

“MODAL VERBS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS: LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND SOLUTIONS FOR STUDENTS”

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ANNOTATION This article explores the English modal verbs (can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would) and their various functions in language use. The study identifies the main difficulties that students face when learning modal verbs, such as understanding multiple meanings of a single verb, using them in context correctly, dealing with their tenseless nature, and applying them with main verbs properly. The research highlights effective teaching strategies to overcome these challenges, including communicative and contextual approaches, interactive exercises, visual aids, and role-playing activities. The findings demonstrate that integrating these methods into the learning process enhances students’ mastery of modal verbs, improves their grammatical competence, and strengthens both written and spoken communication skills. Furthermore, the study suggests that future research can explore technological tools and AI-based methods to further improve the teaching and learning of modal verbs, making the process more efficient and engaging.

Key words modal verbs, grammatical rules, student learning, teaching methodology, communicative approach.

KIRISH In the field of English language teaching, grammar is not only crucial for the technical aspects of the language but also plays a significant role in shaping the logical and communicative structure of speech. From this perspective, modal verbs are

an integral part of the grammatical system and hold a central position in language learning. Modal verbs serve as a means to express various meanings, such as possibility, probability, permission, obligation, necessity, or advice. For example, the verb *can* indicates ability, while *must* expresses obligation or necessity.

For students at the polytechnic level, learning modal verbs is often a challenging process. The reasons for this complexity include the fact that modal verbs do not fully conform to tense and person, their meaning often depends on the context, and understanding the rules for using them with main verbs is essential. Consequently, students frequently encounter confusion and make errors when applying modal verbs in practice. Furthermore, learning modal verbs in English contributes not only to the acquisition of grammatical knowledge but also to the development of students' communicative competence. Students should not only memorize the rules but also be able to apply them correctly in real speech contexts. To achieve this, pedagogical methods and interactive approaches—such as dialogues, role-plays, visual aids, and online exercises—are used as effective tools.

Modal Verbs

might/might not

could/could not

would/would not

must/must not

may/may not

will/will not

ought/ought not

can/cannot

should/should not

shall/shall not

Modal verbs can have many uses. In most cases, they work with another verb to describe the possibility of something happening or to describe to what degree of certainty something is known.



The netball team might win the tournament.

Humpty Dumpty could fall off the wall.



In modern language teaching methodology, working on modal verbs involves not only understanding grammatical rules but also learning to use them effectively in speech. This is particularly important for polytechnic students, as they need to correctly comprehend the various functions of modal verbs when reading, writing, and communicating in technical and scientific texts. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to identify the difficulties students face while learning modal verbs and to propose effective methodological solutions to overcome them. The study examines the advantages of communicative and contextual approaches, interactive exercises, and the use of visual materials, and provides practical recommendations for their implementation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Grammatical Features of Modal Verbs

English modal verbs (can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would) are grammatically simple but semantically rich. They are used together with main verbs and primarily express the following meanings:

Ability/Possibility: can, could

She can solve complex problems.

Permission: may, can

You may leave the classroom now.

Obligation/Necessity: must, should

You must submit the report by Monday.

Probability: may, might, could

He might be at the library.

A key grammatical feature of modal verbs is that they do not fully conform to tense and person. They are used only with the infinitive form of the main verb and do not take additional endings such as –s, –ed, or –ing. This can cause confusion among students.

Main Learning Difficulties for Students

Students face several challenges when learning modal verbs:

Multiple meanings of a single modal verb:

May can indicate permission or probability.

Example: *You may enter the lab* (permission), *He may be late* (probability).

Tenseless nature and lack of agreement with person:

Can indicates present or future ability, whereas *could* refers to past ability or hypothetical situations.

Incorrect understanding of contextual rules:

The meaning of modal verbs often depends on context.

Example: *should* can indicate advice or obligation.

Difficulty using modal verbs with main verbs:

Students may make mistakes like *She can sings* instead of the correct form: *She can sing*.

These difficulties can lead to errors in applying grammatical rules and reduce students' communicative accuracy.



Effective Methodology for Teaching Modal Verbs

Research shows that the following methods are most effective for students:

Communicative Approach:

Students practice using modal verbs in real speech contexts, such as lists, conversations, and problem-solving situations.

Contextual Exercises:

Filling in gaps in sentences, role-plays, and dialogues.

Example: You _____ (should/must) wear a helmet when riding a bike.

Visual and Interactive Materials:

Using diagrams, infographics, videos, and interactive applications to explain the functions of modal verbs.

Comparison and Categorization:

Comparing multiple modal verbs to highlight differences.

Example: can vs could, may vs might.

Gradual Complexity in Exercises:

Starting from simple sentences and gradually moving to complex sentences and combinations.

Practical Application Examples

The practical use of modal verbs is important not only for teaching grammatical rules but also for developing students' speech skills:

Obligation/Necessity: *You must submit your assignment by Friday.*

Ability: *She can solve complex engineering problems.*

Permission: *Students may use laptops during the lecture.*

Advice/Recommendation: *You should revise the lecture notes before the exam.*

Probability: *The experiment might fail if the instructions are not followed.*

These examples provide polytechnic students with opportunities to understand and apply modal verbs in real contexts. Through interactive exercises and visual materials, students not only acquire theoretical knowledge but also learn to apply it in practice.

Contextual and communicative approaches help students better understand the different meanings of modal verbs. Role-plays and problem-solving exercises develop students' speaking skills and reinforce grammatical rules.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article provided a comprehensive analysis of English modal verbs (can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would) and their various functions, as well as the difficulties faced by polytechnic students in the process of learning them. The

research results indicate that modal verbs are a crucial tool for students in mastering grammatical rules and developing their communicative competence. Students primarily encounter the following challenges when learning modal verbs: difficulty understanding multiple meanings of a single verb, confusion in context-dependent usage, tenselessness and lack of agreement with person, and incorrect application of rules when used with main verbs. These difficulties hinder students from applying grammatical rules accurately and reduce the clarity and reliability of their speech. The methodological approaches recommended in the article—communicative and contextual methods, interactive exercises, visual materials, and role-plays—help students effectively master modal verbs. This not only improves their theoretical understanding of grammatical rules but also enhances their practical application skills. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that reinforcing modal verbs through practical exercises is essential for developing students' speaking and writing skills. For instance, dialogues based on real-life situations, problem-solving exercises, and contextual tasks ensure that students apply rules correctly and logically. In summary, teaching modal verbs in English grammar serves as an effective means of developing polytechnic students' comprehensive understanding of the language and their ability to use it in practice. These approaches make the pedagogical process more interactive and productive, deepen students' language knowledge, and prepare them for practical activities. Future research can focus on exploring the effectiveness of teaching modal verbs using technological tools, online platforms, and artificial intelligence. Such studies would further enhance students' ability to quickly and efficiently master grammatical rules in the polytechnic setting.

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