

Verbal Phatic Expression in EFL Student Teachers' Classroom Interaction

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 9 January 2023 Reviewed: 9 January - 3 March 2023 Accepted: 8 March 2023 Published: 31 May 2023	<p>Purpose</p> <p>The present study looks at the types and utilization of verbal phatic expression by student teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) during classroom interactions. This teaching strategy is perceived as being crucial for communicative EFL teaching especially in high-context cultures.</p> <p>Methodology</p> <p>The present study adopted a qualitative approach utilizing a descriptive research design to address the research inquiries. The data collection process involved the utilization of observation and semi-structured interview, with a cohort of seven participants.</p> <p>Results/Findings</p> <p>The findings indicate the existence of twelve types of phatic expressions observed in the study. These encompass greetings, small talk, compliments, apologies, expressions of gratitude, farewells, polite phrases, affirmative expressions, negative responses, interjections, hedges, and filler words. Meanwhile, an examination of the data revealed that among the various phatic expressions employed by EFL student teachers in the context of classroom interaction, ten of them were found to be the most frequently utilized. These include greetings, small talk, compliments, apologies, expressions of gratitude, farewells, polite phrases, affirmative expressions, hedges, and filler words. The utilization of these expressions by student teachers served the purpose of facilitating a seamless continuity of interaction within the classroom.</p> <p>Implications</p> <p>This qualitative study presents pedagogical implications that are relevant to both EFL teachers and students, as it highlights the significance of exposure to both language competence and performance in the educational setting.</p>
Keywords: Verbal phatic expressions; Student teachers; Classroom interaction; EFL Communicative teaching strategies	

1. Introduction

Verbal phatic expression plays a vital role in establishing and maintaining positive teacher-student relationships (Jumanto, 2014). By utilizing phatic language, student teachers can create a supportive and welcoming classroom atmosphere, fostering a sense of rapport and connection with their students (Byram & Grundy, 2003; Curtis, 2019; Kayzouri et al., 2020). This interpersonal connection contributes to a conducive learning environment where students feel comfortable, engaged, and motivated to participate actively in classroom activities. Verbal phatic expression in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student teachers' classroom interaction holds significant importance in the context of teaching and learning EFL (Curtis, 2019; Knežević et al., 2020; Nasiruddin & Hum,

2018; Sah, 2020). Understanding the significance of phatic language and its application in instructional settings is crucial for several reasons.

Phatic expressions serve as communication tools for building social bonds within the EFL classroom (Curtis, 2019; Dymont et al., 2013). Student teachers who employ appropriate phatic language demonstrate their interpersonal skills and cultural competence, promoting inclusivity and understanding among diverse groups of learners (Mahmoud & Elsayed, n.d.; Yeşilçinar, 2021; Zakareya & Alahmad, 2019). Phatic language acts as a bridge, facilitating interaction and fostering a sense of community among students, thereby enhancing their overall learning experience. Effective communication lies at the heart of successful teaching and learning experiences in the EFL classroom (Chen, 2018; Sousa, 2011; Tuyet & Khang, 2020). In this context, understanding the dynamics of verbal phatic expression, which refers to the use of language for social and interpersonal purposes rather than conveying substantive information, plays a crucial role (Stubbs, 2017). However, while ample research has been conducted on language learning, pedagogy, and communicative strategies in EFL settings, there is a noticeable gap in the exploration of the types of verbal phatic expression and the frequency utilized on classroom interaction, particularly among student teachers.

Verbal phatic expression enhances the effectiveness of language instruction (Amirullah Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2019; Alderson, 2009; Indriati, 2015). By incorporating phatic language into their teaching practice, student teachers can engage students on a personal and emotional level, enabling them to better comprehend and retain new linguistic concepts. Phatic expressions help create a context for language learning, making it more meaningful and relevant to students' lives, thereby facilitating language acquisition and retention (Jumanto, 2014; Yeşilçinar, 2021). Furthermore, phatic language serves as an important tool for classroom management. Student teachers who employ appropriate phatic expressions effectively establish clear communication channels, promote positive behavior, and manage classroom dynamics more efficiently (Alshurman & Alsreaa, 2015; Hwang et al., 2022; Karjalainen et al., 2020; Kožić et al., 2013). Phatic expressions, such as praise, encouragement, and small talk, contribute to a positive classroom climate, encouraging student participation, and fostering a supportive learning environment (Zuckerman, 2020).

Recent studies and related previous research have started to shed light on the topic of verbal phatic expression in EFL student teachers' classroom interaction. Here are some noteworthy recent and previous results: A study conducted by Jumanto (2014) investigated about "Phatic communication: How English native speakers create ties of union." The research findings provide insights into the multifaceted nature of phatic communication among English native speakers, elucidating both its functions and the specific types of expressions employed to establish bonds of affiliation. The study establishes a significant link between phatic communication in this context and the concept of politeness, while also drawing support from other prominent theories in the domain of verbal human communication. Moreover, the research emphasizes the practical implications of phatic communication among English native speakers in the realm of English language instruction, wherein English teachers can utilize such communicative strategies to facilitate effective teaching and learning processes. By incorporating phatic expressions into classroom interactions, teachers can enhance students' communication skills, enabling them to navigate diverse linguistic contexts and situations while mitigating the potential for cross-cultural misunderstandings. Ultimately, recognizing the importance of phatic expressions in fostering human relationships is instrumental in building and sustaining fruitful teacher-student dynamics within the educational setting.

Several previous studies regarding phatic expression have been investigated by Porter (2017), the researcher examined about "Professional communication as phatic: From classical Eunoia to personal artificial intelligence." The findings of the study suggest that within this domain, the role of professional communicators shifts from being the creators of novel information to becoming spatial organizers, facilitators of online interactions, curators of user-generated content, and leaders in communication. The phatic function, which holds particular relevance in online interactions such as virtual teamwork, intercultural communication, and user help forums, should be given considerable attention as a primary objective in professional communication. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating phatic expressions into the communication process. Professional communicators should employ phatic exchange in their writing, interactions, and design, actively embracing and utilizing phatic discourse in various digital platforms including social media applications, virtual teamwork settings, cross-cultural interactions, blogging communities, online user help communities, and other digital environments. The phatic function is particularly significant in intercultural and/or virtual communication, as it plays a crucial role in establishing trust and social cohesion necessary for productive and ethical interactions. In essence, incorporating phatic expression, specifically verbal phatic expression, can be beneficial in certain contexts, such as enhancing instructional effectiveness for EFL student teachers.

Another relevant study by Mawadda (2021) explored the phatic communion as a unifier as portrayed in 'Wonder.' The research revealed that the phatic communication in "Wonder" is divided into 4 types i.e., greeting, making small talk, agreeing on something and joking and these types respectively serve the functions of expressing friendship and solidarity and creating harmony and comfort. The discussion also reveals the significance of phatic

communication and how it acts as a unifier for someone in need like Auggie. These findings suggest that the use of phatic expressions that this research model on phatic communication can also be adapted or even be improved by other researchers to conduct another research on phatic communication concerning another data source and possibly another language. In line with above research, Jones (2016) explored the concept of phatic competence, focusing on how second language (L2) users comprehend and engage in phatic communion. The findings unveiled the significance of employing diverse speaker strategies and indexical cues in this process. The principal objective of this research was to contribute valuable empirical evidence concerning the utilization and interpretation of phatic expressions within the realm of second language acquisition. The implications extend to researchers, language educators, and professionals in the field. Notably, student teachers frequently utilized phatic language to establish rapport and foster a positive classroom atmosphere. Furthermore, the study underscored the importance of integrating phatic expressions into teacher training programs as a means to enhance communication skills and foster effective teacher-student relationships.

Another prior research by Rodriguez and Lopez (2017) focused on the phatic communication and its implications for online learning motivation. The present research delved into the repercussions of the phatic category on the drive to learn, with particular emphasis on motivational factors related to competence, including the inclination to invest effort, enthusiasm towards facilitating student communication, and cultivation of self-directed learning. Meanwhile the recent survey conducted by Anwar et al. (2023) with a title “The role of language teachers in teaching speaking skills by using phatic expressions.” This study highlights the crucial need to explore the multifaceted role and distinct identity of language teachers in the classroom, with a particular focus on their use of phatic expressions, as they facilitate the development of speaking skills in secondary schools in Iraq. This research underscores the importance of investigating the role and identity of language teachers within the classroom setting when teaching speaking skills through the incorporation of phatic expressions in secondary schools in Iraq.

The aforementioned findings lay the groundwork for comprehending the broader implications of phatic expression beyond the confines of classroom interactions among EFL student teachers. Although these studies offer valuable insights, additional research is imperative to delve into the specific contexts, functions, and consequences of employing phatic language among EFL student teachers. Moreover, such research endeavors should aim to formulate practical strategies and recommendations to bolster the communicative competence of EFL student teachers within the classroom setting (Rahardi, 2019; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015).

Therefore, this study encompasses the investigation and identification of the types of verbal phatic expressions utilized by student teachers in their teaching practice, along with determining the frequency of their usage. By examining the range and prevalence of phatic language employed by student teachers, this research aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic and pedagogical strategies utilized in the EFL classroom. This research also seeks to contribute novelty to the existing body of literature by shedding light on a less-explored aspect of EFL instruction.

2. Literature review

2.1. Verbal phatic expression

Verbal phatic expression in EFL student teachers' classroom interaction provides valuable insights for teacher training programs (Megah, 2017). Understanding the types, functions, and frequency of phatic language used by student teachers can inform the development of curriculum and instructional strategies that explicitly incorporate these linguistic elements (Rahardi, 2019). By training student teachers to effectively utilize phatic expressions, teacher education programs can equip future educators with essential communication skills necessary for successful classroom interactions. Verbal phatic expression holds great importance in teaching and learning EFL. It plays such many roles as establishing positive teacher-student relationships, promoting social bonds, enhancing language instruction, facilitating classroom management, and informing teacher training programs underscores its significance (Zakareya & Alahmad, 2019). By recognizing and leveraging the power of phatic language, student teachers can create meaningful and engaging learning experiences that contribute to the overall success of EFL instruction.

2.2. Classroom interaction

In a classroom setting, interaction can take various forms, including verbal and non-verbal communication, discussions, debates, questioning, sharing of ideas, and collaborative activities (Challob et al., 2016; Crăciun, 2019). The teacher plays a central role in facilitating learning by providing instructions, explanations, and demonstrations. They also encourage students to engage in class activities (e.g., asking and answering questions) and provide guidance and feedback to support students with learning and development.

Classroom interaction is enhanced through the implementation of active learning strategies. These strategies involve hands-on activities, group work, problem-solving tasks, simulations, and role plays (Carless, 2022; Cummings et al., 2017). By actively engaging with the materials, students become more invested in their learning and are more likely to retain information and develop higher-order thinking skills. The benefits of effective classroom interaction are numerous. It promotes a positive and inclusive classroom climate, where students feel valued and motivated to participate actively. It enhances their understanding of concepts and helps them develop critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and social skills. Classroom interaction also promotes a sense of community, encourages creativity, and fosters a lifelong love for learning.

Teachers play a crucial role in fostering and facilitating classroom interaction. They create a supportive and respectful environment, encourage active participation, and employ effective instructional strategies to promote engagement and collaboration. By recognizing and valuing the diverse perspectives and experiences of students, teachers can leverage classroom interaction to create meaningful and transformative learning experiences.

2.3. Communication strategies

Communication strategies refer to the deliberate and planned techniques employed to effectively convey information, ideas, and messages between individuals or groups (Trisnawati et al., 2020). These strategies encompass a wide range of skills, tools, and approaches that facilitate clear, efficient, and meaningful communication. Effective communication involves expressing thoughts, ideas, and information clearly and concisely. It is crucial to use language that is appropriate for the audience, avoiding jargons or complex terms that may cause confusion. Organizing information in a logical and coherent manner, using examples and visual aids when necessary, can enhance the clarity of the message (Pratolo, 2019).

Effective communication strategies have numerous benefits. They promote understanding, facilitate cooperation, and foster positive relationships. Clear and effective communication minimizes misunderstandings, reduces conflicts, and improves productivity (Porter, 2017). By actively employing communication strategies, individuals can enhance their interpersonal and professional skills, become better leaders, and contribute to a positive and inclusive communication environment. So, communication strategies in classroom interaction, teachers can create an inclusive and engaging learning environment. Effective communication enhances student participation, understanding, and critical thinking skills. It fosters positive teacher-student relationships, encourages collaboration among students, and cultivates a classroom culture that values active learning and mutual respect (Barati & Barati, 2015). This is so important in high-context cultures

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

The present study adopted a qualitative approach, specifically employing a descriptive research design, to comprehensively address the research inquiries regarding verbal phatic expression in EFL student teachers' classroom interaction (Akinyode & Khan, 2018; Creswell, 2013). The qualitative paradigm was deemed suitable for capturing the richness and nuances of the phenomena under investigation, allowing for in-depth exploration and understanding of the types and frequency of phatic expression used by EFL student teachers in EFL student teachers' classroom interaction (Christopher Pole., 2003; Patton, 2002). The purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure a diverse representation of EFL student teachers as the participants of this study.

3.2. Research participant

Five out of the seven eligible EFL student teachers volunteered to partake in the present research. The subsequent table provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Participant demographics

No.	Names (Pseudonym)	Genders	Age (years)	Teaching experiences
1	Aiman	Male	22	Three months of experience in teaching English. Had experience in implementing offline teaching and learning during his teaching practice.
2	Harini	Female	21	Three months of experience in teaching English. Had experience in implementing offline teaching and learning.
3.	Sarina	Female	21	Three months of experience in teaching English. Had experience in implementing offline teaching and learning.
4.	Budiarti	Female	21	Three months of experience in teaching English. Had experience in implementing offline teaching and learning.

5.	Mariana	Female	21	Three months of experience in teaching English. Had experience in implementing offline teaching and learning.
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3.3. Data collection instrument

The collection of data was employed direct classroom observation and video recording (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Steven J. Taylor et al., 1375). Observation provided an opportunity to directly observe and document the verbal phatic expressions utilized by student teachers in their classroom interactions. This method allowed the real-time data collection, capturing the spontaneous use of verbal phatic expression used by the student teachers in authentic teaching contexts. Meanwhile collecting data through video recordings intended to capture the teacher and students' classroom interaction, classroom dynamics, instructional techniques, or student engagements and it can be observed again later (Christopher Pole., 2003). By strategically positioning cameras, researchers can record different angles or viewpoints of the same event. This multi-angle approach provides a comprehensive view of the subject, enhancing the understanding of interactions, relationships, and contextual factors.

3.4. Data analysis

The data analysis in this study followed a systematic approach to ensure thorough exploration and interpretation of the qualitative data collected. The analysis process can be outlined as follows: (1) transcription; (2) coding; (3) data tabulation; (4) data interpretation; and (5) data interpretation validation or trustworthiness (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Steven J. Taylor et al., 1375). To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings, the researchers employed various strategies, such as member checking and peer debriefing. Member checking involved sharing the analyzed findings with the participants to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the interpretations (Goodyear et al., 2014; Jack R. Fraenkel & Wallen., 2009).

4. Finding and discussion

The primary objectives of this study are to address two key research questions. Firstly, it aims to explore the various types of verbal phatic expressions employed by student teachers during their teaching practice or interactions within the classroom. Secondly, the study seeks to determine the frequency at which these verbal phatic expressions are utilized by the student teachers in their instructional activities.

Through a comprehensive exploration of the various types of verbal phatic expressions employed by student teachers, this study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge base in the field of education. By unraveling the intricacies of these expressions, we can gain a deeper understanding of their role in promoting effective communication, fostering positive teacher-student relationships, and ultimately enhancing the educational experience for both educators and learners. The following is an exposition of the diverse types of verbal phatic expressions that student teachers employ during their interactions within the classroom.

Table 2: Types of verbal phatic expressions used by student teachers in classroom interaction

No.	Types of phatic expressions	Verbal phatic expression
1.	Greetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hello - Hi. - Hey - Good morning - Good afternoon - Good evening - Etc.
2.	Small talk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How are you today? - Nice weather we're having isn't it?" - How long have you been here today? - What are your hobbies and interests? - Do you have any homework? - Where do you travel for this vacation? - How many brothers and sisters do you have in your family? - What favourite food and drink do you like most? - What sports do you like most?
3.	Compliment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You look great today - That's a really nice outfit - You did a fantastic job on that task - Good looking, boy - Pretty good

4	Apology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good job guy - I'm sorry for being late - I apologize for my mistake - Please forgive me for what I said - I'm sorry - I apologize - I would like to apologize - Please accept my apologies
5.	Thank-you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I regret what I did/said - Thank you for your help - I really appreciate it - Thanks a lot
6.	Farewell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good job - Goodbye - Take care - See you later - have a nice day
7	Polite phrase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excuse me - Pardon me - May I ask - Would you mind
8.	Affirmative response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes - I see - Absolutely - That's right - Good job - incredible
9.	Negative response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No - I don't think so - That's not true - I disagree
10.	Interjection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wow - Oh - Ah - Ouch
11.	Hedge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'm not sure - But I think - It could be that - To some extent
12.	Filler words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uhm - Er - Uh - Like

The data in Table 2 shows that there are at least twelve types of verbal phatic expressions used by student teachers in classroom interaction encompasses a wide range of communication strategies employed to establish rapport, engage with students, and create a positive learning environment.

Utilizing verbal expressions in EFL classroom interaction offers a multitude of benefits, functions, and positive impacts on both students and teachers (Chapman, 2020). Firstly, verbal expressions enhance communication by providing a means to convey information, clarify concepts, and express thoughts (García-Pinar, 2022; Yao & Lai, 2019). Teachers can effectively deliver lessons, while students can articulate their ideas, resulting in a smoother exchange of information and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Secondly, verbal expressions contribute to increased engagement among students. By incorporating greetings, small talk, and compliments, teachers create a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment (Sultan, 2020). This, in turn, fosters a sense of value and motivation in students, leading to higher levels of participation, active engagement, and a positive attitude towards learning. Verbal expressions establish a positive emotional connection, making the classroom an enjoyable and supportive space for students (Kesevan et al., 2020; Žegarac & Clark, 1999). Thirdly, utilizing verbal expressions in EFL classroom interaction facilitates rapport building between teachers and students. Through greetings, small talk, and positive feedback both affectively and cognitively, teachers establish personal connections with their students. This helps foster trust, respect, and a sense of belonging and motivation to engage in the learning process. Students feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts, seeking assistance, and engaging in meaningful discussions, which in turn enhances their overall learning experience (Stubbs, 2017).

Furthermore, verbal expressions promote cultural awareness and sensitivity (Cheraghi & Karamimehr, 2022). Teachers can introduce greetings, expressions of gratitude, and small talk related to different cultures. In addition, such expressions also help to create the feeling being safe in the classroom. When the students feel safe, they are more likely to express their ideas openly because the power distance between the teacher and the students is narrowed. This exposure encourages students to appreciate and respect cultural diversity, fostering empathy, tolerance, and a global perspective (A Abduh, 2018). By incorporating various verbal expressions, teachers create an inclusive and culturally rich learning environment that prepares students to be competent global citizens (Amirullah Abduh et al., 2020; Hedda, 2013).

Lastly, utilizing verbal expressions in EFL classroom interaction aids in language learning and fluency development (Andrew et al., 2023). Actively using a variety of verbal expressions exposes students to authentic language usage, idiomatic expressions, and colloquialisms (Appropriate & Language, 2022; Nurmallasari et al., 2021). This exposure enhances their language skills, including vocabulary expansion, grammar proficiency, and oral fluency. Through meaningful and contextually relevant communication, students gain confidence in using the language effectively in real-life situations (A Abduh, 2018).

The benefits, functions, and positive impact of utilizing verbal expressions in EFL classroom interaction are substantial. They enhance communication, increase student engagement, foster rapport, promote cultural awareness, and aid in language acquisition (Rosmaladewi, 2017). By incorporating a variety of verbal expressions, teachers create an environment that encourages active participation, builds relationships, and supports students' overall language learning journey. The utilization of verbal phatic expressions by student teachers in the EFL classroom interaction is vital for effective communication, creating a positive and engaging learning environment, and nurturing meaningful connections between student teachers and their students (Agustine et al., 2021; Amirullah Abduh et al., 2020; Ayuningsih et al., 2022; Rosmaladewi et al., 2020; Simpuruh et al., 2020). Understanding the functions and benefits of these expressions empowers student teachers to establish rapport, motivate students, and foster a supportive classroom climate that facilitates academic growth and personal development.

The second finding refers to the observation and analysis of verbal phatic expressions with most frequent use by student teachers during their interactions within the classroom setting. Verbal phatic expressions are commonly used to establish and maintain social connections, express politeness, and initiate small talk (Begum, 2018; Hoinbala, 2022). The employment of such expressions by student teachers within the classroom context suggests their recognition of the importance of interpersonal communication and their efforts to foster positive relationships with students. By engaging in small talk and using polite phrases, student teachers aim to create a comfortable and welcoming environment for effective teaching and learning (Pratolo, 2019; Zakareya & Alahmad, 2019). This finding sheds light on the significance of verbal phatic expressions in the pedagogical practices of student teachers and highlights their awareness of the interpersonal dynamics that contribute to successful classroom interactions.

Table 3. Verbal phatic expressions most frequently utilized by the student teachers

No.	Types of phatic expression	Verbal phatic expression
1.	Greetings	- Hello - Hi - Hey - Good morning - Good afternoon - Good evening - Etc.
2.	Small talk.	- How are you today? - Nice weather we're having isn't it? - How long have you been here today? - What are your hobbies and interests? - Do you have any homework? - Where do you travel for this vacation? - How many brothers and sisters do you have in your family? - What favourite food and drink do you like most? - What sports do you like most?
3.	Compliment	- You look great today guys - That's a really nice - You did a fantastic job on that task - Brilliant boy

4	Apology	- Fantastic
		- Good job guys
		- I'm sorry
		- I apologize
		- I would like to apologize
5.	Thank-you	- Please accept my apologies
		- I regret what I did/said
		- Thank you
		- Thanks a lot
		- I appreciate it
		- I'm grateful
		- Many thanks
		- I'm so thankful
		- I can't thank you enough
		- Please
7	Polite phrase	- Thank you
		- Excuse me
		- I'm sorry
		- Could you please...?
		- Would you mind...?
		- Pardon me
		- Yes
		- I see
		- Absolutely
		- That's right
8.	Affirmative response	- Good job
		- Incredible
		- I think...
		- Perhaps...
		- Maybe...
9.	Hedge	- It's likely that...
		- In my opinion...
		- Uhm
		- Uh
		- Well
10.	Filler words	- You know
		- So
		- I mean
		- Right

The range of verbal phatic expressions employed by student teachers in the EFL classroom as depicted in Table 3 encompasses greetings, small talk, compliments, apologies, expressions of gratitude, farewells, polite phrases, affirmative expressions, hedges, and filler words (Anwar et al., 2023; Jumanto, 2014; Mawadda, 2021). Each of these expressions serves a specific purpose and contributes to effective communication and positive classroom dynamics.

Greetings play a crucial role in establishing a welcoming atmosphere at the beginning of interactions (Jones, 2016). They help create a sense of connection and set a positive tone for the rest of the classroom exchange. Small talk, on the other hand, allows student teachers to engage students in casual conversations, promoting rapport, and building relationships (Jones, 2016; Mawadda, 2021; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). It also helps create a comfortable environment for students to express themselves and share their thoughts.

Compliments serve as powerful tools for encouraging and motivating students (Jasrial et al., 2021). By recognizing and appreciating their efforts, skills, or contributions, student teachers enhance students' self-esteem and confidence, ultimately fostering a positive learning environment. Apologies, on the other hand, demonstrate accountability and empathy (Hedda, 2013; Senft, 1996). When student teachers acknowledge their mistakes or any inconvenience caused, it shows their commitment to maintaining respectful and constructive interactions (Begum, 2018; Lau et al., 2019).

Expressions of gratitude play a crucial role in nurturing a culture of appreciation within the classroom (Fajar & Sulistyowati, 2022; Kesevan et al., 2020; Stubbs, 2017). By expressing gratitude for students' cooperation, assistance, or positive behavior, student teachers reinforce positive attitudes, encourage helpfulness, and strengthen the student-teacher relationship (Bond & Worthing, 2016). Farewells, whether at the end of a class or an individual interaction, allow student teachers to conclude on a polite and respectful note, leaving a positive impression on students (Agustine et al., 2021; Porter, 2017).

Polite phrases are essential for maintaining a respectful and considerate classroom environment. They help student teachers navigate social interactions, promote good manners, and teach students the importance of politeness in communication (Ambarwati et al., 2019; Kamlasi & Sahan, 2022; Nurmalasari et al., 2021; Trihartanti & Septian, 2021). Affirmative expressions contribute to building a supportive classroom atmosphere by validating and reinforcing students' ideas or efforts. They foster a sense of validation and encourage active participation.

Hedges serve the purpose of indicating caution or uncertainty in student teachers' statements (Trihartanti & Septian, 2021). They allow for careful communication, acknowledging the limitations of knowledge or opinion. Filler words, although often overlooked, have a role in providing linguistic placeholders, allowing student teachers time to think, formulate their ideas, or fill pauses in their speech (Laserna et al., 2014; Sugiura et al., 2020).

Referring to the use of verbal phatic expression above, it could be summed up that the utilization of greetings, small talk, compliments, apologies, expressions of gratitude, farewells, polite phrases, affirmative expressions, hedges, and filler words by student teachers demonstrates their ability to establish rapport, motivate students, maintain a positive learning environment, and effectively communicate in the EFL classroom (García-Pinar, 2022; Hwang et al., 2022; Jasrial et al., 2021; Nurmalasari et al., 2021; Yao & Lai, 2019). By incorporating these verbal phatic expressions, student teachers enhance engagement, foster positive relationships, and create an inclusive and supportive space for students to thrive academically and personally.

5. Conclusions and suggestions

5.1. Conclusions

This qualitative descriptive study aims to comprehensively investigate and examine two primary research inquiries. The utilization of verbal phatic expressions by student teachers in EFL classroom interaction plays a crucial role in fostering effective communication, building rapport, and creating a positive and inclusive learning environment. Throughout the analysis of various types of verbal phatic expressions, including greetings, small talk, compliments, apologies, expressions of gratitude, farewells, polite phrases, affirmative expressions, hedges, and filler words, it is evident that these expressions serve specific functions and yield significant benefits (Anwar et al., 2023; Jumanto, 2014; Wuryaningrum, 2023). This study has also shed light on the ten most frequently utilized verbal phatic expressions employed by EFL student teachers during classroom interactions. These expressions, including greetings, small talk, compliments, apologies, expressions of gratitude, farewells, polite phrases, affirmative expressions, hedges, and filler words.

Based on the results, it could be concluded that the study highlights the importance of incorporating verbal phatic expressions into the pedagogical practices of EFL student teachers, enhancing the quality of classroom interactions and ultimately supporting students' language learning and overall educational experiences. Recognizing their impact empowers student teachers to effectively engage students, foster positive relationships, and create a conducive environment for successful language learning and overall academic growth. This finding serves as a strategy for EFL student teachers, offering valuable insights to enhance their proficiency in fostering positive relationships, motivation, self-confidence, and an inclusive learning environment, particularly within the context of teaching and learning (Alek, et al., 2023).

5.2. Suggestions

Building upon the aforementioned findings, it is recommended that EFL student teachers and teacher educators are well aware of active utilization of verbal phatic expressions in their classroom interactions. By doing so, they can effectively enhance their skills in building positive relationships, fostering motivation and self-confidence among students, and creating an inclusive learning environment. Attention should be given to practicing *greetings, small talk, compliments, apologies, expressions of gratitude, farewells, polite phrases, affirmative expressions, hedges, and filler words*, as these expressions have been found to contribute significantly to successful classroom communication and engagement. Student teachers can further develop their proficiency in employing these verbal phatic expressions through reflective practice, professional development opportunities, and continuous self-improvement efforts (Alshawi & A. Alshumaimeri, 2017; Gilbert, 2012). By embracing these recommendations, student teachers can enhance their teaching effectiveness and facilitate a more enriching educational experience for their students (Fakhri Alamdari & Ghani, 2022; Yeşilçinar, 2021).

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