

Netizens at Odds with the Education Department: Analysis of Impoliteness Strategies on an Online Platform

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the Philippines, along with other nations, to restructure its educational framework to meet the evolving needs and challenges of the time. Consequently, this reorganization has led to changes in the learning delivery modalities (LDMs). The Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) has faced significant criticism on social media regarding issues related to preparation, flawed materials, and implementation. By employing a pragmatic analysis approach based on Culpeper's theory of impoliteness strategies, this study examines fifty Facebook comments criticizing the said department and its new LDMs. The findings reveal that critics employed various impoliteness strategies, including bald-on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, withhold politeness, and impoliteness meta-strategy. The study's outcomes suggest that analyzing impoliteness strategies in online comments can provide insights into how such remarks serve as social actions. Researchers working with these textual forms, as well as those specializing in the study of genres and languages, can benefit from the findings of this study. The implications of the findings are discussed for policymakers, educators, and students within the Philippine education system.

Keywords: Impoliteness strategies, Philippine education department, Online comments, Learning delivery modalities, Pandemic

Introduction

Following the worldwide spread of COVID-19, both public and private educational institutions were compelled to revise their teaching strategies to accommodate the ongoing educational needs and issues. With that, many people had something unpleasant to say about how the curriculum had been changed and the introduction of new learning delivery modalities (LDMs), i.e., modular, online, television/radio-based instruction, and blended learning approaches. For example, in India, as students experience issues with depression, anxiety, poor internet connectivity, and an unsuitable study environment at home, varied opinions have been

stated on the application of their learning modalities (Kapasias, et.al, 2020). Similarly, American parents lashed out at teachers and officials during the pandemic for failing to adequately address challenges related to the aforementioned juggling act, learner motivation, accessibility, and learning results (Garbe et al., 2020). Similarly, the attempt to combat the pandemic by homeschooling, i.e., learning from home, as the best remedy to continue education has been criticized by those who want to continue face-to-face schooling in government schools (DeAngelis, 2020).

In the Philippine context, news articles (see Lalu, 2020; Magsambol, 2020; Malipot, 2020) have emphasized Filipinos' perspectives on how the Department of Education (DepEd) addressed concerns in distance education. In line with that, the DepEd secretary has also received insults for promoting the resumption of courses with newly introduced modalities during the pandemic (Lalu, 2020). She noted that there has been a great deal of negative press over the continuation of lessons; nonetheless, the fact that DepEd has made preparations for the resumption of school nullifies all attempts to malign their work. In the meantime, three weeks after schools reopened, the public began to express their displeasure with the Department of Education due to errors discovered in their online learning modules, in addition to concerns such as a lack of preparation, numerous inaccuracies in the purported lessons, and uninformed regional officers (Adonis, 2020; Malipot, 2020).

Evidently, netizens made themselves impolite with their online comments criticizing the department and its institutions, stating that, despite a worldwide learning crisis, they could have done more to ensure that students acquire essential life skills (Reimers et al., 2020). Categorically, the dissemination of these remarks and complaints on online platforms has led to the unraveling of the pandemic-related impoliteness directed toward the education system. Therefore, it is argued by this paper that social media platforms are a breeding ground for these critiques, which in turn generate texts characterized by language impoliteness. Hence, an examination of these impolite complaints and criticisms in the form of online comments from a linguistic, theoretical, and empirical perspective is warranted.

Impoliteness Strategies

Culpeper (1996) categorizes impoliteness strategies into six types: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record politeness (indirect), withhold politeness, and impoliteness meta-strategy/sarcasm or mock politeness. These strategies, proposed by Culpeper (1996) and partly resembling the politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson (1987), can be defined as follows:

1. Bald on-record impoliteness: This strategy involves directly and clearly performing a face-threatening act without minimizing its impact. It aims to shock or embarrass the addressee and is typically used in close relationships such as family or close friends (Mohammed & Abbas, 2015).
2. Positive impoliteness: This strategy aims to harm the addressee's positive face wants. It includes actions such as disregarding and manipulating the other person, dismissing others from activities, showing disinterest or indifference, using incorrect identifying indicators, employing secretive language, seeking disagreement, making others uncomfortable, using taboo words, and using insulting language (Culpeper, 1996).
3. Negative impoliteness: This strategy aims to undermine the addressee's negative face wants. It includes actions such as instilling fear, showing disdain or ridicule, being impolite or insincere, mocking others, attacking personal space, and using condescension, threats, curses, or bad wishes (Culpeper, 1996).
4. Off-record impoliteness: This strategy involves performing a face-threatening act indirectly through implicature, where one intended meaning outweighs others. It often manifests as

insinuations, innuendos, casting dispersions, digs, or snide remarks (Culpeper & Hardaker, 2015).

5. Withhold politeness: This strategy refers to the absence of expected politeness work. For instance, deliberately failing to acknowledge a present can be interpreted as impoliteness (Culpeper, 1996). It relies on direct language and avoids imposing on the speaker.
6. Impoliteness meta-strategy: This type of impoliteness strategy involves using deceitful politeness strategies, where the face-threatening act is concealed beneath surface realizations. It relies on convention-driven implicational impoliteness, which can be internal or external (Ardila, 2019).

In essence, impoliteness, as characterized by Culpeper (2005), refers to communicative strategies that attack face and cause social conflict and disharmony. It is perceived by listeners as a threat to their face or social identity, breaching norms of appropriate behavior in specific contexts and with specific interlocutors (Holmes et al., 2008). This study aims to examine impolite language in online comments targeting the Department of Education during the implementation of LDMs amid the pandemic in the Philippines.

While some studies have explored impoliteness in online communication (e.g., Chung & Tang, 2022; Sharif et al., 2019; Ranalan, 2020; Zhang, 2022), no relevant work has been found regarding impolite language directed at a government agency like the Department of Education. This research gap emphasizes the need for linguistic investigation in the new normal pedagogical context. Hence, in light of the context of the study, this investigation is guided by the following research question:

What types of impoliteness strategies linguistically are observed in online comments against the Philippine Department of Education in the implementation of learning delivery modalities during the pandemic? How are these types employed in such comments?

Methodology

Design and Data Sources

As a descriptive-qualitative study, it made use of screenshots taken from Facebook, including online negative remarks on DepEd. Despite the fact that there have been multiple cases in which DepEd has been criticized on various social media platforms, Facebook was selected for this study because, according to Arora et al. (2019), Facebook is the most popular social media network that is used in the Philippines. As a result, 50 of these rude comments were randomly taken (screenshot) from Facebook between the months of July 2020 and May 2021, which corresponds to the period of time when the groundwork and implementation of LDMs in the new regular set-up of education in the Philippines took place. According to Braun & Clarke (2013), a sufficient amount of corpus materials for analysis is between 10 and 100 samples. The number of corpora that were examined in this study complied with this condition.

Data Collection

The researchers used Facebook to compile comments received by DepEd online. To safeguard their anonymity, the names and photos of the people who posted negative reviews and comments online were erased. Researchers then combed through screenshots of online criticisms to find those that were relevant to the study.

Data Analysis

Based on the assumptions of Grice (1989), Austin (1962), and Searle (1969) regarding how people accomplish things with words and how they understand what others are doing when they speak, the method of this study falls under pragmatic analysis. The study utilized Culpeper's (1996) framework of impoliteness methods in order to identify the impoliteness strategies deployed in the online comments against DepEd. The researchers analyzed the data

using Miles and Huberman's (1984) procedures for descriptive analysis, which included data reduction, data presentation, conclusion, and verification.

Following an extensive analysis of the collected data, the study underwent a process known as peer debriefing. During this phase, a group of linguistic experts was involved in examining the findings and the categorization of the data. The debriefers carefully scrutinized the specifics of the analysis to ensure the accuracy and validity of the study's conclusions. This peer debriefing process serves as a quality control measure, as it allows independent experts to assess the methodology, interpretations, and conclusions drawn from the data analysis. It helps to minimize bias and increase confidence in the study's findings, as they have been subject to rigorous scrutiny and evaluation by knowledgeable peers in the field of linguistics.

Ethical Considerations

Human participants were not used in this study. However, online badmouths and comments that came from Facebook were considered. The University of the Immaculate Conception's Research Ethics Committee (REC) has issued a clearance certificate with protocol number AF-GC29-12-2020. Also, the researchers deliberately removed all the names of individuals in the comments; hence, each comment analyzed in this study was given a code like OC1, OC2, up to OC50. This was done to protect these individuals from public scrutiny and malicious adjudication.

Results

The analysis of the data uncovered all six impoliteness strategies employed by online critics in their criticism against the Philippine Department of Education in its implementation of the learning delivery modalities during the pandemic. These strategies cover bald-on-record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, withhold politeness and impoliteness meta-strategy. Further, this section delves into a detailed explanation of how these strategies were utilized in the comments.

Bald-on Record Impoliteness

Bald-on-record impoliteness is a strategy of communication where a person performs a face-threatening act in a direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise manner without minimizing its impact. It involves expressing one's intentions openly without any attempt to soften or mitigate the potential offense caused. This strategy aims to shock or embarrass the addressee. This impoliteness strategy was revealed in one subcategory: imposing on a target while failing to recognize a face relevance in them.

Table 1 Bald-on Record Impoliteness in the Online Comments

Type of Impoliteness Strategy	Indicator	Sample Statement	Corpus Code
Bald-on Record impoliteness	Imposing on a target while failing to recognize a face relevance in them	Maybe Briones [the Secretary of the Department] is out of her mind. She always thinks about modules. She is very insensitive. It'd be nice to have her eaten up!	OC14
		Just let Briones leave their house and evade the Zoom meeting. It is also better to let her experience the bitter-sweet experience of implementing the modalities. It is just another senseless idea.	OC43

Imposing on a target while failing to recognize a face relevance in them. OC14 includes personal attacks and insults towards Briones. The statement questioning her sanity and referring to her as "out of her mind" is disrespectful. Additionally, expressing the desire to have her "eaten up" is an extreme and offensive remark. Meanwhile, OC43 suggests avoiding the Secretary's presence and implies that it would be better for her to face difficulties and negative experiences. The tone is dismissive and belittling, undermining her decisions and ideas by labeling them as "senseless." Overall, these comments display impoliteness by attacking the person's character, making derogatory statements, and expressing disrespectful wishes towards Briones, regardless of whether they recognize her face relevance or not.

Positive Impoliteness

Positive impoliteness refers to a deliberate communication strategy where individuals utilize language or behavior that is direct, assertive, and disrespectful with the intention of achieving a specific objective or establishing social dominance. The findings show that online comments exemplify this strategy, where critics employ various tactics such as displaying disinterest, indifference, or insensitivity; using inappropriate identity markers; making others feel uncomfortable; resorting to abusive or disrespectful language; and fostering a belief that their actions will cause harm to the target individual.

Table 2 Positive Impoliteness in the Online Comments

Type of Impoliteness Strategy	Indicator	Sample Statement	Corpus Code
Positive Impoliteness	Being disinterested, indifferent, and insensitive.	Oh, it is so tiring!	OC4
		We do not like to venture into what you wanted us to do. It is so annoying.	OC33
	Making the other feel uncomfortable	You are not really ready, DepEd. Do not fool us!	OC22
		This is too much. It degrades a mother's reputation.	OC25
	Using abusive or disrespectful language.	The system is trash!	OC1
		The modules are useless because the students don't apprehend them.	OC11
		Of course, there is no assistance from DepEd. DepEd is inefficient. They did not even allocate funds.	OC46
	Inculcating a belief that action damaging to the other will arise.	There is another suicide victim because of stress and module. What's up DepEd? How many years would you want to come before you will approve the academic freeze?	OC13
		The move will be very risky.	OC34

Being disinterested, indifferent, and insensitive. OC4 and OC33 demonstrate elements of positive impoliteness by showcasing disinterest, indifference, and insensitivity towards the topic or request at hand. The statement "Oh, it is so tiring!" conveys a lack of enthusiasm or interest. By expressing that the topic or task is exhausting, the commenter is implying that they find it uninteresting and burdensome. This conveys a dismissive and uncooperative attitude. Moreover, the phrase "We do not like to venture into what you wanted us to do" reflects a sense of indifference. By stating that they have no inclination or desire to engage in the requested

activity, the commenter is displaying a lack of concern for the interests or expectations of the other person. This indifference suggests a disregard for the other person's desires or needs. Additionally, the comment "It is so annoying" reflects insensitivity by expressing annoyance or frustration without considering the feelings of the other person. By labeling the request as annoying, the commenter shows a lack of empathy or consideration for how their words might affect the other person's emotions. This disregard for the impact of their statement demonstrates insensitivity. Generally, these comments employ elements of positive impoliteness by intentionally using language that disregards the topic, dismisses the request, and conveys a lack of sensitivity toward the other person's feelings or perspective.

Making the other feel uncomfortable. OC22 statement directly challenges the readiness of the Department and implies that they are not adequately prepared. By using the phrase "You are not really ready," the commenter questions DepEd's competence and suggests that they may be attempting to deceive or mislead others. This accusation creates discomfort by undermining the credibility and integrity of DepEd. In OC25, the speaker expresses disapproval or offense towards a specific situation. By stating "This is too much," they convey a sense of being overwhelmed or offended by the circumstances. The following statement, "It degrades a mother's reputation," implies that the situation reflects negatively on mothers as a whole. This accusation insinuates that the actions being discussed harm the reputation of mothers, which can cause discomfort by generalizing and potentially stigmatizing an entire group. These comments utilize direct language that challenges or criticizes the target, intentionally aiming to make them feel uncomfortable. By questioning DepEd's readiness or suggesting that an action degrades the reputation of mothers, these comments employ confrontational tones that can elicit discomfort and defensive reactions in the individuals or organizations being addressed.

Using abusive or disrespectful language. OC1 employs derogatory language by referring to the system as "trash." By using such a derogatory term, the commenter displays disrespect and extreme negativity toward the system. This abusive language serves to belittle and devalue the system, expressing a strong negative opinion in a demeaning manner. In OC11, the phrase "modules are useless" presents a negative judgment about the effectiveness of the learning materials. The following statement, "because the students don't apprehend them," places blame on the students, implying that their lack of understanding is the reason for the modules' perceived uselessness. While this comment may not contain explicit profanity, it uses disrespectful language by assigning blame and implying incompetence on the part of the students. Meanwhile, OC46 includes multiple instances of using disrespectful language towards DepEd (Department of Education). Phrases such as "no assistance," "inefficient," and "did not even allocate funds" express a negative judgment and criticize the organization's performance. The language used implies incompetence and accuses DepEd of not fulfilling its responsibilities. This disrespectful tone and accusatory language contribute to the manifestation of positive impoliteness. In these comments, the language employed is intentionally disrespectful, derogatory, and abusive toward the subjects being discussed. Such language disregards the principles of polite communication and aims to express strong negative opinions in a confrontational and disrespectful manner.

Inculcating a belief that action damaging to the other will arise. OC13 suggests a correlation between the stress caused by the educational modules and tragic outcomes such as suicide. By highlighting the existence of a suicide victim and attributing it to the stress and modules, the commenter implies that the actions or negligence of DepEd (Department of Education) have resulted in harm and potentially fatal consequences. This inculcates a belief that DepEd's actions or policies are directly responsible for damaging outcomes. The comment also contains a critical question directed at DepEd that expresses frustration or discontent with the organization. By asking how many years it would take for DepEd to approve the academic

freeze, the commenter implies that the delay or hesitation in making this decision is harmful or detrimental. This statement inculcates a belief that DepEd's perceived inaction or delay is causing negative consequences or damage. OC34 shows that a specific action or decision being discussed carries a high degree of risk. By emphasizing the potential risks, the commenter implies that this action could have adverse consequences or cause harm. This inculcates a belief that the proposed move is dangerous and damaging. In these comments, there is a deliberate attempt to associate negative outcomes, harm, or potential damage with the actions or inactions of DepEd. By highlighting these connections, the comments foster a belief that the actions or decisions being discussed will result in negative consequences or harm to individuals or the education system as a whole.

Negative Impoliteness

Negative impoliteness strategies are employed to undermine the addressee's negative face wants. The research findings indicate that certain comments fall under this category, including disdain, scolding, or ridiculing; cursing/mock the other; and digging remarks.

Table 3 Negative Impoliteness in the Online Comments

Type of Impoliteness Strategy	Indicator	Sample Statement	Corpus Code
Negative Impoliteness	Disdaining, scolding, or ridiculing like accentuating relative power	This woman should be replaced! DepEd has become insensitive and inconsiderate under her.	OC6
		What is up DepEd? What happened to the grammar and giving answers against exercising democratic rights?	OC12
	Cursing/mock the other	Fuck the one who made the DepEd modules; her (referring to Briones) being slut is taught to the children. Trash!	OC2
		What the f*ck, Briones!	OC1
	Digging remarks	It came from the first teacher's guide of DepEd during the first batch of the SHS. I don't know why they did not check it.	OC3
		We do not have efficient modules because of the incompetent writers that you have chosen.	OC26

Disdaining, scolding, or ridiculing like accentuating relative power. In OC6, the phrase "This woman should be replaced!" displays disdain and suggests that the person in question is inadequate or incompetent. By stating that DepEd (Department of Education) has become insensitive and inconsiderate under her leadership, the commenter implies that the woman in charge is responsible for these negative qualities. This statement accentuates relative power by asserting a belief that someone else would be more suitable or capable in the position. Meanwhile, OC12 employs a scornful tone and rhetorical questions to express disapproval and ridicule. The phrase "What is up DepEd?" conveys a sense of mockery and implies that there are significant issues or shortcomings within the organization. The following question, "What happened to the grammar and giving answers against exercising democratic rights?" suggests that DepEd has failed to maintain proper grammar and inhibit the exercise of democratic rights, further emphasizing perceived incompetence or negligence. This statement ridicules DepEd by highlighting specific areas of criticism and implies a sense of superiority or higher standards.

on the part of the commenter. In both comments, there is a deliberate use of language that disdains, scorns or ridicules the target (either an individual or DepEd as an organization), accentuating relative power dynamics. These comments aim to demean or belittle the person or entity being criticized, suggesting that they are inadequate or have failed in their responsibilities. This manifestation of negative impoliteness seeks to assert superiority or express contempt by highlighting perceived weaknesses or shortcomings.

Cursing/mocking the other. OC2 contains offensive language and a derogatory term ("slut") used to demean the person being referred to (Briones), who is associated with the creation of the DepEd modules. By using profanity and derogatory language, the commenter is expressing strong disapproval and resorting to insults to mock and belittle the person. The use of derogatory terms and explicit cursing intensifies the disrespectful and offensive nature of the comment. Likewise, OC1 includes a vulgar expression directed at Briones. By using such explicit language, the commenter is expressing anger, frustration, or disbelief toward Briones. The tone and choice of words serve to mock and criticize the person, showing a lack of respect or consideration. In both comments, the language used is explicitly offensive and disrespectful. The use of profanity, derogatory terms, and vulgar expressions serves to mock, insult, and belittle the person being referred to.

Digging remarks. OC3 contains a subtle dig by suggesting that the content or quality of the teacher's guide from DepEd's first batch of the Senior High School (SHS) program was not adequately checked or reviewed. The use of phrases like "I don't know why they did not check it" implies negligence or incompetence on the part of the responsible individuals or department. This remark indirectly criticizes the competency of those involved and suggests that their oversight or lack of attention has led to undesirable consequences. In OC26, there is a direct accusation of incompetence toward the writers selected by the addressee (presumably DepEd). The remark implies that the modules currently available are inefficient, and this inefficiency is attributed to the incompetence of the writers. By specifically mentioning the writers and their alleged incompetence, the commenter directly criticizes their abilities and indirectly questions the competence of the addressee in selecting capable individuals. By making these digging remarks, the commenters aim to highlight perceived shortcomings or mistakes, often in a critical and derogatory manner, as a form of negative impoliteness.

Off-record Impoliteness

Off-record impoliteness is performed by means of an implicature but in such a way that one attributable intention clearly offsets others. In this study, this strategy was indicated through insinuations in online comments.

Table 4 Off-record Impoliteness in the Online Comments

Type of Impoliteness Strategy	Indicator	Sample Statement	Corpus Code
Off-record Impoliteness	Insinuation	We will be the ones to adjust. Hayst!	OC23
		I will just be quiet on DepEd programs.	OC29
		I will just be silent. DepEd has done nothing right in this pandemic. Hayst!	OC41

Insinuation. OC23 utilizes an insinuation by suggesting that the burden of adjustment or responsibility falls on the speaker or their group. The use of the expression "hayst!" implies a sense of frustration or disappointment, indirectly conveying the sentiment that others (possibly DepEd) have not fulfilled their responsibilities or obligations. The insinuation is that

the speaker's group is left to shoulder the burden, which can be seen as a subtle criticism of DepEd without directly stating it. OC29, likewise, insinuates that the speaker has reservations or negative opinions about DepEd programs. By choosing to remain silent, the commenter implies that there are issues or concerns that they are intentionally not expressing openly. The insinuation is that there are problems or inadequacies with DepEd programs without explicitly stating them. In the same vein, OC41 combines the use of insinuation with a sigh of exasperation. By stating that they will be silent, the commenter suggests that they hold negative views or judgments about DepEd's actions during the pandemic. The insinuation is that DepEd's efforts or decisions have been largely ineffective or unsuccessful. The inclusion of the sigh further emphasizes a sense of disappointment or frustration. In all these comments, there is a deliberate use of insinuation to indirectly convey negative opinions or criticisms about DepEd without explicitly stating them. By leaving certain aspects unsaid or implied, the commenters subtly express their discontent or disapproval, making use of off-record impoliteness.

Withhold Politeness

This impoliteness strategy uses direct language and puts the speaker from the potential to be imposing. Withhold politeness is observable in the comments through the use of teasing or sarcasm.

Table 5 Withhold Impoliteness in the Online Comments

Type of Impoliteness Strategy	Indicator	Sample Statement	Corpus Code
Withhold Politeness	Teasing or sarcasm	But it is too much that an owl will become an ostrich. Our common sense will tell us that before disseminating this one, the person in authority of the module maker should have checked this.	OC5
		The one who made the module is a genius.	OC19

Teasing or sarcasm. OC5 employs teasing or sarcasm by using the comparison of an owl becoming an ostrich. The statement suggests that the content of the module is so illogical or nonsensical that it is akin to an absurd transformation. The use of phrases like "Our common sense will tell us" and mentioning the need for the person in authority to have checked it implies that such a mistake is obvious and should have been avoided. This teasing remark indirectly criticizes the module maker's oversight or lack of attention to logical inconsistencies. OC19 uses sarcasm to express the opposite of its literal meaning. By referring to the module maker as a "genius," the commenter is employing irony or teasing to suggest the opposite—that the module maker is not actually a genius. This remark may be intended to convey a sense of disbelief or dissatisfaction with the module's quality or content. Both comments make use of teasing or sarcasm to indirectly express criticism or skepticism. By employing irony or teasing language, the commenters subtly convey their negative opinions about the module maker or the quality of the modules themselves. This teasing or sarcastic tone allows the commenters to express their disapproval in a somewhat playful or indirect manner while still conveying their point of view.

Impoliteness Meta-strategy

This type of impoliteness strategy is performed with the use of the obviously deceitful act and thus remains surface realizations. Samples of this strategy are harsh or bitter jokes and humor.

Table 6 Impoliteness Meta-strategy in the Online Comments

Type of Impoliteness Strategy	Indicator	Sample Statement	Corpus Code
Impoliteness Meta-strategy	Throwing harsh or bitter jokes and humor.	The one who made the module is bright hahaha! (OC 20)	OC20
		Briones' idiocy! She should have been a [profanity] so I can swallow her easily!	OC36

Throwing harsh or bitter jokes and humor. OC20 utilizes bitter humor or sarcasm to convey the opposite of its literal meaning. By stating that the module maker is "bright" while including laughter ("hahaha"), the commenter employs irony or sarcastic humor to suggest the opposite—that the module maker is not actually bright. This remark may be intended to mock or criticize the module maker's intelligence or competence, using humor as a vehicle for expressing dissatisfaction or disapproval. Likewise, OC36 includes harsh language and a bitter joke aimed at Briones. The phrase "Briones' idiocy!" directly insults Briones by implying a lack of intelligence. The following remark about her being something vulgar and swallowable is a metaphorical expression of contempt and aggression. This comment demonstrates a particularly strong level of impoliteness, combining insults, derogatory language, and a bitter joke to convey a negative view of Briones. In both comments, there is a deliberate use of harsh or bitter jokes and humor to express criticism, mockery, or disdain. The humor employed serves as a cover for expressing negative opinions or insults in a somewhat veiled manner. By utilizing bitter jokes and sarcastic humor, the commenters employ the Impoliteness Meta-strategy to convey their discontent or disapproval in a way that may elicit amusement from some while simultaneously expressing their negative views.

Discussions

Based on the findings, six impoliteness strategies with indicators and subcategories that pinpoint the types of impoliteness perceptible in the statements, which are bald-on record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, withhold politeness, and impoliteness meta-strategy.

Bald-on record Impoliteness. In the comments analyzed, it is evident that critics resorted to this impoliteness strategy that involves imposing negative attributes and undesirable features onto various learning delivery modalities without considering the relevance to the situation (Culpeper & Hardaker, 2015; Scarantino, 2017). By disregarding the face-saving aspect of communication, such behavior can be perceived as socially unacceptable and impolite. Furthermore, the online comments express discontent and disillusionment with the teaching modalities implemented by the department, prompting the critics to impose their own proposed programs before others. In doing so, these critics impose pessimism on the LDMs, engaging in what can be termed as face-threatening acts (FTAs). These acts threaten the negative face of the hearer by restricting their personal freedom (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Overall, the use of this impoliteness strategy in the comments reflects the critics' intention to

assert their negative opinions without regard for the potential consequences or the impact on the face of the hearer.

Positive Impoliteness. The findings evidence the use of positive impoliteness strategies in online comments criticizing the DepEd and its LDM implementation. The findings suggest that critics employ positive impoliteness to damage DepEd's reputation and name. This strategy involves showing disapproval, indifference, and callousness. Bousfield & McIntyre (2018) argue that this strategy harms the hearer's need for acceptance and a good self-image. Magnifico & Defrancq (2016) claim that criticizing the hearer's actions can damage their good image and undermine their pleasant face. Critics also aim to make DepEd feel uncomfortable through their impolite statements, which can cause emotional and physical discomfort (Zeff, 2016). Mohammed & Abbas (2015) suggest that making others feel uncomfortable indicates positive impoliteness and damages the desire for acceptance. The use of abusive and disrespectful language is another indicator of positive impoliteness, belittling DepEd, and expressing criticism (Wiegand et al., 2018). Finally, critics inculcate a belief that actions damaging to DepEd will arise, initiating setbacks and impediments to DepEd's implementation of LDMs. This inculcation of beliefs can cause uneasiness and discomfort (Bousfield & McIntyre, 2018; Karttunen, 2016; Polyzou, 2015). More so, these positive impoliteness strategies threaten the positive face and self-image of the hearer and restrict their personal freedom (Kamalu & Fasasi, 2018; Mollin, 2018).

Negative Impoliteness. Critics have expressed their dissatisfaction with the interventions implemented by the Department of Education (DepEd) to rectify grammar and content errors found in various learning delivery modalities. These criticisms often take the form of negative impoliteness, characterized by a disdainful, scornful, or ridiculous tone aimed at asserting relative power dynamics (Thielemann & Kosta, 2013). By employing such strategies, the critics aim to challenge the hearer's negative face wants, which refer to the desire to be free from imposition (Thielemann & Kosta, 2013). It is worth noting that some of the critics might feel entitled to mock and ridicule the DepEd due to perceived mistakes and shortcomings in the implementation of the learning delivery modalities. Yet, cursing, mocking, and digging remarks definitively cause offense and negatively impact communication climate (Haugh, 2017; Culpeper & Hardaker, 2015; Lim, 2017). These actions threaten the positive face and professional identity of the department and teachers (Kamalu & Fasasi, 2018; Kopecky & Szotkowski, 2017). As Taylor (2016) explains, ridiculing someone serves to undermine their credibility and dignity. In the context of online comments, the use of ridicule by these critics serves to threaten the negative face of the hearer, restricting their personal freedom by expressing orders, reminding them of their duties, and suggesting negative actions (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The manifestation of negative impoliteness in online comments serves as a means for critics to assert their discontent and exert power over the perceived shortcomings of the department. By employing ridicule and expressing their dissatisfaction, these critics challenge the department's credibility and attempt to restrict the freedom of the DepEd and its stakeholders.

Off-record Impoliteness. This study reveals the presence of off-record impoliteness in online comments, where attributable intention deliberately outweighs other intentions (Culpeper & Hardaker, 2015). Insinuation emerges as an indicator of off-record impoliteness, characterized by the expression of unpleasant hints or suggestions regarding DepEd's implementation of learning delivery modalities. An insinuation is employed by speakers to make addressees believe them without being held accountable for their statements (Papi, 2014). Online comments demonstrate critics expressing weariness and annoyance towards DepEd's ineffective programs while evading accountability for their expressions. Camp (2018) highlights that insinuation offers a unique rhetorical advantage by mitigating communicative risk by leaving certain contents unstated. The critics leave harsh comments, provoking harsh

and inhospitable reactions from the public. Consequently, the positive face of the hearer is threatened, as the critics negatively express DepEd's positive face by voicing criticism and complaints. Chen & Lu (2017) argue that the positive face wants of the hearer are undermined when the speaker disapproves by stating or implying that the hearer is mistaken, irrational, or misguided.

Withhold Politeness. This research reveals the utilization of a strategy that employs direct language to avoid imposition. This strategy is evident in online comments through the use of teasing and sarcasm. Teasing, as described by Trotzke et al. (2020), involves playfully provoking or making fun of someone. In the context of online comments, teasing and sarcasm are directed towards DepEd's implementation of learning delivery modalities. These sub-strategies may appear superficially acceptable but carry an underlying meaning that opposes the surface level (Bousfield, 2008; Thielemann & Kosta, 2013). The comments indicate that critics employ these strategies to challenge the perceived incompetence of DepEd. With the presence of flaws and errors in the learning modules, the critics vent their frustrations regarding the ineffectiveness and inadequacy of DepEd in addressing the problems associated with each learning modality. This conflict serves as a catalyst for creativity (Huang et al., 2015; Rajadesingan et al., 2015). Consequently, the positive face of the hearer is threatened in the online comments, as criticism and sarcasm are directed toward the errors present in the modules. As highlighted by Chen & Lu (2017), the positive face wants of the hearer are undermined when the speaker expresses sarcasm and indifference towards them.

Impoliteness Meta-strategy. The findings of this research highlight another type of impoliteness strategy that involves obviously deceitful acts, and maintaining surface-level appearances (Culpeper & Hardaker, 2015). In the context of online comments, this impoliteness meta-strategy is evident through the critics' utilization of harsh or bitter jokes and humor to express their dissatisfaction and disapproval of DepEd's interventions concerning the learning delivery modalities. The comments indicate that the critics aimed to insult the department by mocking its mistakes and shortcomings, using symbolic violations of identities and social norms to entertain other internet users. Culpeper (1996) suggests that creativity is a key characteristic of this form of impoliteness, often observed in competitive environments. Frustrated and angered critics resort to online humor as a means of garnering attention from the department. Savage et al. (2017) argue that employing jokes and a sense of humor can serve as a defense mechanism for coping with stress, frustration, and anger. Additionally, the online comments' FTAs pose a threat to the positive face and self-image of the hearer, as they involve negative evaluations of the DepEd secretary and complaints about the module writers' shortcomings, leading to damage to the reputation of these officials and teachers. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the positive face of the hearer is undermined when the speaker directly or indirectly employs bitter jokes targeting the hearer's attributes, actions, and desires.

Conclusion and suggestions

The study identifies six impoliteness strategies, including bald-on record, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, withhold politeness, and impoliteness meta-strategy. These findings make significant contributions to our understanding of impoliteness in online comments. It sheds light on the various forms of impoliteness that can be observed on social media platforms, alerting users to the potential for negative and disrespectful discourse. By identifying impoliteness strategies, the study provides a comprehensive framework for categorizing and analyzing impolite behavior in online communication. Hence, the study suggests practical implications for educational institutions and individuals. It calls for the Department of Education to be more meticulous in its decision-

making processes, policies, and production of learning delivery modalities to mitigate situations that elicit impoliteness. Quality assurance committees can be established to ensure the dependability and integrity of educational programs and initiatives. Furthermore, implementing values-related interventions can help reduce rudeness among students, teachers, parents, and the general population, fostering a more respectful communication environment. The study also highlights the moral and social obligations of individuals in online communication. It reminds users that impoliteness directed at others reflects their own character and ethics, potentially harming not only the recipient's face but also their own reputation. By understanding how impoliteness is manifested in online comments, society can gain insights into building remarks that do not disgrace or injure others, promoting more considerate and respectful communication practices. In essence, this study's contribution lies in its identification and characterization of impoliteness strategies in online comments and its practical implications for educational institutions and individuals. By increasing awareness and understanding of impoliteness, the study paves the way for fostering a more respectful and constructive online communication environment.

The study offers valuable insights and practical implications for impoliteness in online comments. However, it has limitations in terms of sample representativeness, subjective coding, contextual factors, and focus on specific forms of online communication. Further research is needed to address these limitations and enhance our understanding of online impoliteness. This includes exploring the prevalence and effectiveness of impoliteness strategies in different online contexts, as well as developing and evaluating interventions to reduce impoliteness, especially in educational settings. Evaluating the effectiveness of interventions can contribute to evidence-based strategies for fostering respectful online communication. Exploring politeness in addition to impoliteness strategies in the study is of paramount importance as it offers a more well-rounded and nuanced analysis of the communication dynamics surrounding DepEd and its officials during the implementation of new learning delivery modalities. Most importantly, it is essential to acknowledge that this focus on online critics and their criticisms brings about certain limitations to the research. It is recommended to conduct additional research that explores the sentiments and counter-strategies of DepEd officials and employees regarding online criticism. This research can be conducted through interviews, surveys, or focus groups with relevant stakeholders within the organization. By examining both sides of the communication dynamic, the study will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issues, leading to more effective policy recommendations and practical implications for improving educational messaging and implementation during challenging times like the pandemic.

New knowledge and the effects on society and communities

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the Philippines, along with other nations, to restructure its educational framework to meet the evolving needs and challenges of the time. Consequently, this reorganization has led to changes in the learning delivery modalities (LDMs). The study's outcomes suggest that analyzing impoliteness strategies in online comments can provide insights into how such remarks serve as social actions. Researchers working with these textual forms, as well as those specializing in the study of genres and languages, can benefit from the findings of this study. The implications of the findings are discussed for policymakers, educators, and students within the Philippine education system.

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