



DISCOURSE MARKERS IN FOCUS: STUDENTS' APPLICATION OF TRANSITIONAL DEVICES IN THEIR ACADEMIC WRITING TASKS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper assesses second-year students' use of transitional devices in their essays at St. Ambrose and Berekum Colleges of Education, Ghana. The objective of the study was to examine how college students use transitional devices to achieve coherence in their essays.

Design/Methods/Approach: The study employed the descriptive survey method, using Halliday and Hasan's Theory of Cohesion and Coherence as the theoretical framework and Oshima and Hogue's categorisation of transitional devices as the analytical framework. A sample size of 214 essays was randomly selected from about 520 essays written by first-year students from Berekum College of Education and St. Ambrose College of Education, both in the Bono Region of Ghana. The data were analysed using content analysis.

Findings: The study's results showed that students used transitional devices at the inter-sentential and inter-paragraph levels to convey addition, contrast, comparison, time sequence, cause and effect, and conclusion, thereby achieving cohesion and coherence in their essays.

Research Limitation: The paper is limited to only two colleges of education in Ghana: Berekum and St. Ambrose Colleges of Education. Hence, the results cannot be generalised as the true reflection of the performance of all students of colleges of education in Ghana.

Practical Implication: The study will aid students, particularly those in the colleges of education, in overcoming their difficulties with using transitional devices and, ultimately, improving their writing skills.

Social Implications: The study will help inform policy-making in colleges of education regarding how teachers can address students' writing flaws in cohesion and coherence.

Originality/Value: The study is based on the authors' efforts to identify how students used transitional devices in context in their essays to achieve coherence and cohesion.

Keywords: *Coherence. cohesion. conjunction. device. essay*



INTRODUCTION

Noelle (2021) reiterates the four modes of teaching and learning English, emphasising the complexity of writing and the need for students to master it at every level of education, a position also amplified by Brown (2004). Writing is the most difficult because writers do not face their readers directly (Gallagher, 2023; Richards & Renandya, 2002). If there are mistakes or structural errors, the writer cannot overcome or correct errors using their body language, facial expression, or speaking tone (as may happen in speaking). These mistakes can affect the interpretation of the message, leading to a misunderstanding. The implication is that writing difficulty is not only in generating and organising ideas but also in translating the ideas into a readable text.

One major problem confronting many students in English language writing is the absence of transitional devices to create cohesion in essays. Some students are unaware of the existence of transitional devices; therefore, when attempting to use them in their essays, they misuse them. So, it is not surprising that English language teachers at some public colleges of education in Ghana, for instance, have often complained about student teachers' writing problems.

Several studies (Asinyor et al., 2023; Owusu, 2012; Agor, 2010; Gyimah, 2005; Adika, 2003) have been conducted on students' writing flaws at different levels of education in Ghana. The findings of some of the works (for example, Adika, 2003; Owusu, 2012; Owusu, 2020) indicate that the composition of some senior high school students lacked coherence, paragraph unity, completeness, and the use of conjunctions. In light of this, the present study aims to extend the existing literature on this topic by examining the use of transitional devices by student teachers in colleges of education in Ghana, using the Berekum College of Education and St. Ambrose College of Education as case studies. Thus, the study sought to fill the gap regarding the use of transitional devices in students' essays. The objective of this study is to investigate how college students utilise transitional devices to achieve coherence in their academic writing. Thus, the study seeks to identify patterns of cohesive device usage, common deployment challenges, and the relationship between cohesive device competence and overall writing quality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

There have been numerous studies on how students utilise transitional devices in their essays. Smith (2017) examines the importance of transitional devices in academic writing and their influence on overall coherence. Additionally, Johnson et al. (2018) compare the use of transitional devices in essays written by native and non-native English speakers. Gyimah (2007) also studied students' essays from secondary schools. At the tertiary institution level, Sari et al. (2021), Owusu and Adade-Yeboah (2014), Adika (1999), and Tandoh (1987) have also conducted similar studies. The findings of all these works indicated that students have writing problems.



Transitional devices, also known as transition words or phrases, are words or phrases that help to create coherence and smoothness in writing or speech (Giddi et al., 2022). They act as bridges between sentences (intra-paragraph), paragraphs (inter-paragraph), or ideas, helping to guide the reader or listener through the text and establish logical connections between different parts of the text (Giddi et al., 2022). Thus, transitions link words or phrases between sentences and paragraphs in writing (and in speaking) to facilitate coherence and cohesion when used correctly. Therefore, words and expressions such as “therefore”, “consequently”, “on the other hand”, and “in conclusion” all serve as transition words or phrases used both between sentences and ideas, and sometimes, used between paragraphs. Although all these words may qualify as transition words, it is worth noting that not all transition words and phrases are created equally.

According to Giddi, Bruce, and Fosu (2022), transition signals are words and phrases that connect the ideas in one sentence with those in another sentence, showing the relationship between them. Transition signals are usually at the beginning of a sentence or paragraph to relate it to the one preceding it, and they can also come within sentences to connect one idea to another within a sentence. By using them correctly and adequately, cohesion in writing can be achieved.

Jones (2010) conceptualised three types of ‘logical connectives’ as: a) Coordinating conjunctions (for example, and, or, but); b) Subordinating conjunctions (for example, before, because, and although); c) Conjunctive adjuncts (for example, meanwhile, moreover, therefore, and however). Jones (2010) further observed that coordinating and subordinating conjunctions are sentence-level structural items that mark logico-semantic relations between or among clauses. On the other hand, conjunctive adjuncts have a discourse-level, text-building function. Jones’s (2010) view indicates that the third classification, “conjunctive adjuncts,” refers to words and phrases that connect independent clauses.

It must be emphasised that the current study aligns with Jones’s (2010) third category. Several scholars have given different designations for the concept in question. Some of them are adverbial adjuncts, and transition signals (Oshima & Hogue, 1991); discourse markers (Fraser, 1999); linking adverbials (Liu, 2008); and transitions (Maurer, 2006). Taboada (2006) also listed other names, including “coherence markers, lexical markers, discourse operators, discourse connectives, pragmatic connectives, sentence connectives, cue phrases, clue words, and discourse signalling devices.” Although this device has different lexemes in the literature, the current paper uses the terms *“transition words,” “transitions,” and “transitional devices” to describe their uses in introducing a paragraph, explaining a concept, emphasising a point, introducing a related idea, and concluding or summarising a student’s essay.*

Oshima and Hogue (1998) conceptualised transition signals into three groups based on their grammatical function. These three groups are sentence connectors, clause connectors, and the mixed group. They also indicated that transition signals can be categorised into types based on their uses. These are addition, contrast, comparison, example, cause and effect, sequence, and



conclusion. Thus, transitions are words and phrases that provide the glue for holding ideas together in writing. Duke (1983) states that transitions show the relationships between sentences and help link one sentence to the next, making the sentences and paragraphs run smoothly and coherently, and enabling readers to understand the writer's message. Thus, transitional devices can be used to add information or provide examples. For instance, words like *for example*, *in addition*, and *for instance* can be used to introduce examples or provide additional information. Transitional devices can also be used to create a contrast or a contradiction between ideas. Words like *on the other hand*, *however*, *in contrast* can be used to indicate a different or opposing viewpoint. Again, transitional devices can be used for sequencing events. They can be used to show the order or sequence of events. Words like *first*, *next*, or *finally* can be used to indicate the order in which events or ideas occur in an essay. They can also be used to summarise or conclude a paragraph or piece of writing. Phrases like *in conclusion*, *in summary* or *to summarise* can be used to signal the end or final thoughts of a text.

Empirical Review

Elahi and Badeleh (2013) conducted a study on the distribution of transitional markers in thirty articles written by English and Persian academic writers. Their findings revealed a notable difference in the use of transitional markers between the two groups, attributing this difference to the writers' failure to master the language's norms and conventions.

In Giddi, Kpeglo, and Fosu (2022), the authors investigated the challenges faced by trainee teachers in utilising transitional devices to achieve cohesion in their writing. Their findings showed that trainee teachers have problems with the use of transitional devices, as they misplace the transitions, omit them in certain instances, use nonstandard forms of the devices, incorrectly spell the devices, and misuse them in terms of grammar.

Sekwo (2020) investigated cohesion and textual coherence in students' essays at Colleges of Education in Ghana, using Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbila, as a case study. The study focused on the challenges students face in using these devices. The study identified interlingual sources, interference, and developmental errors as some of the causes of students' problems with using transitional devices. The study suggested that these problems could be minimised with the use of awareness creation strategies.

Additionally, Afeadie and Kpeglo (2022) examined the impact of errors on the written communication of college of education students. It was found that, among other things, students were unable to construct connected sentences or ideas, which has a significant impact on their written communication.



In a related study conducted by Mahendra and Dewi (2017), the researchers looked into the use of transition signals in the EFL academic writing context. This study aimed to identify students' problems and tendencies in using transition signals in academic writing. The findings revealed that most graduating students at Ganesha University of Education had problems with constructing their academic writing.

Another study, conducted by Lili (2021), examines the application of transitional devices in the teaching of writing in English. According to the researcher, a paragraph should be logical in structure and coherent in meaning (Lili, 2021). This can be achieved by using transitional devices. His findings revealed that most students are unable to connect ideas logically because they lack knowledge of the use of transitional signals.

In a related study by Sattayatham and Ratanapinyowong (2008), the authors aimed to investigate the categories of errors that students make in writing paragraphs in English. The study participants were 134 medical students from four medical schools at a university. They were made to write an opinion paragraph on medical ethics based on a passage they had chosen from the Internet. The findings showed that errors in the area of omission of transitional devices were the most frequent type of error that students make in their writing.

In a study conducted by Masadeh (2019) on achieving cohesion and coherence in the writing of Saudi undergraduates, the author found that most students struggled to present their ideas logically because they lacked the use of appropriate transitional words. Thus, the author surmised, "The bad use of accurate transition words to link sentences and/or paragraphs together to convey relationships throughout the essay was the most problematic area.

In another research, Astanti, Rozimela, and Fitrawati (2016) studied the use of transitional devices by students and found that most of these devices are not used correctly. In most cases, the use of the devices was meaningless. Much like the above studies, which were conducted in different settings at various times, they emphasise common themes: transitional devices are used in text composition. In the use of transitional devices, writers encounter several challenges that stifle their quest to achieve cohesion and coherence in their texts. On the other hand, some of the aforementioned studies, including a significant number of others, have findings that suggest remedial measures for using transitional devices to achieve cohesion and coherence in texts.

METHODS

Design, Approach, and Sampling Method

Using a multiple-case study design, the paper employed a qualitative research approach. Thus, the study was conducted in two public colleges of education in the Bono region of Ghana (i.e., St.



Ambrose and Berekum Colleges of Education). The participants were drawn from the second-year students of these two colleges. Out of a total population of approximately 520 first-year students from the two colleges, simple random sampling was used to select 214 participants. That is, while eighty-eight (88) were from St. Ambrose College of Education, the remaining 126 were sampled from Berekum College of Education. Four narrative, descriptive, argumentative, and expository essays were used to collect data from the student participants. In total, the students wrote essays in the quantities listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Quantity of Essays collected

Essay	Berekum	St. Ambrose	Total	Percentage
Narrative Essay	32	19		23.83
Descriptive Essay	38	29		31.31
Argumentative Essay	38	26		29.91
Expository Essay	18	14		14.95
Total	126	88	214	100

Data Analysis Procedure

The data was analysed using content analysis. Precisely, conceptual analysis (thematic analysis), which is a category of content analysis, was deployed for this study. This kind of analysis was used to examine the occurrence of selected terms (transitional devices) in the sampled data. To begin with, all the essays were coded. The narrative essays were coded as EN, the descriptive essays used ED, the argumentative essays used EA, and the expository essays used EE. For each sampled script, a specific number was added to the code. For example, the first descriptive essay had the code ED 001 while the last expository essay had the code EE 032. After the labelling, the essays were graded using marking schemes, and the use of transitional devices in each was recorded. The transitional devices were then categorised in terms of their positions, functions, and frequencies.

Ethical Consideration

Since ethical issues are imperative in every scientific study involving human subjects, specific considerations were made. Initially, we ensured that we had the full consent of all the participants before using their scripts for the study. This was after we had schooled them on the purpose of the study. So, no data was collected under duress. Moreover, to ensure anonymity and confidentiality in the data collection and processing processes, the sampled scripts were coded instead of using the participants' full names.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the transitional devices used in the participants' essays. The purposes of usage, and the frequency with which the devices occurred in the sampled scripts, were also analysed. Different questions were set under each of the four essays, and participants had the option of answering any one question they preferred.

The Use of Transitional Devices in Students' Essays

The narrative essay

The participants were tasked to write a story to illustrate the saying, "Two heads are better than one". Fifty-one (51) out of the two hundred and fourteen essays (214), representing 23.8%, answered this narrative essay question. In all the narrative essays students wrote, an attempt was made to use transition words to 'show' events in the various phases of every narrative story. The phases were either three (i.e., exposition, climax, and resolution) or five (i.e., exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution). According to Neo (2005), appropriate transitional devices should be used to link the various phases, thereby enhancing a smooth transition from one phase to another. These transitions are expected to give the narration in every story some rhetorical and stylistic structure. They also help to achieve the main purpose of a narrative piece, which is 'to show' rather than 'to tell' (Owusu, 2012). In general, the following transitional devices, as shown in Extracts 1, 2, and 3, were sampled in the analysed narrative essays.

Extract 1: *At that time*, their father was returning from the farm.

In Extract 1, *at that time* is an adverbial phrase.

This phrase connects the sentence to a previous sentence or idea, showing the relationship between the two structures. This confirms that a transitional device connects ideas to show a relationship (Giddi, Bruce & Fosu, 2022). So, in Extract 1, the use of the device indicates a specific point in time, suggesting that the father's return from the farm is happening simultaneously with or immediately after something else that was mentioned earlier. It adds a sense of context and relevance, implying that the timing of the father's return is important to the situation. By using the phrase '*at that time*', the writer creates a sense of continuity and connection between the events, drawing the reader's attention to the significance of the father's return at that particular moment. This conforms to Cater & McCarthy's (1994) position, which indicates that cohesion and coherence occur when the use of transitional or cohesive devices connects ideas or sentences.

Extract 2: *As they travelled* along the muddy road, they met a man they believed to be mad.

Here, *as they travelled*, is an adverbial phrase.



The phrase highlighted in Extract 2 connects the sentence to a previous sentence or idea, implying a continuity of actions or ideas. It also shows a precise sequence of events: they were travelling, and then they met the man. The transitional device ‘As they travelled’ adds context to the sentence, indicating that the meeting was unexpected or surprising. It also smoothly transitions the reader from one event (travelling) to another. This agrees with Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) classical assertion that transitional devices serve as a bridge to connect one idea to another, thereby bringing about cohesion. The writer uses the transitional device ‘as they travelled’ to create a sense of continuity and connection between events, implying that the meeting was an important part of their journey. The smooth transition from one event to another brings about cohesion and coherence.

Extract 3: *Unfortunately*, when their parents got home...

Unfortunately, is an adverbial word in this context.

This transitional device indicates a negative emotional tone, implying that something unpleasant or unexpected has happened. It connects the sentence to a previous sentence or idea, showing contrast. It shows a contrast of ideas between the expected outcome (a warm welcome or a peaceful scene) and the actual outcome (something unpleasant). This confirms the finding by Zemach and Rumisek, (2003) that transitional devices are used to show contrasts and contradictions between ideas or sentences. The word, ‘*unfortunately*’, indicates that the outcome was unexpected, regrettable, or unhappy. The device smoothly transitions the reader from a neutral or positive expectation to a negative or unpleasant reality, creating a cohesive narrative.

The Descriptive Essay

Some participants answered the descriptive essay question. The descriptive essay question was: ‘*You participated in a local festival recently. Describe the event to a friend and show in three ways how you felt excited during the festival.*’ The data on the descriptive essay were labelled from ED 001 to ED 067. In the descriptive text sampled, some transitional devices were used to describe the various festivals the participants wrote about, as well as the aspects of the festivals that excited them. At the introduction, body, and conclusion of the essays, transitional devices were used significantly to achieve cohesion in the various paragraphs sampled. Some of the transitional devices used in general were ‘*there*’ as in ‘...*there are many festivals celebrated in my country*, and ‘*before*’ as in ‘*before the hunting*’. The participants used each of these devices to identify the festival they participated in, describe its general features, and explain how these features brought excitement to the participants. This confirms the observation of Watkins and Knapp (2005) that transitional devices are used in descriptive essays to achieve the purpose of such essays: a description of the features of an identified subject. Extracts 3 and 4 have been analysed to show the role of the transitional devices in the descriptive essays written by the student participants.

Extract 3: *Luckily*, when we arrived, they had returned from hunting.



Luckily is an adverbial word in this example.

It connects the sentence to a previous sentence. It exhibits a positive emotional tone, indicating that the timing of the arrival was appropriate. The phrase implies a contrast between the expected outcome and the real outcome. It smoothly transitions the reader from one event (the arrival) to another (the return from hunting), creating a cohesive narrative.

Extract 4: *Before the hunting*, the chief poured libation.

Before the hunting is an adverbial phrase in this context.

It indicates a specific point in time, telling us that the libation was made before the hunting. It shows a precise sequence of events: the libation was poured, and then the hunting. The phrase also highlights the causal relationship between the two events, suggesting that the libation was a preparatory act preceding the hunt. The writer uses this highlighted phrase in Extract 4 to create a clear and logical connection between the two events, probably suggesting that the libation was a necessary precursor to the hunting expedition. This is in agreement with Halliday and Hasan (1976), who posit that for a reader to follow a writer's flow of thoughts, the writer needs to connect their sentences by using cohesive devices to achieve cohesion and coherence.

The Argumentative Essay

Apart from the narrative and the descriptive essays, the student participants had the option of writing an argumentative essay or a debate. The question was: '*You are the principal speaker in an inter-college debate on the motion: "The youth of this 21st century are less industrious than their predecessors". Write for or against the motion.*' Similar to the coding of the other two essay types, the argumentative essays were coded from EA 001 to EA 064. Like the descriptive essay, the student participants employed diverse transitional devices in the introduction, body, and conclusion of their essays to convey a range of ideas. Some transitional devices used in general were '*in the past*', '*however*', '*firstly*', '*secondly*', '*finally*', '*although*', '*but*', '*therefore*', and '*in fact*'. Two of these devices, as used in context, are elaborated in Extracts 5 and 6:

Extract 5: *However*, the youth of today don't want to work with their hands.

However, is an adverbial word in this Extract.

It is used to show contrast, a shift in direction, and a change in tone or direction. The word (*however*) moves the reader from a previous idea to a contrasting new one. These result in contradiction: the youth behaviour is contrary to what was previously stated. The writer employs the use of '*however*' to achieve a logical contrast between the youth's behaviour and what is expected of them.

Extract 6: *Lastly*, the youth of today are imitating the behaviours of the whites.



Lastly is also an adverbial word in this Extract.

It is used to show a conclusion, to indicate that this is the final point or idea in a series. It moves the reader through to the final point, which creates a sense of finality and closure.

The Expository Essay

Some of the student participants also answered the expository essay question. The expository essay was the least attempted discourse, as fewer students attempted that question. The scripts were labelled from EE 001 to EE 032. The question the student participants were tasked to write was: *Describe how your local favourite meal is prepared.* Ideally, doing such an exposition would require transitional devices, which the student participants used. These transitional devices were used to ensure cohesion in the various steps of the expository essay. Examples of the use of some of these devices are illustrated in Extracts 7 and 8:

Extract 7: *First of all*, cut or chop your okra into smaller pieces.

The phrase indicates a sequence or series of events or steps in a specific order or progression. It emphasises the importance of the initial step to the entire process. It ensures clarity to the organisation, clarifying what needs to be done first. The student participants used the phrase to create a clear and logical sequence of steps, giving a straightforward process.

Extract 8: *Furthermore*, add water to the soup and stir for a few minutes.

'*Furthermore*' indicates an addition to a previous point or idea, which shows continuity and expansion. It moves the reader from one instruction to another, resulting in a smooth transition. It shows a logical progression of events in a recipe. The student used it to create a clear and logical connection between steps to achieve continuity and a coherent process.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSES

The study found that the participants used transitional devices in all four types of essays they wrote. They used these devices in both the inter- and intra-paragraph positions in all sections of the essays. Additionally, they utilised these devices to raise initial points, add ideas, and indicate comparisons and contradictions, demonstrate temporal relationships, provide examples, illustrate cause and effect, and to convey. Consequently, this section of the paper, which begins with an examination of the functions of transitional devices, analyses how these devices were employed in the essays of the student participants.

Functions of the Use of Transitional Devices

Besides the general discussion of transitional devices as evident in Extracts 1-8, the paper also examined the transitional devices used to achieve the participants' essays. This considered only



the transitional devices that were used correctly, except in cases where mistakes bordered on other aspects of the sentences or paragraphs, which fell beyond the scope of transitional devices. The findings show that the transitional devices were used to introduce the first points or ideas. These transitions included ‘Firstly’ and ‘First and foremost’. There were also transitional devices used to add ideas, such as ‘Again’, ‘Also’, and ‘One more thing’ (is that). Apart from these, ‘Despite’ (this), and ‘however’ were used to show contrasts, comparison, and contradiction. Additionally, ‘Later (that evening)’ and ‘During’ (the festival) were the transitional devices used to indicate time relationships. Some transitional devices of illustration found in the students’ scripts were: ‘(Another) example (is)’, ‘For instance’, and ‘Example’. Again, cause and effect transitional devices such as ‘For this reason’, ‘Due to this’ were found in some of the participants’ essays. Finally, some writers concluded their essays by using devices such as ‘Finally’ and ‘In a nutshell’.

Introducing New Points

In all four essay types, introductory transitions were used to announce new points – ‘firstly’, ‘first and foremost’, ‘to commence’, ‘to begin with’, and ‘to set the ball rolling’. Instances of the use of transitional devices to indicate the statement of first points or ideas are shown in Extracts 9 and 10.

Extract 9: *Firstly*, the arrival of the village chief was really amazing and hilarious.

In Extract 9, ‘Firstly’ shows the first point in a sequence. It transitions the reader from an introduction to the first main idea, showing a clear and logical progression. It also provides an organisation and structure that indicates that the writer is about to present a series of points.

Extract 10: *First and foremost*, the festival we celebrated is called the Awubia festival in the Central Region of Ghana.

The phrase ‘first and foremost’ shows the magnitude of the point that follows, the most important or initial point to make. It moves the reader smoothly from an introduction to the main focus of the discussion, progressing gradually. It marks the introduction of essential information.

Adding New Points

Again, some transitional devices were used to reinforce points already made in a paragraph and to introduce new ideas within the paragraph. Examples: ‘also’, ‘secondly’, ‘additionally’, ‘moreover’, ‘besides’, ‘furthermore’, ‘One more thing’, and ‘again’. These are known as transitional devices of addition. Instances of contextual use of such devices are found in Extracts 11 and 12:

Extract 11: Mr. Chairman, *another* area worthy of note is that men of the 20th century are those who helped their nations a lot.



The use of ‘*Another*’ in Extract 11 indicates the addition of a point or idea to an already stated point(s). It smoothly moves the reader from a previously mentioned point to a new, related one. It also shows that the point that follows is equally important as the previous one. The use of ‘*another*’, thus, adds a degree of formality and politeness suitable for a formal presentation.

Extract 12: *Additionally*, we went to the festival, and we saw so many things.

In Extract 12, ‘*Additionally*’ is used to add a point to a previous point. This is consistent with Gerot & Wignel (1994), who posit that transitional devices are placed at, or near the start of sentences to signal to the reader where the text is directing, whether the text is reaffirming a previous sentence or paragraph, adding something to it, or offering an example of it. It transitions the reader from a previously mentioned point to a related one. It emphasises the idea that what follows is an extra or supplementary point. It connects the new idea to the previous one, indicating that it is a further development or expansion of the previous point. ‘*Additionally*’ is a great way of adding more information or ideas without interrupting the flow of the text.

Indicating Comparisons and Contradictions

The third function of transitional devices identified was their role in indicating comparison and contradiction. In an attempt to show this function of contrast in their essays, the participants used transitions such as ‘*in spite of*’, ‘*however*’, and ‘*despite*’. Extracts 13 and 14 are some instances where these transitional devices were used to indicate comparisons and contradictions.

Extract 13: The youth of these days, *however*, are more industrious because they use machines to do ten times the work their fathers did.

In Extract 13, ‘*However*’ shows contrast between what was previously said and what follows. It moves the reader smoothly from the previous point or idea to a novel, contrasting one. The smooth transition from one point to another brings about cohesion and coherence in reading a text, as postulated by Carter & McCarthy (2006). It also shows a clear and logical progression from a previous point to a contrasting idea.

‘*However*,’ as used by some student participants, suggests a sense of surprise, implying that the youth of today are more industrious despite any preconceived notions.

Extract 14: *In spite of this*, the chief, together with his subject, had to do certain rituals for the success of the festival.

The phrase ‘*in spite of this*’ shows contrast or contradiction between what was expected and what actually happens. It transitions the reader from a previous point to a contrasting one in a



progressive way, which shows a sense of surprise. It suggests determination, implying that the chief and his subjects are committed to performing the rituals despite any challenges or obstacles.

Showing Time Relationship

Some transitional devices (for example, '*Later*', '*during*', '*prior*', and '*before*') were also used to indicate time relationships in the ideas that were conveyed in the various essays that the participants wrote.

Extract 15: *Later in the evening*, we, the young boys, girls, and the aged, walked from the palace to the beach to pour libation.

In Extract 15, the phrase '*later in the evening*' indicates a time transition; it shows a transition to a later period in the day. It transitions the reader from one activity to another, demonstrating a logical sequence of events. It also shows specificity; it emphasises the idea that the next event occurs at a specific time, creating a sense of progression. This participant used the phrase '*later in the evening*' to create a clear and logical transition to a new event, implying a sense of sequence and temporal connection.

Extract 16: *During the festival*, there is a preparation called the 'mna dumo'.

In Extract 16, the phrase '*during the festival*' indicates a specific time frame the event occurs. It emphasises the idea that 'the preparation' is an integral part of the festival, highlighting its significance. It connects the preparation to the festival, implying a logical relationship between the two. It provides a specific timeframe for preparation, which helps create a clear and concise narrative.

Giving Example

In the scripts sampled, transitional devices were furthermore used to show examples. These were '*Another example is*', '*For instance*', and '*Example*'. Some cases of the use of transitional devices to give examples are shown in Extracts 17 and 18.

Extract 17: *Another example is* the invention of the light bulb.

In Extract 17, '*Another example is*' introduces an additional instance or case. It connects the previous ideas to a new, related example. It implies a sequence of examples that suggest a logical progression from already given examples to the next, creating a sense of continuity and coherence. It shows an additional example rather than starting with the first in a series of examples.

Extract 18: *For instance*, Ghana was led to independence by its founding leaders.



In Extract 18, '*For instance*,' introduces a specific example to illustrate a point or an idea. It moves the reader from a general statement to a specific example or case study. The writer uses it to create a clear and logical transition to a specific example, implying a sense of illustration and clarification. The phrase used in this context also implies a sense of specificity and detail, suggesting that the example is a relevant and important illustration of the point made.

Indicating Cause and Effect

Another important function of transitional devices that was realised after the analysis is their use to indicate cause and effect. In the essays that were analysed, devices such as '*For this reason*', '*Due to this*', '*As a result*', and '*Therefore*' were used to show cause and effect. Extracts 19 and 20 are examples of the use of transitional devices in contexts to illustrate cause and effect.

Extract 19: The youth of today want to get rich quickly. *Due to this*, they end up pickpocketing, stealing, and engaging in armed robbery, just to become rich at a young age.

In Extract 19, '*Due to this*' shows a causal relationship between the two clauses. The phrase moves the reader from the first statement to its results. It emphasises the fact that the second clause is a direct result of the first clause. It creates a logical connection between the two clauses, implying a cause-and-effect relationship. The transitional device indicates that the second clause is a consequence of the first, leaving no ambiguity.

Extract 20: When the results were announced, Kwame had failed. *As a result*, he became very sad.

In Extract 20, '*As a result*' shows the consequence or outcome of the first clause. It moves the reader from a cause to its effect. It creates a logical connection between the two clauses, resulting in a cause-and-effect relationship. Its use implies a sense of inevitability, suggesting that Kwame's sadness was a natural outcome of his failure.

Showing Conclusion

The findings further revealed that transitional devices were used in the sampled essays to show conclusions, or the end points that the student participants raised in their essays. Transitions such as '*finally*', '*in a nutshell*', and '*lastly*' were a few examples recorded.

Extract 21: *Finally*, after we finished everything, they danced, sang, and praised Allah for what He had done for them that whole year.



In Extract 21, ‘*Finally*’ indicates a concluding event or action. It moves the reader from a series of actions or events to a final or culminating point. It emphasises that the point is described in the last or concluding part of the celebration. It provides a sense of closure and completion, implying that the celebration has reached its final stage. The participant used ‘*finally*’ to create a clear and logical transition to the concluding event, implying a sense of conclusion and closure. This brings about cohesion and coherence. As surmised by Carter and McCarthy (2006), cohesion and coherence are achieved when words and expressions in a text are connected through the use of transitional devices. It signals the end of a sequence of events. This agrees with Zemach and Rumisek (2003), who postulate that transitional devices are used to show an end or a final point in written or oral discourse.

Extract 22: Mr. Chairman, *to conclude*, I will say that the youth of this 21st century are less industrious since the management rate of the century is very low.

In Extract 22, ‘*To conclude*’ indicates a final statement or summary. The phrase transitions the reader from the central argument or discussion to a final thought or conclusion. It emphasises the idea that the speaker is about to make a final and decisive statement. It brings a sense of closure and finality, showing that the speaker has reached the end of his argument or presentation. The participant used it to signal the end of their presentation.

The Most Dominant Transitional Devices Used

Furthermore, the paper examined the frequency of transitional devices used in the participants' essays to achieve cohesion and coherence. Findings from the data are shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Dominant Transitional Devices Used

Devices Type	Frequency	Percentage
Additions	182	21.8
Time Relationships	173	20.7
Causes and Effects	126	15.1
Comparisons and Contradictions	117	14.0
First Points	107	12.8
Examples	68	8.2
Conclusions	61	7.3
Total	834	100

Table 3 indicates that the type of transition signals mostly used by the students was *Addition*, which occurred 182 times, representing 21.8%. The second-most-used device was *Time Relationship*,



which had 173 occurrences, indicating 20.7%. The third was *Cause and Effect*, which occurred 126 times, indicating 15.1%. *Comparisons and Contradictions* were the fourth, and had 117 occurrences, representing 14.0%. The fifth was the *First Point*, which occurred 107 times, representing 12.8%. The sixth was *Example*, which occurred 68 times, indicating 8.2%. Finally, *Conclusion*, with 61 occurrences, representing 7.3%, was the seventh-most-used device. These results showed that students use all types of transition signals as proposed by Oshima and Hogue (2007). This finding concurs with Djahimo (2018) and Mohamed-Sayidina (2010), who found that addition is the type of transition signal students often use. On the other hand, while Djahimo (2018) found contrast as the second-most-used device, this current study found time relationship as the second-most-used device. Also, unlike Djahimo (2018), who found emphasis as the least preferred device, this current study found conclusion as the least used transition signal in the texts of the student participants. According to Djahimo (2018), the *conclusion* is placed at the fifth level.

CONCLUSION

The result of the data analysis revealed that students use diverse transition signals in their academic writing. Generally, it was found that the students' level of writing was unsatisfactory and that their language proficiency was relatively weak. The discussion reveals that teachers of the English language cannot assume that their students possess sufficient knowledge of using transitional signals appropriately in their writing. Teachers should assign students to have extensive reading outside the classroom. Thus, students can be tasked with exercises that will motivate them to read other books to enrich their knowledge on how to construct their paragraphs coherently and cohesively.

In addition to extensive reading, students could be given practice writing, where they will be tasked with using appropriate transition signals in writing situations. In this case, English teachers need to provide exercises that prompt students to learn how to use transition signals. One such exercise is a cloze test, where students are provided with a model text with transition signals omitted, allowing them to insert the missing items.

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