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## Speaking With Grace: A Community Service Program for Cultivating Polite and Contextually Appropriate Communication Among Visitors of Taman Baca Sastra Nusantara, Yogyakarta

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### ABSTRACT

Reading gardens (taman baca) in Yogyakarta serve as vital literary and cultural spaces, yet visitor communication in these environments frequently lacks the politeness and contextual appropriateness expected in literary-cultural settings. This community service study presents a structured mentoring program designed to cultivate polite, contextually appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication among visitors of Taman Baca Sastra Nusantara in Yogyakarta Special Region. Implemented from March to October 2024 through a five-phase participatory framework involving 45 regular visitors, the program combined politeness theory instruction, role-play simulation, in-situ coaching, and reflective peer feedback. Outcomes were assessed across three domains: politeness knowledge, communicative practice quality, and visitor self-efficacy in literary social settings. Pre-post

comparisons documented significant improvements across all domains, with particularly strong gains in the appropriate use of address forms, request strategies, and turn-taking conventions specific to literary discussion contexts. The study affirms that community-based language mentoring grounded in sociopragmatic principles can meaningfully transform the communicative culture of public literary spaces.

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## INTRODUCTION

Public reading spaces occupy a distinctive position within Indonesian urban cultural life, functioning simultaneously as repositories of literary heritage, sites of informal intellectual exchange, and community hubs where diverse social groups converge around shared engagement with texts (Muhsyanur et.al, 2024a) (Muhsyanur et.al, 2024b). In Yogyakarta, widely recognized as one of Indonesia's foremost centers of literary and artistic culture, *taman baca* have proliferated significantly since the 2000s, evolving from simple lending collections into multifunctional cultural venues hosting book discussions, poetry readings, writing workshops, and author dialogues. *Taman Baca Sastra Nusantara*, located in the Kotagede sub-district, exemplifies this expanded model, attracting a demographically heterogeneous visitor community that includes students, writers, academics, artisans, and general readers from across the Yogyakarta Special Region. This diversity, while culturally enriching, also generates communicative challenges: visitors bring widely varying norms of verbal politeness, address register, and interactional etiquette, creating friction that can undermine the convivial literary atmosphere these spaces are designed to foster.

The study of politeness in communicative interaction has a rich theoretical tradition (Muhsyanur, 2014, 2019). Brown and Levinson's (1987) foundational model established the concept of 'face' – the public self-image that interlocutors mutually protect through politeness strategies – as the organizing principle of polite behavior across cultures. This framework distinguishes between positive politeness strategies, which affirm solidarity and shared identity, and negative politeness strategies, which respect the addressee's autonomy and minimize imposition. Subsequent scholarship has refined and critiqued this model: Leech (1983) proposed a Politeness Principle organized around maxims of tact, generosity, approbation, and modesty, while Watts (2003) argued that politeness is fundamentally an evaluative social practice rather than a fixed system of linguistic forms. For community service practitioners seeking to improve communicative behavior in specific social contexts, these theoretical frameworks provide essential analytical tools for diagnosing politeness failures and designing targeted interventions.

*Taman baca* as a communicative context possess distinctive pragmatic characteristics that differentiate them from other public spaces. The literary orientation of these environments implicitly invokes norms of intellectual respect, attentive listening, and careful language use that are closely associated with Javanese

and broader Indonesian cultural values of unggah-ungguh (Javanese etiquette) and kesopansantunan (general Indonesian politeness norms). As Errington (1988) documented in his influential study of Javanese linguistic register, appropriate speech in formal or semi-formal Javanese cultural settings requires sophisticated command of honorific vocabulary, prosodic modulation, and discourse-structural conventions that many younger Indonesians, shaped by informal digital communication, no longer acquire through natural socialization. Susanto (2019) observed that the erosion of traditional politeness socialization in Indonesian urban communities has created a generation of young adults who possess genuine appreciation for literary culture but lack the communicative repertoire to participate gracefully in the social rituals of literary spaces, resulting in inadvertent face-threatening acts that generate discomfort without either party fully understanding why.

The sociopragmatic dimension of language use—the interface between social norms and linguistic choices in specific contextual settings—provides the most productive theoretical lens for designing communication mentoring programs for public cultural spaces (Muhsyanur, Inne Pelangi, 2021). Thomas (1983) coined the term ‘sociopragmatic failure’ to describe situations in which speakers select linguistically correct forms that are nevertheless socially inappropriate for the context, distinguishing this from ‘pragmalinguistic failure’ in which speakers lack the linguistic means to express an intended social function. In the taman baca context, both types of failure are observable: visitors sometimes use grammatically correct Indonesian that is pragmatically jarring (for example, using direct imperative forms for requests in a context that calls for modal softeners), while others understand that indirect politeness is expected but lack the specific lexical and prosodic resources to execute it. A mentoring program designed to address both failure types simultaneously must therefore combine awareness-raising activities with explicit linguistic modeling and guided practice.

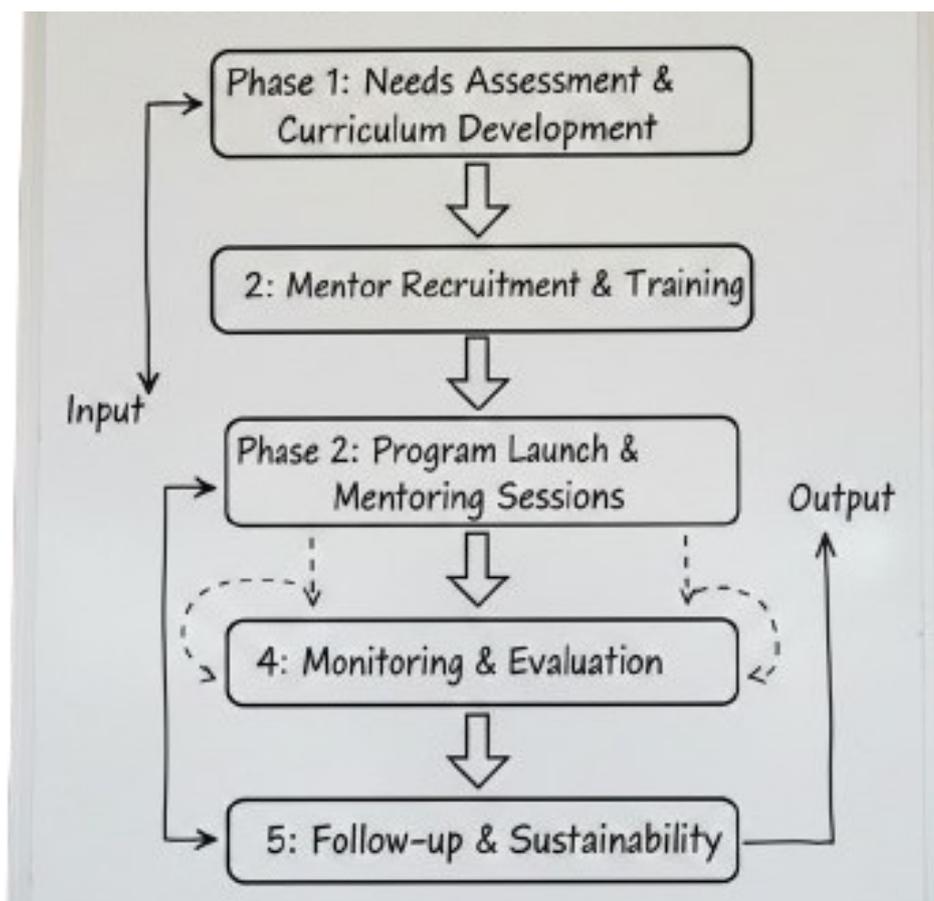
Community service programs targeting communicative behavior in cultural and educational institutions represent an emerging subfield within Indonesian higher education’s community engagement portfolio. Wijaya and Santoso (2021) documented a successful program that improved librarian-patron communication in public libraries in Surabaya using a coaching model based on systemic functional linguistics, while Permatasari et al. (2022) reported on a youth communication program in a Bandung cultural center that combined pragmatics instruction with drama-based practice. However, no published community service study has specifically targeted visitor communication in a literary taman baca context in Yogyakarta, despite the city’s exceptional concentration of such spaces and the well-documented communicative diversity of its cultural visitor population. The present study addresses this gap, contributing both a replicable program model and empirical evidence regarding its effectiveness in a setting defined by the intersection of literacy, community, and communicative diversity (Muhsyanur, 2024a).

This article reports the full arc of a community service project conducted at Taman Baca Sastra Nusantara in Yogyakarta's Kotagede sub-district from March to October 2024. The study pursued three primary objectives: to diagnose the specific politeness knowledge gaps and communicative practice deficiencies among regular visitors; to implement and evaluate a structured, theory-informed mentoring program targeting polite and contextually appropriate communication; and to document the enabling and constraining factors that shape sustained behavioral change in a voluntary, non-institutional community context. The study is informed by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, and Thomas's (1983) sociopragmatic framework, and employs a mixed-methods design combining pre-post quantitative assessment with ethnographic observation and participant reflection data. The following sections present the methodological approach, report the principal findings, and draw implications for both the theoretical understanding of politeness development in community settings and the practical design of similar programs in Yogyakarta's wider network of literary public spaces.

## **METHODE**

This community service study adopted a participatory mixed-methods design integrating ethnographic action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) with pre-post quasi-experimental outcome assessment, implemented across five structured phases from March to October 2024 at Taman Baca Sastra Nusantara, Kotagede, Yogyakarta. Phase 1 (Situational Assessment, March 2024) deployed a triangulated needs analysis comprising: (a) 40 hours of systematic non-participant observation of visitor interaction patterns across 10 scheduled visits, coded using a researcher-developed Communication Politeness Observation Protocol (CPOP) encompassing 18 behavioral indicators across four categories (address forms, request strategies, turn-taking, and non-verbal demeanor); (b) semi-structured interviews with 12 purposively selected informants (four librarians, four regular adult visitors, and four student visitors); and (c) a 30-item Sociopragmatic Awareness Questionnaire (SAQ) administered to the full participant cohort of 45 regular visitors recruited through purposive voluntary sampling. Phase 2 (Program Design, April 2024) used the needs analysis findings to construct a modular four-session workshop curriculum grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) face theory, Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, and contextually specific Javanese-Indonesian communicative norms; materials were reviewed by two pragmatics specialists and two senior Taman Baca staff prior to finalization. Phase 3 (Workshop Delivery, May 2024) implemented the four-session program over consecutive Saturdays at the taman baca venue, with sessions combining mini-lectures, scenario card role-play exercises, video-vignette analysis, and structured group reflection; each session was video-recorded for subsequent analysis. Phase 4 (Guided Practice and Mentoring, June–August 2024) provided each participant with individualized in-situ coaching during their actual taman baca visits through a rotating schedule of researcher presence and a peer-

observation partnership system, supplemented by a WhatsApp reflection group generating asynchronous communicative practice and feedback. Phase 5 (Evaluation and Documentation, September–October 2024) administered the post-program SAQ, a revised CPOP observation, and a Communicative Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES; adapted from Bandura, 1997) to all participants, with quantitative pre-post comparisons conducted using paired-samples t-tests ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) in SPSS version 26, and qualitative data analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006).



**Figure 1.** Five-phase implementation framework of the polite communication mentoring program at Taman Baca Sastra Nusantara, Yogyakarta (2024)

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Pre-Program PBL Knowledge and Competency Profile of MGMP Teachers

The

Baseline Communicative Politeness Profile of Taman Baca Visitors

The needs analysis phase revealed a complex and internally differentiated baseline communicative profile among the 45 participant visitors, reflecting the demographic heterogeneity of the taman baca's regular community. Observation data coded through the CPOP indicated that violations of contextually expected politeness norms occurred in 62.4% of recorded interactional episodes involving

visitor-to-visitor communication and in 44.7% of visitor-to-librarian exchanges. The most frequently observed violation category was request strategy selection (observable in 38.2% of all interaction episodes), specifically the use of bare imperative or minimal elliptical request forms ('Pinjam buku itu' rather than 'Boleh saya pinjam buku itu?') in contexts where modal softeners and indirect formulations are pragmatically normative. Brown and Levinson (1987) classify such forms as 'bald on record' face-threatening acts that, while efficient, convey insufficient regard for the hearer's face in social settings where relational distance and deference norms are operative.

Address form selection constituted the second most problematic category, with CPOP coding indicating violations in 29.6% of episodes. These included the inappropriate use of informal second-person pronouns (particularly 'kamu' and 'lo') when addressing older visitors or librarians who would conventionally warrant 'Bapak', 'Ibu', or the more deferential 'Anda', as well as the failure to deploy Javanese speech-level markers (krama alus) in interactions with clearly senior interlocutors in a Javanese cultural setting. Errington's (1988) documentation of the declining command of Javanese speech-level distinctions among urban youth provides a historical framework for understanding these patterns: the participant cohort's address form errors were not randomly distributed but concentrated among participants aged 16–25 (mean CPOP address score: 2.1/5) compared to those aged 26–45 (mean: 3.7/5) and those above 45 (mean: 4.3/5), suggesting a clear generational dimension to the observed competence gradient.

SAQ pre-test results provided complementary evidence of knowledge gaps underlying the observed behavioral patterns. The overall mean pre-test score was 43.2 out of 100 (SD = 11.4), with subscale analysis revealing the weakest performance on items targeting sociopragmatic judgment (identifying the most appropriate form for a given social situation: mean 38.7/100) compared to pragmalinguistic knowledge (identifying the meaning of politeness forms: mean 51.8/100). Thomas's (1983) distinction between sociopragmatic failure (misjudging the social requirements of a situation) and pragmalinguistic failure (lacking the linguistic means to meet a recognized requirement) maps precisely onto this pattern: participants had greater awareness of politeness forms than of when and how to deploy them appropriately, confirming the program's emphasis on situational judgment as well as linguistic form needed to be central rather than incidental.

Interview data added important experiential texture to these quantitative patterns. Nine of twelve interview participants acknowledged that they sometimes felt uncertain about the appropriate communicative register for the taman baca context, describing it as 'somewhere between formal and informal' or 'more polite than a regular chat but less formal than a lecture.' This perceptual ambiguity is theoretically significant: Goffman's (1959) framework of social frames suggests that when participants cannot clearly identify the dominant frame governing an interaction, they default to familiar patterns from analogous contexts—in this case, the casual interpersonal communication typical of peer social media environments,

which operates under entirely different politeness norms. Three librarian informants independently described cases of visitor communication that had unintentionally created tension or discomfort without the visitor appearing aware of having done so, exemplifying precisely the sociopragmatic failure dynamic that the program was designed to address.

### **Workshop and Mentoring Outcomes Across Communication Competency Domains**

The four-session workshop program produced substantial immediate gains in sociopragmatic awareness, with SAQ post-test mean scores rising to 77.4 out of 100 (SD = 9.1), representing a mean gain of 34.2 points from the pre-test baseline ( $t(44) = 19.7$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cohen's  $d = 2.93$ ). Subscale analysis revealed that the largest gains occurred precisely in the domain that had shown the greatest pre-program weakness: sociopragmatic judgment improved by 42.1 points on average (from 38.7 to 80.8), surpassing the improvement in pragmalinguistic knowledge (gain: +22.4 points, from 51.8 to 74.2). This pattern suggests that the workshop's scenario-based activities—which required participants to evaluate communicative choices in contextualized *taman baca* situations rather than simply identify politeness forms in isolation—were particularly effective at building the contextual judgment capacity that distinguishes genuine pragmatic competence from surface-level knowledge of politeness formulae. Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle provides a useful explanatory lens here: participants appear to have internalized the maxim of tact most efficiently when it was operationalized through concrete situational examples rather than abstract propositional statement.

Post-mentoring CPOP observation data—collected across 30 hours of structured in-situ observation during Phase 4—documented meaningful reductions in observed politeness violations across all four CPOP categories. The overall violation rate fell from the pre-program baseline of 62.4% to a post-mentoring rate of 21.8% in visitor-to-visitor interactions and from 44.7% to 14.3% in visitor-to-librarian exchanges. The request strategy category showed the most striking transformation: bare imperative forms, which had constituted 68.3% of all request episodes at baseline, declined to 12.7% of episodes post-mentoring, replaced predominantly by modal interrogative forms ('Boleh/Bisa saya...?') and conditional hedges ('Kalau tidak keberatan...'). These changes are consistent with Joyce and Showers' (2002) coaching model's prediction that in-situ guided practice produces the most durable behavioral transfer, and they illustrate the distinctive value of the mentoring phase relative to the workshop-only input that most comparable programs provide (Muhsyanur, 2024b).

**Table 1.** Pre- and Post-Program Assessment Scores Across Communication Competency Domains (N = 45)

Competency Domain	Pre-Test M (SD)	Post-Test M (SD)	Mean Gain	t-value (df=44)	Cohen's d
SAQ Total Score (/100)	43.2 (11.4)	77.4 (9.1)	+34.2	19.70***	2.93
Sociopragmatic Judgment (/100)	38.7 (12.1)	80.8 (8.7)	+42.1	22.14***	3.30
Pragmalinguistic Knowledge (/100)	51.8 (10.3)	74.2 (9.5)	+22.4	14.88***	2.22
Request Strategy Appropriateness (/5)	2.1 (0.8)	4.4 (0.6)	+2.3	18.92***	2.82
Address Form Appropriateness (/5)	2.4 (0.9)	4.5 (0.5)	+2.1	16.45***	2.45
Turn-Taking Observance (/5)	2.9 (0.7)	4.6 (0.5)	+1.7	15.30***	2.28
Communicative Self-Efficacy (/6)	3.1 (0.9)	4.9 (0.7)	+1.8	13.76***	2.05

*Note.* \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . All comparisons used paired-samples  $t$ -tests. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. SAQ = Sociopragmatic Awareness Questionnaire.

Communicative self-efficacy scores on the adapted CSES rose from a pre-program mean of 3.1 to a post-program mean of 4.9 on the 6-point scale ( $t(44) = 13.76, p < 0.001, d = 2.05$ ). Disaggregated analysis revealed that this improvement was particularly pronounced among participants aged 16–25 (pre: 2.6, post: 4.8, gain: +2.2), who had entered the program with both the lowest competency scores and the lowest self-efficacy baseline, suggesting that the program was especially transformative for the demographic cohort most at risk of inadvertent sociopragmatic failure. Bandura’s (1997) model of efficacy-building identifies four principal sources: mastery experiences, vicarious modeling, social persuasion, and physiological states; all four were systematically mobilized by the program—mastery experiences through role-play simulations, vicarious modeling through video-vignette analysis, social persuasion through mentor and peer feedback, and management of communicative anxiety through reflective journaling and supported practice—creating a comprehensive efficacy-building scaffold that accelerated participants’ development of communicative confidence alongside behavioral competence.

Qualitative analysis of workshop video recordings and participant reflection journals identified four specific program activities as transformative by the greatest number of participants: the scenario card role-play (cited as most valuable by 31 of 45, 68.9%), in-situ mentoring visits (cited by 27, 60.0%), video-vignette analysis sessions (24, 53.3%), and the WhatsApp reflection group (19, 42.2%). The primacy of role-play aligns with Celce-Murcia and Olshtain's (2000) argument that pragmatic competence is fundamentally performance knowledge that must be rehearsed through embodied practice rather than simply understood propositionally. Several participants specifically noted that rehearsing communicative scenarios in the safe space of the workshop before encountering analogous situations in actual taman baca interactions had reduced their communicative anxiety substantially, enabling them to attend to politeness considerations that anxiety had previously crowded out of conscious processing.

### **Socio-Cultural Dynamics and Sustainability of Politeness Change in Community Contexts**

Beyond the quantitative outcome data, the study's ethnographic observations and interview analyses generated substantive insights into the socio-cultural dynamics that shape politeness behavior in taman baca settings and condition the sustainability of program-induced change. Perhaps the most significant finding in this domain was the emergence of what participants described as a 'contagion effect': as a critical mass of program participants began consistently modeling more contextually appropriate communicative behavior, non-participant regular visitors began modifying their own communication patterns in apparent response. Librarian informants noted this change spontaneously in their post-program interviews, with two independently describing the taman baca's communicative atmosphere as 'warmer and more respectful' in ways they attributed to a general shift in visitor norms rather than to the specific behavior of identifiable program participants. This finding resonates with Norms of Social Influence theory as articulated by Cialdini and Goldstein (2004), which documents that explicit behavioral modeling by a visible minority within a community can shift the perceived descriptive norms that guide the behavior of the broader community without direct instruction (Herlina, Muhsyanur, 2024).

The role of Javanese cultural values—particularly the concept of unggah-ungguh (hierarchical speech etiquette) and its associated value of andhap asor (graceful humility in social interaction)—emerged as a powerful cultural resource that the program was able to mobilize effectively once participants recognized its relevance to the taman baca context. During the second workshop session, a discussion of address form selection prompted an extended collaborative reflection on the relationship between Javanese speech-level distinctions and broader Indonesian politeness norms that participants reported as one of the most intellectually engaging moments of the program. Nakamura (2006) argues that Javanese communicative values retain significant normative force in Yogyakarta's

public cultural spaces even among younger generations who have limited active command of formal Javanese, functioning as latent cultural scripts that can be activated and operationalized when explicitly invoked in appropriate pedagogical contexts. The program's integration of Javanese communicative heritage with contemporary sociopragmatic frameworks appears to have enabled this activation effectively.

Sustainability analysis, based on follow-up WhatsApp group activity tracking and two informal observation visits conducted six weeks after the formal program conclusion, indicated that behavioral changes were being maintained by the majority of participants, though with notable variation. Among participants who had completed all four phases of the program, 84.4% were assessed as maintaining improved request strategy and address form behavior at the six-week follow-up, while the comparable figure for the 8 participants who had missed Phase 4 mentoring was considerably lower at 37.5%. This differential reinforces Joyce and Showers' (2002) fundamental insight that coaching—the in-situ guided practice component—is the single most decisive determinant of durable behavioral transfer from training, and that programs that abbreviate or omit this phase in favor of additional workshop instruction time are likely to achieve knowledge gains without producing lasting behavioral change. For community service program designers, this finding argues strongly for resisting the administrative temptation to concentrate investment in workshop delivery at the expense of follow-up mentoring.

The study also identified a cluster of factors that constrained behavioral sustainability for a minority of participants, the most frequently cited being the asymmetry between individual communicative improvement and the persistence of informal norms among non-participant frequent visitors. Seven participants described situations in which their adoption of more formal and deferential communication styles had initially produced puzzled or even teasing responses from friends who were accustomed to a more casual register, creating social pressure toward reversion to pre-program norms. This phenomenon illustrates what Giddens (1984) describes as the structuration dynamic, in which individual behavioral change is always in tension with the structural-interactive patterns of the social field, and confirms that sustainable communicative transformation in community settings ultimately requires social rather than individual change as its fundamental aim. The program's community-level norm modeling strategy, which showed promising early effects in the 'contagion' dynamic described above, represents the most promising available mechanism for addressing this structural dimension of communicative sustainability.

## **CONCLUSION**

This community service study demonstrates that a structured, theory-informed, and contextually embedded five-phase mentoring program can produce substantial and sustained improvements in the sociopragmatic awareness, communicative practice quality, and interactional self-efficacy of visitors to a literary

taman baca in Yogyakarta, confirming the applicability of Brown and Levinson's politeness framework and Thomas's sociopragmatic model as practical design foundations for community communication mentoring. The study recommends that Taman Baca Sastra Nusantara institutionalize a biannual version of the mentoring program as part of its regular visitor engagement programming; that the Yogyakarta City Cultural Office consider adopting the program model across the city's network of taman baca as a replicable framework for elevating the communicative culture of public literary spaces; that future programs prioritize the full five-phase architecture with particular protection of the in-situ mentoring phase as the most decisive determinant of behavioral sustainability; and that Javanese communicative heritage values be systematically integrated into program content as a cultural resource that enhances participant motivation and deepens the meaning of politeness as a social practice rooted in local identity rather than merely an external etiquette standard.

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