

# **A STUDY ON THE ABILITY OF THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH STUDY PROGRAM FKIP UNIVERISTAS RIAU IN IDENTIFYING THE APPROPRIATE MEANING EXPRESSED BY MODAL AUXILIARIES**

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**Abstract:** *This research was aimed to find out the ability of the English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries. The population of this research was the first year students of English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau with the total number of 111 students. The number of the sample was 34 students selected by using cluster sampling technique. The instrument to collect the data was a test in the form of multiple choice tests which consisted of 40 questions. The test was used to know the ability of the students in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries specifically the meanings of permission, obligation, possibility and ability. The data were analyzed by classifying them into four levels of ability, which are poor, poor to average, average to good, and good to excellent. Based on the findings of the research, it was found out that the ability of the first year students of English Study Program FKIP Univeristas Riau in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries was in average to good level with the mean score of 66.10. The implication of this research is that the second year students of English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau had good ability in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries.*

**Key Words:** *Study, ability, identifying, modal auxiliaries*

# **PENELITIAN TENTANG KEMAMPUAN SISWA TAHUN PERTAMA PROGRAM STUDI BAHASA INGGRIS FKIP UNIVERSITAS RIAU DALAM MENGIDENTIFIKASI MAKNA YANG TEPAT YANG DIUNGKAPKAN OLEH MODAL BANTU**

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**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kemampuan mahasiswa tahun pertama Program Studi Bahasa Inggris FKIP Universitas Riau dalam mengidentifikasi makna yang tepat yang diungkapkan oleh modal bantu. Populasi penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa tahun pertama Program Studi Bahasa Inggris FKIP Universitas Riau dengan jumlah 111 siswa. Jumlah sampel adalah 34 siswa yang dipilih dengan menggunakan teknik cluster sampling. Instrumen untuk mengumpulkan data adalah tes dalam bentuk tes pilihan ganda yang terdiri dari 40 pertanyaan. Tes ini digunakan untuk mengetahui kemampuan siswa dalam mengidentifikasi makna yang tepat yang diungkapkan oleh modal bantu khususnya makna izin, keharusan, kemungkinan dan kemampuan. Data dianalisis dengan mengklasifikasikan mereka ke dalam empat tingkat kemampuan, yaitu kurang, kurang ke cukup, cukup ke baik, dan baik ke sangat baik. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, ditemukan bahwa kemampuan siswa tahun pertama Program Studi Bahasa Inggris FKIP Universitas Riau dalam mengidentifikasi makna yang tepat yang diungkapkan oleh modal bantu adalah cukup ke baik dengan nilai rata-rata 66,10. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa mahasiswa tahun pertama Program Studi Bahasa Inggris FKIP Universitas Riau memiliki kemampuan yang baik dalam mengidentifikasi makna yang diungkapkan oleh modal bantu.

**Kata Kunci:** Penelitian, kemampuan, mengidentifikasi, modal bantu

## INTRODUCTION

English has been known for its important role as an international language that it is also known as a lingua franca. According to Harmer (2003), “a lingua franca can be defined as a language widely adopted for communication between two speakers whose native languages are different from each other’s and where one or both speakers are using it as a ‘second’ language”. In other words, English is a language that is used by the speakers who have different native languages to communicate with each other. Having the ability to communicate in English can provide various benefits especially the ability to communicate in many places around the world. In Indonesia itself, English is known as a foreign language. There are four main skills which are learned by EFL learners to master English, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. To be able to communicate effectively, the four main skills will also be better if supported by grammar knowledge. Grammar will be needed especially in order to have an effective communication. Similar to this, Greenbaum and Gerald (2002) also state that grammar is needed to be learned by the students in order to use language more effectively in producing words.

Modal auxiliaries are one of the topics discussed in grammar learning. The use of modal auxiliaries is closely related to communication. This is because modal auxiliaries convey the functions that are very often expressed in communicating such as possibility, obligation, permission, ability and so on. In short, most people’s daily communication involves the use of modal auxiliaries. However, besides its importance, mastering English modals becomes a challenging task especially for EFL learners. It is because of the complexity of modal auxiliaries. A single modal auxiliary can express a variety of meanings. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that a particular modal auxiliary such as modal ‘can’ which has a dictionary meaning ‘be able to’ always conveys the function of ability. Instead, modal ‘can’ may also convey the other functions rely on the context. Moreover, misuse or misunderstanding of modal auxiliaries may lead to miscommunication.

The discussion about modal auxiliaries in English learning in Indonesia can be found since junior high school. In Model Silabus Mata Pelajaran Sekolah Menengah Pertama/Madrasah Tsanawiyah (SMP/MTs) published by Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (2017), there are several basic competencies (KD) related to modal auxiliaries which confirm that modal auxiliaries have been studied since junior high school. One of those basic competencies is the basic competency number (3.2) for eight grade junior high school as follows: “Menerapkan fungsi sosial, struktur teks, dan unsur kebahasaan teks interaksi transaksional lisan dan tulis yang melibatkan tindakan memberi dan meminta informasi terkait kemampuan dan kemauan melakukan suatu tindakan, sesuai dengan konteks penggunaannya (Perhatikan unsur kebahasaan *can*, *will*)”. Based on this basic competency, it can be concluded that students study about asking and giving information which are noticed the language feature of modal ‘can’ and ‘will’ in the texts.

To ensure whether modal auxiliaries have been studied by the first year students or not, the researcher also conducted an interview to ten first year students of English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau. The students were selected randomly and then they were asked several questions by the researcher. The result of the interview showed that there were some students who still didn’t know the term modal auxiliaries. From ten students, there were five students who knew the term modal auxiliaries and one

student who recognized it after listened to some examples. But, when these five students were asked to mention modal auxiliaries that they knew, there were only three students who could mention them correctly. However, the students considered the learning material about modal auxiliaries was not difficult. The researcher also asked the students about what they remembered when they studied modal auxiliaries in school. Most of them answered that they mostly remembered the patterns and markers.

The media used in teaching modal auxiliaries commonly are only teachers' voice, whiteboard and textbook. However, another factor contributes to the difficulties of modals comes from "the treatment of such structures in EFL textbooks. Most textbooks attempt a shallow treatment of modals, focusing more on the form at the expense of the more essential aspect, i.e. use and functions" (Saeed, 2009). In addition, the explanation about modal auxiliaries sometimes only covers about the markers and patterns, while modal auxiliaries actually need deeper discussion. Although they have important role in communication, there are still students who don't know about modal auxiliaries. This will become a problem as the students will use modal auxiliaries more often in practicing their speaking and writing skills. Moreover, the knowledge about modals is also important to avoid miscommunication. Because of that, the researcher would like to find out the ability of the first year students in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries. It is important to do the research in order that it can represent the students' knowledge about modal auxiliaries especially based on what they have studied in school. In case the students don't really know about modal auxiliaries, they still have opportunity to study modal auxiliaries more deeply in university. Indeed, the knowledge about modal auxiliaries will be useful to increase the students' ability in communicating.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in conducting a research entitled: "A Study on the Ability of the First Year Students of English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau in Identifying the Appropriate Meaning Expressed by Modal Auxiliaries".

## **METHODOLOGY**

The design of this research was descriptive research with quantitative approach. Gay (2012) explains that descriptive research "determines and describes the way things are; involves collecting numerical data to answer questions about the current subject of study". This research used quantitative approach as Gay (2012) describes "quantitative research is the collection and analysis of numerical data to explain, predict, and/or control phenomena of interest". In this quantitative research, the numerical data were collected and analyzed to find out the ability of the students in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries.

In this research, a test was used as the instrument of the research. The data were collected by using a test. According to Gay (2012), the data of quantitative research "consist of results from tests, questionnaires, and other paper/pencil instruments". The test contained 40 items adapted by the researcher from MyGrammarLab (2012) and English Sentence Structure (2001). The students were instructed to read the statements and choose the appropriate meanings expressed by modal auxiliaries in each statement. There were four points as the answer choices, namely: permission, obligation,

possibility and ability meanings. They were asked to fill out the test independently within 40 minutes.

Furthermore, the population of the research consisted of all the first year students of English Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Riau in the academic year 2018/2019. There were 3 classes of the first year students which are 1A, 1B, and 1C. Each class consisted of 34-38 students. The total number of the population was 111 students.

Since the number of the population was relatively large, a sample for this research needed to be taken. Gay (2012) defines “sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals represent the larger group from which they were selected”. In this research, cluster sampling technique was used by the researcher to determine the sample of the research. According to Gay (2012), cluster sampling is described as “sampling in which intact groups, not individuals, are randomly selected”. This probability sampling was used in this research to give the same opportunity to the population to be the member of the sample since the population consisted of several groups.

The sample of the research was determined by selecting one class from the three classes. Furthermore, lottery method was used to know which class would be the sample. The researcher prepared three small pieces of paper. One of those papers was written by the word ‘sample’ while the others were left blank. Those pieces of paper were rolled and put in a box. Then, the chairman of each class was required to take one of those papers. The one who got the paper with the word ‘sample’ inside it, his class became the sample of the research. After going through the sampling process, Class 1A was chosen as the sample of the research.

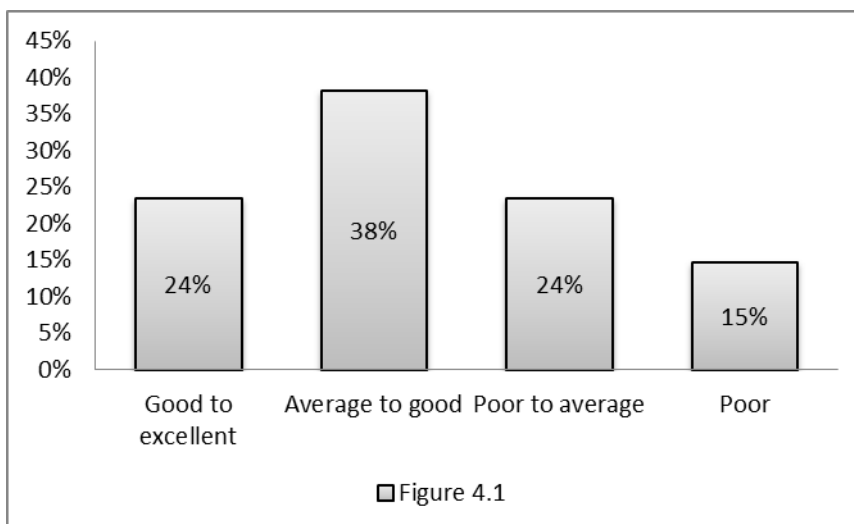
Then, the researcher used classification of students’ score by Harris (1974). The obtained scores of the students were classified into several levels of ability as follows:

**Table 1 The Level of Ability**

No	Score Interval	Level of Ability
1	80-100	Good to excellent
2	60-79	Average to Good
3	50-59	Poor to Average
4	0-49	Poor

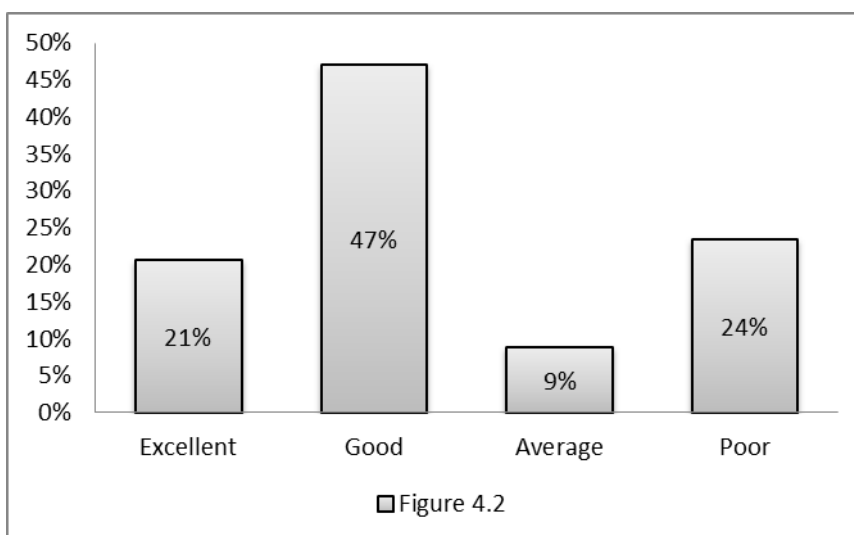
## **RESULTS AND DISSCUSION**

The data which had been collected were calculated and analyzed to find out the ability of the first year students of English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries. Out of 34 students, 8 (24%) students got the scores between 80-100, 13 (38%) students got the scores between 60-79, 8 (24%) students got the scores between 50-59, and 5 (15%) students got the scores between 0-49. It can be concluded that the highest frequency of the students’ scores was 13 (38%) students with the range of score between 60-79. The percentage of the students’ ability level in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries can be seen in Figure 4.1 below.



**Figure 4.1 The Percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying the Appropriate Meaning Expressed by Modal Auxiliaries**

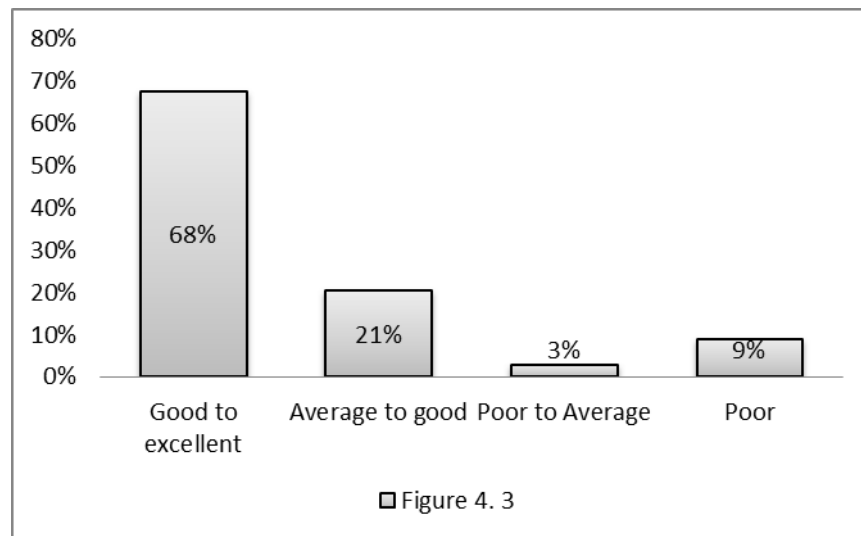
In identifying the meaning of permission expressed by modal auxiliaries, the findings showed that from 34 students, 7 (21%) students got the scores between 80-100, 16 (47%) students got the scores between 60-79, 3 (9%) students got the scores between 50-59 and 8 (24%) students got the scores between 0-49. Figure 4.2 below shows the percentage of the students' ability level in identifying permission meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries.



**Figure 4.2 The Percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying Permission Meaning Expressed by Modal Auxiliaries**

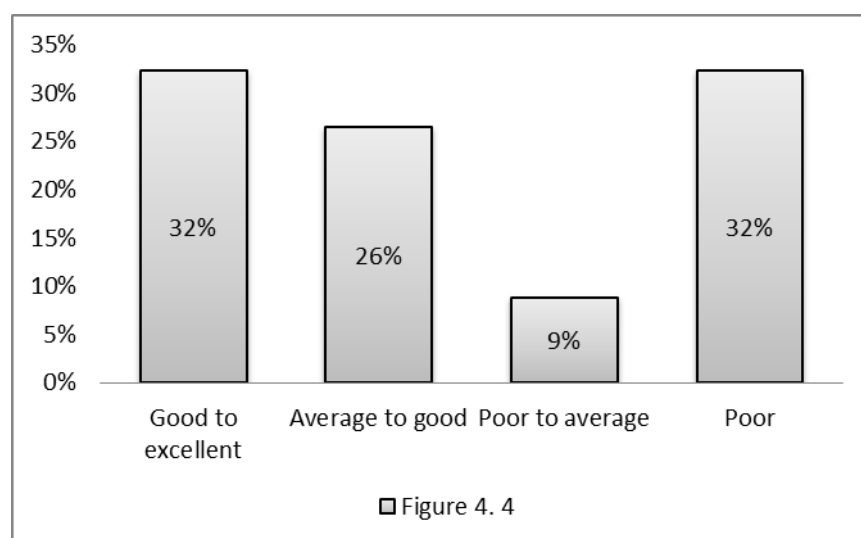
In identifying obligation meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries, the findings showed that, from 34 students, 23 (68%) students got the scores between 80-100, 7 (21%) students got the scores between 60-79, 1 (3%) student got the score between 50-59 and 3 (9%) students got the scores between 0-49. The percentage of the students'

ability level in identifying obligation meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries can be seen in Figure 4.3 below.



**Figure 4.3 The Percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying Obligation Meaning Expressed by Modal Auxiliaries**

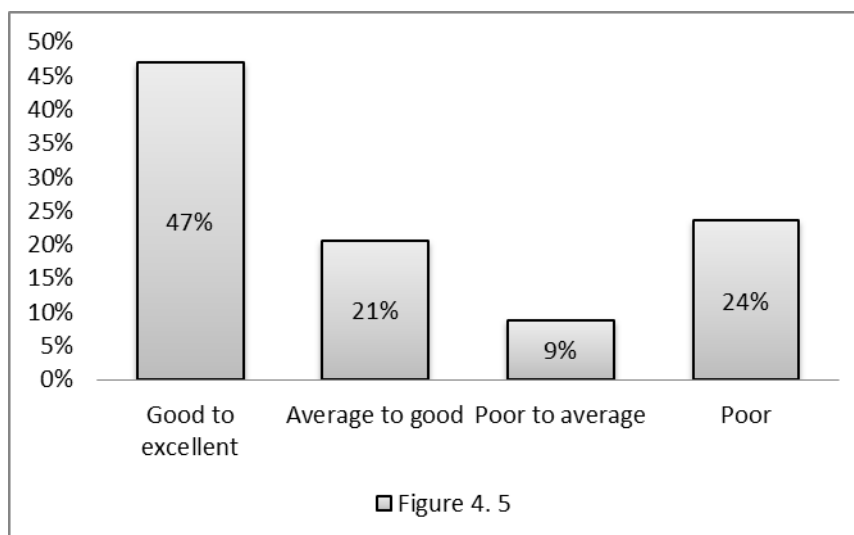
In identifying possibility meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries, the findings of the research showed that from 34 students, 11 (32%) students got the scores between 80-100, 9 (26%) students got the scores between 60-79, 3 (9%) students got the scores between 50-59 and 11 (32%) students got the scores between 0-49. Figure 4.4 below shows the percentage of the students' ability level in identifying possibility meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries.



**Figure 4.4 The Percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying Possibility Meaning Expressed by Modal Auxiliaries**



In identifying the meaning of ability expressed by modal auxiliaries, the findings of the research showed that from 34 students, 16 (47%) students got the scores between 80-100, 7 (21%) students who got the scores between 60-79, 3 (9%) students got the scores between 50-59 and 8 (24%) students got the scores between 0-49. The percentage of the students' ability level in identifying ability meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries can be seen in Figure 4.5 below.



**Figure 4.5 The Percentage of the Students' Ability in Identifying Ability Meaning Expressed by Modal Auxiliaries**

The mean scores of the students' total scores for each kind of meanings identified by the students are presented in Table 12.

**Table 12 Summary of Students' Mean Scores in Identifying the Appropriate Meaning Expressed by Modal Auxiliaries**

Kinds of Meanings	Total Score	Mean Score	Level of Ability
Permission	1990	58,53	Poor to average
Obligation	2790	82,06	Good to excellent
Possibility	2010	59,12	Poor to average
Ability	2200	64,71	Average to good

Table 12 shows the mean scores that indicate the ability of the students in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries. These meanings are limited to permission, obligation, possibility and ability meanings of modal auxiliaries which are based on the major classification of modality. From Table 12, it can be seen that the ability of the students in identifying obligation meaning is at good to excellent level with the highest mean score of 82,06. The second highest mean score is 64,71 which belongs to ability meaning which indicates that the ability of the students is in average to good level. While the ability of the students in identifying permission and possibility meanings are both in poor to average level with the mean score of possibility



meaning is 59,12 which a little bit higher than the mean score of permission meaning which is 58,53.

## DISCUSSION

From the presentation of the research findings, the objective of the research could be resolved. The mean score of the students' total score in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries was 66,10. Based on Harris' (1974) levels of ability, the ability of the students was categorized as average to good level. In other words, the students had been able to answer the test well. Furthermore, in more detail, from 34 students who became the sample of the research, there were 8 students who were categorized as good to excellent level, 13 students who were categorized as average to good level, 8 students who were categorized as poor to average level, and 5 students who were categorized as poor level. It could be seen from the results of the research that although the students' level of ability was varied, there were some students who were still in poor level. However, the students had been able to identify the meanings expressed by modal auxiliaries in the test given. From 34 students who were chosen as the sample of the research, there were only 5 (15%) students who were in poor level or scored in the range between 0-49. In short, most of the first year students already have knowledge about modal auxiliaries. Although, there are still several students who were still difficult to identify the meanings expressed by modal auxiliaries because of their complexity.

It was also found that obligation meaning was the easiest meaning to be identified by the students since the students' mean score for obligation meaning was the highest score which was 82,06. The meaning of obligation became the easiest meaning to be identified by the students was possibly because of the use of modal should and must in the questions for obligation meaning. Commonly, the use of both modal should and must was indicated expressing the meaning of obligation. In line with this, in the previous study about the use of modal auxiliaries by advanced EFL learners which was conducted by Torabiardakani et al (2009), the researchers states "like should, "obligation" meaning of must is more dominant over its "necessity" meaning". Moreover, Torabiardakani et al also found that 100% of the use of modal should by the advanced EFL learners indicated obligation meaning.

On the other hand, the most difficult meaning to be identified by the students was possibility meaning which had the lowest mean score of 59,12. The use of modal 'could' in some items of the test to indicate possibility meaning seemed to be confusing for the students to be identified. Some of the students still identified modal 'could' as a modal auxiliary that only expressed ability meaning while actually in different context, modal 'could' also used to express permission and possibility meanings.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This research was attempted to answer the problem that had been formulated in the previous chapter. Based on the data that had been collected and analyzed in the research findings, it was concluded that the ability of the first year students of English Study Program FKIP Universitas Riau in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries specifically the meanings of permission, obligation, possibility, and ability was in average to good level since the mean score of the students' total score was 66,10 which indicates that the students' ability is in average to good level.

The highest score which was 92,5 and the lowest score which was 30 also have considerable difference in numbers. The high scores which was obtained by some students possibly because they were already familiar enough with modal auxiliaries. However, the low scores which was obtained by the other students surely could not be separated from the difficulties of modal auxiliaries themselves. As stated by Kreidler (1998) "modal verbs have numerous subtleties in what they express in different contexts". It caused modal auxiliaries to have shades of meanings and become complicated. However, the number of students who were in good to excellent level is higher than the number of students who were in poor level. It meant that there were only a few students who were not familiar with modal auxiliaries.

From the four meanings identified, the highest mean score (82,06) was in identifying obligation meaning while the lowest mean score (59,12) was in identifying possibility meaning. It was because there was a possibility that most of the students still identified the meanings of modal auxiliaries only from their dictionary meanings. For instance, the use of modal should + be to express possibility meaning was quite difficult to be identified by the students. However, as a whole, it can be concluded that the students has good ability in identifying the appropriate emaning expressed by modal auxiliaries.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

Surely, there are still a lot of weaknesses in this research. However, concerning the results of the research, the researcher would like to give some recommendations. These recommendations are expected to be useful for the teachers, the students and for the next researchers who are interested in doing a research related to the similar theme especially in learning and teaching modal auxiliaries. First, the researcher recommends the next researchers to further expand the research, for example by doing a research which is not only to know the ability of the students in identifying the appropriate meaning expressed by modal auxiliaries but also to know the students' difficulties in particular. Second, regarding the ability of several students which is still in poor level, it will be better for the teachers to enhance the discussion about modal auxiliaries. As modal auxiliaries have been studied since in junior high school, the teachers possibly have chances to explain more to the students about English modal auxiliaries. Last finally, considering the importance of modal auxiliaries in communication, the

researcher recommends the students to have better understanding about modal auxiliaries especially to be used in their daily communication.

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