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TEACHING DISCOURSE MARKERS TO IMPROVE COHERENCE IN EFL ACADEMIC WRITING

Bozorova Mahliyo Ulugbekovna

Senior student, SamSIFL, Samarkand

Abstract. Coherence is one of the most important characteristics of effective academic writing because it enables readers to understand the logical relationships between ideas and follow the development of an argument. However, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students experience difficulties organizing their ideas into logically connected paragraphs and producing coherent academic texts. One possible reason is their limited understanding and use of discourse markers. Discourse markers are linguistic expressions that establish relationships between sentences, clauses, and larger sections of a text. They help writers indicate addition, contrast, cause, consequence, exemplification, and conclusion. The present study examines the role of explicit discourse marker instruction in improving coherence in EFL academic writing. Particular attention is given to the classification, functions, and appropriate use of discourse markers in academic texts. A qualitative literature-based research approach is employed to examine theoretical perspectives and previous research concerning textual coherence, cohesion, and discourse marker instruction. The analysis suggests that teaching discourse markers explicitly can help EFL learners organize arguments, establish logical relationships between ideas, and improve the overall readability of academic texts. However, the effective use of discourse markers requires more than memorizing linking expressions. Students must understand their semantic functions, contextual restrictions, and rhetorical purposes. The study emphasizes the importance of contextualized instruction, text analysis, paragraph reconstruction, and guided academic writing practice. It concludes that systematic discourse marker instruction can contribute to the development of coherent and well-organized academic writing when integrated into broader EFL writing instruction.

Keywords: discourse markers, academic writing, coherence, cohesion, EFL students, textual organization, English language teaching, writing competence, academic discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is a fundamental skill in higher education because it enables students to communicate ideas, present arguments, analyze information, and participate in academic discussions. Successful academic writing requires not only grammatical accuracy and appropriate vocabulary but also the ability to organize information logically and establish meaningful connections between different parts of a text. One of the most important characteristics of effective academic writing is coherence. Coherence refers to the logical and meaningful organization of ideas within a text. A coherent academic text allows readers to understand how individual sentences contribute to the overall message and how arguments develop throughout paragraphs and sections. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, achieving coherence can be particularly challenging. Students may possess sufficient grammatical knowledge and vocabulary but still produce texts in which ideas appear disconnected, arguments lack logical progression, or paragraphs contain unclear relationships between sentences. These difficulties may result from limited knowledge of discourse organization, insufficient writing practice, and inadequate awareness of linguistic resources used to connect ideas. One important linguistic resource for establishing relationships within academic texts is the use of discourse markers. Discourse markers are words and expressions that help organize communication and indicate relationships between different parts of discourse. In academic writing, they perform important functions by showing addition, contrast, cause, consequence, clarification, exemplification, and conclusion. Common examples include "furthermore," "moreover," "however," "therefore," "consequently," "for instance," and "in

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conclusion." These expressions help writers guide readers through their arguments and clarify how different ideas are connected.

For example, the sentence "Online learning provides flexibility. However, it may reduce face-to-face interaction" demonstrates a contrastive relationship between two ideas. Similarly, the expression "Therefore" can introduce a logical consequence of previously presented information. Although discourse markers are frequently introduced in English language textbooks, students do not always use them appropriately in academic writing. Some learners rely excessively on a limited number of expressions, particularly "and," "but," "because," and "so." Others insert formal linking expressions without fully understanding their meanings or the relationships they communicate. As a result, their writing may contain repetitive transitions, inappropriate connections, or expressions that do not contribute meaningfully to the development of an argument. Halliday and Hasan (1976) identify cohesion as an important feature of textual organization and explain how linguistic resources connect different elements of a text. Their work provides a significant theoretical foundation for understanding the relationships between sentences and paragraphs. However, cohesion and coherence should not be treated as identical concepts. Cohesion concerns the linguistic connections between textual elements, whereas coherence concerns the overall logical interpretation and meaningful organization of a text. A text may contain numerous linking expressions but still lack coherence if its ideas are poorly organized. Therefore, teaching discourse markers should involve more than presenting lists of transitional words. Students need to understand how these expressions contribute to the logical development of academic arguments. Schiffrin (1987) provides an important account of discourse markers by examining their functions in different communicative contexts. Her work demonstrates that discourse markers contribute to the organization and interpretation of discourse rather than serving merely as decorative linguistic elements. Similarly, Fraser (1999) explains that discourse markers signal relationships between

discourse segments and help listeners or readers interpret the connections between them. In academic writing, discourse markers are particularly useful because they help writers structure complex arguments and communicate relationships between claims, evidence, explanations, and conclusions. For example, additive markers such as "furthermore" and "in addition" introduce supplementary information. Contrastive markers such as "however" and "nevertheless" indicate opposing ideas. Causal markers such as "therefore" and "consequently" establish relationships involving reasons and results.

Exemplification markers such as "for example" and "for instance" introduce supporting illustrations, while concluding expressions such as "overall" and "in conclusion" help summarize arguments. For EFL students, understanding these functions can improve their ability to construct logically organized paragraphs and develop academic arguments. The importance of discourse marker instruction is also connected with the development of academic literacy. Students are expected to produce different types of academic texts, including argumentative essays, research reports, literature reviews, and analytical assignments. Each genre requires appropriate ways of organizing information and establishing relationships between ideas. In the context of Uzbek higher education, many students study English as a foreign language and use it for academic purposes. Although they may understand the meanings of common linking expressions, they can experience difficulties selecting appropriate markers according to context and rhetorical function. Some students may use "moreover" to introduce an opposing argument or employ "therefore" when no clear logical consequence has been established. Such problems demonstrate that knowledge of discourse markers involves both vocabulary knowledge and an understanding of discourse relationships. Explicit instruction may help address these difficulties by teaching students the meanings, functions, and contextual uses of different discourse markers. Hyland (2005) emphasizes the importance of metadiscourse in academic communication and explains

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how writers use linguistic resources to organize texts and guide readers through arguments. This perspective is especially relevant to discourse marker instruction because it highlights the relationship between language choices and reader interpretation. Furthermore, writing instruction should help students recognize that coherent academic writing depends on the logical relationship between ideas rather than the number of linking expressions used. The purpose of the present study is to examine the role of explicit discourse marker instruction in improving coherence in EFL academic writing. Particular attention is given to the relationship between discourse markers, textual organization, argument development, and the pedagogical strategies that may help students use these expressions appropriately.

METHODS

The present study adopts a qualitative literature-based research design to investigate the role of discourse marker instruction in the development of coherence in EFL academic writing. This approach is appropriate because the research aims to synthesize theoretical perspectives and previous empirical findings concerning discourse markers, textual coherence, cohesion, and second-language writing instruction. The theoretical framework is based on research in discourse analysis, applied linguistics, academic writing, and language pedagogy. Particular attention is given to the contributions of Halliday and Hasan (1976), Schiffrin (1987), Fraser (1999), Hyland (2005), and other researchers whose work addresses the organization of discourse and academic texts. The literature was examined in relation to the main research focus, namely how explicit teaching of discourse markers may contribute to improved coherence in EFL academic writing. The analysis considers different functional categories of discourse markers, including additive, contrastive, causal, consequential, exemplifying, sequential, and concluding expressions. Particular attention is given to their semantic functions and contextual appropriateness. This distinction is important because discourse markers that appear similar in meaning may

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perform different rhetorical functions in academic communication. The pedagogical analysis focuses on instructional approaches that can help students develop practical knowledge of discourse markers. These include contextualized presentation, identification of markers in authentic academic texts, sentence-combination activities, paragraph reconstruction, guided writing, and revision exercises. The study also examines the relationship between discourse marker knowledge and the broader dimensions of writing competence. These include logical organization, paragraph unity, argument development, cohesion, readability, and academic register. Previous research findings are synthesized thematically to identify common conclusions concerning the role of discourse markers in textual organization and the development of second-language writing skills. The analysis considers both the potential benefits and the limitations of explicit instruction. In particular, it examines the possibility that excessive reliance on linking expressions may produce repetitive or unnatural writing. Because the present study is based on previously published literature, it does not involve a newly conducted classroom experiment, questionnaire, or participant-based investigation. Consequently, the results are presented as a theoretical and pedagogical synthesis rather than as statistical findings from an original intervention.

RESULTS

The analysis of theoretical literature and previous research identifies several important aspects of discourse marker instruction that may contribute to improved coherence in EFL academic writing.

One of the central findings of the analysis is that discourse markers can support the development of coherent academic texts by making logical relationships between ideas more explicit. Students frequently produce paragraphs containing relevant information but fail to establish clear connections between individual sentences. This may cause readers to experience difficulties understanding the relationship between arguments and supporting explanations. Discourse markers can help address this

problem by indicating how one idea relates to another. For example, additive expressions such as "furthermore," "moreover," and "in addition" show that a writer is introducing supplementary information. Contrastive expressions such as "however," "nevertheless," and "on the other hand" indicate differences or opposing perspectives. Causal and consequential expressions, including "because," "therefore," "as a result," and "consequently," help establish relationships between reasons and outcomes. These expressions provide readers with signals that facilitate the interpretation of textual organization. However, the presence of discourse markers does not automatically guarantee coherence. The ideas themselves must be logically connected and relevant to the central topic. Therefore, effective instruction should emphasize the relationship between the meaning of a discourse marker and the actual relationship between the sentences it connects.

The analysis suggests that students benefit from understanding the different functions performed by discourse markers. Additive markers are particularly useful when writers introduce additional information or extend an argument. Expressions such as "furthermore," "moreover," and "additionally" can help students develop paragraphs by introducing related supporting points. Contrastive markers are important for argumentative writing because they allow students to introduce alternative perspectives, limitations, or opposing arguments. Expressions such as "however," "although," and "nevertheless" help writers demonstrate differences between ideas. Causal and consequential markers contribute to logical argumentation by connecting reasons with outcomes. Expressions such as "therefore," "consequently," and "as a result" help clarify the relationships between evidence, interpretation, and conclusions. Exemplification markers such as "for example" and "for instance" help writers introduce specific illustrations that support general statements. Sequential markers such as "firstly," "subsequently," and "finally" may help organize information when a clear sequence is required.

Concluding expressions such as "overall" and "in conclusion" can signal the final stage of an argument and help readers recognize that the discussion is approaching its conclusion. Understanding these categories can help EFL students select expressions according to their communicative purpose rather than using linking words randomly.

Another important issue concerns the overuse and misuse of discourse markers. Some EFL students repeatedly use a limited number of expressions, particularly "and," "but," "so," and "because." This may make academic writing appear repetitive and reduce the variety of rhetorical relationships expressed in a text. Other students may use more formal expressions such as "moreover," "nevertheless," and "consequently" without fully understanding their meanings.

For instance, using "however" to introduce an idea that supports the previous statement may create an inappropriate logical relationship. Similarly, "therefore" should generally introduce a conclusion or consequence that follows from previously presented information. It should not be used simply because a writer wants to begin a new sentence. Explicit instruction can help students recognize these distinctions through contextualized examples and comparative analysis. Students should learn not only what a marker means but also when it is appropriate and what type of relationship it establishes.

Discourse markers may also support the development of well-organized academic paragraphs. An effective academic paragraph usually contains a central idea, supporting information, explanations, and sometimes examples or contrasting perspectives. Students need to organize these elements so that readers can follow the development of the argument. Discourse markers can help signal transitions between these elements. For example, a paragraph may introduce a central argument, provide additional supporting information through "furthermore," introduce an illustration using "for example," and present a consequence through "therefore." Such expressions can make the organization of a paragraph more transparent. Nevertheless, paragraph

coherence should primarily depend on the logical development of ideas. Discourse markers should support this organization rather than replace meaningful connections between sentences.

The analysis also indicates that explicit discourse marker instruction can contribute to students' awareness of academic writing conventions. Academic writing requires more than communicating information. Writers must guide readers through arguments, indicate relationships between claims, and present evidence in a logically structured manner. By examining discourse markers in authentic academic texts, students can become more aware of how experienced academic writers organize information. For example, learners can analyze how authors introduce contrasting arguments, explain research findings, provide examples, and summarize discussions. This process may help students develop a better understanding of academic discourse and apply similar organizational strategies in their own writing.

The analysis highlights the importance of contextualized instruction. Teaching discourse markers through isolated lists may help students memorize their meanings, but it may not develop the ability to use them appropriately in extended academic texts. More effective activities involve presenting markers within authentic sentences, paragraphs, and academic passages. Students can identify discourse markers in sample texts, examine their functions, and discuss why particular expressions are appropriate in specific contexts. Paragraph reconstruction activities can also be useful. In these tasks, students receive sentences in an incorrect order and reorganize them into a coherent paragraph by examining logical relationships. Guided writing activities provide further opportunities for learners to apply discourse markers when developing arguments and supporting ideas. Through these activities, students can gradually develop both knowledge of discourse markers and the ability to use them independently.

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DISCUSSION

The findings of the literature-based analysis suggest that explicit discourse marker instruction can play an important role in improving coherence in EFL academic writing. One of the main conclusions is that discourse markers should be taught as functional linguistic resources rather than as isolated vocabulary items. Students need to understand how these expressions contribute to the logical organization and interpretation of academic texts. This position is consistent with Halliday and Hasan (1976), who emphasize the role of cohesive relationships in creating connected texts. Their work demonstrates that linguistic resources help establish relationships between different textual elements. However, coherence involves more than grammatical or lexical connections. A text must also present ideas in a logical sequence and maintain meaningful relationships with its central topic. Schiffrin (1987) provides an important theoretical perspective by examining discourse markers as elements that contribute to the organization of communication. Her research supports the view that discourse markers should be understood in relation to the broader structure and interpretation of discourse. Fraser (1999) similarly explains that discourse markers signal relationships between discourse segments and contribute to the interpretation of messages. These perspectives are relevant to EFL academic writing because students must understand how linguistic expressions influence the relationship between sentences and paragraphs. Another important conclusion concerns the relationship between discourse markers and academic argumentation. Students who understand contrastive, causal, and exemplifying expressions may be better prepared to develop complex arguments and present different perspectives. For example, contrastive markers allow writers to introduce alternative views, while consequential markers help connect evidence with interpretations and conclusions. This is particularly important in argumentative essays and research-based assignments, where logical organization is essential. The findings are also consistent with Hyland's (2005) discussion of metadiscourse. Hyland

emphasizes that academic writers use linguistic resources to organize texts, express relationships, and guide readers through their arguments. From this perspective, discourse markers contribute not only to sentence connections but also to the interaction between writers and readers. Nevertheless, the analysis suggests that excessive use of discourse markers may negatively influence writing quality. Students sometimes assume that a paragraph becomes coherent simply by adding more linking expressions. This assumption can produce texts that contain numerous transitions but lack logical development. Therefore, teachers should emphasize that discourse markers are useful only when they accurately represent the relationship between ideas. Another important consideration concerns differences in students' linguistic backgrounds. Uzbek EFL learners may transfer certain organizational patterns from Uzbek into English. Such transfer may influence their selection and frequency of discourse markers. Explicit instruction can help students become aware of differences between the two languages and develop greater sensitivity to English academic conventions. The findings also indicate that discourse marker instruction should be integrated with broader writing instruction. Students need to learn how to develop arguments, organize paragraphs, select supporting evidence, and maintain a consistent academic style. Teaching linking expressions separately from these activities may limit their practical value. Overall, the literature supports the integration of discourse marker instruction into EFL academic writing courses. However, further empirical studies involving Uzbek university students are needed to establish the measurable effects of particular teaching techniques on writing coherence.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings have several implications for English language teaching in higher education institutions. Teachers should introduce discourse markers through meaningful academic contexts rather than relying exclusively on vocabulary lists. Students should examine authentic academic paragraphs and identify how different

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expressions establish relationships between ideas. Writing activities should provide opportunities to practice additive, contrastive, causal, exemplifying, and concluding markers. Teachers can also use paragraph reconstruction tasks to help learners understand the logical organization of texts. These activities encourage students to consider the relationships between sentences before selecting appropriate discourse markers. Another useful strategy is guided essay writing. Students can prepare short argumentative paragraphs in which they use appropriate discourse markers to introduce arguments, provide supporting examples, and explain consequences. Feedback should focus not only on grammatical correctness but also on the logical appropriateness of transitions. Teachers should explain why a particular discourse marker is suitable or unsuitable in a given context. Peer review can also contribute to students' awareness of coherence. By examining classmates' writing, learners can identify unclear relationships and suggest more appropriate ways of organizing ideas. Finally, discourse marker instruction should be combined with reading activities. Exposure to well-organized academic texts allows students to observe how writers use linguistic resources to guide readers and develop arguments.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study has several limitations. First, it is based on theoretical literature and previous research rather than an original classroom intervention involving Uzbek EFL students. Second, coherence is a complex concept that cannot be measured exclusively through the frequency of discourse markers. Other factors, including paragraph organization, lexical relationships, topic development, and argument structure, also influence textual coherence. Third, the appropriateness of discourse markers depends on genre, context, and communicative purpose. Expressions that are suitable in one academic genre may be less appropriate in another. Future research should employ experimental or mixed-methods designs to investigate the effect of explicit discourse marker instruction on students' writing performance. Such studies

could compare students' writing before and after instruction, evaluate their use of different discourse marker categories, and examine changes in coherence through independent assessment. Further research could also investigate the specific difficulties experienced by Uzbek EFL students when using English discourse markers and compare these patterns across different proficiency levels.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the role of explicit discourse marker instruction in improving coherence in EFL academic writing. The analysis suggests that discourse markers are important linguistic resources that help writers establish relationships between ideas, organize paragraphs, develop arguments, and guide readers through academic texts. Explicit instruction may help EFL students understand the functions of additive, contrastive, causal, exemplifying, sequential, and concluding expressions. For Uzbek EFL students, systematic instruction can provide opportunities to develop greater awareness of English academic discourse and overcome difficulties associated with inappropriate transitions, repetitive expressions, and unclear logical relationships. However, effective discourse marker instruction should extend beyond memorizing lists of linking words. Students need to understand their meanings, contextual restrictions, and rhetorical purposes. Contextualized examples, authentic academic texts, paragraph reconstruction, guided writing, and feedback can support the development of practical discourse marker competence. In conclusion, teaching discourse markers represents a valuable component of EFL academic writing instruction. When integrated with broader writing activities, it can help students produce more logically organized, coherent, and reader-friendly academic texts. Further empirical research is necessary to examine the specific effects of these instructional approaches on Uzbek university students' writing performance.

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