Exploring interactive metadiscourse as a practical approach to enhancing academic writing skills of newly admitted undergraduate students in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

EN Academic writing is a crucial aspect of undergraduate education, particularly for students in English as Second Language (ESL) contexts. This study investigates the use of interactive resources as discursive strategies in enhancing the academic writing skills of ESL undergraduates in Nigeria. A sample of 100 expository essays was used. The research employs both qualitative and quantitative designs. The qualitative component analyses the types and usages of discursive strategies employed in the selected expository writing, while the quantitative component involves the occurrence of these strategies. The results reveal transitional markers, frame markers, and code glosses were the most frequently used interactive markers in academic writing, while evidential and endophoric markers were used less frequently. These findings underscore the pedagogical significance of incorporating interactive resources into the teaching of academic writing skills for ESL undergraduate students.

Key words: ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS, INTERACTIVE METADISCOURSE, ESL UNDERGRADUATES IN NIGERIA, DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES

ES La escritura académica es un aspecto crucial en la educación universitaria, especialmente para estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua (ESL). Este estudio investiga el uso de recursos interactivos como estrategias discursivas para mejorar las habilidades de escritura académica de los estudiantes universitarios de ESL en Nigeria. Se utilizó una muestra de 100 ensayos expositivos. En la investigación se ha utilizado un diseño cualitativo y cuantitativo. El análisis cualitativo observa los tipos y usos de estrategias discursivas empleadas en los escritos expositivos seleccionados, mientras que el cuantitativo atiende a la ocurrencia de estas estrategias. Los resultados revelan que los marcadores de transición, los marcadores de estructura y las glosas de código fueron los marcadores interactivos más utilizados en la escritura académica, mientras que los marcadores evidenciales y endofóricos se usaron con menos frecuencia. Estos hallazgos subrayan la importancia pedagógica de incorporar recursos interactivos en la enseñanza de habilidades de escritura académica para estudiantes universitarios de ESL.

Palabras clave: HABILIDADES DE ESCRITURA ACADÉMICA, METADISCURSO INTERACTIVO, ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS DE ESL EN NIGERIA, ESTRATEGIAS DISCURSIVAS

IT La scrittura accademica è un aspetto cruciale dell'istruzione universitaria, in particolare, per gli studenti di inglese come seconda lingua (ESL). Questo studio indaga l'utilizzo delle risorse interattive come strategie discorsive per lo sviluppo delle competenze di scrittura accademica degli studenti universitari in Nigeria. È stato usato un campione di 100 testi espositivi. La ricerca utilizza un approccio sia qualitativo che quantitativo. L'analisi qualitativa indaga i tipi e gli usi delle strategie linguistiche impiegate nei testi espositivi selezionati, mentre quella quantitativa studia l'occorrenza di queste strategie. I risultati rivelano che i connettivi di transizione, di struttura ed esplicativi sono i marcatori interattivi usati con più frequenza nella scrittura accademica rispetto a quelli di evidenziazione ed endoforici. Questi risultati sottolineano la valenza pedagogica che assume l'integrazione di risorse interattive nell'insegnamento delle competenze di scrittura accademica per gli studenti universitari di inglese come lingua seconda.

Parole chiave: COMPETENZE DI SCRITTURA ACCADEMICA, METADISCORSO INTERATTIVO, STUDENTI UNIVERSITARI DI INGLESE LINGUA SECONDA, STRATEGIE DISCORSIVE

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1. Introduction

The increasing emphasis placed on improving English language proficiency and communication skills, especially in non-native English-speaking countries, has developed in response to the challenges brought about by the globalization and internationalization of higher education on the one hand, and the growing importance attributed to English as the predominant medium of instruction worldwide on the other. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has become an increasingly important field of study for students, who are non-native English speakers, and it is particularly crucial for those who want to succeed in academic writing and communication, as English is the dominant language of higher education and research worldwide. However, learning to write effectively in English is often challenging, especially in a second language context, where students are not familiar with the discourse and rhetorical conventions of academic writing. Recently, there have been increasing concerns raised by major employers in Nigeria about the inadequate linguistic and communicative skills of many Nigerian university graduates. Therefore, it has become imperative to pay closer attention to the course content and teaching methodology of the Use of English course to address these challenges and improve the language and communication skills of Nigerian university students.

Given the importance of actively engaging students in the process of selecting appropriate vocabulary, constructing meaningful sentences, and applying academic writing conventions to effectively convey their ideas and thoughts with precision and clarity, it is necessary for stakeholders to devise effective strategies that can improve the English writing skills of these students. One such strategy is the use of discursive markers, which are words and phrases that help to structure discourse. These markers are particularly useful in academic writing, where the organization and coherence of ideas are essential.

Research has shown that the use of discursive markers can have a significant impact on the quality of academic writing produced by non-native English speakers. According to Rustipa (2014), the practice of EFL writing can be beneficial for students as it allows them to delve into organizing their ideas, thinking critically, analyzing information, and developing their ability to critique. In particular, the use of interactive markers has been found to be effective in enhancing the coherence and organization of ideas in writing. Interactive resources, in the context of this paper, refer to words, phrases, or elements used as markers to facilitate effective communication and coherence within a written text. These resources enable readers to follow the flow of ideas and understand the relationships between different parts of the text. While these markers are often included in English language teaching materials, their usage in the context of academic writing is not always emphasized. As such, many students may not be aware of their importance, and this is where the role of the instructor is crucial. By providing explicit instruction on the use of discursive markers and incorporating them into writing assignments, instructors can help students develop the skills needed to produce effective academic writing.

In this article, we will explore the use of interactive resources as discursive strategies to enhance the English writing skills of newly admitted undergraduate students. We will focus specifically on the use of discursive markers in expository essays, which are often assigned to students in the first year of undergraduate studies. We will examine the impact of these markers on the organization, coherence, and overall quality of the essays produced by the students. Additionally, the inference from the findings can be integrated into English language teaching materials and curricula to better prepare students for academic writing in a second language context.

2. English for Academic Purposes

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a specialized branch of English language instruction that has developed from the larger field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). EAP is defined by its focus on teaching the English language, specifically to facilitate learners' study or research through the medium of English (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 8; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 1). This approach to language learning is defined by its emphasis on equipping learners with the linguistic and academic skills necessary for success in academic settings.

One key feature of EAP is its emphasis on teaching English in a way that is closely aligned with the demands of academic research. This means that EAP courses often focus on developing the specific skills and strategies that students may need to succeed in academic settings, such as reading academic texts, writing research papers, and participating in academic discussions. In addition, EAP often incorporates elements of academic content into language instruction, helping students build their academic vocabulary and knowledge in specific subject areas. Overall, EAP is a specialized approach to English language instruction that is designed

to meet the unique needs of learners in academic settings. By equipping students with the linguistic and academic skills necessary for success in their studies, EAP plays an important role in promoting academic success and intercultural understanding.

The emergence of EAP had a distinct genesis, as recounted by Bob Jordan in the initial edition of JEAP. The development of the field in Britain had a unique starting point:

> In the 1960s, language support that was provided to international students tended to be on an ad hoc, part-time basis. As problems occurred or developed during studies, some kind of part-time help may have become available, often linked to ELT teacher-training courses in the Departments of Education. This sometimes led to the development of short courses, e.g. four weeks at the beginning of the students' studies. Birmingham University appears to have been the first to be seriously concerned about the needs of overseas students. Vera Adamson, who had joined the University in 1958, was appointed in 1962 to advise overseas students and to start induction courses. This involved analyzing students' problems, developing some teaching materials as well as teaching part-time, and trying to devise an analytical test.(Jordan, 2002, p.70)

Moreover, an integral aspect of EAP is the need for conducting a thorough Needs Analysis of diverse learners to design the syllabus, develop materials, select texts, set learning goals and tasks, and evaluate the success of courses and programs. In fact, needs assessment forms the very foundation of the entire EAP process, as underscored by Carkin's (2005) overview of EAP.

Over the years, numerous notable scholars have conducted critical analyses in the field of EAP. Examples of such scholars include Bridgeman and Carlson (1983), Johns (1981), Hutchinson and Waters (1987), and Munby (1978). Needs Analysis is now considered an essential step in developing English language provision in any new situation, as recognized by Zughoul and Hussein (1985). However, Coleman (1988) has problematized some of the existing needs models as discounting learners as individuals, and assuming that identifying needs necessarily leads to satisfying them, advocating for a more comprehensive and nuanced approach.

2.1. Nigerian university system and English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

Kimbrough (2013) observes that the university is a place where intellectual collisions occur. Kimbrough's (2013) observation posits that the university functions as a nexus wherein intellectual collisions are brought to fruition. In an attempt to establish a university where such collisions can occur, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's first president, pioneered the establishment of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with a strong emphasis on balanced learning and creating informed individuals exposed to both scientific and humanities knowledge. The university introduced the General Studies Programme (GSP) to provide essential knowledge in science and humanities while also emphasizing the development of English language skills. By the provision of the Decree and the recommendation of the National Universities Commission (NUC), other Nigerian universities established units of General Studies (University of Maiduguri, 2015). The curriculum for the GSP was developed by a combined team of British and American experts, showcasing the university's commitment to enhancing students' English language competence as a vital tool for academic success and effective communication in society. Typically, first-year university students, regardless of their English proficiency level, frequently arrive at their institutions with inadequate skills in the English Language. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to bolster and enrich the language competencies of first-year university students during the early stages of their academic voyage. This proactive approach enables students to achieve elevated levels of academic accomplishment and equips them more effectively to confront future professional obstacles and actively participate in societal contexts. While certain factors, such as diverse educational backgrounds, regional language influences, and limited exposure to English as a medium of instruction, may influence students' language abilities upon university entry, the General Studies Programme endeavors to tackle this challenge. By employing supplementary strategies and support systems, the program strives to enhance English language proficiency among incoming students.

In response to the growing need for effective communication in English across academic and professional settings, course designers in ESP have been consistently seeking ways to enhance university students' proficiency in fundamental language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are typically encompassed within the domain of EAP and are an integral component of the curriculum of the Use of English and Communication Skills in Nigerian universities. By prioritizing the development of these

core competencies, ESP course designers aim to equip students with the necessary language skills to succeed in academic and professional contexts where English is used as the medium of communication. As stated by Adegbite (2012, p.2), the introduction of the Use of English as a course in Nigerian tertiary institutions is aimed not only at improving the students' communicative competence, but also at enabling them to learn their courses effectively and perform well in both academic and social settings. Thus, when developing a Use of English course for Nigerian university students, it is ideal for the course objectives, content, and materials to not only address the communication needs of the university setting, but also meet the expectations of future employers or clients in case students opt for self-employment. Additionally, the Use of English instructors must identify the language skills that students require to achieve overall competence in the target language. Therefore, the Use of English curriculum should prioritize the receptive skills of listening and reading and the productive skills of speaking and writing, in addition to teaching grammar. Wei and Flaitz (2005) argue that EAP plays a crucial role in helping English as a Second Language (ESL) students develop the necessary language skills to succeed in their academic and professional pursuits. Mo (2005) further asserts that providing pre-university students, such as first-year Nigerian university students, with ample opportunities to develop their EAP skills can equip them with a solid foundation in academic English, thereby enhancing their ability to learn more effectively at an advanced level.

Furthermore, in order to enhance the language proficiency of Nigerian university students in English, which is the official language and medium of instruction in the country, the Nigerian National Universities Commission (NUC) introduced the Use of English courses in the curriculum of Nigerian universities. The institution of General Studies in Nigerian Universities originated with the University law 1961, (E.N.L. No 21, of 1961, status 6) as "the College of General Studies," included in the thirty-six Colleges listed for establishment. Afterwards, the National Universities Commission (NUC) approved minimum academic requirements for General Studies in all Nigerian Universities in 1989. The incorporation of diverse language skills within the curriculum of an EAP course has the potential to greatly enhance the literary abilities of students, thereby augmenting their proficiency in the numerous skills required to excel in their academic pursuits. Within the Nigerian context, new university students undergo a comprehensive English language course during their first year of study, which is meticulously crafted to facilitate the acquisition of precise and effective language usage. The course primarily focuses on bolstering the grammar and writing skills of students. As such, this course sets a strong foundation for the students to excel in their academic pursuits, as evidenced by a specific assignment given in the form of writing. This particular essay writing assignment was chosen as it provided an ideal opportunity for the students to apply the fundamental principles of grammar and writing that they had acquired during the initial three weeks of their academic program.

The primary aim of this investigation is to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction in English grammar and usage in this course by analyzing students' proficiency in academic writing. Through this analysis, the study intends to provide insights into the most effective methods of teaching basic grammar and writing skills to students in higher education. The findings of this research will thus inform pedagogical approaches to teaching English for academic purposes and contribute to the development of more effective teaching practices in this field.

2.2. Cohesion and coherence in academic writing

According to Mawardi, 2011, p. 1), writing is one of the core language skills, alongside speaking, listening, and reading. It is considered fundamental for students to learn because it is a productive skill that demonstrates their proficiency in using the language and highlights talented students in this area. Furthermore, writing provides a platform for students to express their ideas and thoughts on paper (Harsyaf & Izmi, 2009, p. 4). To fulfil this objective, it is essential to ensure that writing exhibits unity, coherence, and appropriate development.

When it comes to writing, it is considered a form of discourse that should be well-constructed and possess cohesion and coherence to ensure unity. As noted by Halliday and Hasan (1989, p.2), a text or paragraph that employs cohesion and coherence is indicative of good writing. Cohesion refers to the linguistic devices and techniques used to connect various parts of a text, such as conjunctions, pronouns, and repetition. Coherence refers to the overall clarity and logical flow of a text, which is achieved through the proper arrangement and organization of ideas and information. Therefore, to produce a well-written text, it is crucial to use appropriate cohesive devices and ensure that the text exhibits coherence in terms of its organization, structure, and ideas. By doing so, the text will have a unified and cohesive character, which will enhance its clarity and effectiveness in conveying its intended message to the readers. In other words, cohesion and

coherence refer to the logical and linguistic connections between different parts of a sentence, paragraph, or text, which ultimately contribute to a unified whole. These elements are crucial in conveying the intended message of the author accurately. When a text exhibits coherence, the writer has established a clear connection between sentences, paragraphs, and overall structure, making it easy for the reader to follow and understand. This connection not only benefits the writer, but also the reader. In cohesion, the flow and connection of a written text arise from the linguistic links between its surface elements. As a result, the reader can better comprehend the content and meaning of the text.

In recent years, the increasing number of students in English-speaking countries has prompted scholars in cohesion studies to shift their focus to cohesion usage in Second Learner (L2) students' writing. A key concern in this area is the relationship between cohesion and writing quality among L2 students. However, the findings have been somewhat inconsistent (Liu & Braine, 2005). While some researchers have found no direct correlation between cohesion and writing quality (see Castro, 2004), others have reached the opposite conclusion. For instance, Chiang (2003, p. 471) contends, through his analysis of cohesive conditions and perception of writing quality in L2 learners' writing, that cohesion is "the best predictor of writing quality." Yang and Sun (2012) came to a similar conclusion and demonstrated that the proper use of cohesive ties was significantly correlated with writing quality. Although it remains unclear whether there is a definite correlation between cohesion and writing quality, it is generally accepted that cohesion is an important aspect of L2 learners' writing quality.

Therefore, in the realm of academic writing, writers must engage in critical thinking and logically present their ideas to persuade their readers. They are expected to sequence their thoughts effectively so that their arguments are coherent and understandable to the reader, as emphasized by scholars such as Jones (2011) and Hyland (2005). Furthermore, writers must utilize metadiscourse, which comprises various linguistic devices, to effectively communicate their propositions and engage their audience.

3. Theoretical framework

The term "metadiscourse" was first introduced by Zelling Harris in 1959 to explore language in practical use and how writers can influence the reader's comprehension of a text (Hyland, 2005). In essence, metadiscourse refers to the linguistic cues employed to structure a discourse or convey the writer's attitude towards its subject matter or audience (Hyland, 2005). Effective utilization of these markers in academic essays can substantially enhance their overall quality.

Various models have been proposed in attempts to conceptualize metadiscourse, including those by Schiffrin (1980), Williams (1981), Sinclair (1991), Kopple (1985), and Crismore et al. (1993). Nonetheless, Hyland (2005) presented the most extensive framework for investigating metadiscourse, which is adopted in this study.

To resolve the longstanding debate surrounding metadiscourse, Hyland (2004) established three crucial principles for reevaluating its theoretical foundation. The first principle asserts that metadiscourse, distinct from the propositional aspects of discourse, is an essential component of textual meaning that considers the reader's needs, existing knowledge, understandings, relative status, and intertextual experiences about the context. The second principle states that these markers embody the interaction between the writer and the reader in various ways. The third principle clarifies that metadiscourse only pertains to relations that are internal to the discourse, rather than external or experiential.

Hyland (2005) categorizes metadiscourse markers into two groups: interactive and interactional markers. Interactive markers relate to discourse organization and represent the writer's evaluation of which section or idea requires more explanation to limit and direct potential misunderstandings of the text. Interactional markers pertain to the strategies used to regulate the writer's personality in the text, as well as the level of reader involvement (Hyland, 2005).

Table 1
A model of metadiscourse in academic texts (Hyland, 2005)

Category	Function	Examples
Interactive Resources	**Help to guide reader through the text**	
Transition markers	Express semantic relation between main clauses	In addition/but/thus/and
Frame markers	Refers to discourse acts, sequences, or text stages	Finally/to conclude/my purpose is
Endophoric markers	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Note above/see figure/in section 2
Evidential markers	Refer to source of information from other texts	According to X/(Y, 1990)/Z states
Code glosses	Help readers grasp meanings of ideational material	Namely/e.g./such as/in other words
Interactional resources	**Involve the readers in the argument**	
Hedges	Without writer's full commitment to proposition	Might/perhaps/possible/about
Boosters	Emphasize force or writer's certainty in proposition	In fact/definitely/it is clear that
Attitude markers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	Unfortunately/I agree/ Surprisingly
Engagement markers	Explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	Consider/note that/you can see that
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to author(s)	I/we/my/our

However, the present study is focused on the examination of interactive markers, given their critical role in various types of writing, particularly for ESL learners. Interactive markers are considered fundamental since they facilitate the presentation of ideas and information coherently and convincingly to the readers (Hyland, 2005). Furthermore, interactive markers provide writers with a mechanism to regulate the flow of knowledge and express their intended interpretations with precision (Hyland, 2005). The taxonomy of interactive markers encompasses five categories, namely, endophoric markers, evidential markers, code glosses, transition markers, and frame markers.

3.1. Metadiscourse and interactive markers in academic writing

In recent years, the focus on academic writing has shifted towards recognizing the importance of rhetorical and interactive features within written texts, and in particular in highlighting the social relationship between writers and their readers (Franzosi& Vicari, 2018; Hyland & Jiang, 2018; Pérez-Llantada, 2010; Qin &Uccelli, 2019). This perspective emphasizes the role of readers in comprehending the author's intentions and their stance towards the subject matter. Within this context, one crucial aspect that has gained attention is the use of metadiscourse markers to enhance the organization and effectiveness of academic writing. Several experimental studies have been conducted to explore the impact of explicit instruction on metadiscourse markers and their influence on learners' writing performance in both first and second-language contexts.

Feng and Hu(2014) conducted a comparative investigation of interactive metadiscourse across the fields of applied linguistics, education, and psychology. Utilizing Hyland's metadiscourse framework, the study examined the presence and usage of five types of interactive metadiscourse, along with their subtypes, in a corpus comprising 120 research articles. The analyses yielded noteworthy disparities in the frequency of reformulators, comparative and inferential transitions, sequencers, and non-linear references across different research paradigms. Additionally, marked variations were identified in the utilization of exemplifiers, comparative transitions, linear references, and integral citations among the disciplines investigated. These observed differences can be explained in terms of the distinct epistemological perspectives underlying qualitative and quantitative research paradigms, as well as the diverse knowledge-sharing structures prevailing in the respective disciplines under investigation.

Furthermore, Mardani (2017) investigated the effect of metadiscourse explicit instruction on listening comprehension among a sample of 50 undergraduate students. The participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group, which received instruction on metadiscourse markers alongside a process-based approach, and the control group, which only received instruction through the process-based approach. The results indicated that explicit instruction on metadiscourse significantly improved students' listening comprehension. This study emphasizes the importance of metadiscourse markers as a crucial aspect of language learning and suggests the need for further attention from researchers in this area.

Similarly, Vahid, Dastjerdi, and Shirzad (2010) and Taghizadeh and Tajabadi (2013) conducted experimental studies to evaluate the impact of metadiscourse marker instruction on the writing performance of learners. While their research solely centered on instructing metadiscourse markers without teaching explicit writing skills, both studies demonstrated that providing metadiscourse instruction positively influenced learners' writing proficiency.

In an ESL context such as Nigeria, there remains a relatively limited exploration of interactive resources in academic writing. This gap in research presents an opportunity for further investigation into the use and effectiveness of metadiscourse markers in improving writing skills among Nigerian university students and other ESL learners.

As the literature on interactive resources in academic writing expands, it becomes increasingly apparent that interactive features in a text play a pivotal role in organizing the content to facilitate readers in discerning the writer's intentions. These features contribute to the surface cohesion of the text while also influencing the comprehension of the propositional material. The function of interactive features encompasses linking various segments of the text, providing elaborations, signaling different stages of the text, and referring to information located elsewhere in the same text. By performing these functions, interactive features not only enhance the coherence of the text but also engage in an internal dialogue with readers, reflecting the writer's assessment of how to effectively present information in a manner that is both understandable and persuasive to specific readers.

3.2. Previous studies on metadiscourse

Numerous studies conducted in various parts of the world have explored the usage of metadiscourse in the academic writing of university students. For example, Tan and Eng (2014) investigated the use of metadiscourse among Malaysian undergraduates and found that both groups of writers preferred the use of interactional metadiscourse over interactive metadiscourse. Also, Anwardeen, Luyee, Gabriel, and Kalajahi (2013) examined the usage of metadiscourse in the argumentative writing of Malaysian college students and observed that students tend to use textual metadiscourse instead of interpersonal metadiscourse, committing several errors in their usage. In the EFL context, Gholami, Nejad, and Pour (2014) conducted a study on the use of metadiscourse devices in the argumentative essays of EFL undergraduates and found that the students made various errors, with overuse of metadiscourse devices being the most common. In a recent study, Shafique, Shahbaz, and Hafeez (2019) compared research articles written by native English and Pakistani writers and found that Pakistani writers tend to use more interactive markers, while interactional markers are frequent in native English academic writers.

In Nigeria, there have been limited studies that have explored the use of metadiscourse among university students. However, Haruna et al. (2018) conducted a study examining the metadiscoursal choice and its influence on the success of final year undergraduates' academic writing, where they found that many of the students did not use or wrongly used the devices. Additionally, Akinseye (2021) examined the metadiscursive markers in L2 PhD theses abstracts of five disciplines in Nigerian university and showed the predominance of interactive metadiscourse markers across the disciplines. These studies demonstrate the importance of investigating the use of metadiscourse in undergraduate writing and highlight the need for further research in this area.

4. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative designs. The qualitative component examines the types and usages of discursive strategies employed in expository writing. On the other hand, the quantitative component shows the frequency of occurrence of these strategies. The study uses a sample of 100 expository essays on the topic of "The Realities of Virtual Learning in the University of Ibadan: The Pros and Cons*."* The expository essay genre was specifically chosen, as it required the students to present a clear and coherent explanation or analysis of a topic, utilizing a structured and organized approach to support their arguments. The sample are drawn from the population of newly admitted students who had received basic English grammar and writing skills instruction during their first three weeks of the academic program. They are also students who represent a range of academic disciplines and levels of proficiency in English language. The participants were administered a writing task to evaluate their writing proficiency. Specifically, they were instructed to compose an essay of approximately 350 words in response to a provided writing prompt. It is worth noting that the anonymity of the students was ensured throughout the process.

5. Data analysis
5.1. Transitional markers as a discursive strategy in the selected expository essay

Transitional markers, also known as logical connectors, are used to establish semantic relationships between main clauses or sentences in a discourse. These markers are considered as metadiscourse when they serve an internal function within the discourse rather than an external one, helping the reader to interpret the connections between ideas presented. Common examples of transitional markers include "in addition,""thus,""and,""moreover," furthermore,""therefore," and "on the other hand." By using these markers, the writer can guide the reader through the logical progression of their argument, making it easier to follow and understand. Instances of this are as follows:

Table 2
Distribution of transitional markers in the expository essays

Transitional markers	Frequency	Percentage
in addition/additionally	19	10.38
furthermore	20	10.92
unfortunately	4	2.19
moreover	9	4.91
however	31	16.94
in conclusion	30	16.4
in summary	1	0.55
also	18	9.84
but	6	3.3
surprisingly	1	0.55
subsequently	1	0.55
amazingly	1	0.55
thus	3	1.64
as a result	4	2.19
therefore	5	2.73
despite that/in spite of	5	2.7
conclusively	2	1.09
similarly	3	1.64
on the other hand	5	2.73
nevertheless/nonetheless	5	2.73
in contrast/in contrary	2	1.09
hence	2	1.09
similarly	3	1.64
now	1	0.55
although	1	0.55
consequently	1	0.55
Total	183	100

Let us consider some examples from the texts:

Example 1
1) **However**, the use of online classes has its advantages and its disadvantages…. (Text 1)
2) …**In conclusion,** online classes have come to stay in Nigeria particularly at the premier university of Ibadan, although, it has some disadvantages but yet its advantages are very much

important and as such, it is easier, convenient, teaches students how to use internet better, and it is modern in nature…. (Text 1)

Example 2

1) …However, it is quite understandable that the university did not want to put the lives of students at stake…. (Text 8)

2) …In conclusion, new things require a new system, so adequate provisions should be made by the University management to strike a balance between the physical and virtual learning and cover up the lapses pertaining to the smooth running of the virtual learning process…. (Text 8)

Generally, the marker, "however" is one of the most commonly deployed transitional markers in most academic writing, and specifically the most deployed in the analyzed essays as shown in the frequency table above. In Examples 1(1) and 2(1) above, the transitional marker is used to make a shift in focus from the preceding information, and to signal a contrast respectively. It indicates that the following statement or argument may be different or contrary to what has been said before. It helps to connect ideas and create coherence in the text by showing the relationship between the preceding and subsequent information. In the given text in 1(1), "however" marks a shift in focus from the advantages of virtual learning to a consideration of the university's priority for students' safety. This shift in focus helps to maintain coherence in the discourse by acknowledging the possible concerns or limitations that may affect the implementation of virtual learning. On the other hand, the second use of "however" in 2(1) introduces a contrast between the benefits of virtual learning and the challenges faced by students in an ESL context. Also, the usage highlights the limitations or disadvantages of virtual learning, specifically in the context of students who may have difficulty accessing or affording the necessary tools for online classes. By introducing this contrast, the writer acknowledges the reality of the situation and opens up the possibility for further discussion or analysis of these challenges. Thus, when readers encounter the word "however," they expect that the writer is going to provide a counterargument or a limitation to what they have previously said. It alerts the readers that the writer is acknowledging a different perspective or presenting an alternative interpretation of the information presented. In this way, the word "however" helps to improve the coherence and logical flow of the text and makes the writer's argument more nuanced and sophisticated.

Furthermore, the next commonly used transitional marker in the analyzed text is "in conclusion." In academic writing, it is used as a discourse marker to signify to the reader that the writer is summarizing the main points or reiterating the thesis statement in the final paragraph of the text. This phrase aids the writer in organizing the text and guiding the reader through the arguments, while providing closure and a sense of finality to the text. By utilizing this marker, the writers emphasize the significance of their key points and create a lasting impression on the reader. By using "in conclusion," in Example 1(1) above, the writer signals that he/she is wrapping up the discussion and restates the thesis that online classes have come to stay in Nigeria despite their disadvantages. The conclusion also suggests that further improvements could be made to the virtual learning system to address the challenges faced by students and lecturers, indicating a call for action to improve the system. Also, in Example 2(2) above, "in conclusion" is used as a discourse strategy to summarize the key points and provide a closure to the essay. The use of "in conclusion" allows the writer to bring together the main ideas on a clear note, emphasizing the importance of finding a balance between the physical and virtual learning systems in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. However, if it is overused or misused, it can become repetitive and may weaken the impact of the argument. It is important to use it appropriately and sparingly to avoid diminishing its effectiveness. Additionally, writers should aim to use other discourse markers that signal the end of the essay or argument, such as "to sum up" or "in summary," to add variety to their writing and keep the readers engaged. As an ESL teacher, it may be helpful to introduce other alternatives and encourage students to experiment with different ways to signal the end of their writing. It is also important to note that some analyzed essays misuse the word "conclusively" instead of "in conclusion." Let us consider the example below:

Example 3

1) …**Conclusively**, It would seem best to adopt an open-minded view of technology implementation that would enhance the learning environment as some students still find it difficult to adapt to the new system…. (Text 3)

In the sample provided above, the word "conclusively" is used inappropriately because it is not a suitable transitional phrase to conclude the essay, as it is not preceded by any arguments or evidence that would be logically concluded. Precisely, "conclusively" refers to a way that settles an issue or decision; decisively, and in this context, it is not appropriate to use it to conclude the argument or present a final decision. Instead, the student could have used a more appropriate transitional phrase such as "in summary" or "to sum up,""conclusion" or "in conclusion." So, the sentence should be revised as: "in conclusion, it would seem best to adopt an open-minded view of technology implementation that would enhance the learning environment as some students still find it difficult to adapt to the new system."In the context of teaching English as a Second Language, it is crucial to teach students on the proper usage of transitional phrases. By teaching these phrases, students can effectively organize their ideas and connect them in a cohesively and understandably. Failing to use appropriate transitional phrases can result in confusion and misunderstandings, ultimately hindering effective communication. Therefore, ESL teachers need to prioritize teaching the correct use of transitional phrases to their students. A few other transitional markers in the analyzed texts include:

Example 4
2) …**Subsequently**, this pandemic forcefully brought about a new pattern of lifestyles called the "the new normal…. (Text 3)

3) **Furthermore**, most students lack the ability to focus on screens. (Text 3)

4) **Moreover**, students also develop bad posture and other physical,mental or emotional problems due to staying haunched in front of a screen. (Text 3)

5) **Additionally**, virtual system has denied science students access to the laboratory. (Text 3)

Transitional markers like "subsequently", "furthermore,""moreover," and "additionally," as used in the text above can be used as discursive strategies in academic writing to connect ideas and present a logical argument.

The use of "subsequently" in Example 4(2) above serves as a discursive strategy by linking the previous discussion to the new idea introduced in the sentence. Its discourse function is to show a relationship between two or more events or actions, indicating that one occurred after the other. In the clause above, it is used to connect a piece of writing by indicating the chronological order in which it occurred. It shows the causal relationship between the pandemic and the new pattern of life, which had a significant impact on people's lives and led to "the new normal." In other words, the transitional marker emphasizes the importance of the change that occurred due to the pandemic. It helps the writer to present information in a clear and organized way, making it easier for the reader or listener to follow the logical progression of their argument or narrative and helps the reader understand the cause-and-effect relationship between the two events.

Similarly, "furthermore" in 4(3) above is used to add new information to a previous statement or idea. Its discursive function is to indicate that the following information builds upon, supports, or strengthens the previous idea. It provides additional evidence to support the writer's argument. In the context of the selected essays, it is used to introduce additional disadvantages of virtual learning after the first disadvantage has been discussed. It connects the two ideas in the text and indicates that the following information builds upon the previous point. It shows that the lack of focus on screens is not just a personal issue, but a widespread problem among students. Using "furthermore" as a transitional marker provides additional evidence or support for the main point. It signals to the reader that the writer is building on a previous point and is introducing new information that strengthens the argument. In addition, the use of "furthermore" helps students vary their sentence structure and create a more interesting and engaging piece of writing.

In sample 4(4) above, the word "moreover" reveals an additional point that strengthens the previous idea. It is used to connect two ideas that are related and to introduce an idea that builds upon the previous argument. In the essay, "moreover" is used to introduce an additional point to support the advantages of virtual learning. It emphasizes the benefits of virtual learning, such as the efficiency of the virtual learning tools used

by lecturers, which in turn makes it easier for lecturers to deliver lessons to students. It supports the argument that there are negative consequences associated with screen time, and specifically highlights the physical and mental health impacts on students.

Also, in sample 4(5), the use of "additionally" is a discursive strategy that introduces a new point to support the writer's argument. This marker introduces a new point that reinforces or supplements the previous point(s). Apart from its function of connecting ideas and arguments, it further shows that the writer has considered multiple perspectives on a topic. In one instance, it highlights the negative impact of virtual systems on science students who require laboratory access, providing further evidence for the argument that online learning may not be suitable for all subjects. In another context, it indicates that the writer is about to present another advantage of virtual learning having already presented some benefits earlier. In other words, it shows the relationship between the previously discussed advantages of virtual learning and the new one about to be presented.

5.2. Frame markers as a discursive strategy in the selected expository essay

Frame markers are linguistic devices used to organize and structure texts for readers, with the primary purpose of aiding comprehension and facilitating effective communication. These markers can be categorized into four subtypes based on their functions: sequencers, topicalizers, discourse labels, and announcers. Sequencers refer to markers that indicate the chronological or logical order of information, such as "firstly,""secondly,""finally," or "to sum up." Topicalizers, on the other hand, signal shifts in topic or focus, and include markers like "with regard to,""as for," and "speaking of". Discourse labels are markers that introduce or label a discourse unit, such as "the main point,""the problem," or "the solution," while announcers indicate the speaker or writer's intention or purpose, such as "my aim,""my intention," or "I propose." Further examples of frame markers include "finally,""my purpose,""firstly,""to sum up,""in short,""return to,""in regard to," and "aim." By using these markers, writers structure their writing in a way that is easy to follow and understand, and guide readers through the various stages of the discourse.

Table 3:
Distribution of frame markers in the expository essays

Frame markers	Frequency	Percentage
to begin with/to start with	2	3.85
firstly/first	14	26.92
secondly/second	14	26.92
thirdly	3	5.77
in the first place/first of all	3	5.77
finally	8	15.38
on a final note	1	1.92
last/lastly	5	9.62
first and foremost	2	3.85
Total	52	100

Some instances from the text include:

Example 5

1) **Firstly**, relating virtual learning to transportation, students love the idea of not waking early to catch the morning bus, not running down to the lecture room, not having to miss breakfast. They can receive lectures in the comfort of their rooms, whereby they get to maximize their time effectively…. (Text 15)

2) **Secondly**, most classes online are recorded and so it is accessible to the students at any time, they can re-listen to it over and over again unlike physical class where they can't record because using your phone during the class is a punishable offense…. (Text 15)

3) **Thirdly**, students have access to other materials apart from the material the school lecturers are using to lecture, which is an advantage to them…. (Text 15)

4) **Finally**, the main reason behind virtual learning in the University of Ibadan is to prevent the spread of Coronavirus, which has been achieved to a high rate, so virtual learning may not be convenient to all but it has helped to keep both the students and their lectures alive…. (Text 15)

In Example 5(1) above, the discourse function of "firstly" is to express the first main point or argument that the writer or speaker makes. It is used to introduce the first idea in a series of ideas or arguments that will be presented in the text or speech about the pros and cons of virtual learning at the University of Ibadan. This marker is a common discourse marker used to signal the beginning of a new argument or idea in academic writing, particularly in ESL situations, as it helps to organize and structure the ideas in a clear and logical manner. In this context, it introduces the first advantage of virtual learning, which is related to transportation. The use of "firstly" allows the reader to anticipate additional points that later follow, and further helps to guide them through the writer's argument.

In Example 5(2), the discourse function of the word "secondly" is similar to that of "firstly." It points to the second main point or argument in the series. It helps to organize the text or speech by showing the reader that the writer is moving on to a new idea. The use of "secondly" in the text above introduces the second point that supports the argument being made about the pros of virtual learning. The writer uses "secondly" to transition smoothly from the first point about transportation to the second point about the accessibility of recorded lectures. In the sampled essay, "secondly" is used as a discourse marker to present the second supporting point or argument. It is very useful in organizing ideas while writing and making clear connections between different points, thus improving the coherence of the text.

In 5(3), "thirdly" is used in a similar way to "firstly" and "secondly," but here, it signals the third main point or argument in the series. The marker introduces the third advantage or benefit of virtual learning after introducing the first and the second benefits of virtual learning. This point underscores the fact that virtual learning provides students with access to additional materials beyond what is presented by their instructors, which is a significant benefit for them.

In 5(4) above, the discourse function of "finally" signals the final main point or argument in the series. It indicates that the writer is ending the series of ideas or arguments and is summarizing the text about the pros and cons of virtual learning and offering a final evaluation of virtual learning. The use of "finally" in this context shows that the writer is ready to present the last point, which is the main reason behind the implementation of virtual learning in the University of Ibadan. This final point serves as a concluding thought to the entire discussion and emphasizes the importance of virtual learning in the current context.

Generally, in academic writing, using these markers can also improve coherence and cohesion, which are important factors in achieving a higher level of writing proficiency. They help to connect ideas, indicate transitions between paragraphs, and provide a clear roadmap for the reader to follow. However, it is important to use these frame markers appropriately and effectively. Overuse or misuse of these words can make the writing seem repetitive or unskilled. It is also important to vary it rather than relying too heavily on one particular word.

5.3. Endophoric markers as a discursive strategy in the selected expository essay

Endophoric markers are linguistic devices that refer to other elements within the same text, such as words, phrases, or sentences. These markers provide additional information or context by referencing other parts of the text and are used to help guide the reader towards the writer's intended interpretation. The process of employing endophoric markers involves providing supporting arguments and additional information that is made available by referencing specific elements within the text. By doing so, the writer can steer the reader towards a preferred interpretation by emphasizing or clarifying certain aspects of the text. Also, an endophoric marker could refer back to a previously mentioned noun or a repeated phrase that serves to reinforce a particular idea or theme. By using endophoric markers effectively, writers can help ensure that their message is communicated clearly and effectively to their intended audience. Examples include: "noted above….," "in section 2 above…." etc.

Table 4
*Distribution of endophoric markers in the expository essay*s

Endophoric markers	Frequency	Percentage
it (virtual learning)	38	73.1
this (virtual learning)	12	23.1
I, we, us, you	2	3.85
Total	52	100

Example 6
1) **It** is a recent system of learning that has been popularized due to the coronavirus pandemic…. (Text 11)
2) **This** learning system has its pros and cons which shall be addressed in subsequent paragraphs….(Text 11)

Example 7
3) As this is the first time **we** will be using this learning means… and helps **us** adapt and advance further from archaic ways and methods to technological ways that are easier. (Text 13)

The mostly deployed endophoric marker is the pronoun "it." In 6(1) above, the endophoric marker "it" is a versatile and commonly used linguistic device in English. It refers back to a previously mentioned or implied element within a text, thereby creating coherence and connecting different parts of the text. In the text provided, "it" is used as an endophoric marker several times to refer back to the concept of virtual learning that was introduced at the beginning of the text. By doing so, the writer is able to present the points in a clear manner, thereby pointing the readers back to the main subject matter "virtual learning," while also highlighting its advantages and disadvantages.

Similarly, in 6(2), "this" is used to refer back to a concept, argument, or idea that was introduced earlier in the text. In the text provided, "this" is used as a deictic reference to refer to a specific point earlier made by the writer. In the context of the sample above, the pronoun refers back to the concept of virtual learning that was introduced in the previous sentence. By using "this" in such away, the writer is able to create a clear link between the two sentences and maintain coherence in the text.

Also, in 7(3), the discourse function of the pronouns "we" and "us" is to refer to a group of people that includes the writer and at least one other person. These pronouns create a sense of unity, inclusivity, and shared responsibility among the group members. In discourse, "we" and us" are used to express solidarity, establish a sense of belonging, and to emphasize commonalities among group members. By using "we" and "us," the writers are able to position themselves as members of a group and to express opinions, experiences, and ideas that are shared by the group. In the given text, "we" and "us" are used as endophoric markers to refer to the writer and other students who are experiencing the realities of virtual learning at the University of Ibadan. It suggests that the writer is not alone in their thoughts and opinions about virtual learning. It also gives a collective voice to the students, making their views more impactful and persuasive.

5.4 Code glosses as a discursive strategy in the selected expository essay

In order to convey their intended message effectively, writers often employ additional language or phrasing to clarify or elaborate upon the ideas that they have already presented. This can take the form of rephrasing or restating the same information in different words, explaining the concept in more detail, or providing examples or context that help to illustrate the meaning. One way writers can signal to readers that they are providing additional information is through the use of certain linguistic markers or signposts, such as the expressions "in other words," "for example," or "such as." These terms help to signal that the writer is providing a further explanation of a particular term or concept, and can help to guide the reader towards a better understanding of the writer's intended meaning.

Example 8
1) **for example** the advantages of virtual learning is there first it'll be able to cover the curriculum faster, the students can have a wider source of knowledge by using the internet, it's more efficient in terms of learning….

2) **for example** , if a student needs to travel that doesn't mean such student won't be able to attend classes because all what the student needs to do is just to have access to the internet and such student will be able to attend the class….

3) **for instance,** the University of Ibadan has many populations, it will be very difficult for people to maintain social distance….

4) Learning is an online-based platform that offers students new understanding, knowledge, behaviors, skills, values, attitudes, and preferences online through the use of Internet and social media platforms **such as** Zoom, Telegram and Whatsapp….

In Example 8(1), 8(2) and 8(3) above, "for example" and "for instance" provide a specific instance or illustration of something that has been mentioned or is being discussed. It shows the reader that the following information is a concrete example that clarifies or expands upon a previous point or idea. Both are commonly used in persuasive writing or speaking to support an argument or claim by providing evidence or demonstrating the validity of a statement. In the given text, the discourse function of "for example" is to provide specific instances that support the writer's argument regarding the advantages and disadvantages of virtual learning. In 8(1), the writer uses "for example" to highlight some of the advantages of virtual learning, such as faster coverage of the curriculum and wider access to knowledge through the internet. The use of "for example" here helps to illustrate and clarify the writer's points, making it easier for the reader to understand the benefits of virtual learning. On the other hand, in 8(2), the discourse strategy of "for example" is used to provide concrete instances that illustrate the advantages of virtual learning, while in 8(3), the discourse function of "for instance" in the text provides an illustration of the point being made. In this case, it explains how the adoption of virtual learning in Nigeria's higher learning institutions, including the University of Ibadan, has been a response to the COVID-19 outbreak. It provides a specific instance of a broader trend, in order to make the point more concrete and tangible.

5.5. Evidential markers as a discursive strategy in the selected expository essay
In academic discourse, evidentials are linguistic devices that are employed to refer to external sources of information, such as other academic publications, research studies, or expert opinions. The purpose of using evidentials is to support or strengthen the arguments being made in the text by incorporating external evidence that lends credibility and validity to the author's claims. Evidential markers are typically expressed in the form of academic attributions or citations, which provide the necessary information about the source being referenced, such as the author's name, publication title, date, and page numbers. These markers help to not only credit the original source but also enable readers to locate and verify the information themselves, thereby enhancing the overall quality and reliability of the text. In academic writing, the use of evidentials is considered a vital aspect of scholarly research, as it helps to establish the author's credibility and expertise and demonstrates their familiarity with existing research and literature in their field. By incorporating evidentials effectively, writers can convey their ideas and arguments more convincingly, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their respective disciplines. Examples include: "According to X;""Z states."

Example 9
1) **According to** Simonson and Schlosser (2006)virtual learning is defined as that learning that can functionally and effectively occur in the absence of traditional classroom environments…. (Text 79)

The only instance of evidential in the entire essay is exemplified above in 79(1). The discourse function of "according to" is to introduce an external source of information or an opinion from a specific person, typically an expert or authority, that supports or adds credibility to the writer's argument or claim. In academic writing, "according to" is often used to attribute a statement, finding, or theory to a specific academic source, such as a journal article or book. This helps the writer to establish authority and expertise by demonstrating knowledge of existing research and literature in the field, while also providing evidence to support their argument. In the instance above, it provides information that is based on the authority or research of Schlosser and Simonson (2006) and is using it to support the argument about the benefits of virtual learning. The phrase "according to"is commonly used in academic writing to introduce evidence or support for a claim, and is often followed by

a citation or attribution. In this case, it helps to establish the credibility and validity of the author's argument by providing a reliable source for the information presented. However, the use of evidentials is not commonly found in the analyzed expository essays of students due to various factors. Firstly, students may not fully understand the significance of incorporating external evidence to bolster their arguments. Secondly, they may lack the necessary skills or knowledge to locate and properly cite relevant sources to support their claims. Thirdly, they may lack confidence in their ability to critically analyze and evaluate sources, and may rely excessively on their own subjective viewpoints or personal experiences. Moreover, students may perceive the use of evidentials as unnecessary, particularly if they are writing for a less formal or academic audience. Finally, inadequate instruction or limitations in the curriculum may contribute to students' lack of proficiency in using evidentials effectively.

6. Results and Discussion

The overall results, as presented in Table 5 below, highlight the distribution of various interactive markers in the analyzed texts.

Table 5
Overall distribution of interactive markers in the expository essays

Interactive Markers	Frequency	Percentage
Transitional markers	183	62.24
Frame markers	52	17.69
Code glosses	6	2.04
Evidential markers	1	0.34
Endophoric markers	52	17.69
Total	294	100

The findings of this study underscore the significance of incorporating interactive resources as viable discursive strategies in the teaching of academic writing to undergraduate students in an ESL context. The study demonstrates that these resources can enhance the coherence and cohesion of academic writing produced by ESL students. Therefore, educators need to integrate these strategies into their teaching methods to help students improve their academic writing skills.

One significant finding from the study is the high frequency of transitional markers in the analyzed essays. Transitional markers are used to indicate the sequence of ideas, show contrast, compare, and emphasize with certain points. Therefore, incorporating transitional markers in academic writing can enhance the coherence and clarity of the text. Furthermore, frame markers are a viable tool in introducing and concluding ideas, emphasizing key points, and providing context for the argument. Therefore, they are important in helping readers to follow the argument and understand the purpose of the text. Also, endophoric markers are important in academic writing because they help to maintain coherence and avoid repetition because they can be used to refer to a previously mentioned idea, introduce a new idea, or provide a link between ideas. These markers can help to organize the ideas in the writing and enhance its clarity. It is therefore essential for educators to focus on teaching these strategies to their students so that they can produce more effective academic writing. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of not overlooking less frequently used markers such as evidential markers and code glosses. These markers can also play a crucial role in enhancing the persuasiveness and coherence of academic writing. For instance, evidentials help to establish the credibility of the argument and demonstrate the writer's knowledge of the field, while code glosses help to clarify the meaning of technical terms and ensure that the reader is not confused or distracted by unfamiliar vocabulary. Thus, educators should not underestimate the teaching of these markers and should integrate them into their teaching methods. By incorporating interactive resources in the teaching of academic writing skills, educators can help ESL students produce more coherent, organized, and persuasive academic writing.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of incorporating interactive resources and discursive strategies in the teaching of academic writing skills to undergraduate students in an ESL context. The insights provided in the analyses serve as a useful guide for educators in developing their teaching methods. The study reveals that educators need to focus on teaching transitional markers, frame markers, code glosses, evidential markers, and endophoric markers to help students produce effective academic writing. Hence, it is crucial for educators to incorporate these strategies in their teaching methods to help ESL students produce more coherent, organized, and persuasive academic writing that meets the expectations of academic writing in an ESL context.

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