

RPPLE Method in Teaching and Learning Discourse of Pre-University Student

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ABSTRACT

Discourse is an essential element in conveying ideas or messages so that they can be clearly understood by the reader. Ideas are organized in an orderly, structured, and sequential manner to produce a complete text, and the use of discourse markers plays a vital role in ensuring cohesion and coherence. Among the key discourse markers that need emphasis are reference, connectors, substitution, lexical choice, and ellipsis, as these create harmony between linguistic elements while sustaining the flow of ideas. Building on Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory (1976), which highlights the importance of grammatical and lexical cohesion, the RPPLE method was developed through four phases: concept understanding, method design, method development, and method evaluation. The main objective of this method is to assist pre-university students in producing impactful academic writing while preparing them with strong discourse skills before entering university. Initial findings revealed that many students still lack the ability to use appropriate discourse markers in both spoken and written contexts, and thus the RPPLE method was introduced to address this gap. Its effectiveness is evidenced by the significant improvement in results, with the proportion of students achieving grade A increasing to 63.3% compared to 0% previously. Therefore, the RPPLE method should be applied by Form 6 Malay language teachers to help students develop quality discourse that demonstrates cohesion and coherence, serving as early preparation for tertiary-level studies.

Keywords: discourse, cohesion, RPPLE, Halliday and Hasan (1976), academic writing

INTRODUCTION

Discourse refers to a unit of language larger than a sentence, encompassing the structured arrangement of form and meaning with the aim of conveying a complete message in communication, whether spoken or written. As highlighted by Nurmasitah and Jama'yah (2015), information becomes difficult to interpret or fully understand if a discourse lacks cohesive elements to connect its parts. Cohesion, therefore, is a crucial concept to ensure the smooth flow and continuity of meaning between sentences and paragraphs in a text. In other words, the deliberate use of cohesive devices within a discourse enables readers or listeners to identify interrelationships between ideas, thereby facilitating deeper comprehension of the message being conveyed.

Halliday and Hasan (1976), in their seminal work *Cohesion in English*, introduced the theory of discourse cohesion, which has become a fundamental basis in modern linguistic studies. They emphasized that both grammatical and lexical aspects play a crucial role in achieving cohesion, as a text can only be regarded as a unified discourse when cohesive relationships semantically bind its internal elements. They identified five main principles of cohesion: (i) reference, (ii) conjunction, (iii) substitution, (iv) lexical cohesion, and (v) ellipsis. Based on this framework, it can be argued that discourse unity is not solely dependent on grammatical structure but also on the meaningful relationships constructed between elements of a text. This theory provides discourse researchers with an analytical tool to evaluate the strength and effectiveness of a text by examining the degree of cohesion present within it (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Ineffective discourse delivery often results in information or messages that are vague and difficult for the

audience to understand. This issue is closely related to an individual's mastery of the skills needed to link ideas through coherence and cohesion. As highlighted in the study by Arbak and Ahmad Khair (2016), the arrangement of information and sentences must function as a unit in both utterances and textual contexts, incorporating syntactic features that should be explicitly expressed in a discourse. Furthermore, limited mastery in the use of words, phrases, or clauses that demonstrate coherence and cohesion reduces one's ability to connect ideas with appropriate supporting details and relevant examples, whether in spoken or written form. Similarly, Neng Lia, Mohammad Fadzeli, and Harishon (2023) emphasized that knowledge of cohesive and coherent elements enables students to determine the types of relationships that should exist between ideas, thereby ensuring that the issue or topic being discussed can be clearly understood by all parties involved.

Therefore, studies on discourse writing among pre-university students—referring to those enrolled in programs under the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) such as matriculation, foundation, Form 6, polytechnics, and others—are particularly significant. Initial findings indicate that pre-university students, especially Form 6 students in the field of Malay language, face difficulties in producing discourse that systematically connects its parts to generate unified and meaningful writing. These challenges are closely linked to their limited use of the five principles of discourse markers highlighted by Halliday and Hasan (1976), namely reference, conjunction, substitution, lexical cohesion, and ellipsis. In response to this, the RPPL method has been introduced in the teaching and learning of discourse to strengthen students' readiness to produce effective and high-quality writing as they transition into university-level studies. Accordingly, this study aims (i) to identify the level of discourse mastery among pre-university students in Malay academic writing, and (ii) to analyze the effectiveness of the RPPL method in enhancing the teaching and learning of discourse in Malay academic writing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on discourse have been extensively carried out by previous researchers across various dimensions, particularly in relation to levels of achievement and mastery. Among these are the works of Neng Lia, Mohamad Fadzeli, and Harishon (2023), Marzni, Nur Mimi, and Marni (2025), as well as Arbak and Ahmad Khair (2016). In addition, research focusing on teaching and learning methods has also been conducted by Hidayah and Nor Maizatul (2024), Nurhanna Syahira et al. (2024), Zul Izuddin and Kama Shaffee (2023), and Juwairiah et al. (2018).

The study by Neng Lia, Mohammad Fadzeli, and Harishon (2023) revealed that in discourse, the use of presentation markers—such as the marker word *paraton* or the use of interrogative sentences—plays a crucial role in highlighting the presence of ideas coherently, as well as in establishing cohesion when introducing or linking new ideas to those already discussed within a teaching context. They further emphasized that presentation markers not only demonstrate the cohesiveness of a discourse but also foster a sense of respect between the speaker and the audience, thereby enhancing the interpersonal dimension of communication.

A study by Marzni, Nur Mimi, and Marni (2025) on the effectiveness of applying discourse marker models, auxiliary words, and Malay descriptive words highlights the importance of specific lexical items in discourse when conveying ideas, particularly in essay writing. Their findings emphasize that discourse markers, auxiliary words, and descriptive terms are essential in demonstrating the interweaving of ideas within an essay in relation to the given topic. They further note that a good essay is not solely defined by the accuracy of its ideas but also by the effective use of words that connect ideas within and between paragraphs, thereby ensuring that the discussion consistently aligns with the main topic. Consequently, they argue that teaching methods grounded in appropriate models or theories should be developed and applied by teachers to enhance students' ability to produce essays characterized by quality discourse.

In addition, Arbak and Ahmad Khair (2016) emphasized that the structure of a discourse should be assessed based on the arrangement of ideas by examining the presence and role of elements within each sentence, such as morphemes, words, phrases, or clauses. They argued that a sentence does not exist independently in language communication but is always intertwined and related to other sentences within the discourse. Thus, the weaving of ideas—achieved through cohesion and coherence—must be mastered in order to enhance the effective use of lexical items that connect the parts of a discourse to its topic. Without these elements, the

sentences produced will fail to convey the intended meaning of the discussion.

The study by Hidayah and Nor Maizatul (2024) on the diversity of strategies in education found that effective teaching methods depend largely on a teacher's creativity and expertise in selecting strategies, planning, preparing, and implementing instruction to achieve the intended learning goals. They further emphasized that if teaching methods are not suited to the varying levels of students, the skills being taught and the materials provided will negatively influence students' ability to understand and master those skills. This highlights the importance of ensuring that the teaching methods employed are both appropriate and effective in meeting learners' needs.

Meanwhile, a study by Nurhanna Syahira et al. (2024) highlighted that effective learning management requires adherence to specific requirements within a teaching and learning session, particularly the integration of diverse teaching resources through both existing and innovative methods, including the use of information technology as a key element to capture students' attention. In other words, teachers must remain responsive to current developments and student needs by aligning skills, materials, and teaching methods in ways that create impact and enhance the effectiveness of the learning process.

This statement is supported by the findings of Zul Izuddin and Kama Shaffee (2023), who observed that conventional-based teaching methods are no longer relevant as students' interest and attention have shifted away from outdated approaches, resulting in weak engagement during teaching and learning sessions. This situation highlights the need for teachers to initiate change by diversifying their instructional strategies while also developing a deeper understanding of curriculum components. At the same time, teachers must implement teaching methods that are flexible and suitable for students across different proficiency levels to ensure effective learning outcomes.

Juwairiah et al. (2018) further emphasized that in Malay language teaching, innovation must be integrated into instructional methods to ensure that students can effectively engage with the learning process. Their study revealed that teaching methods should remain relevant to current needs and contexts, particularly for students who are directly involved in the learning process. As such, interactive and innovative elements must be applied to make learning more interesting, focused, and well-structured, while simultaneously enhancing knowledge acquisition and overall achievement. In other words, innovative and interactive teaching approaches not only attract international learners to study Malay but also increase the enthusiasm of Malaysian students and communities in participating in diverse teaching and learning practices. In line with this perspective, the present study applies the RPPL method in the teaching and learning of discourse writing skills among Form 6 students.

It is evident that discourse plays a crucial role in conveying messages or ideas through lexical elements that demonstrate cohesion and coherence, with the ultimate aim of ensuring that the information delivered is clearly understood and perceived as meaningful. To enhance writing skills and the ability to communicate effectively, various methods and strategies can be employed, including the RPPL method as applied in this study. By adopting appropriate teaching methods grounded in discourse theory, learners can be guided to produce discourse that is not only effective and coherent but also of high quality and impact in communicating ideas or messages related to a given topic.

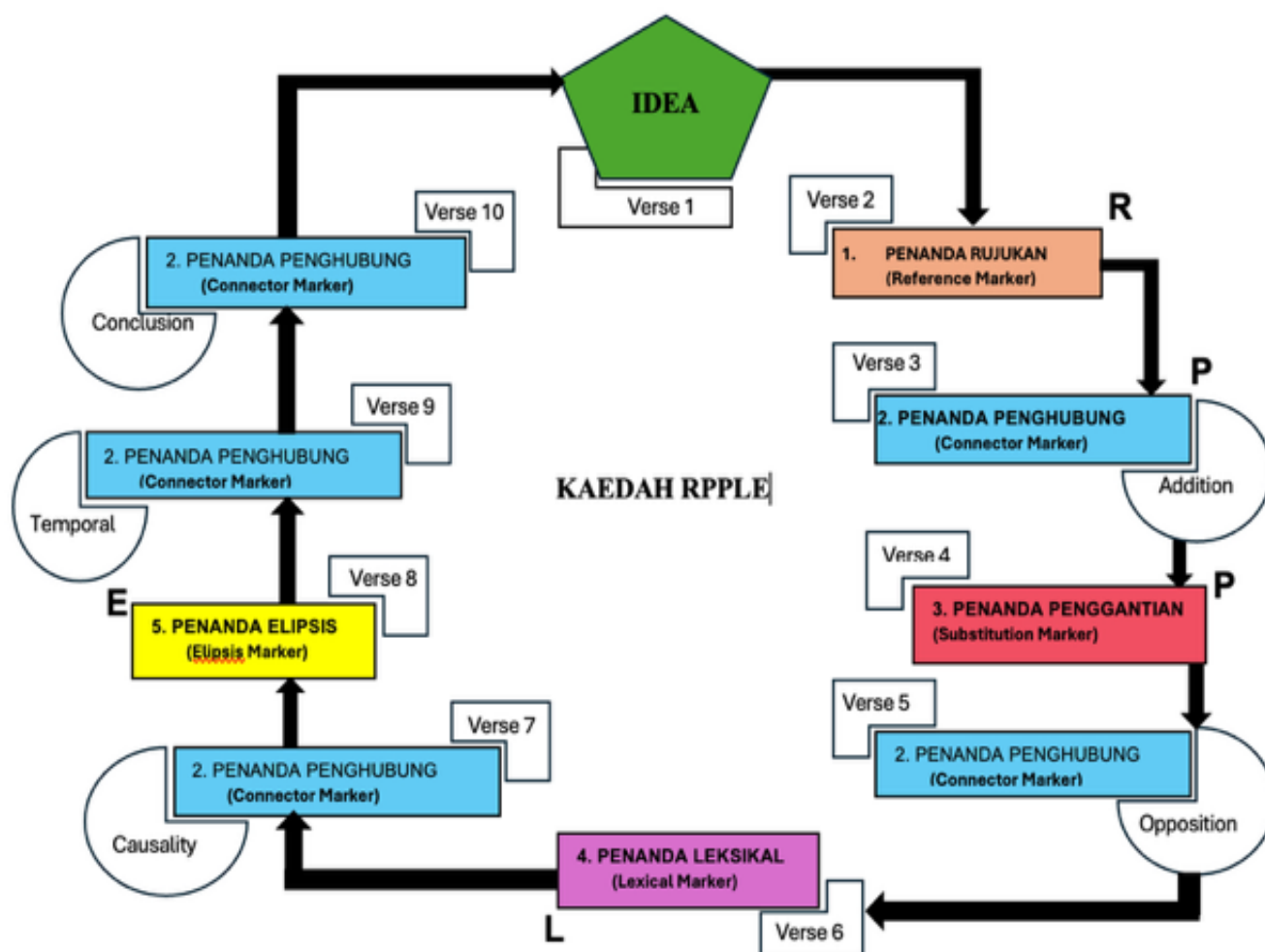
METODOLOGY

Methodology plays a vital role in ensuring that research is conducted using approaches that are appropriate, relevant to the field of study, and capable of addressing the research problem statements. This study employed a qualitative research method to enable the collection of detailed and in-depth data on the effectiveness of the RPPL method in enhancing the academic writing of pre-university students through the application and use of appropriate discourse markers, as emphasized in Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory (1976). The study sample comprised Form 6 students from three schools in Mukah, Sarawak—referred to as Schools X, Y, and Z. A total of 30 participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with 10 students chosen from each school. Although the sample represents a relatively homogeneous group, it was still able to provide the necessary insights for this research, as each selected

participant contributed towards achieving the common objective of evaluating the effectiveness of the RPPL method (Mohd Badrul, Wan Muna, & M. Khalid, 2023).

In addition, pre-tests and post-tests were conducted to measure the effectiveness of the RPPL method in enhancing pre-university students' ability to construct coherent discourse with strong and appropriate cohesion. This aligns with Marsden and Torgerson (2012), who emphasized the importance of pre- and post-testing in enabling researchers to determine measurable improvements in the subject being studied. Furthermore, the development of the RPPL method was structured into several phases, as Norafidah (2017) explains that each phase in a teaching and learning model serves to bridge gaps from multiple perspectives, including theory, knowledge, and practice. Accordingly, the construction of the RPPL method was carried out through four phases: (i) Concept Understanding Stage, (ii) RPPL Method Design, (iii) RPPL Method Development, and (iv) RPPL Method Evaluation, all of which were guided by Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory (1976). After undergoing the four phases of teaching and learning method development, the procedure for implementing the RPPL method in strengthening the academic writing discourse of pre-university students is illustrated in figure 1. This procedure was designed based on Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory (1976), which emphasizes the use of reference, conjunction, substitution, lexical cohesion, and ellipsis as essential elements in producing coherent and cohesive discourse.

Figure 1: RPPL Method based on Halliday and Hasan's Theory (1976)



Based on figure 1, the discourse produced by the study samples is strengthened through the systematic application of all five principles of cohesion to construct discourse around a single idea or topic related to a given issue or writing task. The integration of these five principles enables the discourse to become more organized and unified, producing meaning that is impactful for the reader. The principles emphasized in the RPPL method do not only include reference, conjunction, substitution, lexical cohesion, and ellipsis, but also extend to the sub-principles of conjunctions such as addition, opposition, causality, temporality, and conclusion, which must be embedded within each sentence of the discourse. In other words, a coherent and

cohesive discourse must incorporate all of the principles highlighted in Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory (1976) to ensure effective and impactful delivery. Table 1 presents an example of discourse constructed using the RPPL method, with words or phrases highlighted in blue to indicate the application of cohesion principles within each sentence.

Table 1: Example of Discourse based on the RPPL method

Verse	RPPL Method	Sentence
Verse 1	Idea	Language politeness is an important element that needs to be instilled in students' communication skills at school.
Verse 2	Reference Marker	Their tendency to imitate impolite language is feared to influence language development.
Verse 3	Connector Marker (Addition)	Moreover, with the advancement of technology that is able to spread various information without borders.
Verse 4	Substitution Marker	This situation exposes students to negative communication elements until they begin to practice them.
Verse 5	Connector Marker (Opposition)	Students are like a blank canvas who need to be educated and exposed to positive values so that they can grow into useful individuals.
Verse 6	Lexical Marker	The future leaders of the nation must be nurtured from a young age to be aware of the need to practice politeness in life.
Verse 7	Connector Marker (Causality)	This is not only intended to enhance politeness in communication, but also to enable future leaders to guide the nation by treating all citizens with respect, regardless of race or religion.
Verse 8	Elipsis Marker	Continuous efforts beginning at school must be carried out to ensure that students are able to benefit from it.
Verse 9	Connector Marker (Temporal)	Sustained and ongoing steps until they reach adulthood are expected to educate and shape them into individuals with strong character and enduring values of politeness.
Verse 10	Connector Marker (Conclusion)	Therefore, this effort does not rest solely on the shoulders of teachers; parents and the community must also play their respective roles.

The RPPL method can be identified through the use of specific words that reflect the cohesion principles introduced by Halliday and Hasan (1976). As illustrated in Table 1, the ideas or issues discussed must remain focused so that the elements of RPPL can be woven into a cohesive and coherent discourse. For example, Verse 1 shows that the ideas presented in writing should be clearly elaborated to guide pre-university students in selecting appropriate words that correspond to the RPPL principles, enabling them to weave ideas effectively—whether sentence to sentence or paragraph to paragraph. However, initial analysis revealed that most pre-university students tend to write without fully integrating all the cohesion principles as suggested in Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory (1976). Therefore, the introduction of an innovative teaching model guided by the RPPL method serves as a practical tool to support teachers in instruction and to assist pre-university students in learning how to produce quality discourse, thereby achieving stronger academic writing standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the pre-test analysis, the discourse writing produced by the study samples consisted of only five to six sentences to explain an idea. Moreover, the ideas conveyed did not cover the overall aspects of the discourse under discussion. This shows that the intended meaning was not clearly communicated, leading to ambiguity or misunderstanding, whereas in academic writing, writers are expected to explain ideas accurately and scientifically to justify every phenomenon discussed. The findings also revealed that the sentence structures produced by the study samples did not emphasize the five cohesion principles outlined by Halliday and Hasan (1976), resulting in discourse that lacked unity. The students only applied a limited number of cohesive principles when expressing their ideas, causing the discourse to have less impact in terms of clarity, understanding, and interconnectedness. This situation highlights the urgent need for a method that can strengthen pre-university students' academic writing discourse to ensure they are well-prepared before pursuing their studies at the university level, where academic writing is a fundamental skill required for producing assignments across disciplines.

The implementation of the RPPL method, developed through four phases as outlined earlier, revealed notable changes in the academic writing discourse of the study samples. When applied in Schools X, Y, and Z in Mukah, Sarawak, the method enabled students to gradually master the approach by producing longer and more structured discourses. Specifically, the students began using ten sentences to elaborate on a single idea, with sentences two to ten systematically incorporating the five cohesion principles along with their sub-principles, as illustrated in Diagram 1 and Table 1. For instance, sentence two applied reference markers, sentence three employed additive connectors, sentence four used substitution, sentence five applied opposition connectors, sentence six incorporated lexical cohesion, sentence seven used causal connectors, sentence eight demonstrated ellipsis, sentence nine applied temporal connectors, and sentence ten concluded with conclusive markers. By emphasizing these principles and their sub-categories, the discourse produced was not only coherent but also demonstrated continuity of meaning between sentences, paragraphs, and overall ideas, thereby elevating the quality and impact of students' academic writing.

Table 2 presents the pre- and post-test scores of the study samples involved in this research. The results indicate significant improvements, demonstrating that the discourse of pre-university students began to develop positively through the application of the RPPL method. Analysis of the essays tested revealed that 23 students achieved score increases of 60% or more, while the remaining seven recorded improvements of 40%. These findings provide clear evidence that the RPPL method enhances students' ability to produce quality discourse by integrating and unifying linguistic and sub-linguistic elements. In addition, the method offers teachers a valuable alternative for diversifying instructional strategies, particularly in the teaching of academic writing, thereby contributing to more effective and impactful teaching and learning practices.

Table 2: Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

Study Sample	Pre Test (100 marks)	Post Test (100 marks)
SK1	24%	85%
SK2	13%	73%
SK3	30%	90%
SK4	19%	79%
SK5	28%	89%
SK6	20%	80%
SK7	20%	60%
SK8	20%	60%
SK9	24%	87%
SK10	30%	92%
SK11	22%	83%

SK12	27%	88%
SK13	20%	60%
SK14	10%	70%
SK15	21%	81%
SK16	19%	80%
SK17	17%	77%
SK18	22%	82%
SK19	20%	81%
SK20	25%	86%
SK21	24%	83%
SK22	24%	64%
SK23	25%	66%
SK24	21%	81%
SK25	28%	89%
SK26	27%	87%
SK27	25%	86%
SK28	20%	63%
SK29	15%	55%
SK30	23%	83%

Based on Schedule 1, only SK7, SK8, SK13, SK22, SK23, SK28, and SK29 recorded an increase of 40% to 45% in academic writing performance after applying the RPPL method, compared to 27 study samples that demonstrated more significant improvements of 60% to 65%. In addition, the average increase in the number of A grades also showed a notable rise of 63.3%, representing 19 students (SK1, SK3, SK5, SK6, SK9, SK10, SK11, SK12, SK15, SK16, SK18, SK19, SK20, SK21, SK24, SK25, SK26, SK27, and SK30) compared to the results before the implementation of RPPL. These findings clearly prove the effectiveness of the RPPL method in enhancing pre-university students' ability to use cohesion in linking discourse. The strength of this method lies in its emphasis on ensuring that every sentence in a discourse incorporates all five cohesion principles rather than focusing selectively on only certain principles, as observed in the students' previous writing styles. To ensure that ideas are meaningful and impactful, they must be expressed in ways that allow not only comprehension but also clear conveyance of the intended message to the reader or listener. In other words, the RPPL method highlights the comprehensive use of all cohesion principles—including reference, conjunction, substitution, lexical cohesion, and ellipsis—together with the five sub-principles of conjunctions, namely addition, opposition, causality, temporality, and conclusion, as introduced by Halliday and Hasan (1976). This finding supports the view of Rozita, Rahim, and Shahidi (2022), who argued that cohesion-based teaching practices in composition must be designed using a variety of approaches, methods, techniques, and strategies. Teachers, therefore, must not only rely on linguistic knowledge but also integrate comprehensive instructional methods to help students produce discourse that fully applies cohesion principles. As a result, teaching will not only address students' difficulties in linking ideas into solid discourse but will also strengthen their ability to produce quality academic writing that aligns with their educational background.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the RPPL method implemented to strengthen the academic writing discourse of pre-university students has proven effective in enhancing their ability to comprehend and produce discourse that is not only meaningful but also capable of influencing readers' understanding. Beyond improving students' mastery of linguistic structures, the method also facilitates the focused integration of cohesion elements as outlined in Halliday and Hasan's (1976) discourse linguistics theory. As a result, students are able to develop into discourse-literate and critical individuals who can engage effectively in various language contexts through



writing characterized by strong cohesion and coherence. Therefore, the RPPL method should be applied by Malay language teachers in schools and further considered for patenting, alongside the development of interactive innovation kits to support teaching and learning activities. Such efforts would enable the RPPL method to be expanded through comprehensive studies across diverse fields, thereby strengthening its role as a practical and impactful pedagogical model.

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