

Authorial Stance in Government News on Social Media Age Restrictions: A Comparative Analysis of Indonesian and English Discourse

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Abstract

This study examines how epistemic stance is linguistically realized across two institutional genres addressing children's digital protection: an Indonesian government policy corpus (Data A, 908 words) and an Australian research report (Data B, 1,490 words). Employing a quantitative corpus-based discourse analysis, the study identifies and compares the distribution of epistemic stance markers across three analytical categories, namely cognitive attitude, epistemic modality, and epistemic justification, developed inductively from the data. The findings reveal a striking asymmetry in both density and distribution: the policy corpus deploys markers at nearly three times the rate of the research corpus (89.21 vs. 32.89 per 1,000 words), with cognitive attitude dominating at 58% of policy markers, while epistemic justification accounts for 84% of research markers. These results indicate that the two corpora construct institutional authority through fundamentally different epistemic logics, with the policy text commanding through normative evaluation and deontic assertion, and the research report persuading through evidential accountability and methodological transparency. The study contributes to cross-genre discourse analysis by demonstrating that comparative examination of institutional texts addressing the same social issue can reveal epistemic patterns invisible in single-genre studies, and affirms that stance is always shaped by communicative purpose, audience design, and institutional ideology.

Keywords: *Epistemic Stance, Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis, Institutional Genres, Comparative Analysis, Social Media Age Restrictions*

Introduction

The rapid development of social media has significantly transformed patterns of communication and interaction in contemporary society. Initially designed primarily for adult users, social media platforms are now increasingly accessed by younger users, including children and adolescents (Ahmad et al., 2025). These platforms function not only as tools for communication but also as spaces where individuals express identities, share experiences, and participate in social interaction (Kucher et al., 2016). In Indonesia, social media usage has grown rapidly, with approximately 43 million user identities recorded, representing more than half of the population (DataReportal, 2025). This widespread adoption indicates that digital platforms play an increasingly influential role in shaping everyday communication and social life.

Despite the various benefits offered by social media, particularly in education, communication, and information access, concerns regarding its potential risks for young users have intensified. Research suggests that exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying, and the tendency to compare oneself with others on digital platforms may contribute to anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression among adolescents (Prakash, 2025). Similar concerns have been reported internationally. In Australia, for example,

rising concerns about adolescent mental health have prompted discussions about restricting social media access for users under the age of sixteen (Blake et al., 2025). In response to similar challenges, the Indonesian government has introduced regulatory initiatives aimed at strengthening digital protection for children.

The introduction of such regulations raises important questions about how these policies are communicated to the public. Policy announcements must not only convey rules but also establish authority, present convincing reasoning, and build public trust. In institutional communication, the effectiveness of policy messages often depends on how successfully discourse constructs legitimacy and justifies regulatory decisions. Dissemination in academic and policy contexts therefore involves more than transferring information; it requires adapting messages to the audience's knowledge and communicative needs (Dong & Zhang, 2025). Consequently, discourse plays a central role in shaping how institutional messages are interpreted and accepted by society.

From a discourse perspective, language does not merely represent reality but also functions to enact social relationships. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics proposes that language simultaneously performs ideational and interpersonal functions, meaning that linguistic structures both represent experiences and organize social interaction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Within this framework, discourse becomes an important mechanism through which institutions construct authority and negotiate relationships with audiences. One key concept for examining such processes is stance, which refers to the ways speakers or writers express attitudes, judgments, and levels of commitment toward propositions in discourse (Du Bois, 2007; Gray & Biber, 2014; Hyland, 2008; Hyland & Joanna, 2021). Through stance markers, writers position themselves in relation to their claims and signal the degree of certainty or evaluation associated with particular statements or utterances (Bonnin, 2019; Fitzmaurice, 2004).

A growing body of research has explored how stance and epistemic strategies operate across different types of discourse, reflecting the diverse rhetorical functions these linguistic resources serve in context. Toledo (2025), for example, examines epistemic adverbials in women's instructive prose and finds that such expressions simultaneously serve protective and assertive rhetorical functions, softening advice while reinforcing authority, thereby demonstrating how epistemic modality operates not merely as a marker of certainty but as a relational strategy for managing interpersonal positioning. Expanding this understanding beyond individual positioning, Bonnin (2019) introduces the concept of *double stance*, whereby speakers simultaneously express personal and collective evaluations within a single discursive act, resonating with (Du Bois, 2007) sociolinguistic conception of stance as inherently dialogic. This dual positioning illuminates how stance functions not only as a personal act of meaning-making but also as a social act through which speakers negotiate alignment and authority within broader discourse communities.

Building on these insights, other studies have examined stance specifically within political and institutional contexts with settings most directly relevant to the present investigation. Arrese (2015), for instance, analyzes epistemic stance strategies across political testimonies and finds that speakers draw on different epistemic resources depending on their rhetorical goals and interactional identities, with variations in stance expression reflecting underlying differences in authority, accountability, and institutional positioning. This finding aligns closely with the analytical framework adopted in the present study, wherein evidentiality, epistemic modality, and cognitive attitude are understood as interrelated dimensions through which stance is realized in discourse. Taken together, these studies affirm that stance and epistemic positioning are highly

sensitive to context and institutional role, and that their systematic analysis can reveal how discourse simultaneously constructs knowledge, authority, and legitimacy, a premise that directly motivates the present examination of stance in institutional policy discourse.

Despite these contributions, relatively few studies have examined how epistemic stance operates comparatively across different institutional genres addressing the same social issue, most research having focused on academic discourse, political speech, or conversational interaction, while cross-genre comparisons between policy discourse and research reporting remain limited. This gap is significant given that the two genres serve fundamentally different communicative functions: policy discourse constructs regulatory authority and normative obligations, whereas research discourse primarily presents empirical evidence and analytical explanation. To address this gap, the present study investigates the distribution and linguistic realization of stance markers in two institutional corpora related to children's digital protection, comparing Indonesian policy discourse with an international research report on children's use of social media. In doing so, the study aims to identify patterns of epistemicity and examine how linguistic resources are deployed to construct authority, certainty, and evidential support across institutional contexts.

Institutional communication plays a fundamental role in shaping how policies and regulations are interpreted by the public. In academic and policy contexts, communication extends far beyond the simple transfer of information; it requires carefully adapting messages to suit the audience's level of knowledge and communicative expectations (Dong & Zhang, 2025). Institutional discourse thus functions as a strategic tool through which governments and organizations present policies, justify decisions, and construct legitimacy. The effectiveness of such communication depends significantly on how successfully discourse establishes authority while simultaneously preserving public trust. Within this institutional function, discourse becomes a site where linguistic choices are never neutral; they actively shape perception, frame interpretation, and position both the institution and its audience in particular ways. It is precisely this strategic dimension of institutional language that renders stance and epistemic positioning central analytical concerns in discourse analysis.

A key concept in this regard is stance, which refers to how speakers or writers express attitudes, judgments, and degrees of commitment toward propositions (Gray & Biber, 2014). Stance operates as a linguistic mechanism through which speakers position themselves in relation to the information they convey. From a sociolinguistic perspective, stance is also a social act involving evaluation, alignment, and relational positioning in interaction (Du Bois, 2007), allowing speakers to negotiate authority and credibility with their audience. Closely linked to subjectivity, stance frequently involves expressions of cognitive processes such as belief, judgment, and evaluation (Kärkkäinen, 2006). While such expressions may appear explicitly in conversational discourse, institutional communication typically employs more implicit and controlled forms of stance in order to maintain an appearance of objectivity and neutrality. Within academic discourse studies, stance has been extensively examined through the framework of metadiscourse. (Hyland, 2005, 2008) conceptualizes stance as a dimension of interactional metadiscourse the ways in which writers project their textual voice and signal their evaluative orientation toward propositions. According to Hyland, writers employ stance resources to convey judgments, commitments, and assessments, while simultaneously positioning themselves in relation to their readers. These resources serve to construct authorial credibility and guide readers' interpretations of the text.

Stance is closely intertwined with the concept of epistemicity, which concerns how speakers express knowledge, certainty, and evidential support for propositions. Epistemic stance strategies typically involve modal expressions, evidentials, and cognitive verbs that indicate the speaker's beliefs or the sources underlying a claim (Romero et al., 2025). From a functional-cognitive perspective, epistemic meaning reflects how speakers assess the reliability and justifiability of information. Boye (2012) argues that epistemic meaning can be understood as a cognitive phenomenon representing varying degrees of justificatory support for propositions, ranging from strong epistemic backing to weaker or more tentative support. This scalar understanding of epistemicity allows speakers to calibrate how certain or uncertain they appear about the information they present. Within this conceptual domain, epistemic meaning is commonly organized around two core dimensions: epistemic justification (evidentiality), which concerns the source and nature of supporting evidence, and epistemic support (modality), which concerns the degree of commitment or certainty expressed. In addition, attitude-related expressions, including cognitive verbs and evaluative constructions that reflect the speaker's subjective orientation that contribute a third dimension to the construction of epistemic meaning. In the present study, these three dimensions, epistemic justification, epistemic modality, and cognitive attitude, serve as the analytical framework for examining how stance is linguistically realized in institutional discourse.

Evidentiality, understood here as epistemic justification, concerns the source of information and the type of evidence a speaker mobilizes to support a claim, thereby indicating both how knowledge is obtained and how strongly a proposition is grounded. Within the broader domain of epistemicity, evidential meanings are commonly classified into three subdomains: direct, inferential, and reportative evidentiality, with the latter two typically grouped as forms of indirect justification. Building on this taxonomy, Guerra-lyons et al. (2026) further differentiates three subtypes of inferential evidentiality according to the nature of the evidence and the degree of epistemic involvement: circumstantial inferences, derived from observable sensory cues; generic inferences, which combine external evidence with internal reasoning; and conjectures, which rely exclusively on the speaker's internal reasoning. These distinctions are analytically significant because they reveal that evidential expressions do not merely signal the origin of knowledge. They also reflect varying degrees of epistemic commitment and speaker involvement in the construction of meaning, both of which are consequential in institutional contexts where the authority of knowledge claims is under ongoing negotiation.

Closely related to evidentiality, epistemic modality or epistemic support refers to the degree of certainty or commitment a speaker expresses regarding the likelihood or truth of a proposition. Hyland (2005) argues that epistemic modality functions as a key rhetorical resource for gaining adherence to knowledge claims by presenting them as interpretative positions rather than objective facts. It reflects how speakers evaluate whether events are real, probable, or uncertain, and thus plays a central role in the expression of stance. Epistemic modality is commonly organized into two main categories: hedging, which limits commitment and signals uncertainty or probability, and boosting, which expresses strong conviction and high certainty. Through these resources, speakers regulate their level of commitment while managing interpersonal relations with their audience. In this sense, epistemic modality operates simultaneously as a marker of certainty and as a discourse strategy that shapes the construction of stance and governs interactional dynamics in communication.

Complementing both evidentiality and epistemic modality, attitude markers constitute a third and equally important dimension of stance, as they signal the speaker's affective evaluation and subjective orientation toward a proposition. Hyland (2005) defines attitude markers as linguistic resources through which writers express their feelings, reactions, or evaluative assessments of a statement. Similarly, Han & Zhang (2026) highlights that attitude markers convey affective meanings, such as agreement, surprise, or frustration through lexical items such as *prefer*, *hopefully*, and *appropriate*. From a corpus-based perspective, Gray & Biber (2014) characterize these expressions as verbs of cognitive/generic attitude (CGA), signaling speakers' reflective beliefs and evaluative orientations toward representations. Taken together, these perspectives converge on the view that attitude markers function not merely as expressions of individual emotion, but as fundamental resources for constructing evaluative stance in discourse resources that, in institutional contexts, are deployed with particular care to balance subjective positioning with the institutional imperative of authority and credibility.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative corpus-based discourse analysis to examine the distribution of stance markers in institutional discourse addressing children's digital protection. Corpus-based approaches have been widely used in linguistic research to identify systematic patterns of language use across different registers and communicative contexts. Biber and Finegan (Biber & Finegan, 1989) argue that stance can be analyzed through the examination of corpora representing different registers by focusing on lexical items and semi-fixed expressions that function as grammatical devices used to frame a proposition. Following this approach, the present study quantitatively examines stance-related expressions in two institutional registers in order to identify patterns of epistemic positioning in the communication of digital child protection policies.

The corpus design follows the principle that a corpus should represent variation across registers in order to capture differences in linguistic practices across communicative contexts. As noted by Fitzmaurice (2004), an important goal in corpus construction is to represent a wide range of register variation so that linguistic patterns can be observed across different genres. In this study, two institutional registers were selected, policy discourse and research reporting. These registers were chosen because they address the same topic while serving distinct communicative functions. By comparing these two registers, the study aims to observe how similar issues are linguistically framed through different rhetorical and epistemic strategies.

Research Data

The dataset consists of two institutional corpora addressing the issue of children's digital protection, designed to represent variation across institutional registers discussing the same policy issue. The first corpus (Data A) represents policy discourse, consisting of Indonesian institutional communication explaining government regulations related to digital governance and child protection (Kementerian Komunikasi dan Digital, 2026), containing a total of 908 words in Bahasa Indonesia.

The second corpus (Data B) represents research discourse, drawn from an English-language institutional research report examining children's access to and use of social media platforms (eSafety Commissioner, 2025), containing 1,490 words. While both corpora address the same social issue, they differ fundamentally in communicative

purpose: policy discourse primarily aims to establish regulatory authority and prescribe institutional actions, whereas research discourse focuses on presenting empirical findings and analytical explanations regarding children's digital behavior. Prior to analysis, the frequency of stance markers was calculated per 1,000 words to ensure accurate comparison between corpora of different lengths, maintaining methodological consistency and analytical reliability.

Data Analysis

The analysis is organized around three analytical categories that reflect stance and epistemic positioning in institutional discourse, drawn from established theories in discourse analysis and epistemic stance studies. The first category, epistemic justification, concerns the source of information and the nature of evidence used to support a claim, including direct evidence, inferential reasoning, and reportative sources (Boye, 2012; Gray & Biber, 2014; Romero et al., 2025). The second category, epistemic modality, refers to the degree of certainty or commitment expressed toward a proposition, realized through two opposing strategies: hedging, which limits epistemic commitment and signals uncertainty or probability (e.g., *might*, *possible*), and boosting, which asserts strong conviction and high certainty (e.g., *certainly*, *clearly*) (Hyland, 2005; Nuyts, 2001). The third category, cognitive attitude, encompasses verbs, expressions, and constructions that reflect the speaker's evaluative or belief-oriented orientation toward a proposition, including mental state verbs and evaluative expressions that signal the speaker's subjective stance (Gray & Biber, 2014; Hyland, 2005). Together, these three categories provide a systematic framework for examining how epistemic stance is linguistically constructed and how authority, certainty, and evidential support are realized in institutional discourse.

The identification of subcategories within each analytical category was conducted inductively through close reading of both corpora, rather than imposed deductively from a predetermined framework. Each category was found to comprise a range of linguistically distinct expressions that, while sharing a common epistemic function, differed in the specific manner in which that function was realized in context. Recurring patterns of functional similarity gradually revealed natural groupings within each broader category, which were subsequently aligned with established theoretical frameworks to verify their coherence. Within cognitive attitude, seven subcategories were identified: attitude and evaluation markers, purpose constructions, authority verbs, obligation markers, permission markers, prohibition markers, and research intention expressions. Within epistemic modality, four subcategories emerged: certainty and booster markers, modal possibility and hedging expressions, definitional assertions, and prediction/volition markers. Within epistemic justification, seven subcategories were identified: passive procedural verbs, reporting verbs, quantifying evidence, procedural evidence, scope and descriptive markers, evidential and complement clauses, and legal evidential references. It is worth noting that the same lexical item may perform different epistemic functions depending on its discursive context; consequently, functional interpretation within co-text was prioritized over surface-level lexical classification throughout the coding process.

Results

This section is the main part of the article. This is where the author/s should explain in words what he/she discovered in the research. It should be clearly laid out and in a logical sequence. The results of the research presented in this section are the result of a clean process of data analysis such as statistical calculations and testing process or other processes for the achievement of its research. State the findings of the research concisely. If you want to display a table, use the following format.

Table 1. This is the title of your table

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Data 1	Data 4	Data 7
Data 2	Data 5	Data 8
Data 3	Data 6	Data 9
Total	Sum Column 2	Sum Column 3

Interpretation of results should not be included in this section, unless the research required combination of both findings and discussion in one section. Title of a table should be put above the table, as seen on Table 1, while title of image, picture, or chart should be put below the picture.

Overall Distribution of Epistemic Stance Markers

The overall distribution of epistemic stance markers across the two institutional corpora reveals a striking asymmetry in both total frequency and marker density. The policy corpus (Data A) comprises 908 words and contains 81 stance markers, yielding a density of 89.21 markers per 1,000 words. The research corpus (Data B), by contrast, contains 1,490 words and 49 stance markers, producing a considerably lower density of 32.89 per 1,000 words. Despite the research corpus being substantially longer, the policy text deploys epistemic stance markers at nearly three times the rate, suggesting that institutional policy discourse is markedly more epistemically intensive, packing greater evaluative and evidential weight into a more compressed discursive space. This density gap points to a fundamental difference in how the two texts construct authority and communicate with their intended audiences, a pattern that becomes further clarified when the distribution is examined across the three analytical categories.

Table 1. Overall Distribution of Epistemic Stance Markers

Dataset	Total Words	Total Markers	Density / 1,000 Words
Data A (Policy)	908	81	89.21
Data B (Research)	1,490	49	32.89



Figure 1. Distribution of Epistemic Stance Markers across Three Analytical Categories

As illustrated in Figure 1, the three analytical categories, epistemic justification, epistemic modality, and cognitive attitude, are distributed unevenly across the two corpora, with each corpus exhibiting a distinct dominant category that reflects its underlying communicative purpose and institutional orientation. The most pronounced divergence is observed in cognitive attitude, where the policy corpus records 47 occurrences (51.76 per 1,000 words) compared to only 3 in the research corpus (2.01 per 1,000 words), a sixteenfold difference that reflects the fundamentally directive and evaluative character of regulatory discourse. This disparity suggests that the policy text constructs its institutional authority primarily through evaluative and deontic positioning, asserting what is necessary, permissible, or prohibited rather than inviting deliberation, a pattern consistent with Du Bois (2007) conception of stance as a social act of positioning, wherein institutional actors deploy evaluative language to align audiences with prescribed norms and obligations. In the category of epistemic justification, the research corpus registers a markedly higher frequency of 41 occurrences (27.52 per 1,000 words) compared to 20 in the policy corpus (22.03 per 1,000 words), indicating that the research text places considerably greater emphasis on evidential grounding and source-based reasoning as its primary mechanism for constructing credibility. This distinction aligns with Boye (2012) framework of epistemic justification, wherein the degree and nature of evidential support signals the speaker's epistemic commitment and the basis upon which knowledge claims are advanced. Epistemic modality, meanwhile, is more prominent in the policy corpus (14 occurrences; 15.42 per 1,000 words) than in the research corpus (5 occurrences; 3.36 per 1,000 words), suggesting that the policy text makes selective use of certainty markers and modal expressions to reinforce the obligatory and non-negotiable force of specific directives. Taken together, these three distributional patterns reveal a fundamental asymmetry in epistemic strategy: the policy corpus asserts, directs, and evaluates, while the research corpus grounds, documents, and presents.

Categorization and Subcategory Distribution

A closer examination of the subcategory distribution, presented in Table 2 and illustrated in Figure 2, further illuminates the internal composition of each epistemic stance category across the two corpora. Rather than being homogeneous, each of the three analytical categories comprises a range of functionally distinct subcategories that differ in how their shared epistemic function is realized in context. The full frequency count for each subcategory across both corpora is presented below.

Table 2. Subcategory Frequency Distribution across Corpora

Subcategory	Epistemic Type	Data A (Policy)	Data B (Research)
Attitude/evaluation markers	Cognitive Attitude	19	0
Purpose constructions	Cognitive Attitude	13	0
Authority verbs	Cognitive Attitude	6	0
Obligation markers	Cognitive Attitude	6	0
Permission markers	Cognitive Attitude	2	0
Prohibition markers	Cognitive Attitude	1	0
Research intention expressions	Cognitive Attitude	0	3
Subtotal Cognitive Attitude		47	3
Certainty/booster markers	Epistemic Modality	8	0
Modal possibility/hedging	Epistemic Modality	3	3
Definitional assertion	Epistemic Modality	2	0
Prediction/volition markers	Epistemic Modality	1	2

Subtotal Epistemic Modality		14	5
Passive procedural verbs	Epistemic Justification	0	16
Reporting verbs	Epistemic Justification	6	14
Quantifying evidence	Epistemic Justification	3	7
Procedural evidence	Epistemic Justification	5	0
Scope/descriptive markers	Epistemic Justification	5	0
Evidential/complement clauses	Epistemic Justification	1	4
Legal evidential reference	Epistemic Justification	1	0
Subtotal Epistemic Justification		21	41
Total		82	49

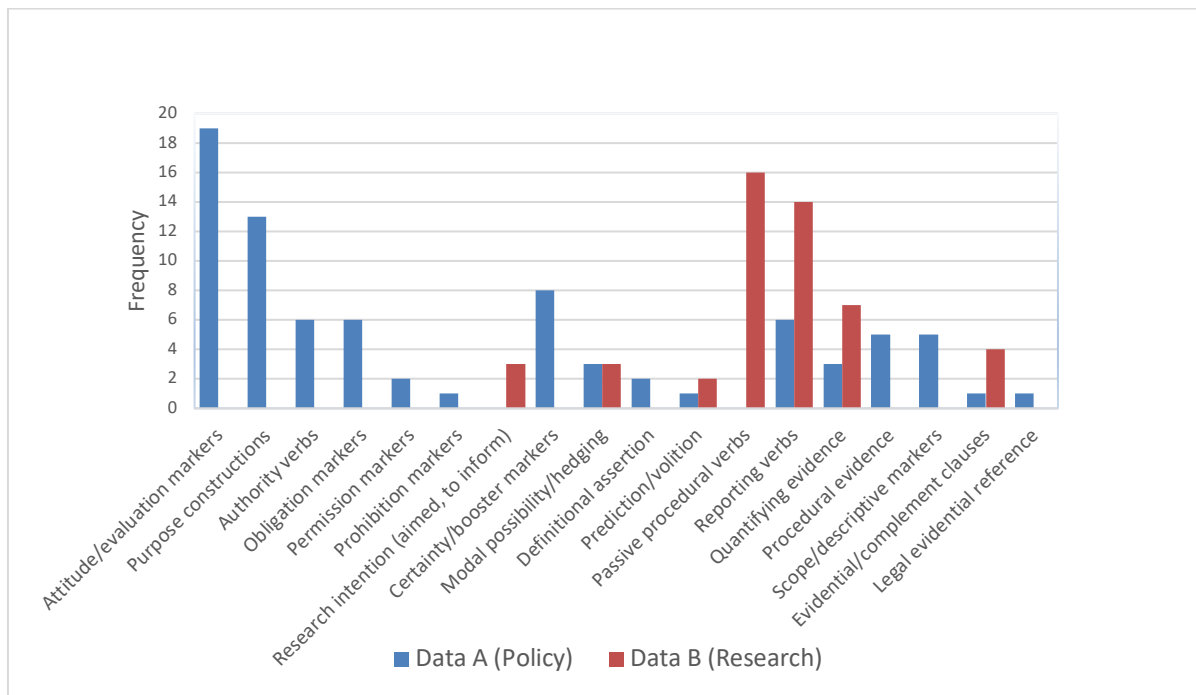


Figure 2. Comparative Distribution of Epistemic Stance Subcategories across Institutional Corpora

As illustrated in Figure 2, the subcategory distribution across both corpora makes visible the internal composition of each dominant epistemic category and consolidates the patterns identified across the three analytical sections. The policy corpus clusters decisively around the cognitive attitude subcategories of attitude and evaluation markers (19), purpose constructions (13), authority verbs (6), and obligation markers (6) a deontic constellation that reflects the text’s regulatory imperative to prescribe, evaluate, and legitimize institutional action. The research corpus, by contrast, registers no occurrences in any of these subcategories, instead clustering entirely around the epistemic justification subcategories of passive procedural verbs (16), reporting verbs (14), and quantifying evidence (7) a pattern that reflects the text’s foundational commitment to grounding every claim in empirical accountability and methodological transparency. Within epistemic modality, certainty and booster markers appear exclusively in the policy corpus (8), while modal possibility and hedging expressions appear in both corpora but serve different rhetorical functions reinforcing conditional permissions in the policy text and acknowledging epistemic limitations in the research text. The near-complete absence of overlap between the two corpora across subcategories confirms that the two texts do not merely differ in degree of epistemic marking but operate through fundamentally distinct repertoires of epistemic resources.

Analysis by Category Cognitive Attitude

The category of cognitive attitude emerges as the most divergent dimension across the two corpora, with the policy corpus recording 47 occurrences (51.76 per 1,000 words) compared to only 3 in the research corpus (2.01 per 1,000 words) a sixteenfold difference that constitutes the most analytically significant finding of this study. This disparity reflects fundamentally different institutional orientations: whereas the policy corpus deploys cognitive attitude markers as its primary epistemic resource and the research corpus employs them only minimally and incidentally. In line with Hyland (2005) conceptualization of stance as a resource for projecting institutional voice, the policy text's overwhelming reliance on evaluative and deontic expressions positions the institution not merely as an informant but as an authoritative arbiter of conducting one that prescribes, prohibits, and evaluates on behalf of the state.

Within the policy corpus, cognitive attitude is realized across several functionally distinct subcategories. The first example, *PP TUNAS mewajibkan setiap Penyelenggara Sistem Elektronik untuk menyaring konten yang berpotensi membahayakan anak-anak* (PP TUNAS obliges every Electronic System Operator to filter content that could potentially harm children), exemplifies the use of an obligation marker as a primary stance resource. The verb *mewajibkan* (obliges/mandates) encodes a strong deontic stance, positioning the regulatory instrument itself as the agent of obligation and the platform operators as subjects of institutional command. This construction leaves no interpretive ambiguity while compliance is not presented as optional or negotiable but as a legally binding requirement. This represents a clear act of social positioning, wherein the institution aligns itself with the role of regulator and simultaneously positions platform operators as accountable parties within the regulatory framework.

The second example, *Negara hadir untuk menjamin setiap anak Indonesia dapat tumbuh dalam lingkungan digital yang aman* (The state is present to guarantee that every Indonesian child can grow up in a safe digital environment), demonstrates how commitment markers function to construct institutional presence and responsibility. The phrase *hadir untuk menjamin* combines a spatial metaphor of institutional presence with a strong commitment verb, projecting the state as an active, protective agent in the digital space. This functions as an attitude marker that conveys the institution's positive evaluation of its own protective role, thereby legitimizing the regulatory intervention that follows.

The third example, *Pemerintah mengatur, mengawasi, dan menegakkan hukum* (The government regulates, supervises, and enforces the law), illustrates the cumulative effect of authority verbs in constructing institutional power. The tripartite structure (*mengatur, mengawasi, menegakkan*) presents governmental authority as comprehensive and multi-dimensional, covering the full spectrum from rule-making to implementation to enforcement. This accumulation reflects an evaluative orientation that actively asserts and reinforces the legitimacy of state power within the regulatory domain. Another example, *larangan profiling data anak untuk kepentingan komersial* (prohibition of profiling children's data for commercial purposes), demonstrates how prohibition markers realize negative institutional evaluation. Unlike obligation markers that prescribe required actions, *larangan* encodes a restrictive evaluative stance, explicitly delimiting what is institutionally impermissible which positioning commercial data profiling as a threat to children's rights and making the prohibition simultaneously a regulatory act and a value judgment.

In sharp contrast, the research corpus registers cognitive attitude in only 3 instances. The expression *The study aimed to build on our understanding of children's access* employs *aimed* as a research intention verb, signalling the researchers' goal orientation rather than normative prescription. Similarly, *to inform current policy discussions* encodes a purpose stance that positions the research as a resource for policy deliberation rather than a directive for action. These instances demonstrate that cognitive attitude in the research corpus serves an entirely different function, signalling epistemic and methodological positioning rather than institutional authority, reflecting the genre's orientation toward transparency and deliberation rather than prescription and compliance.

Collectively, the cognitive attitude distributions confirm that this category is the primary locus of divergence between policy and research discourse. The policy corpus constructs authority through pervasive deontic and evaluative positioning such as, obligating, prohibiting, and asserting on behalf of the state while the research corpus employs cognitive attitude sparingly and exclusively in service of methodological transparency. This contrast reflects fundamentally different institutional epistemologies: one that commands through normative authority, and one that invites through evidential accountability.

Epistemic Modality

Epistemic modality constitutes the second analytical category, concerned with how speakers signal their degree of certainty, commitment, or uncertainty toward a proposition. While both corpora register comparatively lower frequencies in this category, a clear directional asymmetry is observable: the policy corpus records 14 occurrences (15.42 per 1,000 words) compared to 5 in the research corpus (3.36 per 1,000 words), and crucially, the two corpora orient toward opposite ends of the epistemic modality spectrum. The policy corpus is predominantly characterized by boosting expressions that assert strong epistemic commitment and regulatory certainty, while the research corpus tends toward hedging expressions that acknowledge uncertainty, qualify claims, and signal epistemic caution. This divergence aligns with Hyland (2005) argument that epistemic modality functions as a key rhetorical resource for managing knowledge claims with boosting serving to reinforce authority and non-negotiability, and hedging serving to present claims as interpretative positions open to evaluation.

Within the policy corpus, the first example, *sekaligus memastikan mereka mendapat manfaat terbaik dari perkembangan teknologi* (while also ensuring they receive the best benefits from technological development), illustrates how *memastikan* (ensuring/guaranteeing) functions as a booster. Unlike hedging expressions that signal probability or contingency, *memastikan* encodes an unconditional epistemic commitment that the institution guarantees a policy outcome as certain rather than contingent. This projects institutional confidence and closes off interpretive space. The second example, *konten yang berpotensi membahayakan anak-anak* (content that potentially endangers children), presents an analytically interesting case of modal likelihood within an otherwise boosting-dominant text. The marker *berpotensi* (potentially) introduces epistemic qualification, yet functions not to weaken the regulatory stance but to broaden its scope, extending the regulatory reach to cover a wider range of content. This reflects that the same maker in functional complexity of epistemic expressions can perform different rhetorical functions depending on its discursive context.

In the research corpus, the third example, *participants may not have been aware of the differences*, exemplifies the modal verb *may* as a hedging device. The expression acknowledges a potential limitation in the data without dismissing the validity of the

findings, demonstrating epistemic honesty and methodological. The fourth example, *The study will provide an updated evidence base to inform current policy discussions*, introduces the predictive modal *will provide*. Unlike *may*, this projects a future epistemic commitment, asserting confidence that the research will yield a specific outcome. This reflects how modal expressions in research discourse simultaneously signal certainty about research value while framing it in terms of anticipated rather than demonstrated outcomes, constructing credibility through projected usefulness rather than asserted authority.

The epistemic modality distributions reveal a fundamental difference in how institutional certainty is managed. The policy corpus deploys boosting expressions to assert regulatory certainty and eliminate interpretive ambiguity, consistent with a compliance-oriented communication model. The research corpus employs hedging expressions to signal epistemic reflexivity and present findings as carefully qualified interpretations, consistent with an evidence-oriented communication model that values methodological transparency.

Epistemic Justification

Epistemic justification represents the primary epistemic resource of the research corpus while occupying a secondary but significant role in the policy corpus. The research corpus records 41 occurrences (27.52 per 1,000 words) compared to 20 in the policy corpus (22.03 per 1,000 words), making this the only category in which the research corpus outpaces the policy corpus in both raw frequency and normalized density. This confirms that epistemic justification is the foundational mechanism through which research discourse constructs credibility. The policy corpus employs a qualitatively different set of evidential resources: whereas the research corpus relies predominantly on statistical and procedural evidence, the policy corpus grounds its claims primarily in legal authority, institutional mandates, and quantified social conditions that justify regulatory intervention.

Within the policy corpus, the first example, *lebih dari 80% anak-anak Indonesia mengakses internet setiap hari* (more than 80% of Indonesian children access the internet every day), illustrates how quantifying evidence functions as a justificatory resource. The expression *lebih dari* combined with a specific percentage constructs a statistical claim framing the regulatory intervention as an empirically warranted response to a documented social condition. The statistic functions as observable, measurable evidence that the problem being regulated is real and urgent. Crucially, the policy text does not elaborate on the methodology behind this presented figure as settled fact that requiring no further interrogation.

The second example, *Proses pembuatannya melibatkan 287 masukan dari 24 pemangku kepentingan* (The drafting process involved 287 inputs from 24 stakeholders), demonstrates procedural evidence that legitimizes the policy through documented consultative process. The verb *melibatkan* constructs the policy's development as participatory and evidence-based, grounding its authority in demonstrated public consultation. The specific numerical detail transforms a qualitative claim about consultation into a quantifiable fact as reportative evidentiality wherein validity rests on a documented institutional process.

Within the research corpus, the third example, *A total of 1,504 children participated in the survey*, illustrates how quantifying evidence functions differently in research discourse. Unlike the policy corpus's deployment of statistics as rhetorical justification, this expression serves as the foundational empirical anchor of the entire study. The

precision of the figure of exactly 1,504 rather than “approximately 1,500” signals methodological rigour and data integrity. The fourth example, *9 in 10 children (91%) chose to share their gender identity*, illustrates the research corpus’s distinctive approach to quantifying evidence. The dual presentation of a ratio alongside a precise percentage simultaneously serves two epistemic functions: the ratio makes the finding accessible and memorable, while the percentage demonstrates statistical precision for a specialized readership.

The epistemic justification patterns confirm that while both texts ground their claims in evidence, they do so through fundamentally different evidential logics. The policy corpus employs legal references, institutional mandates, and selectively deployed statistics to construct justification that is authoritative and declarative. The evidence is marshalled to support regulatory conclusions already reached. The research corpus constructs justification through exhaustive methodological documentation, statistical precision, transparent source attribution, examined evidence, qualification, and procedural accountability. This distinction characterizes as differing degrees of epistemic support: the policy corpus presents its evidential claims as settled and sufficient, while the research corpus presents its evidence as carefully constructed, openly verifiable, and inherently subject to the limitations of empirical inquiry.

Discussion

The overarching finding of this study is that the two institutional corpora, while addressing the same social issue, the protection of children in digital spaces, construct epistemic authority through fundamentally divergent linguistic strategies that reflect their different communicative functions, audience designs, and institutional epistemologies. The policy corpus finds epistemic stance markers at nearly three times the density of the research corpus (89.21 vs. 32.89 per 1,000 words), and this quantitative disparity is matched by an equally significant qualitative divergence across categories. Cognitive attitude accounts for 58% of all stance markers in the policy corpus, while epistemic justification accounts for 84% of all markers in the research corpus. That is a striking inversion that encapsulates the core difference between the two texts: one constructs authority through evaluation and prescription, the other through evidence and procedure. The findings of this study are consistent with observations by (Han & Zhang, 2026) Han and Zhang, who argue that academic discourse particularly in the Discussion section that tends to be more interpretative and characterized by a higher use of hedges, boosters, and attitude markers.

This finding is theoretically significant in relation to Du Bois (2007) framework of the stance triangle as a social act that stance-taking always involves three simultaneous acts: evaluation of an object, positioning of the subject, and alignment with other subjects in interaction. In the policy corpus, all three dimensions are realized through cognitive attitude markers; the institution evaluates digital risks as threats requiring regulation, positions itself as the authoritative protector of children’s rights, and aligns its audience as compliant subjects of regulatory obligation. In the research corpus, the same three dimensions are realized through epistemic justification; the researchers evaluate their findings through empirical evidence, position themselves as methodologically rigorous investigators, and align their audience as rational evaluators capable of independently assessing the validity of claims presented. The same fundamental act of stance-taking is thus realized through entirely different linguistic resources depending on the institutional context.

This divergence also speaks to conceptualization of epistemic modality and stance as rhetorical resources for managing knowledge claims. The policy corpus's dominant use of boosting expressions (*memastikan, dasar hukum kuat, sanksi tegas*) reflects a rhetorical strategy oriented toward closing off interpretive space and asserting institutional certainty, consistent with the genre's need to project authority and ensure compliance. The research corpus's measured deployment of hedging expressions (*may, could, would be able*) reflects a contrasting strategy of opening interpretive space and inviting critical evaluation, consistent with the genre's commitment to epistemic honesty and methodological reflexivity.

The findings also illuminate a deeper sociocultural dimension extending beyond genre convention. The Indonesian policy corpus constructs its audience as recipients of institutional authority as subjects expected to comply with regulatory directives rather than deliberate over them. The high density of cognitive attitude markers, particularly obligation markers such as *mewajibkan* and *wajib* and prohibition markers such as *larangan*, reflects a top-down, compliance-oriented communication model in which the state asserts its normative judgment with minimal epistemic qualification. The Australian research corpus, by contrast, constructs its audience as rational, autonomous evaluators expected to assess the validity of empirical claims independently. This contrast suggests that the epistemic choices embedded in these texts reflect not only individual genre conventions but broader institutional ideologies about the relationship between state authority, empirical knowledge, and public accountability.

In sum, this study demonstrates that epistemic stance is not a neutral or incidental feature of institutional discourse but a fundamental mechanism through which institutions construct authority, legitimize decisions, and position their audiences. The policy corpus commands through normative assertion; the research corpus persuades through evidential accountability. These are not merely different ways of saying the same thing however, they are different ways of constructing knowledge, authority, and legitimacy in language, and their systematic analysis reveals the epistemic architecture that underlies institutional communication in both its regulatory and investigative forms.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate how epistemic stance is linguistically constructed across two institutional genres addressing the same social issue, namely children's digital protection, through a comparative analysis of an Indonesian policy corpus (Data A) and an Australian research report (Data B). The findings indicate a clear asymmetry in both the density and distribution of epistemic stance markers between the two corpora. The policy corpus employs these markers at a substantially higher rate than the research corpus, with cognitive attitude accounting for the majority of instances. These are primarily realized through obligation markers, authority verbs, and evaluative expressions, which together construct a compliance-oriented institutional voice. In contrast, the research corpus is predominantly characterized by epistemic justification, reflected in the frequent use of quantifying evidence, passive procedural verbs, and reporting verbs. These linguistic features emphasize credibility through empirical accountability rather than normative assertion, highlighting the distinct epistemic orientations of the two institutional genres.

These findings suggest that the two corpora do not merely differ in style but reflect fundamentally different institutional epistemologies: the policy text commands through evaluative authority, while the research text persuades through evidential transparency. This distinction carries broader implications for how institutional discourse constructs

its relationship with its audience. One positioning readers as compliant recipients of regulatory directives, the other as rational evaluators of documented evidence.

Suggestions

This study suggests a number of avenues for further investigation. First, a more complete picture of epistemic stance variance across institutional communication would be obtained by broadening the corpus to include a greater variety of institutional genres. Second, a more in-depth understanding of how particular language decisions operate within their larger sociopolitical settings might be possible with a mixed-methods approach that incorporates qualitative or critical discourse analysis. Lastly, additional policy areas where the conflict between institutional power and evidential responsibility is as important could benefit from the use of the analytical framework created here.

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