

## THE IMPACTS OF EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS OF ENGLISH CONNECTORS ON EFL STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

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### Abstract

There have been many studies on English grammar, but a dearth of studies has been conducted in the cross-sectional fields such as seeking how the field of grammar makes contributions to reading comprehension. Accordingly, the current study sought to find out the impacts of explicit and implicit instructions of English connectors on EFL students' reading comprehension. 50 third semester students from an English department at a university in Bengkulu were incorporated as the samples. Adopting a quasi-experimental method, those 50 students were split into two classes, the so-called experimental and control classes. Students in the experimental class were taught English connectors explicitly, and those of the control class were taught English connectors implicitly. Before eight times of treatments in the form of the two ways of instructions, students of the two group were given a valid and reliable reading comprehension pre-test, and a similar construct of post-test was given after the eighth treatments ended. The data of the current study were analyzed by deploying paired sample t-test and independent sample t-test. The present study revealed that explicit and implicit instructions of English connectors had positive impacts on EFL students' reading comprehension. However, the explicit instruction of English connectors enhanced EFL students' reading comprehension more significantly and more effectively. The foregoing was demonstrated by the explicit instruction's post-test score of 78.5 with SD of 19.787 which was higher than the implicit instruction's post-test score of 66.75 with SD of 25.05. It is recommended that further studies be conducted to replicate the present study in different contexts for the sake of providing rich data to confirm the current study's results..

**Keywords:** Explicit instruction, implicit instruction, English connectors, EFL reading comprehension

### INTRODUCTION

English, when used as a foreign language, will have a different repertoire from English used as the first language. Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat (2017) depicted the difference in a way that English, in a foreign language communicative setting, has been associated with the staging of communication which is less spoken but more written. The foregoing case happens in Indonesia, wherein English has no adequate repertoire of oral communication, but

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the use of written English keeps increasing due to a great, continuous development of technology (Apriani et al., 2019; Apriani & Hidayah, 2019; Islam, 2016; Lauder, 2008; Sanjaya et al., 2020). Accordingly, the English educational curriculum in Indonesia has been developing and oriented more towards cultivating students' English reading and writing skills (Fauziati, 2014; Martina, Syafryadin, Rakhmanina, & Juwita, 2020). In other words, English learning in Indonesia is more focused on cultivating reading skill as the receptive competence and writing skill as the productive competence (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). Talking about reading skill, it relates to students' ability to decode and cognitively process English input provided in the form of texts. Such English input is dense with linguistic, rhetorical, cultural, intercultural, discursive, and interpretative knowledge (Anggraini et al., 2021; Aryadi et al., 2020; Hidayah, 2017; Kusumaningputri & Widodo, 2018; Sukyadi, 2015). Also, such input calls for students' cognitive and metacognitive awareness (Farzam, 2018; Harputlu & Ceylan, 2014; Teng, 2019) so that they can comprehend the input. In this sense, the efforts to comprehend text-based input is called reading comprehension.

Since reading becomes the primary source of input and knowledge in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning and acquisition due to limited natural English speaking environments, comprehension is a crucial factor or ability. Reading is an important language skill, and a comprehensive understanding of EFL reading comprehension growth is needed for successful reading comprehension support in language learning (Tümen Akyıldız & Çelik, 2021; Yakut & Aydın, 2017; Anggraini, Afriani., & Riswanto, 2020). Reading comprehension can be thought of as multifaceted and dynamic relationships among meanings, behavior, readers, and texts in several ways. It is a process by which readers interact with written language to extract and infer meanings (Habók et al., 2019; Hellerstein-Yehezkel, 2017). Readers, texts, and actions of reading in which comprehension is contained are the three components of reading comprehension.

Since the reading comprehension process is so complex, many EFL readers assume that being fluent in the target language is a challenging task (Shang, 2016; Saputri, Rizal, & Afriani, 2021)). As a consequence, text comprehension involves the efficient and integrated coordination of skills. Since they do not take an engaging approach to the entire written text, EFL students face a variety of challenges throughout the reading comprehension period (Namaziandost et al., 2019). Learners must have a sufficient understanding of grammar and vocabulary as the key components of reading texts in order to take an immersive approach to text comprehension. The importance of grammar in reading comprehension is backed up by previous research findings. For Example, see studies conducted by Aryadoust and Baghaei (2016) and Cushing (2020). The Structural Deficit Theory suggests that syntactic processing

deficits are the origin of learners' reading difficulties (Landi & Ryherd, 2017). Text comprehension at higher processing speeds is highly difficult, according to this theory, due to a lack of grammatical information or processing capacity. Syntactic understanding also assists students in more successfully completing reading comprehension assignments. Almost all of the problems EFL readers have with reading comprehension are due to a lack of linguistic skills. A number of studies have been conducted to explore readers' skills and techniques when they read (e.g., Cano et al., 2014; Keenan et al., 2008; Law, 2009; Mohammadi et al., 2020; Mojarrabi Tabrizi et al., 2019; Wawire & Zuilkowski, 2021).

Studies highlighted above have contributed to the fields they oriented to. However, there has been very little empirical research on how grammar, in this regard, especially English connectors, affects EFL reading comprehension. In the case of connectors, different types of connectors are used to add continuity to text content in a variety of reading materials. Readers may use connectors to create a cohesive mental image of how text fragments are connected (Carella, 2011; Molencki, 2011). Connectors within text segments signify both the nature and the form of a relationship, which helps to keep the text together. Few studies have looked into the significance of connectors in the sense of their impacts on reading comprehension (See Das and Taboada (2018); Kleijn (2018); and Kleijn et al., (2019)). Since they enhance text coherence, connectors are an integral part of sentence structure. Connectors are lexical artifacts that a writer or speaker uses to connect facts, clauses, or ideas in a text to explain its meaning (Bolton et al., 2002; Carella, 2011; Carrió-Pastor, 2013; Dupont, 2015; Molencki, 2011; Swan, 2005). The analysis of sentence connectors is divided into three approaches. To begin with, several well-known researchers have been working on the realm of sentence connectors. Connectors were listed as adversative, additive, temporal, and causal by Halliday and Hasan (1976); summative, listing, resulting, appositional, contrastive, transitional connectors, and inferential connectors are the categories made by Quirk et al. (1985). There are also some other classifications (see Biber et al., 1999; Carter and McCarthy, 2006; and Martin and Rose, 2003). When it comes to categorizing text-connectors in meta-discourse research, scholars generally take a wider means. Without specifying any subcategories, Mauranen (1993) called it "internal connectors. Aligned with Martin and Rose (2003), Hyland (2005) split connectors into those that express contrast, series, and addition, placing sequencers in the frame markers group. The roles of connectors influence how they are perceived, studied, and used. Although previous research has shown the significance of connectors in text comprehension, there has been no research comparing explicit and implicit instructions of English connectors in terms of their impacts on EFL reading comprehension.

The provision of the most detailed description of the language's rules and norms by the instructor is referred to as explicit teaching (Asiyaban et al., 2020; Basturkmen, 2018; *Linguists: Journal of Linguistics and Language Teaching* Vol. 7, No. 1, July 2021

Potgieter & Conradie, 2013; Sanz, 2018; Zarei et al., 2020). As a consequence, students who receive specific instructions can acquire grammatical knowledge directly (Criado, 2016; Tsai, 2019). Implicit instruction, on the other hand, encourages students to think about the language and create their own generalization of rules. Implicit teaching is exemplified by experiential approaches that focus the learners' attention by allowing them to respond to grammatical rules (Asiyaban et al., 2020). The use of overt methods to teach learners by raising their consciousness is referred to as explicit teaching. Trial-and-error, explanation, monitoring, and observation are all examples of an explicit instruction (García-Fuentes & McDonough, 2018). In a highly structured environment, the aim of explicit teaching is to draw students' attention to a specific learning goal. The teacher uses presentations, examples, and practice to introduce concepts to the students (Brown, 2000). Explicit instruction causes further noticing, which is critical for matching feedback to intake. Implicit instruction, on the other hand, is a unique type of language instruction in which learners learn by exploration. Subsequently, implicit learning represents an information acquisition without being led by deliberate elaborations, thus students make use of their active cognition to generate their own concepts (Brown, 2001; Tavakoli & Zarrinabadi, 2018). In such a way, the knowledge and ability of language rules are acquired naturally and incidentally. Based on clear theoretical strengths of both explicit and implicit language rules-related teaching, the present study is therefore driven to find out the impacts of explicit and implicit teaching of English connectors on EFL students' reading comprehension.

## **METHOD**

This study applied a quasi-experimental method (Creswell, 2007; Fraenkel et al., 2012; Gall et al., 2003; Yazan, 2015) since the samples incorporated could not be randomized. The current study involved 50 EFL learners as the samples. They were the third semester undergraduate students from an English department at a university in Bengkulu. In selecting the participants, the researchers were helped by an administrator of English department who managed the documents related to students' placement test scores. The administrator helped provide the data of EFL students' profiles in terms of their reading ability based on their latest placement test scores of EFL reading comprehension. The distribution of such scores varied, but the researchers took two classes of students who had the most similar average scores in EFL reading skill. Their demographic data showed that out of 50 individuals, there were 16 female and 9 male students in the first class, and there were 14 female 11 male students in the second class. The first class was set to be the explicit teaching class, and the second class was positioned as the implicit teaching class.

The experimentation adopted a pre-test post-test control group design (Ary et al., 2010). The experimentation was conducted by teaching students in the first class English connectors through reading texts using an explicit teaching method. In this study, the explicit class was categorized as an experimental class. Those of the second class were taught English connectors through reading texts using implicit teaching. This class was called a control class. The targeted effects of the two treatments were subjected to students' reading comprehension. The experimentation was helped by an English lecturer who taught English stylistics because the researchers borrowed his class to conduct the experimentation. The reason for borrowing his class was because he taught the stylistics subject using various texts containing a variety of English styles. In so doing, the students were by nature exposed by many kinds of English reading texts containing an adequate degree of vocabulary size.

The researchers collaborated with the stylistics lecturer to provide the treatments in the form of explicit teaching of English connectors in the experimental class and implicit teaching of English connectors in the control class. During the treatments of both classes, in the middle of receiving stylistic materials, students of both classes were given a section of reading comprehension learning for about 30 minutes for each meeting. There were 8 meetings of treatments in explicit and implicit classes (see table 1 for explicit and implicit teaching procedures). For 30 minutes, those in the explicit class were taught reading comprehension added by direct explanations of English connectors available the text read from rules to examples. Meanwhile, those of the implicit class were taught reading comprehension added by implicit explanations of English connectors available in the text read, whereby students were triggered in some ways to generalize their own versions of rules from the example uses of connectors.

**Table 1. Explicit and Implicit Teaching Procedures**

Procedure in Explicit Teaching (Experimental) Class	Procedure in Implicit Teaching (Control) Class
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students are working with English reading texts.</li> <li>2. Students are given direct explanations about English connectors found in the texts.</li> <li>3. Explicit teaching takes place resting upon the following steps:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Application of the rules by the lecturer in a way that the lecturer gives adequate examples and explanations to students</li> <li>b. Detailed explanations of rules by the lecturer</li> <li>c. Students' engagement in understanding the rules explained by the lecturer</li> <li>d. Examples and the related analysis by the lecturer</li> <li>e. Students create their own examples as guided by the lecturer</li> <li>f. Exercise</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students are working with English reading texts.</li> <li>2. Implicit teaching takes place resting upon the following steps:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Presentation of examples and illustration by the lecturer</li> <li>b. Analysis of examples by students</li> <li>c. Generalization by students</li> <li>d. Explanations of generalized rules by students</li> <li>e. Exercise</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

The materials of English connectors in both classes were similar. They consisted of English connectors associated with topicalizers, sequencers, transitions, and code glosses. Sequencers contained *first, second, third, and so on; firstly, secondly, thirdly, and so on; finally; last; and lastly*. Topicalizers entailed connective words such as *concerning, as for, in the case of, and so on*. Code glosses consisted of *for instance, for example, especially, this means, in other words and so on*. Transitions fell into *although, as well, because, moreover, therefore, and so on*. A variety of English connectors as the foregoing were taught in eight meetings based on their appearances in the texts that students dealt with.

### Measures and analysis

Before students of both groups were taught English connectors using explicit and implicit teaching, they were given a pre-test, and a post-test was also given after they received the eighth treatments. Both pre- and post-test adopted the same test, namely 50 multiple questions of English reading comprehension test adopted from the reading section of TOEFL ITP. Such a test consisted of 5 passages in which each passage was followed by 10 questions. There were some sub-elements of reading comprehension that became the test indicators. They consisted of main idea, stated details, unstated details, explicit information, implicit information, vocabularies, and references. Before the test was officially used to collect the data, the test was validated in terms of content and construct validity, and the reliability of the test was also measured statistically.

To reach the ideal validity of content, the 50 multiple questions of the test were analyzed by three English lecturers who were knowledgeable and experienced in the fields of English reading comprehension subject, English grammar subject (this lecturer focused on looking into the distribution of English connectors contained in each passage), and English test evaluation. The three lecturers reached an agreement that the test was valid already. Subsequently, *Bivariate person correlation* was employed to measure the construct validity, and the result demonstrated that the test was considered valid because the obtained *r* table was 0.447 based upon the *df* of 18, with sig 5%. Subsequently, the result of *Cronbach Alpha* calculation also indicated that the test was reliable as it was proven by the value of *Alpha* of 0.85 higher than 0.7.

Both pre- and post-tests took 55 minutes to be accomplished. This duration was aligned with the rule of TOEFL ITP for reading section. In summary, students of both classes initially took a pre-test, continuously received explicit and implicit teaching of English connectors for eight times, and finally took a post-test. It is important to be underlined that the processes of pre-test, eight treatments of explicit and implicit teaching of English

connectors for respective class, and post-test were undertaken online via Google meet application as the medium of communication. The foregoing was due to the phenomenon of Covid-19 pandemic leading to the governmental rule to conduct any staging of learning online. Subsequently, following the principles of experimental study's analysis as recommended by Bourdieu et al. (2016), the impacts of explicit and implicit instructions of English connectors on EFL students' reading comprehension were analyzed using paired sample t-test and independent sample t-test.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Findings**

As explained in the method section, prior to receiving treatments in the form of explicit and implicit instructions of English connectors in both experimental (explicit teaching) and control (implicit teaching) classes, despite being not able to be randomized, the homogeneous conditions of students from the two classes were pursued. Based on the descriptive statistics of students' data of the two classes given by the staff administrator of English department, the means of students prior reading skill pursuant to their previous placement test scores was 55.7 with SD of 20.2 for students of explicit teaching class, and the means of ones' reading skill in the implicit teaching class was 57.2 with SD of 23.2. Compared to other classes, the means scores of the two classes were the most similar. Subsequently, as suggested by Deng et al. (2014); Glaser (2014); and Parra-Frutos (2009), Levene's test was employed to statistically ensure their degree of homogeneity. The students' placement test data were utilized for computing the Levene's test. In so doing, the groups were homogeneous in terms of variances ( $P > 0.05$ ) as proven by Levene's test of homogeneity. As a result, the independent samples t-test can be safely used as a final data analysis computation. The statistical value of the independent samples t-test is greater than 0.05 ( $t = 0.178$ ,  $P = 0.845$ ), indicating that there was no significant difference in the scores of reading skill based on their prior placement test scores between the students in the explicit class and those of the implicit class. Conclusively, students of the two groups were homogeneous, and they met the requirement to be the samples of experimentation.

## The impacts of explicit and implicit instructions of English connectors on EFL students' reading comprehension

Using a paired sample t-test and an independent sample t-test, the impacts of explicit and implicit instructions of English connectors on EFL students' reading comprehension were assessed. Table 2 summarizes the findings of the data analysis:

**Table 2. The results of data analysis of the impacts of explicit and implicit instructions of English connectors on EFL students' reading comprehension**

Elements of Measures	Explicit Teaching (Experimental) Class		Implicit Teaching (Control) Class	
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
Mean	55.5	78.5	56	66.75
SD	21.057	19.787	23.55	25.05
N	25	25	25	25
Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Table 2 shows that in the explicit teaching (experimental) class, the difference between the pre-test and post-test was statistically significant ( $p=0.0000.05$ ). In the implicit teaching (control) class, There was also a significant difference ( $p=0.0000.05$ ) between the pre-test and post-test. Both classes' post-test means were higher than their pre-test averages. The data conditions showed that the post-test means in the explicit teaching (experimental) class were 78.5 and 66.75 in the implicit teaching (control) class, respectively, and the pre-test mean score in the explicit teaching (experimental) class was 55.5. Subsequently, 56 was the pre-test mean score in the implicit teaching (control) class. As a result of the data conditions, it was discovered that English connectors' explicit and implicit interventions influenced EFL students' reading comprehension.

According to the results of the independent sample t-test, there was a significant difference in post-test results between explicit teaching (experimental) and implicit teaching (control) groups ( $p=0.0000.05$ ). The implicit teaching (control) class's post-test mean ( $M=66.75$ ) was higher than the explicit teaching (experimental) class's ( $M=78.5$ ). In comparison to those in the implicit teaching (control) class, EFL learners in the explicit teaching (experimental) class improved their reading comprehension.

### Discussion

The aim of this study was to see how explicit and implicit instructions of English connectors affected EFL students' reading comprehension. Two groups of EFL students from an English department at a university in Bengkulu were incorporated in the current study. Their humongous reading skill had been got based on the data of prior English placement test



they already took. Explicit instruction of English connectors was given to one group, and implicit instruction of English connectors was given to the other. After the treatment period as many as eight treatments, a post-test was given to see if the treatments had any impact on the students' reading comprehension. According to statistical tests, both explicit and implicit teaching was successful in improving their reading comprehension. A cross examination of the groups revealed that in terms of impacts on reading comprehension, the explicit instruction of English connectors was significantly more effective than the implicit instruction of English connectors.

The importance of connectors in the reading comprehension phase has been highlighted in previous research, and the positive effects of explicit and implicit connector instructions on reading comprehension improvement are consistent. Kleijn et al. (2019) discovered that connectors have a big influence on text comprehension during their study. Moreover, another study conducted by Chung (2000) has also found that conjunctions as part of connectors play a role in reading comprehension, which is consistent with the current study's data. The relationship between connectors as fundamental elements that promote fluency in understanding texts serves as the theoretical explanation for connectors' contribution to reading comprehension. According to Lotfipour (2006), connectors would increase students' reading comprehension by attaching texture and coherence to documents, sentences, and events sequences. Wang and Guo (2014) also point out that the text's lexical and syntactic features also contribute to reading comprehension. Subsequently, having a consistent relationship between text elements makes it easier to incorporate them into a text, leading to better text comprehension (Kleijn et al., 2019).

The present study's results, which show that explicitly teaching connectors improves reading comprehension, are in line with previous studies on the role of explicit teaching in language learning and reading comprehension in particular. For example, the effect of explicit instruction on L2 learners' use of discourse markers in speech was examined by Davatgari Asl and Moradinejad (2016). As the foregoing, students in the experimental group used discourse markers more accurately and reliably than those in the control group. Explicit instruction of discourse markers yielded better results, and learners who obtained connectors at the discourse stage performed better in reading comprehension.

The current study unveiled that the implicit connector instruction, despite being not as effective as the explicit one, increased reading comprehension. This finding is in line with implicit teaching's theoretical underpinnings as a form of instruction that stresses the naturalistic essence of language learning (Tavakoli & Zarrinabadi, 2018). As the foregoing,

an implicit instruction also encourages self-regulated learning and enhances the acquisition of the learned language (Mohammadi et al., 2020; Uztosun, 2017; H. Wang & Chen, 2019). Similar to incidental language learning, an implicit instruction is characterized by its natural and spontaneous nature (Webb & Nation, 2017). Nevertheless, the current study's data show that the explicit instruction of English connectors enhances reading comprehension more than the implicit instruction of English connectors.

## CONCLUSION

The present study revealed that explicit and implicit instructions of English connectors have positive effects on EFL students' reading comprehension. However, the explicit instruction of English connectors enhances reading comprehension more significantly and more effectively. The current study proposes a couple of implications. First, it is inferred that teaching English connectors should be prioritized in language classes in general, and in EFL reading lessons in particular. Second, an explicit instruction of English connectors is strongly recommended. Such implications must be understood by all people participating in the field of language teaching especially EFL teaching. The developers of EFL materials and syllabus, for example, must consider leading the practitioners or teachers to teaching English connectors explicitly in order to improve EFL students' reading comprehension. The current study's results should not be taken as conclusive, as is the case for almost all observational studies, and further replication of this study is required to draw more firm conclusions.

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