

Describing the Use of English Modal Auxiliaries in Class Six Written English in Nakuru County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this study was to describe the use of English modal auxiliaries in class six written English in Nakuru county, Kenya. The study focused on the use of English modal auxiliary verbs by class six pupils from diverse language backgrounds in Kenyan primary schools. No known documentation focuses on modal auxiliary verbs among children. It is this gap that the current study sought to fill. The rationale of the study was therefore to describe the use of this linguistic feature at this foundation level of learning so that appropriate measures can be taken by the stakeholders to alleviate further difficulties that students might encounter in their progressive learning of English. Forty pupils were randomly selected from four primary schools in Nakuru County. Data was elicited using written composition and grammar exercises. Further, it was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively and presented in the form of graphs and tables. The Representational Theory of The Mind was used to explain the research findings. The findings revealed that modal auxiliary verbs are indeed difficult, and their appropriate use present difficulties in pupils' written work. It was therefore recommended that learning of English should be meaningful. To enrich the pupils' mental representations, pupils should be exposed to a linguistically rich environment to enhance acquisition and learning. It is hoped that these findings will be of benefit to school stakeholders in ensuring that appropriate learning environment is created for pupils.

Key Terms: Acquisition, modals/modal, modality, auxiliaries, class/standard six

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Introduction

English is an official language in Kenya. In fact, the Kenyan Constitution (2010) recognizes English and Kiswahili as the official languages. It is well established in the primary school system where it is a medium of instruction and used in teaching all subjects except Kiswahili. English is also an examinable subject at the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE).

The learning of English takes place formally in the classroom, while acquisition takes place outside the classroom (Houwer, 1990). The learning process brings into perspective some fundamental elements: the pupil, the teacher, the strategies employed and the resource materials used. The interplay of these elements is bound to pose challenges in the learning of English and in particular the learning of the modal auxiliary verbs.

A class six learner of English is normally aged between 12-15 years. Majority of these pupils are bilinguals since they come from diverse language backgrounds (Hammers & Blanc, 1989). A pupil's affiliation with their first language could impede their learning and acquisition of modal auxiliary verbs in English. This is because the verb system in different languages is unique. Some of the pupils' first languages have modal auxiliary verbs similar or different from those of the English language. At this level, pupils will also have learnt or acquired Kiswahili, which also affects their modal auxiliary usage. English modal auxiliary verbs are syntactic and semantic elements of the complex English verb phrase (Palmer, 1990). Modal auxiliary verbs indicate modality. Modality in this sense implies permission, ability and obligation. Modal verbs have both grammatical and semantic properties. For this reason, the use of modal verbs presents unique difficulties for class six learners.

At class six, a pupil will have been exposed to a variety of modal verbs in the previous years. At class one *may* for permission is taught *can* and *shall* in class two while *will*, *shall* and *could* are taught in class three as for *may*, *can*, *could* and *would* they are taught in class six. The remaining modal verbs *must* and *should* are taught in class seven and eight. The English language syllabus does not specify the scope of modal verbs that should be taught. Using modals in written English as well as in grammar exercises is spontaneously carried out by pupils as their meanings are not understood. This linguistic feature presents unique challenges to the learners as their use entails intricate mental processing to yield desired meanings (Lyons, 1977). Writing is more involving in terms of processing and conveying what one desires to put across.

Class six pupils are unique individuals as they encounter the learning of English as a second language in different language learning environments and circumstances. They are bilinguals living in a multi-lingual society with varying exposure to English language use and different cognitive and linguistic abilities. All these factors influence how they learn, acquire and use modal auxiliary verbs (Baker, 1993). Although various child language-based studies have been conducted, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no known documentation on the use of English modal auxiliaries in written English among children from diverse language backgrounds. Modal auxiliaries usage presents inherent difficulties even among first language speakers of English. For second language learners of English, more so those in primary schools, modals are bound to pose even greater challenges since they entail syntactic and semantic appropriateness.

Appropriateness of modal auxiliary use is crucial for communication. Available literature reveals that

modal auxiliary verbs are difficult even among advanced learners of English. Pupils in Kenya are drawn from different socio-economic classes, and the learning of English takes place in environments with immense disparities, yet all pupils are subjected to the same rigorous English national examination. A study on modal auxiliary use among this cadre of learners is essential as learning of English in primary schools lays a foundation in which later learning is laid.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English Modal Auxiliaries

Quirk et al. (1985) refer to modality as the status of a proposition being true according to the speaker's judgment. They further propose that there are three categories of modality: intrinsic, extrinsic and deontic. Intrinsic modality implies that there is human control over events. This category involves permission, obligation and volition, for example; *May I drive your car?* This question suggests that permission be granted. Extrinsic modality, on the other hand, implies the absence of human control. It includes possibility, necessity and prediction. A case in point is: *It might rain.* This type of modality is concerned with the speaker's attitude towards the factual assumption and reflects the speaker's judgment of the proposition. This category includes proposition based on speculation or deductions. Deontic modality refers to obligation or permission coming from an external source, as in; *you must leave him.*

All these categories of modals are used by class six pupils in both spoken and written English. Their use may, however, be appropriate or inappropriate depending on how they are interpreted by the user. Most studies on English modals ascertain that modals are generally a problematic area in English. Another crucial reference is Thomson (2002), who notes that modal auxiliaries verbs are complex linguistic features.

The use of this linguistic feature presents difficulties to both L1 and L2 speakers of English. Hoyer (1997) adds that the study of modality generally remains the most intriguing area of philosophical and linguistic inquiry. He further claims that modals do not express statements or facts but are conceptions of the mind. Quirk et al. (1985) claim that there are discrepancies between modal auxiliaries use and that their meanings tend to overlap.

1) English Modal Auxiliaries: Grammatical Perspective.

Lyons (1977) states that modality is a grammatical term and as a grammatical term, rules are governing the construction and use of modal auxiliaries. Greenbaum (1991) further suggests that modality as a grammatical category entails a set of rules which make it possible to combine words in our language into larger units. Leech, Deuchar, & Hoogenraad (1982) see the need for the application of rules in grammar to enhance communication. Modal auxiliaries are part of the complex verb phrase and must be ordered in a particular manner in the verbal sequence of the verb phrase. Failure to observe this order may cause ungrammaticality or obscure the meaning of the sentence. Class six learners often have problems with ordering the modals within the verbal sequence of the verb phrase. This often results in ungrammaticality and production of syntactically inappropriate sentences.

2) English Modal Auxiliary: Semantic Perspective

Thomson (2002) asserts that modal auxiliaries verbs give various meanings to a sentence. Leech (1971) and Quirk et al. (1985) agree that modals indeed signify specific meanings, for example, *can* denotes ability, possibility and permission, *must* implies obligation. As for Coates (1983) and Palmer (1990), they list modality as semantic concepts where each of the modals has a list of meanings.

According to Palmer (1990), meanings expressed by modal auxiliaries represent modality. He further points out that there are two fundamental kinds of modality; epistemic and deontic. Coates (1983) asserts that epistemic modality is involved in making a representation that matches the world through making use of senses or intellect. Deontic modality, on the other hand, implies the state of the affair in the world. It thus refers to obligation or permission coming from an external source. Deontic modality can be a directive as in; *you may leave* to indicate not permission but possibility or necessity as in; *you must leave* or commissives as in promise, example; *we shall be rewarded*.

Hoye (1997) considers modals as a device used in expressions that relate to forming opinions, perception or intentions but still acknowledges that they indicate possibility, necessity, probability, obligation, and volition. Class six pupils use modal auxiliaries to convey different meanings in their written English. The appropriateness of use of modal auxiliary varies according to levels of difficulty perceived by learners.

3) Studies Conducted on Modal Auxiliary Verbs

Rosli and Malachi (1989) conducted a study on the use of English modal auxiliary verbs. The study was conducted in Malaysia among four students. The purpose was to investigate the use of English modals at syntactic and semantic levels. The findings from this study indicated that there were 386 counts of modal auxiliaries and that some of the modals were syntactically accurate while others were not. As for frequency, the data revealed that there were those that were more frequently used than others. It should, however, be noted that the occurrence of modals depends on the topic of writing.

Another study conducted by McDuoall investigated the use of English modal by adult Korean L2 learners. The corpus-based study aimed at finding out the usage patterns of English modal auxiliaries by adult learners of English with a Korean L1 background. The study revealed that there was inappropriateness of the use of the English modal auxiliary verbs. In the study, two corpora were used; Sookmyong University Corpus of Advanced L2 English (SMI) and Yonsei Corpus. The former was compiled by Bill Rago and the later by Yonsei University. The Yonsei Corpus was written assignments for intermediate students while the SMU corpus was for graduate students.

The study revealed that advanced learners used epistemic modality more appropriately than intermediate learners. It was found out that with advancing proficiency, learners used more complex argumentation. The implication of this, in this study, is that as a pupil progresses cognitively, so does their use of complex modal auxiliary verbs increase, it, therefore, follows that class six pupils gain proficiency as they advance. Class six pupils are therefore not expected to use very complex argumentation.

The studies revealed that modal auxiliary use among second language users is difficult; this is because of the multifaceted nature of modals. The modals have grammatical, semantic and pragmatic perspectives. Modals also tended to present inherent difficulties among both advanced and intermediate students of English, as shown by Korean and Malaysian examples. Leech and Coates (1980) assert that the language researcher is faced with the challenge of determining which of the many possible semantic contrasts relevant for the stage of linguistic and cognitive development of the subjects under investigation. Concerning modal auxiliary use, it is necessary that the level of learners be well understood.

Fletcher and Garman (1979) observe that the modal auxiliaries tend to be used as performatives initially and then unfold to be grammatical and semantic complexities as language develops. For instance, *may* is initially used by children when they seek permission usually from their teachers. At a later stage, *may* is used to express a wish or possibility. That way, the level of complexity develops.

Kaplan and Baker (1984) observe that variation in the rate of auxiliary use is related to the frequency of auxiliary input. However, the authors concur to the fact that frequency has nothing to do with rule learning. The study focused on modal auxiliary use among class six pupils in Nakuru County. The literature highlighted includes second language learning, language use in school, bilingualism and the English modal auxiliary verbs.

Krashen's (1988) hypotheses were discussed, and their explanation of language learning highlighted. The hypotheses are the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis and the Monitor hypothesis. The former distinguishes acquisition and learning. Acquisition is informal, natural and subconscious. It is the latter that the study is concerned with, as it shows the relationship between acquisition and learning and how learning influences acquisition. It also emphasizes the importance of second language learning.

It was observed that various learning strategies are employed by both learners and teachers. Language learning strategies are important in determining the quality of input to be processed for the production of English modal auxiliary verbs. It is, therefore, upon the language teacher to employ an eclectic approach or evaluate which method best works for learners. The role of input and language processing and modals, in

particular, cannot be underestimated since the processing of modal verbs is a highly mental process. It is also important to note that learners should take charge of their learning. One such strategy that learners employ is English language use as it enhances proficiency.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was adopted to describe modal verb use in class six written English. Description of the use of English modal auxiliary verbs was limited to written English. The data collected was quantitatively and qualitatively described. Explanations were based on The Representational Theory of the Mind. The nine central English modal auxiliary verbs were considered to be the variables of focus. These modal verbs are; *can, may, should, will, would, could, might, shall* and *must*. The focus was on the distribution of modal verbs in learners' written English. The study was conducted in Nakuru County. Two districts were selected for this study; Nakuru Town and Nakuru North. The study targeted both the rural and urban population of class six learners of English from various language backgrounds. Schools that were deemed to meet the above criteria were selected. A total of four schools were randomly selected. Schools A and B were selected from urban and suburban areas of Nakuru County, respectively. Schools C and D were selected from the rural areas of Nakuru County. The data constituted one composition and grammar tests. The first test was labelled as Test One and the second one as Test Two. Test one was administered by the researcher herself. Research instruments included composition and grammar tests. Data analysis involved three main procedures; the cleaning, correcting and coding of the data.

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Verbs in Test One

Test One consisted of two compositions; *My Favorite Pet* and *My Favorite Game*. Pupils were asked to choose either of the compositions. A total of forty compositions were written. Twenty-six pupils wrote Composition One (*My Favorite Pet*), and fourteen pupils wrote Composition Two (*My Favorite Game*).

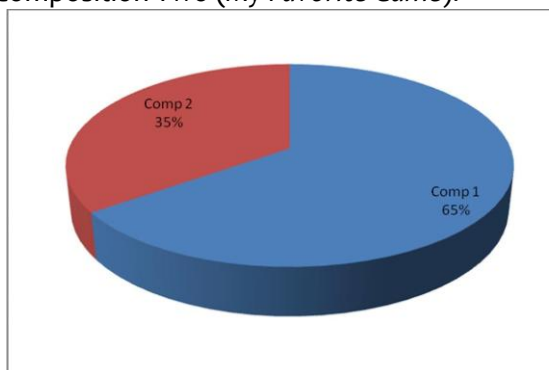


Figure 1: Choice of Composition Made by Pupils

The graph indicates that a majority of the pupils opted for Composition One. All the pupils from School B wrote this composition. Since these compositions were spontaneously written, the pupils' choice could indicate that they were more familiar with the topic given in Composition One than in Composition Two. At class six, pupils are more familiar with adventure and animal stories than in games.

4) Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use in Composition One (*My Favorite Pet*)

Composition one elicited all the modal verbs whose occurrences were examined except for the modal verb *may*. The figure given below illustrates this:

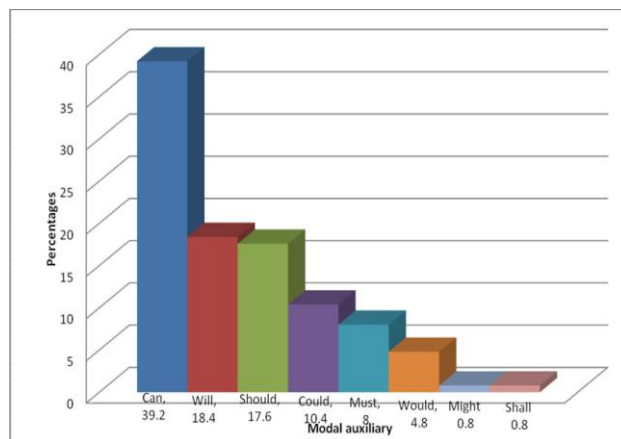


Figure 2: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Verbs in Composition One

The figure shows that modal auxiliary verbs use differed. *Can* was the most appropriately used modal with 39.2% of use, while *shall* and *might* were the least used modal verbs with 0.8% frequency of use. This means the choice of modal verb is determined by the topic given. It is important to note that even the highest used modal (*can*) scored below 50%. It, therefore, means that modal verbs were not very frequently used in this composition. *Can* and *will* were relatively more frequently used.

5) Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use in Composition Two (*My Favorite Game*)

In this composition, seven out of the nine central modal verbs were used. Below is a presentation of the frequency of use.

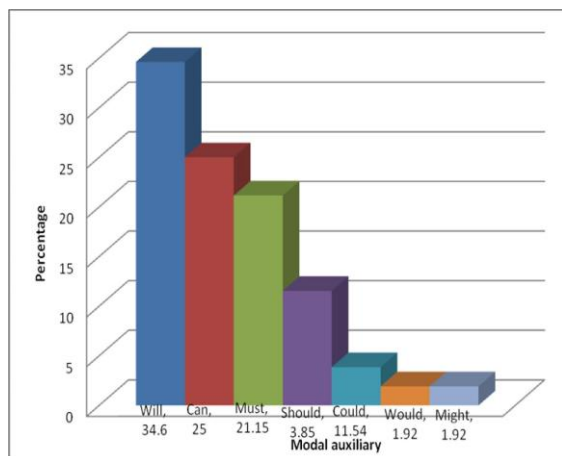


Figure 3: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Verbs Use in Test Two

The most frequently used modal auxiliary verb in this composition was *will* with 34.6%, followed by *can* with 25%. The modal verbs *shall* and *may* were not used at all. It is to be noted that the modal auxiliaries *can* and *will* have the highest frequency of use in both compositions. This is perhaps due to what pupils at class six have learnt or acquired from their environment. Surprisingly, the modal verbs *would* and *might* were not very frequently used in both compositions. Probably, the frequency of use is not so much determined by the topic given to pupils at this level but rather by what has been learnt or acquired. This perhaps underscores the fact that in The Representational Theory of The Mind, there is a link between one's natural and social environment and the content of the mental representation.

6) Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use in Composition One Use per School

Frequency of modal auxiliary use differed from school to school in Composition One. This is both in terms of modals that each school yielded and the number of

frequency for each modal verb. This is illustrated in the pie chart given below.

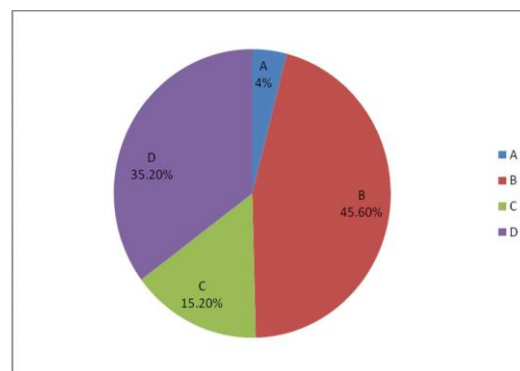


Figure 4: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use in Composition One Use per School

The graph shows that School B had the highest modal auxiliary verb use (45.6%) in Composition One while School A had the least modal auxiliary use (4%). The finding here reveals that pupils in School B are probably more exposed to modal auxiliary verb use than the Schools A, C and D. Exposure in modal auxiliary use is through learning and acquisition processes. School B, being a high-cost private school, implies that the learning resources are much more accessible to these pupils. Language promoting activities are more diverse in comparison to other schools. Another implication of this finding is that pupils in this school were more familiar with the topic of choice and used modal verbs with ease.

In terms of the distribution of modal auxiliary use, interestingly, School B used seven out of nine modals. School C used eight out of the nine modals, but still, School B used more modals. This probably suggests that pupils in School B were more confident in their choice of modals. As for School A, they had the least distribution of modal verb use. Low distribution of

modal use could imply either lack of knowledge of modals due to failure of learning or acquiring them.

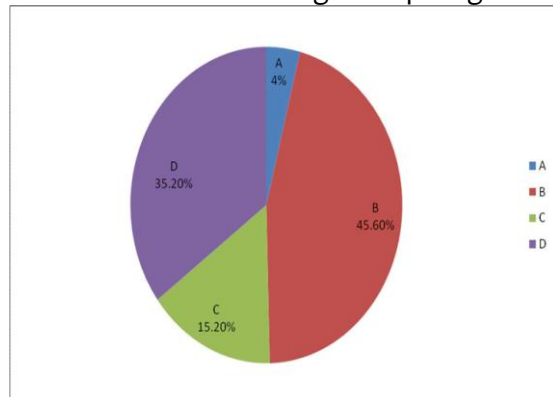


Figure 5: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use in Composition Two per School (My Favorite Game)

Pupils from three schools wrote this composition. The figure above is a graphic presentation of how various schools used modal verbs. School A recorded the highest frequency of modal use in Composition Two. It also had the highest modal distribution. Pupils from School A, being residents of the suburban area of Nakuru town were more familiar with the topic than pupils from other schools. Familiarity with the subject of choice sometimes yields more auxiliary verbs. Generally, urban schools are more conversant with sporting activities than rural schools. *Can* and *will* remained the pupils' favourite choice of modal auxiliary verb use.

The data collected in both compositions showed significant trends; that some modals verbs were more frequently used than others and that pupils from different schools used modals differently.

We now examine the frequency of modal auxiliary use in Test Two. There were twenty test items in Test Two. Pupils were to choose a suitable modal auxiliary and use it as instructed in the sentences given. Since there were forty pupils subjected to this test, eight hundred

responses were expected. However, the data yielded 763 responses since some blank spaces were left by the pupils and other words which were not modals were used, therefore, were not considered for analysis.

What follows is a presentation of modal auxiliary use in Test Two. The figure indicates the occurrences of each of the nine modal auxiliaries (*both appropriate and inappropriate occurrences*).

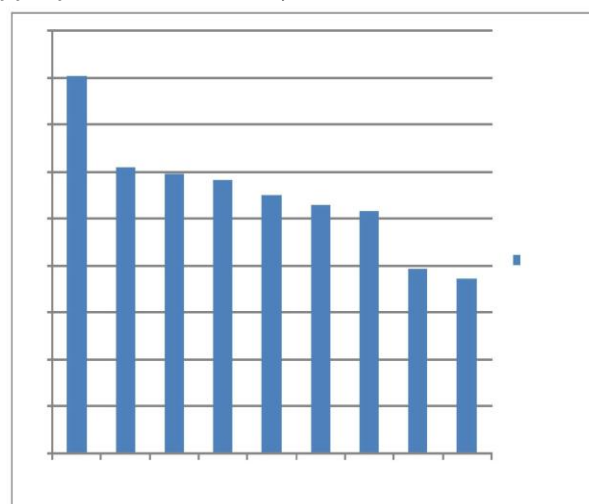


Figure 6: Frequency of modal auxiliary use in Test Two

Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use in Test Two

The figure indicates that *can* was the most frequently used modal auxiliary in Test Two and *should* was the least used. While *can* had 129 counts out of 763, *should* had only 57 counts. The figure shows that *can* was the highest used modal. Even so, the percentage of use was quite low (16.09%) as compared to its occurrence in Test One where it had 39.2% and 25% in Composition One and Two respectively. In this test, all the modal verbs were used, but the modal verb *shall* was more frequently used than *should*. This is probably because it is learnt in class one and also perhaps due to

acquisition. The table given indicates how each of the modal verbs was used in each school in Test Two.

Table 1: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use (both correct incorrect occurrences) in School A in Test Two.

Modal auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage
Can	33	17.01
Will	30	15.46
Must	25	12.89
Could	22	11.34
Would	20	10.31
May	19	9.79
Shall	18	9.28
Might	16	8.24
Should	11	5.67
Total	194	100

In School A, *can* usage scored the highest while *should* was the least. The meanings of *can* and *will* are probably known by class six pupils of this school, and it could also mean that they are frequently used in their environments and therefore easily acquired or learnt. *Might* and *should* may be infrequent in their use in the environment and even so at this level. *Should* has not been learnt. It is important to note that the first three modal verbs were more frequently used and apart from *must* they are used to imply intrinsic modality while the last three modals express extrinsic modality.

Table 2: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary use (both correct incorrect occurrences) in School B in Test Two

Modal auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage
Can	39	19.89
May	31	15.82
Might	26	13.27

Will	22	11.22
Must	20	10.20
Should	18	9.18
Would	17	8.67
Could	12	6.12
Shall	11	5.61
Total	196	100

In School B, the frequency of modal verbs also varied. *Can* was the most frequently used modal while *shall* the least. It is, however, important to note that the use of modals expressing extrinsic modality was also the highest in this school. Given that School B is high cost and the language teaching resource materials are readily available, coupled with the social and natural language environment, the use of extrinsic modality was higher than that of other schools.

Table 3: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use (both correct incorrect occurrences) In School C in Test Two

Modal auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage
Could	32	17.30
Will	23	12.43
Would	23	12.43
Can	21	11.35
Must	21	11.35
Shall	20	10.81
May	19	10.27
Should	16	8.65
Might	10	5.4
Total	185	100

School C exhibited a different trend altogether. *Could* recorded a higher usage of 17.30%, while *might* was the least with 5.4% usage. The modal verb *can*, which was the most frequently used in all the other schools

scored a low percentage of 11.35% in this school. The modal verbs *should* and *might* expressing extrinsic modality remained quite low. Most pupils from this school were from the same language background, and probably they used their first languages to communicate while in the school compound. This behaviour implies that they do not use the English language as much as pupils with diverse first language backgrounds from other schools and therefore, chances of acquiring English modal auxiliaries are limited.

Table 4: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use (both correct incorrect occurrences) In School D in Test Two

Modal auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage
Can	36	19.15
Might	29	15.43
Must	27	14.36
Could	23	12.23
Would	19	10.11
Will	16	8.51
May	15	7.99
Should	12	6.38
Shall	11	5.85
Total	188	100

In School, D *can* registered a higher frequency of 19.15% while *shall* was the least used modal verb with 5.6%. There seemed to be no systematic pattern of modal auxiliary use. This is perhaps due to the fact modal meanings are randomly used.

Frequency of Modal Use in Test Three

There were eight questions in this test. Pupils were to fill in the blank spaces given by selecting any of the nine modals provided. Three hundred and twenty

responses were, therefore expected. However, there were two missing responses.

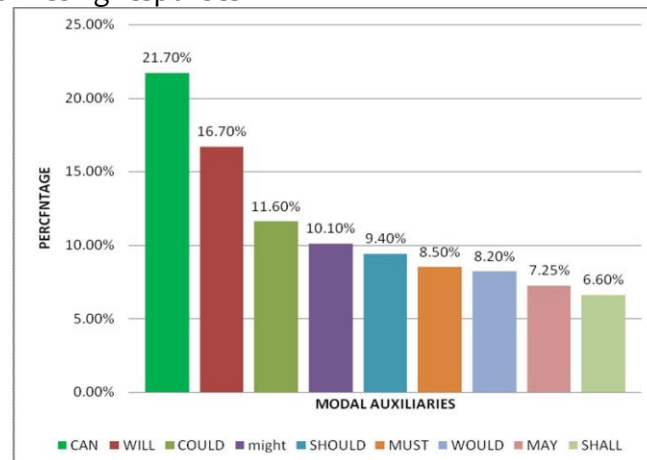


Figure 7: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use in Test Three among Class Six Pupils; Nakuru County

In this test, *can* was the most frequently used modal and *shall* the least with 21.7% and 6.6% respectively. It seemed as if there was no systematic pattern in which these modal verbs were used. The range between the highest and the lowest used modal was relatively high (15.1%). This means then that the selection of modal verbs to fill in the blank spaces was better thought over than in Test Two, where the range was 8.67. We now examine the frequency of modal auxiliary verbs per school in Test Three.

Table 5: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use in Test Three in School (Both Appropriate and Inappropriate Occurrences)

Modal Auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage Of Use
Will	25	31.65
Can	12	15.19
Could	10	12.66
Must	6	7.6

Shall	6	7.6
Must	6	7.6
Should	5	6.33
May	5	6.33
Might	4	5.06
TOTAL	79	100

In this Test *will* was the most frequently used modal auxiliary in this school with 31.65% while, *might* was the least used with 5.06%. In School A, the modal verbs *will*, *can* and *could* are pupils' favourite options in this test. The modal verbs used here stood almost an equal chance of being selected. *Will* was the most frequently used modal in this test.

Table 6: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use in Test Three in School B (Occurrences Include both Appropriate and Inappropriate Choices)

Modal Auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage
Can	24	30
Will	11	13.75
Might	10	12.5
Should	9	11.25
Would	7	8.75
May	6	7.5
Shall	5	6.25
Could	4	5
Must	4	5
TOTAL	80	100

Can occurred more often in this test in School B, *could* and *must* were the least selected modal verbs in this test. *Can* showed an outstanding selection. The reason pupils made this selection was perhaps due to the knowledge that it was appropriate in the context given. The range between the highest selected modal verb and the least is low thus probably showing most pupils were quite careful with what they deemed to be

appropriate choices. The number of pupils, who selected a particular modal, especially the modal auxiliary *will*, demonstrated that these choices were not guesswork or randomly selected.

Table 7: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use in Test Three in School C

Modal Auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage
Can	17	21.52
Could	13	16.46
Must	8	10.13
Should	8	10.13
Will	7	8.86
Would	7	8.86
Shall	7	8.86
Might	7	8.86
May	5	6.33
TOTAL	79	100

In School C *can* was highly used with 21.52% while *may* was the least used modal with 6.33% percentage. The range of modal auxiliary choice was the least (15.19%). This means that all modal verbs stood almost a similar chance of being selected. It could also imply that most modal verbs meanings were not known to pupils, and therefore, any modal verb would have been sufficient. Their choices were therefore not guided by their knowledge of modal auxiliary meaning.

Table 8: Frequency of Modal Auxiliary Use in Test Three School D

Modal Auxiliary	Frequency	Percentage
Can	17	21.52
Could	13	16.46
Must	8	10.13
Should	8	10.13
Will	7	8.86
Would	7	8.86
Shall	7	8.86
Might	7	8.86
May	5	6.33
TOTAL	79	100

In this school, the most appropriately used modal verb was *can*. The range between the highest and the lowest modal verb use was 16.25%. This was quite a close selection of modal verbs in School C whereby, both schools have pupils from limited language backgrounds. From the data collected, it does seem all modal auxiliary verbs seem to be well distributed. Having analyzed the modal auxiliary use per school, several significant findings are worth mentioning. There is always that which motivates pupils to select one modal verb over the other. One such motivation could be the knowledge of the meaning of the modal verb in question so that if a pupil knows the meaning of such modal verb, chances that they are going to use that modal verb are high.

Another factor that would make one modal verb to be selected over the other is the input they get from either learning or acquisition. The learning environment is a critical determinant of how modal

verbs are going to be used by class six pupils. Acquisition also determines how modal verbs are used. Pupils' social and natural environment can either enrich or impoverish acquisition of modal verbs. This is quite evident from the data collected. Schools A and B had some modals selected by the majority of the pupils while others were not very popular with the pupils, especially in Test Two and Test Three. Schools C and D did not have a wide range of modal auxiliary choice. Across the three tests, the most frequently used modal verbs were *can* and *will* while the least was *shall*.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, various conclusions were drawn about modal auxiliary use in pupils' written English. Firstly it was noted that there is a link between modal auxiliary frequency in pupils' written English and learning. The modal auxiliaries learnt for many years are more frequently used than those that are yet to be learnt. For example, the modal verbs *can* and *will* are learnt in class two, four and six and are therefore more frequently used than modal verb *should*, which is yet to be learnt. Learning, therefore, has an impact on modal auxiliary frequency.

Secondly, acquisition plays a significant role in modal auxiliary frequency. The use of *must* and *shall* in the data illustrates this fact. Although the modal auxiliary *shall* is learnt in Class Two, and it is quite infrequent in use outside the classroom *must* is learnt in Class Seven and Eight, yet it is frequent in Test Two. In the school system, the use of the modal verb *must* is frequent as it is used when teachers are giving instructions to pupils. In the process of so doing pupils acquire its use and this explains why even though it has not been learnt, its use is relatively high. This means learning and acquisition go hand in hand with language learning.

Thirdly, learners' first language background is insignificant in modal auxiliary frequency of use. But it should be noted that pupils in diverse language backgrounds environment tend to use diversified modal auxiliary verbs use than pupils in environments where only one language group dominates. Urban schools tend to perform better in using modal auxiliary verbs than rural schools. This means exposure, social and natural language learning environment is important in language use.

Fourthly, English language use in the school compound is also important in enhancing modal auxiliary appropriateness and frequency of use. In the schools where English was exclusively spoken, modal auxiliary frequency and appropriateness was significantly high. It was further concluded that modal auxiliary frequency does not always translate to appropriateness of use. In this study, modal auxiliary verb *will* was frequently used but not the most appropriately used.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need to review the language policy in education. The status of the current language policy invites some scrutiny. There is a discrepancy between what the policy stipulates and what is on the ground. Furthermore, the relevance of the language policy in this very dynamic society is questionable. Since its inception in the '70s, many social changes have taken place. A language policy is instrumental in bringing equity in the proficiency of English. In some schools where pupils from one ethnic community dominate, mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction

while in the multilingual school environment, the English language is more frequently language used. This study has shown that in schools where English is exclusively spoken, modal auxiliary verb frequency and appropriateness is quite high.

The English language syllabus should be reviewed to embrace the modal verbs deemed difficult by pupils. Since semantic inappropriateness is higher than syntactic inappropriateness in modal verb use, more time should be devoted to teaching this intricate linguistic feature. Also, there should be more funding in public primary schools to enable schools to diversify their English language learning materials. It is also recommended that the English language be taught by well-trained personnel specialized in the teaching of English. This is because a teacher is an important model in the learning and acquisition of the English language. It is also necessary to organize in-service courses for teachers of English to equip them with the necessary skills for English language teaching in general and modal auxiliary in particular.

Finally, pupils should be encouraged to take part in language promoting activities such as debates, drama, reciting poems, engaging in writing competitions and reading storybooks. In doing so, the pupils will have the chances to improve in all the language skills necessary that is; listening, speaking, reading and writing as this will enhance modal auxiliary use.

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