A probe into the effect of explicit and implicit instruction of metadiscourse markers on EFL learners' argumentative writing performance

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Abstract

Drawing mainly on Hyland's (2005) "interpersonal model of metadiscourse", the researchers in the current study strived to probe the viable impact of consciousness-raising regarding metadiscourse (MD) markers on Iranian EFL learners' academic writing performance. To this end, 75 university junior students were assigned to three separate groups (two experimental and one control, based on random assignment) and exposed to three different kinds of treatment. While the control group participants followed their normal course of instruction, learners in the explicit

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instruction group (the first experimental group) were provided with overt guidelines regarding the uses of metadiscourse markers through active involvement with MD-marker detection drills, and the participants in the second experimental group (the implicit instruction group) were just given hints, in a tacit manner, concerning the points at which MD markers occurred within the text (this was done through mere noticing procedure via highlighted text). It is also worth noting that an excerpt from IELTS argumentative writing tasks was used for pre and post testing purposes, and a random selection from the introduction and discussion sections of recently-published articles in peer-reviewed educational and teaching journals was utilized as the treatment material. The final analysis of data through one-way ANOVA and ANCOVA revealed significant differences in the writing performance of three groups of learners involved in the experiment.

1. Introduction

The fact that writing is a highly challenging task is buttressed by manifold researchers' claims. In this regard, Kroll (1990) is of the view that "becoming a writer is a complex and ongoing process, and becoming a writing teacher is no less complex" (p. 1). Likewise, Celce-Murcia (2001) contends that "The ability to express one's ideas in writing in a second or foreign language and to do so with reasonable coherence and accuracy is a major achievement" (p. 205). Despite the intricacy with which writing is mostly characterized, it is thought that the stance taken toward this skill is highly determining in configuring the classroom

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activities around it. The traditional approach to writing, known as "learning-to-write perspective", as Williams (2012) states, encompasses moving writing to the periphery of language learning process. Thus, based on this standpoint, only when full mastery through gradual transition via instructive courses is gained by the learner, can he/she commence writing instruction. Opposed to this perspective is the so-called writing-to-learn approach which regards writing as an inseparable part of learning, and to adopt William's words "a vehicle for learning" (p. 321).

No matter which of the aforesaid views writing instructors choose to subscribe to, it is thought that their approach to text functioning is also among the determining factors in the process of teaching writing. In this regard, the interactivity function of the text which is the pathway for creating writer-reader interaction appears to be among the neglected and less-attended areas in the process of writing. Once regarded as a dry and non-dynamic entity, written text is now being viewed as a conduit between the writer and the reader (see for example Hyland, 2005). This interconnectedness between the writer and his/her readers is made possible through the application of metadiscourse markers (MDMs).

An efficient writer, based on this line of thinking, is the one who writes with a sense of readership in mind and tries to anticipate and be responsive to readers' needs, expectations, desires and abilities (Hyland, 2005; Hyland & Tse, 2004). After all, concerning the active role which should be taken by the writers in the process of creating a reader-friendly text, Thompson (2001) maintains:

> proficient writers attempt to second-guess the kind of information that readers might want or expect to find at each point in the unfolding text, and proceed by anticipating their questions about, or reactions to, what is written. The text is built up as a series of writer responses to these anticipated reactions. (p.58)

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2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on Writing

The notorious aura of intricacy surrounding writing skill must not lead to relegating its key importance among other language skills. Regarding the pivotal significance of writing, Olshtain (2001) argues, "Within the communicative framework of language teaching, the skill of writing enjoys special status─it is via writing that a person can communicate a variety of messages to a close or distant, known or unknown reader or readers" (p. 207).

Research on writing enjoys a fairly long-lasting history. As Matsuda, Saenkhum, and Accardi (2013) put it, "Research on L2 writers has a relatively long history going back to the mid-20th century" (p. 69). Among the issues of interest amid the vast body of research on writing lies the researchers' hunt for characteristics of good writers. Indeed, turning to efficient writers appears to be among the focal dreams of most EFL learners. Yet, regarding what facilitates efficient writing, there seems to be no clear-cut consensus among writing researchers and scholars.

Krashen (1984, cited in Hadley, 2003), for instance, refers to three primary features distinguishing efficient writers from poor writers. These features he refers to as planning, rescanning and revising. As he further elucidates, "Good writers seem to plan more than poor writers, to … stop rather frequently to reread what they have already written before continuing to compose," and "… tend to revise more than poor writers do, and they revise somewhat differently." Underscoring the importance of using appropriate writing strategies in the process of composing texts, Jones (1982, cited in Krapels, 1990), however, found that while poor writers are more text-bound, good writers permit their "ideas to generate the text" (p .40).

Among other noteworthy studies delving into the role of writing strategies, mention can be made of Riazi (1997) and

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Sasaki (2004). In his longitudinal study undertaken using four postgraduate Iranian learners studying in Canada, Riazi (1997) maintained that "achieving disciplinary literacy 'is fundamentally an interactive social-cognitive process in that production of the texts required extensive interaction between the individual's cognitive processes and social/contextual factors in different ways'" (cited in Manchón et al., 2007, p. 234). In the other longitudinal analysis conducted by Sasaki (2004, cited in Manchón et al., 2007) concerning the effect of instruction on strategy use in written work, it was "found that the effects of the process instruction that the participants received in their first year at university were neutralized by the subsequent lack of writing practice" (p. 247).

Reading extensively is also said to function as another contributor underlying the development of efficient writing skills. To adopt Zhang's (2013) words, "most writing depends on reading input to a large extent—either directly from source texts, or indirectly from background knowledge, which itself results from experience with texts" (p. 51). Also, as this researcher puts it, among the commonest practices of "reading-based writing is the discourse synthesis, which involves the integration of information from multiple sources" (p. 51). This process, according to him, "not only involves reading and writing (and students' accountability for correct representation and integration of content information) but also is expected to enhance students' critical thinking ability" (p. 51).

Among the other factors that might help enhance the quality of writing lie metadiscursive and metatextual elements. Indeed, though efficient writing depends, to some extent, on stylistics such as grammatical/linguistic accuracy, success in writing, like success in any other skill, requires not only linguistic competence, but also a combination of other higher-order competencies such as discourse and strategic competence (e.g. Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 1997). As Ifantido (2005) observes, through the use of MDMs the writer is enabled

to lead the reader through the task of unfolding the text and getting more engaged with the discourse process. Thus, informed by this key part played by metadiscourse elements in creating a text of a higher quality and intelligibility, the following section is after providing a succinct account of research on MDMs.

2.2 Research on Metadiscourse

Delineated by Hyland (2005) as "the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assist the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community" (p. 37), metadiscourse is said to have made its first debut through attempts by Harris in 1959, and later developed by scholars like Vande Kopple, Crismore, and more importantly Hyland. Hyland's revolutionizing outlooks regarding discourse led to a phenomenal modification in the way written text was construed. His reconceptualization of the function of (written) discourse encompassing "the idea that communication is more than just the exchange of information, goals or services, but also involves the personalities, attitudes and assumptions of those who are communicating" (Hyland, 2005, p. 3), has since been regarded as one of the most influential theories in discourse-oriented literature.

Though diverse models and theories have been put forth to characterize what metadiscourse embodies (e.g. Crismore, Markakanen, & Steffensen, 1993; Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Hyland, 2005), Hyland's (2005) taxonomy seems to have been credited more than any other theories and models of metadiscourse throughout the long-lasting history of research on the issue. Being mainly composed of two major subcategories of interactive and interactional markers, Hyland's model of metadiscourse encompasses five interactive markers, known as *transitions*, *frame markers*, *endophoric markers*, *evidentials*, and *code glosses*, as well as five interactional markers referred to as

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hedges, *boosters*, *attitude markers*, *self mentions*, and *engagement markers*.

Research on metadiscourse has addressed a plethora of diverse perspectives among which reference can be made to studies done under the auspices of instructional attempts to teach metadiscourse and in relation to different language skills, particularly reading and writing. Camiciottoli (2003), for instance, analyzed reading comprehension in ESP courses in the light of metadiscourse use. Striving to find the potential effect of reading texts with varying degrees and types of MDMs, this researcher used two groups of participants and found that the presence of MDMs can occasionally contribute to better comprehension of reading texts.

In a later study focusing on the role of explicit instruction of MDMs in improving pre-intermediate Iranian EFL learners' reading skills, Jalilfar and Alipour (2007) assigned three diverse kinds of treatment (as to the inclusion of MDMs and explicit instruction on them) to three groups of learners and concluded that while removal of MDMs did not lead to any significant enhancement in terms of learners' reading comprehension, the group which was treated through the explicit instruction of MDMs was characterized by a better performance in reading.

In a similar vein, Parvaresh and Nemati (2008) utilized Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse to gauge the possible effect of metadiscourse marker use on the reading comprehension performance of learners in both their mother tongue (Persian) and second language (English). As they reported, though both higher and lower-proficiency learners did better on the text that included metadiscourse elements, it was the lower-proficiency group that gained more from the presence of MDMs.

Tavakoli, Dabaghi, and Khorvash's (2010) research can be regarded as another case in point, concerning the impact of metadiscourse marker use and instruction on the learners' reading comprehension ability. Making use of four groups of

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participants (three experimental and one control), the researchers in this study applied differing sorts of treatment as to interpersonal and textual metadiscourse and contended that not only did metadiscourse training lead to significant reading comprehension betterment in all experimental groups, but it also resulted in more progress within the group in which simultaneous instruction of interpersonal and textual metadiscourse had been provided.

Among other more recent investigations dealing with the possible implications of metadiscourse elements for reading, mention might be made of Assadi and Vafaee's (2012) work, where, using some 50 Iranian EFL high school participants, the researchers examined the role of interpersonal and textual markers in learners' reading comprehension development. Presence of these markers in the texts and learners' awareness of their importance for comprehension were reported to be two main factors underlying augmented reading comprehension.

Now turning to repercussions of metadiscourse knowledge and use for other skills, a great many other investigations might be encountered, out of which the researchers in the current study refer to only three more recent instances. In this line of scrutiny, Simin and Tavangar (2009) explored the effect of metadiscourse familiarity on writing in a sample of ninety undergraduate Iranian EFL learners. Resorting to Vande Kopple's (1985) model of metadiscourse and assigning an argumentative writing task to participants, the researchers culminated in pinpointing the positive effect of proficiency level on the use of MDMs. Furthermore, it was observed that textual type of MDMs had been employed more than the interpersonal category.

In a later endeavor, Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010) probed the potential influence of explicit metadiscourse marker instruction for varied proficiency levels and found that EFL learners' writing ability went through a significant amount of enhancement as a result of explicit instruction of MDMs. Moreover, intermediate-level learners were reported to have outperformed the other two groups, i.e. elementary and advanced learners, in terms of writing improvement.

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Hashemi, Khodabakhshzade and Elahi's (2012) research, however, concerned listening comprehension gains resulting from provision of metadiscourse training. In so doing, four groups of thirty participants (totaling 120) were selected and assigned to two control and two experimental groups. The treatment utilized for the groups involved the use of two types of monologues, one with and the other without metadiscourse elements. Findings of Hashemi, et al.'s study pointed toward the significant listening comprehension improvement of intermediate group learners as a consequence of metadiscourse marker consciousness-raising.

Having dealt with issues such as instruction of MDMs and their implications for different language skills, the researchers close this section by mentioning one more fairly recent study dealing with the role of metadiscourse in learners' perception. Seeking to pinpoint the potential influence the presence of different types of MDMs can exert on Iranian academic EFL learners' perception of written texts, Alavinia and Zarza (2011) adopted Hyland's (2005) model and following Ifantido's (2005) lead, produced three types of texts with different categories of MDMs (interactive, interactional or both) removed from them. These texts were then assigned to 120 participants and their perceptions were tapped through the administration of a questionnaire. In line with the findings, texts with both categories of markers, i.e. interactive and interactional, were reported to have been perceived as more efficient by the learners. Nonetheless, no significant difference was encountered between the alternative effect of either type of markers on the learners' perception.

With all the above-mentioned studies in mind, it must be recapitulated that despite the recent bulk of research on MDMs from a multitude of perspectives, still some issues have remained either unattended or less heeded. Among such areas to which only scant attention has been paid lies the impact of explicit as well as implicit consciousness-raising attempts as to the role of

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MDMs in the writing enhancement of EFL learners, a paramount issue on which the current research is mainly centered. Thus, the significance of the present study is thought to emanate from a number of considerations including its scope (in that it deals with the comparative effect of explicit and implicit kinds of metadiscourse instruction), its treatment methods (for instance, the use of consciousness-raising attempts as a strategy for instructing metadiscourse markers which, to the researchers' best knowledge, has not been employed in any other studies of the type) and its choice of materials for treatment (its use of discussion sections of recently-published articles in peer-reviewed educational and teaching journals).

3. Purpose of the Study

Despite the key role MDMs are said to play in the process of softening the text and making it more user-friendly, few attempts, to date, have centered on the paramountcy of instructing and raising consciousness toward these highly efficacious metatextual devices in writing. Hence, in an attempt to bridge the alleged gap in the literature in this regard, the researchers in the present article aimed to investigate the potential impacts of providing explicit and implicit instruction with regard to the role of MDMs on the writing performance of Iranian academic EFL learners. In this regard, the current study might be said to gain part of its impetus from Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis, which is by definition concerned with raising "conscious apprehension and awareness of input" (Schmidt, 2001, p. 26) in learners. Thus, to go about an adequate appraisal of the study postulation, the following research questions were formulated:

(1) Does explicit instruction of metadisourse markers affect Iranian Academic EFL learners' writing performance?

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(2) Does implicit instruction of metadisourse markers (through noticing strategy) affect Iranian Academic EFL learners' writing performance?

4. Method

As a quasi-experimental study striving to find the potential influence of explicit and implicit instruction of MDMs, the current research was carried out using Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse. In what follows, a brief account of the methodology adopted in the study is outlined.

4.1 Participants

The study was conducted with 70 Iranian EFL students, both males and females, studying at Azarabadegan non-profit university and Urmia Islamic Azad University. At the time the study was being carried out, the participants were doing their third grade of BA studies and hence their age ranged from 21 to 25. These learners were all taking the essay writing course in the spring semester of 90-91 academic year.

4.2 Instruments

A number of instruments and materials were utilized to carry out the study, including a test of homogeneity (Nelson test), which was given to learners at the outset of the study, a list of functions and examples for both textual (interactive) and interpersonal (interactional) MDMs extracted from Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse model, which was utilized for familiarizing learners with MDMs and raising their consciousness towards them, an argumentative essay writing task chosen from *International English Language Testing System (IELTS)* topics, which was assigned to learners at both

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pretest and posttest, as well as the introduction and discussion parts of some peer-reviewed journals, which were randomly selected and manipulated by the researchers through highlighting different types of MDMs occurring in them.

4.3 Data Collection Procedure

Being of a quasi-experimental nature, the current study applied two distinct types of treatment to the experimental groups in the form of explicit and implicit consciousness-raising attempts concerning the role of MDMs. Thus, following homogenization of groups through the administration of Nelson test, the eligible participants (three intact classes from which outliers had been discarded), were randomly assigned to three groups (two experimental and one control).

The participants were all required to write an argumentative essay which was selected from IELTS collection of essay topics. This writing task functioned as the pretest for the current study, and the learners were supposed to complete the task in roughly 40 minutes and write a minimum of 250 words. Afterwards, the first experimental group, termed explicit instruction group (EIG), received explicit instruction on MDMs, whereas the second experimental group, dubbed implicit instruction group (IIG), was treated implicitly. The control group received no specific treatment and followed the regular course of instruction in essay writing class. It must be added that though due to limitations impinging on the research, the classes chosen were taught by different instructors (with only one of the classes being tutored by one of the current researchers), clear instructions were provided to the other two instructors as to how the procedure was to be applied.

It is also worth noting that the first experimental group (EIG) was trained following the presentation, practice, production (PPP) model, whereas the second experimental group (IIG) received instruction on the significance of MDMs through noticing. To apply the treatment, students in the first and second experimental groups were provided with a list of

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functions and examples of both textual (interactive) and interpersonal (interactional) MDMs based on Hyland's (2005) classification, in an attempt to raise their awareness of metadiscourse markers. Nonetheless, unlike what was done in IIG, in EIG, the teacher explicitly elaborated on the functions and uses of MDMs on the first session of treatment.

The material chosen as the principal means of providing metadisourse instruction was composed of a random selection of the published articles appearing in a number of peer-reviewed journals. Indeed, only introduction and discussion parts of the selected journal articles constituted the main focus of the researchers in the current study. Thus, the students in both experimental groups were provided with these selections and the proper treatment for each group (explicit instruction for EIG and implicit instruction through noticing and highlighting for IIG) followed. In other words, while in the first experimental group a lot was done by the teacher attempting to expose learners to the role of MDMs in text construction, in the second experimental group input was not given so much by the teacher but by the task itself. In addition, no rule formation discussion or activity was overtly encouraged or done in this treatment, and it was hoped that the input task alone would push the students to notice the intended markers by themselves. At the end, the posttest writing task – the very task given to learners for pretest – was assigned to participants in all three groups. It must be pointed out that the treatment went on for ten academic weeks and the entire study (proficiency test, pretest and posttest included) spanned over the whole term period.

4.4 Data Analysis

As an initial step toward analyzing the data, IELTS scoring criteria for the writing tasks were adopted, and to ensure higher reliability of the obtained results, inter-rater reliability indices were calculated for both pretest and posttest scores. Thus, four

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major criteria, i.e. *task achievement*, *coherence and cohesion*, *lexical resource*, and *grammatical range and accuracy* were considered as the basis of raters' scoring and each essay was evaluated on a scale of 36 (with 1-9 points being assigned for different degrees of achievement in terms of the afore-said criteria). To determine the reliability between two sets of scores provided by the two raters, the researchers ran a Pearson product moment correlation (see Table 1), based on which a sufficient amount of correlation ($r = .70$) was found between the two raters' scores.

Table 1: Reliability of pretest scores

Correlations

		Prescore1	Prescore2
Prescore1	Pearson Correlation	1	.70[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00
	N	71	71
Prescore2	Pearson Correlation	.70[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	
	N	71	71
**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).			

Statistical analysis was mainly performed through the use of SPSS and by running one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) along with post hoc Tukey HSD on pretest results and one way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) on the posttest results.

5. Results

The researchers in the current study were primarily concerned with finding the potential impact of teaching metadiscourse markers (both explicitly and implicitly) on learners' writing performance.

Prior to delving into the findings obtained for these research questions, some preliminaries such as test of normality are initially dealt with in the ensuing section.

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5.1 Normality of Distribution

In order to ckeck the normality of distribution of scores in each group, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run. The *p* values of .20, .20, and .19 obtained for groups 1, 2, and 3, respectively, indicated that the scores were normally distributed within each group. Table 2 and Figures 1, 2 and 3 provide the information regarding the normality of distribution of proficiency test scores.

Table 2: Normality of distribution

| Group		Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Control	Score	.154	21	.200[*]	.965	21	.615
Experimental 2	Score	.107	27	.200[*]	.959	27	.347
Experimental 1	Score	.129	32	.188	.935	32	.053

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.
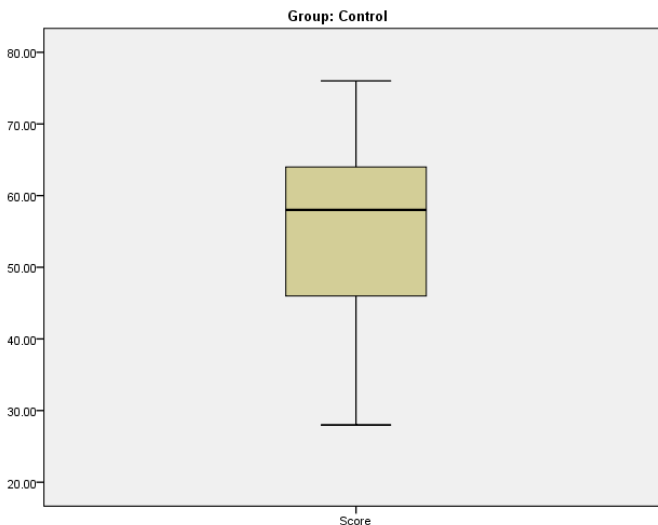
Figure 1: Boxplot for the normality and homogeneity of Control Group

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Figure 2: Boxplot for the normality and homogeneity of Experimental
Group 1
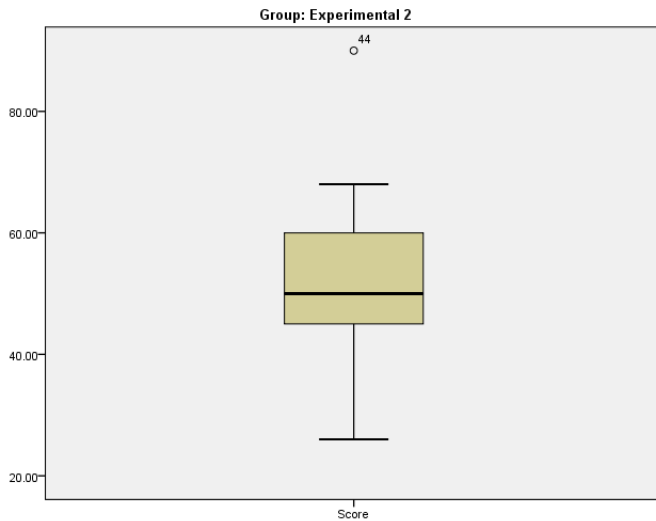
Figure 3: Boxplot for the normality and homogeneity of Experimental
Group 2

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To further test the homogeneity and equality of the groups prior to the application of treatment, an ANOVA test was run on the pretest results gained by learners of all three groups (see Table 3). In line with the results of one-way ANOVA, a significant difference was found to be at work concerning pretest results (F = 7.798; $p < .05$). Thus, to be able to spot the direct point(s) from which this significant difference resulted, Post Hoc Analysis through Tukey HSD was run (see Table 4), according to which significant differences were encountered between the performance of the control group and that of the second experimental group ($p = .002$), as well as between the two experimental groups ($p = .007$), but not between the control group and the first experimental group ($p = .627$). Furthermore, the mean Plot for the Scores of Participants on the Pretest is represented in Figure 4.

Table 3: One-way ANOVA run on pretest scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
ANOVA					
Pretest score					
Between Groups	212.856	2	106.428	7.798	.001
Within Groups	928.102	68	13.649		
Total	1140.958	70			

Table 4: Post Hoc Tukey Test run for pinpointing the sources of variance in pretest scores

(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Multiple Comparisons						
Pretest score						
Tukey HSD					95% Confidence Interval	

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Experimental 1	Experimental 2	3.18333[*]	1.01175	.007	.7591	5.6076
	Control	-1.03725	1.12152	.627	-3.7245	1.6500
Experimental 2	Experimental 1	-3.18333[*]	1.01175	.007	-5.6076	-.7591
	Control	-4.22059[*]	1.17113	.002	-7.0267	-1.4145
Control	Experimental 1	1.03725	1.12152	.627	-1.6500	3.7245
	Experimental 2	4.22059[*]	1.17113	.002	1.4145	7.0267

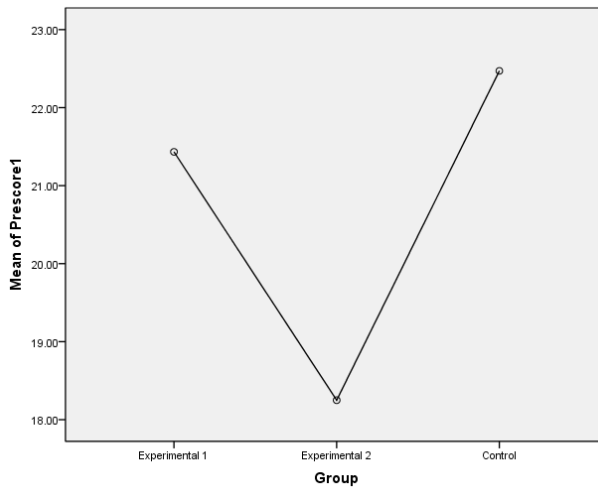*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Figure 4: Mean plot for the scores of participants on the pretest

5.2 Findings Obtained for the Research Questions

In order to answer the research questions, one-way ANCOVA was applied (Table 5). The reason behind the utilization of ANCOVA was to control for the initial differences existing between the performances of the three groups on the pretest. The results revealed that there is a significant difference between the posttest scores of the three groups of learners ($F = 4.489$; $p = .015 < .05$).

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Table 5: One-way ANCOVA run for comparison of posttest scores among three groups

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: Posttest score						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	344.969[a]	3	114.990	13.892	.000	.387
Intercept	280.714	1	280.714	33.914	.000	.339
Prescore	265.953	1	265.953	32.130	.000	.327
Group	74.313	2	37.157	4.489	.015	.120
Error	546.303	66	8.277			
Total	37417.000	70				
Corrected Total	891.271	69				
a. R Squared = .387 (Adjusted R Squared = .359)						

Finally, a quick look through the mean scores obtained by each group (Table 6) might help provide further support for the significant difference among the performances of the three groups on the posttest. As is seen in Table 6, while no significant difference existed between the performances of the two experimental groups ($M_{\text{Experimental group 1}} = 24.75$; $M_{\text{Experimental group 2}} = 24.37$), control group participants' posttest mean score (22.48) differed considerably from those of experimental groups one and two. Drawing on the gained results, it can be claimed that the treatments applied in explicit and implicit metadiscourse instruction groups seem to have proven beneficial in bringing about enhanced writing performance of the two experimental groups.

Table 6: Mean scores obtained by learners on posttest essay writing task

Group			
Dependent Variable: Posttest score			
Group	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval

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			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Experimental 1	23.670[a]	.540	22.593	24.748
Experimental 2	23.119[a]	.627	21.868	24.371
Control	21.041[a]	.721	19.602	22.479

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Prescore = 20.5714.

6. Discussion

The current study examined the impact of explicit as well as implicit instruction of MDMs on Iranian EFL learners' academic writing performance. Based on the analysis of data, though no significant difference was found between the effect of explicit and implicit instruction, students in the explicit group performed partially better than implicit group learners. Moreover, there was a significant difference between the performance of two experimental groups compared to that of control group on the posttest, urging the researchers to claim that both methods have proven to exert a positive effect on learners' writing performance.

As regards the effect of explicit instruction on learners' writing betterment, the findings of the current study are thought to corroborate those of other researchers including Cheng and Steffensen (1996) who found that teaching the form, function and purpose of metadiscourse markers leads to enhanced writing performance in learners, Simin and Tavangar (2009) who concluded that "metadiscourse instruction has a positive effect on the correct use of metadiscourse markers" (p. 230), Lachini (2006) who came up with similar upshots as to the impact of MDMs consciousness-raising on EFL learners' writing skill, and Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010) who pointed toward considerable writing gains within the group exposed to explicit instruction of MDMs.

Furthermore, with regard to the influence of implicit instruction of MDMs on learners' writing betterment, the findings of the current study are in line with those of Karen (2007) who referred to the positive role of MDM instruction (mainly implicit) in the structural enhancement within the

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learners, as well as Andringa, Glopper, and Hacquebord (2011) who substantiated the positive impact of such instruction on free written response task performance.

Writing is to be thought of as an interactive process through which the author communicates his/her views and stances to the reader, at times touches upon and (re)shapes the readers' standpoints, and builds rapport with the reader through the application of the so-called textual and interpersonal (see, for example, Vande Kopple, 1985) or interactive and interactional (see Hyland, 2005) metadiscourse devices. Indeed, awareness of the role metadiscourse elements can play in the process of softening texts and making them more reader-friendly (e.g. Hyland, 2005; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Ifantido, 2005) is reckoned to help sensitize learners toward the pivotal role of writing in bridging the mental and emotional processes holding between the writer and the reader. Such an awareness of the focal part played by MDMs might, in turn, help learners write in a more interactive and resonant manner with a sense of readership in mind.

Though some might argue that mere awareness of interactivity function of the text may not suffice and hence would not guarantee the active use of metadiscourse devices in developing the texts, the findings of the current study as well as many other studies of the type (e.g. Andringa, et al., 2011; Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010) regarding the effectiveness of explicit and implicit instruction of MDMs are to be taken as a springboard for further endorsement of the preeminence and supremacy of metadiscursive instruction and consciousness raising in bringing about the instigation of a more enhanced and reader-sensitive way of writing.

7. Conclusion

As stated earlier, the primary objective of the current study was to probe the would-be effect of implicit and explicit instruction

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of MDMs on EFL learners' writing performance. As the findings revealed, both methods of teaching were found to be effective in improving learners' argumentative writing ability. As the results of a prior study (Alavinia & Zarza, 2011) indicated, metadiscourse elements play a key part in configuring an individual's perception of the written texts. In that study, the authors argued that texts including MDMs (both interactive and interactional types) are normally judged as more intelligible and reader-friendly by the readers. To adopt Hyland's (2005, p. 14) words, "without metadiscourse readers would be unable to conceptualize a text." Also, as Crismore (2004, p. 311) contends, "metadiscourse signals for the reader a way to understand both the writer and the text."

The positive and productive role assumed for metadiscourse devices in revitalizing the text necessitates further attention on the part of all educational stake-holders, including instructors, syllabus designers and material developers toward devising more vibrant methods for the instruction and indoctrination of such beneficial constituents of written discourse. The researchers also hope that the findings of this study can assist EFL writing teachers and students to build more effective and persuasive arguments by giving additional importance to metadiscourse elements in writing classes. Writing courses appear to have dwelled more extensively on issues of grammaticality and accuracy than comprehensibility and intertextuality. However significant these sentential and discursive elements might be in holding the text together and providing a unified whole, a greater and more efficacious role is thought to be played by metadiscourse devices in invigorating the texts and rendering them more communicative.

All that said, the researchers do believe that talking of metadiscourse and its effectiveness still looks like sailing within the uncharted waters, and hence further research is called for to address several unattended issues in this regard, including the possible effect of explicit as well as implicit instruction of metadiscourse markers on enhancing the performance of EFL learners in, say, other types of writing production. Other

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researchers might choose to delve into pinpointing the possible relationship between gender of participants and their writing enhancement as a result of explicit/implicit instruction of MDMs. Eventually, opting for other alternative innovative ways of including metadiscourse markers in writing course syllabi might constitute an intriguing line of research for future investigators.

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