



IMPLEMENTATION OF A DEEP LEARNING APPROACH ASSISTED BY THE POLITE PALS MEDIA IN COURTEOUS SPEAKING INSTRUCTION

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Abstract. Understanding speech politeness is essential for students to apply it in daily communication. However, students' level of understanding remains low, indicating the need for innovative instructional approaches. This study aims to examine (1) differences in students' understanding of speech politeness between those taught using a Deep Learning approach assisted by E-Comic media and those in a control group, and (2) the effectiveness of the Deep Learning approach in improving students' understanding of polite speech. This study employed a quasi-experimental method with a nonequivalent control group design, involving first-grade students (Classes IA and IB) from an elementary school in Semarang City. Data were analyzed using tests of normality and homogeneity, followed by hypothesis testing. The Polite Pals e-comic integrates principles of mindful, meaningful, and joyful learning. The t-test results yielded a p-value of 0.006 (< 0.05), indicating that H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted. The N-gain score for the experimental class was 0.7345, while the control class obtained 0.6095. These findings suggest that the Deep Learning approach assisted by the Polite Pals e-comic is effective in enhancing students' understanding of polite speech.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian language learning aims to develop students' communication skills, both oral and written, in a critical, creative, and communicative manner (Hasanah & Purwati, 2025). This objective aligns with the Decree of the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency Number 046 of 2025, which states that Indonesian language learning encompasses listening, speaking or presenting skills, reading, viewing, and writing (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of social interaction and environmental factors in language development, thereby supporting a collaborative approach to learning (Habsy et al., 2023).

According to Vygotsky, first-grade students, approximately ages 3 to 7, are in the egocentric speech stage, during which they often talk to themselves and verbalize their actions and motivations (Masrura et al., 2024). At this stage, students begin adapting to new social environments that require the use of polite, courteous, and effective language to express their intentions. Vygotsky argues that language serves as a fundamental tool of communication, functioning both to express thoughts and feelings and to understand those of others (Anggraini, 2020).

Understanding polite speech is a key indicator of success in both language learning and character development, as it is closely related to how students respect others and position themselves within social environments. Effective communication forms the foundation of healthy interpersonal relationships (Pohan et al., 2024). The comprehension and use of the four "magic words", namely "sorry", "excuse me", "please", and "thank you", play a crucial role in helping students develop appropriate social skills (Diningsih & Riyandi, 2024). Polite speech involves not only selecting appropriate words but also demonstrating respect, empathy, and moral responsibility toward the interlocutor. Therefore, the development of polite speech should begin at an early age so that it becomes embedded in students' daily behavior, in line with the concept of deep learning. As stated in the 1945 Constitution, primary education aims to enlighten the nation and foster morally upright individuals who demonstrate love for their country, creativity, virtue, and politeness (Nst & Ritonga, 2023).

Polite speaking skills are also aligned with the eight dimensions of the Graduate Profile, including faith and piety, citizenship, critical reasoning, creativity, collaboration, independence, health, and communication (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). Polite communication serves as a foundation for enabling students to position themselves ethically in social interactions, respect differences, and express ideas constructively. However, a gap remains between curriculum expectations and classroom practice. Research by HL (2021) indicates that impolite expressions are still frequently observed in elementary school interactions, both between students and teachers and among peers. Students often imitate speaking styles from their home environments and digital media exposure, which do not always reflect appropriate language politeness. Social and environmental influences, along with the impact of digital popular culture, further complicate students' ability to distinguish between formal and informal contexts. Additionally, a study by Imanellya & Fradana (2024) highlights that the low level of politeness in elementary students' language use is also influenced by insufficient habituation practices within schools.

Based on observations at SDN Palebon 03 in Semarang City, it was found that first-grade students are not yet accustomed to using expressions such as "please", "sorry", "excuse me", and "thank you" in appropriate contexts. The causes vary, ranging from family environments that do not sufficiently emphasize the importance of politeness to a lack of teacher innovation in teaching manners through engaging media, particularly visual media. It not only attracts students' attention but also stimulates affective responses, making the learning process more enjoyable and reducing boredom. Therefore, audiovisual-based learning media can support students' interest in learning (Abdullah et al., 2021; Rofiuddin et al., 2024). In the twenty-first century, the abilities to think critically, collaborate, communicate, and create are essential for effective learning, even at the first-grade level. Education systems that fail to adapt to these demands risk leaving students without the skills required for future success (Jayadih et al., 2024). One medium that can be utilized to support these competencies is digital comics, which integrate text, images, and sound. This is supported by the findings of Hasanah & Purwati (2025), who developed an audiovisual medium, the Polite Pals e-comic, which has been proven effective in improving polite speaking skills among first-grade elementary school students.

However, first-grade teachers at SDN Palebon 03 have not yet implemented a deep learning approach and still rely on lecture methods or simple question-and-answer techniques, often without the support of interactive digital media. According to Ramadhanti et al. (2024), the use of conventional methods in elementary language learning tends to make students passive because the process is teacher-centered. As a result, character values intended to be instilled, such as politeness, are not deeply internalized. Therefore, an innovative learning approach supported by digital media is needed. This issue can be addressed by implementing a learning approach that promotes deep conceptual understanding, thereby improving students' outcomes in polite speaking (Rahaningmas et al., 2025).

One form of effective innovation is the implementation of a deep learning approach assisted by digital learning media. Mu'ti states that deep learning is applied in the current national curriculum (Yudi, 2024). In practice, deep learning is not a new concept in education; however, it remains relatively unfamiliar to the Indonesian public. It is often misunderstood as a new curriculum rather than as an instructional approach (Prajoko, 2024). Deep learning emphasizes strong conceptual understanding, the integration of conceptual and procedural knowledge, and the ability to apply concepts across various contexts (Kharisma et al., 2025). This approach encourages active student engagement, increases participation, and facilitates deeper comprehension of learning materials. Active and deep learning can significantly enhance student engagement and strengthen conceptual understanding (Hariyanti, 2024).

The deep learning approach is grounded in three main principles: meaningful learning, mindful learning, and enjoyable learning. According to Langer (Gifari & Arifin, 2024), mindful learning, rooted in mindfulness, refers to a cognitive state characterized by the ability to notice new distinctions, analyze information from multiple perspectives, and remain sensitive to context. Meaningful learning, as defined by Sutik et al. (2022), involves connecting new knowledge with students' prior experiences, thereby making learning relevant and valuable. Meanwhile, enjoyable

learning is conceptualized as an approach that integrates meaningful, contextual, constructivist, active, and psychological dimensions of learning (Kristiana & Jumadi, 2022; Sufiani & Marzuki, 2021). When learning is enjoyable, students tend to be more enthusiastic and engaged, as they recognize both the purpose and benefits of the learning process.

Research by Aryanto et al. (2025) and Mutawadia et al. (2023) indicates that deep learning improves critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and conceptual understanding, while also fostering confidence and collaboration. Similarly, Weng et al. (2023) argue that deep learning encompasses not only the depth of cognitive processes but also measurable learning outcomes, including problem-solving, metacognitive, and creative thinking skills. Furthermore, Rui et al. (2025) describe deep learning as a process driven by intrinsic motivation, in which learners integrate information from multiple sources to develop higher-order cognitive abilities, such as application, analysis, evaluation, and synthesis, aligned with Bloom's taxonomy, ultimately supporting effective problem-solving and knowledge transfer.

However, empirical studies examining the effectiveness of deep learning approaches in improving first-grade elementary school students' understanding of polite speech remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) examine differences in learning outcomes between students taught using a deep learning approach assisted by the Polite Pals e-comic and those in the control class, and (2) evaluate the effectiveness of implementing a deep learning approach supported by the Polite Pals e-comic in enhancing first-grade students' understanding of polite speech.

This study is expected to contribute to the field of Indonesian language education at the level, particularly in the application of deep learning methods supported by audiovisual comic-based media. It is anticipated that the findings will help elementary students understand polite speech in daily contexts, assist teachers in developing adaptable instructional strategies, and ultimately strengthen both elementary student character development and their competency profiles.

This research supports the application of politeness principles in communication, particularly in the classroom, based on Leech's (1983) politeness theory with his Politeness Principle that emphasizes six maxims, including the wisdom maxim, generosity maxim, praise or appreciation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim, and sympathy maxim, which are relevant to the learning of polite speaking.

This research provides direct benefits for elementary students by applying a concrete, contextual learning approach. Through the Polite Pals media, students are invited to listen to and repeat examples of polite conversations in situations close to their lives. This research is beneficial for teachers in providing examples of applying a deep learning approach in teaching polite speaking with the aid of audiovisual media. This research is also beneficial for parents in providing examples of reading and viewing references at home that support the development of elementary school students' polite speaking skills, such as the Polite Pals audiovisual comic media. Through this research, it is hoped that awareness will arise of the importance of active parental involvement in guiding elementary students in applying polite speech at home.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative design, specifically a quasi-experimental approach using a nonequivalent control group design. This design was selected due to the practical conditions in elementary schools, where class allocations are typically fixed under the school administration system. Consequently, random assignment of students to groups is not feasible; therefore, a quasi-experimental design represents the most appropriate alternative. This approach enables the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning treatment by comparing two pre-existing groups: an experimental class and a control class. Initial equivalence between groups was established through a pretest administered prior to the intervention. This design is particularly suitable for elementary education research, as it balances internal validity with ethical considerations in classroom settings (Takona, 2024).

The study was conducted at SDN Palebon 03 in Semarang City during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. This site was selected based on preliminary observations indicating



that most first-grade students experience difficulties in understanding and applying polite language in daily communication. The participants consisted of two classes with relatively equivalent initial abilities: 27 students in the experimental class and 25 students in the control class. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, considering factors such as teaching schedules, teacher readiness, and institutional support for the research. This approach was chosen to ensure contextual relevance and facilitate efficient implementation.

The independent variable in this study was the implementation of a deep learning approach assisted by the digital e-comic media called Polite Pals, which was developed based on this approach. The dependent variable was students' understanding of polite expressions. Data were collected using both test and non-test techniques. The test method aimed to measure students' understanding of polite expressions, while non-test methods included teacher interviews, observations, and documentation. The primary instrument was a test of polite language comprehension, developed based on the basic competency indicators of the Indonesian Language subject in the Merdeka Curriculum. The test consisted of short-answer items, matching exercises, and essay questions, all tailored to the cognitive development level of first-grade students.

The research procedure comprised four main stages: preparation, implementation, data collection, and data analysis. During the preparation stage, the researcher developed instructional materials based on the deep learning approach, prepared the Polite Pals e-comic, and coordinated with the classroom teachers. The implementation stage began with administering a pretest to both groups to assess baseline comprehension of polite language. This was followed by four instructional sessions in each class. The experimental class received instruction using a deep learning approach based on the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model, supported by the digital Polite Pals e-comic with audio features. In contrast, the control class was taught using a direct instruction approach (lecture-based), supplemented by printed comic media containing identical content but without audio support. After the intervention, a posttest was administered to evaluate students' comprehension of polite language.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and parametric statistical techniques. Prerequisite analyses included tests of normality and homogeneity. Hypothesis testing was subsequently conducted using independent sample t-tests and N-Gain analysis to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

After the study was conducted, an initial data analysis was performed to ensure that the experimental and control groups had equivalent baseline abilities prior to the treatment. The analyzed data consisted of pretest scores, which were examined for normality, homogeneity, and equality of means. The normality test was conducted using the Shapiro–Wilk test at a significance level of 0.05. The results showed that the pretest data for the control group had a significance value of 0.320, while the experimental group had a value of 0.636. Since both values exceed 0.05, the data can be considered normally distributed. The results of the normality test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pretest Normality Test Results

Class	N	Statistic	Sig. (Shapiro–Wilk)
Pretest Control	27	.955	.320
Pretest Experimental	27	.971	.636

The homogeneity of variance test, conducted using an F-test (Levene's test), yielded a p-value of 0.604 (> 0.05), indicating that the variances of the two groups are homogeneous. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Pretest Homogeneity Test Results

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.273	1	50	.604

To examine differences in mean scores, an independent-samples t-test was conducted, as the data met the assumption of normality. The results showed two-tailed significance values of



0.932 and 0.933 (> 0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted, indicating no statistically significant difference between the two groups at the pretest stage (see Table 3).

Table 3. Independent-Samples t-Test Results (Pretest)

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.273	.604	.086	50	.932	.385	4.503	-8.659	9.430
	Equal variances not assumed			.085	47.643	.933	.385	4.529	-8.722	9.492

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the experimental and control groups had equivalent initial conditions, making them comparable for subsequent analysis. The next step involved analyzing posttest data to evaluate learning outcomes after the treatment. Statistical analyses included tests of normality, homogeneity of variance, and differences in means, as well as the effectiveness of the treatment. The Shapiro–Wilk normality test indicated that the posttest data for both groups were normally distributed, with p-values of 0.421 (control group) and 0.166 (experimental group), both exceeding 0.05 (see Table 4).

Table 4. Posttest Normality Test Results

Class	N	Statistic	Sig. (Shapiro-Wilk)
Posttest Control	27	.104	.421
Posttest Experimental	27	.949	.166

The homogeneity test using Levene's test produced a p-value of 0.121 (> 0.05), indicating homogeneous variances between groups. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Posttest Homogeneity Test Results

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.489	1	50	.121

Since the assumptions of normality and homogeneity were satisfied, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. The results revealed two-tailed significance values of 0.006 and 0.007 (< 0.05). Therefore, H_0 is rejected, indicating a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the posttest (see Table 6).

Table 6. Independent-Samples t-Test Results (Posttest)

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	4.340	.042	-2.898	50	.006	-7.90741	2.72825	-13.38726	-2.42756
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.851	40.258	.007	-7.90741	2.77363	-13.51201	-2.30280

The results indicate that the implementation of the Deep Learning approach based on the PBL model, supported by the Polite Pals e-comic, has a statistically significant effect on students' understanding of polite speaking. Furthermore, the improvement in student learning outcomes was analyzed using the N-Gain test. As presented in Table 7, the experimental group achieved an



N-Gain score of 0.7345, which falls into the high category, whereas the control group obtained an N-Gain score of 0.6095, categorized as medium.

Table 7. N-Gain Test Results of Learning Outcomes

	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	N-Gain	Std. Deviation	Category
Experimental Group	.56	1.00	.7435	.11167	High
Control Group	.20	1.00	.6095	.20117	Medium

Discussion

Learning was conducted in both the experimental and control classes over four meetings using a Deep Learning approach supported by the Polite Pals e-comic media, based on the PBL model. The learning media used were developed in previous research by [Hasanah & Purwati \(2025\)](#), which demonstrated that the media were valid and effective in improving polite speaking skills among first-grade elementary school students. Differences in students' understanding of polite speech between the experimental and control classes were analyzed using a normality test, which indicated that the data were normally distributed. Homogeneity testing using the F-test showed that the variances of both groups were homogeneous. Furthermore, an independent-samples t-test conducted on the pretest scores yielded a two-tailed p-value of 0.932 (> 0.05); thus, H_0 is accepted, indicating that both classes had equivalent initial abilities.

The Deep Learning approach applied in this study plays a significant role in promoting students' engagement with polite speaking materials. Students' learning experiences are structured through three processes: comprehension, application, and reflection, each corresponding to the principles of mindful, meaningful, and enjoyable learning ([Anwar & Sodik, 2025](#)). The instructional model used is PBL. In the comprehension stage, students are introduced to problems through illustrative videos on polite speaking, representing an implementation of enjoyable learning. This approach can enhance students' motivation and active participation ([Wibowo et al., 2025](#)), thereby facilitating a better understanding of the material.

During the application stage, students are divided into groups and provided with worksheets, while the teacher guides both group and individual inquiry as part of mindful and meaningful learning. In this stage, students are encouraged to think critically. Previous studies indicate that the Deep Learning approach can enhance critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and conceptual understanding, while also fostering confidence and collaboration ([Aryanto et al., 2025](#); [Mutawadia et al., 2023](#)). Each group then develops and presents its work. In the reflection stage, students analyze and evaluate their problem-solving processes, reflect on their learning through songs about polite speaking, and complete an assessment aligned with the principles of mindful, meaningful, and enjoyable learning.

The implementation of Deep Learning is further supported by digital comic media. These comics present concrete images, text, and narratives that are relatable to students and aligned with the principles of meaningful and enjoyable learning. The improvement in students' understanding of polite speech in the experimental class can be explained by the core principles of Deep Learning, which emphasize connections among knowledge, personal experience, and social values. According to [Biggs et al. \(2022\)](#), deep learning encourages students not only to memorize information but also to understand its meaning and relevance. In this study, students were encouraged not only to recognize forms of polite expressions but also to understand their importance in daily life. Through activities involving exploration of e-comic content and reflection on embedded values, students developed both conceptual and affective understanding simultaneously.

To examine the effectiveness of the Deep Learning approach assisted by e-comic media, the N-Gain test was employed to measure the average improvement in learning outcomes between the experimental and control classes. As shown in Table 7, the experimental class scores ranged from 56 to 100, whereas the control class scores ranged from 20 to 100. The N-Gain score in the experimental class was 0.7345 (SD = 0.11167), which falls into the high category (> 0.7). In contrast, the control class obtained an N-Gain score of 0.6095 (SD = 0.20117), which is categorized as moderate (< 0.7). These results indicate that students in the experimental class,



who were taught using the Deep Learning approach assisted by the Polite Pals e-comic, demonstrated greater improvement in learning outcomes compared to those in the control class who received conventional instruction.

These findings are consistent with Wibowo et al. (2025), who reported that the Deep Learning approach enhances elementary school students' conceptual understanding. Similarly, Dewi & Rusilowati (2025) found that deep learning is effective in improving student learning outcomes. Other studies have also shown that the Deep Learning approach not only improves conceptual understanding but also promotes engagement in discussion, collaboration, and problem-solving activities (Royani et al., 2024; Diputera et al., 2024; Suwandi et al., 2024; Rizki, 2024).

This study demonstrates that the Deep Learning approach has a significant impact on student learning outcomes, particularly in the Indonesian language subject. These findings support Hattie's (2009) theory, which suggests that deep learning enhances academic achievement by fostering critical thinking, reflective abilities, and knowledge transfer. Learning materials on polite speech help students achieve a deeper understanding by not only memorizing content but also connecting new knowledge with prior experiences. This aligns with the perspective of Marton & Säljö (1976), who emphasize that a deep approach is essential for achieving a holistic understanding of meaning.

Academically, this study contributes to the literature on the effectiveness of the Deep Learning approach in enhancing students' comprehension, particularly in polite speaking materials at the elementary school level. Practically, it provides recommendations for teachers and schools to integrate Deep Learning principles into classroom instruction. However, a limitation of this study is the absence of a mastery learning test using a one-sample Z-test. Such a test could further determine whether learning outcomes meet predefined mastery criteria, complementing the difference-in-means test (independent t-test) and the improvement test (N-Gain).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the Deep Learning approach, assisted by the Polite Pals e-comic, is effective in enhancing students' understanding of polite speaking. This is evidenced by the higher average N-Gain score compared to the conventional approach. Furthermore, the principles of the Deep Learning approach support students in mastering concepts through more meaningful and contextualized learning activities. Therefore, teachers and school principals are encouraged to integrate the principles of the Deep Learning approach into elementary school learning practices.

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