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Research Article

Exploring Gender-Associated Patterns of Politeness and Directness in EFL Students' Prompts to Generative AI

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how EFL students employ politeness and directness strategies in their prompts to Generative AI and explores the underlying motivations shaping these linguistic choices. While prior studies have examined gendered communication and prompt effectiveness separately, limited research has integrated these perspectives within AI-mediated interaction. Grounded in Politeness Theory, the CCSARP framework, and Genderlect Theory, this study adopts a qualitative design combining directed content analysis and thematic analysis. The dataset consists of twenty-six prompts generated by four Indonesian EFL students, supported by semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal that bald-on-record and conventionally indirect strategies dominate, reflecting a balance between efficiency and minimal politeness. Thematic analysis identifies four key factors influencing prompting behavior: politeness strategies, directness strategies, variation strategies, and perceptions of AI. Politeness is shaped by sociocultural norms and expectations of improved output quality, whereas directness is driven by efficiency and reduced cognitive effort. Participants also demonstrate adaptive prompting behavior, reflecting emerging AI literacy through iterative refinement. Importantly, no strong gender-based differences were observed, suggesting that individual preferences and task demands play a more significant role. The study highlights that politeness and directness function as complementary strategies in AI-mediated communication and offers implications for developing AI literacy in language learning contexts.

Keywords: *Generative AI, EFL learners, politeness strategies, directness strategies*

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INTRODUCTION

The global educational landscape has undergone a radical transformation with the rapid integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI). Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude have quickly transitioned from experimental technologies to ubiquitous, indispensable tools in academia. This shift is particularly pronounced within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, where students frequently face barriers related to limited access to native speakers and individualized feedback (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2023). Unlike traditional internet search engines that merely retrieve indexed links, Generative AI operates fundamentally differently by utilizing deep learning to generate novel, contextually relevant text. Thus, AI has evolved from a passive database into an active "conversational partner" and sophisticated virtual assistant. For EFL students, these platforms serve dynamic roles: they act as on-demand writing tutors, dynamic grammar correctors, and realistic conversation simulators that offer immediate, personalized scaffolding (Jeon, 2024). Because these systems require instructional input to function, students no longer simply "search" for static answers; rather, they "prompt" a responsive entity. This interactive loop requires EFL learners to continuously formulate instructional commands, requests, and inquiries in their target language, thereby turning the act of prompting itself into a distinct site of language production and sociolinguistic behavior.

As Generative AI systems have become increasingly sophisticated, often mimicking human conversational patterns, utilizing empathetic language, and even apologizing for errors, the nature of user interaction has shifted dramatically. These human-like conversational characteristics encourage users to engage with AI systems in more natural and socially oriented ways, rather than relying solely on keyword-based or command-driven inputs (Kasneci et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2023). Modern users frequently abandon rigid, keyword-based search queries in favor of natural, everyday language. This behavioral shift is rooted in the Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) paradigm, originally proposed by Reeves and Nass (1996), which suggests that people subconsciously apply social rules and interpersonal heuristics to computers when they display human-like characteristics. Recent studies further indicate that these social responses become more pronounced when AI systems exhibit natural conversational styles and human-like linguistic cues (Li et al., 2025).

"Gender may influence how EFL students interact with Generative AI"

This anthropomorphization of technology has birthed a highly observable spectrum of interaction. At one end of the spectrum, users instinctively "humanize" the AI. They embed conversational niceties, social pleasantries, and relational markers into their prompts, utilizing phrases like "Could you please help me with..." or "Thank you for that explanation." This behavior is often driven by the AI's conversational interface, which triggers a psychological sense of social presence (Li et al., 2025). Conversely, at the other end of the spectrum, users treat the system strictly as a utilitarian tool. Adopting a "prompt

engineering" mindset, these users strip away all social fluff, issuing blunt, highly directive commands such as "Translate this text" or "Rewrite this paragraph to be more formal" (Dobariya, 2026). This dichotomy raises profound questions regarding how deeply human social conditioning dictates our communicative behavior toward non-sentient digital entities that possess neither feelings nor consciousness.

This spectrum of human-AI interaction intersects significantly with recent sociolinguistic research regarding gender and language use. Contemporary empirical studies continue to demonstrate that male and female speakers frequently employ distinctly different communication styles, particularly regarding linguistic politeness and directness. Recent analyses indicate that female communicators often utilize more mitigated speech, cooperative discourse styles, and negative politeness strategies such as hedging ("I think," "maybe") and indirect requests to maintain social harmony and minimize face-threatening acts (Aini et al., 2023). In contrast, male communicators are frequently observed favoring direct, assertive language and bald-on-record strategies, emphasizing factual information exchange and task completion over relational maintenance (Bakhtiyarovna, 2024). Bringing this sociolinguistic perspective into the digital era raises an important question about whether such gender-related linguistic patterns are also manifested when users communicate with generative AI. Unlike human interlocutors, AI systems do not possess feelings, social status, or a physical gender, yet users may still draw upon familiar linguistic and sociocultural norms when formulating their prompts.

Although previous research has examined gendered politeness and directness in human communication and prompting practices in generative AI separately, limited empirical research has investigated how gender-related patterns of politeness and directness are manifested in EFL learners' prompts to generative AI and, importantly, how learners themselves explain these linguistic choices. Sociolinguistic studies have documented gender-related differences in politeness and directness in interpersonal communication (Aini et al., 2023; Bakhtiyarovna, 2024), while research on generative AI in education has primarily examined prompting from technical and pedagogical perspectives, including prompt effectiveness, response quality, and learning support (Dobariya, 2026; Jeon, 2024). These strands of research have developed largely independently, leaving the linguistic and sociocultural dimensions of EFL learners' prompts relatively underexplored. Addressing this gap is particularly relevant because prompts can be understood not merely as technical instructions but also as instances of language use through which learners may enact, adapt, or negotiate socially learned communication patterns in interaction with a non-human conversational agent.

To address this gap, the present study qualitatively examines the politeness and directness strategies employed by male and female EFL students in their prompts to generative AI and explores the sociocognitive reasons underlying these linguistic choices. The analysis is informed by Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) framework (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), and Tannen's (1990) Genderlect Theory. By examining both the linguistic patterns in learners' prompts and their explanations for those patterns, the study seeks to provide a more

comprehensive understanding of how gender-related communication practices may be reflected and negotiated in AI-mediated language use.

The study is expected to contribute to the literature in several ways. Theoretically, it broadens the application of sociolinguistic theories by examining gender-related politeness and directness in AI-mediated discourse, thereby extending these perspectives beyond conventional interpersonal communication. It also contributes to research on human-AI interaction by demonstrating that prompt construction can be examined not only as a technical process but also as a sociolinguistic practice. Practically, the findings may inform AI literacy and EFL pedagogy by providing insights into how learners formulate prompts and helping educators support students in developing effective and contextually appropriate communication strategies when interacting with generative AI. Rather than assuming that gender directly determines learners' communication styles, this study focuses on identifying patterns of politeness and directness and understanding the sociocognitive factors that may shape these linguistic choices. To address these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

(1) How do EFL students construct politeness and directness in prompts to generative AI, and what patterns emerge across male and female participants?
(2) What are the underlying reasons motivating their choices of politeness and directness strategies when interacting with generative AI?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Genderlect Theory (Deborah Tannen, 1990)

The conceptualization of gender-related variation in language use is informed by Deborah Tannen's (1990) Genderlect Theory, originally developed to explain differences in conversational styles between men and women. Tannen proposed that communication can be understood as a form of cross-cultural interaction because individuals may be socialized into different communicative norms and expectations. Her framework distinguishes between Rapport Talk, which emphasizes connection, involvement, and relationship maintenance, and Report Talk, which emphasizes information, independence, and status. Although this distinction was originally developed in the context of interpersonal conversation, it provides a useful theoretical lens for examining how socially learned communication orientations may be reflected in other communicative environments.

Recent research suggests that gender and language should not be understood through rigid or universal differences between men and women. Rather, gender-related linguistic patterns are influenced by contextual, cultural, interactional, and social factors. Contemporary sociolinguistic research therefore increasingly treats gender as one factor that may interact with other dimensions of identity and communicative context rather than as a direct determinant of language behavior. This perspective is particularly relevant to EFL contexts, where learners' linguistic choices may reflect both their developing proficiency in English and sociocultural expectations concerning appropriate communication.

Within Tannen's framework, Rapport Talk is associated with relationship-oriented communication, whereas Report Talk is associated with information-oriented and status-conscious communication (Tannen, 1990). These orientations can provide a conceptual basis for examining features such as mitigation, politeness, directness, and assertiveness. However, these associations should not be interpreted as fixed characteristics of female or male speakers. Instead, they provide analytical possibilities for investigating whether participants display different patterns in particular communicative contexts. This distinction is important in the present study because the purpose is not to assume that female participants are inherently more polite or that male participants are inherently more direct, but to examine whether such gender-related patterns emerge in their AI-mediated language use.

The relevance of gender-related communication patterns has also extended to digital and human–computer interaction. Recent research on human–machine communication indicates that users do not necessarily abandon social and communicative expectations when interacting with artificial agents. Ding et al. (2024), for example, found evidence of gender-related effects in human–machine communication, suggesting that gender may remain relevant to how people respond to artificial communication partners. Similarly, research on human–machine interaction has demonstrated that users may attribute social characteristics to artificial agents and adapt their communication according to expectations about the interaction. These findings support the relevance of examining gender-related language behavior in AI-mediated contexts while also emphasizing that such patterns should be investigated empirically rather than assumed in advance.

In the present study, Genderlect Theory therefore serves as a theoretical lens for interpreting possible differences in politeness, directness, and other linguistic features between male and female EFL students' prompts. The framework does not predict that all female participants will use Rapport Talk or that all male participants will use Report Talk. Instead, it provides a conceptual basis for examining whether patterns associated with relationship-oriented or information-oriented communication appear in the participants' prompts and how participants themselves explain their linguistic choices.

Politeness Theory, Brown and Levinson's (1987)

Politeness Theory is primarily based on the framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), which centers on the concept of face, or an individual's public self-image in social interaction. The theory distinguishes between positive face, referring to the desire to be appreciated, approved of, or accepted, and negative face, referring to the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. Because communicative acts may threaten either dimension of face, speakers may employ different strategies to manage interpersonal relationships and reduce potential face threats.

Brown and Levinson (1987) identified four major politeness strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Bald-on-record strategies express an intention directly and explicitly without substantial mitigation, whereas positive politeness emphasizes solidarity, familiarity, or shared identity. Negative

politeness emphasizes respect for the interlocutor's autonomy and may involve indirectness, hedging, apologies, or other mitigating devices. Off-record strategies communicate an intention indirectly and require the interlocutor to infer the intended meaning.

Although Brown and Levinson's framework originated in the analysis of human-to-human communication, recent research has demonstrated that politeness remains relevant to interactions between humans and artificial agents. A systematic review by Koc & Course (2023) shows that politeness has become an important area of investigation in human–machine interaction because users may apply social communication norms even when interacting with technological systems. Similarly, recent experimental research has examined how the level of politeness in prompts influences interactions with large language models. Yin et al. (2024), for example, found that the effects of prompt politeness can vary across languages and tasks, indicating that politeness remains a meaningful dimension of human–LLM communication even though an LLM does not possess human feelings or social face.

These developments make Politeness Theory relevant to the present study. When EFL students formulate prompts, they may use linguistic features that resemble politeness strategies found in interpersonal communication, such as greetings, appreciation, hedging, modal expressions, and indirect requests. However, the presence of these features should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that students perceive the AI as a human interlocutor. Instead, such linguistic choices may reflect habitual communication practices, pragmatic conventions, task expectations, or participants' perceptions of appropriate interaction with AI. Therefore, Politeness Theory is used in this study as an analytical framework for identifying and describing politeness strategies manifested in participants' prompts.

Directness in Human–AI Interaction: The CCSARP Framework

To analyze the degree of directness in participants' prompts, this study adopts the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) framework developed by Blum-Kulka et.al (1989). The framework classifies request strategies according to their degree of directness, distinguishing among direct strategies, conventionally indirect strategies, and non-conventionally indirect strategies. Direct strategies explicitly state the intended action, as in "Write an essay" or "Explain this concept." Conventionally indirect strategies use forms that are conventionally associated with requests while providing some degree of mitigation, such as "Could you summarize this text?" Non-conventionally indirect strategies rely more heavily on contextual inference, as in "This paragraph seems too long," when the statement implicitly functions as a request for revision.

Although CCSARP is a foundational framework developed for human speech-act realization, its directness continuum provides a useful analytical structure for examining requests and instructions addressed to generative AI. Recent research on LLM interaction demonstrates that users vary in how they formulate instructions and that prompt language can influence the nature and effectiveness of AI interaction. In particular, research on AI

literacy and prompt engineering conceptualizes prompting as the formulation of precise and structured instructions to obtain desired responses from LLM-based systems. This perspective suggests that directness in AI prompts may be shaped not only by interpersonal considerations but also by users' understanding of how AI systems respond to instructions.

The application of CCSARP in the present study therefore does not assume that requests directed toward AI operate in exactly the same way as requests directed toward human interlocutors. Instead, the framework is used descriptively to identify the degree of explicitness in participants' prompts. The analysis examines whether participants employ direct, conventionally indirect, or non-conventionally indirect forms and whether these patterns vary across the male and female cases. Genderlect Theory provides the broader sociolinguistic perspective for interpreting possible gender-related patterns, while CCSARP provides the specific categories for analyzing directness.

"Prompt-ese" and AI Literacy

The increasing use of generative AI has introduced new forms of interaction in which users communicate with large language models through written prompts. Prompting is increasingly understood not simply as a technical skill but as a communicative practice involving the formulation of instructions, questions, contextual information, and desired outputs. Recent research describes prompt engineering as the ability to formulate precise and well-structured instructions to guide LLMs toward desired responses and identifies it as an important component of effective interaction with generative AI (Walter, 2024). Research on AI literacy likewise emphasizes that effective interaction with generative AI requires users to understand how to communicate with, evaluate, and critically engage with AI systems.

The term "Prompt-ese" can be used to describe the emerging style of communication associated with prompting, particularly its tendency toward concise, structured, explicit, and task-oriented language. However, this style should not be assumed to be uniform across users. Prompt construction may vary according to users' linguistic competence, familiarity with AI, communicative goals, task demands, and sociocultural backgrounds. Recent work on AI literacy and prompt engineering suggests that users' prompting practices can reflect different levels of knowledge and adaptation when interacting with LLM-based systems. Thus, prompt construction can be examined as both a functional practice for obtaining AI outputs and a form of language use.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study because the participants are EFL students communicating with generative AI in English. Their prompts may simultaneously reflect the functional demands of communicating with an AI system and linguistic patterns associated with their existing communicative practices. Rather than assuming that gender determines how participants prompt AI, the study examines whether gender-related patterns of politeness, directness, and linguistic modification emerge across the four participant cases. The analysis then draws on stimulated-recall interviews to explore how participants themselves explain their prompting choices. In this way, AI literacy and prompting provide the technological context of the study, while Genderlect

Theory, Politeness Theory, and CCSARP provide complementary lenses for analyzing the linguistic and sociolinguistic dimensions of participants' prompts.

METHOD

Research Design and Context

This study employed a qualitative comparative descriptive design using directed qualitative content analysis of elicited prompts and thematic analysis of stimulated-recall interviews to address its research aims. The comparative descriptive design was selected to examine patterns of politeness and directness in prompts produced by male and female EFL students and to explore how these patterns may differ across the two groups. The directed qualitative content analysis was used to systematically analyze the linguistic features of the elicited prompts based on the predefined categories derived from Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) framework (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). Meanwhile, thematic analysis of stimulated-recall interviews was employed to explore how participants explained the linguistic choices they made when constructing their prompts. According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), qualitative research is appropriate for investigating complex social and linguistic processes because it enables researchers to interpret participants' meanings, experiences, and interactions within their contexts. Accordingly, this design allows the study to provide a systematic comparison of linguistic patterns across male and female participants while also capturing the participants' own explanations of their prompt construction. Rather than making broad claims about inherent gender differences, the study focuses on identifying gender-related patterns in the data and understanding the sociocognitive factors that participants associate with their linguistic choices.

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met specific criteria relevant to the study (Wan, 2019). The participants were required to be Indonesian EFL university students, have experience using generative AI, lack prior knowledge of prompting techniques, and be willing to participate. Based on a screening questionnaire, four participants (P1–P4) were selected through the Participant Screening Questionnaire. A small sample size is appropriate for qualitative research, which prioritizes in-depth exploration rather than statistical generalization. Accordingly, this study involved four undergraduate EFL students from an Indonesian university, consisting of two female and two male participants to ensure balanced gender representation. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) they were undergraduate EFL students enrolled between the second and eighth semesters; (2) they had prior experience using Generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT) for academic or English learning purposes; (3) they were willing to complete all prompting tasks and participate in follow-up interviews; and (4) they represented both male and female groups, which was essential for addressing the research objective of comparing gendered prompting strategies. The limited number of participants allowed for detailed analysis of each participant's prompts and interview responses, enabling an in-depth examination of linguistic patterns and the sociocognitive motivations

underlying their interactions with Generative AI. Prior to data collection, all participants were provided with an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, the research procedures, their rights as participants, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. After receiving this information and having the opportunity to ask questions, each participant voluntarily signed a written informed consent form before participating in the prompt collection and semi-structured interviews. This sampling approach ensured that all participants were directly relevant to examining how EFL students construct prompts in AI-mediated interactions.

Data Collection

The data collection procedure was conducted sequentially to support methodological triangulation and to address the two research objectives. The first stage involved a Prompt Elicitation Task, in which four participants (two males and two females) were instructed to use a generative AI platform, ChatGPT, to write a short argumentative essay. The task was designed to elicit naturally occurring prompting behavior within a controlled context and to provide comparable linguistic data across participants. The task instructions were developed to reflect the intended language-use context and were reviewed through expert judgment to establish content validity. The instructions were distributed online through a WhatsApp group, after which participants individually completed the task using ChatGPT to ensure consistency in the elicitation procedure. The session lasted approximately 15–20 minutes, during which participants constructed prompts and generated AI responses. Immediately after completing the task, participants submitted their unedited chat logs through screenshots or history links to a designated submission link. These chat logs served as the primary data for analyzing participants' politeness and directness strategies.

In the second stage, the researcher conducted stimulated-recall interviews based on the participants' elicited prompts and chat logs. This procedure enabled participants to revisit their own prompts and explain the reasons behind particular linguistic choices. The interview guide was developed based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and the Directness framework of the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). The interview guide was validated through expert judgment and consisted of seven main questions with additional follow-up probes. The interviews were conducted individually via Zoom in the participants' mother tongue to minimize potential misunderstanding and allow participants to explain their reasoning comfortably. Each interview lasted approximately 10–15 minutes. The interviews were used to complement the prompt data by providing participants' own explanations of their linguistic choices and to clarify interpretations of potentially ambiguous prompt features.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, the study followed the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was supported through data triangulation between the elicited prompts and stimulated-recall interviews, as well as member checking to confirm the accuracy of participants' explanations and interpretations. Representative excerpts from

the data were retained to support the interpretations. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and participant selection criteria so that readers can assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. Dependability was supported by maintaining a systematic record of the research procedures, including the development and validation of the instruments, data collection procedures, coding decisions, and an audit trail. Confirmability was strengthened by grounding interpretations in the participants' actual prompts and interview responses, using peer debriefing as an additional analytic check, and maintaining researcher reflexivity throughout the research process to minimize the influence of researcher assumptions.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis involved two sources: elicited prompts and stimulated-recall interview transcripts. The analysis was conducted systematically to identify patterns of directness and politeness and to explore participants' motivations for their linguistic choices. First, each interaction was segmented into individual prompts, with each prompt treated as the primary unit of analysis. The dataset consisted of 26 prompts produced by four EFL students, comprising two males and two females. The prompts were analyzed in their original form without modifying participants' wording.

Next, the prompts were coded for directness using the CCSARP framework (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), covering direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect strategies. They were then coded according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, including bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Additional linguistic modifiers, such as please, hedges, appreciation, greetings, apologies, and modal verbs, were also identified. Multiple coding was permitted when a prompt contained more than one relevant strategy or feature. Frequency counts were used descriptively to show the distribution of codes and were not subjected to statistical inference.

Following coding, the data were organized into participant-level matrices (P1–P4) and compared descriptively across male and female participants. This comparison focused on patterns within the sample rather than generalizable gender differences. The stimulated-recall interviews were subsequently analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006), involving familiarization, initial coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Finally, the prompt findings and interview themes were integrated to connect participants' observed linguistic choices with their reported motivations. The integrated findings were presented through descriptive tables, narrative interpretation, and representative excerpts.

FINDINGS

RQ1: Patterns of Politeness and Directness in EFL Students' AI Prompts

The first objective of the study covers the politeness and directness strategies based on their frequency of occurrence. The findings include the distribution of politeness strategies, the

frequency of directness levels, and ultimately the gender-based comparisons across both dimensions.

Politeness Strategies

The following table presents the distribution of politeness strategies employed by the participants based on the framework. The data are categorized according to strategy type and participant, showing the frequency of each strategy across all prompts.

Table 1
Politeness Strategy Frequency

Strategy	P1 (M)	P2 (F)	P3 (M)	P4 (F)	Total
Bald on record	5	4	1	1	11
Negative Politeness	2	1	4	4	9
Negative + Positive (Mixed)	1	0	2	2	5
Positive Politeness	0	0	2	4	3
Bald on record + Positive	1	0	1	0	2
Off Record	0	0	0	0	0
Total Prompts	8	5	6	7	26

The data in Table 1 show that bald-on-record was the most dominant politeness strategy, occurring in 11 of 26 prompts (42%). This strategy reflects participants' preference for direct and efficient communication, as illustrated by expressions such as "I want to discuss with you…" (P1), "That is not true." (P1), and "make me an initial draft…" (P2). Negative politeness was the second most frequent strategy, with nine occurrences, indicating attempts to reduce imposition through expressions such as "Can you help me develop…" (P3) and "I think they are still a bit general. Can you make them more specific…" (P3). A combination of negative and positive politeness occurred in five instances, suggesting that participants sometimes balanced directness with interpersonal consideration. Positive politeness appeared only three times, while off-record strategies were not identified. At the individual level, P1 and P2 contributed most to bald-on-record strategies, P3 showed greater use of negative politeness, and P4 displayed a relatively balanced pattern. Overall, the findings reveal no consistent gender-based pattern, with variation appearing primarily at the individual level.

Directness Strategies

The following table presents the distribution of directness strategies employed by the participants based on the framework. The data are categorized according to strategy type and participant, showing the frequency of each strategy across all prompts.

Table 2.
Directness Strategy Frequency

Strategy	P1 (M)	P2 (F)	P3 (M)	P4 (F)	Total
Conventionally Indirect	2	1	5	6	**10**
Direct Command (Imperative)	4	4	0	1	9
Mixed (Direct + Conv Indirect)	1	0	1	1	3
Non-Conventionally Indirect (hint)	1	0	1	0	2
Total Prompts	8	5	6	7	26

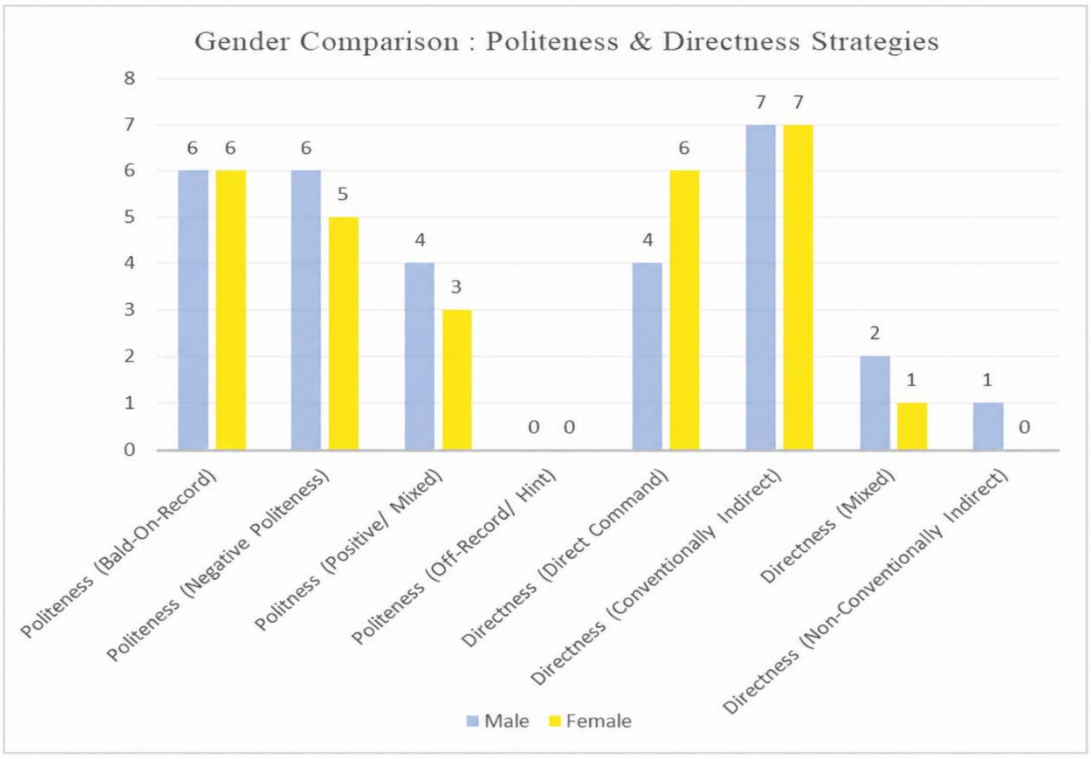
Table 2 shows that conventionally indirect strategies were the most frequently used, occurring in 10 of 26 prompts (38%). This indicates a preference for maintaining clarity while softening requests through conventional forms, particularly modal verbs such as can and could, as in "Could you give me some interesting topic…"(P1) and "Can you help me develop…"(P3). Direct commands (imperatives) were the second most frequent, with 9 occurrences (35%), reflecting participants' preference for efficiency and explicitness in expressions such as "make me an essay outline…" and "Write a short argumentative paragraph…"(P2). The mixed strategy (direct + conventionally indirect) occurred 3 times (12%), demonstrating pragmatic flexibility in combining explicit statements with softened requests. Meanwhile, non-conventionally indirect strategies (hints) appeared only 2 times (8%), indicating limited use of highly implicit forms. At the individual level, P3 (M) favored conventionally indirect strategies, P2 (F) predominantly used direct commands, P1 (M) showed a mixed pattern, and P4 (F) displayed relatively balanced use. Overall, the findings show no consistent gender-based pattern and suggest that participants' prompting strategies reflect a continuum between clarity, efficiency, and politeness, with limited reliance on highly implicit forms.

Patterns Across Male and Female Participants

Figure 1 presents the comparison between male and female participants regarding the use of Politeness Strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1978) and Directness Strategies based on Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). It compares politeness and directness strategies across male and female participants. Overall, both groups show broadly similar pragmatic patterns, suggesting that gender is not a strong determining factor in strategy selection. For politeness, both groups used bald-on-record equally (6 instances each), while males showed slightly higher use of negative politeness (6 vs. 5) and positive politeness (4 vs. 3). Off-record strategies were absent in both groups, indicating a shared preference for clarity and explicitness. For directness, females used more direct commands (6 vs. 4), whereas conventionally indirect strategies were equally frequent (7 instances each). Mixed strategies were slightly higher among males (2 vs. 1), while non-conventionally indirect strategies appeared only once among males. Overall, the differences were minor, and both groups demonstrated a similar balance between directness, efficiency, and politeness. These findings suggest that

individual preferences and task context may have a greater influence than gender on prompting strategies in AI-mediated communication.

Figure 1
Gender Comparison



RQ2: Participants' Reported Motivations for Using Politeness and Directness Strategies in Generative AI Interaction

The second objective of the study explores the underlying reasons for participants' choices of politeness and directness strategies. The thematic analysis was employed to address the objective, resulting in the frequency of merged codes that will represent the development of the nine categories and four major themes. In addition, the data from the interview was presented partially for each participant to collect motivation or the reason behind the prompt strategies that were supported by the interview data.

Participant 1 (Male)
P1 primarily perceived AI as a practical learning tool while maintaining control over the interaction. His use of politeness was largely habitual and influenced by Indonesian communication norms, with an expectation that polite prompts might produce better responses. In contrast, directness was associated with familiar and cognitively simple vocabulary. P1 also demonstrated adaptive prompting by combining politeness and directness when initial responses were unsatisfactory. He perceived direct prompts as producing more targeted and relevant responses and used variations to compare outputs and improve their quality.

Participant 2 (Female)
P2 viewed AI primarily as a functional tool and assistant, resulting in a predominantly direct and efficiency-oriented prompting style. Direct strategies were preferred because they were habitual, simple, and required less cognitive effort. Politeness was used occasionally, mainly as a variation in wording rather than an interpersonal necessity, although P2 perceived some differences in response quality. She also demonstrated adaptive prompting by moving from general to specific instructions and emphasizing detail and clarity. Overall, directness remained her dominant strategy, while politeness and variation were applied selectively according to task needs.

Participant 3 (Male)
P3 perceived AI as both a learning tool and a socially familiar interaction partner. His politeness was largely habitual and transferred from everyday interpersonal communication, particularly through greetings, gratitude, and conversational expressions. Long-term interaction also contributed to a perception of familiarity and personalization. At the same time, P3 used politeness strategically because he believed it could improve AI responses. Indirectness and mitigation were also used to generate alternative responses and facilitate exploration. His prompting behavior therefore reflected a combination of politeness, personalization, role attribution, and strategic adaptation.

Participant 4 (Female)
P4 perceived AI as a supportive and non-judgmental discussion partner, which encouraged a predominantly polite, indirect, and collaborative prompting style. Her politeness was influenced by habitual communication norms and was also perceived as contributing to better responses. Indirect expressions were used to seek validation and collaboratively develop ideas. However, she adapted her prompts when responses were unsatisfactory, sometimes shifting to more direct language. She also emphasized that specificity and detail were more important for obtaining relevant outputs. Overall, her prompting reflected politeness, collaboration, and context-dependent adaptation.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that EFL students' prompting behavior with Generative AI is shaped by politeness, directness, habitual communication patterns, AI perceptions, and emerging AI literacy rather than gender alone. These findings can be interpreted through Genderlect Theory (Tannen, 1990), Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and the CCSARP framework (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

From the perspective of Genderlect Theory, the findings only partially support Tannen's (1990) distinction between Rapport Talk and Report Talk. Although some participants used collaborative and polite expressions associated with Rapport Talk, these patterns were not exclusive to females. Similarly, direct and task-oriented language associated with Report Talk appeared among both genders. This suggests that communicative goals and individual preferences may have a stronger influence than gender

in AI-mediated interaction. The task-oriented nature of Generative AI may reduce the prominence of gendered communication patterns typically observed in human-to-human interaction. This interpretation is consistent with Grassini and Lauman (2022), who found that technological contexts may encourage more utilitarian interaction, and Kasneci et al. (2023), who describe Generative AI primarily as a task-oriented learning tool. Thus, AI-mediated communication may reduce, rather than eliminate, the influence of gendered linguistic tendencies.

Regarding Politeness Theory, the dominance of bald-on-record and direct strategies reflects the efficiency-oriented nature of AI interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that bald-on-record strategies prioritize clarity when face concerns are limited. Because AI lacks human emotions and social status, participants appeared to perceive direct prompting as acceptable. However, the use of negative politeness and mixed strategies demonstrates that human communication norms are still transferred to AI interaction, supporting Deng et al. (2023). Politeness also functioned as transactional politeness, as some participants believed that polite prompts produced better or more detailed responses. This is consistent with Zamfirescu-Pereira et al. (2023), although Reynolds and McDonell (2021) found that direct prompts may produce more concise and task-focused outputs. These differences suggest that the effects of politeness may depend on the AI model, task, and prompting context.

The CCSARP framework (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) further demonstrates that participants balanced directness and indirectness. Conventionally indirect strategies and direct commands were both prominent, indicating a continuum between politeness, clarity, and efficiency. Direct commands may reduce cognitive effort, whereas conventionally indirect forms maintain politeness without sacrificing clarity. Highly implicit strategies were rarely used, possibly because Generative AI responds more effectively to explicit instructions (Kasneci et al., 2023).

Another important finding concerns adaptive prompting and emerging AI literacy. Participants refined their prompts based on previous AI responses, evaluating output quality and adjusting subsequent prompts. This indicates that AI literacy involves more than technical prompt writing; it also includes critical evaluation, strategic adaptation, and iterative refinement. This process corresponds with prompt engineering described by Zamfirescu-Pereira et al. (2023) and the adaptive prompting practices emphasized by Liu et al. (2026). Specificity also consistently emerged as an important factor in obtaining relevant outputs. In addition, perceptions of AI influenced prompting styles: participants who viewed AI primarily as a tool tended to use direct and efficiency-oriented language, whereas those who perceived AI as a discussion partner used more collaborative and polite expressions, supporting Deng et al. (2023) and Kasneci et al. (2023).

These findings have important pedagogical implications for EFL learning. Politeness and directness should not be treated as opposing strategies but as complementary resources that learners select according to communicative goals, task demands, and interactional experience. Effective prompting therefore requires pragmatic flexibility, allowing learners to balance clarity, politeness, specificity, and purpose. AI literacy should consequently be integrated into EFL instruction through prompt-writing activities, comparisons of different

prompting strategies, reflection on AI-generated responses, and iterative prompt revision. Such activities can develop both pragmatic competence and responsible AI use.

Overall, the findings suggest that established sociolinguistic frameworks remain useful for explaining language use with Generative AI, but their application should account for the distinctive characteristics of technology-mediated communication. AI interaction introduces additional considerations, including task efficiency, prompt effectiveness, iterative refinement, and users' perceptions of AI. Thus, AI-mediated communication can be understood as a hybrid communicative environment in which traditional sociolinguistic competence interacts with emerging digital and AI literacy.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how EFL students employ politeness and directness strategies when interacting with Generative AI and explored the motivations underlying their prompting choices. The findings indicate that bald-on-record and conventionally indirect strategies were commonly used, reflecting a balance between efficiency and politeness. Participants also demonstrated adaptive prompt refinement, suggesting that prompting involves not only linguistic choices but also emerging AI literacy. No substantial gender-based differences were identified, indicating that communicative goals, individual preferences, and task requirements may have greater influence on prompting behavior than gender. The findings extend sociolinguistic perspectives by showing that Politeness Theory, Genderlect Theory, and the CCSARP framework should be interpreted within AI-mediated contexts, where communication is shaped by task efficiency, perceptions of AI, and technological affordances. Pedagogically, EFL instruction should incorporate AI literacy and pragmatic awareness through activities that encourage effective prompt construction, critical evaluation of AI responses, and iterative prompt refinement. Given the small sample size and specific Indonesian context, the findings are not broadly generalizable. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples and examine factors such as proficiency, AI experience, task type, and differences across Generative AI platforms.

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