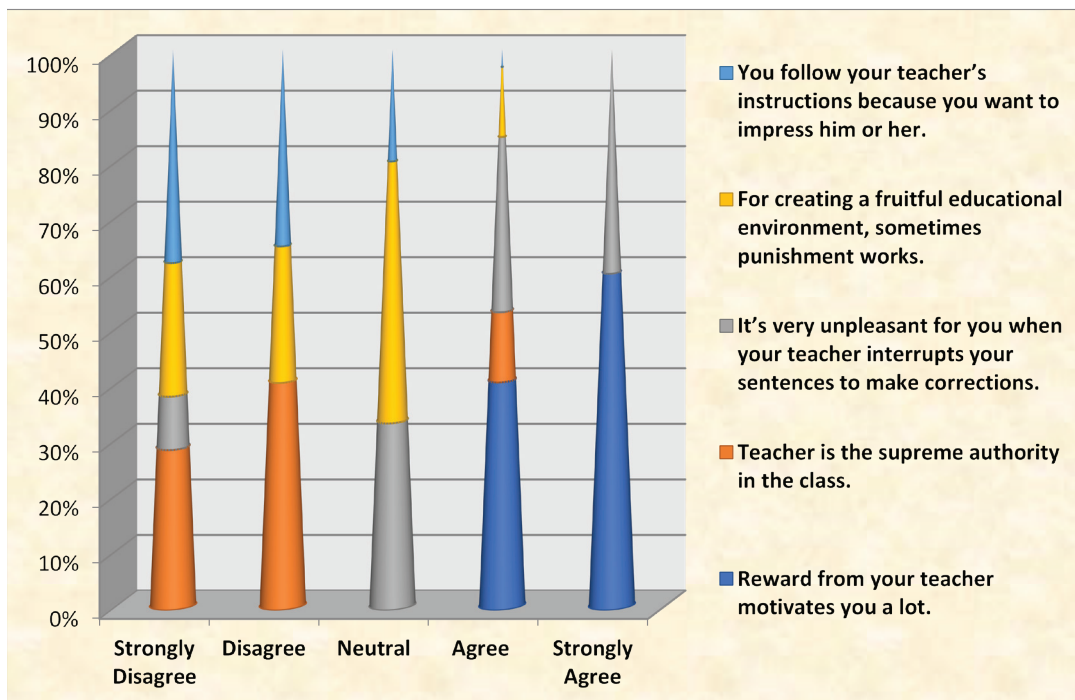
Perceptions of students towards teachers' power exercise in English Language classrooms

Figure-2.

Perceptions of students towards teachers' politeness in English Language classrooms

Teacher is a guide, an instructor, a mentor. He is not the supreme authority. There is no place for dictatorship in a language class and 60% of students think so. Students always love to have a reward from their teacher. It really motivates them. In this study 48% students strongly agree and 52% students agree that reward from their teacher motivates them. 40% students agree and 32% students strongly agree that teachers should not interrupt in order to correct their mistakes while they are talking. Direct orders can make students offended. Direct orders from teachers represent bald on record politeness and 44% students think that it is not an appropriate approach for language teaching. 20% students strongly disagree, 36% students disagree and 16% students agree that sometimes, punishment works in the class. 28% of students are neutral about this issue. 28% of students are confused because of the culture of this country. Maybe, they are used to getting punishments in the classroom. 52% of students like it when their teacher asks them to do something using 'could you please/would you mind'. It is clear that the negative politeness strategy used by the teacher can create a good impression on students. 56% students strongly agree that a teacher's language shouldn't be disgraceful for them. If a teacher's language disgraces the students, they will be in great anxiety. As a result, they will not

be able to participate in any kind of activity with enthusiasm. In our country, teachers are very strict as well as authoritarian. No mistake is tolerated. Humiliation and punishment are part and parcel of typical Bangladeshi classrooms. Teacher is considered the supreme power. In our culture, it is assumed that a teacher can do anything and can say anything. But the situation is changing. It is a positive achievement of our education system. Our students think they should be graced. But surprisingly, this study has shown that 44% of students think being polite in a class does not mean a teacher is powerless. The students want a friendly and supportive teacher, not a strict dictator teacher.

Implication of the study and Conclusion

This study will pave the way for the pre-service and in-service teacher about how they can create an effective teaching-learning environment by ensuring appropriate linguistic politeness while interacting with the students. In a class, students are the most important stakeholders. Their learning is a matter of concern. A teacher should be very careful about his or her language. A teacher can maintain a sound and effective relationship with students by following politeness strategies as discussed. Students should not feel threatened in any way. Teacher's attitude should be friendly towards the students. But there should be a minimum distance in order to manage the class properly (Mariani, 2016).

This research was done on a very small scale. Only two classes were observed and analysed. Number of participants was not sufficient to generalize the observation. Besides, only verbal interactions were analysed. There are many other media that can express politeness. Future researchers may include a larger variety of data including non-verbal expressions such as gesture and posture. It will make the research more reliable and valid.

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