The Use of Discourse Markers in Paragraph Writings: The Case of Preparatory Year Program Students in Qassim University

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify the discourse markers used by Saudi EFL learners in their paragraph writing. The study was conducted on fifty students of the Preparatory Year Program at Qassim University. Data were collected from one hundred paragraphs written by the students at the end of the first and second semesters of the academic year 2012/13. These paragraphs were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively in terms of the number of discourse markers used and their categories preferred in written paragraphs by three raters. The findings of the study revealed that the students overused the additive connectors followed by the causative, the contrastive and the illustrative ones. In addition, the students' use of writing discourse markers is too limited and the ones that were most frequently used are "and", "in addition", and "for example". The findings also indicated that the subjects of the study wrote too many simple sentences in their paragraphs in a choppy and immature manner and that their use of discourse markers did not develop as they progressed in education. The results also showed a positive and direct relationship between test scores and the use of discourse markers. A number of reasons were found to underlie the lack of using discourse markers on top of which were the teaching materials and examinations. The study concluded that students' ability to use discourse markers should be developed as a condition to improve their writing fluency and that their writing instructors should bridge the gaps in writing course books by suggesting necessary supplementary materials. The study suggests further extensive research investigating the misuse of discourse markers in the different language skills among students of different majors.

Keywords: discourse markers, cohesion, lexical density, writing quality

1. Introduction

The Preparatory Year Program (henceforth, PYP) is a mandatory one-year prerequisite for students who will enroll in the university's various undergraduate science and health programs. The main purpose of the PYP is to foster a smooth transition from the Arabic language teaching/learning setting in the secondary schools to an English medium college where most of the subjects are taught in English being the most commonly used language of communication all over the globe. English writing, as one of the important means for communication, is very important in English learning. Jalilifar (2008) argues that with the status of English as an international language and the expansion in the use of English, an increasing number of second/ foreign language learners are engaged in academic pursuits that require them to write well. However, developing the writing skill has always been the most complex and difficult aspect of language teaching because writing is seen basically as a process of four main stages: planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Haselow, 2011). Thus, EFL learners need to be aware of the different components of writing that would assist them to write effectively and teachers are advised to focus on the process of writing more than the finished product since various operations and strategies applied during the completion of a writing task became important (Assadi, 2012).

Although mastery of vocabulary and grammar rules is important to write grammatically correct sentences, yet it is not enough to help learners produce meaningful sentences that are value coherence in pragmatic level and cohesion in semantic level (Dergisi, 2010). In this context (Schiffrin, 1987) states that knowledge about the discourse markers (henceforth, DMs) amongst other things, is used to improve writing skill. According to Carter and McCarthy (2006), DMs are words and phrases which function to link segments of the discourse to one

another in ways which reflect choices of monitoring, organization and management exercised by the speaker or the writer. Similarly, Carter & Fung (2007) define DMs as "intra-sentential and supra-sentential linguistic units which fulfill a largely non-propositional and connective function at the level of discourse, (p. 411)". Swan (2005) adds that DMs are words and expressions used to show the connection between what a speaker is saying and what has already been said or what is going to be said; they can indicate what speakers think about what they are saying or what others have said. DMs are also seen as linguistic expressions such as "now, well, so, which signal a sequential relationship between the current basic message and previous discourse (Fraser, 1990: 302). They are also defined as a set of words which mark transition points in communication, facilitate the construction of a mental representation of the events described by the discourse as well as creating cohesiveness, coherence and meaning in a text (Louwerse & Mitchell, 2003).

In writing, developing students' ability to use DMs is helpful in connecting the sentences effectively as well as paragraphs, showing the logical or semantic relations between the previous information and the following one, and facilitating readers' interpretation of the whole discourse effectively (Ali et al, 2012). The use of DMs also enables speakers or writers make the context more accessible to listeners or readers and constrain their interpretation of message through using DMs in communication (Swan, 2005). Accordingly, awareness of the use and practicality of DMs can immensely contribute to the overall quality of the discourse created by English language learners. Rahimi (2011) rightly points out that DMs constitute an essential component of communicative competence in the sense that they help learners produce fluent and meaningful discourse in English.

2. Research Problem

The students in Saudi Arabia start learning writing in English from grade 6 onwards. At each grade level, the students learn to write in English. The writing activities show a gradual progress from writing letters of alphabet to copying, completing sentences, writing sentences, and writing controlled paragraphs. It is also to be noted that students throughout the kingdom study the same reading textbooks and do the same type of writing activities based on the textbooks. Likewise, the development of discourse competence has not been taken seriously in teaching the English language skills in general and the teaching of the writing skill in particular to PYP students who used to receive nine hours of writing skill instruction from Interactions Series by Segal (2007) a week.

The present researchers, having a six-year teaching experience in the PYP, noticed that teaching writing is mostly at the level of sentence and short guided paragraph instead of discourse level. The researchers also observed that the development of grammar, vocabulary and writing mechanics is much valued and emphasized while DMs are underused. In addition, as a result of a careful review of twenty randomly-selected paragraphs written by first level PYP students, the researchers found many problems in the logical organization of ideas in the students' writing due to poor or inadequate use of discourse markers. Adding to that, a pilot study carried out by the researchers revealed that PYP students are experiencing problems with the use of DMs and that they are fully unaware of applying DMs in their writing.

With consideration of these problems and of the demand of writing meaningful and coherent paragraphs, the researchers surveyed and reviewed a number of studies (Al Hamada et al, 2013; Assadi, 2012; Modhish, 2012; Kalajahi, 2012; Rahimi, 2011; Dergisi, 2010; Ying, 2009; Jalilifar, 2008; Carter & Fung, 2007; Martinez, 2002; Inuzuka, 2001; Takahara, 2000) that investigated the use of DMs by ESL / EFL students in different contexts. However, the researchers found that little is known about the use of writing DMs in paragraphs created by EFL students in the Saudi context. They also found that measuring the Lexical Density (LD) of the use of DMs by non-native writers of English in paragraphs is an interesting area of investigation in foreign language writing.

Accordingly, the present study attempts to bridge this research gap through investigating the use of the writing DMs by PYP students as well as the teaching of those DMs by PYP teachers so as to provide a diagnosis for a problem in the teaching of writing that teachers and learners used to encounter.

3. Research Questions

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1) What are the DMs that are frequently used by Saudi PYP EFL learners?

2) How is lexical Density (L D) presented in the participants' paragraphs?

3) What is the relationship between the frequency of using DMs and test scores?

4) What are the reasons behind the lack of using DMs in the paragraph writings of PYP students if there is any?

4. Hypothesis

In light of the introduction and the work reviewed so far, the researchers assume that DMs are underused by PYP learners and that the LD of DMs in subjects' paragraphs is too limited to make their English writing more cohesive and more coherent. They also hypothesize a direct and positive relationship between the frequency of using DMs and test scores.

5. Objectives of the Study

This study is meant to shed light on the importance of the efficient use of DMs that attach the structure of the paragraph together and organize the ideas in a logical order. It is also targeted to analyze the occurrence of DMs in the paragraph writings of Saudi PYP EFL learners, look into the relationship between frequencies of DMs and test score, find out the levels of lexical density in the participants' paragraphs, and explore the reasons underlying the underuse of DMs in case a lack is found.

6. Methodology

6.1 The Participants

A. The EFL learner-participants (N=50) are 25 post-secondary female and 25 male level PYP EFL students, with an average age of 18 years. These learners have already done intensive language courses for 16 hours a week in level one and in level two, and each level goes for a complete academic semester through which they studied writing, reading and listening in addition to speaking and grammar which are stressed in the listening and writing courses. These students scored at least 60% of the total mark as a course completion requirement. The one hundred paragraphs written by subjects of the study were randomly chosen from 2200 students studying PYP in thirteen branches in Qassim University.

B. The EFL teacher-participants (N=10) are 5 female and 5 male native and non-native English speaking teachers teaching writing to PYP learners were also randomly selected to evaluate students' paragraphs which had already been marked at least two times by different writing teachers as the first and the second markers. All the participants are master-degree holders either in English language or English literature along with their teaching experience ranging from 6 to 12 years at post secondary level. In addition, three writing skill coordinators participated in the study to make use of their long experience in the teaching of writing.

6.2 Instruments

The descriptive quantitative and qualitative approaches were used since this research mainly aims to gain rich understanding of the use of DMs in the paragraph writings of PYP students and the correlation between using DMs and the test scores in paragraphs. Quantitative measures included analysis of the DMs used in a hundred paragraphs written by fifty PYP EFL learners in terms of the number of words written in each paragraph, the number of DMs used and the variety of preferred expressions. Because there are many DMs that express different relationships between ideas, a checklist was designed for this purpose including a preliminary list of DMs that can be used in paragraph writing. This list was derived and adapted to suit the purpose of the present study from several sources (Al Hammadi, et al, 2013; Modhish, 2012; Rahimi, 2011; Jalilifar, 2008 ;). After that, these DMs were grouped and classified in terms of their functions under 9 categories. The level of LD was measured manually using Text Content Analysis Tool (TCAT) to identify the DMs used by PYP EFL learners. For this purpose, the study employs the method proposed by Ure (1971), O'Loughlin (1995) and Halliday (1985) as a central measurement to lexical density exploration in texts. Qualitative measures include holistic evaluation of the quality of the students' paragraphs on the scale (Poor – Fair – Good – Very Good – Excellent) and interviews with writing teachers and writing skill coordinators from the different 13 PYP branches to find out the reasons underlying the underuse of DMs if the results revealed any.

6.3 Data Collection Procedure

Ten writing PYP teachers were requested to select randomly 100 paragraphs (50 from level one and 50 from level two final exams) of 25 male and 25 female PYP students and to count the frequency and number of DMs used in each paragraph. The evaluation form consisted of all the categories of the DMs e.g. DMs of addition, contrast, concession, sequence, cause and effect, comparison etc. The data collected through the evaluation were analyzed quantitatively by means of frequency of occurrence of DMs, mean of occurrence and percentages.

7. Results and Discussion

On the basis of data analysis, the major findings are presented according to the order of the research questions as follows:
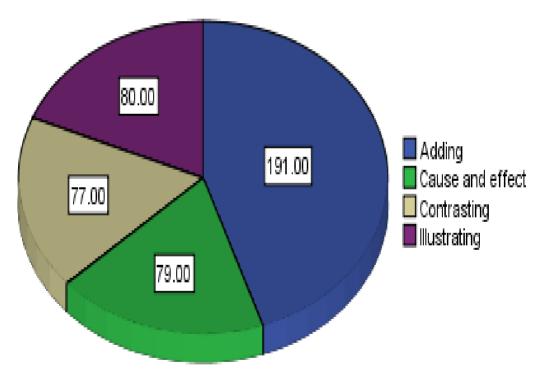
Question one: what are the DMs that are frequently used by Saudi PYP EFL learners?

To answer the first research question, a hundred paragraphs written by fifty PYP EFL learners as part of their final level one and level two writing examinations were analyzed manually both category-wise and item-wise. In terms of the DMs categories, the analysis showed that only four categories of DMs out of nine (44%) were used. These are: Adding, Contrasting, Illustrating and Cause and Effect. The analysis also showed that the other five categories of DMs, (56%) were not used at all. These are: Concession, Condition, Sequencing, Comparing and Emphasizing. In addition, only 13%- 15% of the preliminary list of DMs lexical items were used in the subjects' written paragraphs. The following table shows the DMsused in all the one hundred written paragraphs by PYP EFL learners category-wise and item-wise.

Table 1. Categories and lexical items of DMs written in paragraphs

Categories of DMs	Lexical items of DMs	
	Level one exam	Level two exam
ADDING	In addition; Also; And	In addition; Also; And
CONTRASTING	However; But	However; On the other hand; In contrast; But
ILLUSTRATING	For example; Such as	For example; Such as
CAUSE and EFFECT	Because; Since; So; Therefore	Because; Since; So; Therefore
(44%) Total = 4	Total = 11 (13%)	Total = 13 (15%)

The DMs categories shown in the above table were used at different frequencies as shown in the following figure.

Used by PYP EFL Learners. Figure 1. Frequencies of the varieties of DMs

The results shown in the above figure reveal how the participants in this study used a variety of DMs with some categories used more frequently than others. The adding connectors were the most preferred by PYP EFL learners since they were used 191 times in their written paragraphs and the percentage of their usage compared to the other categories was 45%. The other three categories were almost used equally and their frequency of use ranged from 77-80 times in all written paragraphs with an average percentage of 18.5%. However, results of the ANOVA analysis shown in Table 2 below do not indicate any significant differences between the means of the four types of DMs. The following table also provides a summary of the results of regression analysis of the

categories of DMs and gives evidence for students' preference for the four types of DMs mentioned above.

Table 2. ANOVA Analysis of DMs

ANOVA		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.247	4	.062	1.068	.427[a]
	Residual	.521	9	.058		
	Total	.768	13			

The results obtained from the above table confirm the previous research findings by Jalilifar's (2008) that investigated DMs in descriptive compositions of 90 Iranian EFL learners and found that students used DMs with different degrees of occurrence. However, the present research findings differ from those of Jalilifar and Martinz's (2004) who concluded that elaborative markers were the most frequently used, followed by inferential, contrastive, causative, and topic relating markers.

Similarly, research results revealed that lexical items of DMs were used at different frequencies as shown in the following
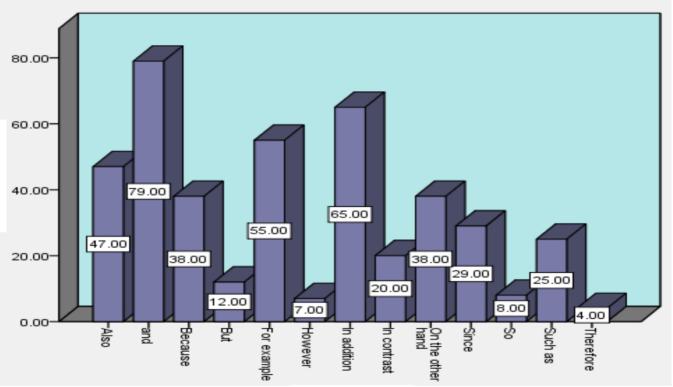

Figure 2. Frequencies of Discourse Markers

Figure 2 above shows that the DMs used by the participants of the study in their written paragraphs are: In addition, Also, And (additive); However, On the other hand, In contrast, but (contrastive); for example, such as (illustrative); Because; Since; So; Therefore (causal). Based on the available data in Table 2, it is obvious that the DMs "and", "in addition", and "for example" topped all other DMs and occupied the first rank. While DMs "also", "because", "on the other hand", "since" and "such as" fall in the middle, DMs "but", "however", "in contrast", "therefore", and "so" occupied the third rank. These DMs represent only 15% of the total number of the DMs in the preliminary list. It is worth noting that the 65% of the DMs in that list were not used at all. This result indicates that the PYP EFL learners' use of writing DMs is too limited and this shows that the ones that were extensively used might have been employed because they are widely used in their first language or they might have been kept repeated in other courses and by their different instructors. These findings are similar to those of Al Hammadi, et al (2013) who investigated the English Discourse Markers (EDMs) used by the Saudi

EFL learners at the pre-university level. Their results illustrate that EDMs "and", "but" and "also" are the most frequent EDMs in the talk of Saudi EFL learners at pre-university level. They also found that these markers are randomly used by Saudi EFL learners who mix their use (appropriateness) with usage (correctness) due to the influence of their L1 (Arabic).

Question two: How is Lexical Density presented in the participants' paragraphs?

The lexical density (LD) of DMs in the participant's paragraphs was measured by means of calculating the number of words written in the one hundred paragraphs in relation to the number of DMs employed using a specific formula for that as shown in the following table.

Table 3. Number of wrds, nmber of DMs and lxical dnsity of wtten pragraphs

The Lexical Density Test uses the following formula: Lexical Density = (Number of different words / Total number of words) x 100

Exam	No. of Paragraphs	Minimum	Maximum	Number of words	Number of DMs	Number of preferred DMs	(LD)
Level one	50	0	3	5194	246	11	4.7 %
Level two	5o	0	3	7064	284	13	4.02%

As shown in table 3, the use of DMs is restricted to those familiar to PYP EFL learners who preferred an average of 12 different discourse markers in their paragraphs. The paper with the minimum variety contained no DMs while the one with the maximum variety had 3 different discourse markers. Table 3 also demonstrates the proportion of the lexical words (connectors/DMs) used by the subjects of the study over the content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs). In this regard, Thomas et al (2013), Yule (2010), Ure (1971), O'Loughlin (1995) and Halliday (1985) argue that lexically dense text has a lexical density of around 60-70% and those which are not dense have a lower lexical density measure of around 40-50%. As illustrated in the above table, the lexical density of the DMs used by the PYP EFL learners is too low with a maximum ratio of 4.7 % which is considered to be far beyond the ratio needed to make any written paragraph easy to understand. This finding reveals that the subjects of the study wrote too many simple sentences in their paragraphs and that the sentence variety was too limited. For this reason, the sentences written by the participants were choppy and immature and their paragraphs were generally poor in quality as indicated by the majority of teachers who rated the quality of the participant's paragraphs. In addition, the data in the above table show that students' use of DMs did not improve as they progress in education and move from level one to level two. Although PYP EFL learners' use of DMs was too limited in level one writing exam where they used only 11 DMs, it continued almost the same until the end of level two where they used only 13 DMs in their level two writing examination. The Independent Samples Test results in Table 4 below show no significant differences in students' use of DMs as they moved from level one to level two.

Table 4. Development of the use of DMs in witten pragraphs

		t-test for Equality of Means				
		Sig.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
DS	Equal variances assumed	.455	-.115	.910	-1.06667	9.25587
	Equal variances not assumed		-.106	.918	-1.06667	10.04844

Accordingly, the results illustrated in tables 3 & 4 above are in line with Al Hammadi et al, (2013) who found that Saudi EFL learners used EDMs not only less than native speakers, but also less than other EFL learners.

Also, other findings of the previously conducted research by Rahimi (2011), Dergisi (2010), Jalilifar (2008) and Carter & Fung (2007) ascertained that the use of DMs by EFL learners is rather limited and this affects the quality of their compositions.

Question three: What is the relationship between the frequency of use of DMs and test scores?

Since the present study also aims to look into the relationship between the frequency of using of DMs and test scores, it was important to carry out a regression analysis to find out the extent the variations in the dependent variable (students' scores in paragraphs) are being affected by the independent variable (DMs) as illustrated in the following table.

Table 5. Regression analysis between the frequency of use of DMs and test scores

Regression equation: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X$ Where Y is the Score in paragraphs β_i, $i = 0,1$ are the regression coefficients and X is the DMs.					
Model	R		R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.343[a]		.117	.099	.58773
Model		Non standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.354	.334		1.057	.296
	Discourse Makers	.077	.031	.343	2.527	.015

The results obtained from table 5 above reveal a statistical significant relationship between the frequencies of using DMs and test scores of the paragraphs written by the PYP EFL students. However, the analysis indicates that the frequency of using DMs explains only 11.7 of the quality of the paragraphs. To go deep into the analysis, a more thorough technique was employed to find out if all the DMs categories have the same effect on the subjects test scores in their paragraphs. This was done through a multiple regression analysis where the independent variables are the number of DMs in each category. Table 6 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis completed.

Table 6. Multiple rgression aalysis between the fequency of ue of DMs types and test scores

Regression equation: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4$ Where Y the Score in paragraphs is β_i^2, $i = 0,1,2,3,4$ are the regression coefficients and X_i, $i = 1,2,3,4$ are Additive, Causative, Contrastive and Illustrative respectively					
Model	R		R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.567[a]		.322	.020	.24056
Model		Non standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.443	.297		1.490	.171
	Additive	.120	.065	.542	1.852	.097
	Causative	-.009	.116	-.024	-.080	.938
	Contrastive	.035	.128	.093	.277	.788
	Illustrative	-.122	.146	-.258	-.834	.426

In table 6, correlation was computed between the paragraphs scores and the frequency of DMs using a Pearson correlation test that explains relationships among variables. The researchers found statistically significant

relationship between the paragraphs scores and the number of DMs of each category present in the same paragraphs. The correlation has a value of 0.567 which means that the larger the number of DMs used, the higher the scores of the paragraphs. The results in the above table also indicate a positive and direct relationship between the additive and contrastive DMs and test scores in the paragraphs. So, it can be inferred that the larger the number of additive DMs the higher the score in paragraph, and that the larger the number of DMs the higher the score in paragraph. These results emphasize those of Martinez (2004) who found statistically significant relationship between the scores of the compositions and the number of discourse markers used in the same compositions. However, the present researchers differ with Martinez for attributing test scores to the compositions' quality which is not necessarily true in most cases.

Question four: What are the reasons behind lack of the use of DMs in the paragraph writings of PYP students if there is any?

The answer of this question was gleaned by means of individual interviews with 10 writing skill instructors and 3 writing skill coordinators and the main question addressed in these interviews stressed the reasons why the students have not used a wide variety of DMs in their paragraphs. The participants show unanimous agreement that an efficient use of DMs contributes to sticking the structure together to have a cohesive, coherent and a unified whole. They make the connections between ideas clear to the readers. Writing teachers admitted that their PYP EFL learners used a very limited number of DMs due to several reasons such as students ' level of English, course materials and examinations .

When the students join the PYP, they have little prior knowledge of English language specially that of DMs. They can hardly write simple sentences and the ones they write are not cohesive and accordingly lack unity due to their poor knowledge of connectors and transition words. The course materials focus mostly on developing vocabulary in a semantic field, enhancing specific grammatical structures and fostering the use of a handful number of connectors. These are "and, but, also, however, such as, so, in addition, for example". This indicated that students are to be excused for using a too limited number of DMs in their paragraphs since they are expected to use what they are taught. Also, they have not yet got exposed to any other expressions different from those taught to them in writing classes. In addition, students are not exposed to extensive reading activities such as story books which are loaded with discourse markers. Consequently, even after spending almost eight months at the PYP, students learn only those few DMs that are given in their books and they feel very much comfortable to come up with the desired objectives of using a restricted amount of discourse markers.

In addition, the writing examination is always based on what is taught in the writing course. So in the exam, students usually have no other choice except using these expressions. Any attempt to use other connectors will put students in a risky position and might lead them to lose marks in the exam and thus they prefer to use only the specific DMs they are sure of to meet the demand of the examiner. Adding to that, students are required to use only two connectors in the writing exam to get the allotted score that does not exceed 5% of the total mark for a complete paragraph.

Writing skill coordinators comments on the lack of using writing DMs by PYP EFL learners came to confirm those stressed by the writing teachers. They emphasized that the written samples (exam papers) analyzed in this research project are to some extent expected at the low intermediate level of the PYP EFL learners who have just passed their secondary school exam and are going through the interim phase of learning English for their entry to the professional colleges. Also, the syllabus being taught comprises "Interactions Series" is limited to few varieties of writing DMs and the DMs being taught in the classes include connectors such as "but, so, because, when, therefore, in addition, finally, then and also". These DMs are the ones that have been used by the students in their exam. The writing skill coordinators also noted that the focus of the students is centered on the knowledge imparted by the teachers to them especially with reference to their exams only. They also added that students preferred to make use of DMs that they know how to use perfectly and would not take the risk of trying to use the ones they are not sure of to avoid any misuse. That is why no other discourse markers have been used. An additional reason was attributed to students who might know some basic DMs but they find it difficult to use them to develop their ideas chronologically and fluently. Finally, writing skill coordinators stressed that teachers' beliefs might lie behind learners' use of a very limited number of discourse markers. They explained that some writing teachers think that students are almost at their pre-intermediate level of language learning and that at this stage students should be trained to create simple sentences only and that developing learners' ability to use writing DMs to produce complex sentence structures should be emphasized at an advanced level when they are expected to develop extended argumentative of persuasive essays. Writing skill coordinators admitted that such a belief is erroneous since the use of DMs could help learners at all levels to develop clearer paragraphs for the readers. The coordinators' opinion agrees with Martinez (2009) who found a significant correlation between

using writing DMs and comprehending a written text. Writing coordinators, therefore, believe that teachers' negative attitudes toward using DMs underlie the reasons why some of them do not train or encourage their learners to use a vast variety of discourse markers. They also added that some teachers sometimes avoid discussing DMs in class to speed up their progress in the syllabus and to avoid learners' questions. This result came to confirm similar results by Al Hammadi et al (2013), Modhish (2012), and Buyukkarci, et al (2009) who attributed the restricted use of DMs to the fact that the explanation of DMs by writing instructors is inadequate or inappropriate. The results also match those of Carter and Fung (2007) who found that students at the intermediate-advanced level are challenged to acquire DMs for both receptive and productive purposes. They also revealed that the underrepresentation of DMs in existing teaching materials led to the misuse and limited use of DMs.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of the present paper was primarily to identify the discourse markers used by Saudi EFL learners in their paragraph writing as well as investigating the reasons underlying the underuse of those DMs. Based on the analysis of the research results, it can be concluded that the PYP students overused the additive DMs followed by the causative, the contrastive and the illustrative ones. In addition, the results illustrate that the PYP EFL learners' use of writing DMs is too limited and the ones that were most frequently used are "and", "in addition", and " for example". The findings also indicate that subjects of the study wrote too many simple sentences in their paragraphs in a choppy and immature manner and their paragraphs were generally poor in quality as indicated by the majority of teachers who rated the quality of the students' paragraphs. Furthermore, there was no development in students' use of DMs as they moved from level one to level two. Accordingly, the lexical density of the DMs used by the PYP EFL learners is too low and far beyond the ratio needed to make any written paragraph easy to understand. Adding to that, the study revealed a significant relationship between the test scores in paragraphs and the use of DMs in the same paragraph. Finally, the research results revealed significant reasons underlying the lack of using DMs related to course materials, exams, teachers and students as well. These findings are consistent with the previously cited findings by Al Hammadi, et al, (2013) Assadi (2012), Modhish (2012), Kalajahi (2012), Rahimi (2011), Dergisi (2010), Jalilifar (2008), Carter & Fung (2007) and Zhang (2000) who found that students' reliance on the use of specific markers clearly indicates their unawareness of the existence of the other markers or they are reluctant to use them due to fear of making errors. These researchers also emphasized that poor quality of the learners' writing can also be attributed to their tendency to produce too many simple sentences rather long ones. Accordingly, the use of DMs makes learners' paragraphs or essays more coherent but scarcity of DMs in learners' paragraphs and essays in addition to other inadequacies makes their compositions less coherent and rather fragmented.

9. Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study that highlight the important role of DMs in creating a smooth and enjoyable written text, a number of implications and recommendations can be suggested. Writing instructors need to appreciate the importance of developing their students' ability to use DMs as a means of improving their writing fluency. Toward this end, they should include a variety of connectors in their writing classes and they also should emphasize them in exams so that students do some extra effort to use the connectors accurately both grammatically and semantically. Writing instructors should have an adequate awareness of the usage patterns of the DMs frequently used in English writing. They ought to emphasize both the explicit and implicit teaching of DMs as an integral part of writing courses offered to PYP EFL learners. They need to use a variety of teaching methods to encourage and motivate their learners to use DMS. Therefore, they need to make use of the two famous views of teaching writing in a combination (the traditional product-view, and a relatively new process-view). It is also the instructors' duty to fill the gaps in writing course books by developing their own supplementary materials and encouraging students to use other available material. Students, on the other hand, should realize that developing the use and usage of DMs will have a positive impact on the quality of their writings. Students must be aware that the writing skill is one of the important and difficult tasks to learn. Learning to write well requires being equipped with some knowledge about DMs. They should take part in the responsibility of their own learning and study in libraries or search the web for additional material that would help develop their writing skill to be able to produce more coherent and cohesive paragraphs. In conclusion, the study also recommends further related studies to look into the following areas:

1) Reasons for the misuse of DMs in the different language skills among students of different majors.

2) Students' and teachers' attitudes toward the use of DMs.

3) The interrelationship between the use of DMs and writing Quality should be also investigated.

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