

**A Corpus-Based Investigation of Occurrences and Functions
of Frame Markers in Filipino University Students'
COVID-19 Written Narratives**

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Abstract

Using corpus-based analysis, this study sought to investigate the occurrences and functions of frame markers in the written narratives of Filipino English-as-a-second language (ESL) university students about their COVID-19 pandemic experience. Specifically, this study analyzed a 344,652-word corpus culled from the 439 pandemic narrative essays of first-year and second-year Filipino ESL undergraduate students written during the first and second semesters of academic year 2020-2021 in a private university. Frame marker was the focus of the investigation due to the very limited studies conducted on this feature of metadiscourse. Although metadiscourse has become an established and most commonly used method in analyzing academic discourse, frame marker, which is one of its interactive features, remains underexplored. In addition, the decision to focus on students' narrative essays was motivated by the relevant and prominent role frame markers play in this type of academic writing. The frame markers in the corpus were analyzed using Laurence Anthony's AntConc concordancer (version 4.2.0). The list of frame markers by Hyland (2005) and Hyland and Zou (2020) was also used to match the hits of frame markers in the corpus. Overall findings indicate that in writing narrative accounts of their individual pandemic experiences, students employ frame markers which assume various functions: sequencer, stage labeller, goal announcer, and topic shifter. These frame markers serve as marking devices to facilitate the readers' understanding of the message of the text by making the structure of the propositional content explicit, offering explicit means to mark the upcoming stages of the text, indicating the overall discursive purposes and intended goals, and indicating that there are changes of focus happening in the text. The findings of the study may inform ESL classrooms on the need to put more emphasis on the teaching of metadiscourse markers, and may also highlight Filipino writers' tendency to

follow certain linguistic or cultural patterns typical of their own discourse community.

1 Introduction

Writing is a crucial component of a student's academic life, often assigned as a means of evaluating their proficiency in essential disciplinary skills such as critical thinking, interpretation, and presentation (Ervin, 2010). Academic writing takes various forms, with essays being the primary medium for students to demonstrate a range of strategies and authoring skills, including careful planning, preparation, and execution (Ebron & Mabuan, 2021). As students progress to higher levels of education, the demands of writing become even more challenging, requiring not only writing skills but also complex reading and thinking abilities (Greene & Lidinsky, 2012). At the tertiary level, students are expected to have acquired a wide range of competencies, including a strong vocabulary, adept mechanical skills, a clear understanding of voice, text structure, and genre, as well as well-developed higher-order thinking skills. Adhering to these academic writing conventions necessitates the maximization of linguistic and cognitive resources. Proficient use of these resources significantly contributes to the quality of students' written outputs, which not only benefit their academic achievement but are also crucial for their development into adulthood.

Despite the importance of academic writing, many students still lack the expected competence to communicate effectively in written format upon entering university. Moreover, the complex writing skills required of them often lead to negative perceptions about academic writing, making it one of the most challenging tasks for teachers (Kirby & Crovitz, 2013). Shannon (2011) broadly defines academic writing as a type of writing accomplished by students in fulfillment of their tertiary education requirements. It is characterized by a formal tone and aims to present precise and objective information about a particular subject (Nordquist, 2011). Academic writing can be classified into various types, such

as technical reports, theses, dissertations, book reports, critiques, translations, course papers, research papers, book articles, abstracts, and essays (Shannon, 2011). Among these types, academic essays have become a major area of investigation for language educators and researchers. According to Tagg (2000), an essay is a piece of non-fiction addressed to someone and aims to make a point and engage the readers with the presented ideas. It can take the form of argumentative/persuasive, narrative, descriptive, comparison and/or contrast, cause and effect, or classification essay, incorporating elements such as observations of daily life, political manifestos, recollections, and arguments (Swales & Feak, 2004).

Numerous studies have explored students' academic essays, investigating their writing difficulties, errors, and strategies for improvement. Researchers have examined paraphrasing abilities and plagiarism perceptions, organizational skills in achieving coherence and cohesion, and students' abilities in writing descriptive, argumentative, and narrative essays (Hasanah & Fatimah, 2020; Keck, 2006; Masniyah, 2017; Pertiwi, 2019; Vrbanec & Meštrovi, 2020). One area of research that has recently gained interest is metadiscourse, a structured basis for analyzing academic texts written by non-native English writers. Hyland (2005) citing Harris (1959) and Vande Kopple (1985) defined metadiscourse as "discourse about discoursing," guiding readers towards the messages in a text. Studies on metadiscourse have focused on its use, misuse, and variations, with an emerging interest in frame markers, a less-discussed aspect of interactive metadiscourse. According to Hyland (2005), frame markers include signaling words *to sequence* (first, to begin with, finally, then, e.g.), *to label stages* (at this point, in conclusion, in the nutshell, etc.), *to announce goals* (aim, goal, there are some reasons, my purpose here is to, etc.) and *to shift topic* (OK, now, well, back to, let us turn to, etc.). These markers also include *announcing phrases that highlight the stages in the writing* such as now you have to and my purpose here is to (Hyland, 2005, p. 51). As Hyland and Zou (2020) observed, metadiscourse has become an established and most frequently used methods in analyzing academic discourse, but one feature, which is the frame marker, remains underexplored. They also emphasized that among

the interactive metadiscourse, it is the least-discussed feature.

While many studies have explored various aspects of academic writing, there is limited research on frame markers, particularly in the context of COVID-19 pandemic written narratives of undergraduate students. Hence, this study aims to investigate frame markers in Filipino university students' narrative essays during the pandemic, identifying common markers and their functions, by addressing the following questions:

1. What frame markers are common among Filipino university students in writing narrative essays?
2. What are the functions of those frame markers?

The findings of this study have the potential to inform English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classrooms about the need to emphasize the teaching of metadiscourse markers, particularly frame markers. Additionally, it may highlight Filipino writers' inclination to follow specific linguistic and cultural patterns characteristic of their discourse community. Through this investigation, we aim to contribute to the understanding of frame markers' role in narrative essays and their impact on students' academic writing abilities.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

1.1.1 Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse plays a crucial role in guiding readers' perception of a text, emphasizing the importance of attitude, assumptions, and personalities in communication (Harris, 1959; Williams, 1981; Vande Kopple, 1985; Crismore, 1989). It goes beyond mere exchange of information, engaging readers as members of a community and illuminating the writer's attitude and credibility (Hyland, 2000). Hyland and Tse (2004) identified three key principles of metadiscourse: its distinction from propositional aspects, its embodiment of interaction between writer and reader, and its focus on internal discourse relations.

1.1.2 Interpersonal Model of Metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005)

This model recognizes two dimensions of interaction: the interactive and interactional

dimensions. The interactive dimension prioritizes organizing discourse to meet readers' needs and achieve the writer's preferred interpretations and goals. The interactional dimension involves the writer intruding on the message to engage readers in dialogue and anticipate their objections and responses.

1.1.3 Frame Markers (Hyland & Zou, 2020)

Frame markers are interactive metadiscourse markers that signal text boundaries and elements of a schematic text structure. They include signaling words for sequencing, labeling stages, announcing goals, and shifting topics, among others.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

A qualitative descriptive research approach was used to answer the research questions. The descriptive approach identified occurrences of frame markers in students' narrative essays, while the qualitative approach determined the functions of these markers.

2.2 Corpus

The study's corpus consists of 344,652 words from 439 pandemic narratives written by first-year and second-year Filipino ESL undergraduate students. The essays were submitted during the first and second semesters of 2020-2021 at a Manila university. Students from various courses, including Nursing, Medical Technology, Tourism, Psychology, and Architecture, wrote the essays about their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the role of art in their lives during this challenging time. The essays were required to have a minimum length of seven paragraphs.

2.3 Data Analysis

The essays were first converted into an electronic corpus by transforming the original word/PDF files into Plain Text files, each containing a minimum of 2,000 words. Since the student essays ranged from 500-1,500 words, two to three essays were combined to meet the 2,000-word requirement for each Text File. Cutting of essays was done at the end of a paragraph to preserve the complete ideas. Frame markers in the corpus were then electronically searched using Laurence Anthony's AntConc (2022), matching the hits with the list of frame markers provided by Hyland (2005) and Hyland and Zou (2020). The specific

list of frame markers used in the study is as follows:

Table 1

Frame Markers

Frame Markers	Examples of common Frame Markers
Sequencing	Finally, First/ Firstly, First of all, Last/ lastly, Next thus, so, there are three reasons for this (etc.) listing (a,b,c, etc) Second/Secondly subsequently Then Third/Thirdly to begin, to start with
Label stages	all in all, at this point, at this stage, by far, for the moment, in a word, in brief, in conclusion, in short, in sum, in summary, on the whole overall, so far, thus far, to conclude, to repeat, to sum up, to summarize
Announce goals	(in) this chapter (in) this part (in) this section aim desire to, focus, goal, intend to, intention, , objective, purpose, seek to, to better understand, want to, wish to, would like to
Shift topic	back to digress, in regard to, move on, now, regarding, resume, return, to revisit, shift to, so, to look more closely, turn to, , well, with regard to

Only sentences with apparent frame markers were thoroughly analyzed and classified according to their functions. To answer RQ1 (common frame markers among Filipino university students in narrative essays), the frequency of each marker was identified using AntConc. To address RQ2 (functions of these frame markers), Hyland's (2005) classification guided the analysis. Frame markers include signaling words for sequencing (e.g., first, to begin with, finally, then), labeling stages (e.g., at this point, in conclusion, in the nutshell), announcing goals (e.g., aim, goal, my purpose here is to), and shifting topics (e.g., OK, now, well, let us turn to). They also include phrases like "now you have to" and "my purpose here is to" (Hyland, 2005, p. 51). To determine whether a marking device functions as a frame marker, Hyland and Zou's (2020) explanations of the specific functions of each category were used: Sequence frame markers are expected to order parts or arguments within a sentence, explicitly structuring propositional content to aid readers' understanding (Hyland, 1998).

1. Label stage frame markers mark upcoming stages or functions of the text, performing tasks like summarizing and explaining, guiding readers

through the discourse's progression, and highlighting rhetorical functions (Tahman, 2004).

2. Goal announcer frame markers indicate the writer's overall discursive purposes and intended goals, establishing the core of the argument and explicitly stating the rhetoric's purpose (Hyland and Jian, 2018; Lim et al., 2015). Topic shifter frame markers signal changes in the discussion's focus, organizing discourse to introduce related or returning topics (Mur-Duenas, 2011). Any marking devices that did not meet these criteria were not classified as frame markers.

4 Results and Discussion

This section presents the occurrences and functions of the investigated frame markers, divided into four categories: sequencers, labellers, goal announcers, and goal shifters. Please refer to the Appendices section for Table 2-5.

Table 2 presents the twenty (20) sequence frame markers investigated in the study. These markers are expected to order parts or arguments in the text, guiding readers' understanding. Among them, 'first' had the highest occurrence (375 instances, 28.06% of total). However, only 37 of these (9.87%) functioned as sequencers, while the rest served non-sequencer roles. Here are some excerpts illustrating the use of 'first' as a sequencer in the students' narrative essays.

(1) *There are three elements of art that I used from the drawing. First, I used the color gray as a background...* (SNE-021).

In excerpts 1 and 2, 'first' was used as a sequence frame marker, particularly as a numerical sequencer. It takes the *initial position* to introduce the first supporting details the writer wishes to discuss. On the other hand, the following excerpts show the non-frame marker functions of 'first' taking the *medial position* in a sentence. They function as *post determiner, noun, or adverb*.

(2) *As seen in the first (POST DET.) visual art, the subject of art is a girl, me, writing in a green journal* (SNE-010).

(3) *...I just wanted to share this experience because quarantine made us experience a lot of firsts (N.) in our lives...*

(4) *When the Beatles first (ADV.) emerged on the scene in the early 1960s, they wore black suits...* (SNE-097).

Next to 'first' is another sequencer which is 'then' which is categorized as temporal sequencer by Hyland and Zou (2020). As the table shows, it occupies the second rank of the most used sequencers. It has a frequency of 239 or 17.88 percent. As a sequencer, it is used to indicate 'what will happen next' or 'what should happen next'. The

following excerpt shows how the students used 'then' as a sequencer.

(5) *Then, I established my proper skincare routine. Not only it cleans my skin, but will also give my face...* (SNE-081).

However, like 'first,' not all the occurrences of 'then' manifested the function of a temporal sequencer, as 53 or 77.82 percent of the occurrences exhibited either an *adverbial*, or a *nominal* function;

(6) *...if I feel like I want to sing and dance then (adverbial)...* (SNE-0129)

(7) *To be honest, it turns our world the other way around that we can feel how well we are going to miss each other when pandemic is over and be apart since then (nominal) because of school* (SNE-060).

Interestingly, there are also instances when 'then' was used as a *binomial adverb* as it displayed eight occurrences like in the following excerpts:

(8) *Reading books is one of my habit every now and then because it gives me a new feeling...* (SNE-029).

Findings reveal that although 'first' is the most common sequencer among students, it doesn't equate to the automatic occurrence of other numerical sequencers like 'second' and 'third' for they show large discrepancies in their percentage of occurrences. In addition, the *-ly* forms of 'first', 'second', and 'third', are not common among students as they recorded only 0 to 1 occurrences. 'First of all' is not also automatically used with 'second of all' or 'third of all'. In summary, results show that out of the 1, 322 occurrences of the twenty (20) sequencers investigated, only 351 of them or 26.55 percent was used as sequence frame markers. 890 of them or 67.32 percent assumed other functions such as *adjectival, adverbial, nominal, post determiner* and *verbal* functions. The data also suggest that although the use of sequencing devices as frame markers may not be very common among Filipino ESL students, the high percentage reported by its use as a non-sequencing device shows its versatility as a discourse marker.

The above findings indicate that the sequence frame marker 'first' was the most frequently used among Filipino university students in their written narratives about the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is noteworthy that only a small proportion of these occurrences (9.87%) functioned as sequencers, while the majority assumed non-sequencer roles. This suggests that while 'first' is commonly employed, its function as a sequencer is not as prevalent as expected. The non-sequencer roles observed, such as post determiner, noun, or adverb, imply that students may use 'first' for other

grammatical purposes, possibly leading to potential ambiguity or lack of coherence in their writing.

Table 3 shows the occurrences and functions of the 18 label frame markers investigated in the study. These frame markers intend to mark the upcoming stages or functions of texts or rhetorics (Hyland & Zou, 2020). They are also called ‘discourse activity markers’ (Fraser, 1988) that perform works such as summarizing and explaining. They are helpful in guiding the readers on the progression of the discourse and beneficial in underscoring the rhetorical functions of texts (Tahman, 2004). After the thorough investigation, important findings about the occurrences and functions of this type of frame marker were attained. First, the data reveal that the most common label frame marker among Filipino university students is ‘**overall**.’ It recorded 44 occurrences which are equivalent to 32.35%. As labellers, they were used to signal the ending of the students’ essays. Normally, it is found at the last paragraph of the students’ essays to express their final thoughts and share their important reflections and realizations about their pandemic experiences. However, the data also reveal that out of the 44 occurrences, only 14 of them or 31.82% was used as label markers. 30 of them or 68.18 percent manifested a **prenominal adjective** function. The following excerpts show how the students used ‘**overall**’ as labeller and prenominal adjective in their narrative essays.

(9) **“Overall (labeller), this pandemic made me realize that life is short so always be grateful for what you have. Being able to wake up every day and eat three times a day is something to be thankful for”** (SNE-119).

(10) **“...because the subject and the overall (PREN. ADJ.) emotion that we feel is easily to convey”** (SNE-048).

In addition, the study also investigated the occurrences and functions of ‘**in conclusion**’. It occupies the second position of most used label markers as it recorded 29 occurrences or 32.35% of the total identified occurrences. Unlike ‘**overall**,’ the label marker ‘**in conclusion**’ showed consistency in its use as a frame marker. The following are excerpts showing how the students used it as a label frame marker.

(11) **“In conclusion, all of these helped me shape into who I am today”** (SNE-0126).

As excerpts 25 and 26 demonstrate, ‘**in conclusion**’ is used as a label frame marker taking the initial position to mark students’ final points and concluding remarks. On the other hand, another label frame marker investigated is ‘**so far**’. It has a total frequency count of 19 or 13.97% which occupied the third rank of most used label markers. Specifically, students used this marking device as a label frame marker to express ‘*what has happened*’

until the moment of speaking (Collins, 2022). Specifically, the students used it to highlight what their argument or discourse has reached and to signal what will come next in their discussion. For example:

(12) **“I started this hobby around May this year, and so far my work is still mediocre and in need of improvement”** (0147).

However, not all the identified occurrences of **so far** in the corpus using AntConc functioned as labeller, five of them or 26.31% was used as an adverb indicating distance such as:

(13) **“Though we are not so far (ADV) away from each other, ...”** (SNE-061).

The above findings present that the most common label marker used by Filipino university students was ‘**overall**,’ which typically signals the ending of their essays and expresses their final thoughts and reflections about their pandemic experiences. However, despite its high occurrence, only a minority of instances (31.82%) functioned as label markers, while the majority served as prenominal adjectives. This finding suggests that students may tend to overuse ‘**overall**’ as an adjective rather than utilizing it specifically as a label marker. This overreliance on adjectival functions could affect the overall structure and organization of their essays, potentially leading to less effective communication of their intended message.

Table 4 presents the seventeen goal announcer frame markers investigated in study. These frame markers are usually used to indicate the writer’s overall discursive purposes and intended goals (Hyland and Zou, 2020). They are important to establish the core of the argument (Lim et al., 2015) and to explicitly state the purpose of the rhetoric (Hyland and Jian, 2018). As can be seen in the table, the most common goal announcer found in the students’ narratives is ‘**want to**.’ It recorded 44.65% of the total occurrences equivalent to a frequency count of 234. However, examining how it was used in students’ essays, only 28 out of the 234 occurrences or 11.97% functioned as goal announcer. They were used to signal the discussion intention and the direction of the narrative. The rest of the occurrences which is 88.03% or 206 occurrences displayed a non-frame marker function as a **verb** to express the writers’ plans and aspirations. The following excerpts show the use of **want** as both a **frame marker** and a **verb**:

(14) **The first picture that I want to (goal announcer) share is my Pigeons, I started to breed and compete last June 2020”** (SNE-033).

(15) **Furthermore, that feeling built up inside and I just want (verb) to free them”** (SNE-088).

Next to *'want to'* in terms of ranking is the frame marker *'focus'*. It occupies the second rank with a frequency count of 89 or 16.98% of the total occurrences. As the data exhibit, out of the 89 occurrences of *'focus'*, only 7 of them or 7.87% functioned as frame marker to indicate the discursive purpose of a specific part of the students' narratives. Most of the occurrences consists of 82 total frequency or 92.13% manifested *nominal roles* to talk about the students' pandemic experiences, to share about their pandemic plans, to tell something about their priorities, and to highlight the important qualities and skills they used to survive the pandemic. In addition, it was also used as an *infinitive phrase* for some specific purposes such as giving advice and sharing the important given by the pandemic. The following are sample excerpts:

- (16) *The subject of art is representational art, the focus (frame marker) of this is to display the image..." (SNE-097).*
- (17) *I lost focus (N.) as if my life becomes a non-representational art, where I don't know subject" (SNE-079).*
- (18) *By elevating my mood, music allows me to drift away from negative thoughts, which, in turn, empowers me to focus (infinitive phrase) on the positive aspects that motivate me to keep going" (SNE-040).*

In addition, another frame marker investigated is *'purpose'*. This frame marker occupied the third rank with a total frequency of 68 or 12.97% of the total occurrences. Results of the analysis reveal that out of the 68 occurrences of *'purpose'*, only three of them were used as frame markers to tell to the readers the discursive purpose of a specific part of the students' text like in the following excerpt:

- (19) *"...furthermore the purpose of the subject is to be in social function due to the idea of representing an experience in art form, it also uses the style of surrealism because of it's odd visuals with the depiction of reality" (SNE-116).*

On the other hand, 65 or 95.59 percent of the occurrences functioned as *noun*. For example:

- (20) *"I would like to have a stable purpose (N.) in this world" (SNE-075).*

In summary, out of the 524 occurrences of the seventeen goal announcer frame markers investigated, only 51 of them or 9.73 percent exhibited frame marker functions. The rest of the occurrences which is 476 or 90.84% performed other functions such as *verbal*, *nominal*, and *adjectival*. So far, compare to the sequencers and label frame markers, this category has the least percentage of occurrences that function as a frame marker.

The above findings highlight the goal announcer frame markers, particularly 'want to' which emerged as the most common goal announcer used by Filipino ESL university students in their pandemic narrative essays. However, it is concerning that only a small proportion (11.97%) of these occurrences functioned as goal announcers, indicating the intended purpose or direction of the narrative. The majority of instances (88.03%) displayed a non-frame marker function, as verbs expressing the writers' plans and aspirations. This finding suggests that students may not be utilizing 'want to' effectively as a goal announcer, potentially leading to a lack of clarity and coherence in conveying their narrative objectives to the readers.

Table 5 illustrates the occurrences and functions of the topic shifter frame markers investigated in the study. Topic shifters are used to signal that there is a change in the focus of discussion in the text. These markers organize the discourse for the purpose of introducing a related topic, changing the current topic, or returning to a topic introduced earlier (Mur-Duenas, 2011). After careful analysis, the data reveal that *'so'* is the most common topic shift frame marker used by Filipino ESL university students in their pandemic narrative essays. It recorded a total frequency of 873 or 47.6% out of the 1,834 total identified topic shifters. The following excerpts show how the students used *'so'* as a topic shifter.

- (21) *"I want them to feel proud for what the achievements I will got now or on the future. So, whenever I still see these picture all problems that I have I think I will make it because I have a family like them that I will support and always there for me no matter what happen" (SNE-07).*

As shown in excerpts 45 and 46, *'so'* was used as resultive conjunct to mark a shift of focus from the previous utterances or discussions made by the writers. Hence, they manifest a frame marker functions in those instances. However, findings also reveal that not all the 873 occurrences of *'so'* functioned as frame markers. In fact, only 402, or 46.05 of the 873 occurrences were identified as frame markers. The remaining 53.95% or 471 occurrences played different grammatical functions. For example, some students used *'so'* as a *pronoun* to substitute an idea mentioned earlier like the following:

- (22) *"I have always wanted to try paintings, but I didn't have the time to do so before the pandemic..." (SNE-0157).*

On the other hand, other occurrences of *'so'* manifested an *adverbial function* to indicate or suggest extent or degree. This function comprises

the majority of the use of 'so' in the essays of the students:

- (23) "I am *so* scared that night, ..." (SNE-0120).
(24) "I felt *so* blessed because I am able to see the beauty that God build for us (SNE-097).

In addition, 'now' was also investigated and it occupied the second rank in terms of frequency count. It accounted 480 occurrences equivalent to 26.17%. The analysis show that the students used it as a frame marker for the purpose of introducing new idea or instructions such as:

- (25) "Whenever I look at a piece, I get absorbed by each unique story the artist has presented to the audience. *Now* that health restrictions are stricter and people are advised to stay home, I could not go on adventures..." (SNE-070).

Notably, like *so*, not all the occurrences of *now* performed a frame marker function. Other occurrences were identified as *time adverbial* to mean 'at this moment' or 'at the present time'. Other students used it as an *emphasizer* which is placed either before or within an imperative clause. The following are some examples taken from the corpus.

- (26) "...I realized that I am *now* (ADV.) happy and I am in the best state of myself..." (SNE-0126).

Aside from (*now*), another commonly appearing frame marker in the students' narrative essays is 'well'. It occupies the third rank getting a total frequency count of 337 or 18.37%. Primarily, the students used *well* as a frame marker to indicate a slight change of topic or say something in another way:

- (27) 'After we recover, we made everything sure about our safety. *Well*, art has a big impact on my life during this pandemic' (SNE-075).

Aside from functioning as a frame marker, *well* was also used as an *adverb* to mean that something was done in a good way. Other occurrences manifested an *adjectival function* written after a linking verb such as *be*, and as a *multi-word preposition* that means 'in addition to'. The following are examples:

- (28) "...contrast between the tint and shade of colors blends *well* (ADV.) together..." (SNE-0109).
(29) "...both paintings symbolize growth and hope that another day will come, and all will be *well* (ADJ.)" (SNE-0110).
(30) "I decided to read about ways to learn quicker and more efficient *as well as* (MWP) less consumption of time" (SNE-0105).

Findings reveal that out of the 1,834 total occurrences of the goal announcer frame markers, 25.08 % or 460 occurrences were identified as frame markers. The majority of them which comprise 1, 359 occurrences or 74.10% were non-

frame markers. They functioned as *pronouns*, *adverbial*, *emphasizer*, *multiword preposition*, and *phrasal preposition verbs*. In comparison with the other three categories of frame markers investigated, topic shifter is the third most commonly used frame marker in terms of its percentage of occurrence. On top is labeller followed by sequencer and goal announcer.

The above findings reveal the occurrences and functions of topic shifter frame markers. The most commonly used topic shift marker was 'so,' which was employed by Filipino ESL university students in their pandemic narrative essays to signal changes in the focus of discussion. However, it is important to note that out of the total identified topic shifters, only 25.08% were identified as frame markers, while the majority (74.10%) served as non-frame markers, such as pronouns, adverbials, emphasizers, and multiword prepositions. This indicates that while 'so' is frequently used as a topic shifter, its role as a specific frame marker for organizing discourse and introducing new topics may not be fully realized by students.

4 Conclusion

Using corpus-based analysis, this study sought to investigate the occurrence and functions of frame markers in the written narratives of Filipino English-as-a-second language (ESL) university students about their COVID-19 pandemic experience. Overall findings indicate that students employ various metadiscourse markers particularly frame markers in writing their narrative accounts of their individual experiences. These frame markers were used as sequencer, stage labeller, goal announcer, and topic shifter. They are realized in various forms: single words (e.g., first, finally), infinitive phrase (to conclude, to understand), prepositional phrase (by far), phrasal verb (move on), verb phrase (seek to), adverbial phrase (thus far), and noun phrase (all in all). These frame markers serve as marking devices to facilitate the readers understanding of the message of the text by: by making the structure of the propositional content explicit, by offering explicit means to mark the upcoming stages of the text, by indicating the overall discursive purposes and intended goals, and by indicating that there are changes of focus happening in the text. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that while there appears various frame markers and their functions, as aforementioned, there are also occurrences of their homonym counterparts which do not necessarily express the same functions as identified. They assume pronominal, adverbial, verbal, and adjectival functions. The implications of these findings for

English language teaching are significant. Educators should focus on explicitly teaching the functions and proper usage of frame markers in different contexts to help students enhance the organization and coherence of their writing. Providing clear examples and explanations of how frame markers can guide readers' understanding and convey the writer's intentions can be beneficial in improving students' narrative writing skills.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The corpus analyzed only included narrative essays, excluding other essay genres. Future research could expand the scope to encompass various essay types, investigating how frame markers are utilized across genres and whether their functions remain consistent. Additionally, further investigation into the morphological, semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic aspects of various metadiscourse markers in different essay types written by Filipino ESL students could offer deeper insights into their usage patterns and effectiveness. Furthermore, exploring how frame markers are used by students with different language proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds could provide valuable insights into potential cultural influences on metadiscourse usage. This research could help in designing more tailored and effective ESL writing instruction that considers the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students. Are there specific metadiscourse markers for specific types of essays, or are there commonly appearing metadiscourse markers across various types of essays? Are these metadiscourse markers influenced by the level of formality in writing the essay, as well as the point-of-view employed by the writer? Is the use of such metadiscourse markers a common characteristic across ESL writers of essays in various levels and cultures?

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Appendices

Table 2
Occurrences and Functions of Sequence Frame Markers

Frame Markers	Occurrences			Used as Sequencer			Used as Non-Sequencer		
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>r</i>	<i>f</i>	%	<i>r</i>	<i>f</i>	%	<i>r</i>
first	375	28.37	1	37	10.54	4	338	37.98	1
then	239	18.08	2	53	15.1	2.5	186	20.9	2
last	210	15.89	3	28	7.98	7	182	20.45	3
second	110	8.32	4	53	15.1	2.5	57	6.4	5
lastly	95	7.18	5	95	27.07	1	-	-	14
next	83	6.27	6	29	8.26	5.5	54	6.06	6
finally	67	5.06	7	8	2.27	9	59	6.63	4
third	38	2.87	8	29	8.26	5.5	9	1.01	7
to begin with	9	0.68	9.5	4	1.14	11	5	0.56	8
there are three reasons for	9	0.68	9.5	9	2.56	8	-	-	14
first of all	5	0.38	11	5	1.42	10	-	-	14
firstly	1	0.08	12	1	0.28	12	-	-	14
secondly	-	-	16.5	-	-	16.5	-	-	14
thirdly	-	-	16.5	-	-	16.5	-	-	14
subsequently	-	-	16.5	-	-	16.5	-	-	14
Number (1,2,3)	-	-	16.5	-	-	16.5	-	-	14
Bullet point	-	-	16.5	-	-	16.5	-	-	14
Roman numeral (i, ii, iii)	-	-	16.5	-	-	16.5	-	-	14
to start with	-	-	16.5	-	-	16.5	-	-	14
Letters (a,b,c/A,B,C)	-	-	16.5	-	-	16.5	-	-	14
Total	1, 322	100%		351	100%		890	100%	

Table 3
Occurrences and Functions of Label Frame Markers

Frame Markers	Occurrences			Used as Labeller			Used as Non-Labeller		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>r</i>
overall	44	32	1	14	17.3	2.5	30	47.62	1
in conclusion	29	21	2	29	35.8	1	-	-	12
so far	19	14	3	14	17.3	2.5	15	23.81	2
as a whole	13	9.6	4	2	2.47	7	9	14.29	3
all in all	6	4.4	6	6	7.41	4.5	-	-	12
in short	6	4.4	6	6	7.41	4.5	-	-	12
to summarize	6	4.4	6	-	-	13.5	6	9.52	4
to conclude	5	3.7	8	5	6.17	6	-	-	12
to repeat	2	1.5	9.5	-	-	13.5	2	3.17	5
to sum up	2	1.5	9.5	2	2.47	8	-	-	6
by far	1	0.7	12.5	1	1.23	10	-	-	12
for the moment	1	0.7	12.5	-	-	13.5	1	1.59	12
at this stage	1	0.7	12.5	1	1.23	10	-	-	12
in summary	1	0.7	12.5	1	1.23	10	-	-	12
in a word	-	-	16	-	-	13.5	-	-	12
in brief	-	-	16	-	-	13.5	-	-	12
thus far	-	-	16	-	-	13.5	-	-	12
Total	136	100		81	100		63	100	

Table 4
Occurrences and Functions of Announce Goals Frame Markers

Announce Goals	Occurrences			Used as Announcer			Goal Used as Non-Goal Announcer		
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>r</i>
want to	234	44.7	1	28	54.9	1	206	43.28	1
focus	89	17	2	7	13.72	3	82	17.23	2
purpose	68	13	3	3	5.88	4	65	13.66	3
to understand	34	6.48	4	-	-	13	34	7.14	4
goal	26	4.96	5	-	-	13	26	5.46	5
objective	17	3.24	6	1	3.57	6.5	16	3.36	6
desire to	14	11.3	7.5	-	-	13	14	2.94	7
would like to	14	11.3	7.5	9	17.65	2	5	1.05	8
aim	10	1.91	9	-	-	13	10	2.1	9
(in) this part	5	0.95	10	2	3.92	5	3	0.63	11.5
seek to	4	0.76	11	-	-	13	4	0.84	10
intend to	3	0.57	12	-	-	13	3	0.63	11.5
intention	2	0.38	13.5	-	-	13	2	0.42	14.5
wish to	2	0.38	13.5	-	-	13	2	0.42	14.5
(in) this chapter	1	0.19	15.5	-	-	13	2	0.42	14.5
(in) this section	1	0.19	15.5	1	3.57	6.5	2	0.42	14.5
to better understand	-	-	17	-	-	13	-	-	16
Total	524	100		51	100		476	100	

Table 5
Occurrences and Functions of Shift Topic Frame Markers

Frame Markers	Occurrences			Used as Topic Shifter			Used as Non-Topic Shifter		
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>r</i>	<i>f</i>	%	<i>r</i>	<i>f</i>	%	<i>r</i>
so	873	47.6	1	402	87.39	1	471	34.7	1
now	480	26.17	2	40	8.7	2	440	32.4	2
well	337	18.37	3	12	2.6	3	325	23.9	3
back to	80	4.36	4	3	0.65	4.5	77	5.67	4
return to	20	1.66	5	-	-	10	20	1.47	5
regarding	18	0.98	6	3	0.65	4.5	12	0.88	7
move on	14	0.76	7	-	-	10	14	1.03	6
resume	5	0.27	8.5	-	-	10	5	0.37	8.5
turn to	5	0.27	8.5	-	-	10	5	0.37	8.5
in regard to	1	0.05	10.5	-	-	10	1	0.07	9.5
shift to	1	0.05	10.5	-	-	10	1	0.07	9.5
revisit	-	-	13	-	-	10	-	-	12
with regard to	-	-	13	-	-	10	-	-	12
digress	-	-	13	-	-	10	-	-	12
Total	1,834	100		460	100		1,359	100	