

Enhancing Postgraduate English Majors' Academic Writing Skills and Self-Efficacy Using Metadiscourse Markers

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Abstract

Recently, researchers and scholars have come to a consensus that developing academic writing has become a challenge to EFL students. However, less emphasis is placed on the social and situated perspective of writing which allows students to cope with the demands of producing their proposals effectively, considering the purpose, audience, and context. The current study, therefore, aimed at examining the effect of using different interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers to enhance postgraduate English majors' academic writing skills and self-efficacy. To fulfill this purpose, 60 postgraduate students enrolled in the second-year diploma program, EFL Curricula and Instruction were selected as the study sample. Following a quasi-experimental design, the study comprised two groups: an experimental group (n=30) and a control one (n=30). To obtain data, a pre-post academic writing skills test and a writing self-efficacy scale were designed to measure students' level before and after the treatment. Findings revealed that the experimental group students outperformed their counter peers in the control one in overall academic writing skills, except for "mechanics" where the difference was not significant. Additionally, the experimental group had significantly positive results in the self-efficacy scale compared with the control group.

Keywords: metadiscourse markers, academic writing skills, self-efficacy, postgraduate students.

1. Introduction

Writing is regarded as a complex skill to master and one of the most difficult to teach. Its development involves not only mechanical and grammatical skills but also stylistic and judgmental skills (Heaton, 1994, p. 7). Furthermore, Strongman (2014, p. Xiii) contended that writing requires only communicating ideas and thoughts clearly, whereas academic writing entails eliciting words and ideas, and then communicating such ideas to various audiences. Hence, EFL learners need to be equipped with the necessary writing skills which contribute to their academic success and help them advance in their careers. Similarly, Glenn and Gray (2018, p.4) maintained that although teaching academic writing seems to vary across courses and disciplines, its development involves a set of essential skills. It includes organizing the written text in a coherent and logical manner, communicating thoughts and ideas clearly, editing and revising to check conventions (e.g., punctuation, mechanics, and grammar), and utilizing other resources (e.g., observations, readings, and practices).

Although EFL learners, particularly university students, receive instruction on how to produce academic texts, very little emphasis is given to the social and situated view of writing which gives learners the opportunity to cope with the demands of accomplishing their academic tasks and writing their proposals effectively (Correa & Echeverri, 2017). Thus, the development of academic writing can be considered a persistent problem that EFL students may find challenging and stressful. Stressing the challenges encountered by EFL students in academic writing, Thomas (2005, p. 1) pointed out that that writing instruction, particularly for post-graduate students, may be more frustrating and exhausting, as it necessitates more effort to explain various cognitive processes to students. Ideally, post-graduate students are required to write well-organized proposals having considerable quality. Nevertheless, most of them lack the

necessary skills to write effectively despite of receiving instruction for four years during college.

In recent years, research on academic writing has stressed the role of the interactive and rhetorical features of the written text (Hamam, 2019; Hyland & Jiang, 2020; Liu and Stapleton, 2018; Qin & Uccelli, 2019). This view focuses on the readers' active role in understanding the writer's intentions and stance towards the message and the reader. According to Blagojevic (2009, p.64), academic writers do not produce written material that merely represents external reality, rather they utilize the language to negotiate thoughts and communicate relations. This can be done through using a variety of devices that establishes and fosters reader-author relationship. Such devices involve interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers which assist readers in organizing, interpreting and evaluating the content.

Metadiscourse is considered as one of the key rhetorical strategies which is used as a means to explore the author-reader relationship and organize discourse. It serves as an important component through which the author interacts with readers and establishes his/her own perspective (Sanderson, 2008, p. 165). Metadiscourse, therefore, marks the text as comprising social interaction involving the ways through which the writer negotiates meaning with readers. Such interaction can take place when both writer and reader adhere to specific rhetorical features that should be considered and recognized in the production of written materials. When EFL readers are guided by different metadiscourse markers, they can understand the propositional content and draw on their interpretations, rather than focusing on linguistic patterns and structural forms. With respect to readers' social engagement with text content, Hyland (2005, p. 4) claimed that metadiscourse markers can serve as a framework which shows the author's attitude and signals the interactive nature of academic materials. This allows readers to understand the language in

context, identify the author's implicit intentions and attitudes, and construct the intended meaning.

Context of the problem

To shed light on the study problem, a pilot study was carried out on a random sample of 68 postgraduate English majors enrolled in the second-year diploma program, EFL Curricula and Instruction. To obtain data, a pre-post academic writing test and a writing self-efficacy scale were administered to the participants. Results showed that 82% of the participants obtained very low scores. Additionally, the participants seemed to exert their efforts on the structure of the written material, rather than communicating their ideas and interacting with the audience. Furthermore, based on the participants' written works, it was concluded that most of them lacked the necessary skills to exploit different metadiscourse markers. They also encountered many challenges to write their research proposals, showing their uncertainty to utilize different devices (e.g., expressions of ability, certainty, probability, uncertainty, etc.).

In their investigation of academic writing, Phakiti and Li (2011) examined the difficulties encountered by postgraduate students who were completing their master's degree in TESOL. The data obtained through questionnaires and interviews indicated that academic writing skills, particularly synthesizing information, seemed to have been quite difficult to the students. Most students found that writing instruction seemed to be more challenging and problematic. Students could not adequately organize their ideas. They were unable to use relevant evidences and form correct structures.

To study the writing perspectives across different cultures, Eldaba and Isbell (2018) investigated the experiences of three international graduate students in producing academic texts. Findings indicated that the three students encountered problems and self-doubts related to their academic writing skills. They also showed lack of ability to produce well-organized pieces of writing. Furthermore, the

researchers suggested developing new ways to overcome these challenges and to enhance the necessary skills of academic writing.

Besides, Matoti and Shumba (2011) attempted to investigate post-graduate students' level in writing self-efficacy. The sample comprised 84 students enrolled in postgraduate programs. It was found that most students exhibited a low level of writing self-efficacy. They indicated their inability to accomplish writing tasks and to follow the rules of writing correct sentences and well-developed paragraphs.

Statement of the problem

The problem of the present study could be stated in the low level of postgraduate English majors in academic writing skills and self-efficacy. Therefore, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1- What is the effect of utilizing metadiscourse markers on developing postgraduate English majors' academic writing skills?
- 2- What is the effect of utilizing metadiscourse markers on developing postgraduate English majors' self-efficacy?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated:

1. There are statistically significant differences between the experimental group students' mean scores and those of their control peers in the post administration of the academic writing skills test in favour of the experimental group students.
2. There are statistically significant differences between the experimental group students' mean scores in the pre-post administrations of the academic writing skills test in favour of post-administration results.

3. There are statistically significant differences between the experimental group students' mean scores and those of their control peers in the post administration of the writing self-efficacy scale in favour of the experimental group students.
4. There are statistically significant differences between the experimental group students' mean scores in the pre-post administrations of the writing self-efficacy scale in favour of post-administration results.

Significance of the study

As the present study examines the use of metadiscourse markers, it is expected to provide curriculum developers in the field of academic English language learning with insights into how to employ different writing tasks and activities that enhance communication and promote interaction between the writer and readers. It may assist EFL students to produce more dialogic written texts that maintain the relationship between the writer and readers. The study also provides an academic writing test which may help EFL instructors to diagnose and assess academic writing skills. Additionally, the study may help EFL instructors to find new ways to solve writing problems and encourage students to be more confident and enhance their own beliefs about their writing ability. Furthermore, the study stresses the social context and the argumentative nature of the written text, which may provide EFL instructors with insights to focus on the rhetorical features and language devices that may assist EFL students in negotiating and constructing knowledge.

Definitions of terms

The following definitions were adopted in the current study:

Metadiscourse markers

According to Ädel (2006, p. 31), metadiscourse markers are regarded as language features and cues employed by writers in order to reconstruct and organize the text, establish relationships with readers, and guide readers to interpret and decode the text.

Academic writing

It indicates a style of writing which involves careful choice of words and phrases employed by the author to communicate ideas to a wide variety of readers through the written text (Strongman, 2014, p. xv).

Writing self-efficacy

It refers to learners' beliefs and personal judgements about their ability to perform and accomplish written tasks successfully. These beliefs and judgements can influence learners' choices and efforts to perform the assigned tasks (Bandura, 1997).

II. Literature Review

Writing is not considered as mere representation of written words regardless of its context, reader, and author. It does not only involve generating linguistic forms and text-based information; rather it is connected in complex ways and maintains interactive relationships to achieve a variety of communicative purposes (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p.6). Hence, when readers approach a written text, an exchange of information and thoughts occurs between the writer and readers.

Advocates of the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) argue that it is necessary to take into account three main variables in order to master writing academic texts. Such variables include context, purpose, and audience (De Oliveira & Lan, 2014). Context involves the time and place, the setting, in which the interaction between the author and the reader takes place (Glenn & Gray, 2018, p.3). In academic contexts, more effort and practice is required as the language used in academic writing involves difficult structures and unfamiliar language patterns that might hinder the understanding of the delivered message (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010, p. 588). Purpose indicates the function of the written material or the reason for which the writer produces the text, e.g. whether the writer presents ideas and information to interpret a certain phenomenon, give explanations, or argue a specific point of view. Consequently, identifying the author's purpose helps readers to clarify the intended message, e.g. whether it is expository, expressive, or argumentative. The last variable, audience, involves the individuals to whom the text is written and addressed. Writers should understand audience features and characteristics (e.g. their values, interests and knowledge), which helps in forming the delivered message through exploiting suitable terms, using appropriate language structures, and following a logical organization (Glenn & Gray, 2018, pp. 2-9). Ideally, the context, purpose and audience are important variables in academic writing as they influence the subject matter, the language mode, and the writing situation.

Emphasizing the social nature of writing, Hyland (2004, p.1) viewed academic writing as a social activity which can be recognized from the society's perspective and not only from the individual's. Given this view, writers need to embed certain devices in their writings and utilize different grammatical patterns and linguistic features with consideration of the situated, social context of writing. AbdelWahab (2020) and Schryer (2011) maintained that written texts have significance only when considered with reference to the social context in which certain features impact meaning. Additionally, Chapetín Castro and Chala (2013, p.27) identified two key features that make written texts socially situated: (a) the author's feelings, beliefs and experiences which are shaped through engagement in interactions with others, and (b) factors inherent within individuals such as gender, age or background. Adopting this view of academic writing allows students to go beyond recognizing the forms and linguistic elements of the language to understanding the cultural and social context of the written material.

Although studies have affirmed the importance of academic writing to EFL learners (e.g., Altınmakas and Bayyurt, 2019; Marulanda Ángel and Martínez García, 2017; Patriotta, 2017; Sulisworo, Rahayu, & Akhsan, 2016), seldom research has been carried out on post-graduate students. For example, Marulanda Ángel and Martínez García (2017) used a multi-strategy approach to investigate the academic writing skills of pre-service teachers. The approach comprised of developing various genre-based tasks providing systematized feedback and promoting writing tasks through repeated practice. Sample texts of 16 university students studying in a program for English teacher preparation were analysed to obtain data collection. Results showed that the multi-strategy approach enhanced the students' academic writing skills in terms of mechanics, vocabulary, language conventions, syntax and discourse. Using smartphones in a blended learning environment, Sulisworo, et al. (2016) examined EFL college students' academic writings skills. Sixty-one students received a timed-essay test to assess their level after one semester of applying the blended learning activities. Results indicated

that blended learning had significantly positive effects on academic writing, especially in developing the skills of organizing and shaping ideas. Additionally, students enhanced their knowledge of understanding new concepts that promote academic writing.

In fact, the development of students' academic writing does not only involve enhancing a number of specific skills, rather thoughts and beliefs can form an important factor in the process of producing written materials (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003). According to National Commission on Writing (2003), such thoughts and beliefs are related to learners' self-efficacy and affects their efforts and persistence to perform tasks.

The term self-efficacy was introduced as a one of the concepts emerged from Social Cognitive Theory which indicates that people acquire knowledge and behave in a specific way influenced by physical and social environmental factors (Bandura, 1997; Prat-Sala & Redford, 2012). In the context of writing, self-efficacy refers to learners' specific beliefs and judgements about their abilities to accomplish a task such as writing an academic essay (Zimmerman, 1995). Walker (2003) added that performing any writing task depends on the goals that students set within particular situations. Self-efficacy is also influenced by other motivational factors, such as task value, self-regulation, self-esteem, self-concept, and interest (Garcia & de Caso, 2006).

According to Bandura (1997), there are a number of sources that comprise self-efficacy beliefs. The first source, mastery experience, refers to a learner's experience gained from his/her performance in similar tasks in the past. For instance, when a learner performs well on a task, his/her self-efficacy will be enhanced when performing similar tasks in the future. Pajares (2003) posited that a challenging task that is successfully accomplished can promote students' self-efficacy. The second source, the vicarious experience, refers to a specific situation in which a learner gains his/her self-efficacy

through observing others' performance against his/hers. Self-efficacy can be enhanced when a learner realizes that he/ she has performed the task better than others. The third source involves the positive comments that learners receive from others. Such positive comments can increase learners' self-efficacy, particularly when teachers make positive comments about specific tasks achieved by students (Schunk, 2003). The fourth source involves the physiological and affective factors. Students who are less tense or worried are more likely to accomplish tasks successfully.

Furthermore, higher levels of self-efficacy can play a vital role in promoting students' social skills, tolerance, and assertiveness. Self-efficacy beliefs can also help learners increase their concentration and exert more effort in the task (Walker, 2003). Thus, instructors need to help their students increase their level of self-efficacy in order to assist them to be engaged in different literacy activities and increase their language skills performance.

Research conducted on self-efficacy and academic writing has indicated that there is a positive relationship between students' belief and performance in their writing abilities. For instance, Chea and Shumow (2014) investigated the relationship between students' writing achievement and self-efficacy among EFL university students. A questionnaire was designed to assess students' self-efficacy level. Findings indicated that both students' self-efficacy and writing achievement have positive correlations. Choosing a sample of 120 students studying English in a language institute, Khosravi, Ghoorchaei and Arabmofrad (2017) explored the relationship between students' writing abilities and their self-efficacy. A test based on IELTS writing tasks and a self-efficacy questionnaire were used to collect data. Results showed that there was a significant relationship between students' self-efficacy and their writing abilities.

To achieve a high level of academic writing, students are required to synthesize information to form a coherent thought and make use of

the rhetorical features of academic materials which assist them in understanding the argumentative and interpretive aspects of the language (Marulanda Ángel and Martínez García, 2017, p.3). Such rhetorical features and conventions have attracted the interest of researchers and scholars when investigating academic writing across different fields (e.g., linguistics, languages for specific purposes, humanities, and sociology). Such diversity has led to employment of different interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers which assist learners in negotiating and constructing knowledge (Hyland, 2004, p.5). Consequently, in order to meet the needs of EFL learners, the current perspective of writing should involve not only the writer's thoughts and ideas within the written text but also how the language is formed to promote interaction and foster reader-writer engagement. Hence, academic writers should not produce texts involving discrete elements; rather they are expected to use language that allows readers to negotiate meaning and establishes social relations.

Although metadiscourse has been defined and delimited by a number of scholars in the field of language study and research, there is little consensus on what the term accurately implies and it was viewed from different perspectives. For instance, Hyland (2015) argued that metadiscourse refers to specific rhetorical or linguistic devices utilized by the writer to organize a discourse, as well as reflect the writer's purpose and perspective. From another token, Ädel (2006, p.31) maintained that metadiscourse refers to author's commentary throughout the written discourse. It indicates the author's stance about the text content and the ways by which the reader is engaged to make decisions on wording of the text and language use.

Ideally, metadiscourse focuses on linking the written text to its context and emphasizes reader's contribution in the meaning-making process. Besides, the term involves an array of devices assisting readers to understand the suggestions and implications put forward by

the author. Hence, metadiscourse interweaves content and language, along with the context in which the written discourse is delivered.

Due to the comprehensive review of a wide variety of metadiscourse features, various classifications of metadiscourse have been introduced. Ädel (2006, p. 179) distinguished between two main approaches of metadiscourse: the narrow and the broad approach. The former delimits the concept by recognizing metadiscourse markers as linguistic elements that stress the textual functions of the language and exclude the interaction between the writer and reader; whereas the latter views metadiscourse as comprising textual functions (i.e., textual organization and linguistic elements), as well as interpersonal functions which focus on the reader's textual experiences, processing needs, and knowledge (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p.161).

Adopting the broad approach, Hyland (2005, 2010, 2015) proposed the interpersonal model of metadiscourse which distinguishes between two categories of metadiscourse (i.e., interactive and interactional). Interactive metadiscourse involves how the author anticipates readers' interests and directs them throughout the text in order to make the meaning clearer. This entails using certain devices to formulate the text in order to accommodate readers' needs and adapt their expectations. Examples of interactive markers involve transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses. On the other hand, interactional markers are used to indicate how readers are engaged within the act of reading the written text and how the author maintains an appropriate relationship of his thoughts and the reader (Hyland, 2004, p. 139). This enables readers to respond to and interact with the propositional content, in addition to participating in the construction of meaning. Interactional markers involve boosters, hedges self-mentions, attitude markers, and engagement markers (Hyland, 2005, p.50).

Interactive metadiscourse markers are divided into five sub-categories. They are utilized to organize the content, manage the flow

of information, and assist readers in obtaining interpretations (Aguilar, 2008, p.87). Such markers include:

Transitions: They involve conjunctions and adverbials that are used to mark relationships between sentences, paragraphs, or ideas. They can be used to refer to concession (e.g., although, nevertheless, however, regardless, yet, *etc.*), addition (e.g., in addition, furthermore, moreover, and, also, *etc.*), **similarity** (e.g., similarly, by the same token, likewise, equally, correspondingly, *etc.*), and consequence relations (e.g., thus, therefore, consequently, in conclusion, *etc.*).

Frame markers: They indicate words and phrases that mark schematic text structure, showing topic shifts and sequences. They can be used to indicate sequence (e.g., first, next, then, at the same time, *etc.*); text stages (e.g., to summarize, to conclude, in sum, *etc.*); and discourse goals (e.g., I argue here, my purpose is, there are several reasons why, *etc.*) (Chen, 2006).

Endophoric markers: They involve words and phrases referring to previously mentioned information or anticipating upcoming discussions. They can be used to make the text salient and comprehensible by indicating other parts of the written text and recovering author's information (e.g., as noted above, see Figure 2, in section two, *etc.*) (Cheng, 2016, p.94).

Evidentials: They indicate referenced information or adding ideas from different resources and representing them in a way which allows readers to rely on authentic sources when interpreting the text (e.g., according to X, Z states, (Y, 1990) , *etc.*).

Code glosses: They involve restating or rephrasing ideas in a way that helps readers understand the propositional meaning and elaborate on the content. They can be used as a means to support and clarify meaning (e.g., such as, for example, in other words namely, *etc.*).

Interactional metadiscourse markers, on the other side, are used to evaluate the given ideas and indicate the author's perspectives of the reader and content (Hyland, 2005, p.56). They involve the following.

Boosters: They can be used to refer to the author's certainty of the stated claims and propositions. Using boosters indicates the author's absolute certainty and solidarity with the content without having any choices or alternatives. They include epistemic modals (e.g., *must*), main verbs (e.g., affirmed, asserted, prove), adjectives and adverbs (e.g., undisputed, certainly, indeed, undoubtedly), and nouns (e.g., emphasis, certainty) (Peacock, 2006).

Hedges: Unlike boosters, hedges refer to devices that indicate the author's commitment to various perspectives on the propositional content. They involve epistemic modals (e.g., can, could, may, might); main verbs (e.g., suggest, claim, argue, maintain); adjectives and adverbs (e.g., plausible, perhaps, probably etc.); nouns (e.g., probability, possibility, etc.); and other expressions (e.g., to some extent, in general) (Hyland, 2010).

Attitude markers: They indicate the author's stance and attitude of the propositional content, conveying agreement, obligation, importance, frustration, surprise and so on. They include modal verbs (e.g., have to, should), main verbs (e.g., agree, prefer), adjectives (e.g., desirable, remarkable, appropriat, etc.), adverbs (e.g., unfortunately, surprisingly, hopefully, interestingly, etc.), and other expressions (e.g., what is more important, it is necessary).

Self mentions: They indicate the degree to which the writer establishes his/her authorial identity in the text using first person pronouns and possessive determiners (e.g., I, we, me, our, mine, ours). They are used to refer to the author's presence as related to readers and the stated argument (Hyland, 2005, p. 53).

Engagement markers: They are used to involve readers and signal their presence in the text through second-person pronouns, asides, or question

forms (Hyland, 2001, 2004). They can be used to allow readers to participate in the meaning-making process and direct them to act in a particular way.

Obviously, research on metadiscourse analysis stresses the functional approach to writing, indicating how certain devices can be used to achieve various communicative purposes (Fa-gen, 2012, p.2). The emphasis is on how the meaning is formed as regards the context not the dictionary. In this context, Halliday (2005, p. 26) identified three metafunctions of language (i.e., the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual metafunction) that can be used as a basis for coding and organizing ideas by metadiscourse analysts. These metafunctions can be integrated simultaneously during the process of constructing the meaning of the text. According to Fa-gen (2012), the ideational function implies using language to convey experiences and ideas. The interpersonal metafunction indicates how the language is used to engage the author with readers, promote interaction, and understand mental processes. The textual metafunction implies utilizing language to establish an organizational pattern which links the written text to the reader and the world.

Conversely, some metadiscourse theorists argue that metadiscourse does not include the ideational function, as it excludes the propositional content that make up a text (Crismore, Markkanen, & Steffensen, 1993; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Kopple, 2012). Ideally, the interpersonal and textual functions are considered as key components of metadiscourse, that is because they focus on forming a coherent discourse and promoting the interaction between writers and their readers. On the other hand, Ädel (2006, pp. 174-176) maintained that metadiscourse items have three main functions: (a) the metalinguistic function which is employed to make clarifications about the ideas involved in the content, (b) the expressive function which is used to reflect the author's emotions and feelings, and (c) the directive

function which is utilized to influence readers when eliciting responses about text interpretations.

Metadiscourse, therefore, directs readers on how to grasp the writer's purpose and assists them to effectively engage in a range of discourse situations. Besides, readers can probe into the implicit features of writing through communicating ideas using metadiscourse devices (Hyland, 2005, p. 185; Aguilar, 2008, p. 67). It is necessary for writers to exploit different devices in order to organize their ideas and clarify their intentions. Hence, readers can go beyond the factual information and ideas within the text and recognize various perspectives identified by the author. For this purpose, theorists as well as researchers should adopt a holistic perspective of the different features of metadiscourse, taking into account the nature of the propositional content and readers' conception of the world and self.

Incorporating various metadiscourse markers within texts allows authors to communicate their ideas effectively, considering readers' needs, interests and perceptions of the content. In this context, readers need to consider how the written text is connected to other material and how the author employs rhetorical features in a certain context (Hyland, 2005, p.12). Therefore, metadiscourse can be used to enhance "reader-author solidarity" through the mutual dialogue that takes place between the writer and the reader. This involves using persuasive devices employed to influence readers' responses to the written text based on their purposes and expectations (Camiciottoli, 2003, p.29). When metadiscourse markers are utilized effectively, writers can thus evaluate the presented information, considering the readers' potential reactions and responses. Furthermore, writers can put forward arguments to the text in order to make the content more dialogic. For instance, criticism may be anticipated when the writer does not have enough evidence to support the ideas presented. Additionally, the emphatic "do" can be used to emphasize objection of what is perceived.

Writers need to communicate different ideas precisely in order to guide readers and promote their thinking. In order for readers to grasp the assumed meaning, they need to seek interpretations and construct assumptions by understanding the author's intentions. What is more important is the transaction of ideas that occur through the interrelationship between the author, reader, text and context. This transaction affects readers when interacting with and responding to any written discourse.

Hyland (2005) posited that novice writers may be struggling to maintain an adequate level of interaction with their readers. Such writers are required to utilize interactive resources to organize the content and guide readers throughout the text, as well as interactional resources in order to inform about the writer's perspective on the topic and readers themselves.

Despite emphasis on the need to utilize metadiscourse markers, rare studies investigated the use of metadiscourse markers to enhance academic writing skills, particularly for postgraduate students. For example, Tavakoli, Dabaghi and Khorvash (2010) conducted a study to examine the impact of metadiscourse markers on students' level of reading comprehension. Participants involved 80 intermediate level students equally assigned into three experimental groups and a control one. Experimental group 1 received instruction based on both textual and interpersonal metadiscourse, experimental group 2 received instruction based on textual metadiscourse, and experimental group 3 received instruction based on interpersonal metadiscourse. The control group, on the other hand, did not receive any special intervention. Findings showed that the three experimental groups outperformed the control one in reading comprehension scores. Choosing a sample of 34 university students, Ahour and Maleki (2014) investigated the effect of instruction via metadiscourse on EFL students' speaking ability. Students were assigned into two groups: the experimental group receiving instruction via metadiscourse and the control one receiving

regular instruction. Findings showed that the experimental group indicated significant improvement in their speaking ability, whereas the control one did not show any significant changes.

Utilizing interactional metadiscourse markers, Hassanein (2016) used a sample of 34 EFL majors to enhance their reading comprehension skills. The students were divided equally into two groups, i.e. an experimental group and a control one. To obtain data collection, a reading test was designed to assess students' level in reading comprehension. Findings indicated that students in the experimental group obtained the highest mean scores in reading comprehension as a result of receiving explicit instruction of interactional metadiscourse markers. A study by Mardani (2017) examined the impact of explicit instruction of metadiscourse on developing students' listening comprehension. A sample of 50 undergraduate students was selected and divided into two groups (experimental and control). The experimental group studied through metadiscourse markers and a process method, whereas the control group was taught only using a process method. Results showed that using metadiscourse significantly enhanced experimental group students' listening comprehension.

To conclude, scholars as well as researchers need to exert efforts in order to enhance students' level in academic writing, considering the interaction that occurs between the reader, writer, text, and context. Obviously, the interest in developing academic writing has recently gained emphasis in the field of English language. Nevertheless, most studies conducted in the field shed light on analysing or exploring how metadiscourse markers are used in academic writings. Limited work has been conducted- to the researcher's best knowledge- to investigate the influence of utilizing metadiscourse markers on developing academic writing. Furthermore, rare studies have focused on emphasizing the relationship between reader and writer, as well as the active role of readers in understanding the author's intentions and perspectives.

III. Methodology

Participants

The current study involved 60 postgraduate English majors enrolled in the second-year diploma program, EFL Curricula and Instruction at the Faculty of Specific Education, Zagazig University. This sample was selected since students, at this year, need to develop their skills of writing academic materials, especially writing thesis proposals. The students were equally assigned into an experimental group and a control one. In order to verify that both groups are homogenous, students were at the same average age (22-23) and they have studied English at college for four years. Additionally, students' academic writing and self-efficacy were pre-tested to make sure that both groups were at the same level before treatment and there is no significant difference between the two groups.

Table 1

t-test results comparing the experimental group and the control one in the pre-administration of the academic writing test

Group	No.	Mean	S.D	t-value	Sig.
Exp.	30	14.20	3.133	0.631	0.87
Cont.	30	13.700	3.007		

t-value is not significant at (0.01) level

Table 2

t-test results comparing the experimental group and the control one the pre-administration of the self-efficacy scale

Group	No.	Mean	S.D	t-value	Sig.
Exp.	30	16.466	2.374	0.508	0.660
Cont.	30	16.766	2.192		

t-value is not significant at (0.01) level

Study design

The current study adopted the quasi-experimental design, in which two groups (an experimental group taught through metadiscourse and a control one receiving regular instruction) were assigned to fulfill the purpose of the study. The experiment continued for three months during the academic year (2018-2019). To collect data, a pre-post academic writing test and a writing self-efficacy scale were designed and administered to find out any significant differences. The data obtained from the study were then analyzed using t-test.

Instruments

A pre-post academic writing test (See Appendix B) and a writing self-efficacy scale (See Appendix C) were designed to assess students' level before and after the treatment. Both the test and the scale were submitted to a jury of experts and specialists in the field of English language learning to determine their validity. They were asked to evaluate the test and the scale regarding wording, clarity, correctness, and the suitability for the students' level. Besides, the test and the scale were piloted on thirty students a part from the study participants to obtain feedback on the clarity of instructions and the suitability of the items to the participants' proficiency level. To determine reliability, the test-retest method was used and the internal consistency was calculated (alpha coefficient = 0.87).

To ensure scoring reliability of the test, a rubric was used to correct the test items (See Appendix B). The rating scale ranged from A= the highest performance to D = the lowest performance. On the other hand, students were asked to choose one of three responses (i.e., always, sometimes, or never) when being assessed using the writing self-efficacy scale.

Study Material

Based on literature survey and previous studies, four units were designed on the basis of the interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers (See Appendix D). The units aimed at:

1. Enhancing students' academic writing regarding content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.
2. Recognizing the different features of academic writing.
3. Recognizing how different metadiscourse markers can be utilized to develop academic writing.
4. Identifying the purposes for which metadiscourse markers are used.
5. Producing academic materials in a coherent and cohesive manner.

Content of the units

The content was developed and designed based on the interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers and with regard to the assigned objectives. It involved four units including a variety of academic activities and tasks, and each unit was assigned to enhance specific academic writings skills and addressed certain types of metadiscourse markers.

Unit one: using boosters and hedges

Students, in this unit, were introduced to using boosting and hedging as communicative strategies. First, they were guided to identify the differences in tone when using boosting or hedging. They were then trained on how to make generalizations and express certainty about information using adjectives, adverbs, lexical verbs, or certain phrases. They were also asked to match boosters and hedges with appropriate evidence, considering the consistency of the devices with

the content. Distributing copies of selected written materials, the instructor asked the students to reformulate the materials using boosters and hedges. Finally, the instructor asked the students to select a certain topic and utilize the specified devices in interactive discussions.

Unit two: attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions

In this unit, students were trained to express their attitudes, and produce written texts, taking into account the relationship between the writer and reader. They were also taught how to refer to the writer in the text and indicate why specific devices were used in academic texts. For this purpose, the instructor helped the students to utilize different devices using determiners, personal asides, pronouns, lexical verbs, adjectives, affective adverbs and questions. After reviewing the key guidelines for determining author's attitude, the students worked in pairs to identify the metadiscourse markers and state what type of attitude they convey. Having finished the previous step, the students were guided to use the specified devices in authentic discussions. Finally, each group was given a text analysis worksheet, along with copies of research articles in order to analyse the articles and explain how metadiscourse markers are used.

Unit three: frame markers, endophoric markers and code glosses

This unit aimed at helping students use: (a) frame markers in order to label stages, sequence ideas, announce goals, and indicate topic shifts; (b) endophoric markers to focus readers' attention on the author's interpretations; and (c) code glosses to verify that readers understand the author's message. Hence, students were given selected excerpts and were asked to identify the metadiscourse markers and indicate the function of each marker. They were, then, asked to work in groups and analyse the use of metadiscourse markers in research articles using the

text analysis worksheet. Finally, they were asked to engage in interactive discussions about specific topics and produce texts using the metadiscourse markers worksheet.

Unit four: transition markers and evidentials

At this stage, students were asked to utilize different transitions and evidentials in order to signal connections within ideas and maintain authority of the topic. For instance, they were trained on how to use transition markers to indicate comparison, consequences, addition, etc.; and evidential markers to maintain responsibility of the ideas within the text. Students were then given excerpts of academic materials in order to determine different transitions and evidentials and identify the function for which each marker is used. Finally, a number of research articles were distributed to the students in order to analyse the use of metadiscourse markers using the text analysis worksheet.

IV. Results

Findings were introduced in terms of the study hypotheses. The t-test for paired and independent samples was used to analyse the data collected. Descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated using the Statistical Package for Social Science.

Testing the first hypothesis

The first hypothesis states that there are statistically significant differences between the experimental group students' mean scores and those of their control peers in the post administration of the academic writing skills test in favour of the experimental group students. In order to test the first hypothesis, t-test for independent samples was used to find out any significant differences.

Table 3

t-test results comparing the experimental group and the control one in the post-administration of the academic writing test

Dimension	Group	N	Mean	S.D	t. Value	DF	Sig.
Content	Exp.	30	10.866	1.569	18.873	58	0.001
	Cont.	30	4.1667	1.114			
Organization	Exp.	30	11.833	1.116	26.112	58	0.001
	Cont.	30	4.366	1.098			
Vocabulary	Exp.	30	3.733	0.626	11.977	58	0.001
	Cont.	30	1.800	0.6643			
Language use	Exp.	30	6.00	1.114	9.088	58	0.001
	Cont.	30	3.400	1.101			

Dimension	Group	N	Mean	S.D	t. Value	DF	Sig.
Mechanics	Exp.	30	6.766	0.858	1.201	58	Not sig.
	Cont.	30	6.500	0.861			
Total	Exp.	30	39.200	3.067	26.726	58	0.001
	Cont.	30	20.366	2.592			

Table 3 shows that the experimental group students outperformed their counter peers in the control group in overall academic writing and its components except for the last component, i.e. "mechanics" where there was no significant difference. The mean scores for content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics were 10.86, 11.833, 3.733, 6.0, and 6.766 respectively. On the other hand, students in the control group obtained lower mean scores in overall academic writing skills and in each component except for mechanics (6.5). These findings are expected as regular instruction of academic writing puts much emphasis on writing conventions (e.g., spelling punctuation, and capitalization). The overall t-value for academic writing (26.726) is statistically significant. Thus, the first hypothesis is partially accepted.

Testing the second hypothesis

The second hypothesis states that there are statistically significant differences between the experimental group students' mean scores in the pre-post administrations of the academic writing skills test in favour of post-administration results. In order to test the second hypothesis, t-test for paired samples was used to find out any significant differences.

Table 4

t-test results of the experimental group comparing the pre- and post-administrations of the academic writing test

Dimension	Measurement	N	Mean	S.D	t. Value	DF	Sig.
Content	Pre	30	1.56	1.222	34.209	29	0.001
	Post	30	10.866	1.569			
Organization	Pre	30	2.60	0.813	44.553	29	0.001
	Post	30	11.833	1.116			
Vocabulary	Pre	30	1.266	0.449	21.486	29	0.001
	Post	30	3.733	0.583			
Language use	Pre	30	2.433	0.773	20.888	29	0.001
	Post	30	6.00	1.114			
Mechanics	Pre	30	6.466	1.136	1.795	29	Not sig.
	Post	30	6.766	0.8583			
Total	Pre	30	14.20	3.133	49.051	29	0.001
	Post	30	39.20	3.067			

Table 4 shows that the experimental group students gained higher means in the post-testing of the overall academic writing skills and its components, except for the last component, i.e. mechanics. The post-mean scores for content, organization, vocabulary and language use were (10.866, 11.833, 3.733, 6.0) respectively, while the post-mean score for mechanics was (6.766). Additionally, the calculated t-value for content, organization, vocabulary, and language use (34.209, 44.553, 21.486, 20.88) are significant, while the calculated t-value for

mechanics (1.795) is not significant. The calculated t-value for overall academic writing (49.051) is significant. Hence, the second hypothesis is partially accepted.

Testing the third hypothesis

The third hypothesis states that there are statistically significant differences between the experimental group students' mean scores and those of their control peers in the post administration of the writing self-efficacy scale in favour of the experimental group students. In order to test the third hypothesis, t-test for independent samples was used.

Table 5

t-test results of the experimental and the control groups in the writing self-efficacy post-scale

Self-efficacy scale	Group	N	Mean	S.D	t. Value	DF	Sig.
Total of scale items	Experimental	30	30.60	2.513	11.62	58	0.001
	Control	30	21.26	3.609			

Table 5 shows that the experimental group students achieved higher mean score (M= 30.60) compared to the control one (M=21.26). The estimated t-value (11.62) is statistically significant at (0.001) level. Hence, the third hypothesis is confirmed.

Testing the fourth hypothesis

The fourth hypothesis states that there are statistically significant differences between the experimental group students' mean scores in the pre-post administrations of the writing self-efficacy scale in favour of post-administration results. In order to test the fourth hypothesis, t-test for paired samples was used.

Table 6

t-test results of the experimental group in the pre- and post-administrations of the writing self-efficacy scale.

Self-efficacy scale	Measurement	N	Mean	S.D	t. Value	DF	Sig.
Total of scale items	Pre	30	16.466	2.3741	37.517	29	0.001
	Post	30	30.60	2.5134			

Table 6 shows that the mean score of the experimental group's post-testing (M= 30.60) is higher than pre-testing (M= 16.466). The estimated t-value (37.517) is statistically significant at (0.001) level. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is confirmed.

V. Discussion

The current study attempted to examine the effect of utilizing both interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers on enhancing academic writing skills and self-efficacy for postgraduate English majors. The findings showed that the experimental group outperformed the control one in the overall academic writing and its components (content, organization, vocabulary and language use) apart from the last component, i.e. mechanics. Additionally, the experimental group surpassed the control one in the overall self-efficacy scale.

This development in the experimental group's level could be attributed to the explicit instruction of a wide variety of metadiscourse markers. The students in the experimental group were taught through a systematic instruction based on interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers. They were also involved in different tasks and activities such as distinguishing between statements with and without metadiscourse markers and identifying the different functions for which certain metadiscourse markers are used in a text. Besides, students were trained to make comparisons between two texts and determine how certain metadiscourse markers are utilized within each text. This helped them to gain in-depth knowledge of the text content and organization when producing written texts.

Being engaged in different tasks to utilize interactional metadiscourse markers, the students could establish relationships with readers, maintain presence in the text, convey their attitude, and emphasize a certain perspective. They could also produce generalized statements and indicate their certainty about the ideas presented in the text, which helped them present a credible representation of the written work. Through identifying the different functions of metadiscourse markers, students were able to control the personality level in their writings, negotiate relations with readers, and maintain

an assertive stance by directing the reader's attention towards a certain understanding. Ideally, students were able to restructure and reformulate incoherent texts into coherent, reader-friendly formats. Additionally, guiding students to use different forms of metadiscourse (e.g., modals, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, directives, asides, and questions) in different contexts assisted them in producing correct sentence structures and grammatical patterns. Furthermore, students could evaluate the ideas and information within the text, which helped them provide a thoughtful and in-depth analysis of the subject matter. This is in line with Abdollahzadeh, 2011; Gillaerts and Van de Velde, 2010; Hryniuk, 2018; Kuhl, Asadollahfard, and Amin, 2014; and Susanti, Kurnia, and Suharsono, 2017 who stressed the effective role of interactional metadiscourse markers in enhancing academic writing.

Interactive metadiscourse markers, on the other hand, allowed students to make connections between important ideas and information in the text, determine topic shifts, and anticipate upcoming discussions. This helped students support and clarify the meaning, interpret the content, and develop the ideas accurately and purposefully. Additionally, students showed their ability to connect the ideas to its context using language, taking into account readers' needs, the nature of the content and previous experiences.

By involving students in interactive authentic discussions using metadiscourse markers, they were able to express themselves thoroughly and clearly. They could also challenge different viewpoints within the text through elaborating on ideas and information. This allowed them to negotiate information and support the assigned topic with accurate and relevant information. This result is consistent with Alshahrani, 2015; Chen, 2006; and Ghadyani and Tahririan, 2015 who emphasized the importance of utilizing interactive metadiscourse markers in the development of academic writing.

Additionally, experimental group students were allowed to choose their own writing topics. They were also engaged in interactive activities and discussions, giving them the opportunity to gain much experience and acquire knowledge from similar tasks. Utilizing different metadiscourse markers allowed students to express themselves clearly and present ideas in a way that is understandable to the reader. Hence, students in the experimental group were confident and showed a good level of self-efficacy when writing. They had the ability to accomplish writing tasks successfully and were eager to finish the assigned tasks efficiently. This result is consistent with (Chea and Shumow, 2014; Ruegg, 2018; Zhang, 2018) who stressed the importance of developing self-efficacy beliefs as an indicator of better writing performance.

Unlike the experimental group, students in the control group obtained lower means on the academic writing pot-test, except for the last component, i.e. mechanics. This is because they did not focus on the ultimate goal of writing which is interacting and communicating with readers. They were not able to construct a mental representation of what the text communicates. The instruction they received focused merely on acquiring specific skills, rules of grammar, mechanics and spelling. Such instruction did not give students the opportunity to consider the interests of their readers, communicate different ideas clearly and concisely, or establish an adequate level of interaction with readers. Besides, students could not consider the different factors contribute to effective writing when producing their texts, e.g. the situational context of the text, the purpose for writing the text, and the audience to whom they are writing. Furthermore, in regular instruction, a specific topic was assigned to the students and then they were asked to follow the steps of producing a written material till they create the final product.

In another vein, results indicated no significant differences between both groups with regard to the last component, i.e. mechanics. This

finding came as a result of developing the writing conventions during the years of college study. In addition, spelling, punctuation and capitalization are all aspects in which both groups received instruction and practice.

The results of the current study, therefore, indicated that the development of overall academic writing skills and self-efficacy is significantly dependent on utilizing different interactive and interactional metadiscourse markers. By exploring the use of such markers as communicative strategies, which most studies neglected, students can enhance their abilities to communicate their ideas and write well-organized proposals.

Recommendations

Based on the study results, it is necessary for curriculum designers to integrate explicit teaching of various interactional and interactive metadiscourse markers into postgraduate English majors' curricula. English language learners, particularly those who encounter difficulties in academic writing, should receive instruction on incorporating metadiscourse markers in their written materials. Additionally, instructors should emphasize the role of metadiscourse markers as communicative devices utilized by authors in order to promote readers' engagement and interaction, rather than viewing them as redundant and unnecessary elements. The assessment of post-graduate students' writing should also incorporate the use of metadiscourse markers and their functions within the text. Furthermore, instructors need to consider students' self-efficacy beliefs and to increase their confidence in their own abilities in order to plan and perform writings tasks efficiently.

Suggestions for Further Research

In the light of the current study, the following are suggested:

1. Investigating the effect of metadiscourse markers, as linguistic devices that help writers interpret and evaluate their ideas, on content development and audience awareness-raising.
2. Examining the influence of metadiscourse markers, as one of the indispensable components of oral communication, on spoken language processing.
3. Exploring the influence of metadiscourse markers, as persuasive strategies, on students' argumentative writing skills
4. Investigating the influence of metadiscourse markers instruction on comprehending academic texts.
5. Investigating the relationship between using metadiscourse markers and students' self-efficacy.
6. A case study to examine EFL instructors' beliefs about utilizing different metadiscourse markers is needed.
7. Exploring the relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing fluency for EFL students.

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