

The Use of Metadiscourse Markers in Expository Essays by Malaysian ESL Learners

*Penggunaan Penanda Metawacana dalam Esei Ekspositori oleh Pelajar
Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL) di Malaysia*

MASLIZA MAT ZALI, NURUL AJLEAA ABDUL RAHMAN*, RAZIFA MOHD RAZLAN,
AZMAN CHE MAT & YASSIR SABRI EID AL SUOD

Received: 25-07-2025 /Accepted: 4-06-2026

ABSTRACT

Language elements such as interactive and interactional metadiscourse (MD) are employed to keep essays coherent. Since there was only one way for the writer and reader to communicate, it was difficult for English Second Language (ESL) learners to write clearly and thoroughly. The use of MD markers by ESL learners was studied, and its usage was compared. An experimental study was conducted among 120 ESL learners who are undergraduates from a university in Malaysia. Their use of MD markers was analysed based on Hyland (2005)'s framework. A set of questionnaires was distributed to determine the types of MD markers used and whether learners from different groups make any differences in their choices of MD markers in their expository essays. For data triangulation, a semi-structured interview was conducted too. The analysis revealed that ESL learners in both groups frequently used more interactional than interactive MD. The most prominent feature used is Self-mention and the least is Evidential. However, the experimental group used frequently MD markers in their essays as compared to the control group. The ESL learners from experimental group which were given treatment have chosen to use more MD markers in their essays. This result indicates the vital role of MD use in academic writings to enhance the writing quality. This could lead to a proposition for an analysis of MD use on written corpus to gain fascinating outcomes and also to find the relationship of MD use with the ESL learners' awareness and their writing score.

Keywords: ESL Learners; Expository Essays Interactive Metadiscourse and Interactional Metadiscourse

ABSTRAK

Elemen bahasa seperti metawacana interaktif dan interaksional digunakan untuk memastikan penulisan esei lebih tersusun, koheren dan mudah difahami oleh pembaca. Namun demikian, ramai pelajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL) masih menghadapi kesukaran untuk menyampaikan idea secara jelas dan menyeluruh dalam penulisan akademik mereka. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti penggunaan penanda metawacana dalam kalangan pelajar ESL serta membandingkan corak penggunaannya dalam penulisan esei ekspositori. Kajian berbentuk eksperimen ini melibatkan 120 orang pelajar prasiswazah ESL daripada sebuah universiti di Malaysia. Penggunaan penanda metawacana dianalisis berdasarkan kerangka metawacana yang dikemukakan oleh Hyland (2005). Selain itu, satu set soal selidik diedarkan bagi mengenal pasti jenis penanda metawacana yang digunakan dan menentukan sama ada terdapat perbezaan dalam pemilihan penanda metawacana antara kumpulan yang dikaji. Bagi tujuan triangulasi data, temu bual separa berstruktur turut dijalankan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar ESL dalam kedua-dua kumpulan lebih kerap menggunakan metawacana interaksional berbanding metawacana interaktif. Penanda yang paling dominan digunakan ialah rujukan sendiri (self-mention), manakala penanda yang paling kurang digunakan ialah evidensial (evidential). Walau bagaimanapun, kumpulan eksperimen menunjukkan penggunaan penanda metawacana yang lebih tinggi berbanding kumpulan kawalan. Pelajar yang menerima intervensi metawacana didapati lebih cenderung menggunakan lebih banyak penanda metawacana dalam penulisan mereka. Dapatan ini membuktikan bahawa penggunaan metawacana memainkan peranan penting dalam meningkatkan kualiti penulisan akademik. Kajian ini turut mencadangkan agar analisis korpus penulisan yang akan datang memfokuskan penggunaan metawacana diperluaskan bagi memperoleh pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang hubungannya dengan tahap kesedaran metawacana dan pencapaian penulisan pelajar ESL.

Kata kunci: Esei Ekspositori; Metawacana Interaksional; Metawacana Interaktif dan Pelajar ESL

INTRODUCTION

Metadiscourse (MD) is a compelling field of research widely recognised as crucial for structuring and producing both oral and written discourse. According to Hyland (2005) and Zali et al. (2021), teaching learners MD markers offers three key benefits. First, it helps them recognise the cognitive demands texts place on readers and the techniques that can improve their own writings. Understanding audience needs is vital for strengthening writing effectiveness (Voon et al., 2019). Second, MD instruction provides learners with strategies to assert and defend their viewpoints more effectively. Additionally, it fosters critical engagement between writers and their readers. Reyes et al. (2024) also highlighted the importance of teaching MD as a way to enhance learners' understanding of language use and support increased control and personal expression in academic writing. Hence, researchers continue to explore many advantages of teaching MD, underscoring its important role in learning writing.

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

DEFINITION OF METADISCOURSE (MD)

The term 'metadiscourse' was first coined by Harris in 1959 to label those features in texts which contained no essential information by themselves but commented on information-carrying parts of a text. The concept of metadiscourse has been further elaborated and investigated by such scholars like Williams (1981), VandeKopple (1985), Crismore (1989), and Hyland (2005). Hyland (2005), a pioneer scholar in the MD field, defines it as "the self-referential expressions used to guide readers through a text, signal the writer's stance, and anticipate audience needs," categorising it into *interactive* (text-organizing) and *interactional* (reader-engaging) dimensions.

Similarly, Adel (2006) emphasizes its role in "writer-reader interaction," framing metadiscourse as markers that reveal the writer's awareness of both the text's structure (*textual metadiscourse*) and the reader's potential reactions (*interpersonal metadiscourse*). In summary, MD refers to the linguistic features writers use to organize their text, express stance, and guide readers through their arguments, rather than adding propositional content. In other words, it is "discourse about discourse" language that signals how ideas should be understood and how the writer wants to interact with the reader. Hyland (2005) distinguishes between interactive markers and interactional markers (see Table 1 and Table 2). Interactive MD helps structure the text for clarity and coherence, for example transition markers like *however* and *thus*, or frame markers like *firstly* and *in conclusion*. Interactional MD, on the other hand, builds a relationship with the reader and conveys the writer's stance, such as hedges (*might*, *possibly*), boosters (*clearly*, *definitely*), attitude markers (*unfortunately*, *surprisingly*), and self-mentions (*I*, *we*). In overall, MD plays a crucial role in ESL contexts by facilitating discourse organisation and writer-reader interaction arguing that effective use of these markers enhance clarity and persuasion in ESL writing. Together, these perspectives highlight MD as essential for structuring discourse, managing reader expectations, and establishing authorial presence in second language communication.

EXPOSITORY ESSAY VS MD

At tertiary education, undergraduates, specifically ESL learners are taught to write persuasive or argumentative essays and expository essays as a preparation to write good academic paper or thesis in their final semester. As Lee (2025) mentioned/asserted, they often face persistent challenges in writing, including structuring ideas into coherent paragraphs, expressing personal perspectives through suitable academic discourse, constructing syntactically complex sentences, developing and substantiating arguments logically, and demonstrating competence in summarizing and paraphrasing source information effectively. Therefore, ESL writing lessons emphasize developing students' ability to compose intelligible and precise texts through instruction in coherence, grammatical accuracy, lexical selection, correct spelling, and suitable language register (Mustapha et al., 2024). Historically, the arguments among past researchers about writing genres began as early as the 1960s when Kinneavy (1969) argued that the genre of writing depends on its purpose in writing like informing, persuading, or explaining. Because of this, expository writing is fact-based essays which is different from creative writing (like stories). Researchers like Chang et al. (2020) and Sasaki (2002) have studied how ESL or EFL learners write expository texts. They found that expository writing is taught more formally than descriptive or narrative writing. They also suggested that expository writing should focus on important topics in education. Hyland (2005) added that good communication in writing depends on the writer's tone, beliefs, and personality. In this regard, MD markers can help writers share their emotions and connect with readers. As explained by Hyland (2017), MD is the way the writers use language to convey meaning and connect with their readers. After decades of research, Hyland clarified its complex role in writing which MD helps to analyse text structure and composition. For example, Code Glosses, (explanatory phrases like "in other words") is commonly used in expository writing. Early scholars like Crismore & Farnsworth (1989) found that MD helps writers control their writing process and improve clarity. Fadhlani et al. (2017) added that MD markers help the writers to organise text and make it more reader-friendly by guiding understanding. Therefore, MD acts as a "bridge between writers and readers", making texts clearer, more structured, and easier to follow.

INTERACTIVE VS INTERACTIONAL MD

Hyland (2005) proposed model consists of two categories of MD: the interactive and the interactional MD. Hyland (2005) categorises interactive MD as linguistic devices that help writers structure their texts logically, guiding readers through the discourse with clarity and coherence. These markers function as signposts, ensuring smooth transitions and logical flow by signalling relationships between ideas. Key subcategories include *Transition Markers* (e.g., *however, therefore, moreover, thus*), which clarify connections between clauses; *Frame Markers* (e.g., *finally, in conclusion*), which indicate speech acts, sequences, or stages; *Endophoric Markers* (e.g., *as noted above, previously mentioned, see fig. x*), which refer to other parts of the text; *Evidentials* (e.g., *according to X, as indicated by x, z states*), which attribute external sources; and *Code Glosses* (e.g., *in other words*), which clarify complex ideas. In ESL contexts, interactive MD is particularly valuable as it aids learners in constructing well-organised, reader-friendly texts, reducing ambiguity and reinforcing argumentative structure.

In contrast, interactional MD focuses on engaging the reader and conveying the writer's stance, fostering a dialogic dimension in writing. Hyland (2005) identifies subcategories such as *Hedges* (e.g., *possibly, might*), which soften claims to invite negotiation; *Boosters* (e.g., *clearly,*

undoubtedly), which strengthen assertions to persuade; *Attitude Markers* (e.g., *surprisingly, unfortunately, lamentably, startlingly, thankfully*), which express the writer's evaluative stance; *Self-mentions* (e.g., the writer, the essayist, the author, *pronouns- I, me, my, our, mine and us*), which establish authorial presence; and *Engagement Markers* (e.g., *we, our, and us', you and your, and a question mark*), which directly address the reader. For ESL writers, mastering interactional MD is crucial for developing an authoritative yet reader-sensitive voice, allowing them to balance assertiveness with politeness while participating in academic discourse communities. These markers not only enhance persuasiveness but also help learners navigate the sociocultural expectations of English academic writing. Previous research indicates that strong essays contain more MD than weak ones (Jalilifar & Alipour, 2007). However, the use of interactional MD is dependent on the writer's writing competence, which is sometimes lacking when compared to expert authors or local speakers (Fadhlini et al., 2017).

According to Hyland (2005), ESL learners use interactional markers—such as speaking directly to readers—to improve their weaker writing flow. For example, overusing the *Engagement Markers* like “*you should note*” or *Boosters* like “*definitely*”. Besides that, ESL writers utilise more interactional markers to sound confident and connect with readers, even if it makes their writing less coherence (Hyland, 2005). The choice of interactional markers might be influenced by cultural rhetorical styles such as high-context cultures, for example Asian or Middle Eastern writers prefer indirectness or emphatic persuasion as found by Lee and Casal (2021) that *Hedges* (e.g. *this might suggest*) are commonly used by Japanese or Chinese EFL writers. Alotaibi (2021) also found *Boosters* (e.g. *it is obvious that*) frequently overused by Arabic-speaking writers. The table 1 and 2 explain the details for interactive and interactional MD below:

TABLE 1. Interactive MD Model based on Hyland (2005)

No.	Interactive Metadiscourse	Examples
1.	Code glosses- supply additional information by rephrasing, illustrating or explaining.	called, defined as, e.g., in other words, specifically
2.	Endophoric markers- refer to other parts of the text in order to make additional information available, provide supporting arguments, and thus steer the reader toward a preferred interpretation.	(in) (this) Chapter; see Section X, Figure X, page X; as noted earlier
3.	Evidential- start with verb like others representations of an idea from another source and help to establish authorial command of the subject.	(to) quote X, according to X
4.	Transitions Markers- express semantic relation between main clauses	In addition, but, thus, and, because
5.	Code glosses- supply additional information by rephrasing, illustrating or explaining.	called, defined as, e.g., in other words, specifically

TABLE 2. Interactional MD Model based on Hyland (2005)

No.	Interactional Metadiscourse	Examples
1.	Attitude Markers- indicate the writer's opinion or assessment of a proposition.	I agree, I am amazed, appropriate, correctly, dramatic, hopefully, unfortunately.
2.	Self-mention refers to explicit authorial presence in the text and gives information about his/ her character and stance.	I, we, the author
3.	Engagement markers- explicitly address readers to draw them into the discourse.	We, our (inclusive), imperative mood.
4.	Hedges- indicate the writer's decision to recognize other voices, viewpoints or possibilities and be (ostensibly) open to negotiation with the reader,	Apparently, assume, doubt, estimate, from my perspective, in most cases, in my opinion, probably, suggests
5.	Boosters- allow the writer to anticipate and preclude alternative, conflicting arguments by expressing certainty instead of doubt.	Beyond doubt, clearly, definitely, we found, we proved, it is an established fact.

PAST STUDIES

Recently a few studies of the use of MD markers have been conducted among ESL or English for Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Recently, Pham (2024) examined ESL students' source-based writing by comparing higher- and lower-rated essays using computational analysis to identify MD marker patterns. The study found that higher-rated essays employed a wider variety of MD devices, improved coherence and reader engagement. While both groups favored imperative directives for direct reader interaction, higher-rated essays more effectively utilised interactional MD like hedges, boosters, and self-mentions to modulate certainty and integrate sources. Conversely, excessive self-mentions in lower-rated essays suggested difficulties in synthesising source material. The findings underscore MD's role in enhancing ESL writing, offering pedagogical insights and avenues for further research. On the other hand, Tahmasbi et al., (2024) examined how MD markers instruction affected expository writing in 80 male and female EFL students in a classroom setting, selected by convenience sampling and interviewed with smaller participation. It was found that MD markers instruction improved EFL students' expository writing and learners frequently employed interactional MD markers.

Akinseye (2023) investigated the effectiveness of interactive MD as discursive approaches for enhancing academic writing skills among ESL undergraduates in Nigeria. A total of 100 expository essays were utilised. The study found that *Transitional Markers*, *Frame Markers*, and *Code Glosses* were the most widely used interactive markers in the essay, while *Evidential* and *Endophoric Markers* were used less frequently. These findings highlighted the pedagogical significance of using interactive materials into the teaching of academic writing skills to ESL undergraduate students.

Goltaji and Hooshmand (2022) investigated the use of interactive MD markers—following Hyland's (2005) framework—in TEFL textbooks authored by native (English) and non-native (Iranian) writers. Analysing four textbooks on testing and material development using *Wordsmith* software, the study identified both similarities and differences in marker usage. Notably, *Transitions* emerged as the most frequently employed MD feature across both groups.

Zahro et al. (2021) examined MD use among EFL learners at Kencana University, Indonesia, comparing written and spoken discourse. The study found that learners employed more MD markers in written than spoken discourse, with interactive markers being more frequent than interactional ones in both modes. However, interactional markers appeared more often in spoken discourse. These findings suggest Indonesian EFL students prioritise discourse coherence over interpersonal engagement, reflecting their communicative preferences.

Shafqat et al. (2020) analysed MD markers in argumentative essays written by Pakistani university students. Their research aimed to categorise these markers and determine their frequency patterns. The findings indicated that interactive MD markers were commonly used than interactional MD, with *Transitions* being the most frequently used and *Endophoric Markers* the least. The study highlights the importance of metadiscourse in teaching and acquiring writing skills within English Language Teaching (ELT) and contributes to understanding discourse marker conventions.

In Malaysian context, a few studies have been explored about the use of MD markers among ESL learners in their essays. Lo et al. (2021) investigated booster usage, one of MD markers, in Malaysian first-year doctoral students' academic writing using Hyland's (2005) framework. The study revealed a relatively low frequency of booster markers, suggesting students' difficulties in employing these devices with appropriate semantic nuance. The researchers

recommend explicit instruction on booster categories in postgraduate writing courses to enhance students' ability to construct persuasive academic arguments.

According to Chan and Tan (2010) study on ESL writers in their argumentative essays and found that Malaysian undergraduates widely used more interactional MD markers than interactive MD markers. Mat Zali et al. (2020) examined 200 evaluative essays from Malaysian ESL learners participating in hard and soft science courses using Hyland's Interactional MD Table (2005). The study sought to discover whether learners in both groups utilised the same amount of MD, whether learners in separate course groups selected MD differently, and whether the MD feature was used the most or least in both courses. The results showed that learners in soft science courses demonstrated more MD markers than learners in hard science courses. Furthermore, it was discovered that learners commonly used *Self-mentions* and had little *Evidential* in their work.

In another study, Zali et al. (2022) also conducted a study that emphasises how important MD should be employed in ESL writing. Based on Hyland's MD table (2005), this study looked specifically on interactional MD markers in 40 expository essays authored by Malaysian ESL learners. The study sought to examine whether learners in hard and soft science course groups differed in their choice of MD, as well as whether both groups used the same amount and type. Both group of learners used most *Hedges* and *Self-mention*. This trend showed hard science learners were extremely confrontational in their writings, soft science students exhibited more MD markers and were more interpretive. Furthermore, there was nearly an absence of *Boosters* in soft sciences and none in hard sciences.

PROBLEM OF STUDY

In educational contexts, researchers have observed that ESL students struggle with using metadiscourse (MD) markers effectively. Mu et al. (2015) found that learners possess only a partial grasp of MD markers and tend to overuse certain types, like transition markers and self-mentions in their essay (Mat Zali et al., 2020). This study aims to explore ESL students' usage of MD markers. As Kashiha (2022) and Alharbi (2021) suggest that analysing how these markers function in different writing genres like expository essay is essential to highlight their significance for ESL writers. Additionally, expanding the study to include a larger corpus focused on the Malaysian context could yield further insights.

Current studies on metadiscourse (MD) and writing predominantly emphasises English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, particularly within the English teaching community. In response, this study aims to analyse the frequency and usage of MD markers among two groups of Malaysian ESL learners in their expository essays, drawing on Hyland's (2005) framework. Despite the scarcity of studies on MD in expository essay within this context, existing research provides valuable insights into diverse writing genres. For instance, Yea et al. (2020) studied the deployment of boosters in PhD research proposal drafts, Mat Zali et al., (2020) compared evaluative essay across hard and soft science courses, and (Hanim Rahmat et al., 2020) investigated differences in gender. Mohamed et al. (2021), meanwhile, focused on strategies for writing effective persuasive essays, Khazae et al. (2022) investigated the effectiveness of instructional methods in improving the use of specific MD markers-code glosses in expository essays, Bannerman-Wood and Boakye (2025) focuses on the identification of frame markers in terms of types, frequency, and appropriate use in argumentative essays. Thus, this study was conducted to achieve these research objectives to:

- 1) identify the frequent types of MD markers used by the experimental and control groups in their expository essays.
- 2) distinguish the differences between MD markers choice by these two groups.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

The experimental study was conducted in a local university in Malaysia. Specifically, ESL learners from the diploma level were considered for the study. The participants of this study were 120 undergraduates taking English classes. They were purposefully chosen because it assumed that they had obtained a certain level of proficiency in writing in English in their first year of the university. They have also acquired a certain level of proficiency in the English language based on the minimum entry requirement for university admission. Since the study is an experimental study, the participants were classified into two groups; 60 participants for experimental group meanwhile another 60 participants for control group. For the participants in the experimental groups, they were given intervention of MD which they were taught MD in their writing class, involved in MD activities and practices. Meanwhile, the participants from the control group, they were not given any treatment, they were taught using conventional method in their writing class. All the participants involved in the responding the questionnaires meanwhile only 8 selected participants were randomly chosen to answer the semi structured interview, 4 from the experimental group and another 4 from the control group.

EXPERIMENTAL GROUP VS CONTROL GROUP

During the study, the participants from the experimental group were given explicit treatment which they were taught formally with MD lessons, asked to do MD exercises and involved in MD activities in their essays writing. However, the ESL learners from control group were not given any treatments and they were taught by using conventional method.

DATA COLLECTION

For data collection, a set of questionnaires and a semi-structured interview were utilized as the research instrument. The data collection involved two phases. In the first phase, after six weeks of learning writing, the participants from both groups responded to a set of questionnaires in 10 to 15 minutes. The questionnaires were adapted from Bogdanović and Mirović (2018) which was utilised for data collection to collect data regarding the participants' use of MD markers. The questions of MD use were developed based on Hyland (2005)'s table as shown in table 1 and 2 before. The 5 Likert scale responses ranges from *I don't use them at all* (1), *I rarely use them* (2), *I occasionally use them* (3), *I use them quite often* and *I always use them* (5) were utilised to get the participants' response of their use of MD markers in their expository writing. Having obtained permission from the department, the consent of the participants was sorted for. They were asked to fill in an informed consent form. In the second phase, 8 selected participants were interviewed. The semi structured interview was conducted as the data triangulation to seek the participants' experience of the MD use in the expository writing.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data gathered from the questionnaire were descriptively analysed using SPSS to find the frequency of the MD use. The results were presented in percentage and mean. Next, the semi structured interview data was analysed based on category and theme to support the data findings from questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data of the use of MD gathered from the study were analysed and the findings are discussed based on the research objectives of the study. For the first objective, the response of the preference MD type (interactive vs interactional MD) is presented from the questionnaire data. Meanwhile for the second research objective, the response of the MD use by the two groups is presented not only from the questionnaire data but supported with semi-structured interview data.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1: IDENTIFY THE FREQUENT TYPES OF MD MARKERS USED

The two tables below indicate the MD markers (interactive and interactional) utilised by both groups, the experimental and control groups. Table 3 shows that experimental group used more interactional MD as compared to Interactive MD, with 119 and 83 frequencies. The table also shows that the experimental group prominently used *Self-Mentions* with the mean 48 percent of “*I always use them*”, followed with *Attitude Markers* (26.7 percent), *Boosters* and *Engagement Markers* (21.7 percent) and lastly, *Hedges* (20 percent) in interactional MD. Meanwhile for interactive MD, *Frame Markers* (40 percent) were prominently used by experimental group, followed by *Transition Markers* (33.3 percent), *Evidential* (18.3 percent) and *Endophoric Markers* (16.7 percent).

TABLE 3. The use of MD markers by Experimental Group

No	Types of MD	MD Markers	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1	Interactive MD	Transition Markers	-	3 5%	11 18.3%	26 43.3%	20 33.3%	4.0500	.85222
		Frame Markers	-	-	12 20%	24 40%	24 40%	4.2000	.75465
		Endophoric Markers	2 3.3%	11 18.3%	18 30%	19 31.7%	10 16.7%	3.4000	1.07672
		Evidential	6 10%	13 21.7%	17 28.3%	13 21.7%	11 18.3	3.1667	1.25099
		Code Gloss	-	4 6.7%	14 23.3%	25 41.7%	17 28.5%	3.9167	.88857
		Total	6	31	73	107	82		
2	Interactional MD	Hedges	2 3.3%	6 10%	19 31.7%	21 35%	12 20%	3.5833	.84706
		Booster	-	4 6.7%	15 25%	28 46.7%	13 21.7%	3.8333	.92913
		Attitude Markers	-	6 10%	12 20%	26 43.3%	16 26.7%	3.8667	.92913

Engagement Markers	1 1.7%	8 13.3%	16 26.7%	22 36.7%	13 21.7%	3.6333	1.02456
Self-mentions	- 1.7%	1 13.3%	8 26.7%	22 36.7%	29 48.3%	4.3167	.77002
Total	3	25	70	119	83		

*1- I don't use them at all

*2- I rarely use them

*3- I occasionally use them

*4- I use them quite often

*5- I always use them

For the control group, similarly with experimental group interactional MD was used frequently than interactive MD as shown in Table 4. However, it shows only little difference. The table also shows the control group highlights the top use of in *Self-Mentions* (41.7 percent), 12.7 percent in *Boosters*, 16.7 percent in *Attitude Markers*, 10 percent in *Hedges* and the lowest use in *Engagement Markers* (8.3 percent). While in the interactive MD, the control group has prominently used 35 percent in *Frame Markers*, 25 percent in *Code Gloss*, 20 percent in *Transition Markers*, 3.3 percent in *Evidential* and 1.7 percent in *Endophoric Markers*.

In overall, both courses used more interactional MD than interactive MD type in their writings which is similar to the result by Pham (2024), Tahmasbi et al. (2024) and Heng and Tan's (2010), but somehow different with studies by Zali et al. (2020) who revealed that undergraduate students' L2 corpus exhibited more interactive MD type rather than interactional MD type. The experimental group predominantly opted for interactional MD, perhaps due to its association with proficient writers and its capacity to test writing skills, as this group received specialized MD treatment in the study (Fadhlini et al., 2017). Hyland (2005) also mentions that "L2 writers rely heavily on interactional markers to assert authority and engage readers, often at the expense of textual coherence." Meanwhile, Zahro et al. (2021) found that EFL writers used interactional markers more frequently than interactive ones, indicating a preference for interpersonal over textual functions.

TABLE 4. The use of MD markers by Control Group

No	Types of MD	MD Markers	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1	Interactive MD	Transition Markers	1 1.7%	5 8.3%	16 26.7%	26 43.3%	12 20%	3.8000	.91688
		Frame Markers	-	6 10%	6 10%	27 45%	21 35%	4.0500	.92837
		Endophoric Markers	1 1.7%	27 45%	20 33.3%	11 18.3%	1 1.7%	2.7333	.84104
		Evidentials	4 6.7%	32 53.3%	18 30%	4 6.7%	2 3.3%	2.4667	.85304
		Code Gloss	1 1.7%	6 10%	17 28.3%	21 35%	15 25%	3.7167	1.00998
		Total		7	76	77	110	51	
2	Interactional MD	Hedges	-	9 15%	31 51.7%	14 23.3%	6 10%	3.2833	.84556
		Booster	-	5 8.3%	21 35%	21 35%	13 21.7%	3.7000	.90760
		Attitude Markers	-	12 20%	12 20%	26 43.3%	10 16.7%	3.5666	.99774

Engagement Markers	2 3.3%	9 15%	22 36.7%	22 36.7%	5 8.3%	3.3167	.94764
Self Mentions		7 11.7%	2 3.3%	26 43.3%	25 41.7%	4.1500	.95358
Total	2	42	88	109	59		

- *1- I don't use them at all
*2- I rarely use them
*3- I occasionally use them
*4- I use them quite often
*5- I always use them

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2: DISTINGUISH THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MD MARKERS CHOICE BY THE TWO GROUPS

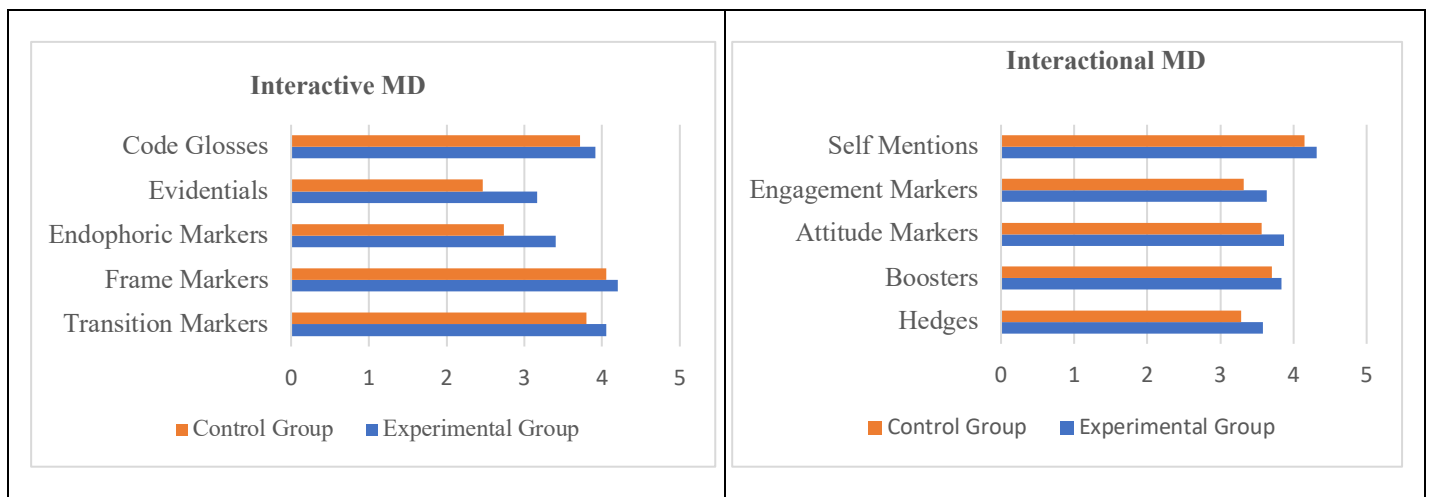


FIGURE 1. The Comparison of MD Markers Used by Experimental and Control Group

The above figure 1 demonstrates the differences of MD markers used by the experimental and the control groups in mean. Comparing the mean between these two groups, ESL learners from experimental group used more MD markers for both types of MD; interactive and interactional MD. This might be because they had been given formal lesson of MD in their lecture, had done various tasks using MD and had involved in MD learning activities. However, it was found that both groups preferred to use the MD markers from interactional MD type which is *Self-mentions*. This finding is similar with the study done by Zali et al. (2021) and Zali et al. (2022). According to Hylands (2005), *Self-mentions* refer to “explicit authorial presence in the text and give information about his/her character and stance” which are normally used by the writers in the essay like *I, you, we, the author, etc.* This is also mentioned by Zali et al. (2022) that the use of the interactional MD markers like *Self-mentions* are also more prevalent, reflecting a more interpretative and engaged writing style. This result is also supported by the participants’ response from both groups in semi-structured interview which they have excellent knowledge and frequently use *Self-mentions* in their essays as presented in table 5.

TABLE 5. Knowledge and frequent use of *Self-mentions* in essay

Items	Experimental Group	Control Group
Knowledge and frequent use of <i>Self-mentions</i> in essay.	(1) The MD marker used is "I" or "we"..I always use it. (2) I would use "I" sometimes	(5) I always used "I" or "we" (6) "I" For example is I agree with the issue discussed.
Question: What metadiscourse marker do you use to show your presence as the author of the text and gives information about your opinion? Give one example and how frequent you use it in the essay?	(3) Metadiscourse marker that I always use to show my presence as the author of the text and gives information about my opinion is I (4) I would always use "I" and "we"	(7) Yes..mostly use "I" or "we" (8) Yes..I know.. I use "I" frequently

Another top use of MD markers are *Frame Markers* and *Transition Markers*. As Zali et al. (2020) have discovered before, ESL learners prefer to employ specific MD markers like *Transition Markers* and *Frame Markers* in their essays. This result is also agreed by the participants' response from both groups in semi structured interview which they have excellent knowledge and use *Transition Markers* frequently in their essays as indicated in table 6. Meanwhile for *Frame Marker*, both group participants have good knowledge and frequently in their essays as shown in table 7 below:

TABLE 6. Knowledge and frequent use of *Transition Marker* in essay

Items	Experimental Group	Control Group
Knowledge and frequent use of <i>Transition Marker</i> in essay.	(1) The MD I mostly used is to connect the idea, therefore. (2) I often use 'for instance' and 'therefore' in my essay.	(5) "Secondly". I always use it. (6) In addition. Yes, I usually use it. (7) Yes..Besides that. I always use it (8) I always like to use "consequently".
Question: What metadiscourse markers do you use to connect the ideas in the sentence? Give one example and how frequent you use it in the essay?	(3) The metadiscourse markers that I always use to connect the ideas in the sentence is transition markers. (4) I usually use 'therefore' or 'however' in my essay to add more ideas.	

TABLE 7. Knowledge and frequent use of *Frame Marker* in essay

Items	Experimental Group	Control Group
Knowledge and frequent use of <i>Frame Marker</i> in essay.	(1) The metadiscourse marker that I use to provide supporting argument is firstly, secondly. I like use it in the essay...	(5) I'm not sure..may be can use "Furthermore". (6) I usually use "firstly. Finally" (7) I like to use "firstly, next, finally" (8) I always use "For example".
Question: What MD markers that you use refer to writing organisation, express sequence, label text stages, announce discourse goals, or indicate topic shift? Give one example and how frequent you use it in the essay?	(2) I usually use firstly, secondly, lastly (3) Metadiscourse marker that I use is such as, next, first and foremost (4) Metadiscourse marker that I use sometimes to express sequence are 'furthermore and next'	

Meanwhile, the lowest use of MD marker is *Evidential*. This might be because the chosen type of essay (expository) might contribute to this factor because in the expository essay, the writers are usually not encouraged to provide support or evidence in their content of essays. The participants' response from semi-structured interview confirmed that *Evidentials* were rarely used in the essay eventhough they have good knowledge about this as indicated in table 8 below.

TABLE 8. Knowledge and frequent use of *Evidential* in essay

Items	Treatment Group (TG)	Control Group (CG)
Knowledge and frequent use of <i>Evidential</i> in essay.	(1) <i>The metadiscourse marker that I use to represent my idea from another source and establish authorial command of the subject is according to..I sometimes use it.</i>	(5) <i>I'm not really use it but I know the word "According to".</i>
Question: What metadiscourse marker do you use to represent your idea from another source and help to establish authorial command of the subject? Give one example and how frequent you use it in the essay?	(2) <i>I would use 'according to (research)' to represent the idea from another source ..I rarely use it</i>	(6) <i>We can use "According to"..I rarely use it.</i>
	(3) <i>Metadiscourse marker that I use sometimes to represent my idea from another source and help to establish authorial command of the subject is according to</i>	(7) <i>I don't know..</i>
	(4) <i>I like to use 'according to' as it refers to the source directly to make it easier to understand..I have problem to use it because I don't have content.</i>	(8) <i>No comment..</i>

CONCLUSION

MD markers are linguistic features that help improve the quality of writing. MD marker is used as the linguistic device in producing good writing. Therefore, the instruction of MD markers is imperative to make the writers' texts clearer. Overall, both groups employed more interactional MD than interactive MD type in their essays. In addition, the ESL learners from both groups preferred to use *Self-mention*, *Transition Markers* and *Transition Markers*. In this study highlights that experimental group which was given intervention of MD have chosen to use more MD markers in their essays. This indicates that the treatment given is effective in providing their awareness about the importance of using MD in the essays. In teaching the concept of MD, the learners could be introduced on how to insert and use MD markers in their essays. This would be effective for undergraduate learners because many novice writers just focus on the product which is the written text itself and they neglect the main objective of writing which is engagement with the readers of the essay.

This study offers significant contributions to individual learners, the educational community, and the broader society by highlighting the value of metadiscourse (MD) markers in academic writing. Firstly, it enhances individual learners' writing proficiency by raising awareness of how MD markers function as essential linguistic tools to improve clarity, coherence, and reader engagement. By emphasizing interactional features such as *Self-mention* and *Transition Markers*, the study empowers novice writers, particularly ESL learners to communicate their ideas more effectively and confidently.

Secondly, the study contributes to educational practice by providing empirical support for the integration of explicit MD instruction in writing pedagogy. The positive impact of the intervention demonstrates that targeted teaching strategies can help students better understand the communicative purpose of writing beyond mere content delivery. This finding is especially valuable for educators seeking to improve students' academic writing through structured and meaningful engagement with their audience.

At the societal level, the research promotes inclusivity and equity in education by supporting the linguistic development of learners from diverse backgrounds. It encourages the cultivation of critical literacy and communicative competence, which are crucial for academic success and lifelong learning. Furthermore, by proposing an effective instructional model for MD awareness, the study contributes to the ongoing development of language education policies and classroom practices that foster better academic communication and a more engaged learning community.

This present study, on the other hand, has faced several limitations that could be highlighted in future study. First, the study is only about the learners' perception on the use of MD markers in their essays in an experimental study. Next, the validity of these findings could be more precise with a larger sample. For future study, it is suggested that a study on comparisons pertaining to MD can be done thoroughly on written corpus itself. From that, we can see clearly on the exact amount of MD types and markers produced by ESL learners and also to find the relationship of MD use with the ESL learners' awareness and their writing score.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge the support from the Strategic Research Partnership (SRP) grant in collaboration with Tafila Technical University, Jordan (UiTM.800-3/1 SRP INT (025/2025)). The authors also would like to send their sincere gratitude to the Research Management Centre (RMC), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), for the constant support and encouragement of this completion of this project. The funding, institutional collaboration and participation provided by both universities are gratefully appreciated, as they contributed significantly to the success of research project completion.

REFERENCES

- Akinseye, T. (2023). Exploring interactive metadiscourse as a practical approach to enhancing academic writing skills of newly admitted undergraduate students in Nigeria. *EuroAmerican Journal of Applied Linguistics and Languages*, 10(2), 44–61.
- Alharbi, S. H. (2021). An investigation of metadiscourse features in applied linguistics academic research articles and master's dissertations. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 12(1), 46. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.12n.1.p.46>
- Alotaibi, H. S. (2021). The use of metadiscursive markers in letters of recommendation: An investigation of gender variations. *Arab World English Journal*, 12(2), 238–250.
- Ädel, A. (2006). *Metadiscourse in L1 and L2 English*. John Benjamins.
- Bannerman-Wood, J., & Boakye, N. Y. (2025). The use of frame markers in undergraduate students' argumentative essays. *The International Journal of Literacies*, 32(2), 77–91. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-0136/CGP/v32i02/77-91>
- Chan, S., & Tan, H. (2010). Extracting and comparing the intricacies of metadiscourse of two written persuasive corpora. *International Journal of Education and Development Using ICT*, 6(3), 124–146.
- Chang, P., Tsai, C.-C., & Chen, P. (2020). Organization strategies in EFL expository essays in a content-based language learning course. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 29, 183–197.

- Crismore, A., & Farnsworth, R. (1989). Mr. Darwin and his readers: Exploring interpersonal metadiscourse as a dimension of ethos. *Rhetoric Review*, 8(1), 91–112.
- Mohamed, A. F., & Mohd Noor, N. (2017). Corpus analysis of metadiscourse in undergraduate academic projects. *International Journal of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 24. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ijmal.v1i1.7618>
- Goltaji, F., & Hooshmand, M. (2022). The study of interactive metadiscourse markers in TEFL textbooks written by native vs. non-native authors. *Journal of English Language Research*, 3(1).
- Hanim Rahmat, N., Abdullah, N. A. T., Yahaya, M. H., Pow Yean, C., & Whanchit, W. (2020). Gender differences on the use of metadiscourse on reflective essays: A case study of inbound students. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*, 10(5), 248–261. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.1.2020.105.248.261>
- Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Continuum.
- Hyland, K. (2017). Metadiscourse: What is it and where is it going? *Journal of Pragmatics*, 113, 16–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2017.03.007>
- Kashiha, H. (2022). On persuasive strategies: Metadiscourse practices in political speeches. *Discourse and Interaction*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.5817/DI2022-1-77>
- Khazaei, H., Maftoon, P., Birjandi, P., & Golandouz, G. R. (2022). Fixing the underuse of code glosses in Iranian EFL learners' academic writing: A corpus-based comparison of three pedagogical approaches. *Teaching English Language*, 16(1), 167–201. <https://doi.org/10.22132/tel.2022.150320>
- Kinneavy, J. E. (1969). The basic aims of discourse. *College Composition and Communication*, 20(5), 297–304.
- Lee, J. J., & Casal, J. E. (2014). Metadiscourse in results and discussion chapters: A cross-linguistic analysis of AL master's theses written in English, Spanish and Chinese. *System*, 46, 39–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.07.009>
- Lee, R. S. P., Verezub, E., & Adi Badiozaman, I. F. (2025). *Enhancing ESL low proficiency pre-university students' writing skills through flipped writing framework*. Akademika. (Advance online publication). <https://journalarticle.ukm.my/24697/1/AD%209.pdf>
- Lo, Y. Y., Othman, J., & Lim, J. W. (2021). Mapping the use of boosters in academic writing by Malaysian first-year doctoral students. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 29(3). <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.29.3.23>
- Mat Zali, M., Mohamad, R., Setia, R., Raja Baniamin, R. M., & Mohd Razlan, R. (2020). Interactional metadiscourse analysis of evaluative essays. *ESTEEM Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 5, 120–129.
- Mohamed, A. F., Ab Rashid, R., Lateh, N. H. M., & Kurniawan, Y. (2021). The use of metadiscourse in good Malaysian undergraduate persuasive essays. *Insaniah: Online Journal of Language, Communication, and Humanities* (Special Issue), 1–12.
- Mu, C., Zhang, L. J., Ehrich, J., & Hong, H. (2015). The use of metadiscourse for knowledge construction in Chinese and English research articles. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 20, 135–148.

- Mustapha, A., Mohd Radin, N. N., & Mohd Adam, A. F. (2024). *Evaluating automated grammar corrective feedback tools: A comparative study of Grammarly and QuillBot in ESL expository essays*. *Akademika*, 94(2), 474–491. https://journalarticle.ukm.my/24291/1/Akademika_94_2_23.pdf
- Pham, D. T. A. (2024). *Metadiscourse markers in L2 source-based informative essays: An analysis of texts written by L2 undergraduate students* (Master's thesis). Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi.
- Reyes, N. A., Ulloa, E. L., Lagos, J., & Miralles, J. F. (2024). Students' voice in essayist prose: A longitudinal study of metadiscoursal textual practice and awareness. <https://doi.org/10.17398/2340-2784.48.171>
- Sasaki, M. (2002). Building an empirically-based model of EFL learners' writing processes. In Ransdell, S. & Barbier, ML (Eds.), *New directions for research in L2 writing* (pp. 49-80). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Shafqat, A., Arain, F., & Dahraj, M. T. (2020). A corpus analysis of metadiscourse markers used in argumentative essays by Pakistani undergraduate students. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 24(4), 341–351. <https://doi.org/10.37200/IJPR/V24I4/PR201013>
- Tahmasbi, M., Fatahipour, M., & Gharagozloo, N. (2024). The impact of online metadiscourse markers instruction on Iranian EFL learners' expository writing: A mixed methods study. *Research in English Language Pedagogy*, 12(1).
- Vande Kopple, W. J. (1985). Some exploratory discourse on metadiscourse. *College Composition and Communication*, 36(1), 82–93. <https://doi.org/10.58680/ccc198511781>
- Voon, B. H., Teo, A. K., & Voon, J. E. C. (2019). Improving the performance of MUET students in report-writing: From experiment to actions. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 15(3), 176–186.
- Williams, J. M. (1981). *Style: Ten lessons in clarity and grace*. Scott, Foresman.
- Yea, L. Y., Othman, J., & Wei, L. J. (2020). The use of metadiscourse in academic writing by Malaysian first-year ESL doctoral students. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(1), 271–282. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v10i1.25069>
- Zali, M. M., Mohamad, R., Setia, R., Raja Baniamin, R. M., & Razlan, R. M. (2021). Comparisons of interactive and interactional metadiscourse among undergraduates. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 16(4), 21–30.
- Zali, M. M., Razlan, R. M., Raja Baniamin, R. M., & Setia, R. (2022). Interactional metadiscourse analysis of ESL learners' essays. *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal*, 7(SI9), 55–60.

BIODATA OF AUTHORS:

Masliza Mat Zali
Academy of Language Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu Branch, Malaysia
Email: masli154@uitm.edu.my

Nurul Ajleaa Abdul Rahman (Corresponding author)
Academy of Language Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu Branch, Malaysia
Email: ajleaa@uitm.edu.my

Razifa Mohd Razlan
Academy of Language Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu Branch, Malaysia
Email: razif004@uitm.edu.my

Azman Che Mat
Academy of Language Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu Branch, Malaysia
Email: azman531@uitm.edu.my

Yassir Sabri Eid Al Suod
Department of English,
College of Arts,
Tafila Technical University, Jordan
Email: yasser.soud@ttu.edu