

## EXPLORING POLITENESS THROUGH MODALITY: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF MODAL VERBS IN INDONESIAN EFL TEXTBOOKS

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><b>Article History</b> Received: October 2025 Revised: December 2025 Accepted: February 2026 Published: April 2026</p> <p><b>Keywords</b> Corpus analysis; EFL textbooks; Modal verbs; Language politeness; Pragmatics analysis;</p>	<p><i>Politeness is a core aspect of language use and is frequently realized through modality, particularly modal verbs expressing permission and indirectness. In EFL contexts, textbooks play a crucial role in shaping learners' pragmatic competence by modeling how modal verbs encode culturally appropriate politeness strategies. This study aims to explore modal verbs expressing politeness in English textbooks for grades 10, 11, and 12. A corpus-assisted approach was employed and the primary data consisted of reading and instructional texts from the three English textbooks constructed as a corpus. The texts were converted into txt format and processed using AntConc to analyze six modal verbs associated with politeness: may, might, can, could, will, and would. The analysis focused on frequency counts and contextual usage identification to determine how each modal conveyed politeness in different topics and tasks. The results showed an increasing frequency of modal verbs across grade levels, with 183 occurrences in Grade 10, 329 in Grade 11, and 343 in Grade 12. Across all grades, the modal verb can was the most frequently used, while modal verbs might and could were rarely used. Modal verbs like may, can, might, could, will, and would in the textbooks reflect Indonesian social norms of politeness. Among them, modal verbs can, will, and may are used most often, showing common expressions of permission and polite requests in formal and everyday contexts. The findings suggest that modal verb usage in the textbooks reflects Indonesian cultural values, particularly the preference for polite, indirect communication in formal and educational settings.</i></p>

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### INTRODUCTION

Politeness constitutes a central aspect of human communication, fostering social harmony and strengthening positive interpersonal relationships. It reflects an individual's sensitivity to social conventions as well as their awareness of the emotions, expectations, and social positions of others (Chintawidy & Sartini, 2022; Eslami et al., 2023). Politeness becomes especially significant in multicultural and cross-cultural contexts, where differing cultural norms can lead to varied expectations of respectful and appropriate language use (Fathi, 2024; Friginal & Leymarie, 2020; McGee, 2019; Puput Handriani et al., 2025). In such contexts, misunderstandings often arise not from a lack of grammatical competence, but from pragmatic

deficiencies, particularly when speakers fail to use language appropriately in social situations (McGee, 2019; Nu, 2020).

Politeness in language studies has been extensively analyzed within pragmatics, with frameworks such as Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (2014) offering insights into how speakers mitigate face-threatening acts, soften requests, and preserve positive relationships. These theories assert that politeness transcends basic verbal selection, functioning as a tactic intricately linked to power dynamics, social proximity, and cultural norms. Modality, conveyed through modal verbs such as *may*, *might*, *can*, *could*, *will*, and *would*, is one of the most prevalent linguistic mechanisms for expressing politeness in English. These verbs enable speakers to indicate possibility, grant permission, propose tentative ideas, and convey deference—functions essential for cultivating civilized communication.

Enhancing pragmatic proficiency In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), it is seen as a fundamental component of communicative competence (Jin et al., 2025; Salih & Kurt, 2025; Wati et al., 2025; Zavialova, 2023). Pragmatic competency allows learners to construct grammatically correct sentences while simultaneously conforming their speech to contextual standards of civility, formality, and respect (Jakupčević & Čavar Portolan, 2024; Yan, 2022). This is especially crucial in multicultural communication, when neglecting to employ polite forms may result in perceptions of incivility, even if unintentional.

In Indonesia, where actual English contact outside the classroom is scarce, textbooks are the principal source of linguistic and pragmatic input for learners (Fani Prastikawati & Yonata, 2022; Foll, 2021; McGrath, 2013). Textbooks not only offer grammar and vocabulary but also serve as exemplars for appropriate language use in interaction (Andajani et al., 2024; Meihami & Khanlarzadeh, 2015; Nishizaki, 2025; Nu, 2020; Tran & Yeh, 2020). The degree to which textbooks illustrate politeness tactics, particularly via modal verbs, directly influences students' capacity to interact graciously and successfully in English. If textbooks offer restricted or biased representations, pupils may cultivate an inadequate comprehension of pragmatic standards.

Prior studies have underscored issues regarding the disparity between grammatical and pragmatic content in EFL courses. Research conducted by Akhofullah & Oktavianti (2023) and Nozawa (2014) demonstrates that although modal verbs are prevalent in textbooks, their pragmatic functions are typically inadequately examined. Modal verbs are primarily introduced as grammatical indicators of tense or modality, with inadequate focus on their roles in requests, offers, suggestions, or hedging. This establishes a disparity between linguistic understanding and pragmatic application, potentially obstructing learners' capacity to engage in effective real-life communication.

This study used a corpus-based pragmatic methodology to examine the representation of politeness via modal verbs in Indonesian EFL textbooks for senior high schools. A corpus-based approach facilitates systematic, quantitative examination of modal verb frequency, enhanced by qualitative interpretation of their pragmatic functions within context (Adil Jaafar, 2022; Caprario et al., 2022; Çepani & Rushiti, 2025; Tsung & Wu, 2021). This dual perspective facilitates an overview of linguistic patterns and a profound comprehension of the role of modal verbs in enhancing politeness within authentic textbook speech. The study specifically seeks to address two research questions as follows: (1) What are the frequency patterns of modal verbs denoting politeness (*may*, *might*, *can*, *could*, *will*, *would*) in Indonesian EFL textbooks for Grades X, XI, and XII? How are modal verbs employed to express several politeness functions (possibility, permission, ability, prediction, and volition) in these textbooks?

This study's findings aim to enhance the expanding literature on pragmatic competence in EFL teaching, offering practical insights for textbook authors, educators, and curriculum designers. The study reveals strengths and weaknesses in politeness representation, offering ideas for designing textbooks that promote both grammatical precision and pragmatically

suitable communication. This ultimately equips Indonesian learners to interact successfully and politely in local and global communication situations.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### *Research Design*

This research employed a corpus-based qualitative methodology to examine the portrayal of politeness through modality in Indonesian EFL textbooks for senior high school students. A corpus-based methodology was used due to its capacity for methodical and data-driven examination of linguistic trends within real language texts, including EFL textbooks. The qualitative portion of the study concentrated on analyzing how modal verbs facilitate the expression of politeness, taking into account both language and pragmatic dimensions.

### **Research Subject**

This study's primary data comprised three EFL textbooks utilized in Indonesian senior high schools. The textbooks were chosen according to the following criteria: (i) they are officially endorsed or widely utilized in Indonesian high schools, (ii) they fulfill the curriculum requirements for Grades 10 to 12, and (iii) they include dialogues, reading passages, and exercises that demonstrate the use of modal verbs. The selected textbooks represent *Kurikulum Merdeka* materials published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, ensuring both curricular relevance and authenticity of language input. Table 1 provides an overview of the corpus token distribution across the textbooks.

Table 1  
Corpus Detail

No	Textbook Detail	Token
1	Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress grade 10 (2022) written by Budi Hermawan, Dwi Haryanti, and Nining Suryaningsih	34.211
2	Bahasa Inggris: for Change grade 11 (2022) written by Puji Astuti., et al	36.309
3	Bahasa Inggris: Life Today grade 12 (2022) written by Susanti Retno Hardini, et al	36.607
Total		107.127

### **Corpus Construction**

The textbooks were compiled into a corpus file through a series of systematic procedures to ensure accuracy and consistency of the data. First, the selected textbooks in PDF format were collected and prepared as the primary data source. These files were then converted into plain text format to facilitate further processing and analysis. Subsequently, the raw text files were carefully cleaned by removing extraneous elements such as page numbers, headers, references, and illustrations, all of which were not relevant to the linguistic analysis. Once the data had been refined, the cleaned texts were saved into structured corpus files and organized according to grade level. This process resulted in a well-structured corpus that was ready for subsequent linguistic and pragmatic analysis. This process ensured that the corpus was both clean and suitable for systematic analysis of modality and politeness.

### **Data Collection**

Corpus queries were conducted using the *Key Word in Context* (KWIC) feature. All textual content from the textbooks, including dialogues, reading passages, language focus sections, and example sentences, was compiled into the corpus. The texts were manually reviewed to extract instances of modal verbs relevant to politeness. The modal verbs under study are *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *shall*, *should*, *will*, *would*.

## Corpus Tool

The corpus queries and analyses were conducted using AntConc (Anthony, 2024). AntConc was selected as the corpus tool for this study due to its accessibility, functionality, and widespread acceptance in the field of corpus linguistics.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted in two primary phases: linguistic analysis and pragmatic analysis, to achieve a thorough understanding of the utilization of modal verbs in the textbooks. The stages were created to illustrate the structural distribution of modal verbs and their pragmatic functions concerning politeness, thereby offering a multifaceted view of their educational representation.

The initial phase involved linguistic analysis. At this stage, all instances of modal verbs were methodically detected and later classified based on their grammatical categories and communicative purposes. Subsequently, frequency counts were performed to ascertain the relative distribution of modal verbs and identify the most prevalent forms throughout the examined textbooks. Special emphasis was placed on the textual settings in which these modal verbs manifested, concentrating on their prevalence in politeness-related scenarios. These scenarios encompassed making requests, offering advice, providing ideas, and expressing ambiguity and indirectness, all of which are acknowledged as significant roles of modal verbs in English language.

The second stage was a pragmatic analysis that beyond the mere identification of modal verbs to investigate their role in politeness techniques. This phase was informed by Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness and Leech's principles of politeness, both of which offer recognized frameworks for analyzing the interpersonal and sociolinguistic aspects of language utilization. Every occurrence of a modal verb was meticulously analyzed within its surrounding co-text and context to assess its pragmatic function in executing techniques of indirectness, mitigation, or awareness of uneven power dynamics and social distance. This analysis aimed to reveal the role of modal verbs as both grammatical instruments and tools for fostering social cohesion and negotiating interpersonal meaning in educational discourse.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, investigator triangulation was applied during the data coding and interpretation process. In addition, illustrative examples from the textbooks were presented in the findings to ensure transparency and facilitate validation by readers. Inter-coder reliability was established by comparing the coding of modal verbs and their pragmatic functions between two researchers (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved until consensus was reached, ensuring consistency and accuracy in the interpretation of the data.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Research Findings

#### Frequency of Modal Verbs Expressing Politeness

This section addresses Research Question 1, which concerns the frequency of modal verbs related to possibility, permission, and ability (*may, might, can, could*) as well as prediction and volition (*will, would*) in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* English textbooks for Grades X, XI, and XII. The results of the corpus analysis using AntConc reveal important findings regarding how frequently these modal verbs occur across the textbooks.

Table 2  
The Frequency of Central Modal Verbs in Textbooks X Grade

Modal Verbs	Frequency	Percentage
Can	75	40,98%
Will	49	26,78%
May	32	17,49%

Modal Verbs	Frequency	Percentage
Would	18	9,84%
Could	7	3,83%
Might	2	1,09%
Total	183	100%

The analysis shows that *can* is the most frequent modal verb (75 occurrences, 40.98%), followed by *will* (49 occurrences, 26.78%). *May* also appears relatively often (32 occurrences, 17.49%), while *might* is the least frequent (2 occurrences, 1.09%). Figures 1 and 2 visualize these results in terms of raw frequency and percentage.

Table 3  
The Frequency of Central Modal Verbs in Textbooks XI Grade

Modal Verbs	Frequency	Percentage
Can	142	43,16%
Will	129	39,21%
Would	19	5,78%
Might	17	5,17%
May	13	3,95%
Could	9	2,74%
Total	329	100%

In this textbook, *can* again dominates (142 occurrences, 43.16%), followed closely by *will* (129 occurrences, 39.21%). Modal verbs *might* (5.17%) and *would* (5.78%) occur more frequently than in Grade X, while *may* (3.95%) and *could* (2.74%) remain relatively low. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate these results.

Table 4  
The Frequency of Central Modal Verbs in Textbooks XII Grade

Modal Verbs	Frequency	Percentage
Can	153	44,61%
Will	64	18,66%
May	48	13,99%
Could	43	12,54%
Would	22	6,41%
Might	13	3,79%
Total	343	100%

Similar to the previous grades, *can* is the most frequent modal verb (153 occurrences, 44.61%). Interestingly, *could* occurs more often in Grade XII (43 occurrences, 12.54%) compared to earlier grades. Modal verb *may* also shows a notable increase (48 occurrences, 13.99%). Figures 5 and 6 visualize these results.

### Comparative Overview

Across the three textbooks, *can* consistently emerges as the dominant modal verb, ranging from 40.98% in Grade X to 44.61% in Grade XII. *Will* also appears prominently, particularly in Grades X and XI. By contrast, *might* and *could* occur far less frequently, though *could* shows a significant rise in Grade XII. These findings suggest that Indonesian EFL textbooks emphasize expressions of ability and certainty more than those of possibility or tentative politeness.

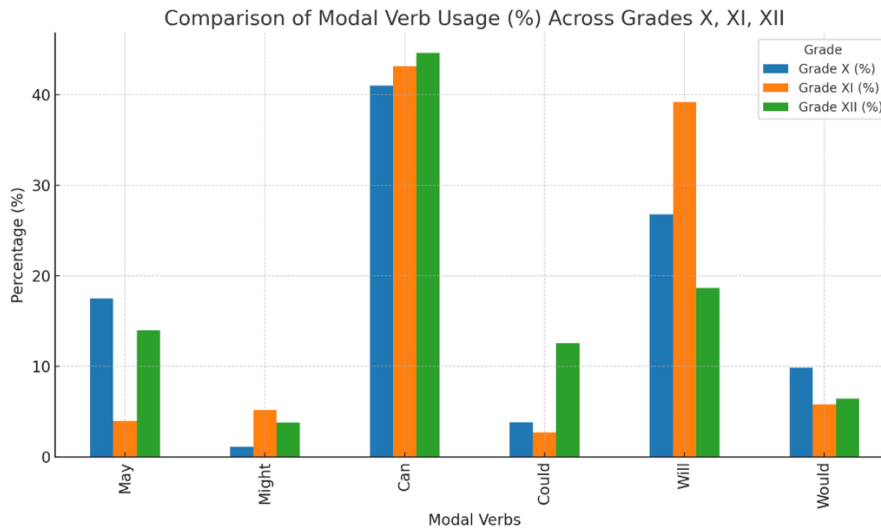


Figure 1. Comparison of modal verb use

The comparative chart highlights clear trends in the distribution of modal verbs across the Grade X, XI, and XII *Kurikulum Merdeka* textbooks. First, “can” consistently emerges as the most dominant modal verb across all three grade levels, accounting for 40.98% in Grade X, 43.16% in Grade XI, and reaching its peak at 44.61% in Grade XII. This strong presence suggests that the textbooks heavily emphasize expressions of ability and general possibility, which are fundamental to everyday communication in English.

Second, “will” is the second most frequent modal verb overall, particularly salient in Grade XI where it reaches 39.21%. Its high frequency in Grades X and XI reflects the importance of prediction and future-oriented expressions in the learning materials. However, its usage drops significantly in Grade XII (18.66%), which may indicate a curricular shift toward encouraging students to use more varied modal expressions beyond simple futurity. Third, the results reveal a noticeable rise in the use of “may” and “could” in Grade XII. The proportion of *may* increases from 3.95% in Grade XI to 13.99% in Grade XII, while *could* rises sharply from 2.74% to 12.54%. This trend suggests that more advanced levels of the curriculum introduce greater emphasis on tentativeness, politeness, and indirectness, aligning with learners’ growing communicative competence.

In contrast, “might” and “would” exhibit consistently low frequencies across all grades, with only minor fluctuations. Their restricted depiction suggests that subtle kinds of modal politeness, such as hypothetical or extremely tentative utterances, are not significantly emphasized in the textbooks. The transition from Grade X to XII illustrates a steady expansion in the usage of modal verbs, shifting from the predominance of “can” and “will” in lower grades to a greater inclusion of “may” and “could” in higher grades. This demonstrates the curriculum’s effort to gradually introduce learners to modal verbs, progressing from expressions of certainty and ability to more nuanced kinds of politeness and indirectness.

### Variations of Politeness Functions

The modal verbs served various functions in the textbooks, primarily falling into five categories: *possibility*, *permission*, *ability*, *prediction*, and *volition*. Possibility (*may*, *might*, *can*, *could*) highlights how modal verbs are employed to express options, likelihood, or hypothetical conditions in the textbooks. Each modal demonstrates distinct shades of meaning and levels of politeness. Some examples are as follows.

- (1) *May* frequently conveyed polite options or probability (e.g., “You may use symbols or illustrations”).
- (2) *Might* appeared less often but indicated tentative politeness in hypothetical situations (e.g., “What might be Maudy’s purpose?”).

- (3) *Can* often expressed factual or dynamic possibility (e.g., “Stressing the wrong syllable can cause misunderstanding”).
- (4) *Could* provided a softer, more polite form of possibility (e.g., “It could be better if...”), especially in Grade XII.

In the domain of Permission (*may, can, could*) the modal verbs illustrate varying degrees of formality, naturalness, and politeness depending on the context of use. The patterns observed reveal how learners are guided to recognize and employ different levels of directness when making or granting permission. Some examples are as follows.

- (5) *May* was used in formal, classroom-related contexts (e.g., “May I thank you for being an attentive audience?”).
- (6) *Can* was more common in everyday interactions, making permission requests sound natural (e.g., “Can you mention one creative way of staying healthy?”).
- (7) *Could* expressed greater politeness and indirectness (e.g., “Could you feel the same excitement?”).

Ability (*can, could, may, might*): When expressing ability, the textbooks predominantly relied on certain modal verbs, with others appearing more sparingly in specific contexts. The distribution highlights differences between present, past, and hypothetical expressions of capability. Below are some examples for ability.

- (8) *Can* dominated ability expressions across all textbooks (e.g., “Ronaldo can run very fast”).
- (9) *Could* often conveyed potential or past ability (e.g., “We could clearly understand the text”).
- (10) *May* and *might* occasionally expressed ability in hypothetical contexts (e.g., “You might want to do some online searches”).

Prediction (*will, would, may, might*): In terms of prediction, the textbooks employed modal verbs to signal varying degrees of certainty, ranging from definite outcomes to tentative possibilities. The usage reflects how learners are exposed to both direct instructions and hypothetical or uncertain future events. Some examples are written below.

- (11) *Will* was widely used to indicate certainty or instructions (e.g., “You will learn through Team Jigsaw”).
- (12) *Would* conveyed hypothetical predictions (e.g., “What would you do in the same situation?”).
- (13) *May* and *might* offered softer predictions, signaling uncertainty (e.g., “Wasting time may become obsolete”).

Volition (*will, would*): For volition, the textbooks demonstrated how modal verbs can be used to express intention, willingness, or preference in varying degrees of directness. The contrast between *will* and *would* highlights differences in formality and politeness. Below are some examples of volition.

- (14) *Will* expressed intention or desire (e.g., “Your teacher will give your partner a picture”).
- (15) *Would* reflected politeness in offers or preferences (e.g., “I would like to say thank you”).

Based on the findings, the textbooks gradually introduce learners to both direct and indirect forms of politeness. While *can* dominates basic requests and statements, higher-grade textbooks incorporate *could* and *would* to model more refined politeness strategies. A cross-grade comparison reveals three noteworthy trends in the use of modal verbs. First, *can* consistently dominates across all levels, underscoring its central role in teaching functional English related to ability, permission, and informal requests. Second, the distribution of *will* and *could* shifts noticeably, with *will* reaching its peak in Grade XI before declining in Grade XII, while *could* gains greater prominence in Grade XII, suggesting a pedagogical emphasis on

developing more nuanced expressions of politeness at higher levels. Finally, *might* remains rare throughout all grades, indicating that tentative politeness strategies receive relatively little attention in Indonesian EFL materials. These patterns imply that textbooks prioritize accessibility and clarity at lower levels, gradually moving toward indirectness and nuance as learners advance.

The use of modal verbs in the textbooks reflects Indonesian cultural values surrounding politeness, respect, and indirectness. *May* and *might* align with formal and respectful communication, reinforcing hierarchical classroom norms. *Can* reflects everyday politeness that is easily transferable to students' daily interactions. *Could* and *would* embody indirectness, a key feature of Indonesian politeness, by softening requests and expressing deference. By embedding these patterns, the textbooks not only teach grammar but also socialize learners into culturally appropriate communication. This supports the notion that EFL materials function as both linguistic and cultural tools, shaping students' pragmatic awareness in line with Indonesian social norms.

## Discussion

The research indicated that *may*, *can*, and *will* are the predominant modal verbs in the Merdeka Curriculum textbooks for Grades X, XI, and XII, with *can* exhibiting the highest frequency at all levels (183 in Grade X, 329 in Grade XI, and 343 in Grade XII). The pronounced prevalence of "can" aligns with previous research (Akhofullah & Oktavianti, 2023; Kipiani, 2022; Nozawa, 2014; Oktavianti & Fajria, 2021; Qian & Pan, 2019), which consistently identified "can" and "will" as the most prevalent modals in both EFL instructional resources and extensive corpora like COCA and BNC. The prominence of these modals demonstrates their critical significance in instructing core communicative functions, specifically ability, permission, and routine interactional purposes, deemed crucial in formal educational settings. Their repetition also signifies the educational emphasis on high-utility modal verbs that students are prone to encounter in everyday conversation.

The findings indicate that modal verbs play a crucial role in expressing nuanced dimensions of politeness in communication, extending beyond their quantitative frequency of use. The modal verbs *may* and *might* are traditionally associated with requests and permissions (e.g., *May I borrow your eraser?*), with *may* often signaling greater formality and deference (Durst-Andersen, 2023; Leech, 2014; Panuntun & Ulya, 2023). Modal verb "might," however less commonly used, signifies a more hesitant and indirect request, therefore suggesting heightened politeness (Akhofullah & Oktavianti, 2023; Collins, 2014; Collins, 2009; Nozawa, 2014). Similarly, "could" frequently serves as a more courteous substitute for "can," favored in situations when politeness and respect are anticipated (Akhofullah & Oktavianti, 2023; Collins, 2014; Collins, 2009), in accordance with Indonesian cultural norms that prioritize indirectness and harmonious contact (Chintawidy & Sartini, 2022; Prayitno et al., 2022). At the same time, *will* and *would* not only denote intention or future action but also function as markers of politeness; in particular, *would* is frequently employed to frame requests more courteously or to introduce hypothetical situations with greater tact.

The results suggest that the use of modals in the textbooks reflects broader socio-cultural orientations of Indonesian society, where courteousness and indirectness are highly valued in communication (Durst-Andersen, 2023; Nozawa, 2014). Given Indonesia's cultural diversity, the focus on polite modal forms in English textbooks may significantly enhance students' knowledge of suitable language use in both local and intercultural contexts. By integrating these politeness tactics, the textbooks enhance language competency while simultaneously fostering pragmatic competence, allowing learners to engage in social interactions with an awareness of cultural norms. The focus on *can*, *may*, *will*, and their counterparts illustrates both prevalent patterns of English modality and the sociocultural importance attributed to polite and respectful language usage. This indicates that textbooks not only instruct on grammar but also implicitly

convey cultural communication norms, influencing how students articulate possibilities, permission, and requests in socially acceptable manners.

A corpus-based method facilitates a systematic and quantitative analysis of the distribution of modal verbs in textbooks. This reinforces the theoretical assertion that modality is not arbitrary but structured in accordance with educational objectives. Corpus analysis elucidates patterns, so reinforcing the assertion that language instruction need to be grounded in empirical data rather than mere intuition. It also offers a reproducible framework for future research to investigate the evolution of modality and politeness across various levels or genres of educational materials.

Corpus findings provide educators with data-driven insights into the modal verbs that are underrepresented in textbooks. The prevalence of "can" and "will" compared to the infrequent use of "might" and "would" can assist educators in developing additional classroom activities. Educators can utilize corpus data (e.g., frequency lists, concordances, collocation patterns) as instructional resources to demonstrate authentic usage situations to learners (Curry & Mark, 2024; McCarthy & McCarten, 2022). This methodology cultivates both grammatical proficiency and statistical literacy, enabling pupils to perceive language as a dynamic system that fluctuates with context. A corpus-based method offers empirical evidence of imbalances or deficiencies in modal verb usage for textbook authors and curriculum designers (Li, 2022; Oktavianti et al., 2025; Wardah & Oktavianti, 2025). Textbook developers can draw on corpus-based statistics rather than anecdotal evaluations to ensure a balanced representation of modal verbs that support the teaching of politeness strategies. Furthermore, concordance lines and genuine speech samples from learner or native corpora could be integrated into materials, enhancing the alignment of textbooks with real-world communication.

A corpus-based approach demonstrates that the evaluation of textbooks should be grounded in linguistic evidence rather than limited to the scope of content coverage. In a globalized educational context, this approach guarantees that students acquire both the formal structures and the practical roles of modal verbs (Ahmed, 2021; Kongpetch, 2021). This results in enhanced cultural sensitivity and pragmatic efficacy in international communication. Moreover, applying corpus analysis to additional linguistic features (e.g., speech acts, lexical bundles, or error patterns) can contribute to the continuous improvement of textbooks and potentially inform curriculum-level policy decisions.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of modal verbs of politeness in Indonesian EFL textbooks for senior high schools (Grades X–XII). The findings revealed consistent patterns across levels, with *can* dominating in all textbooks (40.98% in Grade X, 43.16% in Grade XI, and 44.61% in Grade XII). In contrast, *might* and *could* appeared far less frequently, suggesting that more nuanced or tentative expressions of politeness receive limited emphasis. Variations were also observed in the use of *may*, *will*, and *would*, reflecting the communicative functions prioritized in the curriculum. Beyond their grammatical functions, the modal verbs analyzed reflect broader cultural and social norms of politeness in Indonesia. *May* conveys permission and respect appropriate for formal settings, *might* softens statements in line with non-coercive communication, and *could* functions as a polite alternative to *can*. The prominence of *can* resonates with everyday interactions, making it both accessible and practical for learners. These patterns indicate that textbooks serve not only to teach linguistic forms but also to transmit cultural values related to politeness.

This study is limited to the analysis of three *Kurikulum Merdeka* textbooks and their use of modal verbs, thereby excluding other politeness strategies such as hedging and honorifics. Future research should expand the scope to encompass a broader range of materials and examine classroom practices to explore how learners interpret and employ polite forms in authentic interaction. Comparative studies incorporating learner corpora could further

illuminate how exposure to specific modal patterns shapes students' pragmatic competence and communicative awareness.

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### INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Participation in this study was fully voluntary. Before joining, participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, possible risks, and benefits. Their identities were kept confidential, and their information was used only for research purposes. Participants could withdraw at any time without penalty. Continued participation indicated their informed consent.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data used in this study are not publicly available because of privacy concerns and ethical responsibilities to protect participant confidentiality.

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