

Students' Motivation in English Learning amid Covid-19 Pandemic: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic of covid-19 has had a negative impact on schooling quality around the world. The lack of student enthusiasm to learn using digital platforms is one issue leading to the low quality of education. Several prior researches have looked into how students perceive their motivation to learn in the face of pandemic covid-19. However, modal analysis to reveal students' motivation through their written personal views on learning during the epidemic Covid-19 remains a relatively unexplored area. This research aims to expose the students' motivation to learn during the outbreak of covid-19 using modality theory. 20 English Department students, Faculty of Language and Arts, University of HKBP Nommensen were involved in this research. The students were assigned to write an essay about their experiences and opinions of learning amid the covid-19 outbreak. The essay consists of approximately 250 words. The research was conducted in a mixed method. The results showed that the most modality used in the text is probability 39.82%, afterward frequency 27.60%, obligation 17.19%, and inclination 15.39%, respectively. A medium level or category dominated each type of modality. Regarding polarity, 159 (71.95%) of modal words were in the positive range, and the rest of modality 62 (28.05%) were located in the negative range. This demonstrates that students' enthusiasm to learn throughout the pandemic was characterized as medium and highly positive. The findings were relatively different with the previous research in the same topic. Most of the research revealed low student's motivation amid the covid-19 pandemic. However, this research showed different results that the EFL students were still motivated to study their lessons amid covid-19 pandemic. The results bring consequences to the future educational research to consider using linguistic perspectives in the research method, especially the application of Systemic Functional Linguistics to reveal the meanings of the students' perspectives on certain educational issues.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The covid-19 pandemic has lasted two years and has become into a global calamity (Mishra et al., 2020). At schools and universities, the learning approach has changed away from the traditional face-to-face classroom setting and toward a digital platform-based environment. This circumstance has resulted in a tremendous change in students' study habits and interests (Tuwu, 2020). Students are compelled to learn at home. As a result, they must strive to learn on their own. Additionally, the increased use of digital gadgets, such as android smartphones and computers, has exacerbated the difficulties students encounter when engaging in digital learning via a variety of digital platforms (Rahmaini, 2021; Fathurrahman, 2020). Throughout the learning process, they struggle to learn how to operate devices and computer apps. On the other side, this pandemic renders digital gadgets unaffordable.

These intricate complications and obstacles have eroded students' motivation, resulting in a low level of learning (Ahmad, 2021). As a result, a lack of motivation results in low accomplishment in all subjects examined (Truong, 2021; Chowdhury et al., 2021; Galiana et al., 2020; Escobar Fandiño et al., 2019; Ahmed & Al-Ward, 2020). As a result, teachers should be knowledgeable with effective methods or strategies for motivating students in the classroom (Haftador et al., 2021; Rahman & Sahayu, 2020; Dörnyei, 2018; Whitaker & Valtierra, 2018). As motivation is a critical aspect in a student's academic achievement (Ahmad, 2021; Goodridge, 2017).

Several researches on students' motivation in learning experiences during the covid-19 pandemic have been published from various perspectives. During the covid-19 outbreak, Zboun & Farrah (2021) conducted a study to discover more about Palestinian students' learning preferences. According to the findings, the students had difficulty adapting to online learning. The students prefer face-to-face interaction sessions because to dissatisfaction with the repeated teaching technique, inadequate interaction, limited motivation, and bad internet access. Pelikan et al (2021) found that the students who received a high level of motivation did better in their academics. In contrast, Irzawati (2021) discovered that the study's findings on students' digital learning outcomes differed during the covid-19 epidemic. During the outbreak of covid-19, positive learning outcomes were achieved across a variety of digital platforms.

The other critical aspect of motivational learning research during the pandemic is the data collecting and analysis methodologies used. Previous research indicates that the most frequently employed method for identifying motivational difficulties in learning during the covid-19 epidemic was a questionnaire or Liker scale survey (Truong, 2021; Zboun & Farrah, 2021). Additionally, a quantitative experiment (Sugiarto, 2021) and a mixed method were used (Irzawati, 2021; Pelikan et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2020). All of the previous study uncovered the students' motivation amid corona virus pandemic using quantitative method, like experiment and questionnaires. However, little study has been conducted on the use of discourse analysis to ascertain students' motivation to learn in the midst of the covid-19 pandemic, especially through the application of modality theory (Siregar et al., 2021). This strategy is likely to provide novel insights into students' motivation for learning in the face of the covid-19 pandemic by analyzing the semantic meanings of their written expressions. The way students describe their experiences using digital platforms for learning can reveal their feelings and motivation for the future learning process.

Students' motivations can be interpreted in a variety of ways (Eggins, 2004; Setiawan, 2018). Through the use of modal analysis, the degree to which students are motivated can be determined through their expressions or written texts (Supadmi & Laksana, 2021). Since the modality is considered as a perspective, reflection, and personal opinions about the meaning of disclosure experiences communicated through written or spoken expressions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Setiawan, 2018; Rahmadhani & Rustandi, 2018)

The polarity or choice between "yes" and "no," as well as intermediate degrees of "never" and "always," is known as modality (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In the description of certainty/uncertainty or possibility/impossibility, it lies between positive and negative polar. Positive

polar is a positive focus on the mode that is often expressed by verb markers like want, wish, obligated, definitely, perhaps, maybe, always, sometimes, and so on. Negative polar, on the other hand, is a negative margin point in the ordinary mode, such as not, never, rarely, and so on.

Modality can be classified into two domains: modalization and modulation. Modalization is the expressing of subjective opinion or debate through the language use of a proposition, which is a statement of fact or a question (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Modulation, on the other hand, is the expression of one's personal viewpoint or consideration of a proposal (goods or services offered or requested). Additionally, modalization is separated into two categories: possibility and frequency. On the other hand, modulation takes into account both necessity and inclination. Modalization and modulation are classified into three grades: high, medium, and low. The modality and polarity of an essay can be utilized to ascertain the students' perspectives and motivations (Siregar et al., 2021; Supadmi & Laksana, 2021). Thus, this study will examine students' motivation to learn in the midst of the coronavirus epidemic through their written expressions utilizing the modality theory.

2. METHODS

The goal of this study is to ascertain EFL students' motivation to learn English during the epidemic of covid-19. The students' motivations were expressed through writing forms that reflected their problems, hopes, and opinions on learning English through various digital learning platforms. This study employs a mixed method to illuminate the concept of motivation in student essay writing (Cresswell, 2014). The occurrence of modalities in the text is quantified using descriptive quantitative methods, as is the sort of modality most frequently encountered in the text. Simultaneously, the qualitative descriptive approach is used to explain how words or phrases are classified into modalities and to describe the meaning of each word or sentence classified into a modality based on context.

This research involved a total of 20 undergraduate students from the English Department at the University of HKBP Nommensen who took the Academic Writing course in the third semester. The data of the research were the students' motivation that they expressed in written text. Each student was assigned to write an essay about their experience and motivation in learning English during the pandemic. The essay is around 250 words in length. So, the data corpus consisted of 5.870 words from 20 students' essays. The essays were written during a 90-minute academic writing lesson in October 2021. The writing class was conducted via Zoom. Despite this, the writings were sent by email. During the writing session, students were guided in outlining their essays, which focused on their learning experiences during the outbreak of the covid-19, their survival of the difficult condition, and their motivation and hope to remain still in the face of the drastic change in the learning process.

The essays were then analyzed word by word to determine the possible meaning of each phrase or clause that could be considered a modality. The term or phrase chosen must have some relevance to the students' motivational context. Following identification, a total of 221 words contain the concept of modality. The data were then categorised according to their modalization or modulation type. The data were classified into two subcategories: probability or frequency for modalization and obligation or inclination for modulation. The identification then progressed to the modality value and polarity levels. It is the direction in which a word's meaning moves from negative to positive, as in the modal "never" in the negative pole, "sometimes" in the range between negative and positive, and "always" in the positive pole. However, the context must be taken into account when determining the meaning of polarity. Additionally, the semantic meanings of the words were classified according to their degree of modalization and modulation: high, intermediate, and low. The data were analyzed quantitatively to found out the number and percentage of the occurrences of modality according to its type. On the other hand, the qualitative method was used to analyze the data to describe how the modality was realized in the text.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Modalization and Modulation

This study investigates EFL students' learning motivation at the outbreak of the covid-19 epidemic. The research data was gathered from students' essays, which were approximately 250 words long. In the essays of 20 students, there were a total of 221 words that contained the word modality. The data was then separated into two sorts of modalities: modalization accounted for 67.42 percent of the data, while modulation accounted for 32.58 percent. Modalization consists of probability 88 words (39.82 percent) and frequency (usuality) 61 words (27.60 percent), while modulation consists of obligation 38 words (17.19 percent) and inclination 34 words (15.39 percent). Table 1 shows the results of the modality analysis on the data of students' writing.

Table 1 Types of modality in students' writing

Type of Modality	Sub-type	Frequency	Percentage
Modalization	Probability	88	39.82 %
	Frequency	61	27.60 %
Modulation	Obligation	38	17.19 %
	Inclination	34	15.39 %
Total		221	100 %

According to the results in Table 1, the modalization type is more prevalent than the modulation type. This demonstrates that the language used to represent students' motivation in learning experiences during pandemic places a greater emphasis on the probability and frequency (usuality) of the terms than on the obligation and inclination of the phrases. From all the data evaluated in the probability type, 42 modals "can," 36 modals "will," and other modal eight words were identified as ways in which students expressed their enthusiasm and motivation to learn. This result was confirmed by Ardiansah's (2015) research finding that uncovered the domination of modalization types appeared in the students' hortatory exposition texts. Moreover, Siregar et al (2021) also revealed the same result that modalization type was dominantly appeared in the students' writing texts. This indicates that EFL students in Indonesia are more familiar with the use of modalization type in writing.

The results also revealed the use of non-modal modes. Although in small number around two words, like in the phrase "*The learning system has changed **completely**.*" These findings corroborate those of Rahmansari and Lauren (2020) and Ardiansya (2015), who discovered that probability modality was more prevalent in the text than other modalities. On the other hand, the usuality type, which reflects the frequency of an event, discovered the following modality frequency types: "sometimes" 18 words, "often" 17 words, "never" 11 words, "always" 10 words, and "usually" 5 words. There are 38 words of obligation in the modulation type, including "make" (12 words), "need" (7 words), "have to" and "must" (10 words), "want" (3 words), "ask" (3 words), and "should" (3 words). Finally, the inclination type consists of 28 words beginning with "like," two words beginning with "interesting," two words beginning with "excited," and with "willing."

Value and Polarity

The term "value" refers to the modality's intensity, which is classified into three categories: high, medium, and low. This level illustrates the significance of the strongest, middle, and lowest modality (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Through study, the essay's stated degree of student motivation can also be classified as high, medium, or low. Polarity analysis is used to identify the modality terms that indicate whether the modality of student learning motivation is positive or negative. Polarity analysis is used to identify the modality terms. By examining the polarity of the modal word's meaning, we

may determine whether it trends toward a negative or a positive pole. The data analysis revealed that the value and polarity of modality are as indicated in table 2 below.

Table 2 Values and polarity of modality

Type of modality	Value	Polarity	
		Positive	Negative
Modalization	High	4	2
-Possibility	Medium	64	16
	Low	-	2
	High	8	2
- Frequency (usuality)	Medium	26	14
	Low	7	4
Modulation			
- Obligation	High	6	4
	Medium	15	7
	Low	5	1
- Inclination	High	2	-
	Medium	20	10
	Low	2	-
Total		159 (71.95%)	62 (28.05%)

Table 2 illustrates how modal words are classified according to their value and polarity. The distribution of modal terms is skewed toward the middle, while the number of modal words is nearly balanced at the high and low levels. This finding demonstrates that students' emotional declarations and drive for studying are modest. Student motivation is often positive, with 159 terms (71.95 percent), and negative polarity is at 62. (28.05 percent). These findings demonstrate that students' motivation for online learning is extremely strong during the pandemic period, which is achieved with moderate modalization. This conclusion also corroborates Sugiarto's (2021) research, which indicates that student's motivation for learning during a pandemic via digital learning technologies is quite high. The similar conclusion was reached by Siregar et al (2021), who discovered that students' enthusiasm and drive for learning during a pandemic were reasonably strong, as determined by the findings of a modality theory-based examination of students' conversation texts.

Modality was realized in students' essays in a variety of ways, including modalization (probability and frequency) and modulation (obligation and inclination). The following is a descriptive examination of the value and polarity of modality. The frequency or usuality modality is the most frequently utilized. As demonstrated in table 2, modal word types like as "will" and "can" occur more frequently than other modal verbs. The following is a modality study of the frequency and possibility (usuality).

*"...but I hope that the good news **will** come soon, the pandemic **will** pass, and everyone **will** stay healthy and return to normal as usual".*

Three modal words appear in the preceding phrase "will," which convey the student's optimism and motivation to study during the pandemic with the statements "...good news will arrive...", "...the pandemic will pass...", and "...everyone will stay healthy.... " The modal "will" in the three clauses also conveys the idea of a moderate level of hope and motivation. However, if we examine the frequency with which the modal "will" appears in the text, it is clear that the students were highly driven to see new hope in future learning methods. Additionally, polarity analysis reveals that 68 (77.27 percent) of potential modality are positive in meaning, while the remaining 20 (22.73 percent) are negative in meaning. All of the evidence indicates that students' drive to pursue the prospect was favorable.

The modal terms "sometimes" and "often" were found to appear more frequently in the modalization frequency type than other modal words. The text contained a total of 40 modal terms with a medium frequency. The remaining modal words, 21 in total, were found at both the high and low levels in approximately equal numbers. In terms of the positive and negative meanings of modal words, it is clear that the positive meaning of modal words outnumbers the negative meaning of modal words by 41 (67.21 percent) out of 61 modal words (32.79 percent). In terms of modal frequency, students' motivation was positively moderate. The frequency realization of the modality can be seen in the extract below.

"...sometimes there is a sense of longing to learn...."

The modal word "sometime" in the preceding clause denotes the frequency of an event. "A sense of longing to learn" in this context suggests that students have the desire and motivation to study to appear "sometimes" during the pandemic. This statement demonstrates students' good motivated attitudes toward learning. However, modal words can also have negative connotations, indicating a lack of motivation. The following instances demonstrate students' lack of (negative) enthusiasm and motivation.

*"Studying at home makes me **always** feel bored and **less** enthusiastic."*

The use of the modal "always" in this clause conveys the idea that studying at home during a pandemic is extremely boring. In the midst of the covid-19 pandemic, the student has minimal motivation to study. Zboun & Farrah (2021) discovered the same research findings, confirming that online classes had more problems than benefits for students. Similarly, student interest for learning via digital methods is weaker than it was before to the Covid-19 breakdown.

Students' enthusiasm to learn during the pandemic is likewise strongly correlated with modality in modulation types. This argument is backed up by data showing that medium obligation is the most prevalent sort of capital obligation, accounting for 22 words (57.89 percent) out of 38 terms, followed by high obligation ten words (26.32 percent), and low obligation six words (15.79 percent). The fact also reveals that the modality obligation has a positive meaning with 26 words (68.42%) more than a negative meaning with 12 words (31.58 percent). This demonstrates that students were extremely motivated to study English amid the pandemic outbreaks. The following excerpt demonstrates the students' positive learning motivation.

*"...we have to stare at cellphone and laptop screens every day. So, we **must** make our learning atmosphere exciting and fun."*

The modal "must" in the extract underlines the students' strong motivation to learn, despite the fact that they are struggling due to the pandemic. On the other side, like in the extract "Lecture online is something I don't want and not even everyone wants," there is an obligation type with a meaning that tends to be negative motivation. Because it is followed by the negation word "don't," the word "wants" is classified as a negative medium obligation in this phrase. The following statement "not even everyone wants" emphasizes the meaning of the clause, implying that students' excitement and drive for learning are quite low.

There were 34 terms in the essay content that corresponded to the inclination category. The medium level, with 30 words (88.24 percent), was determined to be more dominant than the high and low levels, which each included four terms (11.76 percent). The modal terms of inclination found in the study of polarity were 24 words (70.59 percent) that suggest meaning in the positive range, while the remaining 10 words (29.41 percent) indicated meaning in the negative range. It can be inferred that students' motivation in learning during the pandemic is classed as positive meaning based on the outcomes of this inclination modality analysis.

Students' motivation indicated in the categories of possibility, frequency, obligation, and inclination is evidently realized in a medium positive meaning among all modal terms discovered. That is, based on the modal words analysis in inclination, the students' motivation to learn during the pandemic is rated as moderately positive. The modality is also seen in the data at a low level and in

the negative range. Low motivation was also discovered in the prior studies, even though in a small amount (Setiawan, 2018; Ahmed & Al-Ward, 2020; Escobar Fandiño et al., 2019).

The findings of the study show that the students remained eager to learn despite the coronavirus outbreak. Although small number of the students stated that they were unmotivated to learn online by means of digital platforms. They preferred to learn the lessons directly. The findings were quite different with the previous research that claimed that the students had low motivation in learning during the covid-19 pandemic. The results of the study will bring pedagogical implication to teachers, lecturers, and researchers. They should devise some appropriate strategies to keep the students engaged in their studies during the pandemic.

4. CONCLUSION

Using Systemic Functional Linguistics theory, this research tries to uncover students' motivation for learning in the midst of the covid-19 pandemic. This study differs from prior research that used on survey and experimental approaches to determine how students' motivation to learn changed during the covid-19 pandemic—this study relies on descriptive analysis to determine the meaning of modal phrases used by students in their writings. This study contradicts several prior studies that defined students' motivation for learning as reasonably high and positive. The research provides evidence that all types of modality imply that the meaning of modal words is considerable on a medium level when studied in context, and that the meaning contained in modal words also tends to be positive on the polarity line. That is to say that most of the EFL students in the English Departments showed good motivation in learning during the corona virus outbreak. However, a few students felt unmotivated in online-learning method and preferred to have face-to-face lectures.

The research finding will bring the pedagogical implication for educational practitioners and future research. The findings of this study provide information for educators and academics. Teachers instructing students via online classes during the epidemic should be mindful that the majority of students may be very motivated to study. However, some individuals may be confronted with complex issues and be reluctant to study digital platforms. Thus, teachers should devote additional attention to these disengaged students by motivating them and implementing an engaging teaching technique that is appropriate for the epidemic circumstance. The other implication of this study is that educational research, such as students' perceptions of specific issues, can be explored not only through survey or other traditional research methods, but also through the lens of linguistics, which allows for an examination of educational issues through the lens of linguistic meaning realized in oral or written texts.

This study, however, still has some weaknesses, such as the small number of students participated in this research, and the research data limitation. Therefore, further studies with the same topic should concern about these matters. Apart from the numerous advantages of using Systemic Functional Linguistics to uncover students' motivation to learn during the coronavirus pandemic, this research should be continued by other researchers, particularly those who are interested in the strategies students use to maintain their learning motivation during the covid-19 outbreak.

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