

# Politeness Strategies for Indian Engineering Students in ESL Situation: Teachers' Perception

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## **Abstract**

*The main focus of the research was to explore the Indian teachers' perceptions and their classroom practices on politeness strategies of target language. Questionnaire was designed and administered to 60 English teachers who were working for ten different engineering colleges. The aim of the questions was to understand the views and practices the English teachers on politeness strategies of the target language. The data collected was analyzed by using descriptive statistics like percentages, mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) by IBM SPSS Statistic Data Editor 20. The findings of the research revealed that all the teachers of English knew the aspects of politeness of target language were important to teach for effective communication in formal discussion and conversations, the syllabus of English and learning materials offered to the students had no sufficient focus on the component. The finding also exposed that most of the teachers considered the students' level of using polite turn takings in formal discussions or conversations was unsatisfactory and they strongly felt that their students had to improve their awareness and use of polite expressions in the target language to a great extent. The findings recommended that classroom was the best platform and explicit instructions in the component were appropriate measure to address the gap in teaching the target language.*

**Keywords:** *politeness strategies, English as second language, learning materials*

## **1. Introduction**

Teaching English is part of engineering curriculum in India. The purpose of teaching the language is to prepare the engineering students to meet the academic and the professional needs of language then and in the future. In other terms, the goal of teaching English language is to develop communicative competence in it. Therefore, in teaching English to non-native students, it is crucial for teachers and other stakeholders to understand what really makes the students competent in the language, what exactly are the various components of language competence and the teaching procedures that would lead to the improvement of language competence. According to Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence includes grammatical competence, socio-cultural competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. On the other hand, Bachman's (1990) model of communicative competence emphasizes the importance to pragmatic (socio-cultural competence) competence and considered the component as a prominent aspect in the use of a language. It clearly indicates that socio-cultural competence is as essential as any other competencies in teaching of the second language. From this understanding, excluding the socio-cultural features and concentrating only on grammatical competence makes the language teaching process incomplete (Kasper & Rose, 2001). This context calls for making the politeness strategies and other aspects of socio-cultural competence integral part of all the English as Second Language (ESL) teaching practices. Apart from that, considering politeness strategies or other socio-cultural aspects of the target language would address an important gap in English teaching and thus help the students mindful of the unique socio-cultural features of English and their mother tongue. Consequently, ESL classroom would empower the students to use the languages effectively.

Several researchers (Searle, 1979; Leech, 1983; Krashen, 1985; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Patil, 1994; Kasper & Schmidt, 1996; Doughty, 2003; Ellis, 2005; Mills, 2005; Locher, 2006; Bose, 2007; Suzuki, 2008; Verghese, 2009; Mey, 2001; Zielinska, 2011) also pointed out that the inadequate teaching or

training in politeness or other aspects of socio-cultural competence of a second language would result in ineffective teaching and inadequate development of the language, no matter how best the focus on grammatical competence or vocabulary of the language

At this juncture, the present research tries to understand the Indian English teachers' perceptions and practices of teaching politeness strategies of the target language, the coverage of the component in the syllabus, the emphasis on the element in the learning materials, to what extent their students have scope to improve upon the aspect and what would be the best resource for improving the component.

## **2. Review of Literature**

### **Why the teachers' views are important?**

A critical study of the views of various stakeholders involved into the process of teaching learning directly or indirectly helps to design a practical and suitable course (Mackey, 1978; Manlopoulou-Sergi, 2004; Richards, 2012). In this way, the opinions and practices of the teachers who deal with a particular student plays an important role (Brindley, 1989) because the process would contribute to identify the exact practices and gaps in the target language teaching in advance (Fatihi, 2003; Watanabe, 2006), helps the makers of language policies, the designers of English language curriculum and the teachers sharing the similar context of teaching to assess the gaps in teaching of target language (Manlopoulou-Sergi, 2004). Apart from that, it also contributes to develop appropriate learning materials, design proper teaching activities, and formulate accurate tests and evaluation techniques (Brown, 1995). Thus, understanding the teachers' views lead to the success of effective teaching and the progress of students' study (Clark & Peterson, 1986).

### **Second Language and Politeness Strategies**

In India, teaching English as second language is intended to develop communicative competence of the students in the language. So, there should be adequate focus on all the aspects of communicative competence of the language. According to Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence incorporates grammatical competence, socio-cultural competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. However, the traditional English teaching process in the professional colleges of India emphasizes more on grammatical competence (Sailaja, 2009) than other important competence like socio-cultural competence. As a result, the performance of the professional students has become better in grammatical competence and insufficiently developed in socio-cultural competence. The same thing has been observed by Kachru (1983) and Bhatt (2000) in their studies. In their opinion, it is a need to focus on the socio-cultural aspects of English as the engineering students in India are suffering from low competence in it and required to improve it to a great extent. There are several reasons for low competence in the socio-cultural competence of second language. According to Sailaja (2009), teaching does not focus on socio-cultural differences of first and second language, teaching of second language does not deal with over generalization of the unique socio-cultural aspects of the students' first language, and there is no explicit instruction on the aspects of politeness strategies and other socio-cultural features of second language. Moreover, apart from classroom teaching, the students have hardly any exposure to the politeness strategies of the language in their families or the society they live in (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2009; Holtgraves, 2005). Hence, explicit teaching of politeness seems to be only alternative. Several studies (Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Kasper, 1992; Patil, 1994; Kasper & Rose, 2001; Bose, 2007; Locher, 2006; Doughty, 2003; Suzuki, 2008; Uso-Jaun, 2010; Naiditch, 2011; Taguchi, 2011) conducted in the field also recommended the same.

## **3. Methodology**

### **Design and Procedure of the Study**

This study was based on quantitative research approach. It comprised of preparation of a questionnaire, taking opinion from an expert about language and content of the questionnaire, implementation of the questionnaire, and analysis of the data gathered to arrive at a rational conclusion.

The questionnaire was intended to find out the views, attitudes, opinions and preferences of the selected teachers (Aliaga and Gunderson, 2002; Dornyei, 2003; Mujis, 2004). Before the conduction of the questionnaire, the teachers were educated that the objective of it was to gather information about their opinions, practices and belief system towards the teaching of politeness strategies or polite turns in the target language and to what extent their students could perform in the area. The teachers were asked to put their opinions for each of the questions honestly. They were also guaranteed that the data gathered would be used only for the research purposes and kept confidential.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections broadly. The first and the second sections were meant for the personal information and professional information of the respondents and the third section had 14 closed questions with varieties of options on different scales. The questions 1, 2, 6, 7B, 8, 9, 10, 13 and 14 were on five-point Likert Scale, the questions 3, 4, 5, and 11 were *Yes* or *No* type, and the question 12 was on three-point Likert Scale. The particular combination of questions was adopted 1) to boost the speed of responses, 2) to ease the teachers in providing their responses and 3) to enable objective analysis (Kothari, 2004; Pandey & Pandey, 2015).

### **Population of the Study**

The population for the study is the teachers of English working for Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University (JNTU), Hyderabad, Telangana, in particular and the Indian English teacher in general. They were chosen for the study for three reasons:

- A. A large number of English teachers in Telangana State are working for the colleges affiliated to the university.
- B. This university and its affiliated colleges offer English and English laboratory courses in several semesters.
- C. The teachers the university and its affiliated colleges represent all parts of the country.

### **Sample of the Study**

60 teachers (30 women and 30 men) from each college were chosen as the sample of the study. They were selected purposefully from ten engineering colleges, six teachers (3 men and 3 women) from each college. They were dealing with English and English Language & Communication Skills for first year engineering students and Advanced Communication Skills for third year engineering students who belonged to various branches of engineering education such as, Mechanical Engineering, Computer Science, Electronics and Communication, Information Technology Civil Engineering and Electronics and Electrical Engineering. They belonged to the age group of 29 to 51 years.

### **Ensuring Validity and Reliability**

To ensure validity and reliability, the draft of the questionnaire was sent to a research expert in the area, a professor, the department of Training Development, The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad, India, for his comments on the content, language, and organization of the questionnaire. This process helped the researcher to refine the questions and overall questionnaire so that it could meet the objective of the study. Thus, the researcher made sure of the suitability and order of the questions and language clarity in the questionnaire.

### **Research Instruments and Purpose of the Questions**

A structured questionnaire was used as a research tool. It had three sections: persona details, professional details and the questions meant for actual study. The first section, personal details, consisted of seven items: name of the teacher, gender with male and female and other as options, qualification, total teaching experience, phone number, and e-mail id. The second section, professional details, consisted of name of the institution where the teacher was working, her or his designation, total experience in teaching English for engineering students and number of students in the classroom. This data was gathered only for identification purpose of the sample group, so, it was not analyzed or presented statistically or graphically.

The third section consisted of 14 questions. The purpose and other details of the questions are discussed in the following section.

Question 1 aims at understating the teachers' opinion about the importance of politeness in formal speaking. This question had *Strongly Approve, Approve, Neutral, Disapprove, and Strongly Disapprove* as options on Likert Scale.

Question 2 tries to know whether the teachers think socio-cultural knowledge of English language is a part of teaching English. It had *Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree* as options on Likert Scale.

Question 3 attempts to find out whether the teachers' conduct formal discussions and conversations in your language laboratory. This question has two options: *Yes* and *No*, for the teachers to choose one from them.

Question 4 tries to learn from the teachers whether the syllabus of English for engineering students had politeness as a component or not. It was a *Yes* or *No* type question. The teachers were asked to choose any one of them.

Question 5 aims at knowing whether teachers think polite turns should be part of the syllabus of English for engineering students. It had *Yes* and *No* as options for the teacher-respondents to choose any one of them.

Question 6 attempts to find out whether the teachers were teaching polite expression or politeness strategies for their students. This question had *Always, Often, Usually, Sometimes, and Never* as options on Likert Scale.

Question 7 and its sub-question, 7B, ask the teachers whether their course book or manual focuses on the unique politeness strategies of the second language sufficiently and to what extent they were satisfied with the focus on it. The former one was a *Yes* or *No* type question and the teachers were asked to tick one of the two. If any teacher chose the option *Yes* for the question, then, she or he had to respond to latter one, the sub-question, which had five options: *Most Satisfied, Satisfied, Moderately Satisfied, Least satisfied* and *Not Satisfied at All* on Likert Scale.

Question 8 tries to find out whether the teachers provide any materials for their students on polite expressions. This question had five options: *Always, Often, Usually, Sometimes* and *Never*, on Likert Scale. The teachers were free to choose any one of the option.

Question 9 attempts to understand from the teacher whether they had observed their students taking turns politely while performing in group discussion and other formal conversations. This question had *Always, Often, Usually, Sometimes* and *Never* as options on five-point Likert Scale. The teacher-respondents were asked to choose the most suitable option.

Question 10 asks the teachers that how satisfy they were with their students' level of taking turns politely. It had *Most Satisfied, Satisfied, Moderately Satisfied, Least satisfied* and *Not Satisfied at All* as options on Likert Scale. The teachers were requested to opt for only one of the five options. Question 11 attempts to understand whether the teachers felt that their students required to improve the use of polite expressions for various language functions. It was a *Yes* or *No* type question.

Question 12 is to find out what the teachers understood about their students' awareness of politeness strategies in the second language and to what extent they had scope to improve in the area. The question had *To a Great Extent, To Some Extent* and *Not at All* as options on three-point Likert Scale.

Question 13 tries to understand whether the teachers felt the students of engineering needed to be given explicit instruction on politeness strategies of the second language. This question had *Strongly Approve, Approve, Neutral, Disapprove, and Strongly Disapprove* as options on Likert Scale.

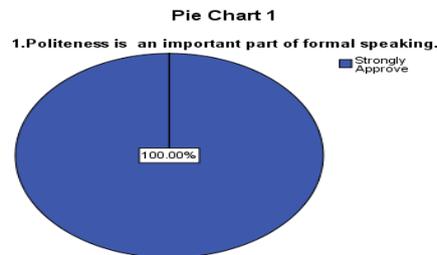
Question 9 attempts to understand from the teacher what they thought about the best resource for their students for learning politeness expressions. This question had *Family, Peer Group, Internet, Library* and *Classroom* as options on five-point Likert Scale. The teacher-respondents were asked to choose the most suitable option.

### **Data Analysis**

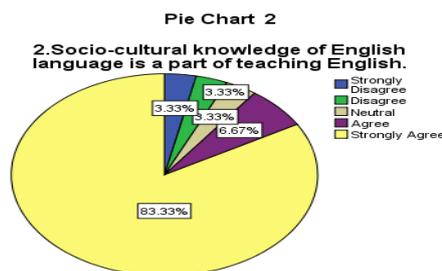
The information collected for the study was analyzed by IBM SPSS Statistic Data Editor 20. With help of this programme, the data was presented in descriptive statistics, means and standard deviations. The

statistical output was described in pie charts and in a descriptive table to explain the views of the teachers on teaching of politeness strategies in English as Second Language situation.

Pie chart 1 shows that 100% of the teachers strongly approved that politeness was a part of formal speaking. None of the teachers had chosen the options *-Approved, Neutral, Disapprove* and *Strongly Disapprove*. The data clearly indicated that all the teachers of English in engineering colleges strongly believed that politeness was an essential component in speaking.



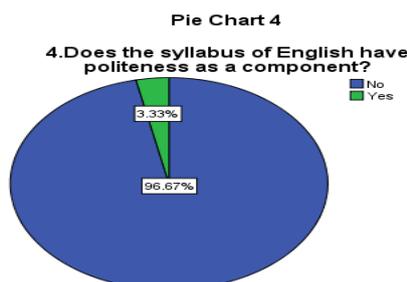
Pie chart 2 explains that 83.33% of the teachers strongly Agreed that the teaching of socio-cultural aspects was a part of teaching English. 6.67% of them *agreed*, 3.33% of them disagreed, 3.33% of them chose the option *Neutral* and the other 3.33% of them strongly disagreed. Thus, the data revealed that most of the teachers of English did not deny the fact that teaching of socio-cultural aspects is of a part of teaching a second language. Furthermore, the agreement of 90% of the teachers with the statement was an evident that most of them were aware of the importance of teaching social-cultural competence of a second language.



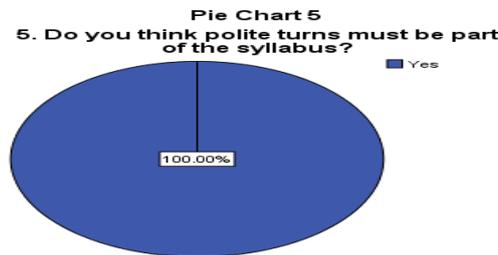
Pie chart 3 indicates that all the teachers accepted that they conduct formal discussions and conversations in their language laboratories.



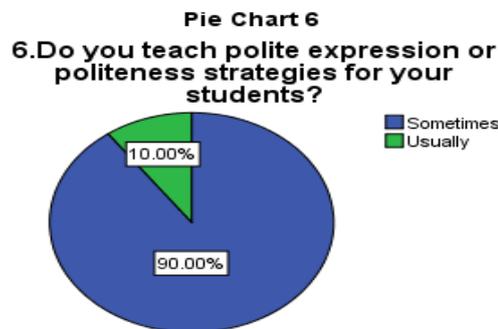
Pie chart 4 shows that 96.67 % of the teacher agreed that the syllabus had no focus on politeness of second language as a component. And, only 3.33% of them expressed that the syllabus had the coverage of the component. However, almost all of the teachers agreed that the syllabus of English had no focus on the component.



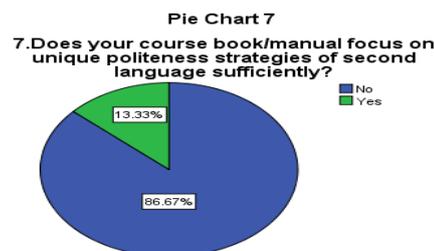
Pie chart 5 indicates that all the teacher wanted to have polite turns of the target language as one of the components in the syllabus.



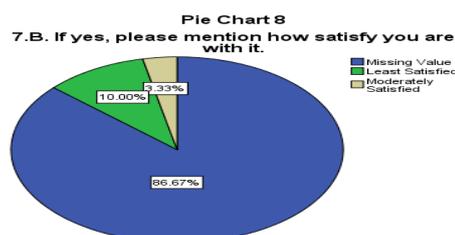
Pie chart 6 reflects that 90% of the teacher taught politeness strategies or polite expression of target language sometimes and the remained 10% of them did it *usually*. None of them opted for *Always*, *Often* or *Never*.



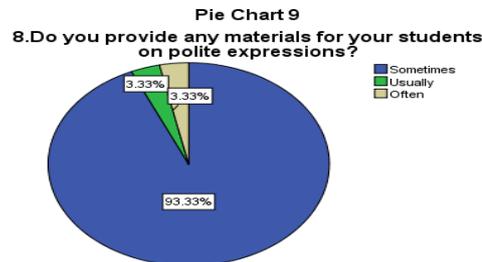
Pie chart 7 explains that 86.67% of the teacher approved that their learning materials did not focus on unique politeness strategies or polite expressions of the target language and the other 13.33% of the teachers said that the aspect of language was offered in the learning materials. Thus, most of the teachers asserted the learning materials did not have any focus on unique politeness strategies of second language.



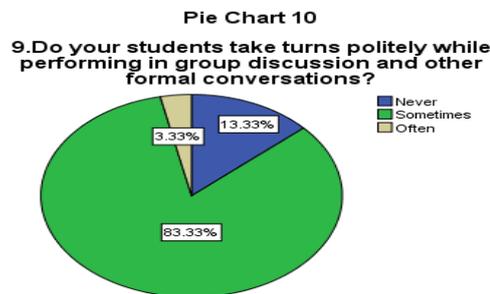
Pie chart 8 exposes that out of 13.33% who stated that there was focus on the unique aspects of politeness of language target language in the learning materials, 10 % of the teachers were least satisfied and the other 3.33% were moderately satisfied with the coverage of politeness strategies or polite expressions of the target language in the course book or learning materials they used in the language laboratory.



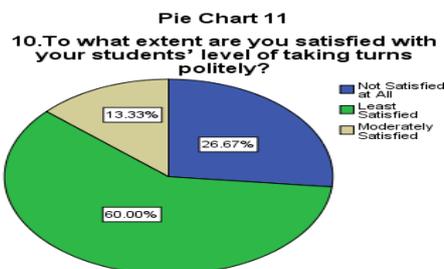
Pie chart 9 reveals that 93.33% of the teacher were in the practice of offering materials on polite expression of target language sometimes, 3.33% of the teachers provided the usually, and the other 3.33% of the teachers did it often. None of them opted for Always or Never.



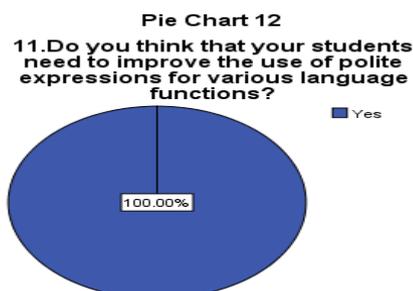
Pie chart 10 indicates that 83.33% of the teacher observed that their students taking turn politely sometimes, 13.33% of the teachers said their students *never* took polite turns, and the other remaining 3.33% of the teacher stated that their students *usually* took polite turns. None of the respondents opted for *often* or *always*.



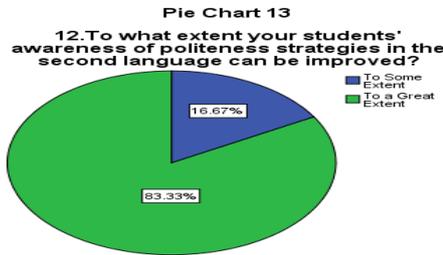
Pie chart 11 reveals that 60 % teachers were least satisfied', 26.67% of teachers not satisfied at all, and 13.33% teachers were moderately satisfied with their students' level of using polite turn takings in formal discussions and conversations. Besides it, on teacher opted the options of *Most Satisfied* and *Satisfied*.



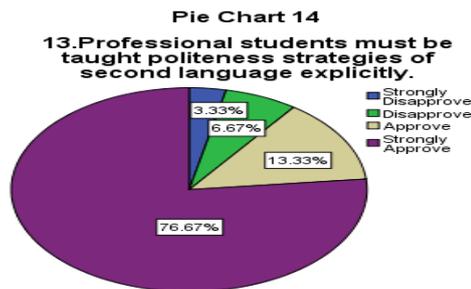
Pie chart 12 indicates that all the teacher felt that their students needed to improve the use of polite expressions for various functions of the target language.



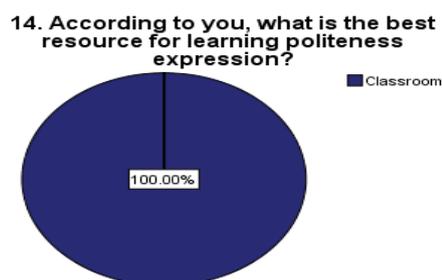
Pie chart 13 reflects the teacher' view on their students' scope for improvement in the awareness of politeness strategies in the second language. 83.33% of the teachers agreed that their students had to improve the awareness of polite expressions *to a great extent* and the remaining 37% of them stated that their students could be improved in the area *to some extent*. No teacher only responded for the option - *not at all*. The figures implied that all the teachers observed that their students needed to improve the awareness of polite expressions in the target language.



Pie Chart 14 denotes that 76.67% of the teacher strongly approved, 13.33% of the teachers approved, 6.67% of the teachers disapproved, and 3.33% of the teachers strongly disagreed that the professional students had to be taught the politeness strategies of a second language explicitly. No teachers stood neutral for the statement. Thus, the data exposed that though 10% of the teachers thought that there was no need for explicit teaching of politeness strategies of the second language, however, 90% of them expressed that their students were in need of explicit instructions in the area.



Pie chart 14 shows that 100% of the teachers confirmed that classroom was the best resource among family, peer group, internet and library for learning politeness expressions for the students.



#### 4. Results from the questionnaire

##### Descriptive Statistics

Particulars	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Politeness is an important part of formal speaking.	60	5.00	.000
2. Socio-cultural knowledge of English language is a part of teaching English.	60	4.63	.956
3. Do you conduct formal discussions and conversations in your language laboratory?	60	2.00	.000
4. Does the syllabus of English have politeness as a component?	60	1.03	.181
5. Do you think polite turns should be part of the syllabus?	60	2.00	.000
6. Do you teach polite expression or politeness strategies for your students?	60	2.10	.303
7 .Does your course book/manual focus on unique politeness strategies of second language sufficiently?	60	1.13	.343
7B. If yes, please mention how satisfy you are with it.	60	.30	.788
8. Do you provide any materials for your students on polite expressions?	60	2.10	.399
9 .Do your students taking turns politely while performing in group discussion and other formal conversations?	60	1.93	.516
10. What extent are you satisfied with your students' level of taking turns politely?	60	1.87	.623
11. Do you think that your students need to improve the use of polite expressions for various language functions?	60	2.00	.000
12. To what extent your students' awareness of politeness strategies in the second language can be improved?	60	2.83	.376
13 .Professional students must be taught politeness strategies of second language explicitly.	60	4.53	1.033
14. According to you, what is the best resource for learning politeness expression?	60	5.00	.000
Valid N (listwise)	60		

The table above shows the results from the responses of 60 teachers of English. The table offers data from all the 14 questions asked in the questionnaire and statistical values in columns with number of the teachers responded, mean (M), and standard deviation (SD). The mean scores in the table shows the teachers' views, practices and observations towards teaching and learning of politeness strategies or polite expression of the target language.

The table shows that the teachers of English in engineering colleges were in the practice of conducting formal discussions and conversations in their language laboratories (M: 2.00, SD: .000). In their opinion, politeness is an important part of formal speaking (M: 5.00, SD: .000) and socio-cultural aspects of English is a part of teaching English (M: 4.63, SD: .956). Although the aspects of politeness of target language were claimed important and classroom was only resource for learning and practice polite expressions (M: 5.00, SD: .00), the syllabus of English (M: 1.03, SD: .181) and learning materials (M: 1.13, SD: .343) had no sufficient focus on the component. Besides it, few teachers who claimed that there was some focus on unique politeness strategies or polite expressions of the target language in their learning materials (M: 2.10, SD: .399) were not satisfied with the coverage of the component (M: .30, SD: .788). However, they were touching the component sometimes in their classroom teaching if not often or always (M: 2.10, SD: .303). They also wanted to have polite turns of the target language as one of the components in the syllabus (M: 2.00, SD: .000). Thus, they thought that their students required explicit instructions on

the component (M: 4.53, SD: 1.033) because their students were not good at taking turn politely often or always (M: 1.93, SD: .516); their level of using polite turn takings in formal discussions and conversations was unsatisfactory (M: 1.87, SD: .623); they needed to improve the use of polite expressions for various functions of the target language (M: 2.00, SD: .000); they had to improve the awareness of polite expressions in the target language to a great extent (M: 2.83, SD: .376). In addition, all the teachers confirmed that the classroom was the best resource among family, peer group, internet and library for learning politeness expressions for the students (M: 5.00, SD: .000).

## 5. Discussion and Implications

The analysis of the data shown that all the teachers of English working for engineering colleges were in the practice of conducting formal discussions and conversations for their students in their language laboratories. They were aware of the importance of politeness strategies in formal speaking and admitted that socio-cultural aspects of English is a part of teaching English (Narayana et al., 2008). Although all the teachers stated that the aspects of politeness of target language were important, in reality, the syllabus of English they taught and learning materials they offered to their students had no sufficient focus on the component. Moreover, a small number of teachers who agreed that there was some emphasis on unique politeness strategies or polite expressions of the target language in their learning material expressed their dissatisfaction with the coverage of the element. Besides, a few teachers who claimed that there was some teaching on the politeness strategies for the students but only sometimes, not often or always.

In the same way, the teachers also considered the level of using polite turn takings in formal discussions or conversations of their students were unsatisfactory with the competence the students' demonstrating. They strongly agreed that their students needed to improve their awareness and use of polite expressions in the target language to a great extent. For this to happen, according to all the teachers, classroom was the best platform and explicit instructions in the component were suitable measure (Doughty, 2003; Ellis, 2005; DeKeyser, 2007). Thus, although all the teachers knew the importance of politeness expressions for the students in taking turns in formal discussions or conversation, the real classroom teaching, learning materials offered for the students or the syllabus of the target language have insufficient focus on the component which in return causes for low performance of the students in the area. Therefore, as all the teachers expressed their consent, there is need for explicit focus on politeness competence to maximize the exposure and make the student competent enough using polite expression in the target language (Mills, 2005).

## 6. Conclusion

The present research was directed to understand systematically the perspective of Indian English teachers on the need of explicit instructions on politeness strategies for the students of engineering in ESL context. The outcome of the research is useful for curriculum designers to design suitable course by considering importance of politeness strategies, for material designers to include one of the important components of effective language skills, for teachers to maximize the quality of teaching for professional students of India and for students to be aware of significance of politeness strategies and their necessity in effective formal communication of second language. As this research does not include all the English teachers of India, the generalizations of the findings is restricted. On the other hand, the researcher sincerely believes that the sample of the research relatively represents the teachers of English of India. Apart from that, the findings are restricted to the target teachers' views, beliefs, opinions and practices that were obtained from a questionnaire only. They did not include interview of the teachers, classroom observations or their students' views and for generalization and validation of the present findings, further studies that includes new methods of data collection and students of engineering are essential.

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