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The Impact of Explicit Instruction on the Use of Discourse Markers in Classroom: A Comparative Study of ESL Students

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Abstract
This study examines the effect of explicit instruction on English as a Second Language (ESL) students' pragmatic competence, focusing on their use of discourse markers (DMs) such as "so," "okay," "oh," "however," and "well" in spoken interactions. A quasi-experimental design was applied, with Class A as the experimental group and Class B as the control group. Pre-test results revealed a minor difference in DM use, with Class A producing 32 instances and Class B 27. The marker "so" was most common, while "okay" appeared least. A pre-test t-test ($t = 1.39$, $p = 0.203$) indicated no significant difference, suggesting similar baseline proficiency. After explicit instruction for Class A, post-test results showed substantial improvement: Class A achieved a mean of 12.8 (SD = 1.92), compared to Class B's 4.6 (SD = 1.14). A post-test t-test ($t = 8.2$, $p = 0.001$) confirmed significance. Findings underscore the value of explicit instruction in enhancing ESL learners' pragmatic competence.

Keywords: Discourse markers; Explicit instruction; Classroom interaction; Communication

INTRODUCTION

Discourse markers (DMs) such as "okay," "oh," "well," "so," and "however", are widely recognized in applied linguistics as essential pragmatic devices through which discourse coherence is constructed, interactional flow is managed, and speaker intent is conveyed (Schiffrin, 1987). Although these forms appear structurally simple, they perform complex interactional functions including organizing discourse, regulating turn-taking, and signaling cognitive or interpersonal meaning. That is, their use supports coherence in spoken interaction, whereas their absence often results in less natural and less organized discourse. Within classroom discourse, particularly teacher–student interaction, DMs support topical coherence, promote dialogic engagement, and contribute to learners' pragmatic development (Biber et al., 1999; Alami, 2016). Consequently, their integration into teaching is both a linguistic and pedagogical concern.

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in context, and it is highly responsive to instructional intervention (Kasper & Rose, 2002). DMs play a central role in this competence by signaling communicative intentions, managing information flow, and

coordinating conversational turns (Aijmer, 2013; Fung & Carter, 2007). For instance, forms such as "well," "I mean," and "you know," are used to reformulate ideas, signal hesitation, or indicate shared understanding in interaction (Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995). However, L2 learners tend to use DMs less frequently and with a narrower range than native speakers (Kovač & Jakupčević, 2020; Mirzaei et al., 2018), largely due to limited exposure and lack of systematic instruction (Demissie et al., 2025). Their importance in improving fluency, comprehension, and interactional management is well established (Mascherpa, 2016), as learners who use DMs demonstrate better engagement and listening performance (Fung & Carter, 2007). Explicit instruction has also been shown to improve oral performance and reading comprehension (Rahimi, 2012; Jalilifar et.al., 2014). Several factors influence DM acquisition, including proficiency level, cultural background, and instructional approach (Mirzaei et al., 2018). Without targeted intervention, pragmatic fossilization may occur (Hsieh & Chen, 2005), whereas explicit instruction improves fluency, cohesion, confidence, and willingness to communicate (Asadzadian et al., 2017; Hernandez, 2008). Structured teaching further provides contextualized practice and feedback that support pragmatic development (Taguchi, 2015).

Empirical studies show that "okay" is used for classroom management, initiating instruction, and regulating IRF exchanges (Lee, 2017; Fuseini, 2024), as well as emphasizing key points in lectures and managing transitions (Akbaş & Bal-Gezegin, 2022; Nowotny, 2004). The marker "oh," expresses emotional and cognitive reactions, including surprise and information uptake (Amino, 2020; Tree & Schrock, 1999), while also managing stance, coherence, and turn-taking (Trester, 2009; Foolen, 2011; Zarei, 2013; Cohen, 2012). It also mitigates sensitive interactional moments (Trihartanti & Damayanti, 2014). The marker "well" functions as a hesitation and politeness device, signals uncertainty, and supports social and structural discourse functions (Tonio, 2021; Yong-ping, 2003; Diễm, 2023; Hongying, 2020; Faisal, 2023; Jucker, 1993), although it is often underused by learners (Li & Xiao, 2012). The marker so organizes discourse, initiates topics, and manages transitions and summaries (Bolden, 2009; Rennie et al., 2016; Turiman, 2020), though overuse among L2 learners has been reported (Buysse, 2012). Collectively, these findings show that DMs are central to pragmatic competence.

Pragmatic competence has been shown to improve significantly through explicit instruction, which is generally more effective than incidental learning (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Learners who receive explicit instruction tend to demonstrate stronger pragmatic performance and better retention of pragmatic knowledge (Aufa, 2011; Ziashahabi et al., 2020), with additional improvements reported in pragmatic awareness and speech act performance (Soler, 2007; Flor and Soler, 2004; Aydin, 2023). Although some studies report mixed outcomes where different instructional approaches yield improvements without clear superiority (Ziafar, 2020), explicit instruction remains consistently effective across contexts, particularly when it is supported by extended exposure such as study abroad experiences (Hernández, 2021).

This understanding of instructional effectiveness is theoretically supported by Schiffrin's (1987) discourse-pragmatic framework, which conceptualizes discourse markers as linguistic devices that operate beyond sentence structure to organize discourse, manage interaction, and index speaker orientation across ideational, actional, exchange, information state, and participant frameworks. Within this model, discourse markers perform distinct pragmatic roles: "well," signals hesitation and stance, "oh," indicates cognitive shift and information uptake, "okay," marks agreement, transition, or closure, "so," expresses inference and summarization, and "however," introduces contrast or opposition in discourse. That is, these markers are not merely fillers, but functional tools for managing meaning in interaction.

Building on this theoretical and empirical foundation, the conceptual framework of this study illustrates the hypothesized relationship between explicit instruction in discourse markers, students' ability to use them effectively, and their overall pragmatic competence. The framework is structured as a linear model comprising three key components. The independent variable is Explicit Instruction in Discourse Markers, which refers to structured pedagogical strategies used to teach the forms, meanings, and contextual functions of discourse markers, including categories such as additive, contrastive, and inferential markers. The intermediate variable is Discourse Marker use, which represents learners' actual ability to appropriately apply these markers in spoken or written communication. The dependent variable

is Pragmatic Competence, which reflects learners' ability to use language appropriately, coherently, and contextually in real communicative situations. In the model below, it is assumed that explicit instruction improves learners' understanding and use of discourse markers, which in turn enhances their overall pragmatic competence.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

This suggests that learners are expected to demonstrate increased frequency, greater variety, and improved accuracy in their use of discourse markers during communication, thereby reflecting a higher level of discourse marker proficiency. Such improvement is assumed to serve as a pathway through which explicit instruction contributes to the development of overall pragmatic competence.

However, despite extensive research on explicit discourse marker instruction, most existing studies have been conducted in EFL contexts such as Iran, Japan, and Spain (Yoshimi, 2001; Rahimi & Riasati, 2012; Hernández, 2021), whereas African ESL contexts remain underexplored despite their distinct linguistic and pedagogical realities. This imbalance highlights the need for context-specific research that examines how explicit instruction operates within authentic ESL classroom environments. Against this background, the present study seeks to examine the effect of explicit instruction on students' use of discourse markers and their pragmatic competence in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This paper employed a quasi-experimental, pre-test/post-test control group design to evaluate the impact of explicit instruction on the acquisition and use of discourse markers among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Two intact Senior High School ESL classes in the Mion District of Education were selected and designated as the experimental group (Class A) and the control group (Class B), each comprising 10 students. Over a six-week instructional period, both groups followed the standard ESL curriculum; however, the experimental group received explicit instruction on the pragmatic functions and usage of selected discourse markers (DMs), while the control group did not receive any targeted DM instruction. This design enabled a controlled comparative analysis to determine the effectiveness of focused pedagogical intervention on students' pragmatic competence.

Research Target/Subject

Participants were drawn from Sang Senior High School in the Mion District of Education. Two pre-existing art classes were selected based on their top average scores in the Cambridge Online General English Test, ensuring adequate baseline English proficiency for the study. Prior academic records and teacher assessments further confirmed the similarity in academic profiles and language competence between the two classes. Each class consisted of 10 students, resulting in a total of 20 participants—8 males and 12 females with an average age of 17 years. A census sampling approach was employed, meaning all students in the selected classes were included in the study. This helped eliminate sampling bias and strengthened the internal validity of the research. Other classes within the school were excluded due to lower English proficiency levels and inconsistent academic records, which could have compromised comparability. To maintain consistency in instruction and minimize variability in teaching, both classes were taught by the same English teacher and followed a similar curriculum, ensuring uniform learning conditions across groups.

Research Procedure

Pre-Test Procedure

Before the instructional intervention, both the experimental group (Class A) and the control group (Class B) completed a pre-test to establish baseline proficiency in the use of discourse markers (DMs) and ensure group comparability. At this stage, neither group had received explicit DM instruction; both continued with the standard English curriculum, allowing any post-intervention differences to be attributed solely to the treatment given to Class A.

The pre-test employed a researcher-designed Discourse Completion Task (DCT) comprising written prompts and simplified conversational scenarios. These tasks elicited the use of five target discourse markers "so," "oh," "however," "well," and "okay," within relevant communicative contexts. Students completed dialogue fragments by inserting suitable markers, thereby demonstrating their pragmatic competence in structuring interaction. Administered under supervised classroom conditions, the test lasted approximately 40 minutes. Responses were collected and evaluated independently by two trained raters using a rubric aligned with Schiffrin's (1987) and Fraser's (1999) frameworks.

Intervention Plan for Explicit Instruction

Table 1. Weekly Intervention Plan for Explicit Instruction in Discourse Markers

Week	Intervention (Explicit Instruction in Class A)
Week 1	Introduction to discourse markers, their functions, and examples such as "so," "well," "you know,"
Week 2	Use of discourse markers for coherence, including cause-effect markers and contrast markers
Week 3	Application of discourse markers in conversation, focusing on turn-taking, hesitation, and politeness
Week 4	Role-playing and discussions where students incorporated discourse markers in real life interactions
Week 5	Fluency building activities that encouraged natural and spontaneous use of discourse markers
Week 6	Review and assessment of discourse marker acquisition and usage

The experimental group engaged in targeted activities to enhance their use of discourse markers, while the control group followed the standard ESL curriculum without explicit instruction. The intervention integrated direct explicit instruction, metalinguistic instruction, and explicit strategy instruction. First, direct instruction introduced discourse markers with clear explanations and contextualized examples to build awareness of their communicative functions. Second, metalinguistic instruction encouraged analysis of their grammatical and pragmatic roles, supported by corrective feedback. Finally, explicit strategy instruction equipped learners with practical techniques to use discourse markers for turn-taking, managing hesitation, and maintaining politeness in real interactions.

Post-Test Procedure

Following the instructional intervention, a post-test was administered to both the experimental group (Class A) and the control group (Class B) to assess any changes in their proficiency in using discourse markers (DMs). The objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of the explicit instruction provided to the experimental group and to determine whether there were measurable improvements in their pragmatic competence.

The post-test used the same Discourse Completion Task (DCT) format as the pre-test, featuring a new but structurally similar set of prompts designed to elicit the use of the same five discourse markers: So, Oh, However, Well, and Okay. The tasks required students to complete dialogues and conversational scenarios, ensuring consistency in measuring performance across both test phases.

While the experimental group had received explicit instruction in the use of discourse markers over six weeks, including guided practice, peer interaction, and feedback sessions, the control group continued with the regular English curriculum without any targeted instruction on DMs. This instructional distinction allowed for a controlled comparison of the post-test results.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability of the coding process, Cohen's Kappa statistic (Cohen, 1960) was used to assess inter-rater reliability for the analysis of DCT responses. Two raters independently coded the functional appropriateness of discourse marker use based on a coding guide. In the pre-test, agreement was achieved on 58 out of 59 coded instances (Observed Agreement = 0.983; Cohen's Kappa = 0.936), and in the post-test, agreement was achieved on 94 out of 99 instances (Observed Agreement = 0.949; Cohen's Kappa = 0.937). According to Landis and Koch's (1977) benchmark scale, these kappa values fall within the "Almost Perfect" agreement range, affirming the reliability of the instrument and the consistency of the coding process. Minor discrepancies in coding appeared in the post-test, largely due to the increased number of discourse marker instances, but these did not compromise overall reliability. Table 2 below presents the reliability test results.

Table 2. Inter-Rater Reliability of Discourse Marker Function Coding

Test Phase	Discourse Marker	Expected Function	Instances	Coder A Correct	Coder B Correct	Agreements
Pre-Test	So	Result / Conclusion (Inferential marker)	15	15	15	15
	Oh	Realization / Knowledge shift (Information management)	13	13	13	13
	However	Contrast / Contradiction (Contrastive marker)	11	11	11	11
	Well	Topic shift / Framing (Discourse structuring marker)	11	11	11	11
	Okay	Acknowledgment / Transition (Discourse structuring marker)	9	9	8	8
Post-Test	So	Result / Conclusion (Inferential marker)	24	24	23	23
	Oh	Realization / Knowledge shift	21	21	21	21
	Well	Framing / Topic Shift	21	20	19	19
	However	Contrast / Contradiction	18	18	17	17
	Okay	Acknowledgment / Transition	15	15	14	14

Table 3. Inter-Rater Reliability Summary with Effect Size Interpretation

Metric	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Total Items	59	99
Total Agreements	58	94
Observed Agreement (Po)	0.983	0.949
Expected Agreement (Pe)	0.720	0.193
Cohen's Kappa (κ)	0.936	0.937
Effect Size Interpretation	Almost Perfect Agreement	Almost Perfect Agreement

Validity of the Data

To enhance the validity of the study, classroom interactions during the instructional phase were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, yielding a 40,000-word corpus. This supplementary data source provided authentic evidence of students' spontaneous use of discourse markers in real-time communication beyond structured testing formats. The transcripts were analyzed to assess whether students in the experimental group were actively incorporating the taught discourse markers into their spoken interactions during classroom discussions, group tasks, and teacher-student exchanges. Triangulating DCT performance with naturalistic speech offered deeper insights into the transferability and functional integration of discourse markers in actual language use.

Operationalization of Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence for this study was defined as learners' ability to appropriately use discourse markers to convey specific communicative functions in appropriate contexts. More specifically, pragmatic competence referred to students' ability to appropriately use each target discourse marker (i.e., So, Oh, However, Well, and Okay) to fulfill its pragmatic function. Their pragmatic functions included making inferences or conclusions, signaling realization or shifts in knowledge, signaling contrast, organizing discourse, and acknowledging or transitioning into statements. To make pragmatic competence observable, learners' performance on selecting an appropriate discourse marker was used in response to a contextually-specific speaking prompt from a DCT for ESL learners. These DCT items consisted of a short contextualized dialogue followed by a space for students to provide an appropriate discourse marker.

Learners' pragmatic competence was determined by whether or not they selected the appropriate discourse marker that best suited the context. Selecting the appropriate discourse marker required that students recognize which discourse marker was pragmatically expected in each context. Their scores were calculated by assigning one point for each correct response and zero points for incorrect responses on the entire DCT. Changes in learners' pragmatic competence were measured by comparing pre-test scores to post-test scores.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The primary instrument used for data collection was a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) specifically tailored by the researcher for ESL learners. The DCT targeted five pragmatic discourse markers"So," "Oh," "However," "Well," and "Okay"each selected for their distinct functional roles in conversation. Task items were contextualized within simplified conversational scenarios requiring students to complete dialogues by selecting or inserting the appropriate discourse marker to convey meaning effectively. The design of the DCT was informed by Schiffrin's (1987) and Fraser's (1999) frameworks, which classify discourse markers according to their pragmatic and interactional functions. The instrument was administered during both the pre- and post-test phases to evaluate changes in students' pragmatic language use resulting from the instructional intervention, check Appendix "A" for the DCT.

Data analysis technique

The administration of the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was carried out with a total of 20 students, comprising 10 from Class A and 10 from Class B. Each student was required to provide five responses in both the pre-test and post-test sessions, which resulted in 100 possible responses for each phase. In the pre-test, 59 valid responses were recorded, representing a response rate of 59 percent. This suggested that not all items were completed as expected, thereby reducing the volume of analysable data at this stage. In the post-test, 99 valid responses out of the expected 100 were obtained, giving a much higher response rate of 99 percent. Across both sessions, 158 responses were recorded out of a possible 200, producing an overall response rate of 79 percent. Through the higher response rate in the post-test, the quality and robustness of the data were strengthened, and a solid basis for subsequent analysis and reliability testing was ensured.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section discusses the findings of the study, presenting evidence of students' pragmatic abilities through an analysis of their use of discourse markers. The data comprised students' performance before and after explicit instruction on five discourse markers, namely "so", "oh", "however", "well", and "okay". The analysis focused on how these markers were used during classroom oral interactions, particularly in response to a story-based task. It was assumed that students' pragmatic competence could be reflected in the appropriateness of their use of these discourse markers, as demonstrated in their spoken production, as well as in the frequency with which they occurred during peer conversations. The data were analyzed using a combination of pre-test and post-test comparisons, classroom discourse analysis, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics.

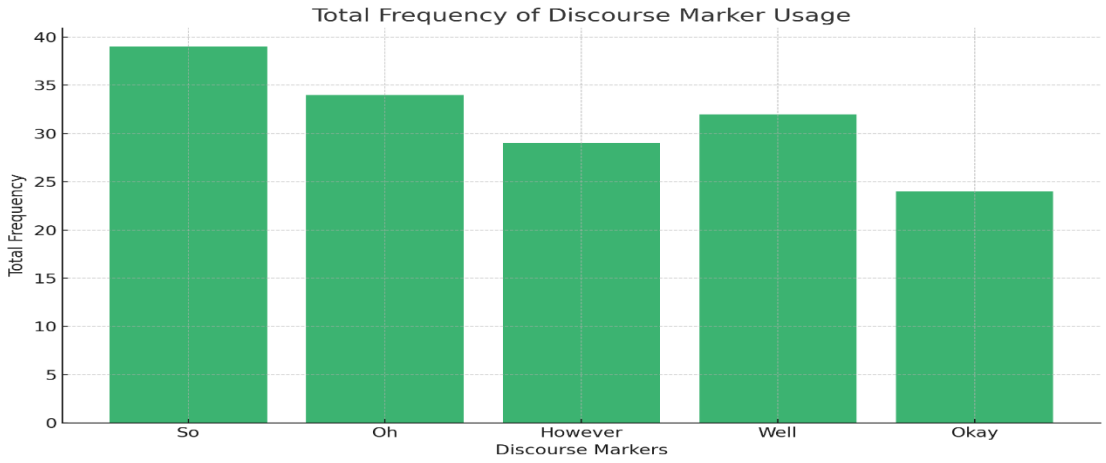

Figure 2. Total Frequency of Discourse Marker Usage

The chart presents the overall frequency of each discourse marker across both the pre-test and post-test sessions. Among the markers, "*so"* was used most frequently (39 occurrences), followed by "*oh*" (34 occurrences) and "*well*" (32 occurrences). This pattern suggests that students were able to use these discourse markers pragmatically to a considerable extent. In comparison, *and* occurred 29 times, while "*okay*" was the least frequent, with 24 occurrences.

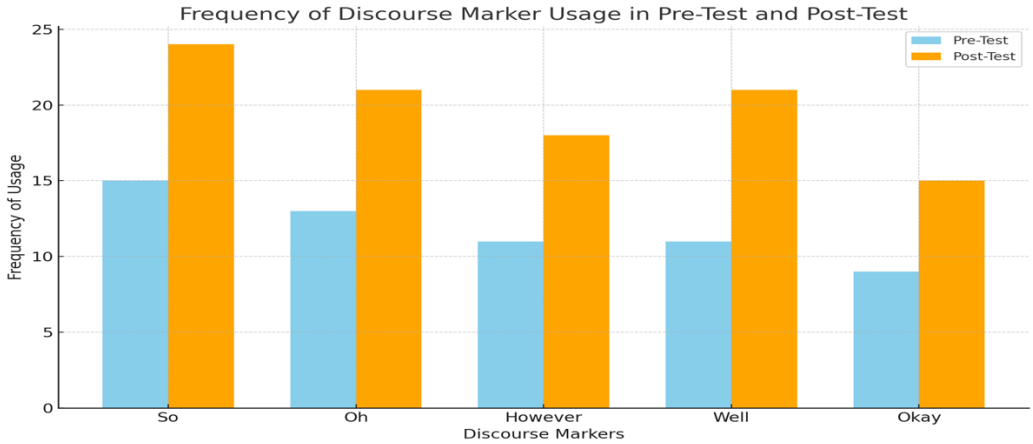

Figure 3. Comparison of Discourse Marker Usage Between Pre-Test and Post-Test

As illustrated in Figure 3, a clear increase in the use of discourse markers (DMs) was observed across all five categories from the pre-test to the post-test. The number of correct DM uses rose from 59 out of 100 in the pre-test to 99 out of 100 in the post-test, indicating substantial improvement. Gains were also evident in the use of individual discourse markers. For example, "so" increased from 15 correct instances in the pre-test to 24 in the post-test, while "oh" rose from 13 to 21 instances. "However" improved from 11 occurrences in the pre-test to 18 in the post-test. In addition, both "well" and "okay" showed notable increases, with "well" rising from 11 to 21 instances and "okay" from 9 to 15. Taken together, these findings suggest that explicit instruction had a significant positive effect on students' production of discourse markers.

Table 4. Types of Discourse Markers in Classroom Dialogue

Type of Discourse Marker	Function	Example from Dialogue
Well	Introduces a reflective or thoughtful response	*"Well, I think Amina was very kind to help the old man..."*
Oh	Expresses sudden realization or discovery	*"Oh, I just realized that if Amina hadn't helped the old man..."*
Okay	Acknowledges a previous point before elaborating	*"Okay, so we know Amina got the book because she was kind..."*
So	Indicates a conclusion, logical connection, or explanation	*"So, if we think about it, being kind can sometimes lead to unexpected rewards."*
However	Introduces a contrast or alternative perspective	*"However, what if Amina had ignored the old man?"*

The results reaffirm that discourse markers play distinct and meaningful roles in classroom discourse. They contribute to smoother conversational flow and help students organize their responses more logically. For instance, "well" was commonly used to signal reflective or thoughtful responses, allowing students time to gather their ideas before expressing their opinions. The marker "oh" often indicated moments of realization, as students demonstrated understanding or made connections during interaction. Similarly, "okay" was used by responding students to acknowledge prior contributions and transition smoothly into further explanation. In addition, discourse markers such as "so" and "however" supported the construction of logically coherent statements. Students used "so" to highlight key points or draw conclusions, while "however" enabled them to introduce contrasting ideas, thereby promoting more critical and analytical thinking.

A*: "...Like, hmm, are we together class, why do you think Amina decided to help the old man?"*

B: *"Well, I think Amina was very kind to help the old man… because she didn't know she would get anything in return…like so..I'm just. It shows that being helpful is important in life. People should always try to do good things without expecting rewards."*

The student started the response with "well." This discourse marker helped the student introduce his opinion in a thoughtful way. It showed that he was going to gather his thoughts before providing a rational response. It also created a casual natural flow to the student's speech.

A: *Maybe her actions were guided by perception, leading her toward a fate she had yet to understand*."*"What would have happened if Amina had not helped the old man?"*

B: *"<u>Oh</u>, I just realized that if Amina hadn't help the old man, she wouldn't have gotten the book. That means she wouldn't have found the treasure map! I didn't think about it that way before."*

The discourse marker “oh” is used to express a sudden realization. It indicates that a connection has just been made to an idea that had not been previously considered, thereby introducing an element of discovery into the response. Through this use, the speech is made more engaging and reflective.

A: "*So, do you think the old man had a reason for giving the book to Amina?" Could it be that the old man saw something special in Amina that made her the right person to receive it?*

B: *"Okay, so we know Amina got the book because she was kind. But what if the old man was testing her? Maybe he had the book all along, waiting for someone kind enough to help him before giving it away."*

The marker “okay*”* is one of those acknowledgement tokens that the student uses to agree with the prior statement before going into his/her explanation. Also the marker "so" helps connect his reasoning therefore creating coherence. The use of these markers improved the flow of their responses.

A: "Let’s look at this please, what lesson can we learn from Amina’s experience, what lessons?"

B: *Amina and him, Amina didn’t help the old man because she wanted something, that is, but in the end, she got a treasure map. "So, if we think about it, being kind can sometimes lead to unexpected rewards, let’s us focus now sir.*

The marker "so" functions as a discourse marker that signals what comes next is a conclusion drawn from the previous information. In this sentence, "so" allows the student to conclude what lesson was learned from reading the story while keeping his response cohesive.

A: “*This shows that small decisions can change our future in big ways. Perhaps the book contained knowledge or secrets meant only for the person who chose to show kindness."Could there have been a different ending to the story?"*

B: *"However, what if Amina had ignored the old man? Maybe someone else would have helped him and gotten the book instead. This shows that small decisions can change our future in big ways."*

The student used “however” to contrast what occurred in the foregoing discourse. This use of a discourse marker showed that he could think critically about the situation by exploring different options.

Overall, this conversation between teacher and student showed how students use discourse markers in daily conversations. They used them to share opinions, transition to new topics, recognize something, come to conclusions, and show contrast. Discourse markers allowed their conversation to flow better and allowed them to sound more engaged in what they were saying.

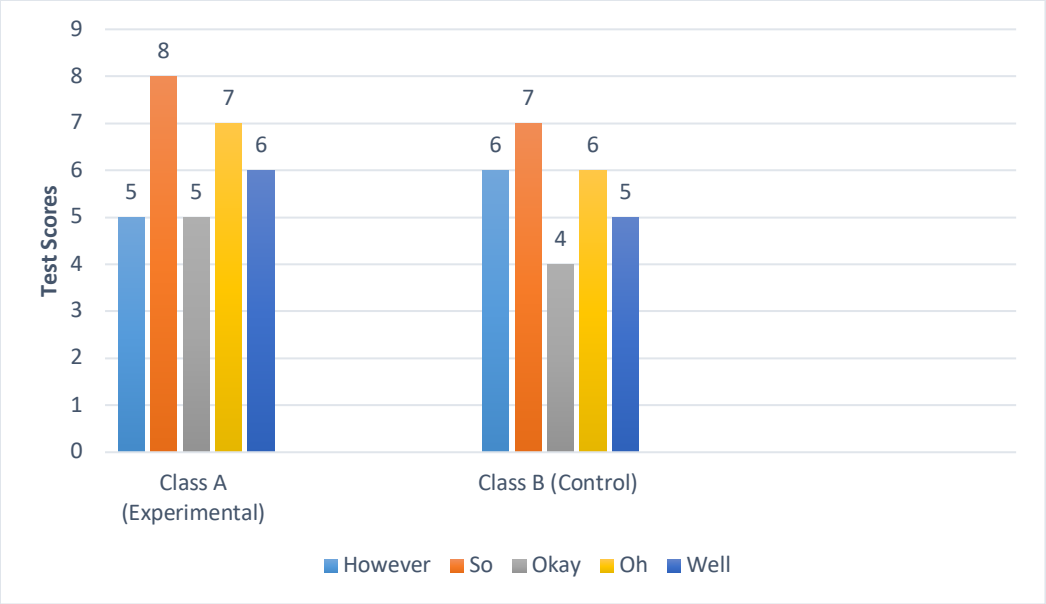

Figure 4. Pre-Test Scores Comparison of Experimental (Class A) and Control (Class B) Groups on Discourse Marker Proficiency

The results presented in Figure 4 show that the experimental group (Class A) used discourse markers slightly more frequently (32 instances) than the control group (Class B), which recorded 27 instances. "so" emerged as the most frequently used marker in both classes, with 8 instances in Class A and 7 in Class B, indicating its common role in organizing speech and signaling logical connections. "oh" followed closely, appearing 7 times in Class A and 6 times in Class B, reflecting its importance in expressing realizations or conversational shifts. The markers "however" and "well" showed minimal variation, with Class A using them 6 times and Class B 5 times, suggesting limited influence from the intervention. "okay" was the least used marker in both groups, with 5 instances in Class A and 4 in Class B, pointing to its more situational application.

Table 5. Score Range and Standard Deviation of Discourse Marker Usage

Class	**Mean ($\bar{X}$)**	**Min Score**	**Max Score**	**Standard Deviation (σ)**
Class A (Experimental)	6.5	5	8	1.20
Class B (Control)	5.5	4	7	1.08

Table 5 presents the mean, score range, and standard deviation of discourse marker usage for Class A (Experimental) and Class B (Control). Class A recorded a higher mean score of 6.5 compared to Class B's 5.5, indicating better overall performance in discourse marker usage. The score range for Class A (5 to 8) was slightly higher than that of Class B (4 to 7), suggesting a generally stronger grasp of discourse markers in the experimental group. The standard deviation was slightly higher in Class A (1.20) than in Class B (1.08), indicating more variability among students in the experimental group.

Table 6. Inferential Statistics of Discourse Marker Usage Scores

Statistic	**Class A (Experimental)**	**Class B (Control)**
Mean	6.5	5.5
Standard Deviation	1.20	1.08
T-Statistic	1.39	–
P-Value	0.203	–

The results in Table 6 show that the mean score for Class A (Experimental) was 6.5, slightly higher than Class B (Control), which had a mean score of 5.5. However, the standard deviations for both groups (1.20 for Class A and 1.08 for Class B) indicate relatively low variability in performance. The t-statistic of 1.39 and the p-value of 0.203 suggest that the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant.

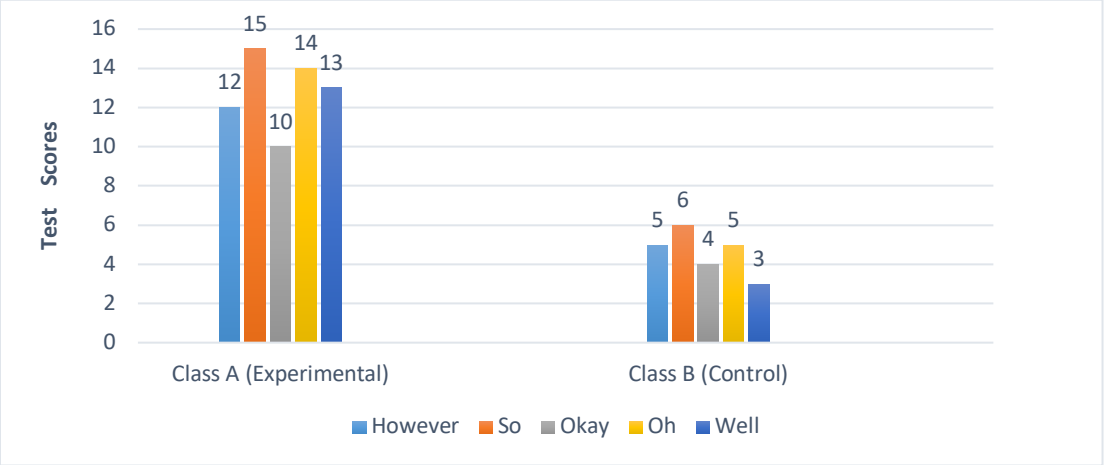

Figure 5. Post-Test Scores Comparison of Experimental (Class A) and Control (Class B) Groups on Discourse Marker Proficiency

Figure 5 illustrates the frequency of five discourse markers, *"however," "so," "okay," "oh,"* and *"well"* used by Class A (Experimental) and Class B (Control). Class A, which received explicit instruction in discourse marker use, demonstrated a significantly higher frequency across all markers, indicating greater development in pragmatic competence. The marker "*so"* was the most frequently used in both groups, but its notably higher occurrence in Class A (15 vs. 6) reflects enhanced ability to structure discourse coherently. Similarly, the increased use of *"well,"* and "*however,"* in Class A (14 and 12) compared to Class B (5 and 5) suggests improved sensitivity to signalling contrast and conversational management. The markers *"okay"* and "*oh"* also appeared more frequently in the experimental group, reflecting stronger control over interpersonal cues and cognitive signalling during interaction. These findings support the claim that explicit instruction can strengthen learners' pragmatic competence, particularly their ability to use the five discourse markers appropriately.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of Scores

Class	**Mean ($\bar{X}$)**	**Min Score**	**Max Score**	**Standard Deviation (σ)**
Class A (Experimental)	12.8	10	15	1.92
Class B (Control)	4.6	3	6	1.14

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 7 show a clear difference in discourse marker usage between Class A (Experimental) and Class B (Control), pointing to variations in pragmatic competence. A higher mean score of 12.8 was recorded for Class A, compared to 4.6 for Class B, indicating that students who received explicit instruction demonstrated stronger pragmatic awareness. The minimum and maximum scores for Class A (10 and 15) were also higher than those of Class B (3 and 6), suggesting more consistent and proficient use of discourse markers. Although the standard deviation for Class A (1.92) was slightly higher than that of Class B (1.14), reflecting some variation in individual performance, this does not diminish the overall improvement observed. The greater frequency and wider range of discourse marker use in Class A indicate an enhanced ability to manage interactional meaning, coherence, and turn-taking.

Table 8. Comparison of Discourse Marker Use Between Experimental and Control Groups

Statistic	Class A (Experimental)	Class B (Control)
Mean	12.8	4.6
Standard Deviation	1.92	1.14
T-Statistic	8.2	-
P-Value	0.001	-

The results in Table 8 show a clear difference in discourse marker use between Class A (Experimental) and Class B (Control). Class A recorded a higher mean score of 12.8, while Class B had a mean of 4.6. This indicates that students in the experimental group used discourse markers more frequently and appropriately than those in the control group. The difference in mean scores suggests a strong effect of the instructional intervention. The standard deviation for Class A (1.92) is slightly higher than that of Class B (1.14), indicating some variation in individual performance within the experimental group. However, this variation does not reduce the overall higher performance observed in Class A. The t-statistic of 8.2 shows that the difference between the two groups is substantial. The p-value of 0.001 indicates that the result is statistically significant.

Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with a substantial body of literature on the role of discourse markers (DMs) in shaping spoken interaction, particularly in instructional settings. As observed by Lee (2017) and Akbaş and Bal-Gezegin (2022), the marker "okay" functions as a transitional device that supports coherence in learners' responses, an important indicator of pragmatic competence. Similarly, the results align with the work of Nowotny (2004) and Broderick (2001), who highlight the role of DMs in maintaining conversational continuity and enhancing interactional fluency. The use of "oh" as a marker of sudden realization corresponds with findings by Amino (2020) and Tree and Schrock (1999), reinforcing its function in signaling the integration of new information into discourse. In the same way, the use of "well" as a mitigator in reflective speech supports the findings of Trihartanti and Damayanti (2014), suggesting that learners do not merely acquire DMs as lexical items but use them as pragmatic resources for managing interpersonal relations. These patterns underscore the pedagogical value of discourse markers in supporting the development of L2 learners' pragmatic competence.

Beyond confirming earlier studies, the results of the present study contribute further evidence that learners benefit from explicit instruction in pragmatic development. Statistically significant differences were observed between the two groups, with the experimental group (M = 12.8) outperforming the control group (M = 4.6), supported by a high t-value (8.2) and a p-value of .001. This indicates that structured and direct teaching enhances learners' pragmatic performance. These findings are in line with Aufa (2011), who reported better outcomes when learners received explicit instruction in pragmatic features rather than relying on incidental learning. Similarly, Ziashahabi et al. (2020) found that explicit teaching not only facilitates acquisition but also supports long-term retention, which is reflected in the present results. Aydin (2023) also reported that pedagogical input positively influences learners' appropriate production of speech acts, further supporting these findings. In contrast, the relatively low performance of the control group suggests that exposure to pragmatic input alone may be insufficient for the acquisition of pragmatic rules. This supports the claims of Ifantidou (2013) and Hernández (2021), who argue that immersion or natural exposure is more effective when combined with explicit instruction. The findings demonstrate that learners were better able to use discourse markers such as "so," "okay," "oh," "however," and "well" appropriately when they received explicit instruction.

CONCLUSION

The results suggest that explicit instruction contributed to an improvement in students' use of the discourse markers "so," "okay," "oh," "however," and "well" as part of their pragmatic competence. Students who received explicit instruction demonstrated more frequent and contextually appropriate use of

these markers particularly “so,” “oh,” “however,” and “well” and employed them for a wider range of functions than those in the control group. This pattern was observed both within individual speaker turns and across broader classroom interactions. In effect, students exposed to explicit instruction showed a greater ability to use discourse markers to manage conversations, signal relationships between ideas, and respond appropriately to their interlocutors.

Although the study focused on a limited set of discourse markers, the improvements observed among the experimental group are noteworthy. These findings point to potential practical implications for classroom teaching, suggesting that discourse markers can be effectively taught through explicit instruction in ESL contexts. At the same time, caution is required in making broad claims about overall pragmatic competence. Further research that examines a wider range of discourse markers across diverse communicative contexts would provide a more comprehensive understanding of this relationship.
Conclusions can be generalized findings according to research problems, can also be in the form of recommendations for the next step.

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