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Transition Words and Phrases: Logical Fallacy in Saudi Premedical English as a Foreign Language Learners' Written English

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of transition words and phrases in the writing samples of premedical EFL learners enrolled in a preparatory English course at a university in Saudi Arabia. The study employed an empirical research design and mixed-methods research methodology to investigate the factors behind learners' perplexity about the semantic contexts for using transition words in written English. Thirty male premedical EFL learners with B1 proficiency levels participated as subjects in the study. Learners' comprehension of the context of the use of transition words was checked using tests. The test responses were cross-checked through a survey questionnaire. The results show that, in general, these learners are perplexed about the exact semantic connotations of transition words and the complexity in the transition of ideas from one sentence or paragraph to another. This may at times result in a loss of meaning, or a mismatch in the transition word and the context sentence the word is used in. The study's findings suggest that Saudi pre-university EFL learners use transition words and phrases incorrectly or unnecessarily, and therefore, need intensive training in the use of transition words focused on semantic contexts to enhance their writing skills.

Keywords: Coherence in writing; Cohesive words; English for Saudi premedical students; Linking devices; Logical fallacy in writing; Transition words

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

Teaching English as a foreign language holds a special status in Saudi Arabia and, as noted by Al-Seghayer (2023), the status of English will continue to grow in the coming years as well to keep pace with Saudi Vision 2030. Saudi Vision 2030 has positively affected the English pedagogic strategies in Saudi Arabia and, as a result, technology has penetrated Saudi classrooms in a big way (Albiladi, 2022; Alrashidi, 2022) with a significant positive impact. However, the journey is still quite long and much needs to be done to address a few gaps in teaching and learner achievement. For instance, the present researchers noted that the development of writing skills of premedical English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at their university was quite unsatisfactory, especially as regards the use of transition words and phrases in their writings. Premedical students enrolled to learn English in pre-university programs display a basic proficiency level and face significant difficulties in the use of English, particularly writing (Khaleghietal., 2024; Qadeer and Chow, 2023).

Transition words and phrases, also referred to as connectives, are linguistic units used as cohesive devices, especially in written texts, to add significant information to writing to help readers follow the logic connecting disparate sentences (Biber et al., 2021; Kauchak et al., 2020). These words and phrases help readers comprehend the text in a better way. Transition words can be single-term expressions, such as *however, thus, so, therefore, furthermore, rather, meanwhile*, and so on, or multi-term expressions, such as *in conclusion, other than, as a result, in addition, in the meantime, to sum up, to conclude*, etc. Transition words play different roles in a paragraph, and accordingly, they may initiate atopic, establish a cause-and-effect relationship, build an argument, present additional comments or ideas, present alternatives, compare and contrast ideas, emphasize earlier statements, re-phrase what is already stated, present a summary or conclusion, and so on.

However, transition words and phrases are polysemantic in nature, and morphologically similar units, for example, the word “*while*” may convey dissimilar ideas in separate contexts. In a similar fashion, morphologically dissimilar units, i.e., more than one type of expressions, for example, *notwithstanding, however, nonetheless, nevertheless*, etc.,

are interchangeable to express the same idea in different contexts. This feature of these words and phrases sometimes poses serious learning challenges to EFL learners learning English in an non-native environment lacking direct contact with native speakers.

1.2 Research problem

A preliminary analysis of learners’ sample writings reveals that many learners do not use transition words strategically in their texts (Alqaedi, 2013). That is, the transition words or phrases chosen by learners do not reflect the logical relationship the words must emphasize between the sentences they connect (Albousaif, 2011; Rass, 2015). The issue may be associated with L1 transfer as Rass (2015), for example, states that Palestinian Arab learners at Israeli universities fail to use discourse markers appropriately. Rass’s (2015) observation is supported by Sayidina (2010), who says that Arab learners transfer transition words from L1 to L2. Qadeer and Chow (2023) report that pre-clinical medical students from Saudi Arabia face numerous difficulties in writing and that writing is the most difficult among all the language skills for them. As regards transition words, the researchers surmise that the most pertinent issue before learners is that since almost all the transition words and phrases have different meanings (though some of them are interchangeable), different connotations in different contexts, and subtle nuances in semantic shades, if learners are not sure of the exactitude of the shades of meaning, the word or phrase used by them may prove a mismatch in the context. The other issue also observed in Alqaedi (2013) and Sayidina (2010), the preliminary analysis highlights is that a number of learners are found to be overusing the transition words which results in overexplaining the connections that are already clear. To sum up, the situation indicates that the learners have difficulty grasping the semantic context in which a particular transition device is to be used.

However, there is a lack of in-depth research on the topic in Saudi Arabia, particularly the writing difficulties faced by pre-clinical medical students, especially concerning the use of transition words and phrases. Therefore, there exists a huge gap in research literature in this challenging academic area and the present study is a modest attempt to fill that gap.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The present study attempts to identify and discuss a predominant learning issue concerning vocabulary use in written English faced by Saudi pre-university EFL learners to suggest potential solutions to help them improve their writing skills. The study is highly significant in the given contexts as pre-university EFL learners are required to master the writing skills to achieve higher proficiency in English, especially as Saudi premedical students need higher proficiency in English to succeed in their further studies.

2. Literature review

2.1 Transition words and phrases: Importance in English vocabulary

Transition words and phrases play a very significant role in English vocabulary. Two important factors enhance their significance in the language. First, transition words and phrases in English are formulaic sequences as far as learning the language is concerned, especially for EFL learners. Formulaic language means verbal expressions that are fixed in form, often non-literal in meaning with attitudinal nuances, and closely related to the communicative-pragmatic context (Wray, 2002). Therefore, learners must have good competence in the use of these expressions since formulaic language is very common in English, especially in written discourse (Alsharif, 2017; Boers and Lindstromberg, 2012). Second, transition words and phrases play a very important role in expressing a writer's ideas cohesively and coherently. The function of transition words and phrases is to join ideas, sentences, and paragraphs semantically together. They establish a semantic relation between sentences, which Halliday and Hassan (1976) call "cohesion," and create a well-integrated text, emphasized in the studies based on the idea of textual integration and co-functioning of textual components, such as that of van Dijk and Kintsch (1978) and de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981). They indicate the direction, order, and flow of a writer's ideas. Thus, EFL learners aspiring to write well must master the use of transition words and phrases (Ariyanti, 2021; Dontcheva-Navratilova and Povolná, 2020).

The use of transition word in a sentence largely depends upon the meaning of the sentence just concluded, and then upon how the writer wants to carry forward this mean-

ing in the next sentence. Texts are materials made up of interconnected elements where the interpretation of one element is based on the interpretation of another. EFL learners may sometimes be confused either about the meaning of the transition word to be used at the juncture of two sentences to connect them logically or about how they should carry forward the meaning of the first sentence in the sentence coming next. Preliminary analysis of writing samples shows that Saudi EFL students sometimes encounter some challenges to establish interconnections in their written texts (Alawerdy and Alalwi, 2022). Arab learners of English commonly use transition words and phrases less frequently than they are required in writing as is shown in a research study by Abdulla (2023). At the same time, they are also prone to overuse reiteration of the same lexical item, such as *and* and *however*, as cohesive devices while they underuse other lexical items, cohesive devices, and transition words, e.g. *moreover*, *also*, *furthermore*, *nevertheless*, and so on (Khalil, 1989). Kurdish EFL learners, for instance, make several mistakes in the use of transition words while writing argumentative or persuasive essays, as reported by Hama (2021). They also display the tendency to misrepresent or cliché most of the transition words and phrases.

2.2 Semantics, transition, and coherence

Coherence is the connectedness of sentences in a paragraph. To that end, writers have a plan to order sentences in a particular fashion so that the intended meaning is clear to the reader. Transition words used accurately, help writers achieve semantic fidelity as well as coherence in the paragraph (Alyousef, 2021; Fahnestock, 1983). So, transition words are not merely another lexical items that stand as signs for concrete objects or ideas; they are more than that. Their function is to stand as a sign with a sense, to facilitate a smooth transition of ideas from one sentence to the other, and to facilitate connectedness between sentences creating a coherent paragraph. Thus, if one or the other of these functions is not fulfilled by the used transition word, either the sentence meaning is lost or the word stands meaningless or superfluous (Ahmed, 2016, 2019; Alharbi, 2017; Alqasham et al., 2021). To Halliday and Hassan (1976), transition words and phrases, from a lexical point of view, are the superordinate members of major lexical sets. Their cohesive use in a sentence is an instance of the general prin-

ciple whereby a superordinate item operates as an anaphoric reference, as a kind of synonym.

2.3 Research in transition words and phrases

A preliminary review of literature on the subject reveals that there is a general lack of research on the problems of usage of transition words and phrases in university students' writings, and it is particularly visible in Saudi Arabian research contexts. In the Arab world contexts, some research studies function as good reference literature though. For instance, Abdulla (2023) has worked on a frequency count of transition words in Arab learners' writing and found that Arab learners underuse these linking devices. Qadeer and Chow (2023) identify underuse as well as overuse of transition words as one of the learning difficulties of Arab EFL learners. According to Alqaedi (2013) and Sayidina (2010), Saudi/Arab learners' difficulties in the use of English transition words and repetition area result of the rhetorical transfer of L1 devices to L2 learning. Albousaif (2011), however, considers lexical cohesion devices as yet another vocabulary item and argues that in the EFL learning process vocabulary learning needs to be prioritized over learning language structures.

Research studies bordering on the problems of usage of transition words and phrases in Saudi Arabian EFL scenarios are mainly focused on cohesive devices, coherence, unity, conjunctions, and the like (Ababneh, 2017; Alhaisoni, 2012; Al-Khairi, 2013; Alkhalaf, 2022; Al Mahmud and Afzal ur Rahman, 2023; Javid et al., 2013). In general, researchers appear to have preference for the investigation of common errors in the writings of their subjects, that too, their studies are focused on language as a system, not on the elements of the system, such as the linking devices (Khatteer, 2019; Nuruzzaman et al., 2018; Othman, 2019; Wahid and Wahid, 2020). From among the three common writing errors picked by researchers, i.e., coherence, cohesion, and unity, coherence emerges as a very popular topic among researchers investigating problems of EFL learners in writing in their particularized settings (RahmtAllah, 2020). But the researchers tend to ignore the fact that textual cohesion essentially precedes coherence, that connection of ideas (coherence) can be achieved in a text-only if sentences are appropriately connected through cohesive devices. For instance, Cekiso et al. (2016) found coherence a challenging issue for their students

in South Africa, yet the researchers ignored the value of cohesive devices to bring coherence. Al Shamalat and Ghani (2020) from Jordanian settings, Amperawaty and Warsono (2019) and Ariyanti (2021) from Indonesia, and Ding et al. (2017) from Chinese settings report similar problems in the writings of their EFL learners, while none of these researchers pay attention to cohesive devices like transition words and phrases. Khasawneh's (2023) study is also focused on the writing challenges faced by Saudi pre-university EFL learners, and learners' difficulties in the use of proper connectives and transition are just a small part of this study. Khaleghi et al. (2024) discuss frequently occurring grammar errors in Saudi premedical EFL learners' academic writing, but transition words do not form part of this research. The same trend has been observed among Saudi researchers as well (Ahmed, 2019; Alawerdy and Alalwi, 2022; Alharbi, 2017; Alqasham et al., 2021; Alsharif, 2017; Alyousef, 2021; Masadeh, 2019; Qadeer and Chow, 2022). Research in the area of cohesion and coherence touches upon the issue of transition words and phrases; still, there is a lack of research focusing particularly on transition devices.

On the other hand, there are ample research studies on phrasal verbs, perhaps the reason being researchers' perception of that area of language learning as quite challenging for EFL learners because of polysemy and complexity in the use of phrasal verbs (Abdul Rahman and Abid, 2014; Al-Dukhayel, 2014; Al Nasarat, 2018; Al-Otaibi, 2015; Alshayban, 2018; Barekat and Baniyasady, 2014; El-Dakhsetal., 2022; Gandorah, 2015; Gardner and Davies, 2007; Garnier and Schmitt, 2015; Liu, 2011). However, the semantic complexity of transition words and phrases is equally challenging to EFL learners in non-native learning environments. Thus, there is an urgent need for research on EFL learners' challenges in the use of transition words and phrases in written English.

To sum up, the review of existing literature in the selected area of research reveals that there exists a huge gap in the research literature on the topic, particularly pertaining to the difficulties of Saudi premedical EF learners in the use of transition words and phrases in their writing. The existing literature is extremely limited to provide a comprehensive view of the academic problem since the research studies reviewed here are either focused on other writing difficulties of these learners or transition words and phrases form only a

small part of the studies. Moreover, the writing difficulties of premedical EFL learners are generally ignored in the studies. The situation provides enough justification for the present study to be carried out in the Saudi Arabian EFL research scenario.

3. Research hypotheses and research questions

3.1 Research hypotheses

Upon a thorough review of existing literature on EFL learners' challenges in the use of transition words and phrases in written English as well as a review of sample writings of adult Saudi EFL learners, which shows that a number of subjects under study display logical fallacy in the use of transition words and phrases in their written English and they overuse them as well, the researchers' ideas on the topic crystallized into the following hypotheses:

- RH 1: If some Saudi EFL learners use transition words and phrases inappropriately or meaninglessly, they may not be aware of the exact contextual meanings of the expressions.
- RH 2: Even if the learners can contextually comprehend the meanings of a few common transition words and phrases, they lack confidence in using them in their own writings.
- RH 3: Some learners maybe perplexed about the use of transition words and phrases owing to polysemy in the expressions.
- RH 4: Some learners overuse transition words and phrases in written English for lack of understanding of the connection between sentences they just made using transition words.

3.2 Factors

The researchers surmised that the basic issue for the university EFL learners was that they were not aware of the semantic contexts for the use of common transition words and phrases in English. So, it was a case of semantic non-contextualization when it comes to the use of transition devices in their sentences, and the issue must be addressed from a semantic perspective, rather than from a lexical perspective. Learners were less aware of the *what*, *why*, and *where* of the transition words. That is, what word should be used at a par-

ticular transition phase in a sentence, why it should be used at that particular instance (the semantic aspect), and where such a transition should occur in the paragraph so that the transition links the meanings of disparate sentences to create one, overall comprehensive meaning. Therefore, in addition to investigating the efficacy of the hypotheses stated above, the study also explores the factors potentially affecting adult Saudi EFL learners' knowledge of transition words.

3.3 Research questions

The present study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- RQ 1: Are adult Saudi EFL learners perplexed about using transition words correctly in their written English?
- RQ 2: Do adult Saudi EFL learners find the semantic contexts of the use of transition words in English complex in nature?
- RQ 3: What factors do potentially affect adult Saudi EFL learners' knowledge of transition words and phrases in English?

3.4 Objectives of the study

The primary objective of the present study was to investigate the logical fallacy perceptible in the use of transition words and phrases in the written English of a number of young adult EFL learners at a Saudi university. The secondary, and corollary, objective of the study was to identify the potential factors affecting the use of transition words and phrases in the written English of these learners. The secondary objective of the study was tied up to the identification of possible academic measures to help learners grasp the semantic contexts for the use of transition words and phrases in order to enhance their writing. The present research was specifically focused on premedical university students. Premedical students learn English to communicate effectively in the target language; therefore, it is required that their written English is flawless.

3.5 Theoretical framework

Halliday and Hassan's (1976) ideas on cohesion have been quite helpful in making sense of anaphoric as well as cat-

aphoric references in relation to transition words and phrases in written texts. The idea that “cohesion occurs when the interpretation of one element depends on the other. The one presupposes the other, in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it” (p. 4) has been used as the basis for semantic analysis of transition devices. Halliday and Hassan’s (1976) overall idea of textual cohesion, which includes reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion is quite appropriate to analyze the difficulties of adult EFL learners in the use of transition words and phrases. Theoretical inputs on textual integration and co-functioning of textual components from de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) have also been very helpful. In addition, the guidelines in the textbook used to teach English to premedical students (Oshima and Hogue, 2007) have also been taken into consideration.

4. Research methodology

The present study has employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the issue at hand. Quantitative method has been employed to collect numerical data from participants, and qualitative method has been used to interpret the numerical data and arrive at value judgments and present the findings in a narrative format.

4.1 Research design

The study was aimed at finding answers to the research questions framed with reference to the logical fallacy observed in the written English of the participants and to investigate the factors affecting the fallacy. To that end, an empirical research design was prepared involving a class of thirty premedical university students of a module (ELIH 101) as part of a year-long training program. The research design involved data collection using writing samples, tests, questionnaires and interviews, and interpretation of the numerical data. The data collection steps consisted of giving the learners topics to write small essays on medical issues, analyzing the writing samples, further data collection by administering tests to participants, and afterward, collecting qualitative data using questionnaires and interview techniques, and finally, presenting the research findings in a coherent narrative format. The participants were specifically instructed to use suitable transition devices in their essays from the list provided with the writing topics given to them. The motive

behind the writing samples and tests was to find the answer to RQ 1 as the writing samples and test-answers would be good resources to gather information on participants’ level of perplexity in using transition words. The data collected through the first questionnaire was to be used to answer RQ 2 (semantic complexity) while to answer RQ 3 (factors affecting learners’ use of transition words and phrases), the data collected through the survey questionnaire was analyzed.

Learners’ writing samples reveal their perplexity in using transition words. Semantic complexity leading to learners’ perplexity will be determined through analysis of the questionnaire. The tests will only show the extent of the problem; the questionnaire will pinpoint the origin of the problem. Suggestions will be given to improve the semantic aspects of the transition words.

4.2 Participants

Participants in the present study were thirty premedical undergraduate university students who were learning English as an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) subject of study, named ELIH 101, at the English Language Institute (ELI), King Abdulaziz University, Rabigh campus, for a trimester, as part of a three-trimester program. The total number of students in a class was thirty, so, it was not a case of random selection as the whole class participated in the study. These students join university after learning English for six, or more, years at senior secondary school level. All the participants were male students in the age range of 18 to 22 years. The reason for this was the gender-segregated classroom policy for higher studies in Saudi Arabia. The participants’ age range reflects the average age of learners seeking admission into universities in Saudi Arabia. The participants’ proficiency level in English was B1 (intermediate) as they could understand the main points in an English text on a familiar topic fairly well and could write well on a given topic. Their spoken English proficiency was also B1.

4.3 Materials

The materials used for data collection and analysis for the present research were students’ writing samples, participants’ responses to the survey questionnaire, and participants’ test sheets. The selected transition words and phrases were *additionally, as a consequence, as a result, consequently, de-*

spite, finally, for instance, furthermore, however, in addition, in a nutshell, in conclusion, in spite of, instead, last but not least, moreover, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the contrary, otherwise, rather, subsequently, therefore, thus, to summarize, to sum up, and while. The criteria for the selection of these transition words and phrases was their frequency of use in premedical students' writing dealing mostly with medical issues.

4.4 Data collection and analysis

The data were collected in the following manner:

Participants were instructed to write essays (pen-and-paper method) on topics related to medical issues. They were provided with a list of transition words and phrases to be suitably used in their texts. These writing samples were analyzed for the use of transition words and phrases. Further, a pen-and-paper test was administered to the participants to gather information on their depth of knowledge on the contextual meanings of transition words and phrases. The data on participants' understanding of transition words and phrases, and their responses regarding their own perception of the factors creating difficulties they encountered grasping the contextual meanings of transition words and phrases were collected using a general questionnaire and a survey questionnaire. Participants' consent to collect data was obtained prior to administering the questionnaires.

The tests were based on gap-filling exercises and guessing the meaning from context (**Appendix A**). The questionnaire was designed to choose the appropriate response from the multiple choices (**Appendix B**). The questionnaire was meant to collect data on participants' perceptions of transition words and phrases as well as to determine what factors affected their recall, or lack, of the meaning of the expressions.

The survey questionnaire was structured as given below:

Survey Questionnaire

Factors affecting learners' knowledge of transition words and phrases

Keeping in mind the difficulties you have faced in using appropriate transition words and phrases in the test and the questionnaire, choose the factors potentially affecting your knowledge of the transition devices listed below. Choose all

that apply to your situation.

- (a) Lack of direct exposure to native speech
- (b) Low frequency of transition words in everyday English usage
- (c) Polysemy in some transition words
- (d) Lack of reading enough English books
- (e) Social networking

The data were collected over a period of three months in Trimester 1 of 2023. Learners were given in-class writing assignments, while the questionnaires were to be taken home and returned the next day. Keeping in mind participants' comparatively low-level proficiency in English, the tests were deliberately designed to be simple and easy to follow. However, the researchers got the tests checked by senior professors in the department who found them satisfactory, reliable, and relevant to the research purpose.

5. Results

The collected numerical data were analyzed statistically. Quantitative content analysis method was used for the analysis of collected data. **Table 1**, below, presents participants' raw scores obtained in the test (part I and II).

Table 2, given below, presents the number of participants responding to the information elicited in the questionnaire. The transition words used to elicit response were *however, as a result, while, consequently, furthermore, nevertheless, therefore, instead, subsequently, and otherwise*.

A cursory glance at **Table 1** above reveals that on average, participants' scores were low in parts I and II of the test administered to them. The highest scores in Part I were 14 (100%), whereas the lowest scores were 8 (57%). The mean score was 11.6 (82%). Similarly, in Part II of the test, the highest scores obtained by participants were 15 (93.7%), whereas the lowest scores were 9 (56.2%). The mean score was 12.3 (76.8%). The highest total scores (Part I and II) were 29 (96.6%), whereas the lowest total scores obtained were 17 (56.6%). The mean total score was 23.9 (79.6%). As regards the numerical figures obtained from the questionnaire, the highest number of participants indicating unfamiliarity with a transition word was 24 (i.e. 80%) for *nevertheless*, 21 (70%) for *subsequently*, and 19 (63%) for the word *consequently*. The transition words familiar (i.e., they know their meaning and use them in their written English) to the highest

number of participants were *however* and *otherwise* (80% and 76.6%, respectively).

Table 1. Participants' test scores.

Participant	Part I/14	Part II/16	Total/30
1	12	12	24
2	13	14	27
3	12	14	26
4	9	10	19
5	11	10	21
6	13	13	26
7	14	14	28
8	10	10	20
9	12	12	24
10	8	9	17
11	13	14	27
12	12	15	27
13	9	10	19
14	13	14	27
15	12	13	25
16	9	9	18
17	11	12	23
18	12	12	24
19	13	12	25
20	10	13	23
21	12	12	24
22	12	13	25
23	14	12	26
24	14	15	29
25	10	12	22
26	11	11	22
27	10	13	23
28	12	11	23
29	13	14	27
30	12	14	26
Mean	11.6	12.3	23.9
SD	1.61	1.70	3.088
Variance	2.50	2.81	9.22

N=30.

Writing samples collected from the participants clearly show logical fallacy in the use of transition words as well as overuse of transition devices. 27 participants (90%) used transition signals inappropriately, meaninglessly, or illogically. Given below is a sample from the participant's writing. Examples of lack of comprehension in students' writing samples

1. There are no signs or symptoms for hypertension, so you better have to measure your blood pressure. *However*, there are several causes for hypertension.
2. A person who suffers from hypertension undergoes to many effects that harm his health, and some of effects could be life-threatening. *However*, we will see some cases that affect the body.
3. Hypertension is one of the most common diseases worldwide. *However*, many people need to realize the causes of hypertension to be aware of them.
4. When one has hypertension, he is she suffers from pain in the head, *as a result*.
5. *Although* lack of sleeping due to high blood pressure it make the sick person be in a bad mood and runs in the family.

6. Discussion

Now, the question is: what do the numerical figures stated above indicate? We have to look at the numbers from a particular perspective. The perspective is learners' competence in the use of transition words and phrases in their written English, which, ideally, should be above average, especially since transition devices are very important vocabulary items to present ideas in written English coherently and bring cohesion in the text. The test results show that 18 out of 30 participants scored above 80% marks in the test Part I and II; the rest 12 participants also scored between 60 to 79% marks in the tests, indicating that it is a small population of participants who used the transition words and phrases in the tests either inappropriately, or meaninglessly, or illogically. In Part II of the test, the participants were to decide the appropriacy of the transition words used in the given sentences, and their good scores indicate that, on average, a majority of participants arrived at the right decision. However, when it comes to actual writing, they make more mistakes. An analysis of the short essays written by them reveals that 90% of the participants had some incorrect usage. The results obtained from the questionnaire indicate that to a large number of participants, a majority of common transition words and phrases are unfamiliar, and they do not use them in their writing. Two points are clear from this anomaly. First, the test scores show that the participants were able to identify the meanings of these words and phrases used in a

Table 2. Participants' responses to information elicited in the questionnaire.

Response	Transition words/number of participants									
	However	As a result	While	Consequently	Furthermore	Nevertheless	Therefore	Instead	Subsequently	Otherwise
Not familiar with the word and its meaning at all.	3	4	6	19	14	24	2	17	21	6
Kind of familiar with the word and its meaning but not sure.	3	6	2	3	10	2	3	2	2	2
Familiar with the word and its meaning but I never use it in my writing.	0	6	9	5	3	2	2	5	3	6
Familiar with the word and its meaning and I use it in my writing.	24	14	13	3	3	2	23	6	4	16

context. Second, the results obtained from the questionnaire and the analysis of their writing samples show that a large number of the same participants were not familiar with several transition words and their exact semantic range, and in their writing, they used incorrectly, overused, and misplaced even those words and phrases they were familiar with. As regards the factors potentially affecting learners' knowledge of transition words and phrases in English, roughly all the participants have ticked all the factors listed in the questionnaire, i.e. lack of direct exposure to native speech, low frequency of transition words in everyday English usage, polysemy in some transition words, lack of reading English books, and lack of social networking, particularly with native speakers of English.

The findings from the present study could not be reviewed from a comparative perspective since the researchers could not find any previous studies on the difficulties of premedical EFL learners in the use of transition words and phrases in their writing in Saudi Arabian contexts. From this perspective, the present study is quite unique and deals with a hitherto neglected academic issue. However, the present research findings are corroborated by findings from research studies on transition words in other Arab countries where English is taught as a foreign language, and learners find the use of transition words difficult to master. For instance, research studies by Abdulla (2023), Hama (2021), Khawasaneh (2023), and Sayidina (2010) display similar kind of apprehensions among EFL learners as regards perplexity and semantic complexity in the use of transition words in their writing.

Moreover, from the perspective of EFL learners' use of linguistic devices to bring coherence, cohesion and unity in their texts, findings from the present study resonate well with the findings from previous research studies on the topic. For instance, researchers, such as Ababneh (2017), Ahmed (2019), Alhaisoni (2012), Alharbi (2017), Al-Khairi (2013), and Alkhalaf (2022) report that Saudi EFL learners face difficulties in bringing coherence and cohesion in their written English. Some more research studies, such as Al Mahmud and Afzal ur Rahman (2023), Al Nasarat (2018), Javid et al. (2013), Khalil (1989), Khatter (2019), Othman (2019), Wahid and Wahid (2020) also report similar findings and corroborate the findings from the present study.

7. Conclusions

To sum up, the findings from the present study answer the three research questions satisfactorily. The present research was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. Are adult Saudi EFL learners perplexed about using transition words correctly in their written English?
2. Do adult Saudi EFL learners find the semantic context of the use of transition words in English complex in nature?
3. What factors do potentially affect adult Saudi EFL learners' knowledge of transition words and phrases in English?

First, the findings suggest that adult Saudi EFL learn-

ers are perplexed about using transition words correctly in their written English. Second, from their responses recorded in the questionnaire, it may be safely concluded that adult Saudi EFL learners also find the semantic contexts of the use of transition words and phrases in English quite complex. Third, the learners report that the factors potentially affecting their knowledge of transition devices are lack of direct exposure to native speech, low frequency of transition words in everyday English usage, polysemy in some transition words, lack of reading English books, and lack of social networking with native speakers of English. The findings also suggest that if Saudi EFL learners are taught transition words and phrases in proper contexts, their performance will definitely improve.

The research findings have serious implication for EFL pedagogy as regards teaching English to adult learners in Saudi Arabia, particularly those who have achieved a set level of English proficiency but need further improvement and fine-tuning. The focus in the teaching of transition words and phrases needs to be reformulated from lexis-centric to semantics-centric. The polysemy involved in transition words needs to be contextualized in teaching. Moreover, learners need more exposure to native English, which may be fulfilled by an extensive use of the Internet in teaching, and possibly, through faculty exchange program in collaboration with universities in English speaking countries.

7.1 Limitations of the study

The present research has its limitations owing to circumstances beyond the reach of the researchers. First, because of gender segregation in education institutes in Saudi Arabia, the study was conducted only with male participants. Second, for the constraints of time and resources, the researchers could rope in participation only students from a class that consisted of thirty students in total.

7.2 Further recommendations

The limitations of the present research study may become inspirations for further researchers. So, a similar study including female participants may come up with different findings. In the same fashion, a larger number of participants may show a different trend in the use of transition words and phrases and different factors affecting their knowledge base.

Author Contributions

AA (Alaa Alahmadi) conceptualized the research, finalized the research design and methodology, and prepared the first draft of the manuscript. MS (Mohammad Saleem) collected data and revised the manuscript. All authors approve the final version of the article.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Data may be available on request.

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Appendix A

Transition Words/Phrases Test

- I. Fill-in the blanks choosing transition words given from the list below. You can use the words more than once if you like.

However, As a result, Consequently, Furthermore, Additionally, Nevertheless, Thus, In conclusion, Therefore, To sum up, Rather, Nonetheless, In spite of, Despite

- The stirring music acted on the emotions of the audience. _____, some of them started crying.
- Harry used to come home and act out the movie for the kids. _____, he became a good actor.
- She was messing with the coffee pot, which was acting up again. _____, she couldn't brew coffee for hours.
- I could hear Jonathan acting up downstairs. _____, I went to see what he was up to.
- We've added on a couple of rooms to the house. _____, we've constructed an outhouse.
- Watson claimed he was at home at the time of the murder, but police said his story didn't add up. _____, he went on trying to convince them.
- The new measures are aimed at tightening existing sanctions. _____, there is a fear that inflation may go up.
- Your friend was asking about you. _____, as I had no idea where you were, I couldn't tell him anything.
- I had a letter from Jane. She asks after you. _____, she remembers you fondly.
- Ask around to see what others living in your area think about their doctors. _____, you can collect enough information on the medical system here.
- You are asking for trouble. _____, I advise you to be careful.
- "John's at the door." "Oh, I don't like him to be here. ' _____, ask him in."
- The girl you want to ask out is really pretty. I would _____ say, she is extremely charming.
- They have asked us over for drinks on Friday. I am busy, _____ I would join them.

- II. Read the following sentences. Decide whether the underlined words in part b are appropriate in the given context. Tick mark the box if appropriate, or use x if not.

Appendix B

Questionnaire: Transition Words/Phrases

Instruction: Look at the underlined transition words in the following sentences. Considering the meaning and usage

1.	a) "When the weather is nice, I love to get up early." b) "Me, too. <u>However</u> , it's good to enjoy the morning air."	[]
2.	a) "I didn't expect to see Emily at the party. I thought she had gone on vacation." b) "Me neither. <u>Rather</u> , I was surprised when she showed up."	[]
3.	a) "I heard that the company is sending you to Germany again." b) "Yes. It's been a long time since I was there. <u>As a result</u> , I guess it's time to brush up on my German."	[]
4.	a) "How do you like John?" b) "He is very nice. <u>Moreover</u> , he is one of those few people who never let down their friends."	[]
5.	a) "Did you hear about the bombing of the embassy in Nairobi?" b) "That was a disaster. <u>Consequently</u> , there weren't that many people in the building when the bomb went off."	[]
6.	a) "Hello, Jan!" b) "Hi, Susan! Nevertheless, how nice of you to call me!"	[]
7.	a) "I want to ask some advice from you." b) "No problem. Oh, can you hold on a second? <u>On the contrary</u> , someone is knocking at the door."	[]
8.	a) "Michelle always forgets to put out the fire <u>when she leaves</u> !" b) "That's dangerous! <u>Finally</u> , you should talk to her about this."	[]
9.	a) "I was late for my date last night, so I made up a story about a traffic jam." b) "But did your girlfriend believe it at all? <u>Therefore</u> , better be frank next time."	[]
10.	a) "I heard Robert and Paul were fighting on the street this morning. Was it serious?" b) " <u>As a result</u> , they didn't stop until Paul twisted his ankle and had to give in."	[]
11.	a) "How is your business going?" b) "Pretty good. <u>Furthermore</u> , though I have to turn down several good offers because I am just short of time."	[]
12.	a) "When you think about it, most of your classmates will disappear forever from your life after you graduate." b) "Yeah. <u>However</u> , every now and then you will run into one of them on the street."	[]
13.	a) "Do you notice that Marvin likes to show off?" b) "Yes. <u>Nonetheless</u> , I don't think that he has anything to be proud of."	[]
14.	a) "I'm sorry I hurt you. I didn't mean to say those things. I was just angry." b) "Just go away. <u>In addition</u> , I don't want to see you for a while."	[]
15.	a) (in a restaurant): "Miss, could I get a bit more coffee when you've got a chance?" b) "Sure. <u>Additionally</u> , would you like me to take away these plates first?"	[]
16.	a) "How do you get in that bar?" b) " <u>Therefore</u> , you have to come in the back door."	[]

of the words, choose only ONE of the four choices:

1. We can go on like this for the future events too. However, things have got to change.
 - Not familiar with the word and its meaning at all.
 - Kind of familiar with the word and its meaning but not sure.
 - Familiar with the word and its meaning but I never use it in my writing.
 - Familiar with the word and its meaning and I use it in my writing.
2. He is not all familiar with the work culture here. As a result, he finds it difficult to adjust.
 - Not familiar with the word and its meaning at all.
 - Kind of familiar with the word and its meaning but not sure.
 - Familiar with the word and its meaning but I never use it in my writing.
 - Familiar with the word and its meaning and I use it in my writing.
3. And while I know that the pediatric surgery program at the university will likely be the second biggest challenge I will face in my life, I know that I am up for it.
 - Not familiar with the word and its meaning at all.
 - Kind of familiar with the word and its meaning but not sure.

Familiar with the word and its meaning but I never use it in my writing.

Familiar with the word and its meaning and I use it in my writing.

4. Ahmad suffers from high BP, high blood sugar, low Hb, low oxygen level, and iron deficiency. Consequently, he is highly prone to cardiac arrest.

Not familiar with the word and its meaning at all.

Kind of familiar with the word and its meaning but not sure.

Familiar with the word and its meaning but I never use it in my writing.

Familiar with the word and its meaning and I use it in my writing.

5. Community colleges offer preparation for many jobs. Furthermore, they prepare students to transfer to four-year colleges.

Not familiar with the word and its meaning at all.

Kind of familiar with the word and its meaning but not sure.

Familiar with the word and its meaning but I never use it in my writing.

Familiar with the word and its meaning and I use it in my writing.

6. Rains continued to pour down even after the floods. Nevertheless, rescue workers tried to pull victims out of the wreck.

Not familiar with the word and its meaning at all.

Kind of familiar with the word and its meaning but not sure.

Familiar with the word and its meaning but I never use it in my writing.

Familiar with the word and its meaning and I use it in my writing.

7. My grandmother has passed away this morning. Therefore, may I request you to grant me leave for two days?

Not familiar with the word and its meaning at all.

Kind of familiar with the word and its meaning but not sure.

Familiar with the word and its meaning but I never use it in my writing.

Familiar with the word and its meaning and I use it in my writing.

8. The doctors had planned to operate the patient next month; instead, they carried out the operation today.

Not familiar with the word and its meaning at all.

Kind of familiar with the word and its meaning but not sure.

Familiar with the word and its meaning but I never use it in my writing.

Familiar with the word and its meaning and I use it in my writing.

9. The doctors removed two twelve mm stones from gallbladder. Subsequently, they removed one six mm stone from the kidney.

Not familiar with the word and its meaning at all.

Kind of familiar with the word and its meaning but not sure.

Familiar with the word and its meaning but I never use it in my writing.

Familiar with the word and its meaning and I use it in my writing.

10. You must give up smoking immediately; otherwise, you'll face lung failure very soon.

Not familiar with the word and its meaning at all.

Kind of familiar with the word and its meaning but not sure.

Familiar with the word and its meaning but I never use it in my writing.

Familiar with the word and its meaning and I use it in my writing.