

Analyzing Speech Acts in Students' Whatsapp Messages to English Lecturers at English Education Study Program

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Ni Komang Sri Mariati, Eka Dwi Putra^{ab} 

¹²STKIP Agama Hindu Amlapura, Bali, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: sriimariati@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The rapid shift toward digital communication in higher education has established WhatsApp as a primary medium for academic coordination. It poses significant challenges for students' pragmatic competence. This study aimed to investigate the types of speech acts and politeness strategies employed by class leaders in an English Education Study Program when communicating with lecturers via WhatsApp, as well as the underlying factors influencing their linguistic choices. The findings, analysed through Searle's taxonomy and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, revealed that directives were the most predominant speech acts (56.25%), reflecting the task-oriented nature of the class leader's role. Negative Politeness (67.5%) emerged as the dominant strategy, characterized by formal honorifics and apologetic hedges to maintain professional distance. However, a significant pragmatic shift toward Bald On-record strategies was observed in urgent situations, where efficiency overrode etiquette. The interviews highlighted that perceived power distance, the burden of collective representation, and message urgency were the primary drivers of these linguistic patterns. This research implies a need for integrating digital pragmatics into the EFL curriculum to bridge the gap between linguistic knowledge and professional digital communication.

Keywords: *Speech Acts, Politeness Strategies, WhatsApp Messages*

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of information and communication technology has transformed the way academic interaction unfolds in the 21st century. In earlier times, student-lecturer relationships were shaped by formal, face-to-face meetings and rigid bureaucratic procedures. Today, instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp have broken down those traditional barriers, creating an era of constant connectivity. Within Indonesian higher education, WhatsApp has moved beyond its role as a social application and has become a vital channel for academic administration. Through this platform, lecturers and students negotiate class schedules, clarify assignments, and sustain pedagogical relationships. Recent studies show that WhatsApp supports teaching skills and student engagement, making it an effective mobile learning environment (Widari et al., 2025). At the same time, this shift toward digital-first communication presents important socio pragmatic challenges. Scholars note that while WhatsApp enhances accessibility and immediacy, it also raises concerns about maintaining professionalism and respect in a medium that is inherently informal, fast-paced, and lacking the non-verbal cues that usually help reduce social friction (Qiqieh et al., 2025). Thus, the integration of WhatsApp into academic life requires careful negotiation between efficiency and the preservation of academic decorum.

In the field of Applied Linguistics, particularly within English Education programs, communication between students and lecturers through digital platforms is an important area of investigation. Students in these programs are not only language learners but also prospective English teachers who are expected to develop grammatical knowledge and pragmatic competence, including the ability to use language appropriately in different social

contexts. In academic communication, messages sent to lecturers may reflect students' understanding of politeness, social relationships, and institutional expectations. However, communicating appropriately through text-based platforms can be challenging because written messages do not always convey the intended interpersonal meaning clearly. Research on student-lecturer communication through WhatsApp has examined how students use greetings, apologies, expressions of gratitude, and indirect requests to maintain politeness in digital interactions (Bustam et al., 2024; Shalihah & Zuhdi, 2020; Sudar et al., 2025).

This issue can be examined through Speech Act Theory, which explains how language is used to perform communicative actions rather than merely convey information (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). When students contact lecturers, they may perform speech acts such as requesting information, reporting academic activities, apologizing for mistakes, expressing gratitude, or making commitments. The intended force of these utterances depends not only on their grammatical form but also on their context and the relationship between the participants. For example, the message "Sir, when will the grades be released?" may be intended as a request for information, but its perceived politeness may depend on the surrounding context, the wording, and the relationship between the student and lecturer. Studies of WhatsApp communication in educational settings demonstrate the relevance of examining both the linguistic forms and the interpersonal functions of students' messages (Bustam et al., 2024; Shalihah & Zuhdi, 2020).

Class leaders represent an important but relatively specific group for investigating these interactions. Unlike other students, class leaders often communicate with lecturers on behalf of their classmates, for example to request clarification, convey information, coordinate academic activities, or report collective concerns. Their messages may therefore involve both individual communicative choices and responsibilities associated with representing a group. This representative role provides a relevant context for examining how speech acts, politeness, and institutional relationships are negotiated through WhatsApp. Nevertheless, the extent to which class leaders differ from other students cannot be assumed in advance; it requires analysis of the messages and, where appropriate, additional contextual information.

Politeness Theory provides another framework for understanding these interactions. Brown & Levinson (1987) explain politeness strategies in relation to face, or the public self-image that participants seek to maintain. Requests and other potentially face-threatening acts may be formulated directly or modified through strategies such as expressions of deference, apologies, indirect questions, and rapport-building language. In WhatsApp communication, the use or omission of these features may influence how a message is interpreted. Research on student-lecturer interactions in Indonesia has documented the use of greetings, respectful expressions, indirect requests, and other politeness features, while also showing that communication practices differ according to participants' roles and relationships (Bustam et al., 2024; Pasaribu et al., 2022; Shalihah & Zuhdi, 2020; Sudar et al., 2025).

The English Education Study Program offers a meaningful setting for examining these issues because pragmatic competence is relevant to students' development as future English teachers. Appropriate communication requires more than grammatical accuracy: speakers must also consider their communicative purposes, the social relationship between interlocutors, and the context in which a message is delivered. Analyzing students' WhatsApp messages can therefore provide insight into how pragmatic resources are used in authentic academic communication. Such analysis may also identify areas that could be addressed through instruction in professional digital communication, although conclusions about curricular deficiencies should be based on the study's actual findings rather than presumed in advance.

This study focuses specifically on WhatsApp messages produced by class leaders in an English Education Study Program when communicating with lecturers. It examines the speech acts represented in the messages and the politeness strategies used to convey requests, provide information, express feelings, and manage academic relationships. By concentrating on class leaders, the study investigates a particular communicative role that is not necessarily represented separately in research focusing on students as a general group. The findings are

expected to contribute to the discussion of speech acts and politeness in digital academic communication and to provide context-specific insights into professional communication practices among prospective English teachers.

Speech Act Theory, introduced by [Austin \(1962\)](#) and developed further by [Searle \(1969\)](#), provides a framework for analyzing language as action. In this perspective, utterances can perform functions that extend beyond their literal meanings. For the present study, Searle's classification of illocutionary acts offers a framework for identifying the communicative functions of WhatsApp messages.

Four categories are particularly relevant to student-lecturer communication. Directives attempt to get the recipient to perform an action, such as requesting a meeting link or asking for clarification. Assertive present information or propositions that the speaker treats as true, such as reporting attendance or confirming the completion of an assignment. Expressive convey psychological states or attitudes, such as apologizing or thanking a lecturer. Commissive commit the speaker to a future course of action, such as promising to submit a document by a specified deadline. The classification should be applied to the meaning and context of each message rather than to its grammatical form alone. The study may also encounter declaratives, which bring about an institutional or conventional change when uttered under appropriate conditions; their presence should be determined from the actual data rather than assumed.

Politeness Theory

[Brown & Levinson \(1987\)](#) Politeness Theory provides a framework for examining how speakers manage face in interaction. Their model distinguishes between positive face, associated with the desire for approval and appreciation, and negative face, associated with the desire for freedom of action and freedom from imposition. A request to a lecturer may potentially impose on the lecturer's time or autonomy, making the formulation of the request relevant to politeness analysis.

The framework identifies four broad strategies. Bald-on-record strategies communicate directly with little or no mitigation. Positive politeness strategies seek to establish rapport or emphasize common ground. Negative politeness strategies acknowledge the imposition and may include indirect requests, apologies, or deferential expressions. Off-record strategies communicate indirectly, allowing the intended meaning to be inferred. These strategies provide analytical categories rather than fixed judgments of whether a message is polite or impolite. Interpretation must take account of the interactional context, the relationship between the participants, and the conventions of the particular academic setting.

Whatsapp Communication and Academic Politeness

WhatsApp allows students and lecturers to exchange information quickly, but the use of written messages also requires participants to convey interpersonal meaning through linguistic choices and available textual cues. Relevant features may include address terms such as "Bapak," "Ibu," "Sir," or "Ma'am"; opening and closing sequences; expressions of apology and gratitude; indirect requests; punctuation; and emojis, when present. These features should be examined as part of the message context rather than treated as automatic indicators of politeness.

Previous studies provide empirical foundations for examining such communication. [Shalihah & Zuhdi \(2020\)](#) investigated the politeness of students' WhatsApp messages to lecturers and reported the use of greetings, introductions, apologies, statements of intention, expressions of gratitude, and closing expressions. [Pasaribu et al. \(2022\)](#) examined politeness strategies in WhatsApp-based thesis consultations and found differences between the strategies used by students and lecturers. [Bustam et al. \(2024\)](#) analyzed politeness in student-lecturer WhatsApp group interactions, while [Sudar et al. \(2025\)](#) investigated politeness in technology-assisted communication between EFL students and lecturers in Indonesia. Together, these studies establish the relevance of examining politeness in digital academic interactions without implying that all students or all messages follow the same pattern.

Although previous studies have examined politeness and communication between students and lecturers through WhatsApp, the present study focuses on class leaders in an English Education Study Program. Class leaders communicate in a role that may require them to convey collective questions and requests while maintaining appropriate relationships with lecturers. This specific focus offers an opportunity to examine how their representative responsibilities are reflected in the speech acts and politeness strategies found in their messages.

Accordingly, this study analyses WhatsApp messages sent by class leaders to lecturers, focusing on the types of speech acts, the politeness strategies employed, and the ways these linguistic choices function in academic communication. The study does not assume in advance that class leaders are more direct, more anxious, or more polite than other students. Instead, it uses the message data to describe the communicative patterns present in this particular context. The findings may inform discussions of digital pragmatics and provide practical examples for teaching appropriate communication in academic and professional settings.

METHOD

This study employs a Qualitative Descriptive Research design. The primary goal is to provide a systematic and factual description of the types of speech acts and politeness strategies used by class leaders in their WhatsApp messages. As noted by [Creswell & Creswell \(2018\)](#), qualitative research is most suitable for exploring the nuances of human communication and social roles. By using a descriptive approach, the researcher can analyse the "naturalistic data" of digital discourse without manipulating the variables or the environment.

The research is situated within the English Education Study Program at STKIP Agama Hindu Amlapura. This setting is chosen because students in this program are expected to possess a high level of communicative and pragmatic competence. The interaction between class leaders and lecturers in this specific program provides a rich dataset where professional English is expected to be practiced within a digital, yet hierarchical, Indonesian academic culture. The participants of this study are Class Leaders from the first, third, fifth, and seventh semester of the English Education Study Program. The selection is based on Purposive Sampling, focusing on individuals who meet the following criteria: they are currently serving as the official liaison between their class and lecturers, they actively communicate with at least three different lecturers via WhatsApp for academic purposes, they are willing to share their message logs for research purposes under strict confidentiality.

The researcher serves as the human instrument, acting as the primary data collector and analysers. To maintain objectivity and systematic analysis, the following supporting tools are used: Observation Checklist/Coding Sheet: A table designed to categorize messages based on Searle's Speech Acts and Brown & Levinson's Politeness Strategies. Interview Guide: A list of open-ended questions focused on the students' pragmatic awareness and the factors influencing their digital professionalism.

The data collection process follows these ethical and systematic steps: (a) Soliciting Consent: Obtaining informed consent from both the class leaders and the lecturers involved to ensure ethical compliance. (b) Archiving Message Logs: Class leaders will be asked to provide screenshots or "Export Chat" files of their interactions with lecturers over a specific period. (c) Data Selection (Filtering): The researcher will filter the messages to include only those related to academic coordination (schedules, assignments, inquiries) and exclude personal or non-academic conversations. (d) Anonymization: All names, profile pictures, and identifiable personal information will be redacted or replaced with pseudonyms (e.g., Student A, Lecturer B) to protect privacy.

The data will be analyzed using Qualitative Content Analysis, following the model proposed by [Miles et al. \(2014\)](#), which includes: (1) Data Condensation: Selecting and simplifying the message logs into manageable units for analysis. (2) Data Display: Organizing the speech acts and politeness strategies into tables or matrices for easy comparison. (3) Data

Coding: Categorizing each message using codes: *Speech Acts*: [DIR] for Directives, [ASS] for Assertive, [EXP] for Expressive, etc. *Politeness*: [BOR] for Bald on-record, [PP] for Positive Politeness, [NP] for Negative Politeness. (4) Conclusion Drawing/Verification: Identifying patterns and drawing conclusions based on the frequency and context of the coded data.

In this chapter explain about findings and discussion of the study. The findings divided into 3 points, then the details findings discuss at the discussion part. The researchers analysed a total of 80 WhatsApp message tokens collected from four class leaders (CL1, CL2, CL3, and CL4) over a period of one semester. The messages were categorized using Searle's (1969) classification of speech acts. The following table illustrates the distribution of speech act types identified across the four participants:

Table 1: Frequency of Speech Acts among Four Class Leaders

Participants	Assertive	Directives	Commissive	Expressive	Declarations	Total
CL 1	4	12	1	5	0	22
CL 2	3	10	0	6	0	19
CL 3	2	14	0	4	0	20
CL 4	4	9	1	5	0	19
Total	13	45	2	20	0	80
Percentage	16.25%	56.25%	2.5%	25%	0%	100%

Based on Table 1, it is evident that Directives are the most predominant speech acts employed by all four class leaders, accounting for 56.25% of the total messages. This is followed by Expressive (25%) and Assertive (16.25%). Directives were primarily used by the class leaders to coordinate academic activities. These acts appeared in the form of requests (asking for materials), questions (inquiring about class schedules), and requirements (asking for signatures).

Example from CL 3: "Excuse me, Sir. The class wants to ask if we can move the meeting to 1 PM today because of the faculty event?"

Analysis: CL 3 uses a directive to get the lecturer to change the schedule. The use of "The class" indicates the representative role of the leader.

Example from CL 1: "Mam, could you please send the link for today's Zoom?"

Analysis: This is a direct request for action. CL 1 uses "Could you please" as a linguistic softener.

Expressive

Expressive were the second most frequent acts, mostly functioning as social lubricants to maintain a good relationship with the lecturers. The most common forms were thanking and apologizing.

Example from CL 2: "Thank you very much for the clarification, Mam. We understand now."

Analysis: This expressive act (thanking) is used to close a conversation thread politely.

Example from CL 4: "I am very sorry for disturbing your time, Sir. I just want to confirm the deadline."

Analysis: The apology is used as a "pre-act" before delivering a directive, showing high pragmatic awareness of the power distance.

Assertive

Assertive occurred when class leaders provided information or reported the class status to the lecturer.

Example from CL 1: "Sir, all students have submitted the assignment in the Google Drive folder."

Analysis: The leader is committing to the truth that the task is finished. This functions as a report of progress.

Politeness Strategies Utilized by Class Leaders

The analysis reveals that class leaders are highly conscious of the social hierarchy, leading to a strong preference for formal and deferential language. The distribution of politeness strategies across the 80 analysed messages is as follows:

Table 2: Distribution of Politeness Strategies among Class Leaders

Politeness Strategy	CL 1	CL 2	CL 3	CL 4	Total	Percentage
Negative Politeness	15	13	12	14	54	67.5%
Positive Politeness	4	5	2	3	14	17.5%
Bald On-Record	3	1	6	2	12	15.0%
Off-Record (Hints)	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total	22	19	20	19	80	100%

Negative Politeness (The Dominant Strategy)

Negative politeness is the most frequent strategy (67.5%), used to respect the lecturer's "negative face" their desire to be unimpeded and respected. The class leaders utilized several sub-strategies:

Hedges and Apologies: Students often started messages with "Sorry for disturbing" or "I was wondering if..."

Data CL4-09: "I am very sorry to bother you, Mam, but if it is possible, could we collect the assignment tomorrow?"

Honorifics and Formal Address: Every leader consistently used "Bapak/Ibu" or "Sir/Mam" to maintain professional distance.

Pluralization (The Collective "We"): By using "We" or "The class," leaders shifted the "burden" of the request from themselves to the group, making it seem less like a personal imposition.

Positive Politeness

This strategy (17.5%) was used to minimize social distance and create a friendly atmosphere.

Optimism and Gratitude: CL2 frequently used this to ensure the lecturer felt appreciated.

Data CL2-04: "We are really looking forward to your material today, Sir! Thank you 🙌."

Use of Emojis: Emojis like the folding hands (🙏) or a simple smile (😊) were used as "digital smiles" to soften the tone of a request.

Bald On-Record (Direct and Unmitigated)

While generally avoided, this strategy (15%) appeared under specific conditions, particularly for CL3, who managed a high-frequency coordination schedule. Urgency and Efficiency: In cases where a deadline was imminent or a link was missing, the leaders became more direct.

Data CL3-15: "Sir, the Zoom link has not been sent yet."

Analysis: There is no opening salutation or apology. This occurs because the "Efficiency" of the message (getting the link) outweighed the "Etiquette" in a time-sensitive moment.

Multimodal Politeness: Emojis as Digital Softeners

The use of emojis (e.g., 🙏, 😊) by the participants serves a specific pragmatic function. Within the English Education context, where students might struggle with complex English "hedging" (e.g., using *might*, *possibly*), emojis act as Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices

(IFIDs). As identified by Pérez-Sabater (2022), emojis function as "digital smiles" that compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues. For Indonesian class leaders, the folding hands emoji (🙏) is a direct digital translation of the physical "Sembah" or "Salim," providing a cultural bridge that maintains politeness despite the brevity of the text.

Underlying Factors Influencing Linguistic Choices

Based on the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, the researcher identified four primary factors that influence how CL1, CL2, CL3, and CL4 compose their WhatsApp messages.

Perceived Power Distance and Institutional Hierarchy

All four participants identified the lecturer's status as the most significant factor. Even though the medium (WhatsApp) is informal, the participants perceive a high "vertical distance" between themselves and the faculty.

CL1 noted: *"I always use 'I am sorry to disturb' because I am aware that I am 'only' a student and they are my superiors. I don't want to sound like I'm commanding them."*

CL4 mentioned: *"In our culture, we cannot be direct with elders or teachers. Even in English, I feel I must translate that respect."*

This factor explains the predominance of Negative Politeness and Expressive acts (apologies) found in the textual data.

The Burden of Collective Representation

Because the participants are class leaders, they feel that their messages represent the reputation of the entire class. This "liaison pressure" makes them more cautious than regular students.

CL2 stated: *"If I am rude, the lecturer might be angry at the whole class, not just me. I have to be the 'shield' for my friends."*

CL3 shared: *"Sometimes my friends are angry at a lecturer and tell me to 'protest,' but I have to filter their words to make them sound polite and professional."*

Message Urgency and Time Constraints

The findings show a clear tension between Etiquette and Efficiency. When a situation requires an immediate response (e.g., a lecturer is missing from a classroom), politeness markers are often sacrificed for speed.

CL3 (who had the Bald On-Record acts) explained: *"When the class starts in 5 minutes and the lecturer isn't there, I don't have time for long 'Basa-basi' (small talk). I just text them directly so they see it quickly."*

CL1 added: *"In urgent situations, I feel that being too long-winded is actually annoying".*

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data from the four class leaders suggest that their digital communication is task-oriented. As leaders, their primary linguistic function is to "direct" the lecturer's attention to class needs (Directives). However, they frequently balance these directives with expressive acts to mitigate potential face-threats. The absence of Declarations is expected, as students do not have the institutional power to change status or reality (e.g., dismissing a class permanently).

The high frequency of Directives (56.25%) underscores the functional role of class leaders as administrative intermediaries. This finding aligns with Taguchi (2024), who noted that in digital academic discourse, student representatives primarily perform "action-inducing" speech acts to ensure the smooth flow of academic activities. However, the data also show a "directive paradox"; while the leaders aim to be professional, the inherent directness

of English directives can sometimes clash with the high power-distance norms of the Indonesian context. This supports [Al-Qudah \(2024\)](#), who argued that in WhatsApp-based education, the "Information Exchange" function often forces students to be more direct than they would be in face-to-face settings.

The findings indicate that Negative Politeness is the "safety net" for class leaders. They prioritize showing deference and minimizing imposition over being friendly (Positive Politeness). Interestingly, Off-record (hints) were not found at all; this suggests that in a professional liaison role, being clear is more important than being vague, even if it risks a minor face-threat. The data also show a "Situational Politeness" pattern: the more urgent the class matter, the more likely the leader is to switch from Negative Politeness to Bald On-Record.

The overwhelming use of Negative Politeness (67.5%) indicates that the participants are hyper-aware of the "Face" of the lecturer. The consistent use of apologies ("*Sorry for disturbing*") and formal honorifics reflects what [Zhu \(2023\)](#) describes as "Socio pragmatic Caution" in Asian academic cultures. Interestingly, the participants utilized "Pluralization" (using "*We*" or "*The Class*") as a strategy to mitigate the Rank of Imposition (R).

By shifting the request from an individual to a collective need, class leaders reduce the potential threat to the lecturer's negative face. This finding resonates with [Syahrin & Nur \(2021\)](#), who observed that Indonesian students often employ "Linguistic Distancing" to ensure they do not appear overly familiar or demanding, even in the informal environment of WhatsApp. One of the most striking findings is the transition to Bald On-Record strategies during urgent situations. This "Pragmatic Lapse" occurs when the need for speed overrides the social requirement for politeness. This phenomenon is supported by [Garcia-Vidal \(2026\)](#), who proposed that "Digital Urgency" creates a pragmatic shift where the Locutionary meaning (the urgent information) becomes the priority.

The findings suggest that despite being English Education students, the participants' pragmatic choices are still heavily influenced by L1 (Indonesian) Pragmatic Transfer. The frequent use of code-mixing (using *Bapak/Ibu* in English sentences) confirms [Wulandari's \(2025\)](#) assertion that cultural honorifics are the last linguistic elements to be abandoned in digital professional communication. This shows that the participants' professional identity as "Student Leaders" is a hybrid of global English standards and local Indonesian values.

The findings and discussion in this chapter have provided a comprehensive overview of the pragmatic patterns within the digital discourse of class leaders in the English Education Study Program. Several key conclusions can be drawn from the analysis: Functional Pragmatics: The study identifies Directives as the most predominant speech act (56.25%), confirming that the communicative role of a class leader is essentially task-oriented and administrative. These leaders prioritize action-inducing language to manage class logistics, schedules, and lecturer-student coordination. Politeness Dominance: In terms of politeness, Negative Politeness (67.5%) is the primary strategy used to maintain the professional hierarchy. The class leaders exhibit high socio pragmatic awareness by utilizing formal honorifics, apologies for intrusion, and collective "we" framing to minimize the potential face-threat to the lecturers.

The Impact of Urgency: The research highlights a significant shift in linguistic behaviour during urgent situations. When time is a constraint, students tend to abandon complex politeness markers in favour of Bald On-Record strategies. This suggests that in digital academic communication, the need for efficiency can momentarily override traditional etiquette. Socio-Cultural Hybridity: The choice of speech acts and strategies is deeply influenced by the "Power Distance" inherent in Indonesian culture. This results in a hybrid form of communication where English linguistic structures are merged with local cultural values (such as the use of specific honorifics and emojis) to ensure "safe" professional interaction.

In summary, the class leaders demonstrate a high level of pragmatic effort, though their choices are often a compromise between the informal nature of WhatsApp and the formal expectations of the academic institution. These patterns suggest that while they are

linguistically competent, their digital professionalism is heavily governed by situational urgency and cultural deference.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data analysis and discussion presented in the previous chapter, this study draws several major conclusions regarding the speech acts and politeness strategies used by class leaders in the English Education Study Program: Dominant Speech Acts: The primary communicative function of class leaders is task-oriented coordination. This is evidenced by the predominance of Directives (56.25%), which are used to request information, clarify schedules, and manage class administration. Expressive serve as the second most frequent act, functioning as essential "social lubricants" to maintain rapport. Politeness Alignment: Class leaders exhibit high socio pragmatic awareness by prioritizing Negative Politeness (67.5%). They utilize formal honorifics, apologies, and hedging to respect the lecturer's professional boundaries and authority. This indicates that despite the informal nature of WhatsApp, the academic hierarchy remains the primary influence on linguistic choices. The Factor of Urgency: The research identifies Urgency as a critical variable that triggers a pragmatic shift. In time-sensitive situations, class leaders tend to adopt Bald On-record strategies, sacrificing linguistic mitigation for communicative efficiency. Cultural and Liaison Identity: The linguistic patterns reveal a "Hybrid Professional Identity." Student leaders act as a "cultural and pragmatic filter," translating the collective needs of their peers into a form that adheres to Indonesian academic "netiquette" and English pragmatic norms.

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