



Exploring Effects of Explicit Teaching of Metadiscourse Markers on EFL Students' Writing Proficiency

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ABSTRACT

Embracing a lot of functions, metadiscourse markers are among the most significant factors which affect L2 writing quality. In the present study, whether explicit teaching of meta-discourse markers has any effect on EFL students' writing proficiency was investigated. The participants (N: 21) of the study included freshman students majoring in teaching English as a foreign language at a state university in Turkey. One group quasi experimental design was employed in the study. A process-genre based writing course syllabus, in which meta-discourse markers were taught explicitly was designed and implemented. Before the training, participants were asked to write an argumentative essay as pre-test. After the training, students were asked to write another argumentative essay about a different topic which was considered as post-test. In order to find out whether there was any difference between students former and later performances SPSS, a quantitative analysis method, was employed. Firstly, frequencies of metadiscourse markers used by the participants in their pre-test/post-test essays were calculated. Then, students' pre-test/post-test performances were compared. Findings of the study revealed that students made considerable progress in improving their writing as a skill especially in terms of achieving organization in their essays.

INTRODUCTION

There is a consensus in the relevant field that communicative function of writing needs to be emphasized in EFL classes (Olshtain, 2001). In fact, its communicative nature is compelling both for the writer and reader. While in speaking, the message is supported by tones, gestures and facial expressions which make the intended message comprehensible, in writing, this is not the case. Therefore, the writer needs to communicate his/her message clearly through the text itself (Al-Mahrooqi, 2015; Harmer, 2001). Metadiscourse markers are one of the important factors which contributes to communicative function of the written message since they make writer's message and attitude towards readers and the context explicit, and facilitates readers' comprehension of the text (Hyland, 1998). With the current formal education it has been made obvious that written language has an undeniable strength (Al-Mahrooqi, 2015). Besides making spoken language durable and saving information, it enables people to communicate their ideas with its own means to readers who may be strangers or acquaintances, irrespective of physical distance, with traditional and technological options (White & Arndt, 1991; Olshtain, 2001). Therefore, it is recommended that communicative function of writing should have a place in foreign language instruction (Olshtain, 2001)

Meta-discourse and L2 writing

While defining metadiscourse, Hyland indicates that (2005, p.37), it is “the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assist the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community.” Communicative function of MD markers has been accepted by researchers in the relevant field (Cohen & Tarone, 1994; Cohen, 2014). Thanks to metadiscourse, writers are able to communicate their messages clearly and meaningfully where characteristics of the context and the reader are reflected, and thus negotiation of meaning is achieved. This communicative function of metadiscourse “makes it a central pragmatic construct which allows us to see how writers seek to influence readers’ understandings of both the text and their attitude towards its content and the audience” (Hyland, 1998, p.437). Besides its communicative function, metadiscourse markers promote the understanding of the written text through facilitating coherence and cohesion within the text (Akbaş, 2012).

Traditionally, teaching writing has consisted of teaching grammar points necessary and observing written samples of native speakers for many years. However, beside grammatical knowledge, writing proficiency requires some other components (Amiryousefi & Rasekh, 2010). The current position of English as an international language makes writing challenging as a skill for learners (Jalilifar, 2008). Since the emphasis is on communicative function of writing as a skill, appropriateness, being a pragmatic construct, has become an important part of written language. Appropriate use of language considering readers and context facilitates comprehensibility of the text (Dafouz-Milne, 2008). To make it more specific, writing, with a communicative component, provide writers with having interaction and negotiation with the reader (Akbarpour & Sadeghghli, 2015). Metadiscourse markers play a significant role at this point since they are capable of fulfilling such functions in written text (Çubukçu, 2017).

Developing writing skill is significant for students in that it helps students to learn about appropriate usage of target language as learners discover how to negotiate their messages by means of target language (Raimes, 2002). Besides, Harmer emphasizes communicative function of writing as a productive skill claiming that purpose of teaching writing should be to provide students with necessary skills to communicate their ideas, through writing (Harmer, 2001). While writing in target language, it is essential to recognize communicative goals, target readers and context of writing, which require hard work and attention on the part of the learners (Ahmed, 2010). On the whole, writing is a quite challenging task since there are many issues at play in writing: content, style, organization, fluency, grammar, rhetorical forms of discourse and the like. Therefore, content which will be used for teaching writing should be handled with considerable attention. For this reason, it is strongly advised that the instructor choose between them to focus on based on needs of students and her teaching philosophy (Raimes, 2002).

Writing as Process (Process Approach)

The need for more effective approaches to writing has led to emergence of process based writing since the traditional product approach to teaching writing has proved to be unsuccessful in helping students to write effectively (Zamel, 1982). According to Kroll (1990, p.220-221), in the process approach:

Student writers engage in their writing tasks through a cyclical approach rather than a single-shot approach. They are not expected to produce and submit complete and polished responses to their writing assignments without going through stages of drafting and receiving feedback on their drafts, be it from peers and/or from the teacher, followed by revision of their evolving texts.

Process approach includes four main steps: planning, drafting, revising and editing. These steps are complemented by responding, evaluating and post-writing. In process approach, steps need to be followed rigidly to achieve the defined purpose:

Planning (Pre-writing): It is the starting point for students consisting of several activities to foster students through helping them to create ideas and collect information before writing.

Drafting: After fulfilling prerequisites for writing, students are expected to write immediately with a focus on fluency.

Responding: It is a kind of feedback provided by teacher or peers to help students edit and improve their first draft.

Revising: Students revise their drafts considering the feedback they received for both fluency and accuracy

Editing: Students make necessary changes in their drafts and reshape it for the instructor's evaluation: they correct mistakes related to grammar, handle problems with organization of ideas etc.

Evaluating: The instructor evaluates students' writings based on the criteria announced to the students beforehand.

Post-writing: It refers to any kind of activities like posting, reading in front of the class, sharing of written product to stimulate students and show that what they have done is valuable (Seow, 2002).

Explicit Instruction

Explicit instruction is targeted at aiding students to consciously attend to learning process to be aware of choices for learning the target language, maintaining collaboration between teacher and learners, and stimulating recognition and use of techniques that help students to be self-reliant (Oxford, 1990). It is also called as intentional learning (Brown, 2007). By explaining rules, giving corrective feedback, and encouraging students to talk about their learning process, the teacher aims at helping students to understand how the target language works with explicit instruction (Cutrone, 2016). Explicit instruction enables students to master the language in a shorter period of time compared to implicit teaching since learners are not always able to grasp the rules incidentally by themselves especially the complex ones which require teacher intervention (Hulstijn & de Graaff, 1994; Ellis, 2002). Moreover, conscious learning aids students to become aware of the problems or weakness they have in target language and attempt to overcome these handicaps. It also helps learners to evaluate effectiveness of the instruction and feedback provided by the instructor (Klein, 1986).

The recent research confirms that explicit instruction is a better option for teaching pragmatics too (Rajabia & Azizifara & Gowhary, 2015; House, 2013; Aufa, 2011; Cohen, 2008; Soler, 2005). Moreover, students are not likely to learn some pragmatic aspects incidentally unless they are not given explicit explanation about those pragmatic aspects (Aufa, 2011). Similarly, Schmidt (1993) highlights that students need to be engaged with grammatical features, function/meaning of language and characteristics of the context consciously to improve L2 pragmatics. In brief, it has been proven by the recent research that explicit instruction, which was also preferred as a teaching method in the present study, is essential for L2 learning and especially for improvement of competence in L2 forms (Rahimpour & Salimi, 2010).

As a pragmatic construct, usage of metadiscourse markers in students writing was investigated in this study. Even though a good number of studies were conducted related to the usage of metadiscourse markers, most of these studies were descriptive in nature (Akbas, 2012; Simin & Tavangar, 2009; Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Hyland, 2004; Hyland, 1998) and only a few

studies investigated effects of explicit teaching of MD markers on students' writing proficiency (Steffensen & Cheng, 1996; Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010 and Yaghoubi & Ardestani, 2014). Therefore, this study aims to answer the following question(s): Does explicit instruction on meta-discourse markers used in argumentative writing affect students' final performance in argumentative writing compared to their initial performance in argumentative writing in terms of

- content,
- communicative achievement,
- language,
- organization?

METHODOLOGY

Setting and Participants

Participants for the present study were undergraduate students who were enrolled in English Language Teaching department at a state university. Only first year students were included in the study since the study was aimed at improving students' writing as a skill. Courses focusing on the four basic skills including writing are taught in the first year as determined by the national curriculum. As stated by the participants throughout the semester, writing class is the first place to create a piece of writing for majority of the participants, which make the writing class extremely challenging for them.

A writing task was applied to students, and they were evaluated using Cambridge assessment scale (2014). Students whose levels were under B1 were excluded from the study. A total of 21 students took part in the study. They were chosen via convenience sampling as students attending the writing classes regularly fulfilling all of the requirements of the writing course took part in the study.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

One group pre-test/post-test design was adopted as the research design in the present study to collect data. Sometimes called as pre-experimental design, it is generally subsumed under quasi-experimental designs, and widely used in educational research to investigate possible effects of a new learning or teaching method, a new approach to the teaching/learning etc. (Cohen & Manion & Morrison, 2007; Thyer, 2012).

Writing class, in which the present study was conducted, lasted for 12 weeks. To find an answer to the research question, the researcher prepared two similar argumentative tasks which were administered to students as pre-test and post-test. The first task (pre-test) was applied at the beginning of the term. The instructor wanted students to write an argumentative essay about a topic determined by the instructor during the class hours. Before students began to write, the lecturer discussed the topic with students in the class. After collective brainstorming, ideas generated were written on the board by the instructor. Short videos were watched to the students related to the issue. Lastly, the instructor showed several statistics and expert opinions about the issue. All these were done to help students to write without thinking much about the content since purpose of this task was to reveal only their writing performance in a limited time. At the end of the term, a similar task (post-test) was given to the students following the same procedures mentioned above.

In accordance with the purpose of the study, process-genre based approach to writing was employed supported with explicit teaching of meta-discourse markers. Based on the Hyland's (2004) classifications, usage of the metadiscourse markers belonging to the following

categories were taught: interactive resources: transitions, frame markers, evidentials and code glosses; interactional resources: attitude markers and boosters. Pre-test results, students' language level, writing experience and time limitation of the study were mainly taken into consideration while deciding on subcategories; the other subcategories (endophoric markers, hedges and engagement markers) were omitted since they were only barely used by the participants and they were less compatible with the discourse conventions compared to the other subcategories. They were more commonly used in academic writing (Hyland, 2004). Therefore, categories usage of which students have the potential to improve were selected primarily for the present research. Self-mentions were also excluded since students made use of them in the pre-test essays. To determine which meta-discourse markers will be taught, the researcher benefited from BNC (British National Corpus) along with several teaching documents shared by schools, organizations on the internet ("Useful Argumentative", n.d.; "Cause-Effect", n.d.; Smith, n.d.; "Cause-Effect Essay", n.d.).

The courses were shaped around genres. Throughout the term, students wrote three essays in three different genres (compare-contrast, cause-effect, argumentative essay) introduced by the instructor. In addition, two argument-opinion writing tasks were given to students to help students practice and gain familiarity with argumentative writing throughout the term, and they were written in essay format by the students. For each essay, genre-specific meta-discourse markers were chosen to teach maintained by explicit explanation of their meanings and functions supported with sample sentences (ex: for comparison-contrast essay, meta-discourse markers indicating contrast or comparison like: whereas, likewise were taught explicitly). Explicit instruction was supported with sample essays and exercises. Thanks to sample essays, students saw usage of meta-discourse markers in context, and they were also given exercises related to meta-discourse markers in the class to help them strengthen what they learnt. These exercises were in the following formats: fill-in-blanks, matching meta-discourse markers with their functions, combining sentences with appropriate metadiscourse markers, cloze tests with metadiscourse markers missing, finding functions and synonyms for given meta-discourse markers in sample essays. Since process-genre based approach was adopted, syllabus was designed considering following procedure: students were expected to write their first drafts using meta-discourse markers taught by the instructor. The instructor gave detailed feedback with a special focus on usage of meta-discourse markers to each student's first draft stimulating them to use meta-discourse markers that they learnt, their synonyms and also new ones after searching by themselves. After editing based on the feedback from the instructor, students wrote their final drafts in a week. In addition to the criteria included in the writing assessment scale, students' final drafts were especially marked on their ability to make use of a variety of meta-discourse markers appropriately and correctly. The instructor especially checked whether students considered warnings related to usage of meta-discourse markers addressed to them in their first drafts. Lastly, common mistakes encountered in students' essays especially the ones related to usage of MD markers were discussed in the class.

To evaluate students' argumentative essays written before and after the training (pre-/post-tests), and other essays and writing tasks written during the term, a writing assessment scale prepared by Cambridge English (2014) was exploited in this study. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), Cambridge English writing assessment scale consists of following subscales:

-Content: In this subscale, the rater looks for relevancy between the task directed to the student and his/her writing.

-Communicative achievement: This subscale looks for appropriacy in fulfilling requirements of the task and using register necessary for the task. For instance, if students are asked to write a letter, the rater concentrates on whether students followed essentials of letter writing.

-Organization: This part focuses on coherence and cohesion. Students are expected to maintain coherence by pursuing relevancy between paragraphs, sentences in terms of meaning throughout the text. The rater also looks for cohesion; whether students use cohesive devices including meta-discourse markers correctly and appropriately when necessary.

-Language: This part is related to vocabulary and grammar. The rater looks for variety and accuracy in language forms used by students. Students are expected to use both everyday vocabulary and less common lexis appropriate for the context. Likewise, they are anticipated to employ both simple and complex grammatical forms correctly and appropriately to communicate their messages.

It is divided into six bands from 0 to 5 to mark students' written performances. While 0 refers to lowest performance, 5 refers to highest.

Frequencies of the meta-discourse markers used by students in their essays were calculated and students' pre-/post-test performances were compared through quantitative analysis. First, students' argumentative essays were evaluated by the researcher using Cambridge assessment scale. To maintain reliability, five of students' essays, which comprise more than %10 of the participants, were evaluated by two raters. The results were compared and it was found that there was agreement between raters in scoring students' essay. Then, pre-test/post-test performances of the participants were analyzed thorough Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Both parametric and non-parametric statistics were employed in the present study. Even though the number of the participants was below 30, paired samples *t*-test was applied to compare students' overall writing performance at the beginning and at the end of the term since the data had normal distribution. For other statistical operations, a non-parametric test was applied. To investigate the differences between students' pre-/post-test writing performances in terms of content, communicative achievement, language and organization, which are the subscales of writing scale used for the present study, Wilcoxon Signed Ranked Test was applied since the data did not have normal distribution in addition to small sample size.

RESULTS

Comparison of Participants' Performances in Argumentative Writing Before and After Explicit Instruction on Meta-Discourse Markers

Table 1 displays participants overall writing performance in both pre-test and post-test essays together with standard deviation and standard error mean. Comparison of mean scores of pre-test and post-test essays demonstrates that students writing performance improved after experiencing process-genre based writing instruction supported with explicit teaching of meta-discourse markers.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Focus group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	14,7143	21	2,19415	,47880
	Post-test	17,0952	21	2,07135	,45200

As shown in Table 2, the question of whether there was significant difference between students writing performances before and after intervention was also answered. The mean difference between pre-test and post-test essay results were recorded as MD=2, 38. Overall, it was found that there was a statistically significant difference between students' pre-test and

post-test results with $t(20) = 7,81$ and p value = 0.000 in terms of writing performance in general, which meant that teaching approach adopted by the instructor had positive effect on students' writing performance.

Table 2. Comparison of Participants' Overall Writing Performance in Pre/Post-tests by Paired Samples t-Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pre/post test	-2,38095	1,39557	,30454	-3,01621	-1,74570	-7,818	20	,000

Content

For this subscale, the rater seeks answers for the questions like “Is all content relevant to the task?” or “Is the target reader fully informed?” (CAS, 2014). In order to compare students' pre-test and post-test writing performances in terms of content, Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test was applied. It was found that the least significant difference existed in content among the four subscales.

Table 3. Comparison of Participants' Writing Performance with regard to Content in Pre/Post-tests by Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

	Pre-test scores		Post-test scores	
	N	Mean	N	Mean
	21	4.0952	21	4.3333
Z				
Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed)		-2.236		.025

Table 3 shows that there was still meaningful difference between pre-test and post-test scores of the participants in terms of content with $Z=2.23$ and $p=.025$. On the other hand, the mean difference between pre-test and post-test performances was $MD=0.24$.

Communicative Achievement

In this subscale, the rater attempts to find out whether the writer uses the conventions of the task in generally appropriate ways (CAS, 2014). In order to compare students' pre-test and post-test writing performances in terms of communicative achievement, Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test was applied. It was revealed that Communicative achievement was the category which showed second least difference between pre-test and post-test performances. However,

it is still obvious that learners demonstrated better performance in fulfilling requirements of essay writing in given genre in post-test as illustrated in Table 4. Analysis of students' pre-test and post-test essays in terms of communicative achievement by Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test suggests that the difference between students pre-test and post-test performances in communicative achievement was statistically significant with $Z=2,5$ and $p \text{ value}=.012$. The mean difference between pre-test and post-test performances in communicative achievement was found as $MD=0.48$.

Table 4. Comparison of Participants' Writing Performance with regard to Communicative Achievement in Pre/Post-tests by Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

	Pre-test scores		Post-test scores
	N	Mean	Mean
	21	3.6190	4.0952
Z	-2.500		
Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed)	.012		

Extract 1:

“Child therapists are the scientists who work on children with behavioral, emotional and mental disorders. They have a mutual opinion on the censorship of the media in terms of protecting children” (taken from introducing part of the 1st body paragraph in pre-test: P1).

As seen in extract one taken from pre-test, the writer begins body paragraph with a definition which cannot be a topic sentence of this body paragraph since the main idea of this paragraph is not about child therapists.

Extract 2:

“Undoubtedly, one of the main disadvantages of advertisement is making people buy things even if they don't need them. Advertisements are designed very well by the experts in order to control people's desires.” (taken from introducing part of the 1st body paragraph in post-test: P1).

Topic sentence written by the same writer in post-test better represents the main idea of the paragraph since it informs the reader about what the writer is going to mention about in this paragraph and it is followed by further explanations to support the topic sentence. The writer specifies and justifies his topic sentence claiming that advertisements have the power to persuade people and direct their ambitions.

Another student (P8) fails in maintaining communicative achievement in her thesis statement as seen in extract 3 taken from pre-test. Since participants were required to write an argument essay in which they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement given, they were expected to give their opinions clearly about the issue. However, the writer does not share her opinion with the readers in extract 3, which makes her thesis statement unclear. It is not possible for the reader to understand whether positive or negative effects of the media outweigh for the writer.

Extract 3:

“People cannot imagine their daily life without TV, radio or internet. Despite that media has become a part of our life, there are disputes about its positive and negative effects on human beings.” (taken from concluding part of introduction including thesis statement in pre-test:P8)

However, in extract 4 taken from post-test, writer’s position about the issue presented can be understood easily as she explains her opinion with its reasons. The reader can easily understand that the writer stands for ads. She supports her opinion claiming that ads are source of income for some people and inform people about the products.

Extract 4:

“Although some people claim that ads pollute children’s brain and promote unhealthy products, I think they are useful because of being source of income for some people and informing people about new products. Hence, they shouldn’t be banned.” (taken from concluding part of introduction including thesis statement in post-test:P8)

Language

In this subscale, the rater looks for variety and accuracy in language forms used by students (CAS, 2014). For comparison of students’ pre-test and post-test writing performances in terms of language, Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test was applied. It was found that learners were more successful in using language after instruction given by the researcher. They showed better performance in using both basic and less common vocabulary maintaining variety in word usage. Likewise, participants improved their grammar by using not only simple forms but also complex forms, and were able to use both common and less common words correctly (Cambridge Assessment Scale, 2014).

Table 5. Comparison of Participants’ Writing Performance with regard to Language in Pre/Post-tests by Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

	Pre-test scores	Post-test scores
	Mean	Mean
N		
	21	3.5714
Z	-3.557	4.3333
Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

Table 5 illustrates that there was meaningful difference between students’ pre-test and post-test essay writing performances with regard to language with $Z=3.55$ and $p\text{ value}=.000$. Moreover, the mean difference between students’ language performances in pre-test and post-test essays was 0.76.

In extract 5 taken from pre-test, the writer does not use complex sentences with good degree of control; mistakes that both impede and do not impede communication can be noticed easily. For instance, in the sentence starting with “while thinking about the beneficial of pre-education and.....” the first part or dependent clause is not compatible with the independent part in terms of meaning and structure, which violates communication and form of complex

sentence since the subject of the first part is not clear. Besides, some common words are used incorrectly such as assisting, which should be assistance.

Extract 5:

“Talking about TV, a time limitation can be put to decrease damage of programmes. While thinking about the beneficial of pre-education and family control of kids, parents have a really vital duties for their children who need assisting during youth ages.” (supporting ideas for the main idea of body paragraph in pre-test:P9)

When we look at the extract 6 taken from post-test essay of the same participant, we can see that the writer uses complex sentence structures confidently and flexibly as in the sentence starting with “Undoubtedly, the consuming culture drag human being to unhealthy life conditions since...” Besides, writer uses both everyday vocabulary like effect, health etc. and less common vocabulary such as subconscious appropriately and correctly.

Extract 6:

“Advertisements have negative effects on human health because of commercials’ “consume more” messages which affect our subconscious mind. Undoubtedly, the consuming culture drag human being to unhealthy life conditions since fast food advertisements have strict control on them.” (supporting ideas for the main idea of body paragraph in post-test:P9)

In extract 7 written by another student in pre-test, incorrect usage of some common (ex: affect) and less common words (ex: impressionable) are encountered. Besides, other words ‘control’ and ‘mind’ are used inappropriately as it is not sensible to control somebody’s mind.

Extract 7:

“The other negative affect is sleeping problems of child. Because of these harmful programmes, kids can have nightmares. Children are very impressionable and it is important to control their minds.” (supporting ideas for the main idea of body paragraph in pre-test: P6).

On the other hand, in extract 8 written by the same participant in post-test session, both everyday vocabulary (ex: health, need) and less common words (ex: point out, mental) are used correctly and appropriately.

Extract 8:

“Most researchers point out that advertisements increase obesity and mental illnesses such as depression. They make us buy things even if we don’t need. Due to unhealthy foods, especially children’s health is in danger.” (supporting ideas for the main idea of body paragraph in post-test: P6).

Organization

This subscale is related to coherence and cohesion (CAS, 2014). In order to compare students’ pre-test and post-test writing performances in terms of organization, Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test was applied. As expected, it was found that organization was the sub-

category in which students improved most. Students showed worst performance in this sub-scale in the pre-test since they had very limited knowledge about cohesive devices especially meta-discourse markers. However, analyses of the pre-/post-test results highlight that participants performed better in terms of achieving coherence and cohesion in post-test essays. As displayed in Table 6, the difference between participants' pre-test and post-test essay performances in terms of organization was significant with $Z=4.14$ and $p\text{ value}=.000$. Lastly, the mean difference between students' performances in pre-test and post-test essays with regard to organization was found as 0.91.

Table 6. Comparison of Participants' Writing Performance with regard to Organization in Pre/Post-tests by Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

		Pre-test scores	Post-test scores
		Mean	Mean
N			
	21	3.4286	4.3333
Z	-4.146		
Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		

When it comes to comparison of pre-test and post-test performances of the participants with regard to organization, differences in how students organized and linked sentences can be noticed easily. For example, while the writer finishes his essay with a weak conclusion in extract 9 taken from pre-test, he uses a variety of meta-discourse markers which make his position clear and conclusion sound more confident by using 'in conclusion', 'I accept', 'in spite of', in extract 10, which he wrote as a part of post-test essay.

Extract 9:

“Media has a great impact on society. Despite its positive effects, it has negative effects that cannot be solved by an individual or a group.” (from introducing part of the conclusion paragraph in pre-test: P2)

Extract 10:

“In conclusion, advertisement is not all of a healthy-wealthy life. I accept that it may have little negative sides too, but in spite of some debates about them to ban or not, ...” (from introducing part of the conclusion paragraph in post-test: P2)

Another participant does not use any meta-discourse markers taught in class as seen in extract 11 taken from pre-test. However, she connects her sentences with several meta-discourse markers (furthermore, to put it more simply) in extract 12 in post-test, which make her sentences more meaningful and the relation between sentences more obvious. To give additional information she uses 'furthermore' and to restate what she talked about in the whole paragraph, she uses 'to put it more simply'.

Extract 11:

“The increasing presence of violence in films, games and TV programs affect children's personal characteristics. To be exposed to violence at early ages could cause bad habits.” (from concluding part of 1st body paragraph in pre-test :P19)

Extract 12:

“Furthermore, the small and growing companies can advertise their products and compete with others in this way. To put it more simply, ads help some people continue their life and contribute to economic growth.” (from concluding part of 1st body paragraph in post-test :P19)

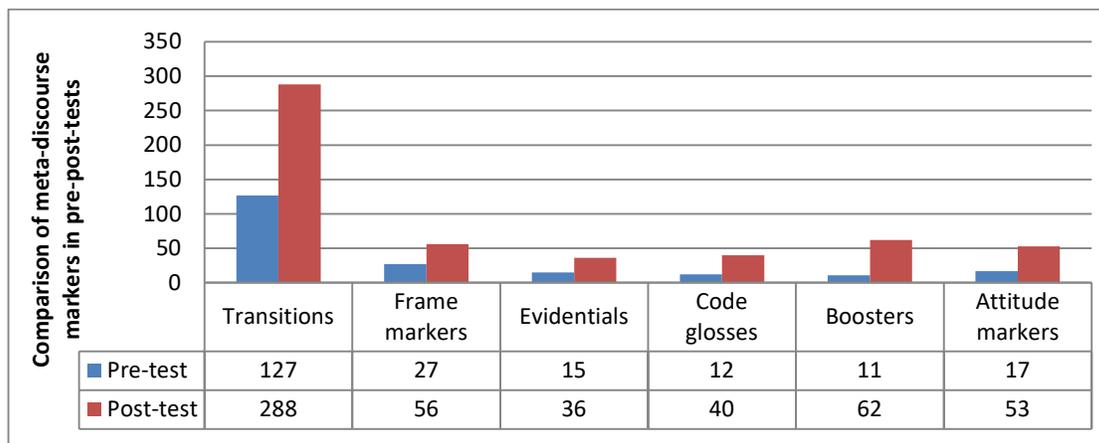


Figure 1. Comparison of Usage of Meta-discourse Markers in Pre-Post Tests

Figure 1 presents the overall picture of students' performances in integrating metadiscourse markers into their argumentative essays through illustrating frequencies of MD markers. It is clear that participants made considerable progress in the usage of meta-discourse markers in their argumentative essays. The most remarkable improvement was in the subcategory of boosters with four-fold increase of usage. It was followed by code glosses, attitude markers respectively. Framer markers were the last in this ordering.

Table 7. Comparison of Frequencies of Boosters Used by Participants in Pre-test and Post-test Essays

Boosters	Frequency (pre-test)	Frequency (post-test)	Percentage (pre-test)	Percentage (post-test)
Especially	3	3	28	4,8
Of course	2	1	18	1,6
Actually	1	6	9	9,6
Even if	1	8	9	12,9
It is clear that	1	5	9	8,06
It is obvious that	1	1	9	1,6
Obviously	1	4	9	6,4
Undoubtedly	1	11	9	17,7
Total (rounded)	11	39	100	63

In Table 7, boosters employed by the participants in both pre-test and post-test essays are illustrated. It was observed that there was significant increase in the frequency of boosters used in post-test essays compared to pre-test essays. As depicted in the table, 'undoubtedly' was the most commonly exploited booster by the participants in their post-test argumentative essays even though it was used only once in pre-test essays. The following boosters were used much more frequently in post-test essays: 'actually', 'even if', 'it is clear that' and 'obviously'.

Even though boosters including ‘especially’, ‘it is obvious that’ and ‘of course’ were not taught by the instructor, they were encountered in both pre-test and post-test essays.

Table 8. Frequencies of Boosters Used by Participants Only in Post-test Essays

Boosters	Frequency	Percentage
It is known that	9	14,5
It is essential that	6	9,6
In fact	2	3,2
Particularly	2	3,2
Definitely	1	1,6
Even when	1	1,6
It is a fact that	1	1,6
It is widely accepted that	1	1,6
Total (rounded)	23	37

Table 8 displays boosters exploited by the participants only in post-test essays. As depicted in the table, the following boosters were not used in pre-test essays but were encountered in post-test essays: ‘it is known that’, ‘it is essential that’, ‘in fact’, ‘definitely’, after explicit instruction on them. The following boosters were not taught but were used by the participants: ‘even when’, ‘particularly’, ‘it is a fact that’ and ‘it is widely accepted that’. Lastly, ‘certainly’ was not exploited by the participants even though it was included in class teaching. Here are several examples for the usage of various boosters by the participants taken from post-test essays:

Extract 13:

“Undoubtedly, people learn a great deal of information about products when they are exposed to advertisements” (P16).

Extract 14:

“It is known that producers sought for new markets to sell their goods after the Industry Revolution” (P2).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Usage of meta-discourse markers was commonly investigated in written discourse since it is believed that understanding how meta-discourse markers operate within context is best realized in written discourse (Hyland, 2005). To this end, students’ performances in argumentative writing were investigated at the beginning and at the end of the term after students were exposed to explicit teaching of MD markers in this study.

Analysis of comparison of students’ overall writing performances in pre-test essays and post-test essays demonstrated that participants became better L2 writers after experiencing explicit instruction on meta-discourse markers supported with process-genre based approach. This finding corresponds to findings of the studies carried out by Steffensen & Cheng (1996), Dastjerdi & Shirzad (2010), and Yaghoubi & Ardestani (2014) since they also found that explicit instruction on meta-discourse markers improved students’ writing proficiency. However, when it comes to analysis of comparison of pre-test and post-test essays in terms of each subscale mentioned above, there were differences in terms of students performances in pre-test and post-test essays.

To begin with, the least difference between students' pre-test and post-test writing performances was found in content subscale. In fact, students' performances in both pre-test and post-test essays were convincing with regard to the criteria mentioned under content subscale. Majority of the participants fulfilled task requirements and wrote about the topic they were expected to write informing reader about purpose and theme of the essay satisfactorily. One reason for this can be students' familiarity with the essay writing process at the beginning of the term. Since this study was conducted in spring term, students had already learnt about essentials of essay writing in fall term writing class prior to the present research, and had experience in essay writing. Still, several students had problems in covering the topic comprehensively in pre-test essays.

Second less remarkable difference between students' pre-test and post-test writing performances was found in communicative achievement subscale even though the difference was still evident. In this subscale, students' essays were marked on conventions of essay writing in terms of given genre. In their pre-test argumentative essays, several students did not fulfill conventions of argumentative essay writing. However, number of those who failed to meet criteria mentioned in communicative achievement subscale decreased in post-test argumentative essays.

Students' essays were also marked on language which is the third subscale of the Cambridge assessment scale for writing (2014). Expectedly, students' post-test performances in language were considerably better than their language performance in pre-test argumentative essays. There was decrease in the following types of errors in students' post-test essays: incorrect or inappropriate vocabulary usage, errors especially impeding communication, incorrect usage of grammatical forms, and sentence forms. Moreover, majority of the students avoided using complex sentences and less common words in their pre-test essays whereas more students attempted to make complex and longer sentences and use less common words in post-test essays.

Not surprisingly, the most significant difference between students' pre-test and post-test writing performances was encountered in organization which is the last subscale of writing assessment scale (CAS, 2014). While assessing students' essays with regard to organization, the following criteria were taken into consideration: maintaining coherence and cohesion which include usage of various meta-discourse markers. In pre-test essay performances by the participants, it was seen that they used a limited number of meta-discourse markers especially in the following subcategories: evidentials, code glosses, boosters and attitude markers, which meant that there were participants who did not use any meta-discourse markers belonging to one or more than one of the subcategories mentioned above. Only in the subcategory of transitions, a fair amount of meta-discourse markers were used by the participants in pre-test since they were familiar with some of the transitions. Problems in achieving coherence and cohesion especially because of lack of usage of appropriate meta-discourse markers were frequently encountered in pre-test performances. Comparison of students' pre-test and post-test performances revealed that participants performed better with regard to using various and appropriate meta-discourse markers and achieving coherence and cohesion in their post-test essays.

The greatest difference between pre-tests and post-tests in terms of usage of meta-discourse markers was seen in the subcategory of boosters as there was more than five-fold increase in the usage of boosters in post-test essays compared to usage of boosters in pre-test essays. The main reason for such increase in the usage of boosters can be features of the essay genre in which students were asked to write as they wrote argumentative essay which required them to make their opinion explicit and support it with examples, evidences or reasons. This finding of the present research was confirmed in a study conducted by Escobar & Fernandez (2017) as they also found that students had the tendency of using boosters more frequently than

other linguistic/rhetorical devices (discourse organizers) in their argumentative essays after experiencing 5-month class teaching which focused on the usage of such devices. Lastly, boosters was the subcategory in which students' attempts for using different metadiscourse markers which were not included in class teaching were the most successful as exactly half of the boosters reported to have been used by the participants in post-test essays were not used in pre-test essays and were not taught in the class.

In the light of the findings obtained, the following implications could be drawn from this research. As stated by Harmer (2001), communicative aspect of writing should be prioritized in writing classes. Since MD markers fulfill communicative functions, they should have a place in L2 writing classes. Moreover, they should be introduced to the students at the very beginning since it often takes time to learn, internalize and use these pragmatic properties. In addition, explicit instruction should be adopted to teach MD markers to guarantee learning (White, 1998). When teaching pragmatics, the teachers should start with getting students' attention to pragmatic properties of language. Importance of raising students' awareness, which is the first step for teaching pragmatics (Brock & Nagasaka, 2005), was widely acknowledged in the present study as most of the students felt the need for using MD markers and began to pay attention to using them during the semester thanks to activities in which students examined sample essays with regard to MD markers included, coherence and cohesion. Finally, understanding and acknowledging challenges of writing class for students and the teachers, the teacher should provide students with scaffolding. Scaffolding, a Vygotskian concept, suggests that the instructor should support and guide the students to complete the writing task till they can achieve it by themselves (Yau, 2007). Teachers could provide this support through giving continuous feedback on students' essays as it is a crucial stage which is likely to guide students in writing process (Kamal & Faraj, 2015).

On the whole, the participants made progress in terms of integrating meta-discourse markers into their essays, and the training they received contributed to their writing skills in general. The results of the study revealed that several metadiscourse markers which were taught by the instructor were frequently made use of by the participants whereas some others were not preferred by any participant although they were also introduced to the participants. Reasons for why participants preferred using several meta-discourse markers to the others could be investigated in future research. On the other hand, the study was conducted in spring term and lasted for 12 weeks. However, this time period was not enough to get more sound and favorable results as it requires time and effort on the part of the learners to promote L2 writing. To adopt and integrate metadiscourse markers into their essays at once was not possible for the students as highlighted in the present study. Even, only raising students' awareness on the usage of metadiscourse markers, which was the first step of intervention, took quite a lot of time. Therefore, studies which last for at least one academic year are needed to keep track of students' progress in writing and effects of such training on students' development. Another limitation was related to number of the participants since they were chosen based on convenience sampling, 21 students took part in the study. Research with larger groups could yield to more sound results.

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