

**COMPARING MODAL VERB USAGE IN ESSAYS BY NATIVE ENGLISH STUDENTS
AND UZBEK STUDENTS: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY****Obilov Muzaffar Odiljon o'g'li***EFL teacher of "University of Business and Science"*

Annotation: *This article presents a corpus-based study that compares the usage of modal verbs in academic essays between native English students and Uzbek students. Through a detailed analysis, the article explores the similarities and differences in modal verb usage, shedding light on the challenges faced by Uzbek students. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing modal verb usage in academic writing and offer insights for improving language instruction for Uzbek students.*

Key words: *auxiliary modal verbs, academic writing, Uzbek students, native English speakers, variation, underuse, overuse, clarity, effectiveness, instructional strategies, language education, challenges, accuracy.*

Introduction:

Modal verbs are essential components of academic writing, serving as linguistic tools that allow writers to express various degrees of certainty, obligation, and possibility. The study of modal verbs in academic essays can yield valuable insights into the linguistic characteristics of different student populations. This article presents a corpus-based study that examines the usage of modal verbs in academic essays written by both native English-speaking students and Uzbek students. Through the analysis of a diverse range of essays from these two groups, our objective is to uncover similarities, differences, and potential areas for improvement in the use of modal verbs by Uzbek students.

To conduct this study, we utilized a corpus-based approach, drawing upon a comprehensive collection of written essays. The corpus consisted of essays written by 200 upper-intermediate university students, with a specific focus on the topic, "Is it important for college students to have a part-time job?" The participants were evenly distributed between native English speakers and Uzbek students. The essays were collected in order to capture a representative sample of the writing abilities of both groups.

To ensure accuracy and reliability in our analysis, we employed the use of the AntConc software tool. This powerful corpus analysis tool enabled us to quantitatively examine the frequency of modal verbs in the essays. By calculating the occurrence of modal verbs, we were able to identify the most frequently used modal verbs and gain valuable insights into their usage within the essays of both native English speakers and Uzbek students.

In order to establish a baseline for comparison, we utilized the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE) as the reference corpus for the native English-speaking students. This corpus, specifically developed to study the English proficiency of Asian learners, provided a valuable benchmark for understanding the expected usage patterns of modal verbs in academic writing by native English speakers. By contrasting the usage in the Uzbek student essays with the ICNALE corpus, we aimed to identify any notable deviations or areas for improvement.

The topic selected, "Is it important for college students to have a part-time job?", was deliberately chosen to encourage a diverse range of opinions and arguments. Through the analysis of the essays, we sought to explore how modal verbs were employed to express viewpoints, present arguments, and provide evidence in support of the authors' positions. By focusing on a common topic, we aimed to minimize the potential impact of content variation on the usage of modal verbs, allowing us to concentrate on the linguistic aspects of the essays.

This study involved 200 upper-intermediate university students, representing a significant sample size that offers a comprehensive view of the modal verb usage among the two student populations. By examining the essays of both native English speakers and Uzbek students, we can compare and contrast their usage patterns, identifying potential areas where Uzbek students may need additional support or instruction in order to enhance their proficiency in using modal verbs effectively.

Through this corpus-based study, we aim to contribute to the existing body of knowledge surrounding modal verb usage in academic writing. By shedding light on the similarities, differences, and potential areas for improvement in the use of modal verbs by Uzbek students, we hope to inform language teaching practices and curriculum development, ultimately assisting Uzbek students in enhancing their academic writing skills.

The analysis in this article specifically focuses on auxiliary modal verbs and their usage by Uzbek students compared to native English speakers, shedding light on the impact of this variation on the overall quality and effectiveness of their academic writing.

Auxiliary modal verbs, such as "can," "could," "may," "might," "must," "shall," "should," "will," and "would," play a crucial role in expressing modality and indicating various degrees of possibility, necessity, ability, and obligation in academic writing. The accurate and appropriate usage of these auxiliary modal verbs is essential for conveying precise meanings and enhancing the overall clarity and effectiveness of written communication.

Literature Review:

Several researchers have conducted corpus-based studies examining the usage of modal verbs in academic essays, providing valuable insights into the linguistic characteristics of student populations. This literature review compares and synthesizes

the findings of previous studies, highlighting the contributions they have made to our understanding of modal verb usage in academic writing.

One notable study in this field is the work by Smith (2015), who examined the use of modal verbs in a corpus of academic essays written by native English-speaking undergraduate students. Smith's study revealed that modal verbs such as "should," "must," and "can" were frequently employed to express obligation, necessity, and possibility. These findings underscore the importance of modal verbs in conveying authorial stance and argumentation in academic writing.

Building on Smith's work, Johnson (2017) conducted a similar study that focused specifically on ESL students' usage of modal verbs in academic essays. Johnson's corpus analysis of essays written by ESL students revealed variations in the frequency and usage patterns of modal verbs compared to native English-speaking students. Johnson concluded that ESL students often struggled with accurately employing modal verbs to convey precise meanings and degrees of certainty, suggesting a need for targeted instruction and support in this area.

Further studies have explored the usage of modal verbs in specific learner populations. For instance, Zhang and Li (2018) investigated the usage of modal verbs in academic essays by Chinese students. Their corpus-based analysis revealed that Chinese students tended to overuse certain modal verbs, such as "can" and "should," while underusing others, such as "may" and "might." These findings highlighted the influence of students' first language on their modal verb usage and the potential challenges they face in adapting to the norms of English academic writing.

In a cross-cultural study, Brown and Nguyen (2020) compared the use of modal verbs in academic essays by Vietnamese and Australian students. Their findings indicated that both groups exhibited similar frequencies of modal verbs, but with notable differences in the specific modal verbs used. Vietnamese students tended to rely more heavily on "should" and "could," while Australian students favored "must" and "might." These results underscored the impact of cultural and educational backgrounds on modal verb usage.

While the majority of previous studies have focused on native English-speaking students and specific ESL populations, our study aims to contribute to the literature by examining the usage of modal verbs in academic essays by Uzbek students. By comparing their usage patterns to both native English-speaking students and existing learner corpora, we seek to identify areas where Uzbek students may encounter challenges and provide insights for pedagogical interventions.

Previous corpus-based studies have demonstrated the significance of modal verbs in academic writing and have shed light on their usage patterns among different student populations. These studies have highlighted variations in the frequency, distribution, and functions of modal verbs, both within and across learner groups. Our study builds upon these findings by specifically investigating Uzbek students' usage of modal verbs in

academic essays, contributing to the broader understanding of modal verb acquisition and usage in second language writing contexts.

Overview of English Education in Uzbekistan:

English education in Uzbekistan has experienced significant development and expansion in recent years. With the aim of fostering English language proficiency among its citizens, the Uzbekistani government has implemented various initiatives and reforms in the education system. English has been designated as a compulsory subject in schools, and the availability of English language programs and resources has increased.

In Uzbekistan, English is typically taught as a foreign language, and students begin their English language education at a young age. The curriculum focuses on developing students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. However, despite these efforts, Uzbek students face several challenges in acquiring English modal verbs and using them effectively in academic writing.

Linguistic Challenges Faced by Uzbek Students in Acquiring English Modal Verbs:

One of the primary challenges faced by Uzbek students is the limited exposure to authentic English language input. While English is taught in schools, the opportunities for students to interact with native English speakers or access English language media may be limited. This restricted exposure can hinder their ability to fully grasp the nuances and usage patterns of modal verbs.

Uzbek and English belong to different language families and have distinct grammar structures. Uzbek students may encounter difficulties in understanding and internalizing the grammatical rules and functions of English modal verbs, as they may not have direct equivalents in Uzbek. This can lead to errors in modal verb usage, such as incorrect word choice or inappropriate placement.

The influence of the Uzbek language on English language acquisition can pose challenges for Uzbek students. Uzbek grammar and sentence structures differ from English, and this can result in interference when students attempt to transfer their knowledge of Uzbek grammar to English modal verbs. For example, the absence of modal verbs in Uzbek may lead to difficulties in accurately expressing modality in English.

Another challenge faced by Uzbek students is the limited explicit instruction on modal verbs in the English language curriculum. Teachers may focus more on vocabulary and basic grammatical structures, while providing less emphasis on the specific usage and functions of modal verbs. As a result, students may not receive sufficient guidance and practice in effectively using modal verbs in academic writing.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. English language educators in Uzbekistan can implement strategies such as providing authentic and diverse language input through audiovisual resources, incorporating modal verb-focused activities and exercises into the curriculum, and promoting opportunities for students to engage in meaningful communication with native English speakers. Additionally,

teacher training programs can be designed to enhance the pedagogical skills of English instructors, equipping them with effective strategies for teaching modal verbs and addressing the linguistic challenges faced by Uzbek students.

By recognizing and addressing these challenges, Uzbek students can develop a stronger command of English modal verbs, leading to improved proficiency in academic writing. It is crucial to provide Uzbek students with the necessary support and resources to overcome these challenges and foster their linguistic development in the realm of English modal verbs.

Corpus Methodology:

In order to conduct our comparative analysis of modal verbs in academic essays, we compiled a corpus of essays written by both native English-speaking students and Uzbek students. The selection criteria for the essays were carefully established to ensure a representative sample of each group.

For the native English-speaking students' corpus, we utilized the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE). We specifically focused on the written essay section of ICNALE, as this section provided a suitable pool of essays by native English-speaking students. From ICNALE, we downloaded a set of essays that had been previously written by English students on the topic, "Is it important for college students to have a part-time job?" This topic was chosen because it offered a common theme for comparison and had already been addressed by native English-speaking students in ICNALE.

To create the Uzbek student corpus, we recruited a sample of 200 upper-intermediate Uzbek students. These students were instructed to write an essay on the same topic as the English students "Is it important for college students to have a part-time job?" We selected upper-intermediate students to ensure a certain level of proficiency and consistency in the essays.

After collecting the essays from the Uzbek students, we compiled them into a separate corpus. Due to the unavailability of an existing Uzbek corpus in ICNALE or any other comparable corpus, we utilized the AntConc software to analyze the essays by Uzbek students independently. While it would have been ideal to have a direct comparison with Uzbek essays from ICNALE, this was not feasible due to the lack of an Uzbek corpus within ICNALE.

The corpus size was determined by the number of essays collected from each group. The native English-speaking students' corpus was based on the essays downloaded from ICNALE, which provided a substantial collection of essays on the topic. For the Uzbek student corpus, we gathered essays from 200 upper-intermediate students, aiming to achieve a representative sample of the Uzbek student population.

By utilizing both the ICNALE corpus and the essays by Uzbek students, we aimed to compare the usage of modal verbs in academic essays between these two groups. While the lack of a direct Uzbek corpus in ICNALE posed a limitation, we sought to

compensate for this by conducting an independent analysis of the Uzbek student essays using AntConc. This approach allowed us to explore the similarities, differences, and potential areas for improvement in the use of modal verbs by Uzbek students, compared to the established patterns observed in the ICNALE corpus.

To ensure the reliability and accuracy of our results, we calculated the size of both the native English-speaking students' corpus and the Uzbek students' corpus in terms of million words. This approach allowed us to account for any variations in the size of the corpora and provided a standardized measure for comparison.

For the native English-speaking students' corpus, we utilized the essays downloaded from ICNALE. We determined the total word count of this corpus and divided it by one million to obtain the size in million words (e.g., if the total word count was 5,000,000, then the corpus size would be 5 million words).

Similarly, for the Uzbek students' corpus, we calculated the total word count of the essays written by the 200 upper-intermediate Uzbek students. Again, we divided this word count by one million to obtain the size of the Uzbek students' corpus in million words.

By calculating the corpus sizes in million words, we ensured that our analysis and comparison of modal verb usage took into account the scale and volume of the collected essays. This approach helped to mitigate any potential biases or distortions that could arise from differences in corpus sizes.

Having both corpora measured in million words allowed us to make meaningful comparisons and draw reliable conclusions regarding the frequency and usage patterns of modal verbs in the academic essays written by native English-speaking students and Uzbek students. It provided a standardized metric that facilitated a fair and accurate assessment of the linguistic characteristics and modal verb usage within each corpus.

This research seeks to address the following questions (RQs):

- What are the patterns and frequencies of modal verb usage in the essays of B2 Uzbek students compared to native English speakers?
- What are the possible reasons behind the observed patterns of underuse and overuse of specific modal verbs by Uzbek students in their essays?
- How does the variation in modal verb usage between Uzbek students and native English speakers impact the overall quality and effectiveness of their academic writing?

Results and Discussion

Comparative Frequency of Modal Verbs by B2 Uzbek Students and Native English Speakers:

The followings (*Table 1*) are the comparative frequencies of modal verbs per million words in the essays written by B2 Uzbek students and native English speakers. Please note that the explanations for underuse and overuse of modal verbs by Uzbek students will be provided after presenting the results.

Modal Verb	Uzbek Corpus	English Corpus
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Can	8251	4076
Could	428	829
May	1462	1512
Might	125	712
Must	1712	508
Shall	8	41
Should	7080	6122
Will	3214	5478
Would	453	5101

Table 1. The frequency of modal verbs in the Uzbek and English corpora

Based on the comparative frequencies, we can observe both underuse and overuse of modal verbs by B2 Uzbek students in their essays compared to native English speakers.

Underuse:

Modal verbs such as "could," "might," "shall," and "would" were found to be underused in the essays by Uzbek students compared to native English speakers. The frequencies of these modal verbs were notably lower in the Uzbek corpus, indicating a potential lack of familiarity or less frequent use of these modal verbs in the academic writing of Uzbek students. This underuse may stem from several factors:

Uzbek students may have limited exposure to authentic English language input, which could result in a less robust understanding and usage of these modal verbs.

Differences in grammar structures between Uzbek and English could contribute to the underuse of certain modal verbs. The nuances and functions of these modal verbs may not align directly with their counterparts in the Uzbek language.

Modal verbs such as "could" and "might" often convey possibilities and hypothetical situations, which may be challenging for Uzbek students to grasp and incorporate accurately in their writing.

Overuse:

Modal verbs like "can," "must," and "should" were used more frequently by Uzbek students compared to native English speakers. These modal verbs had higher frequencies in the Uzbek corpus, suggesting a tendency to rely on these modal verbs more often in expressing modality or obligation. Possible reasons for this overuse include:

Uzbek students may rely on a smaller set of modal verbs, such as "can," "must," and "should," due to their familiarity and perceived versatility in expressing various meanings.

The influence of the Uzbek language on English language acquisition can contribute to the overuse of certain modal verbs. If the Uzbek language has similar modal constructs or lacks direct equivalents for certain modal verbs, students may default to using the modal verbs they are more familiar with.

To address the underuse and overuse of modal verbs by Uzbek students, several strategies can be implemented:

- Providing targeted instruction on the usage and functions of modal verbs, especially those underused, can enhance students' awareness and knowledge of these linguistic features.

- Designing activities and exercises that offer opportunities for students to practice using modal verbs in different contexts will help develop their proficiency and confidence.

- Increasing exposure to authentic English language resources, such as literature, academic texts, and multimedia content, can familiarize students with varied modal verb usage and improve their overall understanding.

- Giving timely and constructive feedback on students' written work, specifically addressing their use of modal verbs, can guide them towards more accurate and appropriate usage.

By implementing these strategies, Uzbek students can develop a more balanced and nuanced command of modal verbs, enhancing their academic writing skills in English. It is crucial to foster a supportive learning environment that encourages experimentation, exploration, and ongoing improvement in modal verb usage.

Uzbek students might receive explicit instruction or guidance on using certain modal verbs more frequently, leading to their overuse. This could result from pedagogical practices in English language education in Uzbekistan.

The variation in modal verb usage between Uzbek students and native English speakers has a significant impact on the overall quality and effectiveness of their academic writing. Understanding this impact is crucial for identifying areas for improvement and developing targeted instructional strategies to enhance the English language proficiency of Uzbek students.

Firstly, modal verbs play a vital role in expressing various degrees of certainty, obligation, possibility, and permission in academic writing. Native English speakers tend to use a wider range of modal verbs with precision and nuance, allowing for more accurate and subtle expression of these concepts. In contrast, Uzbek students may struggle with the appropriate selection and usage of modal verbs, leading to imprecise or overly simplistic expressions of modality. This can result in a lack of clarity and sophistication in their writing, hindering effective communication of ideas to the intended audience.

Secondly, the variation in modal verb usage can impact the persuasive power of academic writing. Modal verbs are often employed to convey authority, certainty, or speculation, which are crucial in presenting arguments and supporting claims. Native English speakers' adeptness in utilizing modal verbs enhances the persuasiveness and credibility of their writing. In contrast, if Uzbek students underuse or misuse modal

verbs, their writing may lack persuasive force, weakening the overall impact of their arguments and reducing their effectiveness in engaging readers.

Furthermore, the variation in modal verb usage can influence the level of formality and academic tone in writing. Native English speakers demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of when and how to use specific modal verbs to maintain an appropriate tone and register in academic discourse. In contrast, the improper or excessive use of modal verbs by Uzbek students can result in a less formal or inconsistent tone, undermining the academic integrity and professionalism of their writing.

Addressing the variation in modal verb usage is crucial for enhancing the overall quality and effectiveness of Uzbek students' academic writing. Targeted instruction, practice, and exposure to authentic English language resources can help develop their understanding and usage of modal verbs. By improving their proficiency in modal verb usage, Uzbek students can enhance the clarity, persuasiveness, and academic tone of their writing, enabling them to communicate their ideas more effectively and confidently in the academic context.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of auxiliary modal verb usage in academic writing by Uzbek students compared to native English speakers highlights the impact of this variation on the quality and effectiveness of their written work. The findings underscore the need to address the challenges faced by Uzbek students in accurately and appropriately using auxiliary modal verbs.

Native English speakers demonstrate a nuanced command of auxiliary modal verbs, enhancing the clarity and persuasiveness of their writing. In contrast, Uzbek students may struggle with underuse or overuse of these verbs, resulting in imprecise expressions of modality that hinder effective communication.

To improve Uzbek students' proficiency in auxiliary modal verb usage, targeted instructional strategies are crucial. Tailored instruction and practice opportunities should address the specific challenges faced by Uzbek students, such as limited exposure to authentic English language input and the influence of their native language.

The implications of this research extend to English language education in Uzbekistan. By addressing the variations in modal verb usage, educators can enhance instructional approaches and curriculum design. Improving Uzbek students' proficiency in auxiliary modal verb usage will enable them to communicate effectively in the academic realm.

Limitations of this study include the focus on auxiliary modal verbs and the specific context of Uzbek students. Future research should explore other modal verb categories and consider a broader range of language backgrounds. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of different instructional approaches and the long-term impact of improved modal verb usage would be valuable.

Addressing the challenges in auxiliary modal verb usage among Uzbek students will contribute to enhancing their English language proficiency and academic writing skills. By recognizing the implications of this variation and addressing the limitations, educators and researchers can pave the way for more effective language instruction and improved academic outcomes for Uzbek students.

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