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Hedging, Signposting and Stance: A Conceptual Model of Library-English Department Collaboration for Developing Metadiscourse Competence in Nigerian Undergraduate Research Proposals

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Abstract

Nigerian undergraduates who write research proposals in English face substantial rhetorical demands. One part of these demands is metadiscourse, the language writers use to organise a text, guide readers, report previous work and calibrate how strongly they commit themselves to claims. This conceptual paper reports no empirical data. Drawing on an explicit, integrative synthesis of literature on Hyland's interpersonal model of metadiscourse, second language academic writing, genre-based pedagogy and library-based academic literacy, it proposes a model of collaboration between the university library and the Department of English for developing students' metadiscourse competence. Librarians lead work on sources, evidentials and the accurate reporting of previous research, while English lecturers lead work on genre, hedging, boosting, textual organisation and interaction between writer and reader. The paper specifies shared inputs, a three-phase teaching sequence, expected outcomes and moderating conditions; defines what counts as appropriate metadiscourse so that outcomes can be measured beyond frequency counts; and illustrates the approach with a six-week programme, including adaptations for very large classes with unreliable electricity and internet. It also addresses reciprocal training, institutional resistance and assessment workload. Five testable propositions are advanced. The paper argues that such a partnership offers a practical basis for testing academic writing support where dedicated writing centres are limited or absent, while stressing that its effectiveness and feasibility remain to be established empirically.

Keywords: metadiscourse; academic writing; research proposals; library-faculty collaboration; Nigerian undergraduates.

1. INTRODUCTION

Competence in academic writing is central to university learning. When students undertake undergraduate research, they are expected to review literature, state a problem, justify a method and explain why a proposed study is valuable. These demands concern not only propositional content but also how writers guide readers, connect ideas, report previous research and calibrate claims. Metadiscourse refers to the resources writers use to organise discourse and negotiate interaction with readers (Hyland, 2005, 2017). They include transitions such as *however* and *therefore*, frame markers such as *this section examines*, and expressions that adjust commitment, such as *may*, *appear to*, *clearly* and *in fact*. Control of these resources is associated with disciplinary enculturation and the emergence of an academic voice in an additional language (Ädel, 2006; Hyland, 2004).

English is the medium of university education in multilingual Nigeria (Bamgbose, 1995). Earlier scholarship questioned how effectively learners were being prepared to use English for complex educational purposes (Afolayan, 1995; Bamgbose, 1995), but these sources are historical and do not describe current university writing instruction. More recent evidence is available. Under the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards introduced by the National Universities Commission (2022), all first-year students take GST 111, Communication in English, whose listed outcomes cover sound patterns, word formation, sentence construction, grammar and usage, logical reasoning, public speaking and the writing of simple and technical reports. These outcomes are valuable, but they do not explicitly address the research proposal as a genre or the use of metadiscourse. Recent Nigerian studies point to the resulting gap. Korau and Aliyu (2020) found that second-year English undergraduates at a northern Nigerian university made little use of metadiscourse in

persuasive essays, misused slightly more than half of the markers they did use, and used hedges least of all, and that writing quality rose with the correct use of metadiscourse. Akinseye (2023) examined interactive metadiscourse in 100 expository essays by newly admitted Nigerian undergraduates and argued for its explicit teaching.

Evidence from other Nigerian university settings points to related problems in academic literacy. At Kingsley Ozumba Mbadiwe University, Nwanekezie and Igboke (2022) found that 85% of respondents reported using the library for study, but only 11.6% reported using it for research and 21.6% reported using reference materials, and the study identified weaknesses in information retrieval skills. These findings do not concern metadiscourse directly, but they point to a gap between access to information and the academic practices through which sources are interpreted and reported. Olateju (2006) likewise reported inadequate competence with cohesive devices among final year secondary school students in Osun State, a finding that should not be generalised to undergraduates but indicates the kinds of textual difficulty students may bring into higher education.

The literature reviewed provides little evidence on metadiscourse in Nigerian undergraduate research proposals, and less on how it is taught for that genre. Meanwhile, academic librarianship has moved beyond a narrow view of bibliographic instruction towards cooperation between librarians and teaching staff (Elmborg, 2006; Grafstein, 2002). The question is whether the complementary expertise of librarians and English lecturers can be combined in a focused intervention on academic writing.

This paper therefore proposes a conceptual model of collaboration between the library and the Department of English for developing metadiscourse competence in

Nigerian undergraduate research proposals. It addresses three questions. What does the literature suggest about metadiscourse in second language academic writing and in the Nigerian context? How might librarians and English lecturers work together to teach metadiscourse in the research proposal genre? What testable propositions follow from the model, and how could they be measured? Section 2 explains how the literature was selected and the model developed; Section 3 reviews the literature, positions the model, presents it with operational definitions and an illustrative programme, addresses implementation challenges and sets out propositions and an agenda for testing; and Section 4 separates the paper's claims from its implications and recommendations.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

2.1 Criteria for Literature Selection and Synthesis

This is a conceptual paper that develops a programme theory; no data were collected or analysed. It rests on an integrative, nonsystematic review, which suits the task of connecting fields that have seldom been brought together but does not claim the exhaustive coverage of a systematic review. Sources were selected according to four explicit criteria. First, relevance: each source had to address at least one of five strands, namely metadiscourse theory, second language academic writing, genre-based pedagogy, library-based academic literacy and information literacy, and the Nigerian university context. Second, type: priority was given to peer-reviewed empirical studies, scholarly books and chapters, and official curricula. To address the concern that empirical findings, theory and contextual commentary had been mixed, each source is now identified in the text by its type, and conclusions are drawn only from the kind of evidence each source provides. Third, context: Nigerian and African sources, and studies of

undergraduate rather than published or postgraduate writing, were sought wherever available, supplemented by foundational international works. Fourth, verifiability: every source was checked against its original publication details, and sources that could not be confirmed were excluded.

2.2 Steps in Model Development

The model was developed in four steps. The instructional problem was defined from the Nigerian and second language writing literature. Hyland's (2005) ten categories of metadiscourse were then mapped onto the demands of the research proposal (Table 1) and divided between the two partners according to their expertise (Table 2). Next, the teaching sequence was derived from genre-based pedagogy and data-driven learning. Finally, the constraints identified in the Nigerian literature were specified as moderators, and the propositions were derived from the relationships in the model. The limitations of this approach are discussed in Section 3.13.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Metadiscourse: The Conceptual Framework

Metadiscourse may be understood as the self-reflective resources through which writers organise discourse and negotiate relationships with readers. The concept developed through the work of Williams (1981), Vande Kopple (1985) and Crismore et al. (1993), and alternative approaches include Ädel's (2006) reflexive model. Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model has been widely applied in research on academic writing and provides the framework for this paper. It distinguishes interactive resources, which help readers follow the organisation of a text, from interactional resources, which make the writer's stance and relationship with readers explicit. Each dimension has five categories, summarised in Table 1 with their relevance to the research proposal.

Table 1. Hyland's (2005) categories of metadiscourse and their relevance to the research proposal

Category	Function	Examples	Relevance to the research proposal
<i>Interactive</i>			
Transitions	Express relations between ideas	however, therefore, in addition	Link the problem, literature and method into a coherent argument
Frame markers	Signal stages, sequence and goals	this section examines; to conclude; the aim of this study is	Make the structure of the proposal visible to assessors
Endophoric markers	Refer to other parts of the text	as noted above; see Table 1	Connect objectives, research questions and methods
Evidentials	Refer to sources	according to X; X argues that	Report previous research accurately
Code glosses	Elaborate meaning	that is; for example; namely	Clarify key concepts and methods
<i>Interactional</i>			
Hedges	Withhold full commitment	may; appear to; possibly	Present claims and expected outcomes with appropriate caution
Boosters	Express certainty	clearly; in fact; demonstrate	Emphasise claims where the evidence warrants stronger commitment
Attitude markers	Express the writer's attitude	importantly; unfortunately	Argue for the significance of the study
Self-mention markers	Refer to the writer	I; we; the researcher	Establish the writer's role where the genre permits
Engagement markers	Address readers directly	note that; consider	Guide or involve readers where appropriate

Source: Adapted from Hyland (2005); applications to the proposal are the authors'.

3.2 Metadiscourse in Second Language Academic Writing

Metadiscourse varies across languages, cultures, genres and disciplines. Empirical comparisons have reported intercultural differences between English and Spanish research articles (Mur-Dueñas, 2011) and between Chinese and English research articles (Mu et al., 2015), and disciplinary variation has also been documented (Abdi, 2002; Kan, 2016). These studies concern published writing and

therefore offer background rather than direct evidence about Nigerian undergraduates.

Empirical research on student writing is more directly relevant. Hyland and Milton (1997) found that Hong Kong Chinese students used a narrower range of devices for expressing doubt and certainty than British students and made stronger claims. Intaraprawat and Steffensen (1995) found that stronger ESL essays used more metadiscourse, and a wider variety, than weaker ones, and Lee and Deakin (2016) found differences in interactional

metadiscourse, including hedging, between more and less successful undergraduate argumentative essays. Closer to the present context, Letsoela (2013) analysed the discussion sections of final year undergraduate research reports at the National University of Lesotho and found that students relied mainly on interactive metadiscourse and largely avoided first person reference, treating academic writing as impersonal. These studies establish metadiscourse as an important feature of student writing, but their findings cannot simply be carried over to Nigerian research proposals.

The pedagogical literature supports explicit attention to metadiscourse, although this does not establish the effectiveness of the present model. Shaw and Liu (1998) found that second language students' academic register changed during an academic English course, and Hyland (2007) argued for genre-based teaching that makes the language features of academic genres visible to learners. Analysing first year argumentative essays, Ho and Li (2018) identified problems in students' use of metadiscourse for persuasion and recommended explicit teaching. Together these studies provide a rationale for testing explicit, genre-focused instruction rather than assuming that competence will develop through exposure alone.

3.3 Academic Writing in Nigerian Higher Education

The Nigerian context requires careful treatment. Afolayan (1995) and Bamgbose (1995) offer historical and sociolinguistic background on the teaching of English and the multilingual environment in which it functions, but they are not assessments of current university writing instruction. For the present situation, the national curriculum is more informative: GST 111 prepares all first-year students in general communication skills, including simple and technical reports (National Universities Commission, 2022), but it

is not designed to teach the genre of the research proposal, which students typically meet in their final year.

Empirical studies of Nigerian undergraduates indicate why this matters. Korau and Aliyu (2020) reported low and frequently incorrect use of metadiscourse in persuasive essays, with hedges the least used category, and a positive relationship between correct use and writing quality. Akinseye (2023) examined interactive metadiscourse in expository essays by new undergraduates. Research on textual cohesion has reported difficulties with cohesive devices among final year secondary school students (Olateju, 2006), and because several connectors overlap with interactive metadiscourse, this indicates difficulties that may persist into university writing. On stance, Ojo (2020) compared hedges and boosters in Nigerian and American newspaper editorials and found that experienced Nigerian editorial writers used both resources, which suggests that any imbalance in student writing reflects inexperience rather than a feature of Nigerian English as such.

None of these studies examined research proposals, and writing instruction in Nigerian universities is unlikely to be uniform. The paper therefore begins from a restricted problem: proposal writers must manage source attribution, textual organisation and degrees of commitment, yet the literature reviewed offers little evidence of an integrated approach to teaching these metadiscursive demands. The model is accordingly presented as a programme theory to be tested, not as an intervention of demonstrated effectiveness.

3.4 The Research Proposal as a Demanding Genre

Research genres are purposeful forms of communication whose conventions are acquired within academic communities (Swales, 2004; Swales & Feak, 2012). The research proposal is especially demanding because it is

prospective: the writer must establish the significance and feasibility of a study before any results exist, which requires careful handling of claims, sources, structure and stance. In an empirical study of European Union grant proposals, Connor and Mauranen (1999) showed that proposals combine promotional moves with careful presentation of the proposed work. Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006) found that second language postgraduate thesis writers reported difficulty with discussion sections, where claims must be positioned in relation to previous research. Neither study concerns Nigerian undergraduate proposals, but both point to the same rhetorical problem: interpreting earlier research and calibrating the strength of one's own claims.

3.5 Libraries as Sites of Academic Literacy Instruction

Instruction in academic libraries is increasingly seen as more than teaching search procedures. Conceptual work has called for critical information literacy (Elmborg, 2006), reflective pedagogical practice (Jacobs, 2008) and discipline-based approaches in which librarians and teaching staff share responsibility for information literacy (Grafstein, 2002). This shared responsibility matters for writing because finding a source and using it appropriately in an argument are connected activities. Empirically, Bowles-Terry (2012) found that students who received library instruction in upper-level courses graduated with higher grade point averages than those who did not, while cautioning that the design could not establish causation, and Zauha (2014) described collaboration between librarians and writing centres as a conversation connecting information literacy and writing.

In Nigeria, Idiodi (2005) identified economic instability, inadequate resources and computer illiteracy as barriers to the development of information literacy, and Okiy (2005) discussed constraints of funding, electricity and skilled staff on the use of

information technology in university libraries. These conditions make resource-sensitive design essential. The library's institution-wide mandate, and librarians' work with students as they search for, evaluate and use sources, make it a potential partner in writing support where no writing centre exists. The partnership does not ask librarians to replace English lecturers or supervisors; it combines the librarian's expertise in source use with the lecturer's expertise in language, genre and rhetoric.

3.6 Positioning the Model: Novelty and Feasibility

The model's contribution should be stated precisely. Collaboration between librarians and teaching staff is well established in the literature (Elmborg, 2006; Grafstein, 2002; Zauha, 2014), and explicit, genre-based teaching of metadiscourse has been advocated (Ho & Li, 2018; Hyland, 2007). What the literature reviewed does not provide is a model that divides responsibility for specific categories of metadiscourse between a librarian and an English lecturer, applies that division to the research proposal, and designs it for Nigerian universities. The model is therefore novel in its combination and specification, not in its separate components: it assigns evidentials and source reporting to the library and stance and organisation to the English department (Table 2), defines appropriate use in measurable terms (Table 3), and treats Nigerian institutional conditions as explicit moderators.

Its feasibility rests on three features, each of which must still be tested. It uses existing staff, rooms and courses rather than a new writing centre; it can run on printed materials; and it can be scaled down to fewer sessions. Its costs, chiefly staff time, printing and the preparation of materials, and the institutional obstacles discussed in Section 3.11, are real, and the claim of low-resource feasibility is therefore a hypothesis, not a finding.

3.7 The Proposed Library-English Department Model

The model has five elements: the partnership, shared instructional inputs, a three-

phase teaching process, expected outcomes and moderating institutional conditions. Figure 1 presents their relationship.

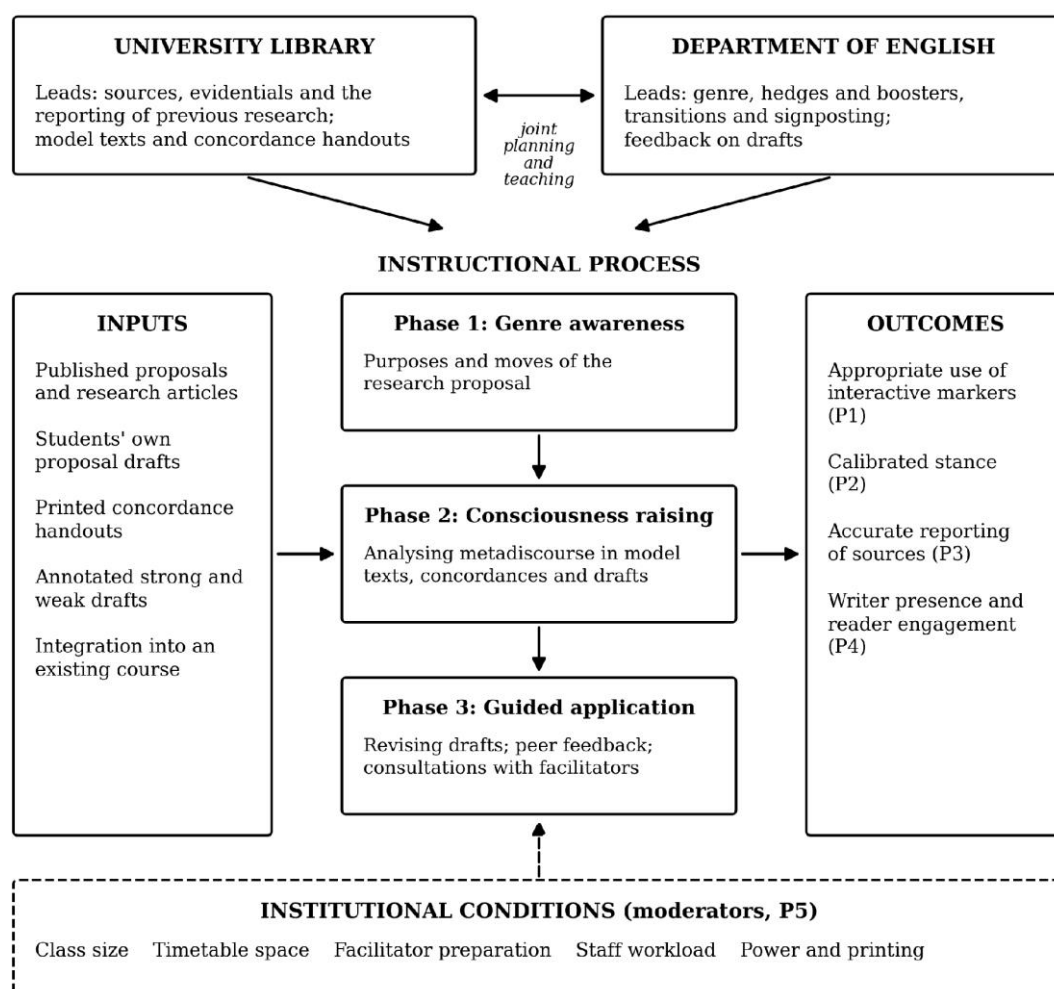


Figure 1. The Library-English Department Model for developing metadiscourse competence. The university library and the Department of English jointly plan and teach a three-phase programme (centre), supported by shared inputs (left), with expected outcomes (right) and institutional conditions acting as moderators (bottom, dashed). P1 to P5 refer to the propositions in Section 3.10. Source: Authors' construct.

The librarian leads instruction on source use, evidentials and the accurate reporting of previous research, and helps prepare model texts and concordance materials. The English lecturer leads instruction on the proposal genre, hedges and boosters, textual organisation and

interaction with readers, and gives feedback on drafts. The division is not exclusive: each partner supports the other, so that source use and rhetorical choices are taught as connected practices (Table 2).

Table 2. Division of teaching responsibilities between the partners

Teaching focus	Lead	Support	Sample activity
Genre and moves of the research proposal	English lecturer	Librarian	Identify moves in published examples and compare them with a student draft
Evidentials and the reporting of sources	Librarian	English lecturer	Check claims against sources and revise categorical reporting with suitable reporting verbs
Hedges and boosters	English lecturer	Librarian	Examine <i>may</i> , <i>suggest</i> , <i>clearly</i> and related forms in concordance lines and revise claims for appropriate commitment
Transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers and code glosses	English lecturer	Librarian	Add signposts to a draft section and clarify key terms for the intended reader
Attitude, self-mention and engagement markers	English lecturer	Librarian	Compare how published writers establish significance, presence and orientation towards readers

Source: Authors' construct.

The inputs are published proposals and research articles as models, students' own drafts, printed concordance handouts showing metadiscourse in context, and annotated examples of stronger and weaker choices. Concordances can be prepared with free software such as AntConc (Anthony, 2021) and printed, so that students need neither computers nor internet access. Participation is best secured by embedding the programme in an existing course or departmental timetable.

The teaching process has three phases. In Phase 1, students develop genre awareness by examining the purposes, audiences and rhetorical moves of research proposals. In Phase 2, consciousness-raising activities from the data-driven learning tradition help students analyse metadiscourse in model texts, concordance lines and sample drafts (Flowerdew, 2015). In Phase 3, students revise their own writing, receive peer response and obtain focused feedback from the facilitators. The following constructed pair of sentences illustrates the kind of revision intended:

Overstated: "Research has proven that social media has a negative effect on students' academic performance."

Revised: "Previous studies suggest that social media may affect students' academic performance negatively (Author, Year; Author, Year)."

The revision does more than replace a booster with a hedge: it attributes the claim to identifiable sources and calibrates commitment to the strength of the evidence. The expected outcomes are stated as propositions in Section 3.10, and the institutional conditions of class size, timetable space, facilitator preparation, staff workload, and power and printing are treated as moderators rather than incidental details.

3.8 Defining Appropriate Metadiscourse

The propositions refer to appropriate use of metadiscourse, a term that must be defined if outcomes are to be measured beyond frequency counts. Frequency alone is a weak indicator, since more markers do not necessarily mean better writing, and Korau and Aliyu (2020)

found that many markers students used were used incorrectly. In this paper, a metadiscourse marker is appropriate when it performs the function its context requires, commits the writer to a claim no more and no less strongly than the

evidence allows, attributes information accurately, helps the reader follow the text, and fits the conventions of the genre and department. Table 3 turns this definition into criteria that trained raters can apply.

Table 3. Operational criteria for appropriate metadiscourse in research proposals

Dimension	Criterion of appropriateness	Example indicator	How it can be rated
Fit of form and function	The marker performs the function its context requires	A contrastive transition joins genuinely contrasting ideas	Each marker rated appropriate, partly appropriate or inappropriate
Calibration of stance	The strength of hedges and boosters matches the status of the evidence	Established findings stated firmly; projected outcomes and contested claims hedged	Each claim rated for calibration against a rubric
Accuracy of attribution	Reported claims match their sources and are attributed specifically	Reporting verb reflects the source's own stance; claim traceable to the cited work	A sample of citations checked against the sources
Guidance of the reader	Signposts and internal references make the structure easy to follow	Frame markers at section openings; accurate references to tables and sections	Analytic rating of reader guidance for each section
Fit with genre and department	Self-mention and engagement follow the department's conventions	"The researcher" or "I" used as departmental guidelines require	Rating with reference to the department's project guidelines

Source: Authors' construct. Ratings should be made by two trained raters working independently, with agreement reported.

3.9 An Illustrative Six-Week Programme

The following programme illustrates how the model might be implemented with about 60 final year students. It consists of twelve two-hour sessions over six weeks, and where space and staffing allow, the cohort may be divided into two parallel groups of about 30. In weeks one and two, the English lecturer introduces the research proposal as a genre, and students identify its main rhetorical moves in selected examples. In weeks three and four, the librarian leads work on sources and evidentials, while both facilitators teach hedging and boosting through model sentences and concordance handouts. In week five, students work on

transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers and code glosses as they revise sections of their drafts. Week six is devoted to guided revision of a full proposal section with focused feedback. The number and length of sessions can be adjusted to the timetable, and a better-resourced institution may add online corpus searches. The essential element is the sequence: genre awareness, then analysis of metadiscourse in context, then guided application in students' own writing.

3.9.1 Adapting the Programme for Very Large Classes with Unreliable Electricity and Internet

Many Nigerian departments have final year cohorts of several hundred students, and

many campuses have unreliable electricity and internet access. The programme can be adapted in five ways. First, each week can combine one plenary session for the whole cohort, in which the facilitators model analysis and revision, with smaller clinics that rotate through groups, supported where possible by trained postgraduate or final year peer tutors. Second, all materials, including concordance handouts, model texts and checklists, can be printed in advance and distributed as a course pack, so that no session depends on electricity, projectors or internet access; key concordance lines can also be written on the chalkboard. Third, sessions can be scheduled in daylight hours and in rooms with natural light. Fourth, analysis can be done in fixed groups with rotating roles, so that every student works actively even in a crowded hall. Fifth, feedback can be made manageable through the strategies described in Section 3.11.2, such as checklists, peer review and feedback on selected paragraphs. These adaptations preserve the sequence of the model while reducing its dependence on staff time and infrastructure; whether they preserve its effects is a question for evaluation.

3.10 Propositions

Five propositions follow from the model. They are stated as relationships to be tested, not as outcomes already established.

Proposition 1. Compared with similar students who do not receive the programme, participating students will make more appropriate and varied use of interactive metadiscourse (transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials and code glosses), judged by the criteria in Table 3, in independently produced research proposal writing.

Proposition 2. Participating students will calibrate stance more appropriately, using hedges and boosters in ways that reflect the strength and status of the evidence, rather than simply increasing one category and reducing the other.

Proposition 3. Participating students will report previous research more accurately, with clearer attribution of claims to specific sources and fewer unjustified categorical statements about what research has established.

Proposition 4. Instruction will influence the interactional resources that express writer presence and reader engagement, namely attitude, self-mention and engagement markers, but the size and pattern of change will depend on genre conventions, departmental expectations and the length of instruction.

Proposition 5. The effects of the programme will vary with class size, facilitator preparation, timetable integration, staff workload and access to resources; a low-resource version based on printed materials will remain empirically testable rather than being assumed to produce equivalent gains.

3.11 Implementation in Nigerian Universities

Implementation should accommodate institutional differences. Where electricity or connectivity is unreliable, printed materials allow the key activities to continue; in a study of one Nigerian private university library, irregular power supply was identified as a major constraint on the use of information technology (Nwanekezie, 2022), a single-institution finding that nonetheless supports a low-technology design. The programme is more likely to be sustained if it is embedded in an existing course, such as research methods, academic writing or project preparation, than if it is offered as an optional addition. Project supervisors should also be familiar with its aims and terms, so that their comments reinforce rather than contradict the conventions students are taught.

3.11.1 Addressing the Risk of Limited Reciprocal Training

The model depends on each partner understanding the other's domain, and many librarians have no training in teaching writing, while many English lecturers have no training

in information literacy. The model addresses this risk in four ways. First, before the first cycle, the two partners attend joint preparation workshops: librarians are introduced to Hyland's categories and to giving feedback on writing, and English lecturers to source evaluation, the library's resources and the teaching of evidentials. Second, the first cycle is taught jointly from shared lesson plans, so that each partner observes and learns from the other before teaching alone. Third, a shared bank of materials, rubrics and annotated drafts reduces the expertise each partner must bring to every session. Fourth, because preparation will vary, facilitator preparation is treated as a measured moderator (Proposition 5), so that evaluations can establish how much reciprocal training the model requires.

3.11.2 Institutional Resistance and Assessment Workload

The model should not underestimate institutional resistance. Departments may regard writing instruction as their own responsibility, librarians' teaching may not be recognised in workload or promotion, timetables are crowded, and supervisors may hold differing views on conventions such as first person reference. Several measures can reduce this resistance: a formal agreement between the library and the department, approved by university management; embedding the programme in an existing course with credit; counting the teaching in both partners' workload; involving heads of department and supervisors from the planning stage; and beginning with a pilot in a single department before any expansion.

Assessment workload is equally real, since detailed feedback on many drafts can overwhelm two facilitators. The workload can be reduced by giving feedback on two or three targeted features per draft rather than on everything; commenting on selected paragraphs rather than whole proposals; training students in structured peer review with checklists based

on Table 3; giving group feedback on common problems; staggering submission dates across groups; and involving trained postgraduate assistants where available. These measures are part of the model's design, and their effect on both workload and learning should be evaluated alongside the propositions.

3.12 An Agenda for Empirical Testing

Before any claim of effectiveness is made, the model must be evaluated. Studies should compare participating students with an appropriate comparison group, since changes between a pretest and a post-test may result from maturation or practice. They should analyse both revised drafts, which show what students achieve with support, and independently produced writing, which shows what they can do alone.

Outcome measures should go well beyond frequency counts. Frequencies of Hyland's (2005) categories, normalised per 1,000 words, remain useful as a description, but competence should be judged mainly through five further measures. The first is ratings of appropriateness against the criteria in Table 3. The second is checks of attribution accuracy on a sample of citations. The third is analytic and holistic ratings of the overall quality of the proposal, to show whether changes in metadiscourse accompany better writing. The fourth is delayed writing tasks, to test retention. The fifth is interviews or think-aloud accounts of revision, to show how students make their choices. All ratings should be made by two trained raters working independently, with agreement reported, and the rubrics should be piloted before use. Mixed methods design combining text analysis with interviews of students, librarians, lecturers and supervisors (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) would help explain how the model works, and replication across faculties, institutions and resource conditions, including very large classes, would test its feasibility.

3.13 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The model rests on an integrative rather than a systematic review, so relevant Nigerian studies, especially unpublished theses and local journal articles, may have been missed. Much of the evidence on metadiscourse and its teaching comes from other countries and from genres other than the research proposal, and its relevance to Nigerian undergraduates is an assumption to be tested. The propositions are untested, the criteria in Table 3 are proposals rather than validated instruments, and the adaptations for very large, poorly resourced classes, although plausible, have not been evaluated. The model should therefore be read as a structured set of hypotheses, not as a recommendation for adoption at scale.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 What the Paper Claims

This paper has proposed a conceptual model for integrating metadiscourse instruction into undergraduate research proposal writing through collaboration between the university library and the Department of English. Its claims are conceptual: that the literature establishes metadiscourse as important in student academic writing and supports explicit, genre-based teaching; that recent Nigerian studies indicate weak and often inaccurate use of metadiscourse among undergraduates; and that the complementary expertise of librarians and English lecturers can be organised into a specified, testable model. The paper does not claim that the model improves students' writing, nor that all Nigerian students receive little rhetorical preparation.

4.2 Implications

If the propositions are supported, the model has implications for three groups. For universities without writing centres, it suggests that existing library and departmental staff can

provide focused writing support. For libraries, it suggests a teaching role that extends from finding sources to reporting them accurately. For English departments, it suggests that the research proposal deserves explicit attention as a genre in the final year, building on the general communication skills taught in GST 111.

4.3 Recommendations

Three recommendations follow, each proportionate to the current evidence. First, the model should be piloted and evaluated in one or two departments before any wider adoption, using the comparison designs and measures set out in Section 3.12. Second, the criteria for appropriate metadiscourse in Table 3 should be developed into validated rating instruments as part of that evaluation. Third, any pilot should be supported by reciprocal training for librarians and English lecturers, a formal agreement between the partners, recognition of the teaching in staff workload, and printed materials that allow the programme to run without reliable electricity or internet access.

Author Contributions

Francis Okechukwu Nwanekezie conceptualised the paper, wrote the original draft and revised the manuscript. Basilia Igbokwe and Nkechi Priscilla Nwanekezie reviewed, revised and edited the manuscript, contributing in particular to the sections on English language teaching and library practice. All three authors approved the final manuscript and take responsibility for its content.

Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

The authors used AI tools in preparing this manuscript. It was used for language refinement and consistency checking. No AI tool was used as a source of scholarly evidence, and no data were generated or analysed, since this is a conceptual paper. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality and integrity of the manuscript. No AI tool is listed as an author.

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