

Effects of discourse markers use on students' argumentative essay writing through process writing approach

Ms. Meseret Getnet

Bahir Dar University, P.O.Box 79, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia
Corresponding Author: mesigetnet@yahoo.com Tel: +251 922 273 779

Abstract

Written discourse markers are an important aspect of academic writing. The main purpose of this study endeavored to test whether or not taking discourse markers instruction through process approach enhances students writing skills, identify if there is a significant difference between high scorer essays and low scorer essays in the use of discourse markers as well as to find out the students over all reaction towards discourse markers use after intervention. To meet these objectives, a study was conducted among second year English Language students' who were selected using purposive sampling method. Data were gathered through tests, students essay corpus and interview. The collected data were analyzed in repeated measures ANOVA. The results of this study indicated that there was a statistical significance difference between the pre and post intervention. From the students' essay corpus the result indicated that before the intervention participants employed very limited number of markers; moreover, some participants used the markers repeatedly. Some markers also employed as if they are compound words. However, from post test 1 & 2, majority students improved their writing in employing markers. The interview result revealed that all respondents stated that discourse markers are highly important and they feel good using them in their composition. Data from the interview transcript also provided that increased knowledge of discourse markers has made a difference to students writing. Finally, it was conclude that giving emphasis for written discourse markers during teaching as well as correcting students' written production is vital for students writing improvement. It was recommended that teachers need to be more aware of various types of discourse markers. Teachers should provide students at least with the different types of cohesive devices in order to teach writing more efficiently. Moreover, integrating reading with writing could help students learn about cohesion through discourse analysis.

Keywords: Written discourse markers, process writing approach, essay corpus, argumentative, coherence, cohesion

Introduction

For many years writing was considered differently by various language scholars. For instance, in the era of grammar translation method, the focus of language teaching was developing grammatical aspect of the language and learning. Writing was considered as one tool for evaluating advanced knowledge students' grammar. Unlike current approaches, which concentrate on the production of new meaning (Richards & Rogers, 1999). Next to Grammar translation method, the Audio-lingual method concentrates on spoken dialogs and rote drills. Teaching and learning of writing is considered as a matter of copying model text. Students are tried to practice writing through the given model, and they are encouraged to write or produce a text which is similar to a model text (Hyland, 2003).

In recent years, second language pedagogy has shifted towards a communicative or proficiency oriented approach. Until 1970, researching on writing has spent much time on studying the factors outside the writer by emphasizing how second language learners can use the language accurately and fluently than

studying how writing as one productive skill can be developed, how people write, what are the strategies of good writers, and what is done in human mind while writing (Rammel, 2009).

However, writing skills continuously rose in the mid 1970s to present due to the benefits of second language learners in the developments of writing skills and the explanations of its intervening in academic contexts (Leki, 2003; Matsuda, 1999). Kroll (2003) stated that writing involved 'process theory' and 'the composing process', where many felt that the focus of the writing course in the writing process was a theoretical development when it was first popularized and introduced (Akindele, 2011; Chen, 2007; Crewe, 1990). However, a more precise statement was the process insights enhanced the methodological breakthrough in terms of the teaching of writing. Kroll (2003) also believed that every writer either from the beginner until the professional writer, engage in some processes in completing a given writing task. In addition, according to McNamara, Crossley & McCarthy (2010) writing well produces a substantial challenge for students and a crucial importance for achievement in an extensive diversity of circumstances and professions. Aligned with this view, Crowhurst (1990) also stated that in order to communicate convincingly with others at large such as peers, colleagues, coworkers, teachers and community, effective writing is apparently crucial.

In terms of textual coherence, Carrel (1982) claimed that text cohesion is not necessarily a written property manifested by grammatical or lexical connective ties, but cohesion is an outcome of coherence where the readers are able to connect ideas from their schemata. She proposed that in teaching writing and composition in second language, cohesive ties should only act as secondary part to instruction in terms of the organization of the flows of ideas in text. This is due to her view, where she mentioned on how the explicit cohesive ties should not be relied on in unifying the text's idea when the readers have the ability to connect the text's idea without relying to it. Similarly, McNamara, et. al (2010) also stated that in terms of reading understanding, cohesion is crucial for its ease, but however it depends on the needs of the readers whether the facilitation benefits them. But on the other hand, they also asserted that the relationship between writing and cohesion has just a little understanding.

According to Thompson (2001), the audience awareness in writing is affected by the organization of text and the signal of the organization. Aligned with Thompson's (2001) idea regarding the relationship between the writer and the reader, McNamara, Crossley & McCarthy (2010) also have the same view where they believed that the writer's aim in conveying the thesis of composition should be aided by the cohesion which either across or within the text. Based on the previous studies reviewed by them, they found that many assumed that in order for the text to communicate successfully the writer's envisioned message to the reader, the essential condition involved a cohesive text.

Recently, several studies have been conducted on how EFL students compose and what difficulties they face in their own writing (Alfarwan, 2015; Akindele, 2011; Chen, 2007; Crewe, 1990; Wu, 2006). Enkvist (1990) considered the achievement of cohesion in writing as an indefinable, obstruct, and controversial concept which is difficult to teach and difficult to learn. We can deduce from this that the use of discourse markers in writing is one of the most difficult skills for learners of English to develop. A study suggests that L2 writing is generally shorter, less cohesive, and contains more errors than L1 writing (Hyland, 2003). The pioneers of cohesion and coherence who are Halliday and Hasan (1976) suggested that a text which is coherent must consider two conditions: one is a text must be consistent with context in which it is created, the other is a text must have cohesion, that is, all parts in a text must be connected by cohesive devices. A number of writing researchers such as Solomon (2001) reported that one of the major weaknesses Ethiopian students exhibit at different levels is writing in English and the situation is worse in secondary schools. The problem is acute even at postsecondary levels in which students fail to cope with the writing requirements in the courses they take (Abiy, 2013). Furthermore, the difficulty of writing skills is attributed to such factors as the method of instruction, the kind of teaching materials, beliefs and perceptions of the instructors on the current theories and practices, the class size, the interest of the learners to augment their writing proficiency, the time given for practicing are some of them (Abiy, 2013).

In particular, the process approach, which several researchers began to emphasize as the key in L2 writing from the late 1970s to the 1980s, has been influential in the classroom. Until then, the focus of writing instruction was the written product. Process writing is an approach to writing, where language learners focus on the process by which they produce their written products rather than on the products themselves. In the end, learners surely need to and are required to complete their products, yet the writing process itself is stressed more (Brown, 2001). Having said that, through extensive research, a number of approaches and techniques have been suggested regarding English as Foreign Language (EFL) or Second Language (L2) writing during the last decade. For example, using pictures, information gap activities,

integrated skills activity, collaborative learning approach, genre writing approach, process writing approach, bottom up Vs top down are some of the techniques and approaches of writing. Unfortunately, it is not easy to introduce these techniques directly into EFL classes.

By focusing on the writing process, learners come to understand themselves more, and find how to work through the writing. Brown (2001:336) states that "Writing is a thinking process; a writer produces a final written product based on their thinking after the writer goes through the thinking process". Many researchers like Brown acknowledged that writing is a recursive rather than a linear process that writers rarely write to a preconceived plan or model and that the process of writing creates its own form and meaning (Brown,2001). As Bolly (2011) notes that one of the most important requirements for designing effective writing tasks is to think of coherent, connected activity sets, which include pre-writing, during-writing and post-writing activities. Moreover, he stated that connected activity sets help students complete the writing task successfully and foster the process of writing. It would be more accurate to characterize writing as a recursive activity in which the writer moves backwards and forwards between drafting and revising with stages of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing (Brown, 2001). Therefore, the above-mentioned stages of process writing will be considered in the current study.

Globally, various scholars examined topics related to the effect of using written discourse markers. For example, studies on the relationship between cohesive devices and writing quality reported contradictory results over the past years. Although researchers have applied the same framework as proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), findings reveal that from a strong correlation between cohesive devices and writing quality to no correlation between the two. Both groups of studies which said strong correlation to no correlation between cohesive devices and writing quality which include participants from the same groups: L1 Chinese writers of English (Liu & Braine, 2005; Wenjun, 1999) and L1 English writers using their first language (Johnson, 1992; Tierney & Mosenthal, 1983). Thus, the authors stressed the need for further research in the area of teaching writing of cohesive devices regarding the significance and implementation in their text. Similarly, Alfarwan (2015) reported that his findings pave for future research; moreover, he strengthen that additional research should be conducted which supports instructional practices for teacher innovation and the introduction of supplementary tasks and materials in case of cohesion.

In addition to global research works, there are a number of local research studies which confirm the low standard of most university students' and secondary school students' writing skills in particular. Solomon (2001), for example, reports that these days most students at secondary school level do not produce written texts which meet the required standard. As he further explains, one of the reasons is the less attention given to the process approach in the teaching materials. With regard to the teaching learning of English as a foreign language in general and the writing skills in particular, studies in Ethiopia show that, many university students are not capable of using the English language effectively to carry out their academic activities successfully, and their writing ability is not satisfactory (Tadele, 1990; Italo, 1999). Additionally, Geremew (1999), in his study on second year university students' writing requirements and their performances, found that students have low writing ability in relation to what is expected of them.

As far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned and the local researches mentioned above, written discourse markers in Ethiopia do not get attention in an EFL classroom context. In connection to this, Widdowson (1990) believed that enough attention has not been paid to the way in which sentences are used in combination in order to form stretches of connected discourse. Hays (1992) suggested that there should be a shift from grammatical competence to discourse competence. Researchers such as (Jalilifar, 2008; Liu & Braine, 2005; Wenjun, 1999; Johnson, 1992; Tierney & Mosenthal, 1983) have studied discourse markers from the descriptive perspective mainly focused on the relationship between discourse markers and quality writing as well as emphasized on the distribution of types of discourse markers. Similarly, the present study investigated how much discourse markers influence students' writing proficiency. However, this study conducted at tertiary level and emphasized on grammatical as well as lexical cohesion. From the contrastive perspective, researchers for example, Connor (1984), Field & Oi (1992), and Perl (2008) have compared the use of connectives in native and nonnative speaker texts. In contrast, this study investigated on nonnative speakers. To determine the role of discourse markers and language skills, still more research needs to be done to address these devices in relation to second language learners writing proficiency. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the effects of written discourse markers on the students' composition through process writing approach.

Different views on cohesive ties

As mentioned earlier the most significant study of "cohesion" in the English language was conducted by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Their study has influenced a number of subsequent studies on textual relation, and their work on cohesion can be regarded as a starting point for late works that investigate relations in discourse or discourse coherence (Schiffrin, 1987; Blakemore, 2002). To them, cohesion is a property of a text. In the discourse or text, cohesion occurs when the interpretation of some element depends on that of another. Although Halliday and Hasan's (1976) *Cohesion in English* can be considered the most comprehensive work, there are considerable non-unified views among other researchers regarding certain cohesive elements.

The first point to be discussed here involves the concept of reference as a cohesive tie. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), in order to be cohesive, a reference has to be endophoric, "pointing to an element within the text itself. On the other hand, exophoric reference is non-cohesive because it involves a reference outside the text. Brown & Yule (1983) do not agree with this concept; they contend that the distinction between endophoric and exophoric reference is very difficult to draw. Below is the reason they provide:

In both cases, we must suppose, the processor has a mental representation. In one case he has a mental representation of what is in the world, in the other he has a mental representation of a world created by the discourse. In each case he must look into his mental representation to determine reference (Brown & Yule, 1983, p.201).

Furthermore, Brown & Yule (1983) contend that when encountering the problem of interpreting a reference, it is very unlikely that a reader would keep tracing back along the text until he or she reaches the last point of reference before starting to match it with the reference in the real world.

Another point that is worth discussing here involves cohesive relations. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesive relations must be established beyond sentence grammar and therefore involve only relations across sentences. Those within sentences are excluded because sentences are governed by grammatical rules. However, there are other different points of view. Gutwinski (1976) investigate both inter-sentential and intra-sentential relations that contribute to cohesion in literary texts in order to account for textual relations of both sentences and clauses. Fowler (1981), on the other hand, has a different view, proposing against restricting the use of a sentence as a unit of analysis.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) investigate the textual unity of English language. They confine themselves to the study of five categories of cohesive ties as lexical and grammatical relations: these are reference, substitution, ellipsis, lexical cohesion and conjunctions. Nevertheless, other linguists include other categories of cohesion in their investigations (Fraser, 1999 & Tanskanen, 2006). However, in the previous study of cohesion, Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework has been adopted by more researchers than that of other scholars who examined cohesion. Therefore, the researcher of this study also adopted Halliday and Hasan's taxonomy of cohesive ties because it is generally considered as a standard model of cohesion.

Cohesion and coherence in writing

Differences between spoken and written language would provide a justification for the importance of cohesion in writing. According to Chafe (1982), writing is generally produced under basically different assumptions from those of speaking. Whereas speaking typically occurs in a face to face interactive situation, writing is typically performed in "social isolation" (Chafe, 1982). Academic writing, in particular, is usually produced in accordance with certain conventions that differentiate the two language skills. Based on this difference, Chafe characterized speaking as "involvement" and writing as "detachment". These two concepts primarily address the speakers' and writers' relationships to their audience.

It is through writing that a person communicates a variety of messages to his/her readers. Writing as a communicative activity needs to be encouraged during the language learners' course of study. As Hyland (2005) notes the writing process, in comparison to spoken interaction, imposes greater demands on the text, since written interaction lacks immediate feedback as a guide. The writer has to anticipate the readers' reaction.

To produce coherent discourse writers must exploit what they already know about the subject at hand and integrate it with information from other sources; they must draw on the way that grammar and discourse function together and they are required to use cohesion appropriately (Hyland, 2005). One of the most important functions for discourse marker is to serve as textual relevance cues. Pérez-Llantada

(2003) states relevance is relative and varies according to the context: relevance for a certain author or reader, relevance with respect to a certain problem or task.

The essential features of a well written text are the unity and connectedness making the individual sentences in the text "hangs" together and relate to one another (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). This textual relationship is partially a result of coherent organization of the propositions and ideas presented in writing. In addition, this relationship significantly depends on the painstaking process the writer goes through in order to create formal and grammatical cohesion among paragraphs and among sentences in each paragraph (Chafe, 1982). Therefore, the writer can strengthen coherence, and create unity by employing various devices.

The overall coherence of a longer text depends on the coherence within each paragraph or section of the text (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). In expository writing, coherence is an essential feature that links ideas or information in different parts of the text so that the reader can understand the entire text more easily. Each sentence in this type of writing is related to both previous and subsequent sentences. In addition, the purpose and the intended audience of an expository text also play a crucial role. For example, a text focusing on the latest developments in biology might take a different form depending on whether it is intended to be included in a popular magazine, a biology textbook, or a scientific journal. Each of these text types follows certain writing conventions; that is, while a popular magazine is intended to convey information to the public in general, a biology textbook and a scientific journal are intended for students who are being introduced to the subject area and scientists who are specialized in the field, respectively. Therefore, coherence can create a logical progression in a text so that the reader can comprehend the text through the connectedness among the propositions presented in the text while relating the information in the text to his or her own knowledge of the world.

Research questions

The researcher aims to answer the following research questions.

1. How does employing discourse markers in writing support students writing development through process writing approach?
2. Is there a significant difference between written discourse markers used by high and low scored essays during the course of action?
3. What does the student's overall reaction in employing discourse markers in their writing through process writing approach look like?

Methods

Design of the study

This study employed quasi experimental mixed method design to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The study sought to identify the difference between the pre-tests and the post-tests scores of one group participants who take the treatment in the absence of control group. This experimental design has several forms. Among those, one group interrupted time series design is preferred due to its advantages. For instance, it avoids reliance on only single pretesting and post-testing data collection point and has the potential to increase reliability. Creswell (2003) describes that a time series design consists of studying one group, over time, with multiple pretest and posttest measures or observations made by the researcher. This design does not require access to large numbers of participants because multiple observations or data conducted in one group and to manage the participants development in the study the number should not be large, additionally it requires only one group for the study.

Participants

The participants of this study were all second year English major students who are studying in the academic years of 2016/2017 at Debre Markos University, Ethiopia. The total numbers of students were 34. The pre tests conducted as a base line data about students writing with regard to discourse markers. After the instruction of discourse markers through process writing approach the participants completed post tests in order to determine the level of improvement. In order to avoid bias students were not informed about the researcher was conducting a research, they believe that it is a part of their course fulfillment. Students in English department take three years course to graduate with Bachelor of Education Degree.

The participants who took Advanced Writing skills were selected using comprehensive sampling technique. These students were selected for this study because they do have exposure of writing skills courses. They had already taken Basic Writing Skills and Intermediate Writing courses before. This helped the researcher to have a look at intensively the essay which is produced by the students. All second year English students who are enrolled in one section were the subjects of this study.

Instruments

The instruments employed for this study were tests, students essay corpus and interview. Writing tests employed to evaluate students writing skill proficiency. Students asked to write essay before the intervention and after the intervention. The tests included writing argumentative essay: for the three pre tests the following argumentative essay topics were given to students respectively: *life in high school is better than life in university, should students wear uniform? and the country should run by woman*. However, after the intervention three post tests given: *technology is not a destruction it is a benefit, books are more important than television and mothers should stay home with their children*. The three pre tests were completed within a week then after the intervention (it was given for two weeks) two post tests given to the target students for a week. The intention of the researcher at the beginning was to provide three post tests. However, due to the final exam schedule clashes with the researcher's plan, the last post test was not given for this participant of the study.

The writing tests prepared by the researcher, and it were also double marked by teachers who have an experience in essay scoring and teaching. Moreover, the corpus consists of essays written by second year English major students in Debre Markos University, Ethiopia. The main purpose of using corpus as instrument in this study is to collect dependable evidence in using discourse markers in students' composition especially it helps to diagnose difficulties of employing markers in writing. The second objective is to investigate the distribution of discourse markers in students' essays, such as over use, under use or misuse. Finally, a series of semi-structured interviews were also conducted with students after the intervention. For the interview, two high achievers, two average achievers, and two low achievers were selected based on their post-test results. The main purpose was to get their opinions and comments towards discourse markers usage.

The participant of this study asked to fill in the consent form. They also agreed to being taped and have consented/ have not consented (indicate by crossing out the statement that does not apply). They understand that consent to being recorded includes their permission to all or part of the recording of their interview being used in the dissemination activities of the project. Moreover, they have read or had read to themselves this document and they understand the explanation provided to them. They have had all their questions answered to their satisfaction, and they voluntarily agree to participate in this study. The organization who provided ethical approval was Bahir Dar University.

Results

Data analysis

For the measurement of writing tests, the scores collected from pre- and post-tests were computed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 for Windows to compare the difference between the pre-intervention and post-intervention writing tests. In order to check the significance difference between the pre-post tests repeated measures ANOVA was used. Cohen (2007) asserted that repeated measures are obtained when we measure the same variable repeatedly, for example, at different multiple observation over time, or under experimental different conditions to see changes to an intervention. Likewise, the main objective of the current study was to identify the improvements of students writing as they employ discourse markers through process writing approach. As a result, repeated measures analysis can be used to assess changes over time in an outcome measured serially. The p-value in this study is <0.05 which is considered statistically significant.

Quantitative data results and analysis

For this study one group interrupted time series design used. The nature of one group time series consist multiple pre tests and multiple post tests over time. For the analysis of quantitative data, the Repeated Measure ANOVA used to examine whether there was a significant difference between the pre-

intervention and post-intervention writing tests. Therefore, five different types of essay writing tests were ready for students. The findings of pre- and post-tests presented below

Table1: *Descriptive statistics*

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pre test1	3.21	1.095	34
Pre test2	2.97	1.029	34
Pre test3	5.47	9.033	34
Post test1	5.53	1.542	34
Post test2	5.62	1.303	34

From the descriptive statistics table pre-test 2 has the lowest mean score, and pre test 3, post test1&2 has the highest mean score. In order to check whether there is significant result or not let's see the multivariate tests table below.

Table 2: *Multivariate tests*

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power
Wilks' Lambda	.209	28.406	4.000	30.000	.001	.791	113.626	1.000

In this study the focus was to identify the effect of written Discourse Markers use in students' argumentative essay writing through process approach. In this case how students improve their essay writing over time while they employ discourse markers through the process writing approach was also purpose of the study. There were five levels. In repeated measures design the participant measured at least twice, but in this case each student measured five times. That is three pre tests and two post tests. Primarily, it was planned to conduct three post tests, but the third post test was not given to students because of the final examination schedule clashes with the researchers' time plan. For one way repeated measure ANOVA post hoc analysis is not used. For post hoc we need to have between subjects factor, however, in this study there was only within subjects factors which repeatedly measured.

In order to check whether there are significant results or not, multivariate tests were examined. In this table four results mentioned: Pillai's trace, Wilks' lambda, Hotelling's trace and Roy's largest root. Noted all the four multivariate test use the same significant result. However, we have to use the result of Wilks' lambda result because most commonly reported is Wilks' lambda result. In table 2 at multivariate tests, we can see the result of Wilks' Lambda data. In this part the value is .209 with the significant value .001, $F(4,30) = 28.40$. Since the Alpha level is less than .05, we can conclude that it is statistically significant effect of time. This suggests there was a change before and after test scores across five time periods that we look at pre test1, pre test2, pre test3, post test1 and post test2.

The next step is to evaluate the pair wise comparison since the result indicated that there is statistically significant suggests that there is a difference somewhere in the tests. As mentioned above post hoc is not used for within subject factor. So, pair wise comparison employed here. Therefore, we can compare each pair for statistical significance.

Table 3: *Pairwise Comparisons*

(I) time (J) time	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
pretest1					
pretest2	-.324	.187	.938	-.888	.240
pretest3	-.441	.180	.198	-.983	.101
posttest1	-.618*	.184	.020	-1.171	-.064
posttest2	-1.853	.207	.001*	-2.477	-1.229
pretest2					
pretest3	-.118	.183	1.000	-.668	.433
posttest1	-.294	.149	.575	-.744	.155
posttest2	-1.529*	.175	.001*	-2.057	-1.002
pretest3					
posttest1	-.176	.209	1.000	-.805	.452
posttest2	-1.412	.224	.001*	-2.085	-.738
posttest1					
posttest2	-1.235	.164	.001*	-1.728	-.742

*p<0.001

The multivariate test in Table 2 result showed that there were significant results. The researcher of this study then conducted Pairwise comparisons. Each Pairwise difference was not significant except post test 2. As Table 3 indicated that post-test 2 (p<0.001) was significantly different than pre-test 1, pre-test 2, pre-test 3 and post-test1.

The above three Tables portray that most students improve the use of discourse markers in their writing in post-test2. In the middle of the intervention, most students were employed various types of discourse markers in their writing. This implies that the treatment influenced students to employ the various markers in their written production. According to Cohen (1988) this result indicates that the participants' writing performance had significantly increased due to the implementation of the five different types of discourse markers.

In line with this finding, Oxford (1990) and Schneider (2007) also point out that identifying students' dimension preference as one important task of Second Language teachers. According to these scholars, SL language teachers can make adjustments to help students extend their learning dimension and develop a balanced approach.

Findings from the students' essay corpus

Misuse of discourse markers

The data revealed that discourse markers were used extensively by the participants of the study. However, some of the participants had problems using markers as well as very limited markers used in their writing. For example, at the beginning majority of the students included wrong use of discourse markers in their essay, such as 'for', 'thus', 'which', 'during', 'whose', 'during', 'whose', 'so', 'then'. These markers are inserted wrongly and mislead the reader rather than gives clue in order to comprehend the text. Some markers employed as if they are compound words, but they are not. For example, 'and also', 'but if', 'like so', 'but on the other hand', 'but because', 'and additionally', 'like so'. In appropriate usage of markers such as: 'but when we', 'because if', 'why', 'example' was also observed.

Over use of discourse markers

Some participants employed the various types of discourse markers repeatedly. For example, 'and', 'who', 'because', appeared in their text more frequently than other types of markers. There was also inappropriate usage of markers which the researcher observed in students' writing. Some participants employed the markers in the wrong position. For instance, some markers were inserted at the beginning and at the end of their text.

Under use of discourse markers

Before the intervention participants employed very limited number of markers. For instance, in some participants' written work, students used fewer amounts of various types of discourse markers in their essay in order to join between or within sentences and paragraphs. For example, 'and', 'as well as', 'who' employed only in some participants composition.

However, after the intervention, improvements in students' writing particularly employing markers appropriately and using various types of markers were observed. Among the five types of discourse markers, participants employed conjunctions, references, substitution and lexical cohesion were used clearly and made the text easy to understand. Particularly, participants were aware of employing the various types of reference markers in their texts.

Students interview

A semi-structured interview was also conducted with students after the intervention. For the interview, two high achievers, two average achievers, and two low achievers were selected based on their post-test results. The main purpose was to get their opinions and comments towards discourse markers usage. As revealed in the interview transcripts, the students' understanding of the role of Discourse markers in writing is similar. All respondents state that discourse markers are highly important, and they feel good using them in their composition. Data from the interview transcript also provided that increased knowledge of discourse markers has made a difference to all students writing. Moreover, students were asked what types of discourse markers seem to have worked and which have not. Some respondents said reference and ellipsis which have not worked for them; however, some interviewees explained that substitution and ellipsis didn't work for them. On the other hand, majority of respondents reported that conjunctions and references used in their writing than other types. The last question from the interview was the major challenges that students face while they learn about discourse markers. Student4 and Student5 explain that it is not easy to deploy discourse markers due to lack of practice.

Discussion and conclusion

This study showed that there was a statistically significant effect of time. This suggests there was a change before and after test scores across five time periods that we look at pre-test1, pre-test2, pre-test3, post-test1 and post-test2. The experiment was carried out based on Halliday and Hasan (1976) types of taxonomy ties through process writing approach. This difference occurred possibly because the method used during the intervention was more effective than before the intervention in developing students' writing skills. Students also seemed to have positive reaction to Discourse markers, although they also pointed out some important issues that teachers can take into consideration when implementing Discourse markers in writing classes. The study was delimited to Debre Markos University, Ethiopia. The participants of the study were second year English major students who are enrolled in one section; therefore, generalizing the findings of this research to other settings may be difficult. In addition, during the data collection, unexpected challenges also appeared in conducting this study. It was planned to collect data six times (that is three pre-tests and three post-tests). However, the third post-test was not achieved due to the final examination schedule clashed with the researchers' time plan.

On the other hand, the findings showed that using discourse markers resulted in significantly positive outcomes after it had been implemented to teach essay writing skills through process writing approach. The participants in this study gained the benefits of the method and improved their essay writing skills. Some scholar stated the importance of employing written discourse markers in students writing. For example, Chiang (1999) confirms those native speakers' judgments of the quality of EFL students' writing relies more on discourse features like cohesion and coherence. Grammatical weaknesses are not considered unless they hinder their understanding of the writer's intended meaning.

Likewise, Jalilifar (2008) in his study reported that learners who employed discourse markers effectively and appropriately were more successful in producing more coherent compositions. It also revealed that the number of well functioned discourse markers positively contributed to the writing quality of learners' compositions. Additionally, Martinz (2004) investigated the use of discourse markers in the compositions of Spanish undergraduates. She ascertained that there was a positive relationship between the use of discourse markers and the writing quality of the learners. She also found that elaborative markers were the most frequently used, followed by contrastive, inferential, and causative markers.

However, Witte and Faigley (1981) found that there is no significant relationship between the quantity of cohesive devices used and the quality of writing. Zhang (2000) conducted an experiment using 85 students from second-year non-English major in Guandong University of Foreign Studies to test the correlation between cohesive knowledge and the quality of writing of college students. He found that there was a statistically significant difference between the high-score and low-score compositions in the use of cohesive devices. Similarly, Khalil (2002) analyzed cohesion in 20 compositions written by EFL college students in terms of Halliday and Hasan's model. The analysis of cohesion showed that students over-used reiteration of the same lexical item as a cohesive device, but underused other lexical and grammatical cohesive devices. The correlation of coherence score with the number of cohesive ties was low (0.18).

Hence, it is beneficial for the learners to be introduced more about the usage of these discourse markers in producing more quality writing. As discourse markers provide the variety or diversity in creating better sentences, it will also help the learners to lead their readers without losing track of the ideas transmit by the writers. However, the teachers should also create awareness to the learners about the overused of certain types of discourse markers which might distract the readers to continue reading their writing. Finally, both teachers and students should concentrate on how to apply written discourse markers in producing a better writing. It should be stressed more during the lesson and the focus should be on various types. Thus, it is recommended that other researchers in the future should focus more on this area and it might produce different result if it is analyzed in some other prospect.

This study is anticipated to benefit the students, teachers, and other researches. For students, it will make them realize the importance of using discourse markers in their writing. Then, it will also enable them to reduce the communication gap within the writing with their readers by producing more coherence writing product. For teachers, it will aware them about their students' difficulties in writing and the importance of discourse markers to reduce the difficulty. Moreover, teachers can also give further attention towards its usage in relation to writing context. For other researchers, those who are interested within the same area of research can use this current study as a guide for their future knowledge. They will also have the opportunity to discover more about discourse markers in writing, which will also eventually contribute to the world of knowledge.

References

- Abiy, Y. (2013). High School Students' Writing Skills and their English Language Proficiency as Predictors of their English Language Writing Performance. *Ethiopian Journal of Education & Science*. 9(1), 51-60.
- Alfarwan, S. (2015). Coherence and Organization in Narrative Discourse by Intermediate EFL Writers. *TESOL International Journal*. 10(2), 110-123.
- Blakemore, D. (2002). *Relevance and Linguistic Meaning: The Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse Markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bolly, J. (2011). An analysis of discourse connectives in English argumentative writing. *Journal of Jimei University*. 7(4), 84-85.
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (2nd Ed.) New York: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Carrell, P.L. (1982). Cohesion is not coherence. *TESOL Quarterly*. 16(4), 479-488.

- Celce-Murcia, M., & Olshtain, E. (2000). *Discourse and context in language teaching: a Guide for Language Teachers*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Chafe, W. (1982). *Integration and involvement in speaking, writing, and oral literature. Spoken and written language: exploring oral and literacy*. NJ: Ablex.
- Chen, Y. L., (2007). Less experienced EFL writers' knowledge and self-awareness of coherence in English writing. *Selected Papers from the Sixteenth International Symposium and Book Fair on English Teaching*, 335-346. Taipei: Crane.
- Chiang, G. (1999). A study of cohesion and coherence in English as a second language students' writing. *Papers in Linguistics: International Journal of Human Communication*, 17(3), 301-316.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Conor, U. (1984). A study of cohesion and coherence in English as a second language students' writing. *Papers in Linguistics*, 17, 301-316.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches*. California: Sage Publications.
- Crewe, W. J. (1990). The illogic of logical connectives. *ELT Journal*, 44(4), 316-325.
- Enkvist, N. E. (1990). Coherence in Writing: Research and Pedagogical Perspectives. *TESOL Journal*, 9-28.
- Field, Y., & Oi, Y. (1992). A comparison of internal conjunctive cohesion in English essay writing. *RELC Journal*, 25, 15-28.
- Fraser, B. (1999). What are discourse markers? *Journal of Pragmatics* 31 (7), 383-95.
- Geremew Lemu. (1999). *A study of requirements in writing for academic purpose at AAU*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).
- Gutwinski, W. (1976). Cohesion in literary texts: *A study of some grammatical and lexical features of English discourse*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Hays, P.R., (1992). Discourse markers and L2 acquisition. The use of meta-discourse in good and poor ESL essays. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 4, 253-272.
- Halliday, M.A.K & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.
- Hyland, K. (2003). *Writing and teaching writing. Second language writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2005). *Meta discourse. Exploring interaction in writing*. London: Continuum
- Italo Beriso. (1999). *A comparison of the effectiveness of teacher versus peer feedback on Addis Ababa University students' writing revisions*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).
- Jalilifar, A. (2008). How explicit instruction makes a difference: Meta-discourse markers and EFL learners' reading comprehension skill. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 38(1), 35-52.
- Johnson, P. (1983). Cohesion and coherence in compositions in Malay and English. *RELC*, 23(2), 1-17.
- Khalil, A. (2002). The cohesive knowledge and English writing Quality of college students. *CELEA Journal*, 82 (3), 24-30.
- Kroll, B. (Ed.). (2003). *Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing*. Retrieved April 3, 2016, from <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/samples>
- Leki, I. (2003). *A challenge to second language writing professionals: Is writing overrated*. USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Liu, M. & Braine, G. (2005). Cohesive features in argumentative writing produced by Chinese undergraduates. *System*, 33, 623-636.
- Matsuda, P.K. (1999). *Second language writing in the twentieth century: A situated historical perspective*. USA: Cambridge University Press.
- McNamara, D., Crossley, S., & McCarthy, P. (2010). Linguistic Features of Writing Quality. *Written Communication*, 27(57), 24.

- Martínez, A. C. (2004). Discourse markers in the expository writing of Spanish university students. *IBÉRICA* 8, 63-80.
- Perl, S. (2008). The composing processes of unskilled college writers. *Researchers in the teaching of English*, 13, 317-336.
- Perez-Llantada, C. (2003). Communication skills in academic monologic discourse. *Empirical and applied perspectives*, 3(15)
- Rammel, S. (2009). Teaching ESL writing. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents Prentice Hall
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schiffrin, D. (1987.) *Discourse Markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Solomon, A. (2001). *The Realization o Process Approach to Writing at the Level of Grade 10*. MA Thesis (Unpublished), Addis Ababa University.
- Taddele, A. (1990). *Individual differences in second language learning in formal context*. Addis Ababa University. (Unpublished doctoral thesis).
- Tanskanen, S. (2006). *Collaborating towards coherence: Lexical cohesion in English Discourse*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company.
- Thompson, G. (2001). Interaction in academic writing: Learning to argue with the reader. *Applied Linguistics*, 22(1), 58-78.
- Tierney, R. & Mosenthal, J. (1983). Cohesion and textual coherence. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 17(3), 215-229.
- Wenjun, J. (1999). A quantitative study of cohesion in Chinese graduate students' writing: Variations across genres and proficiency levels. *Paper presented at the Symposium On Second Language Writing at Purdue University*.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1990). *Aspects of language teaching*. Oxford: OUP
- Witte, S. P., & Faigley, L (1981). Coherence, cohesion, and writing quality. *College composition and communication*. 32,189-204.
- Wu, S. (2006). Connectives and topic fronting devices in academic writing: Taiwanese EFL student writers vs international writers. *International Conference and Workshop on EFL and Applied Linguistics*, 417-425.
- Zhang, Meisuo (2000). Cohesive features in the expository writing of undergraduates in two Chinese universities. *RELC Journal*, 31(1), 61-95.