

An Analysis of Cohesive Devices Usage and Error Pattern in EFL Students' Argumentative Essays

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ABSTRACT

Cohesion is essential in academic writing particularly in argumentative essays as it ensures clarity and logical flow. This study explores the use of cohesive devices conjunctions, references ellipsis and substitution in argumentative writing among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Ten fifth-semester students from Yogyakarta State University participated in the study writing essays on "The Changing Role of Social Media Users." A mixed-methods study was used, combining a quantitative analysis of cohesive device use with a qualitative survey of students' understanding of cohesion. The results showed that students used conjunctions and references more than more complex techniques such as substitution and ellipsis. Although students recognized the importance of cohesion, they found it difficult to apply due to their lack of theoretical knowledge. This highlights the importance of providing clear instruction on a wider range of cohesive devices, including lexical cohesion, if we are to improve the quality of our writing. As this study suggests, improving students' understanding of cohesion and its practical application can significantly improve their argumentative writing skills, as well as their overall academic performance.

Keywords: cohesive devices; argumentative writing EFL

INTRODUCTION

Cohesion is crucial in academic writing, especially in argumentative essays. It purposes text is clear, consistent, and has a logical flow. Academic writing involves more than just writing a lengthy piece; it requires clarity, persuasiveness, and cohesion. Cohesion is a language strategy for connecting words, phrases, and paragraphs, ensuring that each section of the text is relevant and reinforces the main theme (Halliday, 1976). Logical connections help students present persuasive arguments (Nurhidayat et al., 2021). Many students, especially those learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), have obstacles in using cohesive devices correctly. They also struggle to write clear and well-structured essays. This concern extends beyond basic linguistic skills; it also reflects students' understanding and use of cohesive methods when writing. Research shows that students often struggle to properly organize their writing. This can lead to difficult sentences and difficult concepts to grasp due to the overuse of conjunctions, punctuation errors, and reliance on weak references. Students often make the mistake of overusing conjunctions like "and" or "but." As a result, they fail to diversify their use of conjunctions to maintain consistency in their writing.

Students often prioritize the final product of their essay over the writing process. This prevents them from learning and honing the skills necessary for successful writing. Many people don't understand the importance of cohesive argumentative writing, which exacerbates the situation. Therefore, it's crucial to emphasize the importance of this resource for learning and practice, so students can utilize it throughout the creative process.

Cohesion is crucial for ensuring that the text remains fluid and that topics are consistently connected throughout the essay. According to Rahmawati (2015), creating accessible and understandable literary works requires a balance between cohesiveness (linguistic connection) and coherence (meaning connection). A lack of consistency can confuse readers and make even strong

arguments seem inconsistent. When students used cohesive devices inappropriately or don't connect concepts effectively, they often encounter coherence issues. As Almutairi (2017) states, inconsistent references, including inappropriate pronouns and determiners, lead to inconsistent concepts across sentences and paragraphs. As a result, the text becomes difficult to understand.

Cohesive words such as referential words, conjunctions, and ellipsis function to make ideas more connected to each other within and between sentences. This ensures the text remains cohesive and logically structured (Latifah & Triyono, 2020). These cohesive strategies demonstrate how the surface structure of the text aligns with a coherent discourse flow. This helps readers understand the relationships between concepts and the flow of sentences. It also helps readers understand the relationships between concepts throughout the paragraph. This ensures that the overall message communicated in the text is consistent and unified (Eun, 2009). Studies show that cohesion cannot be achieved through conjunctions alone. Due to the overuse of conjunctions, overly simplistic and redundant phrases fail to convey the depth and complexity of an argument. According to Halliday (1976), good writing encompasses more than just structural and grammatical accuracy. To ensure clarity and logic in writing, a variety of cohesive systems are essential for good writing. To create a structured and engaging argumentative essay, it is crucial to understand the use of various cohesive strategies.

Previous studies have investigated common errors made when using cohesive devices; however, most research has focused on the frequency or type of these errors (e.g., Albana et al., 2020). Techniques such as ellipsis and substitution, which are crucial for coherence, are rarely studied by research (Nasser, 2017). Furthermore, direct translation from students' native languages has been shown to lead to cohesive errors (Hatim & Munday, 2019), which hinders their use of cohesive devices in foreign language contexts. Furthermore, many studies focus on conjunctions as the primary means of achieving cohesion, but they ignore the various cohesive tools available to students. This limited perspective prevents us from understanding the various Cohesive methods can improve the cohesion and effectiveness of argumentative writing.

The purpose of this study was to examine how students use various cohesive devices when writing arguments and identify their shortcomings. Quantitative analysis of error frequency was combined with qualitative insights into students' awareness and use of cohesive devices. This dual methodology will yield a deeper understanding of the problems students face and the key factors contributing to their lack of cohesion. The goal is to improve students' writing skills by helping them create more cohesive argumentative essays, which will make their arguments clearer, more logical, and more persuasive.

METHODS

Cohesive devices were used in argumentative essays written by ten selected participants from the English Language Education program at Yogyakarta State University. This study was conducted using a mixed-methods case study framework. Ten fifth-semester students' written works were impressive. The students were given two hours and fifteen minutes to write an argumentative essay on "The Changing Role of Social Media Users." This topic was chosen because it was relevant to the students' knowledge and experience. Based on the theory of Halliday and Hasan (1976), this study focused on the use of cohesive devices in students' writing. The use of cohesive strategies such as references, substitutions, ellipsis, and conjunctions, according to stress theory, can make content easier to read and understand. The types of conjunctions, additive, adversative, causal, or sequential, determined the main data groups of the essays studied. By deconstructing each phrase into its constituent phrases, cohesive devices were discovered. This allowed researchers to identify features such as pronouns (references) or conjunctions that enhance the coherence of reasoning (Suhartoyo et al., 2020). Mistakes made when using cohesive devices include selecting the wrong device or not using it frequently enough, which can make arguments less clear and logical (Prananda, 2016). The argumentative nature of students' work allows for effective assessment of cohesive methods in

logical and persuasive reasoning; this creates a relevant framework for determining strengths and areas for improvement (Suhartoyo et al., 2020).

The second research theme was studied using qualitative methods. The purpose of this study was to determine how well students understand how to use cohesive devices in their writing. Participants were randomly selected based on their outstanding performance in a previous argumentative writing course. To reduce bias, respondents were only asked to participate in the study if they agreed to the terms. During the data collection process, follow-up interviews and assessments of the participants' written essays were conducted their understanding of cohesive methods and how to use them in argumentative writing.

Researchers assessed the use of cohesive devices in students' work through interviews and mixed methods. They also obtained further information about how students used and understood the devices. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) argue that methodological convergence enhances understanding of research phenomena. They argue that the integration of quantitative and qualitative data allows for a more thorough examination of research questions. A mixed methods approach is considered appropriate for investigating how students use cohesive devices and how they use them when writing arguments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Argument Text Written by the Students

The researchers conducted this step to demonstrate that students created cohesive devices in their argumentative essays. They also demonstrated which cohesive devices were used and why some devices were more frequent than others. The researchers found the following findings regarding each type of cohesive device used. The percentage of cohesive devices in the table below was obtained by using the following formula:

$$p = \frac{N}{T} \times 100\%$$

P represents a percentage, N is types or sub-types of cohesive devices, and T is the total cohesive device used by the students (Halliday and Hasan,1976).

Table 1

The Use of Cohesive Devices

Types of Cohesive Devices	Student's Cohesive Devices	Usage
Grammatical Cohesive Devices	N	%
1.Conjunctions	260	57.40 %
2.References	150	33.11 %
3.Ellipsis	0	0.00%
4.Substitution	7	1.15%
Lexical Cohesive Devices		
1.Repetition	10	2.21 %
2.Synonyms	15	3.31 %
3.Meronyms	8	1.77 %
4.Superordinate	3	0.66 %
Total	453	100%

According to the table above, 10 students made 453 cohesive devices. Table 1 shows that the most common type of cohesive device was grammatical. Conjunctions were the most common, with 260 cases (57.40 percent), while references were the second most common, with 150 examples (33.11 percent). There was no use of ellipsis, and substitution was only employed 1.15 percent of the time. Lexical cohesive devices, on the other hand, only made up 9.34% of the total. Synonyms

(3.31%) and repetition (2.21%) were the most common, while meronyms (1.77%) and superordinate terms (0.66%) were the least common.

The results indicated that students predominantly attained cohesiveness via grammatical cohesive devices, especially conjunctions and references. For instance, Student A said,

"I agree that using social media too much makes people less productive, but I think that over time, social media can be a key factor in bringing about big changes."

The student used "although" and "but" to show how they used conjunctions to separate and connect ideas. Likewise, Student B's phrase,

"Therefore, when using Instagram, users feel that time passes very quickly,"

shows how to employ conjunctions (therefore) and references (users) to make sense. Student C's essay provides additional proof, stating,

"In other words, this site allows people to express personal information such as religious beliefs, thoughts, and cultural identity."

Words that have to do with information or identity are repeated to keep things together. In their texts, students who are proficient in using conjunctions can connect concepts rationally. This supports the idea made by Halliday and Hasan (1976) that conjunctions are an essential part of uniting grammar. Similarly, frequent use of references indicates that they know how to connect previously mentioned items within a sentence. This reinforces the argument made by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) that references are crucial for maintaining coherent discourse. In contrast, the relatively limited use of substitutions and the absence of ellipsis suggest that students have not yet begun to use these more coherent techniques in their writing. This supports the claim made by Carter and McCarthy (2006) that students typically demonstrate a stronger understanding of basic coherent structures. More sophisticated strategies, which require better syntactic script, are often used.

These findings show, how the importance of strengthening students' ability to use a wider range of cohesive devices. While providing clear instruction on substitution and ellipsis to diversify grammatical cohesion, teachers can foster students' independence in conjunctions and references. At the same time, lexical cohesion should be enhanced by encouraging the use of synonyms, superordinate categories, and part-whole relationships to increase students' vocabulary and semantic understanding. Hyland (2004) proposed a genre-based approach. This approach is highly relevant because it incorporates cohesive strategies into the process of creating authentic texts. Such interventions can help students progress from primarily relying on basic cohesive devices to more varied, sophisticated, and cohesive writing.

Analysis of Student Interview Data

The interview data gathered from students regarding their understanding and application of cohesive devices in argumentative essays yielded significant insights into their academic writing processes, challenges, and strategies employed to enhance essay quality. A primary conclusion from the interviews is that many students are unfamiliar with the term "cohesive devices," suggesting a considerable gap in their theoretical comprehension of academic writing.

For instance, Student A said:

"I have never heard of the term cohesive devices,"

Student B said:

"I don't know what these cohesive devices mean."

This shows that the students don't know a basic writing principle, which means they don't have a good academic vocabulary or a good understanding of how to write. The interviewer gave the students examples and context, and they were able to name specific cohesive devices, like conjunctions. One student said,

"Oh, I see, this is a type of connector that links one sentence to another and one paragraph to another."

Another student said, *"For example, however, but, and, therefore, etc."*

Even though many students didn't know what the phrase meant at first, they were able to figure out what cohesive devices do after the explanation. This suggests that while students may not have a formal comprehension of the term "*cohesive devices*," they employ these linguistic tools in their writing, albeit implicitly. This phenomenon may be considered a sign of implicit learning, as students employ knowledge without fully grasping the theoretical framework that underpins it. Halliday and Hasan (1976), in their seminal research on cohesion, assert that it operates through many mechanisms that connect concepts across sentences and paragraphs, so promoting coherent and cohesive language. This paradigm is the basis of modern understanding of cohesive devices and enables students to effectively utilize these devices, irrespective of their conscious awareness.

For many students, learning to use cohesive devices without even realizing it is a key part of their writing growth. When writing argumentative essays, students may naturally use cohesive devices like conjunctions, reference phrases, or lexical items to connect their ideas, even if they don't think of them as "tools" for coherence. For instance, students often utilize conjunctions such as "and," "but," and "however" not because they were taught how to use them, but because they seem to work well for connecting ideas. This exemplifies a constructivist perspective on language acquisition, wherein learners gradually internalize linguistic standards through exposure and practice, despite not possessing explicit awareness of those conventions (Piaget, 1970). However, this implicit learning does not guarantee full mastery or the ability to intentionally utilize cohesive procedures to achieve more complex forms of coherence in academic writing.

The students' lack of grasp of coherent devices points to a bigger problem with how they learned to write academically. In many academic settings, students often learn writing rules by doing them instead of being taught directly. The lack of direct theoretical knowledge regarding cohesive devices may hinder their ability to fully comprehend their relevance. Consequently, students may rely on their intuitive judgments of what enhances the coherence of their writing rather than utilizing a full, theoretically informed understanding of cohesion.

The lack of a formal introduction to cohesive devices may explain why these students didn't know what the terms meant at first, but they could recognize the devices after being shown real-life instances. The lack of knowledge shows how important it is to teach students directly about writing tools like coherent devices, which could help them comprehend their importance and learn how to utilize them in writing. Hyland (2004) supports this idea by emphasizing the importance of coherent devices in academic settings and the effectiveness of targeted training in helping students understand their role in academic writing. This is crucial, as the lack of explicit instruction may lead to students not fully understanding the range of cohesive devices, so limiting their ability to produce complex, cohesive writing.

Further examination of student responses revealed that many participants were familiar exclusively with conjunctions, a restricted class of cohesive devices. Student C said, "So far, I only know about conjunctions as connectors, and I'm not sure if there are other types of connectors besides conjunctions." According to Halliday and Hasan (1969), conjunctions are grammatical cohesive devices, but they are only one type of cohesive device. The students' inadequate comprehension of coherent devices signifies a shortcoming in their educational instruction. While they may adeptly utilize cohesive devices in practice, their understanding of the fundamental concept of cohesive devices remains insufficient. This lack of awareness raises an important question.

How can students effectively use a wide range of coherent devices if they are only taught a small number of them? Self-directed learning activities might be the answer. For example, Student C said,

"I learn to use cohesive devices or connectors by reading exemplary essays I found online."

The researcher found more types of cohesive devices in other essays, but I didn't know they were called that. She thought they were just words that people used a lot while writing argumentative essays. This indicates that students are developing the capacity to discern cohesive devices through engagement with well-constructed texts, without overtly labeling them as such. This phenomenon of

learning through exposure rather than direct instruction may be common among students who lack formal training in cohesion, instead obtaining it indirectly by imitating the writing of others. This aligns with the findings of Spivey and King (1989), who assert that interaction with the works of proficient authors can aid students in recognizing cohesive tactics in practice and integrating them into their own writing. This learning process, which involves reading and copying, is like an informal writing apprenticeship in which students acquire the style and structure of good writing. On the other hand, other people have a better understanding of cohesive devices because they took extra classes outside of their degree program.

Student B said, *"When I found out I would be taking an argumentative writing class at the college, I knew I needed extra classes to improve my academic writing skills."*

This session is very helpful for giving me more information about academic writing and helping me practice. This comment highlights the limited writing training offered in the standard curriculum, prompting students to seek additional academic support. The extra lessons give you a better way to understand how coherent devices work in academic writing. This shows that even if learning in class is important, students often need extra academic tools to help them understand writing issues better, such as coherent devices. The students' quest for additional support beyond their formal curriculum signifies a lack of confidence in the instruction received in their standard classes, which they considered insufficient for mastering the complex skills required for writing cohesive, well-structured academic essays. Alarcon and Morales (2011) contend that organized academic support and targeted training are crucial for improving students' understanding of cohesive devices, particularly in formal writing situations.

When asked how important cohesive devices are for good writing, all of the students agreed that they are necessary for making writing that is clear and easy to read. Student A said,

"I used cohesive devices to connect not only sentences but also paragraphs of an essay,"

which shows that cohesive devices make both sentences and texts more coherent. This finding supports Halliday and Hasan's (1976) assertion that literary cohesion depends on the ability to coherently connect ideas at different levels of the text. Student F said,

"I think using cohesive devices helps me organize my writing ideas and make them easier for the audience to read."

It's true that making my ideas easier for readers to understand in writing class helps me do better. This emphasizes the crucial role of cohesive devices in enhancing readability and guiding the reader through the argument, which is critical for academic success. This also means that students are changing how they think about coherent devices. They now see them as more than just mechanical tools; they see them as ways to help readers understand better, which is linked to better writing skills. McNamara et al. (2010) contend that cohesive devices markedly improve text clarity and accessibility for readers; yet, they are not the exclusive factors influencing writing quality.

McNamara et al. (2010) contend that the caliber of writing is influenced by the complexity of concepts, the refinement of arguments, and the variety of terminology. Students agree that cohesive devices are important for keeping things coherent, but they don't all agree on whether cohesive devices alone are enough to make good writing.

Student F said: *"Cohesive devices are only one way to make text easier to understand and don't show how good the writing is." More coherent devices make text easier to read. I don't think that the number of coherent devices has anything to do with the high essay scores we got the high-achieving students who wrote argumentative essays.*

This viewpoint challenges the conventional belief that cohesive devices are always linked to writing quality. On the other hand, Student D argued that cohesive devices are necessary for readability, saying,

"Without connectors or cohesive devices to help readers understand the story or the ideas the writers want to get across, readers may get confused by how the story or ideas are moving along, which will make it hard for them to understand the essay."

The discussion around these two points of view shows how complicated the link between cohesiveness and writing quality is. Cohesive devices are necessary for structural coherence, although they do not automatically guarantee higher literary quality. The ability to combine complex ideas, use advanced syntax, and show a range of vocabulary has a big impact on how well an argumentative essay is overall.

Previous studies (Dastjerdi & Samian, 2011; McNamara et al., 2010) have validated this viewpoint, demonstrating that coherent devices alone do not represent the primary factor influencing writing quality. McCauley (1985) posits that a holistic methodology for teaching writing, including grammar, vocabulary, and cohesiveness, is crucial for the improvement of students' writing abilities.

Furthermore, students underscored the challenges they have when tasked with writing argumentative essays. Student F says that "finding the idea" is the biggest problem. This is a problem that many students have to deal with all the time because coming up with ideas for essays can be hard. Even successful students say they have trouble developing ideas, which shows that this is a common problem in academic writing. The difficulty of coming up with new, relevant ideas could make students angry and stop them from being able to make convincing arguments.

Additionally, Student C stated,

"The most difficult aspect of composing an argumentative essay is effectively organizing the ideas."

Achieving logical consistency in an essay is a major challenge that students face. To solve these challenges, students said they would revisit old writings, undertake peer reviews, and use cohesive strategies to structure their writing.

Student E said, *"By looking at great writing, I learned how good writers use academic vocabulary and grammar, as well as how to combine different ideas to make my own writing better."*

This method stresses reading as a way to learn, showing students that looking at other people's work can help them write better. This corresponds with Plakans' (2009) study, which found a strong link between effective reading strategies and successful writing.

In conclusion, while students acknowledge the importance of coherent devices in writing, there is a nuanced relationship between implicit usage and explicit understanding. Their reliance on conjunctions and little comprehension of alternative cohesive techniques suggests a lack of both knowledge and application. Students agree that cohesive devices are important for making writing coherent, but they also realize that they don't always make writing better. On the other hand, things like developing ideas, using correct grammar, and using a variety of words have a big impact on how good a piece of writing is. To enhance students' writing skills, it is essential to address the pedagogical shortcomings in the understanding of cohesive devices, expand their use beyond conjunctions, and integrate strategies that enhance coherence and order in academic writing.

Additionally, the students' discussions demonstrated an awareness of the importance of cohesive devices, which is crucial for their development as academic writers. Their answers showed that students know that academic writing needs to be coherent, even if they don't fully understand how conjunctions, lexical items, references, substitutions, and ellipsis can make argumentative writing more complex. As a result, teachers need to do more than just teach students how to write technically; they also need to help them develop a deep understanding of writing and how to make it flow. To do this, kids will need to be involved in activities that go beyond rote practice and encourage higher-order thinking and reflection. This method helps individuals go from being able to use coherent devices without thinking about it to being able to understand them and use them on purpose when writing high-quality academic papers.

CONCLUSION

For academic writing to be clear, consistent, and well-developed, it needs to be cohesive, especially in argumentative essays. Halliday and Hasan (1976) assert that the proper utilization of cohesive devices such as conjunctions, references, and ellipsis enhances textual coherence and facilitates the connection of ideas both within and between sentences. Students understand the importance of cohesive devices, but they struggle to use them correctly, especially when they are more than just simple conjunctions. Even though students have used more advanced cohesive techniques like substitution and limited ellipsis, research shows that they still utilize too many conjunctions. Hyland (2004) asserts that cohesiveness is a significant characteristic of academic writing. Some students have problems employing coherence, even though it makes their writing easier to read and more convincing. Students are aware of how to apply cohesive methods in real-life situations, although they may not consistently utilize them in their writing.

This study shows that students need clear instruction and structured practice to better understand cohesive approaches. Asserted that effective writing instruction needs a thorough understanding of theory and regular use of strategies (Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2013). We used both quantitative and qualitative methods in this study so that we could better understand the challenges students have and the techniques they use to improve their writing. When teaching, teachers should focus on bigger parts of cohesiveness, including lexical coherence, and use hard approaches like replacement and ellipsis. Carter and McCarthy (2006) back this up by noting that you need to retain lexical and grammatical cohesion to make discourse that is cohesive. Teachers can help students go from writing simple essays to writing more complex, logical, and convincing arguments by teaching them how to employ cohesive methods and how to use them in their writing. They can write better at school and in disputes if they use more cohesive devices. Halliday and Hasan (1976) assert that this entails the ability to synthesize ideas to construct a compelling and coherent argument. Students need to learn how to fight in school as they advance through college. As studies like Hyland's (2004) study illustrate, it's crucial to help kids understand cohesiveness better, both in theory and in practice, so that they can write and think critically better in school.

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