

Modal Verbs of Prediction and Volition in Indonesian EFL Junior High School Textbooks: A Corpus-Based Study

¹ Wulan Setia Wardah, ² Ikmi Nur Oktavianti*

Email: ¹ 2207042007@webmail.uad.ac.id, ² ikmi.oktavianti@pbi.uad.ac.id

^{1,2} Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia

*Correspondent

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the representation of modal verbs expressing prediction and volition in Indonesian EFL textbooks for junior high schools aligned with the Kurikulum Merdeka. Employing a corpus-based methodology, the analysis compares modal usage in textbooks against two prominent native corpora: the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC). The findings highlight the dominant use of the modal verb "will" and underrepresentation of "would" and "shall," suggesting a limited semantic range presented to learners. This research provides pedagogical insights into improving the authenticity and effectiveness of EFL materials by aligning them more closely with authentic language usage. The study contributes to the growing body of corpus-based linguistic research and proposes practical measures to align language instruction with real-world communication demands. Through detailed linguistic comparison and discussion of pedagogical implications, this article aims to enhance textbook quality and language instruction for Indonesian EFL learners.

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Introduction

Textbooks play a pivotal role in EFL instruction by providing structured content and guiding classroom learning (Tomlinson, 2014). In Indonesia, junior high school EFL textbooks are critical tools in the national curriculum. However, concerns have arisen about the authenticity of the language used in these materials (Harwood, 2015; Mutiara & Inderawati, 2019). Among linguistic features crucial for effective communication, modality—particularly prediction and volition—is often underrepresented or misrepresented in pedagogical texts (Khojasteh & Reinders, 2013).

Modality enables speakers to express attitudes, beliefs, and levels of certainty about propositions (Portner, 2005). Modality is not only a grammatical phenomenon but also a semantic and pragmatic one. It reflects how speakers interpret events and project meanings onto utterances, which plays a significant role in achieving communicative competence. Accurate

representation and understanding of modality are essential for learners aiming to interact in diverse social settings, where expressing intention, possibility, and prediction are daily communicative acts.

This study aims to explore how modal verbs that express prediction and volition are used in Indonesian junior high school EFL textbooks and compare them with their usage in native speaker corpora. The research focuses on modal verbs "will," "would," and "shall," which are central to conveying these modalities. By examining frequency, distribution, and usage patterns, this research seeks to identify possible gaps and suggest pedagogical improvements.

Modality refers to expressions of necessity and possibility and is generally classified into epistemic and deontic types (Fintel, 2006). Epistemic modality reflects degrees of certainty or probability, while deontic modality involves obligation or permission. Modal verbs are primary linguistic tools for expressing these concepts and include terms such as "will," "would," and "shall" (Portner, 2005). Modality is a complex category that allows speakers to project perspectives and evaluate actions. According to Palmer (1979), modality includes a wide range of meanings, from certainty and probability to obligation and desire. The central modal verbs in English—"can," "could," "may," "might," "must," "shall," "should," "will," and "would"—enable speakers to navigate interpersonal communication with nuance.

Prediction relates to statements about future possibilities or expectations. It is often associated with epistemic modality. Volition, by contrast, reflects intention or willingness and can indicate a speaker's desire or readiness to act. Both prediction and volition are frequently expressed using "will" and "would," while "shall" traditionally indicated formal intention or obligation.

These modal meanings are especially important in EFL contexts because they directly influence learners' ability to participate in real-world interactions. For instance, distinguishing between "I will call you" (a promise) and "I would call you if I had time" (a conditional scenario) requires a solid understanding of modal semantics and pragmatics.

Previous research suggests that EFL textbooks often do not reflect authentic use of modal verbs. Bouhlal et al. (2018) found discrepancies in modal usage between ESL textbooks and native corpora, which may hinder language acquisition. Oktavianti and Fajria (2021) observed limited use of "would" and contracted forms, which are common in spoken English. Such limitations may affect learners' ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. Li (2022) showed that modal verbs in Chinese textbooks similarly diverged from native usage, leading to misrepresentation of functional meanings and overemphasis on rigid structures. These findings highlight the importance of grounding textbook content in authentic linguistic data. Suciati et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of modality in representing interpersonal meanings. Their study showed that modality choices reflect authors' stances and relationships with readers, an

insight applicable to classroom discourse. Li (2022) emphasized that textbook designers should incorporate corpus-based insights to enhance authenticity. Despite these findings, research focusing on junior high school materials under the Kurikulum Merdeka remains scarce. The gap in research underscores the urgency of the present study.

Method

A. Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative, corpus-based methodology (Baker, 2006), enabling in-depth analysis of linguistic features in authentic texts. Corpus linguistics allows researchers to extract linguistic patterns from large datasets systematically. Using this approach, the study offers empirical evidence for linguistic phenomena in classroom materials and their alignment with native speaker norms.

B. Data Collection

Textbook content was drawn from the 7th, 8th, and 9th-grade Kurikulum Merdeka textbooks published by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Textbooks were digitized and cleaned of non-linguistic content (images, numbers, formatting) before being processed through AntConc. This software allowed for the extraction of modal verb instances and identification of key patterns using the KWIC (Key Word in Context) function.

C. Analytical Framework

The study adopts Collins' (2009) classification of modals into categories, focusing specifically on prediction and volition. Instances of "will," "would," and "shall" were identified and categorized based on contextual usage. These were then compared against frequencies in COCA and BNC to establish benchmarks for native speaker usage.

Discussion

A. Findings

1. Modal Verb Usage in Textbooks

The results indicate that "will" dominates modal usage in textbooks. In Grade 7, "will" accounted for 95% of all prediction and volition modals. In Grades 8 and 9, "will" remained dominant but declined slightly to 76%. "Would" was rarely used in Grade 7 but increased gradually across higher grades. "Shall" was nearly absent, with only a single occurrence in Grade 8.

Table 1. Frequency of Modal Verbs in Kurikulum Merdeka Textbooks

<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Modal Verb</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Grade 7	Will	19	95%

	Would	1	5%
	Shall	0	0%
Grade 8	Will	41	76%
	Would	12	22%
	Shall	1	2%
Grade 9	Will	41	76%
	Would	12	22%
	Shall	1	2%

These findings suggest that students are primarily exposed to assertive, direct expressions of future intent, while more nuanced or polite forms are underrepresented. This has implications for both communicative competence and pragmatic flexibility.

2. Patterns and Contexts

The most frequent pattern involving modal verbs was: Modal + Verb (e.g., "will go," "would help"). The verb "will" was predominantly used to indicate intention or plans, aligning with volition. In contrast, "would" often appeared in hypothetical contexts, but its limited presence may hinder learners from mastering conditionals and indirect speech.

Table 2. Common Syntactic Patterns of Modal Verbs in Textbooks

<i>Modal Verb</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Syntactic Pattern</i>	<i>Function</i>
Will	"I will come this afternoon."	Modal + Verb	Volition
Will	"She will be here at 5."	Modal + BE + Adverbial	Prediction
Would	"Would you like a cup of tea?"	Modal + Verb (Interrogative)	Politeness
Would	"I would go if I had time."	Modal + Verb (Conditional)	Hypothetical
Shall	"Shall we begin the activity?"	Modal + Verb (Interrogative)	Formal Volition

Notably, modal usage did not sufficiently explore subtleties like conditionality, softening statements, or expressing doubt—elements that are integral to fluent communication.

3. Comparison with COCA and BNC

In COCA, "would" accounts for 51% of modal verb usage related to prediction and volition, while "will" accounts for 47%. In BNC, both "would" and "will" are nearly equally distributed (48% each). These corpora reflect balanced usage between direct and conditional forms, as well as between confident and tentative expressions.

Table 3. Frequency of Modal Verbs in COCA

Modal Verb	Frequency	Percentage
Will	2,148,852	47%
Would	2,349,406	51%
Shall	87,485	2%
Total	4,585,743	100%

Table 4. Frequency of Modal Verbs in BNC

Modal Verb	Frequency	Percentage
Will	239,466	48%
Would	242,195	48%
Shall	19,407	4%
Total	501,068	100%

Table 5. Comparative Distribution of Modal Verbs in Textbooks, COCA, and BNC

Modal Verb	Textbook Frequency	Textbook %	COCA Frequency	COCA %	BNC Frequency	BNC %
Will	101	78%	2,148,852	47%	239,466	48%
Would	37	21%	2,349,406	51%	242,195	48%
Shall	1	1%	87,485	2%	19,407	4%
Total	139	100%	4,585,743	100%	501,068	100%

The discrepancy between textbook and corpus usage indicates that learners are not being exposed to the same linguistic variation as native speakers. This may impact their ability to use modals in polite requests, hypothetical discussions, or formal writing.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study are in line with previous research that identifies a lack of diversity in modal verb usage within EFL textbooks. Similar to the observations of Oktavianti and Fajria (2021), this study found an overreliance on the modal verb "will" at the expense of others such as "would" and "shall." Oktavianti and Fajria noted that the omission of commonly used modals like "would" and reduced forms (e.g., "I'd") in Indonesian senior high school textbooks led to unnatural dialogue patterns. This pattern is mirrored in the present study's findings for junior high school textbooks.

Furthermore, the results support Bouhlal et al. (2018), who found that ESL textbooks used in Quebec offered limited semantic variation in modal usage, which diverged from authentic native-

speaker corpora. Like Bouhlal et al., this study demonstrates that despite the presence of modal verbs in textbooks, their semantic scope and contextual diversity remain constrained. The underrepresentation of conditional and polite expressions (typically conveyed by "would") may reduce learners' pragmatic competence, particularly in real-world and intercultural communication scenarios.

Suciati et al. (2022) also emphasized that modality contributes significantly to conveying interpersonal meaning in hortatory exposition texts. The dominance of "will" in the Kurikulum Merdeka textbooks aligns with the pattern of modalization they observed, where positive polarity and medium certainty were emphasized. However, as Suciati et al. suggested, this narrow range may limit learners' expressive capabilities, especially when engaging in argumentative or persuasive communication.

Li (2022) highlighted the value of using learner corpora and native corpora to assess and improve the authenticity of textbook content. The present study echoes Li's call for a corpus-informed approach, illustrating how discrepancies between textbook and native corpora usage (as seen in COCA and BNC comparisons) can identify specific instructional gaps. As in Li's findings, textbook developers may benefit from more robust corpus consultation to design grammar presentations that are better aligned with learners' needs and authentic use.

In conclusion, while the inclusion of modal verbs in the Kurikulum Merdeka textbooks marks progress in grammar instruction, the restricted variety and context of their use fall short of reflecting real-world English usage. Aligning textbook content more closely with authentic corpora and expanding modal verb instruction to include prediction, volition, hypothetical reasoning, and politeness strategies can significantly enhance learners' communicative competence.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings underscore the need for textbook writers to incorporate a broader range of modal expressions. Teachers may also need to supplement textbooks with additional materials or activities drawn from authentic corpora. Activities could include role plays, writing exercises, and discussions that require students to practice using "would" in conditional sentences or polite requests. If students only learn to use "will" for future events, they may lack the flexibility to express subtleties such as preferences, hypothetical reasoning, or social politeness. Integrating varied modal forms can thus improve both grammatical accuracy and sociolinguistic appropriateness.

Conclusion

A. Conclusion

This study concludes that while Indonesian junior high school textbooks under the Kurikulum Merdeka incorporate modal verbs, their distribution is skewed towards "will" and fails to adequately represent the range of prediction and volition modality found in native English usage. As a result, students may be ill-prepared for real-world communicative contexts. The overuse of "will" may lead to an overly simplistic understanding of future expressions, while the limited exposure to "would" and "shall" restricts learners' ability to engage in conditional, hypothetical, or formal communication.

B. Suggestions

1. Textbook Writers

Include a broader range of modals with authentic contexts from corpora, particularly "would" and conditionals. Provide exercises that reflect real-life usage, not just grammatical form.

2. Teachers

Supplement textbooks with real-life materials such as dialogues from films, interviews, or online forums. Encourage practice in diverse scenarios including hypothetical situations, advice-giving, and negotiation.

3. Students

Practice using modal verbs in different tenses and contexts. Engage in writing tasks that involve prediction and intention. Explore how modal verbs are used in different registers, such as casual conversation versus academic writing.

4. Researchers

Extend this analysis to other language features such as modality in passive constructions or the use of semi-modals like "have to" and "be going to." Comparative studies across textbook publishers may also provide deeper insight into systemic issues in EFL material design.

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