

‘WAIT’ ... A Mobile App to Navigate and Assist Towards Polite and Effective Online Communication

<https://doi.org/10.3991/ijim.v16i09.27191>

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Abstract—This study illustrates the innovation of a mobile app named ‘WAIT’ developed for Android-based applications. Increasingly, most communication in current times is online, and this characteristic has been heightened due to restrictions caused by the Covid19 pandemic. During online communication, the art and etiquette of communication are often omitted. The researchers observed that online interactions tend to be careless and too quick with expressions of anger or just communication that is quick, resulting in sometimes inadvertent rude, abrupt and ambiguous communication. Hence, this app is designed to address this problem and assist users to use polite expressions in their online communication. The objectives of this app are to enable users to “wait”, think and refer to alternative ways how to begin, end and use specific keywords in response to various general situations, using polite expressions. This app is an easy-to-use mobile app. The researchers conducted a preliminary study with school and college students, whereby they were given an online survey with situations requiring a response before and after using the app. Additionally, online questionnaires were given to the participants after using the app. After using the app, the results showed positive feedback in polite and effective communication, leading to more harmony in online interactions and online society.

Keywords—mobile app, mobile learning, online communication, polite expressions

1 Introduction

Online communication is an integral part of our lives today. With increasingly online communication, the personal touch of face-to-face interaction is lost. Most online users want to get their business done as quickly as possible and move on to other tasks. Since the sender and receiver of messages do not see each other, the meaning is purely based on the text. This can seem to be cold and, sometimes, unintentionally rude. At other times, due to stress and the inability to connect, misunderstandings develop, resulting in anger expressed quickly. Impoliteness in social media arises easily as such.

However, netizens must ‘mind their language’ and be polite in cyberspace to avoid misunderstandings, unpleasant feelings, and disharmony.

Online communication occurs in various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, blogs, Instagram, WhatsApp, We Chat, Messenger, etc. The power of mobile technology is growing, and it has replaced laptops and desktops for many purposes in becoming a primary computing device in most forms of communication, from simple, informal communication to more formal office management matters [1]. The wait is moving in this direction with a touch screen app rather than a desktop with a mouse.

Mobile technology has changed the way we communicate, where it is possible to reach out to people wherever they are, irrespective of geographical boundaries, unlike a laptop or computer. Like never before, businesses view the mobile as a core driver of greater productivity and revenue. Based on social media statistics for Malaysia, there were 28.00 million users in January 2021, equivalent to 86% of the total population, and 99.2% own a smartphone. Hence, in line with the above, the present study is about a mobile application named ‘WAIT’ for an Android-based application, designed to assist users in having access to polite expressions in their communication. As many people communicate online nowadays, this app is expected to be able to help users save time instead of browsing through other websites, as a click is all it takes for them to access polite expressions in various situations. This will improve users’ communication and create a harmonious society, consistent with the objectives of the country’s national agenda and achieving the world’s aspirations of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

1.1 Problem statement

During periods of stress, especially when sender and receiver do not see each other during online communication, it is easy to slip into rude and impatient expressions, thus causing misunderstandings and communication breakdown [2], [3], [4], [5]. Given the increasing popularity of mobile technology, it is confident that there is a need to develop a mobile app for teaching and learning purposes. This shows that mobile apps can be an added advantage while reaching out to a broader number of students. Hence, to address this need, the researchers designed a mobile app called “WAIT” whereby users are persuaded to wait, think and click on the app to view polite expressions in various contexts.

1.2 Research objectives

1. To assess online responses before using the WAIT mobile app
2. To investigate online responses after using the WAIT mobile app
3. To evaluate the mobile app in terms of bringing more polite and appropriate expressions online
4. To create and build a harmonious society.

1.3 Research questions

1. How do students respond to online interactions *before* using the app?
2. How do students respond to online interactions *after* using the app?
3. How successful is the WAIT mobile app bringing about more polite and appropriate online expressions?
4. How successful is the WAIT mobile app in bringing about a more harmonious society?

The first section of this paper begins with the Literature review, where the theoretical framework is explained; mobile-assisted language-learning is briefly defined while stressing the importance of being polite in online communication. The following section is followed by a description of the methodology adopted in developing the WAIT mobile app. The following section presents the findings and discussions of the study, leading to the final section, which outlines the conclusion, implications and recommendations for future research.

2 Literature review

This section of the paper presents the definition of mobile learning leading to the study’s theoretical background. The section progresses to the downside of mobile communication and looks at politeness next, from various attempts to describe it to studies involving politeness and impoliteness. The researchers draw attention to the Malaysian context, where this study is situated. The study moves to mobile-assisted language learning, which is the core of this study, during a situated context of the covid 19 pandemic. The section ends with the pros and cons of mobile-assisted language learning.

2.1 Theoretical background

Scholars have defined mobile learning or m-learning differently, and some consider m-learning as opposed to face-to-face communication. According to Crescente and Lee [6], mobile learning means learners can learn anywhere. In the literature, mobile also can refer to mobility in terms of the learners, the mobile devices, the space of learning anytime, anyplace, with learning activities and flexibility. This mobile assisted language learning (MALL) is also a term used to refer to m-learning in the teaching and learning of language [7]. Social Constructivism theory by Vygotsky [8] and Connectivism are two proper theories for the present study on mobile-assisted language learning. The social constructivism theory emphasizes social learning through connecting with people, while the constructivism theory focuses on resources and creating knowledge using technology such as mobile devices [9], [10]. This approach needs many simulations, various media, and immersive environments that can be made available through mobile learning. Task-based and problem-based cases are also commonly used in language learning where learners integrate with others.

2.2 The downside of online communication

Greater use of digital technologies during the covid pandemic [11] has been clear. During online communication, the art and etiquette of communication are often left out [2], [3], [4], [5]. This could be due to stress being one of the many possibilities. Stress could result from the current constrained times of the Movement Control Order, causing people to feel cooped up without opportunities to release pent-up feelings. Such circumstances could lead to impolite communication. An earlier study conducted by the researchers revealed impolite strategies used by netizens in their discussions online [12], but these were not situated in a pandemic scenario. Impolite communication was also found in other studies and concurred by other scholars [13], [14]. At the school level, a preliminary study recently conducted of students’ text messaging among themselves also revealed poor communication strategies, including rude expressions [15]. All these points to the fact that online communication is often awkward and sometimes rude, intentionally, and unintentionally.

2.3 Descriptions of politeness and factors influencing politeness

Over the years, several attempts to describe politeness have surfaced. Researchers like [16], [17], [18] have opted for the term ‘politeness’ in describing their models and strategies of politeness. In pragmatics, politeness is viewed as linguistic politeness, expressed through communication [19]. As politeness can only be expressed through linguistic exchanges, a speaker’s command of the language plays a significant part in getting the message of politeness across. This needs to be highlighted, especially in the Malaysian context where English is the second language, as numerous research has pointed out that there is a tendency for non-native speakers to use fewer politeness strategies [20]. This scenario, coupled with the rising popularity of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), has brought about glaring impoliteness, especially in online communication [13], [14]. Maros and Liyana [21] explored politeness practice on Twitter based on [18] politeness strategies on their tweet updates and reported that the participants in their study employed all four strategies: bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness. However, positive politeness was the most often used strategy.

Nevertheless, the overuse of profanities also occurred, and this could be harmful in terms of politeness and the consequences of using such profanities. The direct utterances reflected expressions of ‘frustration’ or the speaker wanted to be rude and did not attempt to minimize threats to the other person’s ‘face’. Awang et al. [22] showed how impolite students tend to be too direct, which seemed offensive to the hearers. In the virtual ‘faceless’ community, the absence of the physical face and the ability to stay anonymous online has taken impoliteness, causing a drastic rise in online impoliteness.

2.4 Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL)

has also evolved in the teaching and learning spaces for educational purposes. This ensures the continuity of learning among a more considerable number of students and is suitable, especially in a pandemic where there is no face-to-face learning [23].

Moreover, with present touch screen smartphones, students can gain access to interactive content quickly and efficiently [24]. According to Cohen et al. [25], the young use mobile devices efficiently. Kucirkova [26] further supports this by saying it is like a ‘toy’ for them. Statista [27] similarly says that children are more comfortable with mobile apps and social learning via this platform. There are learning modules developed which are accessible with just a click of a button. Mobile assisted language learning (MALL) or m-learning has been used in the teaching and learning of language for grammar, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, and writing [7], [28], [29]. Mobile apps available in Google Play Store and Apple Store such as Babble, Duolingo, Memrise are among the top language learning apps in 2021. Online dictionaries such as Google Translate and the Audioboom app are practical m-learning tools. Past studies show how mobile apps have helped teaching and learning [30], [31], [32]. Mobile learning (ML) has become even more popular in the Covid19 pandemic [11]. Zhang [30] claims most studies on mobile apps for writing are less meaningful and suggests integrating SFL in writing for it to be more meaningful. In the Industry 4.0 revolution, teachers need to design mobile apps for educational purposes to motivate learners [33] and achieve sustainable development goals.

2.5 Points for and against mobile language learning apps

Mobile language learning apps are also beneficial as they provide students flexibility, accessibility, personalized learning experiences, and language resources [34]. They claim that students are more favourable as mobile learning is ubiquitous and it provides alternative learning methods where the environment for learning is also informal [29]. Most importantly, mobile learning is available throughout the day and night, every day – 24/7.

In another study [31] in Indonesia, using the mobile app in the teaching and learning vocabulary showed positive effects. The results of pretest and posttest showed significant differences after using mobile learning. Students enjoy learning directly from their smartphones and thus are attracted and motivated to learn [31]. Likewise, Gangaimaran and Pasupathi [29] and Klimova [7] show how mobile learning is effective for vocabulary proficiency. Mobile language learning also increases enthusiasm [35]. Mobile apps also motivated students and helped in writing and reading skills [36], while Dolzhich et al. [32] highlighted how students are more receptive towards the use of the mobile app in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Their study on Russian and Arab learners was to gather information about mobile applications (smartphone apps) and mobile learning in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Three key considerations in mobile learning were revealed: technical aspects, communication, and organization. The researchers also asserted three principles for using mobile apps: compliance of educational programs with modern technologies, prospects for using mobile apps in teaching foreign languages (FL), and the mobile app’s feasibility. In the local context, Zaki and Yunus [37] reported that mobile app has immense potential for teaching academic writing to ESL learners. In short, mobile apps are the basis of developing the linguistic competencies of the students.

On the contrary, some studies show that mobile apps do not help learners. Although many language learning apps have been available that have helped learners improve, some researchers assert that nothing can replace the classroom and human interaction. Due to the multitasking nature of mobiles, students may lose interest or be distracted [33]. Some apps also focus on individual words rather than authentic speech and, as such, are decontextualized [38]. Other disadvantages include poor internet connectivity, small display size and lack of personal contact [33]. Some mobile apps for language learning also rarely provide users with corrective feedback [38], while some are not suitable pedagogically as a non-expert develops them in language teaching [33]. In brief, there are advantages and disadvantages of mobile learning. Dolzhich et al. [32] recommended that future researchers be more initiative-taking and use mobile apps for specific aspects of learning a foreign language.

Language learning apps need to meet specific quality, age, sustainability, and pedagogical standards [39]. This study investigates one aspect of the English language: polite expressions in online communications. This study also considers the possibilities of using a mobile app as a pedagogical platform for students, as well, in learning how to use polite expressions online. These linguistic expressions are considered necessary during such times as the Covid19 pandemic, which has caused people to feel stifled, depressed and stressed. Such human conditions tend to cause impolite interactions.

The app “WAIT” was specially designed to address the problem statement by providing its users with the linguistic expressions to express themselves politely while managing various situations. The situations cover communal areas, making this app adaptable to numerous day-to-day situations. As Twerefou [40] suggested, the teaching of foreign languages should include social-cultural and language etiquette. This app also serves as a teaching tool to enhance better online relationships and inculcate proper ethics among students and society. It is also the concern of the researchers that perhaps not all students can afford a mobile device, but this concern is beyond the immediate scope of the study. Through work in this area, it was found that some children had to share the mobile apps due to the lack of resources.

3 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach. This study was carried out at a school and university involving 40 students. Data collection methods include a survey questionnaire and pre and post tasks for students. The tasks comprised various simulated situations posted online on YouTube to users to get ‘online responses to these situations. After the users supplied their responses, they were introduced to the “WAIT” mobile app. The same task was then administered, and responses before and after using the mobile app were compared.

Additionally, a questionnaire was administered—the questionnaire comprised 17 statements on the app’s effectiveness. Feedback was obtained on the mobile app from the questionnaire to triangulate data and further information on the app, including politeness, language, and technical aspects. The line dividing politeness and language were blurred and often merged, confirming data given in the sections.

The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis of the survey questionnaire employed descriptive statistics involving means calculation where data was obtained from responses based on a 5-point Likert scale. The qualitative analysis involved analysis of the responses to the tasks.

3.1 Steps involved in developing the app

The following steps were taken to develop the mobile app, as illustrated in the flow chart below.

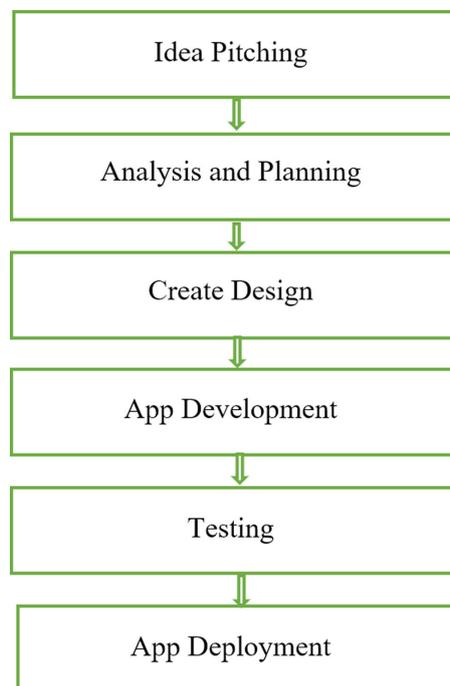


Fig. 1. Process of developing mobile app

As shown in Figure 1, the first stage was idea pitching or where the researchers had to evolve ideas into a successful app, identify the app users as well as establish the goals and objectives of the app. This includes the app’s features, the problems it will solve for the users, and its core appeal.

The second stage was the analysis and planning, whereby the researchers had to find the app’s functionalities. Three system functionalities of the app were shown and listed below:

1. The app shall enable the user to play video clips that explain and guide the use of appropriate expressions of emotions, making requests and making and responding to complaints.

2. The app shall enable the user to select any conversation template to begin and/or end the conversation.
3. The app shall enable the user to select suitable keywords used during the conversation.

Creating the app’s design was the third stage, where the purpose was to identify the app’s components. As shown in Figure 2, the first component of the app is the video player. This part links the app with the video published on our YouTube channel. The second component is the main interface. This interface has a list of buttons to navigate the app. The last part is the textbox that lists all templates to begin or/and end the conversation while accessing a list of keywords used in the context needed.

3.2 The app components

The design should deliver user experiences such as user-friendly, interactive, and intuitive. At this stage, the data or content the mobile app would display was decided, and the wireframes, mockups and prototypes were created.

Next was the fourth stage in the development of the mobile app. The programming language used to implement the app in Java and the Android Studio was used as the sole Interactive Development Environment (IDE). The fifth stage was testing, where the researchers evaluated the app in terms of its functionality. At least thirty users were invited to participate in the Beta Testing process, and the beta testing process was conducted using Google Play Store.

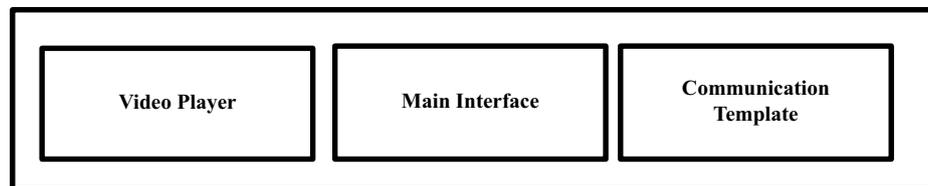


Fig. 2. The app components

The last stage was the launching of the app, whereby it was given to Google Play for Android apps. After the app was made available, users were requested to supply feedback and suggestions for improving and enhancing the ‘WAIT’ app.

3.3 The design and interfaces of the mobile app ‘WAIT’

Figures 3–6 show the development of the interface of the mobile app ‘WAIT’.

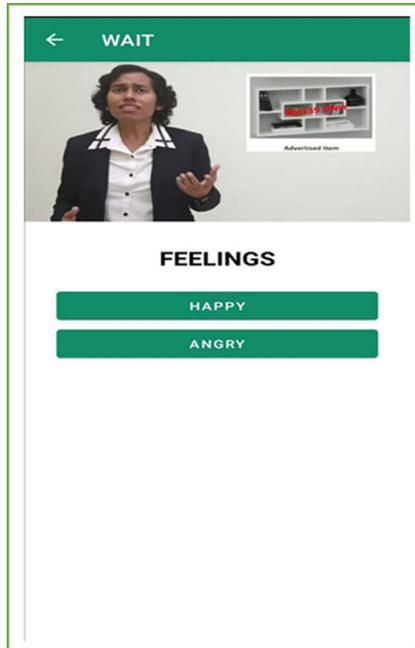


Fig. 3. Main menu

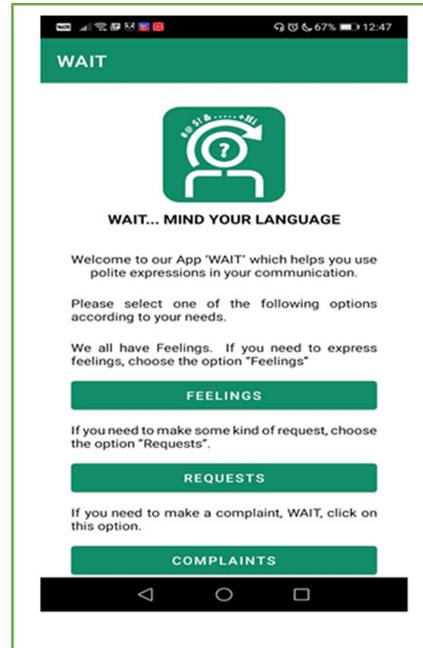


Fig. 4. Begin screen



Fig. 5. Polite expressions

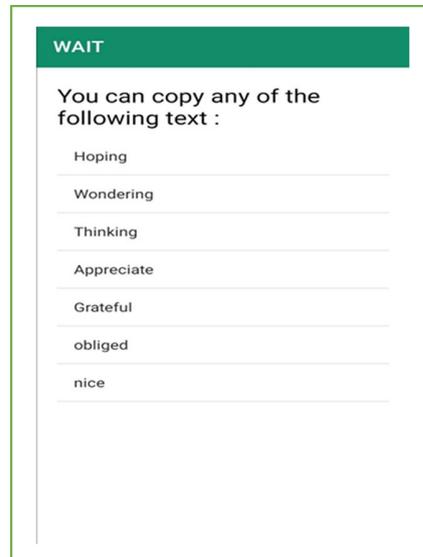


Fig. 6. Keywords

4 Results and discussions

The results will be presented according to the research questions.

4.1 Results for research question 1 and 2

This section presents the responses and feedback received from the users before and after using the mobile app ‘WAIT’, which was developed to use polite expressions in online communication. Based on the responses obtained for three different situations given – expressing feelings, making requests, and making and responding to complaints, it was found that there were differences in the use of polite expressions before and after using the ‘WAIT’ mobile app. The following illustrates the responses of some of the users before and after the use of the app.

Situation 1. You ordered a beautiful handbag online for your aunt’s upcoming birthday. When you opened the box, you were shocked. It was not the handbag that you chose. It was a work bag that was nothing like the handbag you chose. Time is short, you paid a lot, and you are extremely disappointed. Send the merchant an email

Table 1. Responses to situation 1

| Respondent | Before | After |
|------------|---|--|
| 15 | Dear Michael Kor, You gave me the wrong handbag, I ordered another handbag, but you gave me another, my aunt’s birthday is near. I hope this handbag can be exchanged before my aunt’s birthday. | Dear Michael Kor, I am not happy with this bag because I ordered another bag, but you gave me another one. My aunt’s birthday is almost here so I hope you can exchange this handbag before her birthday. I am unhappy with this, and I am so sorry, but I hope this will never happen again. |
| 16 | Dear Michael Kor, I received my order, but it was not the bag I wanted. I am, so XXX disappointed and sad because it was supposed to be a gift for my aunt, and I want a refund. | Dear Michael Kor, I received the bag, but I was annoyed because it was not the bag I wanted. It was a great disappointment since it was a gift for my aunt. Could you give me a refund? I would be happy if you could. |

In situation 1, respondent 15 starts with a negative statement, and the choice of the word “wrong” puts the other party on a different footing. This is followed by a statement of panic about time and the need to get “another” bag in time for the aunt’s birthday. However, after using the app, the word “wrong” is dropped and instead of “unhappy”, the respondent uses the phrase “not happy”, which seems to water down “unhappy”, though, in fact, the crux of the meaning remains the same. The respondent talks about the time factor of the aunt’s birthday in a much – watered-down version. “My aunt’s birthday is *almost* here, so I *hope* ...” (italics by the author). The words “almost” and “hope” show a sense of less urgency and hope for a better future. Respondent 15 goes on with more polite expressions, “so sorry... but hope”, showing the effect of the mobile app. However, this interaction ends firmly – “I hope this will never

happen again”. It may sound firm, but it is not rude. Hence, it can be said that the mobile app was effective in navigating the respondent towards a more polite way of expression, leading to a more harmonious society.

In the same situation, before using the mobile app, respondent 16 ends with a demand for a “refund”. After using the mobile app, respondent 16 ends with a polite expression: “Could you give me a refund? I would be happy if you could...”. The use of hedges softens the person’s tone and shows the impact of the mobile app in navigating the respondent to a more polite way of expressing feelings of disappointment.

Situation 2. You saw an advert about a health product that would help eliminate cholesterol and stabilize blood pressure. Your uncle has problems with cholesterol and blood pressure, and you make an online request for more information on the product.

Table 2. Responses to situation 2

| Respondent | Before | After |
|------------|--|--|
| 18 | This product can help to eliminate cholesterol and stabilize blood pressure. So I want to know more information about the product. So I hope you can help me. | This product can help to eliminate cholesterol and stabilize blood pressure. I would be happy if you could give me more information about this product. Appreciate it if you could help me. |
| 10 | Dear Bio Vit Merchant, I read about the Bio capsules, suitable for my uncle who suffers from cholesterol and blood pressure problems. Can you explain more information about the products? It will be easy for me to make decisions. Thank you. | Dear Bio Vit Merchant, I read about the Bio capsules, suitable for my uncle, who suffers from cholesterol and blood pressure problems. Would you like to explain more information about this product? It would be nice if you could reply to this request. I will appreciate your time and effort. Thank you. |

In situation 2, respondent 18 is more demanding before using the mobile app: “I want to know more about the product”. This changes after the reference to the mobile app to “*I will be happy if you could give me more information about this product*” (italics inserted by the authors). This is another source of feedback to show the impact of the mobile app towards more polite expressions.

In the same situation, respondent ten shows a significant difference in response. Before the use of the app, respondent ten merely portrayed minimal elements of politeness by using ‘can...’ in making a request; however, respondent ten had moved one step ahead in showing appreciation or gratitude to the seller by using phrases such as ‘*It will be nice if you could...*’ and ‘*I will appreciate your time and effort...*’. This online exchange has moved from mere politeness to enhancing cheerful customer–seller relationships.

Situation 3. You purchased four face shields at RM 10 online but mistakenly overpaid via online payment. Instead of RM 40 plus RM 4 for shipping, which totals RM 44, you paid RM 74. You informed the merchant about this, and the merchant replied that the balance of RM 30 would be credited back into your account. It has been more than seven days, and this has not been done. Send the merchant a complaint on this matter.

Table 3. Responses to situation 3

| Respondent | Before | After |
|------------|--|---|
| 18 | I want to ask for a balance of RM 30 as I have mistakenly overpaid via online payment. The merchant already informed me that the balance of RM 30 would be credited back into my account, but nothing had been done. So I hope you can solve this problem. | I have been waiting for over a week to receive a balance of RM 30 as I have mistakenly overpaid via online payment. I was informed that it would be credited back into my account, but this has not been done. I hope that you can resolve this matter. |
| 14 | Hello, I purchased four face shields, but I accidentally overpaid the online payment. I should have paid RM 44, but I paid RM 74. I was informed that the balance would be credited back into my account, but it has been more than seven days, and this has not been done. I hope you can take action soon. | Hello, I purchased four face shields online, but I have mistakenly overpaid the payment. I should have paid RM 44, but I paid RM 74. It upset me greatly that I was informed that the balance of RM 30 would be credited back into my account, but it has been more than seven days, and this has not been done. I hope you can take action soon. |

Respondent 18 demands the excess payment made for purchase before using the mobile app: “I want to ask for a balance of ...”. However, after using the mobile app, this statement transitions to more background to the problem, making the situation more transparent and more polite: “I have been waiting for over a week to receive a balance of RM 30 as I have mistakenly overpaid...”.

Respondent 14 slightly changes his response after using the mobile app, adding the phrase ‘*it upset me greatly that....*’ It is to be highlighted that a slight change as this managed to change the entire tone of the online exchange, from an expression of blaming the seller to one of expressing personal emotions resulting in softening the interaction to a more polite one. Hence, the positive feedback of the mobile app, “WAIT”, fulfils the research objectives. Overall, a few general statements can be made about the mobile app, discussed below.

The results show that the users could use more polite expressions in all three situations after using the mobile app. Politeness affects all communicating parties: For instance, a message’s sender would want the polite attitude he shows through his expressions to be recognized by the receiver. The results also showed that some of the respondents did not use formal grammar in their responses or comments, and neither did they use formal terms of address such as ‘Sir’, ‘Madam’ and so on as Park [41] claims in virtual communication people are generally friendly where social strata are not considered. Additionally, when they do not face each other directly, they tend to be more informal in the setting instead of face-to-face setting. This may be true in other online platforms and not restricted to characterize mobile apps.

People carry their cell phones everywhere, and they are always switched on. Hence users can have access to polite expressions required for their online communication. These expressions can be copied and pasted to other social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Hence, the versatility of this app with a wide range of coverage beyond any and not restricted to any one online platform.

Based on the feedback received from YouTube, as depicted in Figure 7, there were 133 likes and 48 subscribers within the first 14 hours the video was uploaded, as shown below. This shows the app’s attraction for people in such a brief time. This could also

be due to fulfilling their needs in terms of better communication they needed and are lacking in various situations present in the mobile app.

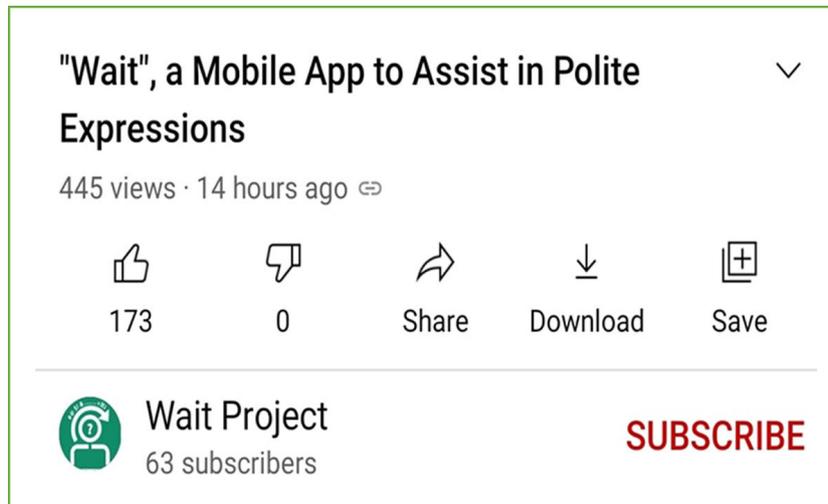


Fig. 7. Feedback from YouTube

4.2 Results for research question 3 and 4

This section presents the responses and feedback received from the users from the survey questionnaire as reported above.

Table 4. Survey results

| No. | Statements | Mean |
|-----|--|------|
| 1. | The app provided access to polite language expressions. | 4.20 |
| 2. | The app helped me manage polite conversation effectively. | 4.24 |
| 3. | The app helped improve my vocabulary. | 5.00 |
| 4. | The app helped improve my grammar accuracy. | 4.80 |
| 5. | The language I used before and after using the app was more or less the same – no difference. | 1.62 |
| 6. | The keywords and phrases helped me begin and end my requests, complaints, and express feelings. | 4.82 |
| 7. | The keywords were a good guide for me while making requests, complaints and expressing feelings. | 4.82 |
| 8. | The instructions were simple and easy to follow | 4.52 |
| 9. | I found the overall language options for all sections useful | 4.00 |
| 10. | I could find suitable language options to fulfil my needs quickly | 3.80 |
| 11. | The process of downloading the app was simple. | 4.80 |
| 12. | The app responds quickly and accurately | 4.60 |
| 13. | The video quality is good | 3.60 |
| 14. | The audio quality is good | 3.80 |
| 15. | The app is versatile, and I can navigate the app easily | 4.20 |

4.3 Discussion of results

Worksheets: Sample 1: Situation 1. Situation 1 is about a handbag ordered by the client for her aunt’s coming birthday. However, the handbag received was not of her choice. Before using the app, the client (student-participant) began the interaction with a negative statement, “You gave me the ‘wrong handbag’”. When one receives an opening remark that is negative, it puts the receiving party in an uncomfortable position and, a response to that could be defensive, aggressive or fearful. In answering research question 1, an assessment of the online response before using the mobile app showed a negative opening.

In answering research question 2, after using the mobile app, the client (student-participant) responded less antagonistically and expressed feelings. Hence, two themes overlapped in the response, that it showed up the theme of less harmful statements while expressing positive feelings. “Depressed” expresses feelings that cushions the original “You gave me the wrong handbag”. In the second instance, the chances of receiving a sympathetic or listening ear would be more significant. Hence, the investigation of responses after using the mobile app shows better responses that help answer research questions three and four. In answering research question three on the evaluation of the mobile app, it has helped in bringing more polite and proper online expressions, which in turn answer research question four, which is that the mobile app helps create and build a harmonious society by using such polite expressions. From this level, such behaviours develop and help build a harmonious society.

It should also be noted that some themes overlap and are not confined to watertight compartments. The “after” responses found above connect with the theme of less harmful statements and the expression of feelings. This is so that the client (student-participant) can express her feelings due to the mismatch between the bag ordered and the one received. This is important as expressing feelings appropriately enable others to understand a situation better.

Another theme that cropped up was that of being apologetic. Student 15 expressed her apologies that such a mismatch of the bags had taken place, “I am so sorry...”. This shows that after using the mobile app, the client was more polite, hence answering research question two, which also connects to research questions three and four where the evaluation of the mobile app shows how effective it is in bringing about more polite online expressions as seen in the description.

The theme of modals is seen in both situations, before and after using the mobile app but with more modals after using the app. The use of modals helps to make a request polite. Hence, greater use of modals is an indicator of more polite communication. There is an overlap of this theme with polite requests, and both themes seem to have merged. “Could you give me a refund” has been categorized by the researchers as both polite requests and the use of modals? This answers research question two. This response occurs after using the mobile app, while the response before using the mobile app was “I want a refund”. In answering research question one, the researchers have assessed this response under the theme of “demanding”. The rephrase after the mobile app helps answer research questions three and four in that the mobile app has been evaluated as acting as a platform to bring in more polite and appropriate online

expressions, leading to research question four of helping to create and build a more harmonious society.

Worksheets: Sample 2: Situation 2. Situation 2 is about a client interested in knowing more about a health product he came across online. He thinks that the product may be able to help his uncle as the product claims to cure a similar condition that his uncle is experiencing. The client writes into the supplier, requesting further information. Before using the app, the client (student-participant) began the interaction with a direct statement, “I want to know more about the product you sell”. The intent seems to come across clear and straight to the point. However, it seems like demand and can be conceived by the other party as rude since there is no face-to-face view of the persons in communication. It is quite possible that the recipient may feel agitated and respond with agitation in his words and tone. In answering research question 1, an assessment of the online response before the use of the mobile app showed a response that was considered polite and lacked a more pleasant way of beginning the communication.

However, after using the WAIT App, there seem to be changes because it appears to be a request instead of a “demand”. Instead of making a demand, the request is made – ‘I want to know more about the product’. After using the app, the modal ‘would’ insertion sees the request. ‘I would like to know more about this product’. Although the message is equally short and straight to the point, the message is seen from a softer perspective, as in a request. The insertion of just a word makes a difference. This would more likely result in a more positive response from the supplier. This finding shows how proper communication can obtain what is required, elicit positive responses, and prevent negative feedback. Hence, this assists in building a harmonious society. After using the mobile app, the investigation of responses helped answer research questions three and four. In answering research question three on the evaluation of the mobile app, it has helped in bringing about more polite and proper online expressions, which in turn answers research question four, which is the mobile app helps in creating and building a harmonious society by the inclusion of such polite expressions, online.

Notably, the theme of using ‘modals’ in turning demands/accusations into more polite and inviting requests of more positive and enthusiastic feedback/information. This is important in online communication, where people do not see each other face to face.

Nevertheless, another sample highlighted in situation 2 is when the client says that ‘I will be happy if you could give me more information about this product’ instead of ‘So I want to know more information about the product’. In this case, the client does not only politely request information, but the client also goes a step further and readily expresses his joy or gratitude for the information he is yet to receive by saying that he would be happy to receive it. In this case, it is essential to note that this expression of positive feelings is more likely to meet with a favourable response than mere information exchange, whereby no emotions are displayed.

Notable was the theme of expressing positive emotions and feelings, which added to the other party’s enthusiasm to respond similarly. Hence, this assists in building a harmonious society. After using the mobile app, the investigation of responses helped answer research questions three and four. In answering research question three on the evaluation of the mobile app, it has helped bring about more polite and positively

charged feelings online. This, in turn, answers research question four, which is that the mobile app helps create and build a harmonious society by including such positive feelings online.

Besides that, other apparent themes in the response production were the expression of appreciation and concluding remarks. Clients 16 and 7 initially had no appreciation remarks. However, after using the app, these clients realized a need to include a message of appreciation. Client 7 even went a step further where the message of appreciation appeared twice in the message. Client 10, who had initially included a Thank you at the end of the message, managed to apply a more heartfelt appreciation. It is essential to highlight that expressing gratitude helps a person recognize the effort on the part of the other party who is unseen in online communication. Besides that, a concluding remark initially missing in clients 15 and 16's messages were included after using the app. The initial message ended abruptly, but after using the app, clients included concluding remarks such as 'I hope that this will make my uncle happy' and 'I am waiting for your...'. This addition helps add the human touch, with a hopeful note of more future interactions. This is often missing in online communication creating abrupt situations and less room for further communication.

Hence the theme of expressing appreciation and a hopeful concluding statement. Once again, this theme overlaps with the expression of happy feelings in that it inspires further communication. In both these themes, it was noted that minor changes to the message made a vast difference to the initial or 'before using the app' response.

To summarise, he assists in building a harmonious society. After using the mobile app, the investigation of responses helped answer research questions three and four. In answering research question three on the evaluation of the mobile app, it has helped bring about more polite and positively changed communication online. This, in turn, answers research question four, which is that the mobile app helps create and build a harmonious society by including such hopeful and polite remarks online.

Worksheets: Sample 3: Situation 3. Situation 3 is about an online purchase that went wrong. The client who had overpaid was promised that his money would be refunded. After the stipulated period, however, the money was not returned. The client is upset that his money was not returned within the stipulated period and writes in to complain about the matter. Before using the app, the client (student-participant) began the interaction with a negative statement, "I hope you can be the honest person, and if the balance still did not show up, I will make a police report". The statement accuses the supplier of being dishonest, but the client also goes a step further by threatening the supplier by saying that he would lodge a police report. With this message, it is natural to expect the supplier to react defensively rather than look for solutions for the issue at hand.

However, after using the WAIT app, the negativity in the statements reduced significantly. The client did not accuse or threaten the supplier. Instead, his statement began to switch focus to himself and his feelings. The Client expresses his worry about losing his money and says, 'I do not want to lose the money. besides that, the client also goes a step further by ending the conversation on a more civil note, stating his hope for a solution on the matter shortly. 'I hope you can proceed with my balance immediately'. With a more civil message, it is more likely that the supplier responds appropriately and strives to satisfy the customer.

In answering research question 2, after using the ‘WAIT’ mobile app, the client responded in a less harmful manner and turned the focus to his disappointment and feelings. As shown in the results, two themes overlapped in the response, where it showed the theme of being less damaging (threatening etc.) while expressing feelings. “I do not want to lose the money” expresses feelings of justified fear, which cushions the original – “I hope you can be the honest person, and if the balance still did not show up, I will make a police report”. The second part of the response, “I hope you can proceed my balance immediately”, showed modal verbs, making the statement polite and hopeful, far from accusing and lodging a police report. Thus, the use of models reflects more polite expressions.

The chances of receiving a sympathetic or listening ear would be more significant in the second instance after using the mobile app. After using the mobile app, the results show more positive and polite expressions, which help answer research questions three and four. In answering research question three on the evaluation of the mobile app, it has helped in bringing more polite and appropriate online expressions. In answering research question four, the use of polite expressions available in the mobile app helps create and build a harmonious society.

Additionally, it was noted that most clients moved directly into the complaint without any thought of the person reading the message. However, the data analysis after using the WAIT app saw some themes that could cushion the harsh impact of a complaint. Firstly, greetings. A simple greeting helps the supplier sense that he is being addressed and respected instead of a blatant complaint. Besides that, clients provided solutions to solve the problem. This would give more opportunities for both parties to come to a compromise as it seeks to solve the problem and not attack, accuse, or blame the other party. Besides that, there were other ways of softening the complaint by excusing oneself from the disruption caused even before moving to the main content of the complaint. Client 9, for instance, says, ‘Excuse me, I am sorry to say this, but where is my balance.’ Here, it is essential to note that this cushioning of a short message goes a long way in producing positive responses and building long term relationships. In this case, the client-supplier relationship can be restored through a firm request.

The five-point Likert scale questionnaire administered to the students further confirmed the student’s text analysis results. The mean score for clients (student-participants) who agreed that the language they used before using the app was not polite was a 4.2 out of 5, and those who agreed that their communication before the app was quick and abrupt was a 4.24. Clients who agreed that the language used after the app was more polite was a five, while the mean score for clients who agreed that the language they used after using the app was more thoughtful and detailed scored a 4.8. However, the mean score for clients who agreed that the language they used before and after the app was the same was 1.62. The questionnaire results confirmed that clients noticed a drastic improvement in polite expressions.

Still, within the language aspect, clients agreed that the words and phrases provided in the app helped them to begin and end their requests, complaints, and express feelings scored a mean of 4.82, while those who agreed that the keywords were a good guide for them while making requests, complaints and expressing feelings, the score was 4.82. Clients who agreed that the rubrics were simple and easy to follow scored a 4.52. Clients who agreed that they found the overall language options for all sections applicable

scored a 4.0, while those who agreed that they could find suitable language options to fulfil “my” needs quickly scored a 3.8. The results also showed that the app fulfilled the clients’ language needs as clients scored a mean of 4.6 to agree that they could find suitable language options to fulfil their needs quickly. This clarifies that in terms of language, the app helped clients express themselves more effectively through the samples given this was further enhanced as clients were able to do this quickly and easily.

As this research revolves around devising an app, it was important for the researchers to put thought into the details of the technical aspects. This was to ensure that users could use and navigate the app with minimal guidance and with ease. Overall, the mean score given by clients who agreed that the process of downloading the app was simple was 4.8. The mean score for clients who found that the app responded quickly and accurately was 4.6. Clients who found a good video and audio quality scored a 3.6 and 3.8, respectively.

Overall, clients who found the app versatile and navigated the app quickly scored a 4.2. This showed good feedback in terms of the technical aspects of an app. Added to this was their response that the process of downloading it and navigating through it was simple and had a reasonable response rate. However, responses to the questionnaire suggested that the video and audio qualities could be improved to get a good experience. However, it seemed that clients were satisfied with the app’s versatility. This was probably because they could copy the words and phrases by just touching the phrase they needed and then paste it onto other apps or documents needed.

5 Contributions and pedagogical implications

The wait app is a simple app with no futuristic features. However, its contribution in several aspects seems significant. Firstly, the app’s aim in bringing about a more polite and civil society was evident. It is clear that before using the app, no thought had been put into making the message more amicable, polite or civil. The client’s only aim was to deliver the message and meet his needs. WAIT managed to realize the need to be civil, especially in online communication. This has helped the clients to move one step back to rephrase their message before sending it out, resulting in many steps forward in terms of fostering better and more harmonious relationships and greater positive output in terms of needs met on a continuing plane, which worked both ways – from the sender and the receiver of messages.

Besides merely bringing about the realization of the need to be polite, the app has also provided clients choices of various parts of the message and the necessary vocabulary to help them in phrasing the message successfully. The linguistic aid was necessary, especially in the Malaysian context, where English is the second language. In settings such as these, the WAIT app is most relevant as language exchanges can quickly go wrong, and the consequences could be vast and irreparable.

In education, the waiting app can be used as a powerful tool in teaching daily conversational language to students. The linguistic forms introduced to students via the medium of a mobile app would undoubtedly gain students’ interest and find their place in the world of education. Today, students are more inclined to learn in mediums such as this. Textbooks, notes, and traditional forms of learning are no longer impressive

or engaging to today’s young people. Digital competence is crucial to become global citizens.

Besides, this app serves as a sample of how technology can aid in bringing about linguistic competence. This app serves as a steppingstone for future development of linguistic apps, especially in terms of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), whereby an app could be created to cater to the needs of people from different fields who require linguistic competencies in their specific area.

6 Limitations and recommendations

There are, however, several limitations in this study, and it is hoped that these limitations can be addressed in future research. The limitation of the study is that the content of the mobile app “WAIT” focuses on only three situations in using polite expressions. These include expressing feelings more appropriately, making requests, and responding to complaints. Additionally, Android Version 8 and above users can use the mobile app only at the current period, limiting users’ coverage. It is hoped that both versions will be made compatible and available.

Besides, the app currently merely has limited keywords and phrases for language expressions in limited contexts. More is required for effective and polite communication on online websites. In future, the WAIT app hopes to include a dictionary corpus so that a complete range of language could be utilized. This will make proper language readily available to all the various fields making communication online more pleasant, subsequently building a more harmonious society. Here it needs to be pointed out that this would be a better paper if it did look at the research impact on the community after the widespread use of the app. It is also recommended that when developing mobile apps for language learning, all stakeholders be considered, such as app developers, ELT experts and end-users. Some language apps developed are not suitable pedagogically [29] as non-experts develop them in ELT. Developers focus on creating educational apps that focus on Mathematics and literacy. This ‘WAIT’ app extends beyond the boundaries of literacy to polite expressions [24] and has been developed by ELT experts, fulfilling part of the criteria suggested in research. In future, developers of language apps should also plan to create off-line mobile apps to help students who have issues with internet connectivity. This would be a great innovation, especially for marginalized groups.

The ‘WAIT’ app is an app by itself and referring to it may require a user to switch from one app to the other. However, the primary intent of this research is to make it an integral part of any media or website, so that polite language is easily accessible with just a click when needed.

7 Conclusion

An overview of this study can be seen as a significant change in online interactions after using the app. Even though the exchanges were far more polite after using the app, it cannot be denied that challenges did exist and surface.

When getting participants to respond to situations before using the app, they were eager as the carrot was the chance to use the app. After using the app, when the participants were asked to fill the survey questions, they were reluctant as they were not keen on having to write responses again, having experienced and enjoyed the app. This is a human trait, so the researchers must find a way to draw the participants into responding “after” using the app more enthusiastically.

Notably, the greater use of ‘modals’ made the interactions “gentler” and more polite. The use of ‘modals softened demands’. Seeing this was an achievement and a success of the app as this was one of the prime reasons the researchers devised this app. To encourage and nurture more polite online interactions.

Apart from this, participants wrote “more” after using the app. Whatever was abrupt was expanded upon to make it more pleasant and with greater detail. Introductions and conclusions were added to give the interaction a beginning, middle and neat ending, making it more wholesome. A drastic increase in the number of words was also seen in the language aspect, which helped to supply a more comprehensive and more precise picture of the event. This could be since respondents were more aware of their need to give more detail and be civil in their exchanges. Besides, it was seen that respondents could better phrase their sentences. This makes it clear that the Wait app did help these respondents be more thoughtful when making a complaint (especially) and provided them with the proper language to express themselves appropriately. Overall, clients (student-participant) admitted that the app did help them in terms of incorporating polite expressions and improving language (vocabulary, language accuracy and their ability to write).

All these were signs that the app successfully achieved the researchers’ objectives: Firstly, the app was assessed from the participants’ responses. Secondly, the objective was to investigate participants’ responses after using the app. Both these results are reported above. The assessment was positive. The third and fourth aims are connected to more polite expressions, resulting in a more harmonious society.

Hence, the task feedback supported the responses to the survey situations given – whereby participants responded to three situations before and after using the app. The survey questionnaire responses triangulated data from the task situations and helped solidify the answers to the research questions. The second aim was to investigate participants’ responses after using the app. Responses from the survey questionnaire triangulated findings from the task situations: their responses were more polite after using the app, and the app’s assessment was positive. The third and fourth objectives are connected to more polite expressions and better language usage, resulting in a more harmonious society.

To conclude, it is essential to be polite to be a competent speaker as politeness is an essential component that is not often given sufficient priority in gauging competence. This is to avoid misunderstandings as impolite and aggressive talk may result in conflicts caused by different impressions on the hearers [42]. In virtual communication, what matters is what is communicated and not who is communicating [43–44]. Hence using correct, polite expressions is essential. During challenging times, an innovative language app such as ‘WAIT’ is deemed of great importance to fill the gap of impoliteness and assist in polite, better and more effective online communication – with just a click of a button, using smart mobile technologies [45]. This brings together the

finer points of minding one’s language with ease, comprising politeness, etiquette, and empathy. This study showed that this mobile app is a useful language app that can provide instant information and relief to users to say the right things under various circumstances. Briefly, one of the strengths of this app is to communicate politely online with others and, in so doing, be a partner in developing and building a harmonious society.

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Article submitted 2021-09-29. Resubmitted 2022-01-25. Final acceptance 2022-03-19. Final version published as submitted by the authors.