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THE USE OF LINGUISTIC MODALITY AMONG MALAYSIAN LECTURERS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION CLASSROOM FOR TEACHER CANDIDATES

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Abstract
This study investigates the use of linguistic modality by Malaysian educators within the context of teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) programmes, focusing on its impact on teacher education and the engagement of prospective teachers. Six classroom observations and corresponding audio recordings were analysed using mixed-method content analysis to identify the frequencies and contexts of modal expressions. The findings revealed a predominant use of modalisation with high probability and a balanced modulation of obligation, alongside a notable use of low-inclination modalities. The lecturers used high-probability modal verbs to convey authority and certainty, while strategically using lower-probability modals to enhance engagement and promote critical thinking. Furthermore, the use of Malay modal expressions contributed to inclusivity and linguistic adaptability in the classroom. These results demonstrated the critical role of modality by educators in shaping the pedagogical communication of prospective teachers. The study highlights the essential need for educators to adeptly manage language choices to meet diverse educational needs and cultural contexts, thus improving teaching strategies in multilingual settings.

Keywords: language choice, linguistic modality, Malaysian lecturers, teacher candidates

Introduction
Malaysia's sociolinguistic diversity, which includes Malay (Bahasa Malaysia), English, and various other dialects, has a lasting impact on teaching practices, curriculum design, and the implementation of language policy in schools (Mei, Abdullah, Heng, & Kasim, 2016; Wong & Yoong, 2019; Yamat, Fisher, & Rich, 2014). For teacher candidates, developing the ability to navigate this multilingual environment is critical to effectively addressing the educational needs of students from diverse backgrounds (Jong & Gao, 2022). Despite their preparation, Sathappan and Sathappan (2018) note that teacher candidates often face significant challenges when trying to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. As the transition is critical to their professional development and effectiveness in the classroom, these challenges also emphasise the importance of the language proficiency of the educators who train these candidates. The ability of educators to

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effectively teach pedagogical concepts plays a critical role in how well teacher candidates absorb and apply these concepts to their practices (Elder & Kim, 2013). This ability also has a direct impact on teacher candidates' ability to communicate effectively with their future students and manage classroom dynamics (Lucas & Villegas, 2013).

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a comprehensive framework that is ideal for addressing the complexity of different educational contexts, levels of instruction, and phases of teacher education. Achugar, Schleppegrell, and Oteíza (2007) examined the knowledge and analytical skills of SFL to improve the writing and reading skills of multilingual students and found that teachers need knowledge of language and tools to analyse language to understand the demands their subject places on students, to support their students' reading and writing development, and to engage critically with the texts they use. In this regard, SFL encourages teachers to reflect on the meanings and values conveyed through language. Furthermore, Yang and Tao (2018) investigated language use within specific classroom interactions by comparing two Chinese teachers of English as a foreign language, namely one high-performing teacher and one low-performing teacher. They found that the high-performing teacher, despite dominating the conversation, managed to create a friendly and engaging environment by presenting engaging content. In contrast, the low-performing teacher allowed more students to speak but failed to engage them effectively by presenting unattractive content.

Modality is one important aspect of SFL that is relevant to educational interactions. As it refers to the use of language to express probability, commitment, ability, and permission, which helps speakers show certainty and commitment in their statements (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Palmer, 2007), in educational contexts, modality determines how knowledge and authority are communicated and how interpersonal relationships between teachers and learners are organised. Despite its importance, previous studies have identified a notable gap in research on how lecturers express modality in verbal interactions with teacher candidates during their training. For instance, Kashiha (2018), and Mukundan, Saadullah, Ismail, and Jusoh (2013) have primarily focused on modality in written contexts, such as textbooks and academic writing, while its use in real-life classroom situations has received less attention. Understanding modality in an actual classroom could provide valuable insights into classroom communication dynamics and their impact on teacher candidates' learning and development.

This study investigates Malaysian educators' use of linguistic modality in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) classrooms. Its aim is to understand the impact of language use on teacher education and classroom engagement. The current study makes an important contribution to the discourse on teacher education by demonstrating how strategic linguistic approaches, particularly through the exploration of modality in SFL, are utilised in Malaysian TESL classrooms, and by delving deeper into the complex relationship between language use and its impact on classroom dynamics. It is guided by two primary research questions as follows:

1. How do Malaysian educators use linguistic modalities in their interactions with teacher candidates?

2. What impact do these modalities have on teacher education and classroom engagement?

Literature Review

Systemic functional linguistics, pedagogical practices, and student engagement

Systemic functional linguistics (SFL), developed extensively by Halliday (2004), Halliday and Hasan (1994), and Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), conceptualises language as a meaning-making tool that is closely linked to situational and cultural contexts. SFL identifies three primary metafunctions of language, namely *the ideational*, which represents experience, *the interpersonal*, which enables the articulation of attitudes and the control of interactions through mood and modality, and *the textual*, which organises information into a coherent discourse. In contrast to the traditional view that sees language learning as a predominantly cognitive activity detached from its social implications, SFL emphasises its semiotic aspects and posits that language not only reflects perceptions but also shapes them (Adenan, 2012).

Research consistently shows that integrating SFL into teacher training and professional development significantly improves pedagogical strategies and deepens content knowledge. Webster (2013) and Banegas (2021) have documented the profound impact of SFL on improving teachers' language awareness and instructional skills. This approach is particularly valuable for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. For instance, studies by Sharpe (2008) and Daniello, Turgut, and Brisk (2014) show that specific SFL strategies, such as strategic repetition and sophisticated questioning techniques, significantly improve student engagement and understanding, thus enriching the learning environment. In addition, Simpson, Thwaite, and Jones (2023) show that integrating SFL with dialogic pedagogy improves classroom interaction and participation, significantly enhancing learning outcomes. Schulze (2015) also emphasises the importance of sound language skills to develop targeted teaching strategies that promote academic literacy. Collectively, these findings demonstrate the important role of SFL in teacher preparation and ongoing professional development to ensure that teachers are well-equipped to effectively meet the diverse educational needs of their students.

SFL also enhances students' linguistic competence and awareness by developing a critical approach to text analysis. Matthiessen and Yousefi (2022) asserted that the incorporation of SFL into education goes beyond traditional teaching paradigms by providing students with the ability to deconstruct and critically engage with texts. This is crucial, as Garcia Montes, Sagre Barboza, and Lacharme Olascoaga (2014) have observed that students often struggle with deep textual analysis due to their limited training in identifying linguistic structures and functions. SFL addresses this by deepening students' understanding of the functions of texts and enabling them to go beyond superficial interpretations. Furthermore, de Oliverira and Schaleppegrell's (2016) exploration of lexicograms to understand language functions through practical classroom exercises found students' ability to recognise underlying linguistic patterns. This means SFL enables students to better analyse character development and narrative interaction.

SFL to promote inclusivity and cultural competence is also evident in education. Lucas and Villegas (2013) found the need to prepare prospective

teachers to interact effectively with students from diverse backgrounds and foster an educational environment that values and embraces cultural differences. Similarly, Singh (2022) demonstrated the role SFL plays in enabling teachers to effectively manage and utilise linguistic and cultural diversity in their classrooms. In addition, Fikri, Dewi, and Suarnajaya (2014) explored SFL in an understanding of gender dynamics in classroom language use highlighting the influence of the development of teaching strategies that recognise and integrate different gender perspectives. Arús, Bárcena, and Rodríguez (2010) also demonstrated that contextualised activities that explore linguistic resources can deepen students' understanding of English-speaking cultures and improve their ability to communicate and interpret meaning within these contexts. These SFL applications contribute to broader educational reforms by promoting literacy and critical thinking skills in diverse groups of students.

Modality and modals in linguistics

Modality in linguistics encompasses the speaker's attitude towards propositions, including dimensions such as possibility, necessity, and obligation (Berry, 2013; Eggins, 2004; Endley, 2010; Palmer, 2003; Swanson, 2008). Modality enables learners to conceptualise and use language effectively, thereby improving their linguistic and cognitive skills.

Modality manifests itself through two main components, namely modularization and modulation (Depraetere & Reed, 2020; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Modalisation involves the expression of probability and usuality, using modal finite (e.g., must, should) and mood adjuncts (e.g., certainly, usually) to convey varying degrees of certainty or usuality. Modalisation can be expressed using modal finite (e.g., must, should, will, can, could, may, might) and through mood adjuncts of either probability (e.g., certainly, surely, probably, maybe, perhaps) or usuality (e.g., always, often, usually, typically, sometimes). Both modal finite and mood adjuncts can be categorised according to the value of probability or usuality they express, i.e., high (must, certainly, always), median (may, probably, usually), or low (might, possible, sometimes). The following presents the expression of modalization using modal finite and mood adjuncts.

Table 1. Modalisation (probability and usuality)

Aspect of Modalisation	Degree	Modal Finites	Mood Adjuncts
Probability	High	must, will	certainly, surely
	Medium	may, might	probably, maybe
	Low	could	perhaps, possibly
Usuality	High	always	always
	Medium	usually	usually, often
	Low	sometimes	sometimes, rarely

Modulation, on the other hand, focuses on propositions of obligation, inclination, and ability, which can be realised through modal finite, be+(-ed) sentences, impersonal sentences, and structures with attitudinal adjectives or nominalised mental processes (Suhadi, 2017). The following illustrative examples show the different levels of obligation, inclination, and ability expressed by modulation.

Table 2. Modulation (obligation, inclination, and ability)

Modulation Type	Degree	Modal Finites	Be + -ed Sentences	Impersonal Sentences	Attitudinal Adjectives/ Nominalised Processes
Obligation	High	You must submit the report.	The form is to be filled out by all applicants.	It is necessary to arrive early.	It is crucial to follow these guidelines.
	Medium	You should submit the report.	The form should be filled out by attendees.	It is advisable to arrive early.	It is important to follow these guidelines.
	Low	You could submit the report if you wish.	Participation is optional.	It might be a good idea to arrive early.	It would be preferable to follow these guidelines.
Inclination	High	You will certainly enjoy the show.	This book must be read for enjoyment.	It is highly recommended to see this movie.	There is a strong preference for early meetings.
	Medium	You would probably enjoy the show.	This book should be read at your leisure.	It is advisable to see this movie.	There is a general preference for early meetings.
	Low	You might like the show.	This book could be enjoyable if you like the genre.	You might consider seeing this movie.	A preference for early meetings is noted.
Ability	High	She can solve the problem quickly.	This task can be completed swiftly by any trained professional.	It is certain that he can finish the work on time.	It is completely feasible to implement the plan.
	Medium	She might be able to solve the problem.	This task can usually be managed by someone with her skills.	It is likely that he can finish the work on time.	It is reasonably feasible to implement the plan.
	Low	She could possibly solve the problem if helped.	This task could be handled by someone with assistance.	It is possible that he can finish the work, given enough time.	It might be feasible to implement the plan.

Modalisation and modulation form the framework through which language users negotiate meaning and interpersonal dynamics in discourse. For instance, Sunardi (2013) used Matthiessen's (1995) basic system of modality within SFL to analyse a conversation between a native American woman and a non-native Indonesian man. The analysis showed that the non-native speaker showed more uncertainty about the truthfulness of his statements and favoured a subjective orientation, while the native speaker took a more objective stance and made judgements on behalf of others. Harnida, Zainuddin, and Pulungan (2021), as well as Sidabutar (2019), extended to various forms of communication, such as official texts and speeches, to identify predominant modal forms such as obligation, probability, and inclination. Rahmasari and Lauwren (2020) investigated modality on Indonesian tourism websites, and Puspitasari, Warsono, and Sutopo (2021) focused on students' academic texts and found the predominance of probability modals. In addition, Lee's (2013) research in the United Kingdom and Montkhongtham's (2021) research in the health and medical fields in Thailand have shown the strategic use of modal verbs in different professional domains. These studies suggest that the use of modality is highly context-dependent and has nuanced applications in specific disciplinary languages.

Mukundan et al. (2013) analysed the use of modal verbs in Malaysian student essays and found that learners often misuse these verbs beyond the categories

provided in the Malaysian curriculum. Further studies by Manaf (2007) and Mukundan and Khojasteh (2011) revealed discrepancies between the modal verbs used in Malaysian textbooks and those used by native speakers, suggesting a mismatch that affects learners' abilities. These studies highlight the complexity of the modal auxiliary system, and the various functions that modal verbs fulfil, from expressing probability and possibility to obligation and permission. Kader, Begi, and Vaseghi (2013) revealed that university students used 'can' and 'will' more frequently in argumentative essays than other modal verbs. In addition, the results showed that the present tense of the modal was used more frequently and that the modal verbs of ability were mostly observed in university students' essays. To improve the pedagogical use of modal auxiliary verbs, all core modal verbs need to be repeatedly emphasised. In Malaysia, most existing research focuses on textbook content and controlled environments, suggesting a need for further single-case studies that look at each unique environment to expand understanding of how modality operates in different domains of discourse.

Method

The present study used a mixed-methods approach to content analysis, informed by Bailey's (1975) critique of the limitations of purely quantitative data for understanding moment-to-moment classroom talk. The methodology involved classroom observations to collect raw data on teacher-student interactions, followed by transcription and detailed analysis. A content analysis phase then quantitatively assesses the frequency of certain modalities, namely probability, obligation, preference, and usuality. A qualitative examination complements this quantitative evaluation, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the strategic deployment of linguistic modality in educational settings to enhance communication and pedagogical effectiveness.

The study was conducted in Selangor, Malaysia, and focused on the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) programme at a university. The study used a purposive convenience sampling method in selecting lecturers based on their geographical proximity, ease of accessibility, and meeting certain predetermined criteria. These criteria required that instructors have at least a bachelor's degree in education, a master's degree in education, linguistics, or ESL, and more than six years of teaching experience in the TESL programme.

The researcher verbally obtained consent to participate in the study from the selected lecturers, who then confirmed it via WhatsApp communication. This process helped to plan suitable dates and times for the lesson observations. The researcher informed the participants in detail about the ethical considerations of the study, which included their rights to interrupt or discontinue participation at any time without any consequences. Measures were also discussed to ensure the anonymity of participants by excluding any personally identifiable information from the results of the study.

The study's observational component included courses taught by six faculty members. The study deemed this sample size appropriate because the detailed examination of faculty members' teaching practices reached a point of data saturation. Data saturation is a key concept in qualitative research and means that further data collection no longer provides new insights or information relevant to

the study (Saunders et al., 2018). Ethical safeguards to maintain confidentiality and integrity were adhered to throughout the research process. The minimum profiles of the participating lecturers are described in detail in Table 3.

Table 3. Participants' profile

Lecturer (L)	Teaching Experience (Year)	Subject Recorded	Duration Recording (hours)
L1	16	Teaching of English for Specific Purposes	1 hour and 34 minutes
L2	18	Testing and Evaluation	1 hour and 46 minutes
L3	10	Material Selection and Adaptation	1 hour and 44 minutes
L4	18	Philosophy of Education	2 hours and 10 minutes
L5	17	Academic Writing	2 hours and 23 minutes
L6	10	Education Research Methodology	1 hour and 51 minutes

The study used unobtrusive audio recording devices for data collection to capture the entire lecture while maintaining the lecturer's natural speech flow. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim to accurately preserve the precision of the modal expressions used by the lecturer.

The researcher conducted the content analysis of these transcripts using Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) framework, allowing for a structured examination of modality in the lecturer's speech. The analysis was methodologically divided into two different phases. First, the modal expressions observed in the transcripts were coded using an inductive approach. In this phase, specific codes were developed that were derived directly from the observed data to capture the authentic use of modal expressions when they occurred. Subsequently, a deductive method was applied whereby these initial codes were categorised into broader themes consistent with the theoretical modality framework used in this study. This analytical framework comprised two main components:

1. Modalisation: This component focused on assessing the way the lecturers expressed probability and usuality in their discourse. The goal of the analysis was to find verbal cues that show certainty, possibility, or normalcy in actions so that theoretical ideas or knowledge about probability and normalcy could be better explained in the educational context.
2. Modulation: The analysis focused on how the lecturers communicated obligation and inclination. The researcher collected modal verbs and other expressions that indicate need, permission, or desire to understand the directive aspects of the lecturers' language and guide student understanding and engagement.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The lecture recordings and transcription data analysis revealed modalities regarding the content conveyed. The study documented the modalities' frequencies of occurrence as follows:

Table 4. Frequency of types and distribution of modal verbs

Modality Category		Values	Frequency	Total Occurrence
Modalisation	**Probability**	Low	58	672
		Median	54	
		High	560	
	Usuality	Low	7	60
		Median	44	
		High	9	
			Total	732
Modulation	**Obligation**	Low	216	441
		Median	57	
		High	168	
	Inclination	Low	24	27
		Median	1	
		High	2	
			Total	468

The results in Table 4 showed tendencies in the use of modalization and modulation, which are of central importance for the design of effective pedagogical communication. In terms of modalization, the data showed different patterns of use. In the case of probability, expressions indicating high certainty were the most prevalent, with 560 out of a total of 672 instances, suggesting a strong preference for communicating certainty in the classroom. In contrast, medium and low probabilities were less common, 54 and 58 times, respectively, suggesting that uncertainty or possibility play a lesser role in pedagogical discourse.

Usuality showed a contrastive pattern. Median usuality was observed most frequently with 44 cases, followed by high and low usualities at 9 and 7 cases, respectively. This suggests that although teachers occasionally point out frequent or typical behaviours or events, they generally avoid committing to absolute regularities.

In terms of modulation in classroom interactions, the obligation was mentioned frequently, both at low and high levels (216 and 168 cases, respectively), suggesting that teachers often categorise tasks as either optional or necessary. This may reflect a pedagogical approach that strikes a balance between directive teaching and autonomy, giving students some choice but also setting clear expectations.

A total of 27 instances were recorded where teachers expressed inclination, with low inclination being the most frequently mentioned (24 times). This suggests that teachers are less likely to express strong personal preferences or wishes, possibly to maintain a neutral or objective stance in education.

Manifestation of modality

Probability

The analysis showed that modal verbs such as 'will', 'should', 'could', and 'might' express different degrees of probability and have an influence on the conveyance of certainty. In the case of high probability, 'will' created strong certainty and positions educators as authorities. The examples are as follows:

(1) 'Any particular thing to do with English *will* have different vocabularies, terminologies and structures.' (Lecturer 1)
(2) 'That will change through education. We *will* see that in the future.' (Lecturer 4)
(3) 'If you are not able to write academically, it *will* have various negative consequences, such as poor grades.' (Lecturer 5)
(4) 'We *will* determine if the plan is feasible by examining the goal and objectives.' (Lecturer 6)

In the first extract, the use of 'will' emphatically expresses that variations in vocabulary, terminology, and structure are unavoidable aspects of the English language and leave no room for doubt. This unwavering confidence was reflected in the second extract, where 'will' was used repeatedly to emphasise the lecturer's firm belief in the transformative power of education over time. Similarly, in the third extract, 'will' emphasises the inevitable negative consequences, such as poor grades, of failing to write academically. Finally, in the fourth extract, 'will' was used to reinforce the lecturer's firm belief that the feasibility of a plan can be determined by careful consideration of its aims and intentions. Through these uses, the modal verb 'will' conveyed a high degree of certainty but also establishes educators as authoritative figures in the classroom, guiding students' perceptions and expectations of the topics discussed.

The use of 'would' and 'should' introduced a more moderate probability, hinting at possible outcomes while inviting exploration and discussion. The examples are as follows:

(5) 'Philosophy *would* ask what life is….'. (Lecturer 4)
(6) 'In a well-designed experiment, the control group *should* show less variation in results than the experimental group.' (Lecturer 6)

Lecturer 4 used 'would' to speculate on philosophical questions and foster a classroom environment that values intellectual inquiry. Similarly, 'should' in Lecturer 6 implied an expected outcome while recognising the potential for variation. Such choices encouraged critical engagement and analytical thinking in scientific studies.

The expressions of low probability using 'may' and 'could' were used to facilitate interactions and encourage students to critically engage with the course content and feel supported in expressing their views. This was made clear as follows:

(7) 'So in your philosophy classes, you *could* learn different types of philosophy, beginning with parallelism and essentialism, then move on to constructivism…., *lagi* (what else?)' (Lecturer 4)

(8) '*Could* you give me an insight into how writing is related to social anxiety?' (Lecturer 5)
(9) 'Some of you *may* say ala (expression) senang (just) je (expression in Malay - only) kita *boleh* letak (put) je (expression in Malay - only) apa apa (anything). If you just say letak apa-apa (anything) with your distractor, you realise that your distractor *may not* be working. Something needs to be corrected in your item.' (Lecturer 2)

The use of 'could' in Extract (7) opened a spectrum of philosophical study and indicated a journey through different theories without asserting a single path as the only option. Similarly, Lecturer 5 enriched the discussion with different viewpoints by using 'could' in the form of a question to invite students to share their views. In addition, Lecturer 2 used the word 'could' to reflect on the possible outcomes of students' choices, highlighting the possibility that students' approaches may need to be re-evaluated.

The integration of local expressions and dialects into classroom dialogue enriches the learning environment by linking formal academic content with the colloquial language familiar to students. Lecturer 4's use of 'lagi' ('what else?) invited further discussion and engagement. Additionally, the modal expression 'boleh' ('possible') in Malay signified a more inclusive and engaging classroom atmosphere. Such examples indicate that language is sensitive to cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Educators who are aware of this could encourage dynamic interaction that supports deeper understanding and learning.

Usuality

Usuality was expressed using words such as 'sometimes', 'usually', and 'always', with each adverb signifying a different degree of frequency in educational discourse. The highest degree of usuality was exemplified in the extracts from Lecturer 1 and Lecturer 3, where the adverb 'always' emphasises ongoing and unchanging practices. The examples are as follows:

(10) 'If you are focusing on specific vocabulary, terminologies, grammar, and more, it is *always* important that you develop an up-to-date syllabus. *Always* update it; you do not want to rely on a syllabus from 20 years ago.' (Lecturer 1)
(11) '*Always* refer to Google when preparing reading comprehension materials. They often provide helpful examples.' (Lecturer 3)

Lecturer 1 emphasised the importance of constantly updating the curricula to stay up-to-date. Expectations are a regular part of academic maintenance. Similarly, lecturer 3 advised, 'Always refer to Google', suggesting that Google is a common and expected practice; 'always' emphasised the regularity and reliability of this resource.

The median usuality was expressed by 'usually' and 'typically' to indicate what generally happens but allow for exceptions. The examples are as follows:

(12) 'In KBSR and KBSM, you *usually* see a lot of questions, essays or MCQs in your final exams' (Lecturer 2)

(13) 'In this pandemic scenario, there is *usually* little information available, and no one provides a clear explanation. Therefore, it is usually a good approach to conduct a survey to understand why some people do not wear masks during the pandemic.' (Lecturer 6)

Lecturer 2's remarks made it clear that, although these elements are common, they are not guaranteed in every case. Similarly, Lecturer 6 recognised the commonality of the situation but left room for variation.

Low usuality was expressed by terms such as 'not typically' and 'occasionally' in the lecturers' words. The examples are as follows:

(14) 'These are the things that are not t*ypically* taught, especially when you consider that teaching adults is very different from teaching young children, who follow a structured sequence from first to sixth grade and then from first to fifth grade. In contrast, in a workplace you will encounter people who are between 25 and 50 years old, and *occasionally* even those who are 60 years old and still actively working in their respective industries. So, the question is: how can you manage this effectively?' (Lecturer 1)

(15) '*Occasionally* you raise questions, but there are no choices. That's one situation.'' (Lecturer 3)

Lecturer 1's statement pointed to practices that deviate from the norm, especially in the context of adult education, which does not follow a structured educational sequence like that of young children. In addition, Lecturer 3 used the term 'occasionally' to describe situations where students were left with no choice. The lecturer highlighted a pedagogical practice that deviated from the norm and required students' critical thinking and adaptability.

Obligation

The function of obligation was manifested in a range of specific linguistic structures: modular finites, be +-ed sentences, impersonal sentences, and structures with attitudinal adjectives or nominalized mental processes. With a high level of obligation, these verbs and phrases conveyed uncompromising demands. The examples are as follows:

(16) 'Those who struggle with science subjects *must have failed* in maths and science and *must refrain* from taking science subjects. The basic principle here is that interest *must be* coupled with achievement. Unfortunately, many people make decisions based on interest alone. This is a profound problem that urgently *needs to be* addressed.' (Lecturer 1)

(17) 'When creating teaching materials, *it is essential* to consider factors such as the performance level of the students. You *need to put* differentiation instructions and strategies at the forefront of your teaching approach.' (Lecturer 3)

(18) 'There *needs to be* a clear influence when discussing relationships and their consequences. In any discussion of relationships and their implications, *it is essential* that one of the parties involved has something substantive to contribute.' (Lecturer 6)

In Extract (16), the modal verb 'must' indicated necessity and obligation. The statement 'must have failed math and science' indicates a logical conclusion or a strong presumption about the student's academic performance. The repeated use of 'must' and 'must be' established non-negotiable conditions for academic choices. These conditions were not recommendations but were essential for student success and a proper academic trajectory.

In Extracts (17) and (18), the lecturers use the attitudinal adjective 'essential' that conveys an important attribute of the action described. The impersonal phrase 'needs to be' indicated an imperative requirement to produce teaching materials and that the discussion must not be superficial.

Median obligation expressed by the modal verbs 'should' suggested a preferred course of action but at the same time provided some room for personal judgement or alternative approaches. Lecturers were seen guiding students' behaviour and expectations without imposing strict requirements, emphasising the advisory role of the lecturer. The examples are as follows:

(19) 'We *should* see this as an opportunity while recognising the valuable lessons from the past that we should heed. Yes, we should recognise that we should not stagnate. Let us move forward and focus on what lies ahead, okay?' (Lecturer 1)

(20) 'A good MCQ *should not* make it easy for you. MCQs should challenge your knowledge. However, many students see MCQs as a platform to test their knowledge rather than relying on guessing answers. It should be clear that a well-constructed MCQ should not allow such guessing. Just check your SPM and PMR. Did you come across any questions where you had to rely on luck?' (Lecturer 2)

(21) 'Your research questions *should* match your research objectives. It is crucial that these two aspects match, otherwise the work *should be* considered flawed.' (Lecturer 6)

Lecturer 1's encouragement to move forward and learn from the past used 'should' to motivate positive action and allow for personal judgement and flexibility. Lecturer 2's comment on designing multiple choice questions (MCQs) and Lecturer 6's advice on aligning research questions with objectives, 'should' were used to advocate best practice, which is strongly recommended but allows for some discretion.

Low obligation was expressed with modal verbs such as 'may' and 'could' and phrases such as 'might be' and 'not necessarily', to introduce options and flexibility. These terms respected the learner's autonomy and suggested flexibility in following instructions or rules. The examples are as follows:

(22) 'What else, and so many companies *might be* willing to provide it for free. This could change the education system and the way we test our students. Consequently, we can not necessarily rely on the old techniques and methods.' (Lecturer 1)

(23) 'You *may* simply google something and access the textbook. You do not necessarily have to go to the library, which can be inconvenient, and the book does not necessarily have to be borrowed. However, it *could be* a choice because some textbooks are expensive.' (Lecturer 3)

Lecturer 1 discussed potential changes to educational testing and suggested new methods. Low obligation using 'might be', 'could', and followed by 'not necessarily' helped Lecturer 1 explain the possibility without imposing it. Lecturer 3 used 'may' to indicate a decision based on personal preference rather than a strict requirement.

Inclination

Inclination reflected the lecturer's approach to persuading students to act or behave in certain ways. The following examples illustrate the spectrum of inclination from high to low.

> (24) 'I *insist* that you read. I *want* you to thoroughly consider and study the formulation of course objectives. I *want* you to look further into this at the course design stage because one module of the syllabus is devoted to these course objectives' (Lecturer 1).

In Excerpt 24, 'insist' was used to express the lecturer's strong expectation that the students would engage with the reading material. In addition, the phrase 'I want you to' was used twice, indicating a high degree of inclination is slightly less forceful than 'insist'. Such repetition suggests the lecturer's strong desire for deep engagement with the content and its application throughout the course design.

In contrast, Lecturer 5 showed a median degree of inclination with the use of 'prefer'. The excerpt is as follows:

> (25) 'I *would prefer* the group leader to add a topic so that I can keep better track of the number of groups and each group could be given an article, ideally an authentic article chosen at random' (Lecturer 5)

The use of 'prefer' is a softer form of inclination compared to 'insist' or 'want'. This implies that although there was a preferred action, there was some allowance for leeway or flexibility. The use of 'could' softened the directive tone. Meanwhile, low inclination revealed a relaxed state in the following excerpt:

> (26) 'Here are some things to keep in mind when designing and preparing lessons. Do you have any questions? *Are we good?* As you can see, it's 44 slides, and this is the last one; *yay, we are done*.' (Lecturer 1)

The informal and celebratory tone ('Are we good?' and 'Yay, we are done') and the direct questions to the listeners reduced the lecturer's stance and indicated a friendly interaction with little pressure. The lecturer wanted an encouraging thought in the classroom towards the end of the class, as well as reflection in a very relaxed and supportive way.

Discussion

The study investigates how Malaysian educators use linguistic modalities when teaching teacher candidates, as well as the impact of these modalities on teacher education. Overall, the results showed a predominant use of modalization with high probability, a moderate frequency of usuality, a balanced obligation in modulation, and a predominance of low-inclination modalities. These findings

pointed to the strategic linguistic choices that influence teacher-student interactions and the educational environment. The results and findings confirmed the SFL principles that language plays a role in conveying information and constructing interpersonal relationships and organisational structures within classroom discourse (Achugar et al., 2007; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Harnida et al., 2021; Rahmasari & Lauwren, 2020; Sagayadevan & Jeyaraj, 2012).

Malaysian classrooms revealed a marked preference for modalities that convey certainty, with high-probability modal verbs such as 'will' to reinforce the inevitability of outcomes and establish the teacher's role as an authoritative source of knowledge. Such findings reflected a didactic tradition in which teachers predominately transfer knowledge without leaving room for ambiguity. Arifin (2018) posited that Malaysian lecturers would assert and position themselves in academic discourse, which explained why the 'will' was frequently observed compared to the other modal expressions. Furthermore, this finding was in line with studies such as Danielsson et al. (2023), Ekawati (2019), and Kader et al. (2013) on the effectiveness of authoritative language in creating a focused learning environment. However, Yang and Tao (2018) have cautioned against the possible suppression of student initiative. The present study reached a consensus that the use of modalities is twofold: it may improve clarity and focus while simultaneously restricting the scope for student-initiated learning and critical questioning.

Interestingly, the study also found that modal verbs indicating lower probabilities, such as 'could' and 'may', encouraged student engagement through inquiry and discussion. The finding was in line with Lee's (2013) study on academic feedback and Kongpetch and Thienthong's (2021) study on Thai EFL students' academic writing, in which modal verbs such as 'could' and 'may' are frequently used to express uncertainty and allow for a less authoritarian and more suggestive tone. The strategic use of the modalities suggests an attempt to integrate learner-centred strategies into a traditionally teacher-centred framework.

One notable finding of this study was the skilful use of code-switching through the inclusion of Malay modal expressions in classroom discourse in Malaysia. This choice aligned with the multilingualism context in the Malaysian classroom, where simple linguistic preference could represent a deliberate pedagogical strategy that engaged with students' diverse linguistic identities (Sathappan & Sathappan, 2018; Wong & Yoong, 2019). Modal expressions used in Malay made academic conversations more accessible and relevant; they enhanced the educational experience in an environment where cultural sensitivity is crucial. Furthermore, the deliberate use of local dialects and modal expressions went a long way in creating a clear and supportive educational environment. These linguistic techniques by lecturers improved understanding and promoted an inclusive atmosphere where students felt recognised and respected (Singh, 2022). This approach is also in line with global educational trends that advocate for cultural and linguistic inclusion in classroom practice to enrich learning and foster a vibrant educational community (Arús et al., 2012; Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Singh, 2022).

Conclusion

This study delves into Malaysian educators' strategic use of language modalities and reveals a nuanced understanding of how language choice can

profoundly affect classroom dynamics. As suggested by Harnida et al. (2021), certain modalities can shape the learning environment by either reinforcing the teacher's authority or fostering a more democratic and interactive space. The findings showed that Malaysian educators have a keen awareness of the role of language in demonstrating teacher candidates' educational experiences and outcomes. The study also showed some instances of code-switching to include Malay modal expressions that enhance the accessibility and relevance of academic discourse.

Prior to this study, the use of modality in Malaysia focused primarily on written texts rather than verbal interactions in the classroom. The findings open revenue for a broader discussion of multilingual and multicultural contexts such as Malaysia where teaching programmes need to accommodate linguistic diversity. The findings of this study serve as an important resource for prospective teachers, enabling them to integrate effective language modalities into their teaching strategies.

The study's restriction to a single institution significantly limits the generalizability of the findings to the Malaysian higher education landscape. While the study captured the use of modalities in a formal classroom setting, it did not capture the informal interactions that significantly influence learning. Future research could extend this study by examining modality in different educational settings and cultural contexts to broaden the understanding of language choice and student engagement globally. Further research could also assess the impact of modality in hybrid and online learning environments, as well as in different age groups and educational settings, potentially expanding the applicability and understanding of these findings.

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