
Research Article

Challenges Faced by Students When Utilizing Modal Verbs

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Abstract

Modal auxiliaries, a grammatical category akin to auxiliary verbs, serve to convey notions of truth, prediction, or possibility. This study delves into the challenges encountered by students while grappling with modal verbs during the 2022/2023 academic year at junior high school SMP N 4 Muara Komam. The primary objective is to find out the hurdles students face when employing modal verbs in their language acquisition journey. This research employed a mixed-methods focused on a sample group of 17 eighth-grade students. The research tools included questionnaires and structured interviews. The data analysis encompassed three key stages: data reduction, data presentation, and data conclusion. From the comprehensive analysis of the data, it becomes evident that students encounter considerable difficulties when it comes to effectively using modal verbs. These challenges extend to comprehending the function, form, usage, and materials that facilitate modal learning. Upon careful consideration of the questionnaire responses and interview findings, it is apparent that students face notable obstacles in their utilization of modal verbs, particularly in understanding their functions, practical applications, linguistic forms, and the instructional resources necessary to enhance their grasp of this grammatical construct.

Keywords

modal verbs; students' difficulties; grammatical challenges; mix-method research

Introduction

Language is a fundamental tool that enables individuals to connect and communicate in their daily lives. It serves as the cornerstone of human interaction, allowing people to express themselves and engage effectively with others. Without language, meaningful interactions between individuals would be impossible, emphasizing the critical role the language plays in both social and emotional aspects of human existence (Rezeki & Sagala, 2021). In today's globalized world, English has emerged as one of the most widely spoken and used languages. It has become a global lingua franca, facilitating communication among people from diverse linguistic backgrounds around the world. Proficiency in English has consequently become an essential skill for effective communication on a global scale (Susanthi, 2020).

In countries like Indonesia, where English is not a native or second language but is still highly valued, its importance is particularly pronounced. English education plays a significant role in the dissemination of knowledge and information, influencing educational systems and everyday life. In Indonesia, learning English is pivotal for acquiring knowledge, skills, and arts and for fostering international connections (Miranti, 2021). To master English, individuals need to develop proficiency in four key language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills encompass aspects such as pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and vocabulary, all of which are crucial for effective communication (Masykuri, 2022).

Grammar, in particular, stands out as a fundamental component of English. It provides the rules and structures necessary for organizing words, phrases, and sentences to convey specific meanings. A solid grasp of grammar is essential for understanding and effectively using the language. It encompasses knowledge of how to construct sentences, utilize correct sentence structures, and apply grammatical rules accurately (Pertiwi, 2019). Understanding grammar goes beyond mere theoretical knowledge; it is essential for constructing coherent and meaningful sentences. Students must be equipped with the skills to create grammatically correct English sentences, as grammar forms the backbone of language proficiency (Ajaj, 2022).

However, despite its significance, grammar is often overlooked by students studying English, primarily due to its reputation for complexity and difficulty (Fitriani in Jelita et al., 2023). English grammar encompasses various aspects, one of which is modal auxiliaries. Modal auxiliaries are grammatical categories that assist in conveying ideas related to truth, prediction, or possibility. These auxiliary verbs serve various functions and hold significance in context, allowing speakers and writers to express themselves effectively (Haq, 2020).

Yet, students frequently encounter challenges when it comes to utilizing modal auxiliaries correctly such as, lack understanding of teacher's explanation, don't know using modal functions, kinds, and the use of modal also requires separate regulations and they were still confused about the variations between the forms of modals that must follow the primary verb without the word "to." Modal in the third singular person, without the addition of "s" or "es," and can be used with a negative note which always follows the modal auxiliary, and there are even other auxiliary words "be" or "have". Then, they were also less in material and meaning, making it difficult to interpret the modal. This is also supported by Previous research corroborates these difficulties, citing outdated teaching methods, ineffective curricula, and students' lack of enthusiasm as contributing factors (Nurlaila, 2019). Additionally, students often struggle with understanding the different types of modals, how to use them appropriately, and discerning their specific functions (Papatungan et al., 2022). These challenges in mastering modal auxiliaries can lead to feelings of anxiety, diminished self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and a reluctance to communicate (Saefudin, 2020). Given these observations, the research aims to delve into the specific difficulties students face when using modal auxiliaries.

While recent studies have shed valuable light on the challenges students face in mastering modal auxiliaries, a notable gap persists in the current empirical and theoretical landscape of this focused study. Previous research has primarily focused on identifying these challenges and their psychological implications, yet there is a dearth of comprehensive investigations into effective pedagogical strategies that could mitigate these difficulties. Furthermore, while existing studies have recognized the importance of understanding modal functions and applications, there is a limited exploration of how contextual factors may influence the acquisition of modal auxiliary skills. This study aims to bridge this gap by not only identifying the specific challenges faced by students but also by examining potential pedagogical approaches and contextual factors that may contribute to a deeper understanding of modal auxiliaries in real-world communicative contexts. In doing so, it extends the current body of research by offering a more holistic perspective on the issue.

Method

The approach used in this research is a mixed methods approach as this research aims to better understand the research problem by converging (or triangulating) quantitative data in the form of numbers and qualitative data in the form of descriptive narratives so that researchers can understand in a more comprehensive and nuanced way the phenomena that are mixed or complex. Regarding the mixed methods approach, according to (Creswell and Plano in Dawadi et al., 2021), a mixed methods approach is an approach that combines two approaches at once, namely a qualitative approach and a quantitative approach. Researchers focus on the phenomenon of students' difficulties in using modal at SMPN 4 Muara Komam in the 2022/2023 academic year.



The total population of this research is 60 students and the sample is a group of people who will participate directly in the research. The sample was class VIII, totaling 20 students. In this research, researchers investigated students' difficulties in using the modal at SMPN 4 Muara Komam. Researchers used questionnaires and interviews to collect data.

Researchers use data collection techniques using closed questionnaires to push through a lot of data. This research uses closed questionnaires for students to obtain information and then the answers obtained are then collected as data. Next, the data is processed and converted into research results, especially regarding students' difficulties in using modal auxiliaries. Researchers also use structured interviews to push through large amounts of data. This research uses interviews with English teachers to obtain information, especially about students' difficulties in using modal auxiliaries. Before the interview, the researcher prepared interesting questions and conversations to obtain clear information and valid data.

Researchers employed three major steps in data analysis: data reduction, data presentation, and data conclusion. Data reduction is defined as the process of selecting, classifying, simplifying, abstracting and transforming "rough/raw" data that emerges from written notes in the field. So, data reduction functions to form raw data which is much more scattered into smaller and simpler data while still maintaining the structure of the research objectives. data presentation, organized activity, which is compressed by assembling information that allows drawing conclusions and actions. Researchers can also understand the social situation that is occurring in the research. The third analysis which is no less important than the previous two stages is the conclusion, namely drawing conclusions and verifying the data. Whether this stage is optimal or not, whether or not the conclusions produced are greatly influenced by the two previous stages; data reduction and display, and the researcher's ability to find out the meaning of phenomena, events, and objects encountered since the beginning of the research. Researchers also try to record explanations regarding causes effects and propositions, as well as possible configurations

Results

The researcher intends to discuss the findings of any difficulties students encounter while using modals as a problem formulation in this research in this part. The researcher discussed the difficulties that students in using modal. This research was created by research participants, who are students in class VIII in the second semester of the 2022/2023 school year. The researcher conducted closed questionnaires for students and an interview guideline for the teacher to know about the difficulties students faced when using modals. The researcher discovered difficulties in using the modal by students at SMPN 4 Muara Komam after performing research. Furthermore, the researcher encountered various problems while doing the investigation.

Questionnaires Result

Table 1. Students Learning Difficulty in using modal

No	Question	Answer		Percentage	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1.	1	14	3	82%	18%
2.	2	16	1	94%	6%
3.	3	13	4	76%	24%
4.	4	13	4	76%	24%
5.	5	8	9	47%	53%

Table 2. Students Difficulties in using modal auxiliary form

No	Question	Answer		Percentage	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
6.	6	7	10	41%	59%
7.	7	11	6	65%	35%
8.	8	10	7	59%	41%



9.	9	8	9	47%	53%
10.	10	13	4	76%	24%
11.	11	11	6	65%	35%

Table 3. Students' Difficulty in making modal auxiliary

	No	Question	Answer		Percentage	
			Yes	No	Yes	No
12.		12.	14	3	82%	18%
13.		13.	9	8	53%	47%
14.		14.	9	8	53%	47%
15.		15	15	2	88%	12%
16.		16	9	8	53%	47%
17.		17	10	7	59%	41%
18.		18	13	4	76%	24%
19.		19	10	7	59%	41%
20.		20	9	8	53%	47%

Interview Guideline Result

According to an interview with an English teacher, students' difficulties in understanding, learning, and using modals are caused by a lack of knowledge about the material and forms of modals, a lack of knowledge about the functions of modals, and a lack of ability to correctly apply modals in sentences due to a lack of knowledge about rules for using modal and reducing auxiliary capital learning materials.

Discussion

Questionnaires

1) Students learning difficulty in understanding the teacher's explanation.

According to the data, 76% of students needed a lot of time to understand the teacher's explanation of modal. This shows that students are having difficulty understanding the teacher's explanation, requiring a significant amount of time. This is also corroborated by the teacher's interview answer, which claimed, "Yes, because before they learned less about modal and not all modal was studied and limited facilities which only have dictionaries and learning books and are not allowed to bring mobile phones."

This is in accordance with the theory (Abuzar in Nauvalia, 2021) concerning factors that cause learning difficulties, namely external factors School environment, such as teacher teaching methods, poor quality and location of school buildings, such as near marketplaces, teacher conditions, and unsupportive learning media. This is also in line with research (Papatungan et al., 2022), in a study entitled "An analysis of students' difficulties in Intermediate English Grammar course" which stated that research findings revealed that they did not know the formula and were confused about how to use pronouns and tenses because they didn't learn it. Furthermore, the factors that influence students' difficulties in learning grammar include lack of enthusiasm, learning methodology, teaching methods, educational background, and family environment.

It can be concluded that students' difficulties in understanding the teacher's explanation connected to previous research and theory external factors, namely the school environment in the form of teaching methods and less supportive learning media (Abuzar in Nauvalia, 2021) and this causes students to have difficulties in learning grammar, especially auxiliary modal including lack of enthusiasm, learning methodology, teaching methods (Papatungan et al., 2022)

2) Students' difficulties in using modal auxiliary

Based on the findings obtained, it was found that students had difficulty in making sentences using modals 65% of students. This result was also supported by interviews with teachers who stated:

Yes, sometimes they have difficulty using the modal function, especially should or will. Then the use of modal also requires separate regulations because in limited schools it is impossible for teachers to be able to face many questions from students and are not allowed to carry cellphones, it is advisable to bring a dictionary, so many students are confused. and experience learning modal difficulties.



This is in accordance with the theory (Al Khresheh in Saefudin, 2020) Error encourage by teaching material or method Error, Error can appear to be induced by the teaching process itself and error is evidence of the failure of ineffective teaching or lack of control. If material is well chosen, graded, and presented with meticulous care, there should never be any error, the students will be easy to accept.

This is also in line with research (Saefudin, 2020) in a study entitled "Error Analysis of Modal Auxilliary Used by Students at the second Semester of the eleventh grade of SMAN 1 Kelumbayan in the academic year of 2019/2020". The research findings found that four types of errors were found in this research, namely additions, omissions, formation errors, and compilation errors. There were 8 addition errors, 3 placement errors, 65 misinformation errors, and there were no ordering errors. The total error is 76 errors. The most dominant error in this research is misinformation. In total, there are 65 errors. It is assumed that students face difficulties in determining the appropriate auxiliary modal in writing sentences. The problems faced by students in learning auxiliary modals are that students experience difficulties in differentiating the use of auxiliary modals and students do not understand the material.

According to the explanation above, it found students have difficulty in using modals connected to previous research and theory (Al Khresheh in Saefudin, 2020) Errors are caused by materials or teaching methods that seem to originate from the teaching process itself and errors are evidence of ineffective teaching failure or lack of control that materials are well chosen, assessed and presented carefully, then there should be no mistakes, students will easily accept them. Therefore, they have difficulties in learning auxiliary modals that students experience difficulties in differentiating the use of auxiliary modals and students do not understand the material (Saefudin, 2020).

3) Students' difficulty in making modal form

Based on the findings, the majority of students experience difficulties in applying auxiliary modals using "s" or "es" after three singular persons, namely 59% of students. Then, modal always follows the main verb without "to" there are 53% of students. Finally, the modal face in terms of modal can be used with the auxiliary word "to be" there are 53% of students.

This result is also supported by interviews with teachers who stated:

First, some students sometimes have difficulty in the form of subtle sentences such as sentences that can be plural. Second, they sometimes have difficulty using modal functions, especially should or will. Then the use of modal also requires separate regulations because in limited schools it is impossible for teachers to be able to face many questions from students and are not allowed to carry cellphones so it is advisable to bring a dictionary so that many students are confused. and experience learning modal difficulties. Third, because previously they did not learn about modal and not allmodal was studied and the limited facilities only had dictionaries and learning books and were not allowed to carry cellphones.

Based on the results of the problems above, it can be concluded that the difficulties faced by students in using modal are in accordance with the theory that students experience difficulties in determining the ability, willingness, and demands of the modal. This is also in accordance with the theory (Raimes in Nurlaila, 2019) which is applied to students' difficulties with modals and main verb forms in modals.

This is in line with research (Nurlaila, 2019) in research entitled "An Analysis of Students' Difficulty in Using Modals at the second semester of the eleventh grade of MA Al-Fatah in the academics year of 2018/2019" that the research findings were found determined the function of modal, the form of modal and how to apply modal correctly.

It can be concluded that students' difficulties in making modal forms connected to previous research and theory (Raimes in Nurlaila, 2019) about Modals can take numerous forms. First, never use the s/es ending. Second, modal auxiliaries always use the basic form of the main verb or the auxiliary verb "be" after the auxiliary modal, both present and past. Third, the modal auxiliary can be used with a negative note which always follows the modal auxiliary and there are even other auxiliary words "be" or "have present" thus causing students difficulties in learning modal such as students' difficulty face in using modal were in determining the function of modal, form



and how to apply modal correctly. And the deep difficulty in using the modal was in modal of “will” (Nurlaila, 2019).

Interview

The results of the interviews show that the results of the interviews with teachers are consistent with the theory that students' difficulties in using modals are due to a lack of knowledge of the forms of modals, a lack of knowledge of the functions of modals, and a lack of ability to apply modals correctly in sentences due to a lack of knowledge of the rules in the use of modal and a reduction in auxiliary modal learning materials.

It can be concluded provides information about the difficulties of learning auxiliary modal and can be used as a reference for conducting relevant research in the future, know that there are still many students who have difficulty learning English, especially in modal at SMPN 4 Muara Komam. From doing this research, the researcher can be motivated to learn more and more. As a source of information for further research on modals then can be used as guidance in teaching modals and applied in their English teaching to help them learn English and can also increase their creativity in learning modals. After that, the result of this research will be useful as a reference and beneficial for other researchers should they encounter a similar situation in their research only focused on modal auxiliaries to analyze students' difficulties in using modal auxiliaries.

Conclusion

First, students have difficulty learning to understand the teacher's explanation. This means that students need a lot of time to understand the teacher's explanation about modal. This can happen because students experience learning difficulties caused by external factors. External factors are factors that influence people from outside themselves, such as the family environment, community environment, and school environment. Therefore, it can be concluded that students' difficulties in using modal are caused by external factors, namely the school environment such as teachers' teaching methods and the lack of facilities that support learning.

Second, students have difficulties in using modal auxiliary. There were students with difficulties to make sentence using modal. Because they don't know how to use modal functions, kinds, and the use of modal also requires separate regulations. Because, in limited schools, it is impossible for teachers to be able to face many questions from students and are not allowed to carry cellphones. It is advisable to bring a dictionary, therefore many of the students become confused and have difficulty learning the modal. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students' difficulties in using modal cause they don't know how to use modal functions, kinds, and the use of modals also requires separate regulations.

Third, students have difficulties in making modal forms like difficulty in applying modal auxiliaries using “s” or “es” after three singulars, always using modal add “to” then they don't know modal auxiliary can be used follows the auxiliary words “be”. It means that students don't know modal never adds “s” or “es”, the modal auxiliary always follows infinitive without “to” and then the modal auxiliary can be used with a negative note which always follows the modal auxiliary, and there are even other auxiliary words “be” or “have”. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students' difficulties in utilizing modal cause students were still confused about the variations between the forms of modals that must follow the primary verb without the word “to.” Modal in the third singular person, without the addition of “s” or “es,” and can be used with a negative not which always follow the modal auxiliary and there even other auxiliary words “be” or “have”. Then, they were also less in material and meaning, making it difficult to interpret the modal.

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