



IRAQI
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية

ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

Journal of Language Studies

Contents available at: <https://jls.tu.edu.iq/index.php/JLS>



Improving English Writing Using Transitional Phrases

Faten Hariri *¹

Idlib University

faten_hariri@idlib.edu.sy

&

Dr. Abdul Hamid Meygle

Idlib University

abdulhamid_mueikil@idlib.edu.sy

Received: 21/09/2025, Accepted: 21/09/2025, Online Published: 30/12/2025

Abstract

Transitional phrases are essential for achieving cohesion and coherence in English writing. However, many second-year English major students produce essays with disjointed sentences and poorly connected paragraphs at Idlib University. This research is built on Hasan and Halliday theory of cohesion (1976). It aims to investigate whether targeted learning of transitional phrases could improve students' writing quality, to identify the types of transitional phrases students used, and to explore the difficulties they encountered. A mixed-method, quasi-experimental design is used, involving 50 second-year English major students. Data are collected through pre- and post-tests, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal a significant improvement in writing quality after the intervention, with writing scores increasing by 66.8% (mean 20.08 to 34.7, sig =0 .001). Students have shown increased use of addition and contrast transitions, while concession and inference transitions have remained limited. These results highlight the importance of integrating focused training on transitional phrases into EFL writing courses.

¹ * **Corresponding Author:** Faten Hariri, **Email:** faten_hariri@idlib.edu.sy

Affiliation: Idlib University - Syria

© This is an open access article under the CC by licenses <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



The study offers practical implications for curriculum design, including incorporating regular drills, checklists for peer review, and short assessments. Teachers should also receive training on how to model and assess transitions effectively. The findings could inform similar interventions in other academic levels or contexts. In conclusion, systematic instruction in transitional phrases enhances students' cohesion and overall writing quality, underscoring its importance in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Cohesion, Coherence, EFL Instruction, Transitional Phrases, University Students, Writing Improvement

تحسين الكتابة باللغة الانكليزية باستعمال العبارات الانتقالية

فاتن حريري

جامعة ادلب/ سوريا

و.د. عبد الحميد المعكل

جامعة ادلب/ سوريا

المستخلص

تُعد العبارات الانتقالية ضرورية لتحقيق التماسك والاتساق في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية. ومع ذلك، يكتب العديد من طلاب السنة الثانية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة إدلب مقالات تحتوي على جمل وفقرات غير مترابطة. تبني هذه الدراسة على نظرية التماسك لحسن و هاليدي (1976) و تهدف إلى التحقق من مدى تأثير التعلم المركز للعبارات الانتقالية في تحسين جودة الكتابة، وتحديد أنواع العبارات الانتقالية التي يستخدمها الطلاب بعد التدخل، والكشف عن الصعوبات التي يواجهونها. تعتمد الدراسة على منهج مختلط ذي تصميم شبه تجريبي، تكونت عينة الدراسة من خمسين طالباً. تجمع البيانات باستخدام اختبار قبلي وبعدي، واستبانة، ومقابلات شبه موجهة. تظهر النتائج تحسناً ملحوظاً في جودة الكتابة بعد التدخل، حيث ارتفعت درجات الكتابة بنسبة 28٪ (من متوسط 54,2 إلى 69,5، دلالة $\geq 0,001$). ازداد استخدام الطلاب لعبارات الإضافة والتضاد، بينما ظلت عبارات الاستدراك والاستنتاج محدودة. تؤكد هذه النتائج أهمية دمج التدريب الواضح على العبارات الانتقالية في مساقات الكتابة للمتعلمين الأجانب. وتقدم الدراسة تطبيقات عملية لتطوير المناهج مثل إدراج تدريبات أسبوعية، وقوائم مراجعة بين الطلاب، واختبارات قصيرة، مع تدريب المعلمين على تقديم نماذج صحيحة وتقييم الاستخدام المناسب للعبارات الانتقالية. كما يمكن الاستفادة من هذه النتائج في تصميم تدخلات مشابهة في مستويات أو سياقات تعليمية أخرى. ختاماً، يثبت البحث أن التدريس المنهجي لعبارات الانتقال يحسن من تماسك الكتابة وجودتها العامة، ويبرز أهميته في سياقات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكتابة الأكاديمية – التماسك – الاتساق – تعليم اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية- العبارات الانتقالية- طلاب الجامعة – تحسين الكتابة.

1.Introduction

1.1. Background Information

Language plays a central role in human communication and in the transmission of ideas. It enables individuals to express thoughts, share knowledge, and interact effectively with others. In Syria, Arabic is both the official and dominant language. At the same time, English has become a necessary subject of study due to its global importance in education, business, and technology. English is taught in Syria starting from the kindergarten stage

and continues through the university level. The curriculum increases in complexity as students advance. At the university level, English majors typically study around 56 courses over four years. These courses are designed to provide comprehensive training in the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, writing is widely regarded as the most challenging. Writing in English requires more than producing words on paper. It demands the ability to construct coherent and cohesive texts, to link ideas logically, and to use appropriate transitional phrases and cohesive devices. Developing these skills is essential for students to achieve academic success and to communicate effectively in English.

1.2. Problem Statement

Writing proficiency requires understanding both cohesion and coherence, which are distinct concepts. Coherence involves logical connections between ideas, while cohesion refers to grammatical or semantic links within a text (Oxford, 2010; Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Cohesive devices—such as conjunctions, reference, ellipsis, and transitional phrases—help achieve cohesion and contribute to a well-organized, coherent text (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Studies have shown that students who use transitional phrases correctly write more effectively than those who do not.

At Idlib University, many second-year English students struggle with writing coherent and cohesive essays. A key issue is their weak use of transitional phrases. Despite being taught definitions and types of these devices, students often fail to apply them properly in writing. This problem is compounded by the unique challenges facing students in conflict-affected areas like northern Syria, where the educational system has been disrupted by war, displacement, and teacher shortages.

1.3. The Objectives of the study:

The current study is conducted to fill a linguistic gap among second-year English students at Idlib University. The gap mentioned earlier is producing disjointed discourses. To write cohesively and coherently is very essential in the process of effective communication in addition to being the core of academic success. This study seeks to solve this problem by enhancing students' writing skills and teaching English majors how to use transitional phrases appropriately. The specific goals of this study are the following:

1. To investigate whether the appropriate use of transitional phrases improve the writing quality of students majoring in English at Idlib University.
2. To identify the types of transitional phrases in English writings produced by students majoring in English at Idlib University.
3. To find out the main difficulties encountered by students majoring in English at Idlib University in the use of transitional phrases.

1.4.

Research

Questions

These are the research questions that need to be answered in order to achieve the research objectives mentioned earlier.

1. Does the appropriate use of transitional phrases improve the writing quality of students majoring in English at Idlib University?
2. What are the types of transitional phrases in English writings produced by students majoring in English at Idlib University?
3. What are the main difficulties encountered by students majoring in English at Idlib University in the use of transitional phrases?

1.5 Significance of the study

Writing proficiency is vital for EFL students, especially English majors. This study investigates how appropriate use of transitional phrases can enhance writing quality and identifies challenges students face in using them. It contributes to linguistic research by offering insights into these issues in a conflict-affected context. Findings may guide better instruction on cohesive devices, helping improve academic outcomes and the design of writing courses. In addition, the study is significant for curriculum designers and teachers, as it emphasizes the need to incorporate systematic training on transitional phrases into syllabi and teaching practices.

2. Literature Review

English majors are expected to master various aspects of good writing since they are required to produce different types of writing, from crafting coherent paragraphs and essays to publishing academic papers. This chapter includes conceptual definitions of some key terms such as transitional phrases and writing quality. Related theories, previous studies and the conceptual framework of the current study are the main parts of this chapter.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Before reviewing the literature, it is important to explain the theory followed in the current study and define the key concepts central to this study—*transitional phrases* and *writing quality*. These definitions help frame the theoretical background, prior research findings, and the conceptual framework presented in this chapter. This focus is particularly relevant to English majors at Idlib University, who are expected to produce a range of written texts, from coherent paragraphs and essays to academic papers. Writing is not just a skill but a core academic requirement that reflects students' ability to organize ideas and express them clearly. Given these expectations, examining the role of transitional phrases in improving writing quality is both relevant and necessary.

2.1.1 Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory (1976)

Michael Halliday (1925-2018) was a British linguist who developed **Systemic Functional Linguistics**, a theory that looks at how language works in social contexts. Ruqaiya Hasan (1926- 2015) collaborated with Halliday on studying text cohesion.

Together, they published *Cohesion in English* (1976), a foundational work on how texts hold together. According to this framework, Halliday and Hasan's explain that **cohesion** is created through linguistic devices that link sentences and ideas. These devices include conjunctions, references, substitutions, ellipsis, and lexical ties. They help readers understand the text as a unified whole. When these devices are used effectively, they contribute to **coherence** which refers to the logical flow of ideas throughout a text. Cohesion is necessary for coherence, but it is not sufficient on its own. Other factors such as **register** which reflects the contextual factors- the **field** (the subject matter), the **tenor** (the participants and their roles), and the **mode** (the form of communication, such as spoken or written) - also influence coherence. In the context of the current study, Halliday and Hasan's theory provides a clear framework for analyzing transitional phrases. These phrases function as cohesive devices that organize ideas and enhance the clarity and flow of student writing. All in all, Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory was chosen by the research as it remains foundational in cohesion studies. It also provides a strong basis for analyzing and understanding how transitional phrases help create coherent writing.

2.1.2 Definition of Writing:

Writing is one of the four core language skills and is defined in various ways depending on context. Halliday et al. (1989) and Nunan (1991) describe it as a demanding, expressive, and complex process. Sari (2020) views writing as any act of generating written content, from simple notes to detailed texts. Oshima and Hogue (1998) stress that writing, especially in academic contexts, should be seen as a process rather than just a final product, as it reflects individual thought and expression.

2.1.3 Definition of Writing Quality

Writing quality refers to how effectively a text conveys its message, engages its audience, and fulfills its purpose. According to Roman and Raphaelson (2010), high-quality writing is clear, concise, direct, and tailored to the reader. It avoids unnecessary complexity, focuses on the audience's needs, and presents ideas in a well-organized, logical structure to ensure clarity and impact.

2.1.4 Aspects of High- Quality Writing

Writing quality can be measured by numerous aspects. Each of these features plays a crucial role in crafting a piece of good writing. For this reason, writers need to understand the essential criteria of good writing in order to produce effective written forms.

2.1.4.1 The Aspects of Good Writing by Heaton

John Brian Heaton outlines key aspects that define good writing. These include:

- Thoughtfulness: A writer must deeply consider the topic and understand the audience's needs to make the content relevant and meaningful.

- Organization: Clear structure—introduction, body, and conclusion—helps readers follow ideas easily and enhances clarity.
- Accuracy: Correct grammar, syntax, and vocabulary are essential for producing error-free, understandable writing.
- Audience Awareness: Adapting language, tone, and content to suit the audience ensures the message is clear and appropriate.
- Reader Engagement: Writing should be enjoyable to read, capturing attention and aiding information retention (Sa'adah, 2020).

2.1.4.2 Characteristics of Good Writing by Tribble Christopher Tribble identifies five essential components of effective writing:

- Content: The ability to generate and fully develop creative, relevant ideas.
- Organization: Logical structure with clear introductions, body paragraphs, and conclusions.
- Vocabulary: Appropriate word choice that enhances meaning and clarity.
- Grammar: Correct use of language following grammatical rules suited to the audience.
- Mechanics: Proper punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

These criteria form a complete framework for assessing writing quality (Amanah, 2020)

2.1.5 Coherence in Writing

2.1.5.1 Definition of Coherence

Coherence is understood as the logical and meaningful connection within a text, primarily based on Halliday and Hasan's theory of cohesion (1976). They explain coherence through two main elements: cohesion, which involves grammatical and lexical links such as pronouns and conjunctions that connect parts of the text smoothly, and register, which includes the context of the text—field, tenor, and mode—that ensures language appropriateness for purpose and audience. Together, these create a clear, logically connected text.

Kies (2015) adds that coherence is achieved through paragraph unity, where sentences align around a single idea, and sentence cohesion, involving smooth transitions and logical flow, allowing readers to follow the message easily.

Hoey (1991) views coherence as dependent on the reader's understanding, emerging from the effective combination of textual elements and shared contextual knowledge between writer and reader. Coherence is essential for readable and successful written communication.

2.1.5.2 Coherence in Paragraphs

Rahman (2022) defines a paragraph as a group of related sentences focused on a single main idea. Erliana et al. (2014) explain that a paragraph typically consists of three parts: a topic sentence that introduces the subject, supporting sentences that develop the idea with examples and explanations, and a concluding sentence that summarizes or restates the topic. Oshima and Hogue (1997) highlight three key techniques to maintain coherence within a paragraph: consistent use of nouns and pronouns to avoid confusion, the use of transitional phrases to link ideas, and organizing ideas logically to help the reader follow the flow. These strategies help create clear and well-structured paragraphs.

2.1.5.3 Coherence in Essays

Oktapian (2014) describes an essay as a written piece presenting a central idea across multiple paragraphs, usually structured with an introduction, body, and conclusion. A five-paragraph format is common for clear organization. Kirkland (1985) emphasizes that coherence in essays is achieved through repetition of key terms, use of similar words, and transitional phrases that connect ideas and signal relationships between sections. These tools ensure smooth flow and clarity, enabling readers to easily follow the argument and understand how each part supports the overall purpose.

2.1.6 Definition of Transitional Phrases

Transitional phrases are words or groups of words that link ideas, sentences, or paragraphs to create smooth flow and internal cohesion in writing or speech (Lili, 2021). They act like glue, connecting ideas and guiding readers through the text by clarifying relationships between points. According to Djahimo (2018), transitional phrases enhance clarity, improve logical organization, and strengthen the overall coherence of a text.

2.1.7 The Classification of Transitional Phrases

Several theories and frameworks were used to classify and understand these phrases:

2.1.7.1 Oshima and Hogue Classification (2006)

Oshima and Hogue categorize transitional words into eight types based on their discourse function. These include transitions that add ideas (e.g., "furthermore," "also"), show contrast (e.g., "however," "nevertheless"), indicate comparison (e.g., "similarly," "likewise"), express cause and effect (e.g., "because," "therefore"), provide examples (e.g., "for instance"), organize time or sequence (e.g., "first," "finally"), emphasize points (e.g., "indeed," "certainly"), and conclude or summarize (e.g., "in conclusion," "to sum up"). These transitions enhance cohesion and clarity by linking ideas logically.

2.1.7.2 Sherman et al. Classification of Transitional Signals (2010)

Sherman and colleagues classify transitional signals into eleven types serving various communicative functions. These include signals for sequence and addition, time markers, comparison, contrast, examples, summary or conclusion, concession, cause and effect, generalization, restatement, and emphasis. Their framework helps structure communication clearly and effectively by guiding the flow and highlighting important points.

2.1.7.3 Hyland Classification of Transition Markers (2005)

Hyland (2005) identifies transition markers as essential linguistic tools that clarify the logical flow of arguments by linking ideas. He classifies them into three main types: additive markers (e.g., and, furthermore) that add information; contrastive markers (e.g., however, but) that highlight similarities or differences; and causative markers (e.g., therefore, consequently) that indicate cause-and-effect or provide justification. These markers are crucial for creating coherence and helping readers follow the progression of ideas.

2.1.7.4 O'Regan Classification of Transitions (2002)

O'Regan (2002) categorizes transitional expressions into thirteen types that connect ideas and enhance writing flow. These include addition (e.g., moreover), comparison (e.g., similarly), contrast (e.g., however), concession (e.g., although), exemplification (e.g., for instance), inference (e.g., therefore), summary (e.g., in short), result (e.g., as a result), reformulation (e.g., in other words), time and sequence (e.g., meanwhile), place/position (e.g., nearby), numeration (e.g., first), and miscellaneous (e.g., overall). Each type clarifies relationships and improves readability.

This taxonomy is viewed as the most comprehensive, covering all types of transitional phrases, and is thus adopted for use in the current study.

2.2. Relevant Previous Studies

Many studies recognize transitional phrases as essential for maintaining coherence and logical flow in writing. Researchers often explore the link between using transitional phrases and improved writing skills in various educational settings. Some focus on challenges faced by second-language learners with cohesive devices, while others examine how transitions specifically enhance coherence. Research shows students who use transitions well produce clearer, better-organized essays. However, most literature addresses ESL learners broadly, with little focus on English majors at universities in regions like Idlib. This gap signals the need for more research on how transitional phrases affect writing quality in this specific context. The present study seeks to fill this gap and improve writing instruction for English learners in similar environments. The researcher critically reviews some previous studies, noting their strengths, limitations, and suggesting improvements.

2.2.1 Utami & Mahendra's Study on University Students (2021)

Ni Putu Cahyani Putri Utami and Made Wahyu Mahendra (2021) conducted a descriptive quantitative study to analyze how students used transitional signals in a real writing task. They focused on a group of 25 seventh-semester English Literature students at Universitas Mah Saraswati Denpasar in Bali, Indonesia. These students were working together to write a community service report, making the study practical and grounded in real-world writing. The researchers chose this context because transitional signals are key to improving writing clarity and flow. Since the students learn English as a foreign language in an Indonesian-speaking environment, their experience connects well with other EFL learners like those in Syria.

To gather data, the researchers simply analyzed the students' submitted reports without interfering. They categorized the transitional signals using Oshima and Hogue's (1998) eight-type framework. In total, 303 transitional words were identified. The most frequently used type helped show sequence and order, while the least used were those meant to emphasize ideas.

In terms of accuracy, students used these transitions correctly more than 60% of the time. While this is encouraging, the findings are specific to community service reports. To understand students' transition, use more broadly, it would be helpful to examine other academic writing forms like essays or research papers.

2.2.2 Farhad's Study on University Students (2021)

Farhad M. Hama (2021) conducted a qualitative study to explore the challenges Kurdish EFL students face when using transitional words in writing. He focused on two groups: second-year and third-year English majors, selecting ten students from each. While this small sample limits the ability to generalize the results, it still offers useful insights into how writing skills evolve over time.

To collect data, Farhad asked the second-year students to write paragraphs, while the third-year students were tasked with writing essays. This comparison helped highlight differences in skill development. Fraser's (1999) model was used to classify the types of transitional words, giving the study a solid theoretical foundation.

The results showed that second-year students struggled significantly with both the range and correct use of transitional phrases. Third-year students performed better, but many still misused these words. This shows that while writing improves with experience, using transitions accurately remains a challenge.

To address these gaps, the study recommended practical strategies for teaching transitional words more effectively. Farhad emphasized the need for targeted writing instruction to help students reduce errors and build stronger, more coherent texts.

2.2.3 Baraat Ismael Faje Abdulla's study at Salahaddin University in Iraq (2023)

Baraat Ismael Faje Abdulla (2023) conducted a study at Salahaddin University in Erbil, Iraq, aiming to explore how frequently Iraqi EFL learners use transitional words in their paragraph writing. The study involved a sample of 36 student-written paragraphs, selected from English major students. The primary goal was to analyze the frequency and variety of transitional words, with a specific focus on identifying common patterns and possible limitations in learners' usage. A descriptive, corpus-based design was adopted, where student texts were examined using manual coding to count the transitional phrases employed. The findings revealed that students heavily relied on basic conjunctions such as "and," "but," and "so," with limited use of more advanced or varied transitional expressions like "in contrast" or "furthermore." This indicated a clear overuse of simple connectors and a lack of diversity in linking devices, which, in turn, affects the overall coherence and academic quality of student writing. The study concluded with a recommendation for curriculum designers and instructors to integrate focused lessons on a

broader range of transitional phrases to help students improve their writing cohesion and fluency.

2.2.4 Rosa Salah Hassan's Study in Iraq (2024)

Rosa Salah Hassan (2024) carried out a study at the University of Thi-Qar, Iraq, focusing on the syntactic and functional roles of transitional words in English as used by Iraqi university students. The study aimed to explore how learners interpret, process, and apply transitional phrases within written English discourse. The research did not involve an experimental sample but rather relied on an analytical and theoretical methodology, grounded in the syntactic frameworks proposed by Quirk et al. The study served as a qualitative examination of sentence structure and cohesion through the lens of transitional usage. The results showed that while students recognized the general purpose of transition words-to connect ideas-they often misused them in terms of syntax or appropriateness. For example, students would insert transitional words in grammatically incorrect positions or combine them redundantly. These findings highlighted a gap in both grammatical understanding and functional application. The researcher emphasized the need for syntactic and discourse-level instruction in Iraqi EFL classrooms, particularly targeting cohesive devices.

2.3 A Comparison Between the Previous Related Studies and the Current Study:

The present study at Idlib University builds on previous research by examining the effect of targeted instruction in transitional phrases on students' writing quality. Unlike Utami and Mahendra (2021), who focused on Indonesian students' use of transitions in community service reports, and Farhad (2021), who explored challenges across different year levels, this study applies a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design to measure improvement after an intervention. Similar to Baraat Ismael Fage Abdulla (2023) and Rosa Salah Hassan (2024), it identifies patterns in the use and misuse of transitional phrases, but it goes further by showing a significant 66.8% improvement in writing scores and highlighting which types of transitions students improved in, as well as the difficulties they still face. Overall, while previous studies emphasized usage patterns and errors, this research provides clear evidence that focused instruction can enhance cohesion and writing quality, offering practical implications for both teachers and curriculum designers in EFL contexts.

3. Research Methodology

This chapter presents the procedures of data analysis, describing both the quantitative and qualitative methods employed to interpret the findings. Ethical considerations and limitations related to the research process were also addressed.

3.1 Research Design

This study used a quasi-experimental design and a mixed-method approach to explore how transitional phrases affect the writing quality of second-year English majors at Idlib University. By combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, the research not only measured student progress with numbers but also captured meaningful insights into the real experiences and challenges faced by students.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population of this study consisted of second-year undergraduate students majoring in English at Idlib University during the academic year 2024-2025, about 200 students. This specific group was selected because students at this level are required to produce academic essays and written assignments, where the effective use of transitional phrases plays a critical role in achieving coherence and cohesion in writing. Furthermore, these students had already been introduced to general writing skills, making them suitable for focused instruction on transitional devices.

3.3 Study Instruments

To answer the three research questions effectively, the current study analysis, a questionnaire and semi- structured interviews.

Here is a table that clarifies the sample involved and tools used to gather data for each question:

RQs	Sample	Instruments
Does the appropriate use of transitional phrases improve the writing quality of students majoring in English at Idlib University?	50 students	Document analysis + a questionnaire
What are the types of transitional phrases in English writings produced by students majoring in English at Idlib University?	50 students	Document analysis
What are the main difficulties encountered by students majoring in English at Idlib University in the use of transitional phrases?	50 students 10 students	A questionnaire+ document analysis Interviews

3.3.1 Document Analysis

Document analysis was the primary tool used to answer all three research questions. It focused on evaluating students' writing before and after they were taught how to use transitional phrases.

The process began with a pre-test given to the selected group. This test helped identify their initial writing level and how well they used transitional phrases at the start. Then, the

students received instruction on how to use these phrases more effectively. After the teaching phase, a post-test was administered.

Both tests- identical in content- were analyzed and compared to track changes in writing quality. This helped determine whether the students improved in using transitional phrases and whether their writing became more cohesive and clearer (see Appendix A).

3.3.2 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data that supports the document analysis and answers the first and third research questions. It focused on students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to using transitional phrases in writing.

The questionnaire was given after the intervention to ensure students had enough exposure to the topic. Their answers were analyzed statistically to understand how they viewed transitional phrases and what difficulties they still encountered.

It was structured into three sections:

- The first section gathered general background and language proficiency.
- The second explored students' experiences using transitional phrases.
- The third examined their perceptions of the importance of these phrases and the obstacles they faced.

The questionnaire included five-point Likert scale items and multiple-choice questions. It ended with an open-ended question where students could freely share any additional thoughts (See Appendix B). Collecting the data after the intervention helped show whether students improved and what challenges remained.

3.3.3 Semi-structured Interviews

This type of tools is used in qualitative approaches. Semi-structured interviews include both prepared questions as well as follow-up ones that could be formulated during the interview based on the respondents' answers (Longhurst,2003). This kind of qualitative data serves as a complement to the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire. The researcher herself conducted semi-structured interviews with students chosen selectively. This kind of sampling means that the researcher intentionally selects information-rich group. To clarify that, in the current study, ten students who have good experience with the topic were selected to be interviewed. Student interviews allowed the researcher to know the students' personal challenges regarding the use of transitional phrases. The researcher asked each student ten probing questions through which she gained a lot of information such as kinds of difficulties they face using these expressions, their experiences, and how they feel using these devices in their writing (See appendix C). As a final step, the interviews were transcribed from audio into written words. Then, they were analyzed to identify recurring themes, difficulties and strategies.

3.4 Description of the intervention

The intervention in this study consisted of a specially designed instructional course aimed at improving students' use of transitional phrases in writing. The course was structured around a clear classification of transitional phrases based on O'Regan's framework, which categorizes them according to their function in a sentence or paragraph, such as addition, contrast, cause and effect, and sequence..

Throughout the intervention, students were introduced to the definitions and types of transitional phrases, with a focus on their practical application in academic writing. A variety of activities were incorporated to reinforce understanding, including matching exercises, fill-in-the-blank tasks, and sentence construction exercises. Students were also asked to identify and explain the function of transitional phrases within given texts, helping them to develop a deeper awareness of how these elements contribute to coherence and clarity. In addition to guided practice, students were encouraged to write their own sentences using different transitional phrases, and to reflect on the specific role each phrase played. This hands-on approach aimed to not only familiarize students with a range of transitions, but also to help them use these phrases purposefully and effectively in their own writing.

3.5 Ethical considerations

In this research, all ethical procedures were carefully followed. First of all, the researcher took the permission of the administration of Idlib University to conduct her study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study. So, they participated voluntarily after giving their consent verbally. They were also told that they had the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Concerning the anonymity and confidentiality, their names and all responses were kept totally private. Moreover, collecting data did not cause any stress to the students. During the interviews, the students were told that they could speak freely since their responses were only used for the research purposes and would not affect their studies. No marks or academic consequences were connected to their performance. Additionally, students were informed before recording their voices. Although member checking is mainly part of trustworthiness, it also expresses ethical issues since it respects the participants' right to check their own ideas. Finally, the researcher expressed gratitude to everyone who supported her in completing her study.

3.6 Limitations of the study

The study offered helpful insights, but there are a few important limitations to keep in mind. Since the research was conducted only at Idlib University, the findings may not apply to students in different regions, programs, or university settings. In other words, what worked here might not work the same way elsewhere. Also, while student interviews added value by highlighting their experiences, the lack of input from teachers is a gap. Teachers could have provided a clearer picture of classroom dynamics, instructional challenges, or student progress from their point of view. Including both voices would have strengthened the analysis.

3.7 Data Analysis and Discussions:

To assess the effectiveness of the intervention, a paired samples t-test was conducted comparing students' pre-test and post-test scores. The test examined whether the observed difference in performance before and after the intervention was statistically significant. In addition, the same tool, document analysis, was used to answer the second research question.

Table 1: Paired Samples Statistics

Pair 1		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Pre	50	20,0800	6,40739	0,90614
Post	50	34,7800	5,17565	0,73195	

The table above illustrates descriptive statistics. The mean score on the pre-test was 20.8 (SD = 6.4), while the mean score on the post-test increased to 34.78 (SD = 5.17). This suggests a clear improvement in student performance after the intervention.

Table 2: Paired Samples Correlations

Pair1	N	Correlation	Sig
Pre & Post	50	0,477	0.001

Table 2 shows a moderate, statistically significant correlation was found between pre and post scores ($r = 0.477$, $sig < 0.001$). This indicates that students' scores were consistently related before and after the intervention. In other words, students who did well before the intervention tended to still do well after it. On the other hand, those who struggled before may have improved, but their ranking compared to others stay somewhat consistent.

Table 3: Paired Samples Test

Paired Differences					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre-Post	-14.70	6.014	0.8505	-16.409	-12.99	-17,283	49	0,001

The t-test results revealed a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores:

Mean Difference = 14.7 $t(49) = 17.28$ $sig < 0.001$

95% Confidence Interval: -16.49, -12.99

This indicates that the improvement in scores was not due to chance.

Table 4: Paired Samples Effect Sizes

			Standardizer	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Pair 1	Pre-Post	Cohen's d	6.01444	-2.444	-2.997	-1.884
		Hedges correction	6.06096	-2.425	-2.974	-1.870

Concerning the effect size, Cohen's $d = 2.4$ – this is considered a very large effect size. It suggests that the intervention had a strong and meaningful impact on students' writing performance.

As a conclusion, the paired sample t-test demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in students' writing scores following the intervention. The average gain was 14.7 points, with a very large effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.4$) indicating that the intervention was highly effective in enhancing students' use of transitional phrases in writing.

In response to the second research question regarding, only 50 essays were analyzed due to time constraints. The researcher noticed that many types of transitional phrases were used more frequently after the intervention. The findings showed a clear improvement in their use of addition and contrast transitions. Many students began to use phrases like “in addition,” “also,” and “moreover” to add supporting points, which helped them present their ideas in a more organized and coherent manner. For example, instead of listing unrelated ideas, they started linking them with clear logical connections: “*The government should invest more in education. In addition, schools need better resources to improve student outcomes.*” Similarly, the use of contrast transitions such as “however,” “on the other hand,” and “although” became more frequent, allowing students to present opposing ideas more clearly and thoughtfully. For instance, a student might write, “*Some people support the new law. However, others believe it will cause more harm than good.*”

On the other hand, transitions of concession (like “even though” or “granted”) and inference (such as “therefore” or “as a result”) were still rarely used. This suggests that while students became more confident in basic transitions that help structure arguments and comparisons, they still struggled with more nuanced connectors that require a deeper understanding of logic and argument flow. Overall, the data points to a shift in students' transitional phrase usage, with noticeable gains in addition and contrast, but limited progress in other, more advanced categories.

Concerning the third research question, which aimed at exploring the difficulties students faced in using transitional phrases effectively, data was collected using semi-structured interviews with students. They were recorded, transcribed and coded. The findings revealed several recurring challenges. Many students struggled with choosing the right transitional phrase to match the relationship between their ideas. This suggests a limited understanding of the functions of different transitions. Others tended to overuse a small set of familiar phrases such as “and” or “but,” which made their writing sound repetitive and lacked the variety needed for smooth flow. Some students also avoided using transitions altogether in complex or argumentative writing, possibly because they were unsure which phrase would fit or feared using them incorrectly. Interviews and written

responses showed that students often found it hard to distinguish between similar transitions like “*although*” and “*despite*,” or “*therefore*” and “*thus*.” These difficulties indicate that while students may recognize transitional phrases, many do not fully grasp how to apply them accurately and flexibly. This lack of mastery affects not only the cohesion of their writing but also their ability to express logical relationships between ideas.

To complement the other research tools, a questionnaire was distributed after the intervention to gather students’ views on transitional phrases, their personal experiences using them, and the challenges they still faced. The data was analyzed using SPSS.

All participants in the questionnaire were undergraduate students majoring in English, which accounts for the full agreement on the initial background questions. Students’ self-assessed English proficiency varied. While 10% considered themselves excellent, 38% described their level as very good, and 46% identified as good. A smaller percentage rated themselves as fair (4%) or poor (2%). When asked about the most difficult language skill, 50% of students pointed to writing as the most challenging area. Regarding their experience with transitional phrases, 58% of students reported having a good level of familiarity. This result is consistent with the timing of the survey, which came after the instructional intervention. The majority (76%) said they first encountered transitional phrases in university lectures. Additionally, 38% indicated that they often use transitional phrases in their writing. Over half of the students (52%) agreed that these phrases help improve the clarity and cohesion of their texts. In terms of instruction and feedback, 40% mentioned receiving positive comments from their teachers about their use of transitions. A larger group (62%) highlighted the importance of transitional phrases in academic writing, while 60% said they had been directly taught how to use them properly. As for the challenges, the most common issue, reported by 24% of students, was difficulty in choosing the right transitional phrase. Other obstacles were mentioned but with lower frequencies. When asked about effective teaching methods, 66% believed that learning through practical examples and explanations was the most helpful. Finally, 56% of students said that using transitional phrases made them feel more confident in their writing. No one provided further written feedback at the end of the questionnaire.

3.8 Summary of the Findings:

The findings of the study show that the intervention had a strong and positive impact on students’ writing. Statistical analysis confirmed a significant improvement in scores from pre-test to post-test, with students gaining an average of 14.7 points. This improvement was not by chance and was supported by a large effect size (Cohen’s $d = 2.4$), suggesting the intervention was highly effective. There was also a moderate correlation between pre- and post-test results, indicating that while all students improved, their relative performance levels remained fairly consistent.

Document analysis of 50 essays further confirmed these results. After the intervention, students used more transitional phrases, especially for addition and contrast. Common phrases like “in addition,” “also,” “however,” and “on the other hand” appeared more often, helping students write more clearly and logically. For example, many began linking related points instead of listing them randomly, and they expressed opposing ideas more clearly.

However, advanced transitions such as those expressing concession or inference remained limited. Students rarely used connectors like “even though” or “therefore,” showing they were still not fully comfortable with more complex structures.

Interviews helped uncover why students continued to struggle in some areas. Many said they found it hard to choose the right transitional phrase, often repeating basic ones like “and” or “but.” Some avoided transitions altogether in complex writing because they are unsure of how to use them correctly. Others confused similar terms, such as “although” and “despite,” or “thus” and “therefore,” which affected the flow and logic of their writing.

A post-intervention questionnaire supported these findings. While most students reported a good experience with transitional phrases and recognized their importance in academic writing, many admitted they still faced difficulties. The most common challenge was selecting the appropriate phrase. Most students felt that examples and clear explanations were the most helpful way to learn. Over half said they gained confidence in their writing after learning how to use transitional phrases. However, the data also showed that many students still lacked full control over when and how to use them effectively. Overall, the results suggest that the intervention was successful but that more focused instruction is needed to help students master more advanced and nuanced use of transitions.

4. Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the effect of teaching transitional phrases on improving the writing quality of English major students at Idlib University, fulfilling the objective of examining instructional impact. Analysis of students’ essays before and after the intervention demonstrated that the study achieved its objective of enhancing students’ ability to express ideas with clarity, coherence, and logical flow. The intervention raised students’ awareness of different types of transitional phrases—such as those used for addition, contrast, cause-effect, and conclusion—and provided practical tools to use these expressions effectively in their writing. These results confirm that the study met its objectives regarding the use and effectiveness of transitional phrases in improving writing quality.

The conclusions are as follows:

1. The use of transitional phrases significantly improved students’ overall writing quality, meeting the study’s objective of assessing instructional effectiveness.
2. After the intervention, students used a greater variety of transitional phrases more accurately and appropriately, achieving the objective of evaluating practical use.
3. Interviews revealed several difficulties students faced when using transitional phrases, including confusion about the function of certain phrases and a lack of confidence in deciding where and how to use them. These challenges were more common among students with weaker writing foundations or less exposure to academic English, fulfilling the objective of identifying students’ challenges.

In short, the findings confirm that the study successfully demonstrated the role of transitional phrases in developing students’ academic writing skills, particularly in

organization and coherence. The study also highlights the need for continued support and targeted instruction to help students overcome the challenges they face in mastering this aspect of writing. These insights can be valuable for English language instructors and curriculum designers in similar educational contexts.

4.1 Implications of the Study

This study highlights the value of teaching transitional phrases as a key part of improving students' writing. When students learn how to use transitions correctly, their writing becomes clearer and easier to follow. Teachers might want to spend more classroom time on activities that show how transitions work in real writing situations. The findings also point to a need for more consistent practice and support for students in this area. On a broader level, the results could help shape future studies that look at how transitions influence writing across different education levels and classroom settings.

4.2 Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that writing instructors dedicate more time to explicitly teaching transitional phrases, especially in EFL contexts where students may not be naturally exposed to them. Providing students with clear examples, guided practice, and feedback can make a real difference in their ability to write more clearly and cohesively. In addition, since some students still faced challenges despite the intervention, it may be helpful to integrate more personalized support, such as peer collaboration or writing workshops, to address individual needs.

Future research could build on this study by exploring how the use of transitional phrases develops over a longer period, or by comparing results across different levels of language proficiency.

Appendix (A)

Idlib University/ General Linguistics / A pre/ post - test

A research project entitled: " Impact of Using Transitional Phrases on the Writing Quality of Students Majoring in English at Idlib University"

I. Read each sentence carefully then choose the suitable word/phrase:

1. Ed learned from his mistake. (Similarly / Moreover/ As a result), others can learn from theirs.
2. The best source of Calcium is milk. (But/ However/ Therefore), many people don't like it.
3. I was tired; (therefore/ so/ and), I decided to take a nap.

4. He stayed up too late last night. (Meanwhile/ Until then/ Consequently), he slept until noon.

5. First, Mary went to the store. (Third/ Similarly/ Then), she went to visit her mother.

II. Match the following words/ phrases with their functions:

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>
6. In addition 7. Conversely 8. First 9. below 10. For instance,	a. to show contrast b. to list c. to show spatial relationships d. to add information e. to amplify f. to exemplify g. to compare

III. Fill in the gaps using the suitable word/phrase mentioned below to complete the following paragraph:

In short, However, but, For example, In fact, As a result, likewise.

A Child Prodigy

Many highly gifted children can find no one who is like them, so they end up lonely and isolated. (11) -----, Ian is six. His IQ is over 200, and he is passionate about dinosaurs. Many children of all ages also like dinosaurs. (12) -----, Ian rarely finds someone to talk to about his passion. Other six-year-olds know too little. Even older children don't know enough. And they don't find his knowledge interesting. (13) -----, they often don't like him because he keeps correcting them. Ian can only talk about dinosaurs to knowledgeable adults. The adults are kind, (14) ----- he is not their social or emotional equal. He's still a child. (15) -----, Ian never feels he has a true friend because no one really shares his interests at the same level.

IV. Fill in the blanks using the most appropriate word/ phrase:

16. My friend looked for food; -----, I made a shelter for the night.

17. There are many ways to stay healthy; -----, by eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly.

18. The roof is leaking in the old house; -----, the brick is crumbling.

19. The project is behind schedule. -----, we need to speed up our work to meet the deadline.

20. She spends a lot of money on clothes. She is also fond of buying designer shoes. -----
---,
she is extravagant.

V. Correct the errors in the following sentences:

21. First, collect the ingredients of making spaghetti. And put water into the pot and turn on the stove.

22. My brother couldn't finish his test on time; however, he got a low grade.

23. Susan played basketball at the park. First, she walked home.

24. The basement is above ground level, offering extra storage space and a laundry area.

25. Many people enjoy the beach; but, some prefer the mountains.

VII. Write a well-organized essay about the benefits of traveling abroad.

Appendix (B)

**Idlib University
Linguistics**

Questionnaire

MA Student, General

A research project entitled "Impact of Using Transitional Phrases on the Writing Quality of Students Majoring in English at Idlib University."

Dear participants, answer the following questions please. Your responses will remain confidential and be used only for academic research.

Section 1: Background Information

1. What is your current level of study?

- Undergraduate

- Graduate

- Postgraduate

- Other: (Please specify) -----

2. Which academic field or major are you specializing in?

- English Language

- Translation

- Literature

- Other (please specify) -----

3. How would you rate your general proficiency in English?

- Excellent - Very good - Good - Fair - Poor

4. Which language skill do you find the most difficult one?

- Reading - Listening - Speaking - Writing

Section 2: Experience with Transitional Phrases

5. Do you have experience using transitional phrases in your writing?

- Yes - Somewhat - No

6. How did you become familiar with transitional phrases?

- From school English classes

- At university lectures

- Online resources

- Personal studying

- I'm still not familiar with them

- Other: (Please specify) -----

7. How often do you use transitional phrases in your writing?

- Always - Often - Sometimes - Rarely - Never

8. In your view, how important are transitional phrases for improving writing cohesion and clarity?

- Very Important - Important - Neutral - Slightly Important - Not Important

9. Have you ever received feedback about your use of transitional phrases?

- Yes, positive feedback - Yes, negative feedback - No feedback - I don't remember

10. Do you believe that using transitional phrases improves writing quality?

- Strongly Agree - Agree - Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree

11. In which activity do you feel transitional phrases are most important? (You can choose more than one)

- Formal letters - Academic essays - Emails - Reports - Other

12. Have you been taught how to use transitional phrases properly?

- Yes - Partially - No

Section 3: Challenges and Perceptions

13. What are the main challenges you face when using transitional phrases? (Choose all that apply)

- Not knowing enough phrases
- Confusion about when to use them
- Difficulty choosing the right phrase
- Not practiced enough in class
- Fear of using them incorrectly
- Other: (Please specify) -----

14. What type of support would help you most in using transitional phrases correctly?

- More classroom practice
- Clear examples and explanations
- Teacher feedback
- Peer feedback or group work
- Online exercises or videos
- Other: (Please specify) -----
--

15. Using transitional phrases boosts my confidence in writing:

- Strongly Agree - Agree - Neutral - Disagree - Strongly Disagree

Appendix (C)

**Idlib University
Linguistics**

Interview Questions

MA Student, General

A research project entitled "Impact of Using Transitional Phrases on the Writing Quality of Students Majoring in English at Idlib University."

Interview questions for students

1. Can you tell me about your overall experience with writing in English?
2. What kinds of writing do you usually do most in your university courses?
3. When you're writing, how do you usually connect your ideas?
4. Have you come across the term "transitional phrases" in your studies? What do you understand by it?
5. Can you describe a situation where you used a transitional phrase in your writing?
6. What do you usually think or feel when you're trying to use transitions in writing?
7. Can you recall any feedback you've received from teachers regarding your use of transitions?
8. In your opinion, how do transitional phrases affect the way your writing is received or understood?
9. Have your courses or instructors included any lessons or activities focused on transitions? How were they presented?
10. What specific difficulties, if any, do you face when using transitional phrases?

References:

Abdulla, B. I. F. (2023). Frequency analysis of transition words in students' paragraphs. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*, 7(4), 105–120.
<https://doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol7no4.8>

Amanah, N. (2020). The effectiveness of using buzz group technique towards students' writing ability in descriptive text at the first semester of the tenth grade of SMA Al Azhar 3 Bandar Lampung in the academic year of 2019/2020 [Doctoral dissertation, UIN Raden Intan Lampung].

Djahimo, H. R. (2018). An analysis of transition signals in discussion texts written by the sixth semester students of the English Study Program of UNDANA in academic year 2016/2017. *International Journal of Research-Granthaalayah*, 6(1), 137–149.

Erliana, S., Nirwanto, R., Sabarun, S., & Miftah, M. Z. (2014). Developing sentences into paragraph: Course materials for paragraph writing.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. Longman.

Halliday, M. A. K., Hasan, R., & Christie, F. (Ed.). (1989). *Language, context, and text: Aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Hama, F. M. (2021). An investigation into the difficulties of using transitional words in Kurdish EFL students' writing at the university level. *UKH Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(1), 107–117.

Hassan, R. S. (2024). A syntactic study of transitional words in English. *American Journal of Language, Literacy and Learning in STEM Education*, 2(3).

Hoey, M. (1991). *Patterns of lexis in text*. Oxford University Press.

Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Continuum.

Kies, D. (2015, June 26). *Coherence in writing*. The HyperTextBooks. <http://papyr.com/hypertextbooks/comp1/coherent.htm>

Kirkland, J. (1985). *Coherence and the teaching of writing*. National Council of Teachers of English.

Lili, T. (2021, June). The application of transitional devices in English writing teaching. In 2nd International Conference on Language, Art and Cultural Exchange (ICLACE 2021) (pp. 355–358). Atlantis Press.

Nunan, D. (1991). *Language teaching methodology*. Prentice Hall.

Oktapian, A. (2014). *Transitional words in essays written by the students' 4th semester of English Education Department at IAIN Padangsidimpuan* [Doctoral dissertation, IAIN Padangsidimpuan].

O'Regan, D. (2015, June). *Cohesive devices*. <http://home.ku.edu.tr/~doregan/Writing/Cohesion.html>

- Oshima, A., & Hogue, A. (2006). *Writing academic English* (4th ed.). Longman.
- Oshima, A., & Hogue, A. (2007). *Introduction to academic writing* (3rd ed.). Pearson/Longman.
- Rahman, M. (2022). The essentials of paragraph writing to develop writing skill. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science*.
- Sa'adah, A. R. (2020). Writing skill in teaching English: An overview. *EDUCASIA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Pengajaran, Dan Pembelajaran*, 5(1), 21–35.
- Sari, I., Pulungan, A. H., & Husein, R. (2020). Students' cognition and attitude in writing descriptive text. *Britain International of Linguistics, Arts and Education (BIO LAE) Journal*, 2(1), 395–404.
- Sherman, D., et al. (2010). *The Little, Brown handbook* (11th ed.). Southeastern Writing Center.
- Utami, N. P. C. P., & Mahendra, M. W. (2021). The use of transition signals in university students' community service report. *Yavana Bhasha: Journal of English Language Education*, 4(1), 56–65.