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## A Study of Cohesive Devices in Students' Academic Writing

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**Abstract:** Writing is a challenging skill for learners learning English as a foreign language. When writing English, students face many problems triggered by a lack of knowledge of the English language, interference with their mother tongue, and difficulties related to vocabulary and grammar usage. One particular demanding aspect of writing is attaining coherence and text harmony. Literature indicates that many second language learners tend to underuse, misuse, or overuse cohesive devices, which is crucial in maintaining coherence and cohesion in academic writing. This research focused on evaluating the use of cohesive devices in the academic writing of undergraduates majoring in English at Islamia College Peshawar. Data were gathered through student-written essays on IELTS test topics, with 30 randomly selected samples from each of the 4th, 6th, and 8th semesters, totaling 90 samples. Employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the analysis revealed a prevalent issue: the inaccurate utilization of various cohesive devices. Students demonstrated an understanding of structuring discussion texts coherently, yet their challenges stemmed from the misapplication of cohesive devices, leading to incomprehensible texts. This study explored lexical and grammatical cohesion, leading to the recommendation that future research should embrace aspects like sentence structure, tense usage, and alternative cohesive models.

**Key Words:** English as a Foreign Language, Academic Writing, Students

### Introduction

Writing is one of the crucial skills for successful language development. Its value and demand are enhanced when it comes to writing in the English language, which is broadly used for international communication and understanding of the required knowledge. English writing has had a huge impact on the whole structure of education since it is the main source of world knowledge (Nunan, 1989). Proficient writers of English possess the ability to unlock opportunities across a wide spectrum of future endeavors (Gill, 2014). However, the art of effective writing hinges on the cultivation of a logical progression of ideas within sentences, urging students to connect their concepts fluently. This pivotal guidance directs learners not only toward articulating their intended thoughts but also toward constructing these thoughts in well-formed sentences (Holloway, 1981). To ensure readability, the coherence of sentences is paramount, transcending mere length and focusing on the seamless interplay of ideas (Brostoff, 1981; Dar and Khan, 2015). The written text represents a comprehensive linguistic exchange (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Haider, 2022). It encapsulates an entire communicative process from inception to conclusion, embodying language in a manner that conveys meaning to its users (Eggs, 1994). This perspective underscores that effective text composition entails guiding students to create a seamless flow of ideas across sentences, emphasizing coherence and cohesion. Regardless of its form or medium, a text's significance lies in its meaning and the coherent linkage of ideas, prompting educators to prioritize the development of meaningful and interconnected linguistic expressions.

In the dominion of writing, cohesion emerges as a fundamental and pivotal factor. It embodies the seamless interconnectedness and progression within a text, a feat accomplished through the skillful

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deployment of linguistic tools that bind words, sentences, and paragraphs harmoniously. This artful orchestration culminates in a logical and fluid transition of ideas, enabling a coherent tapestry to unfold across the expanse of the written composition. At its core, cohesion serves as the architect of semantic harmony, fostering a graceful continuum of notions that traverse ideas, sentences, paragraphs, and the diverse segments composing a literary work (Brostoff, [1981](#)). The exquisite dance of cohesion permits an effortless traversal of the textual landscape as concepts converge and diverge with an inherent sense of unity (Halliday and Matthiessen, [2004](#)). Certainly, its role in forging a symphony among distinct textual components is paramount.

According to Halliday and Hasan ([1976](#)), the essence of cohesion resides in semantics. They introduced the concept of a "cohesive tie," a fundamental element in creating interconnectivity within textual discourse. This tie serves as the linchpin for forging cohesive links between linguistic entities, playing a pivotal role in tethering the interpretation of various textual components. The existence of a cohesive tie engenders a relationship where the understanding of one element hinges on the comprehension of another, thus giving rise to a network of cohesion. This concept of a cohesive tie lends itself as a tool for dissecting and grasping the cohesive essence and structural texture of any given text. In the English language, the creation of cohesive ties finds its manifestation through two principal avenues: lexical and grammatical cohesion (Halliday and Hasan, [1976](#)). Each of these pathways bears immense significance, with scholars and applied linguists meticulously scrutinizing and dissecting their nuances. The objective is to furnish English language learners with effective strategies for mastering these vital cohesive ties.

Lexical cohesion denotes the coherent impact achieved through the meticulous choice of vocabulary (Halliday and Hasan, [1976](#)). This phenomenon pertains to the interconnected words that are purposefully selected to establish meaningful connections among various components of a text. Two primary manifestations of lexical cohesion are recognized: reiteration and collocation. Reiteration involves the deliberate recurrence of words, synonyms, or antonyms within a passage. Conversely, collocation encompasses the grouping of words that commonly coexist due to their shared frequency of occurrence and inherent semantic relationship. In essence, lexical cohesion is an indispensable tool for writers to enhance the logical flow and comprehensibility of their written works. By skillfully employing reiteration and collocation, writers can effectively unify their texts, thereby facilitating smoother communication of ideas to readers.

Grammatical cohesion, an essential aspect of linguistic communication, derives its foundation from the structural content of a discourse. This intricate concept is dissected into four distinct modules, meticulously outlined by Halliday and Hasan ([1976](#)): ellipsis, substitution, references, and conjunction. These modules intricately interweave within the fabric of language to ensure a coherent and unified stream of ideas. Substitution involves the replacement of specific words or phrases with others, enabling the avoidance of repetition and enhancing the overall clarity of the discourse. Ellipsis, on the other hand, involves omitting certain elements that are implied or understood from the context, further streamlining the language while maintaining coherence. References establish connections between elements within a text, such as pronouns referring to antecedents, cementing the logical progression of ideas. Meanwhile, conjunctions act as the glue that binds sentences and clauses together, fostering a smooth transition between concepts (Halliday & Hasan, [1976](#)).

Numerous researchers have inquired into the observation that students often struggle to express themselves with clarity, accuracy, and coherence in their academic writing. This struggle is manifested through a myriad of errors that students tend to make. These errors encompass a wide range of issues, such as grammar, syntax, punctuation, and vocabulary usage (Kellogg, [2001](#); Al Fadda, [2012](#); Frederickson, 997; Richards, [1971](#)). However, a particularly prevalent issue arises from their unfamiliarity with the appropriate use of cohesive devices, which play a crucial role in shaping the comprehensibility and quality of academic writing. Cohesive devices encompass a variety of linguistic elements, including conjunctions, transitional phrases, and pronouns, all of which serve to connect ideas and sentences in a coherent manner. When used effectively, cohesive devices guide readers through the text and contribute to the overall clarity and logical flow of the content (Halliday and Hasan, [1976](#); Yule, [2022](#), p. 126).



The issue concerning cohesive devices can be viewed from two contrasting angles. On the one hand, students frequently fail to recognize their appropriate usage or apply them correctly, resulting in reader confusion. This deficiency in cohesion often manifests as fragmented and disjointed prose, impeding the reader's ability to track the argument or narrative. Conversely, on the other hand, students may, at times, excessively employ cohesive devices, particularly in descriptive essays, where an overabundance of transitional phrases can disrupt the requisite formal and scholarly tone essential in academic writing (Bae, [2001](#); Liu and Braine, [2005](#); Chanyoo, [2013](#); Karadeniz, [2017](#); Nurwahidah et al., [2022](#); Tanskanen, [2006](#)). This dual challenge regarding cohesive devices underscores the critical role they play in academic writing. Cohesion, as a pivotal element in writing, assumes a critical role. It embodies the unified connection and progression within a text, achieved through the skillful deployment of devices that bind words, sentences, and paragraphs, thus establishing a logical continuum of ideas from one segment of the text to another. Cohesion constructs the semantic framework that harmonizes ideas, sentences, paragraphs, and distinct sections within a written composition (Yule, [2022](#); Halliday & Hasan, [1976](#), p. 274; Taboada, [2004](#)).

In light of these compelling observations, the purpose of this research was to analyze the use of cohesive devices within students' academic writing. The objective was to identify the challenges encountered by students while using cohesive devices. By investigating these facets, the study endeavored to enhance the comprehension of how students employ cohesive devices in their writing and the hurdles they encounter in the process. Through a thorough examination of cohesive devices, this research aimed to bridge the gap between the theoretical understanding of these linguistic elements and their practical application in students' writing. By shedding light on the challenges and nuances involved, this study aimed to pave the way for more effective pedagogical approaches and strategies to enhance students' mastery of cohesive devices, thus fostering greater clarity, coherence, and effectiveness in their academic compositions.

## Literature Review

Numerous scholars of linguistics have presented diverse definitions of writing. Writing skills help authors to articulate their ideas and concepts coherently, engaging in a cognitive exchange with their audience. It involves the transformation of language into a textual format through the use of symbols or signs Harmer ([2007](#), p. 33). The act of written expression is an outcome of cognitive processes such as ideation, drafting, and revision, necessitating a specific skill set that does not naturally manifest in all individuals but rather demands dedicated practice and concerted learning efforts, as discussed by Brown ([2003](#), p. 335). Celce-Murcia and Snow ([2014](#)) claim that writing represents a dynamic mode of communication that unfolds as an interaction between authors and readers through the medium of written text. Another illuminating viewpoint proposed by Chakraverty and Kripa (1999) emphasizes that writing stands as a fundamental aspect of language acquisition. It serves as a reflective process requiring considerable time for contemplating a subject, evaluating existing knowledge, and categorizing ideas. This highlights the requirement for an apt linguistic framework to articulate ideas in the realm of written discourse, ultimately positioning writing as an exercise in cognitive application. In essence, writing emerges as a practice that encapsulates not only linguistic expression but also mental engagement. It encapsulates the fusion of ideas, thought processes, and linguistic skills, forming a channel through which intricate mental activities are externalized and shared.

When students write in a second language (L2), they encounter challenges like interference from their native language, difficulties with vocabulary, and grammar issues. Writing, according to Kellogg ([2001](#)), evaluates memory, thinking ability, and expression skills in a second language. Al Fadda ([2012](#)) identifies struggles among L2 students in distinguishing written and spoken words, enhancing grammar, creating coherent sentences, and paraphrasing content. Frederickson (1997) points out confusion with verb tenses, often linked inaccurately to specific time periods. Richards (1971) observes that L2 learners incorporate elements of their native language, leading to errors in various linguistic aspects. Lack of sufficient knowledge of the target language and its intricate vocabulary contributes to these errors (Richards, 1971).

Academic writing, spanning research papers, theses, and conference contributions, is a formal mode of discourse essential for scholarly communication and assessment. It demands mastery over domain-specific knowledge and cognitive competencies such as analytical thinking (Irvin, [2010](#); Murray, [2005](#)).

Oshima and Hogue (2007) delineate its distinctive features, marked by structured argumentation and adherence to disciplinary norms. Academic writing serves as a conduit for information exchange, categorized into student and expert genres, both demanding adherence to standards (Hyland, 2018). The genre-specific nature of academic writing, observed across disciplines, highlights its dynamic interplay with subject matter, methodology, and presentation (Irvin, 2010).

Citation practices in academic writing, crucial for positioning contributions, vary across disciplines (Tusting et al., 2019). The nuances of academic writing in different fields, exemplified by history's reliance on primary sources and mathematics' emphasis on proofs, demonstrate the impact of contextual variations on the writing process (Irvin, 2010). Despite these variations, fundamental elements persist across academic texts, contributing to the richness of academic discourse (Irvin, 2010).

Cohesion and coherence are integral to effective academic writing. Cohesion, encompassing lexical and grammatical dimensions, involves the strategic arrangement of words and structures to ensure text unity (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Lexical cohesion relies on vocabulary selection, while grammatical cohesion utilizes language structure for connectivity. Cohesion aids in guiding readers through the text, enhancing clarity and logical progression (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Coherence, on the other hand, is the contextual structure that contributes to the comprehension of a text (Taboada, 2004; Yule, 2022). It emerges from the interaction between the audience and the text, requiring developed cognitive frameworks for meaningful interpretation (Tanskanen, 2006). While cohesion captures intra-textual connections, coherence ensures a comprehensive and meaningful whole, aligning with the reader's interpretive framework.

Though distinct, cohesion and coherence are intertwined in creating texts that are both connected and meaningful (Tanskanen, 2006). Cohesive devices, including pronouns and references, serve as navigational aids, guiding readers and facilitating the interpretation of relationships within the text. The harmonious interplay of cohesion and coherence enhances a text's unity, intelligibility, and overall effectiveness in conveying information (Hasan, 1984; Tanskanen, 2006). In essence, academic writing, with its genre-specificities and reliance on cohesion and coherence, establishes a potent channel for intellectual exchange and advancement.

This literature review provides an overview of various studies examining how well learners of English as a second language (L2) maintain coherence and cohesion in their writing. Namaziandost et al. (2019) compared how Iranians and non-Iranians used cohesive conjunctions in research articles. Tajeddin and Rahimi (2017) investigated how substitution and ellipsis were used in business English textbooks, showing differences across levels and series. Nurwahidah et al. (2022) focused on grammatical cohesion in a high school English textbook, highlighting the frequent use of conjunctions, references, and ellipses. Rostami Abusaeedi (2012) explored cohesive ties in English L2 students' writing, emphasizing the importance of reference and lexical cohesive devices. Bae (2001) examined coherence and cohesion in English children's writing, emphasizing the prevalence of lexical and referential cohesion. Karadeniz (2017) looked into the relationship between students' proficiency in cohesion and their ability to create coherent texts. Adiantika (2015) studied cohesive devices in expository writing by twelfth-grade students, finding that lexical cohesion was commonly used. The review lays the groundwork for the present research, highlighting diverse contexts and approaches to understanding how coherence and cohesion manifest in L2 writing. It also underscores the research gap in the Pakistani context, emphasizing the need to investigate how students use cohesive devices in their academic writing.

## Research Methodology

The study focuses specifically on this academic setting, using qualitative methods to delve into the details. The participants are the students from the English Department at Islamia College, Peshawar, selected through a purposive sampling strategy to ensure practicality. Opting for a case study design, the research aims to thoroughly investigate the specific context of the English department. Case studies are chosen for their ability to provide a deep understanding of complex phenomena within certain disciplines, allowing for detailed narratives (Basse, 1999; Denscombe, 2007).

The main tools for this research are document analysis methods, a common practice in qualitative research (Rose et al., 2019). Document analysis involves extracting insights from existing materials like



written samples and reports. This aligns with the qualitative tradition of exploring multifaceted issues through the content analysis of documents (Ary et al., 2018; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

Data collection takes place during class sessions, where students independently create written compositions based on IELTS-recommended subjects. The researcher ensures that the process is authentic and each student works independently. The study covers students from the 4th, 6th, and 8th semesters, with a total of 90 samples randomly chosen to represent different groups. The meticulous and systematic approach to data collection, combined with the diverse selection of students from various semesters, strengthens the study's foundation for a robust analysis of how cohesive devices are used in academic writing. In summary, the research methodology lays the groundwork for a thorough exploration of cohesion in the academic writing of BS English students at Islamia College Peshawar.

In the data analysis stage, the researcher used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. They organized descriptive information systematically, following Fraenkel and Wallen's (2009) strategies, which involved creating predefined categories based on existing knowledge and letting categories emerge naturally. The analysis of cohesive devices, guided by Halliday and Hasan's theoretical framework (1976), went through a structured process. This included preparing the dataset, thoroughly exploring it, coding systematically, and identifying detailed patterns and categories. This approach is similar to Lodico et al.'s (2010) framework. The researcher carefully reported and interpreted the outcomes, ensuring a solid understanding of the cohesive device data. This systematic analytical process allowed for a detailed exploration of the data, boosting the study's overall credibility and dependability.

## Data Analysis and Discussion

The researcher categorized and quantified data, presenting findings through tables and graphs. The focus was on identifying types and frequencies of cohesive devices, providing insights into students' writing patterns. The systematic approach ensured reliability, contributing to writing development knowledge.

## Grammatical and Lexical Cohesive Devices

**Table 1**

*Total Number of Grammatical and Lexical Cohesive Devices*

Cohesive Devices	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Grammatical Cohesive Devices	3738	60.6 %
Lexical Cohesive Devices	2425	39.4%
Total	6163	

Based on Table 1, a total of 6,163 cohesive devices were found in the students' writings. Out of these, 3,738 cohesive devices, accounting for 60.6% of the total, were grammatical cohesive devices. The data showed that students focused more on using cohesive grammatical devices. These grammatical cohesive devices include things like pronouns, conjunctions, substitutions, and ellipses, which help make the text flow smoothly. The remaining 2,425 cohesive devices, making up 39.4% of the total, were categorized as lexical cohesive devices. Karasi (1994) documented similar findings, while Liu and Braine (2005), in their analyses of students' essays, identified a greater prevalence of lexical ties compared to grammatical cohesive ties, as their analytical framework encompassed the consideration of lexical cohesion. Lexical cohesive devices primarily involve the use of cohesive elements like repetition, synonymy, and antonyms, which help establish semantic connections between different parts of the text. These devices play a role in connecting different parts of the text and making it easier to understand. This data gave us valuable information about how cohesive devices were distributed and used in the analyzed text, revealing the patterns and strategies that students employed to maintain clarity and coherence.

## Grammatical Cohesive Devices in Students' Writings

**Table 2**

*Types of Grammatical Cohesive Devices in Students' Writing*

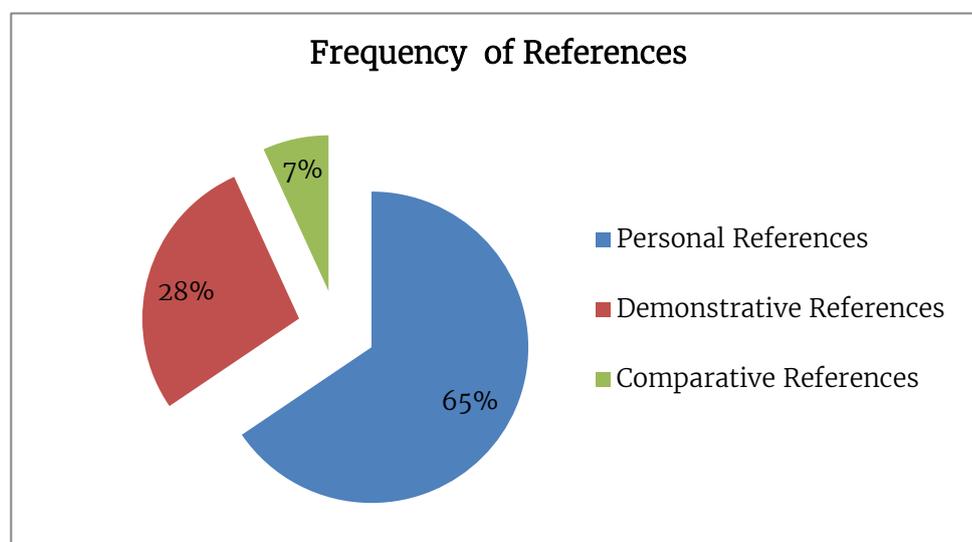
Cohesive Devices	Total Occurrences	Percentage
Reference	2194	58.7%
Conjunction	1403	37.5%

Cohesive Devices	Total Occurrences	Percentage
Substitution	94	2.5%
Ellipsis	49	1.3%
Total	3738	

Based on Table 2, the most frequently used grammatical cohesive device in students' writing was the reference, which accounted for 2,194 occurrences. This represents approximately 58.7% of the total cohesive devices analyzed. Conjunctions were the second most prevalent type of grammatical cohesive device, with 1,403 occurrences, making up 37.5% of the total. Substitutions were also found in the students' writing, with a total of 94 occurrences, accounting for 2.5% of the total. Ellipsis, the least frequently used type of grammatical cohesive device in this dataset, appeared 49 times, representing 1.3% of the total. This shows that students primarily employed references and conjunctions as cohesive devices in their writing. The present finding aligns with the studies conducted by Liu and Braine (2005), Karadeniz (2017) and Bae (2001), although there exists a slight discrepancy in the observed percentage of usage. This finding also matches the study of Nurwahidah et al. (2019), where the percentage of the reference was 61% and 38% for the conjunction, which seemed fair. References play a dominant role, followed by conjunctions. Substitutions and ellipsis, although less frequent, also contribute to the overall cohesion of the students' texts. These findings highlight the importance of understanding and effectively utilizing different types of grammatical cohesive devices to enhance the clarity and coherence of students' writing.

### Graph 2

*Types and Frequency of References in Students' Writing*



Graph 2 presents the frequency of references in students' writings, categorizing them into three types: personal, demonstrative, and comparative. According to Graph 2, the personal references category had the highest occurrence, accounting for 1,438 references, which represents approximately 65.5% of the total references analyzed. These findings align with the study of Nurwahidah et al. (2019), where students used more references in their writings. Personal references typically involve citations that directly relate to individuals, such as their experiences, opinions, or firsthand accounts. This suggests that personal accounts hold substantial weight and relevance within the texts, as they contribute significantly to the body of evidence being examined. Demonstrative references, on the other hand, were the second most prevalent type, with 606 occurrences constituting around 27.7% of the total references. Demonstrative references often involve citations that provide examples, illustrations, or instances to support and clarify specific concepts or arguments within the research. The relatively high number of demonstrative references indicates the importance of presenting concrete evidence and visual aids to enhance the understanding and credibility of the study's writings. Comparative references, comprising 150 instances, accounted for approximately 6.8% of the total references analyzed. Comparative references typically involve citations that draw comparisons between different subjects, variables, or studies to highlight



similarities, differences, or trends. While the frequency of comparative references is relatively lower compared to personal and demonstrative references, they still play a valuable role in the research by providing a broader context and facilitating critical analysis and synthesis of information. Overall, the data demonstrated that personal references were the most frequently used, followed by demonstrative and comparative references. This suggests that the students relied heavily on personal references.

**Table 3**

*Types and Frequency of Conjunctions in Students' Writing*

Type	Number	Percentage
Additive	834	59.4%
Causal	264	18.8%
Adversative	179	12.8%
Temporal	126	8.9%
Total	1403	

Table 3 presents data on the frequency of different types of conjunctions. The data consists of four types of conjunctions: additive, causal, adverse, and temporal. According to the data, the most frequent type of conjunction was Additive, with a total count of 834 instances. This accounts for 59.4% of all observed conjunctions. Additive conjunctions were used to connect two similar ideas or statements, indicating the addition or accumulation of information. This suggests that the majority of the text analyzed in the research tended to link ideas in an additive manner. The second most common type of conjunction was Causal, with a count of 264 instances, comprising 18.8% of the total. Causal conjunctions establish a cause-and-effect relationship between two clauses or sentences, highlighting the reasons behind certain actions or events. The relatively high occurrence of Causal conjunctions implies that a significant portion of the text under investigation was focused on explaining causes and effects. Adversative conjunctions, which express contrast or opposition, were found to be the third most frequent type, with a count of 179 instances, accounting for 12.8% of the total. Adversative conjunctions are employed to highlight differences, contradictions, or conflicts between ideas or situations. The presence of a considerable number of Adversative conjunctions indicates that contrasting viewpoints or conflicting information played a notable role in the analyzed text. Temporal conjunctions, which indicate time relationships between clauses or events, were the least common type observed, with a count of 126 instances, making up 8.9% of the total. Temporal conjunctions link ideas related to time, such as sequence, duration, or simultaneity. The relatively lower frequency of temporal conjunctions suggests that the aspect of time might have been less prominent in the students' text compared to other types of relationships. These findings align with the study of Karadeniz (2017), where students used more additive conjunction, followed by causal, comparative, adversative and temporal.

### Lexical Cohesive Devices in Students' Writings

**Table 4**

*Types of Lexical Cohesive Devices in Students' Writing*

Cohesive Devices	Occurrences	Percentage
Repetition	1865	76.9%
Synonyms	220	9.1%
Collocation	203	8.4%
Antonyms	137	5.6%
Total	2425	

Table 4 presents the types and frequency of lexical cohesive devices in students' writings, which play a crucial role in establishing connections and coherence at the word and phrase level. Table 5 displays the occurrences of each cohesive device type and their respective percentages. According to the data, the most prevalent lexical cohesive device observed in students' writing was repetition, with a total of 1,865 occurrences. This represents approximately 76.9% of the total lexical cohesive devices analyzed. Repetition involves the deliberate reuse of words or phrases within a text to reinforce or emphasize certain ideas or

concepts. The high frequency of repetition suggests that students rely heavily on this device to create cohesion and emphasize key points in their writing. Synonyms, which are words or phrases that have similar meanings, were the second most common type of lexical cohesive device, with 220 occurrences, accounting for around 9.1% of the total. Students employ synonyms to avoid repetition while conveying the same or similar ideas. The relatively lower frequency of synonyms compared to repetition indicates that while students do utilize alternative vocabulary, they rely more on repetition as a cohesive strategy. Moreover, Collocation was observed 203 times, accounting for approximately 8.4% of the total. Collocation refers to the natural pairing or grouping of words that commonly occur together. Students utilize collocations to ensure precision and accuracy in their writing, as well as to maintain coherence by employing word combinations that are expected or familiar to readers. Finally, Antonyms, which are words or phrases with opposite meanings, were found in 137 instances, constituting approximately 5.6% of the total lexical cohesive devices. Although less frequent than repetition and synonyms, the usage of antonyms still demonstrates students' awareness of creating cohesion through the juxtaposition of opposing concepts. In summary, the analysis of lexical cohesive devices in students' writing reveals that repetition is the most commonly employed strategy, followed by the use of synonyms, antonyms, and collocations. While repetition dominates, the presence of synonyms, antonyms, and collocations showcases students' attempts to enhance the variety and coherence of their writing. The finding aligns with studies by Liu and Braine (2005), Karadeniz (2017), and Bae (2001).S They revealed that students frequently repeat words in their writing, followed by using similar words, collocations, and antonyms. Lack of vocabulary, insufficient training, and limited knowledge were identified as the main reasons for this repetition. The studies emphasized the need for expanding vocabulary, providing proper training, and increasing knowledge to enhance students' writing skills and encourage the use of a wider range of language expressions in their compositions.

### **Problems of Cohesive Devices in Students' Writing**

This section of the study addressed the second research question. The second research question was about the problems students face in using cohesive devices in their academic writing. While the analysis revealed a widespread usage of cohesive devices, it also exposed numerous instances where students incorrectly employed these devices in their writing. Consequently, a subsequent manual analysis was conducted to investigate the challenges students encountered when attempting to write cohesively or effectively utilize cohesive devices in their essays.

### **Incorrect Usage of Cohesive Devices in Students' Writing**

The students' writing exhibits a noticeable problem concerning the incorrect usage of different cohesive devices. It becomes evident that there are instances where they employ a particular cohesive device inappropriately, adding it where it is unnecessary and disrupting the flow of the text. Conversely, in other cases, crucial parts of the writing require the application of cohesive devices to establish logical connections between ideas, yet the students omit them. These inconsistencies in the usage of cohesive devices become apparent to any reader who goes through the students' work. The inappropriate use of these devices hampers the overall coherence and clarity of their writing. It leads to confusion and difficulty in following the intended message, as the logical progression of ideas is disrupted.

### **Problems in References**

Reference is a way of referring back to something mentioned before in a sentence or paragraph. It helps connect ideas and show how they relate to each other. When we use reference, we use a word to represent the whole idea instead of repeating the same words over and over again. This way, we can make our writing smoother and easier to understand. According to Johnson (1992), understanding how to use references correctly shows our ability to make connections and create coherence in our writing. The findings revealed that students faced difficulties in distinguishing whether to use a reference item as the subject or object in a sentence, resulting in confusion. They struggled to determine the appropriate grammatical role of the reference item, leading to errors in their sentence structure and potentially impacting the clarity and coherence of their writing. This was evident in various instances, such as the following example:



### Example 1

If a student is allowed to study the subject of his own choice, it will help him become an independent and successful person. Moreover, a student who selects a subject on their own excels in the field, and those who select a subject for the scope of the subject may not be helpful to him. Example 3 shows that, in many instances, the students were confused about the use of third-person singular and plural pronouns. In the first sentence, "them" is incorrectly used instead of the correct word. Similarly, in the second sentence, "their" is incorrectly used while referring back to a singular subject, "a student." Moreover, in the third sentence, "him" is used instead of the correct word "them" when referring to more than one person, "those who." Similarly, in another example

### Example 2

A student would left to his or her choice whatever they want to do or would study...Parents don't need to impose this well on their children. In example 2, the pronoun "they" is used to refer back to the singular subject "a student," and in the second sentence, a singular possessive pronoun "his" is used to refer to the plural subject "parents." This happened because the student didn't have enough knowledge about how to use references correctly. In addition, according to Dastjerdi and Samian (2011), insufficient practice and lack of exposure to authentic examples in the target language contribute to students' mistakes in using cohesive devices. In other words, when students do not have enough opportunities to practice and are not exposed to real-life language usage, they are more likely to struggle with employing cohesive devices correctly. These factors hinder their ability to develop a solid understanding of how to effectively utilize cohesive devices in their writing.

### Problems in Conjunctions

Conjunctions are seen as one of the clearest ways to connect ideas and make writing flow smoothly. They are commonly used by non-native writers because they have a limited range of linguistic tools to create coherence in their writing. In simpler terms, conjunctions are popular among language learners because they help link thoughts and make writing easier to understand (Chanyoo, 2013). This study found that the students found it the hardest to use conjunctions as a way to connect their ideas. They made the most mistakes when trying to use conjunctions correctly. It was a challenge for them to understand and use these connecting words properly.

### Example 3

"When they choose subjects of their choice because their parent impose their subjects on them, and they go for it."

In example 3, the word "because" was used incorrectly in this sentence, making the meaning unclear for readers. The student chose the wrong conjunction in this case. The reason for this mistake was probably not knowing which conjunction to use correctly. Adiantika (2015) suggests that the lack of knowledge is due to not receiving enough training and guidance on using cohesive devices. Additionally, many students made mistakes by starting new paragraphs and sentences with causal conjunctions.

### Example 4

Universities focus on scientific subjects mostly. Because the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the time of modern science, this sentence, in example 4, could be corrected: "Universities mostly focus on scientific subjects because the 21st century is the time of modern science". According to Darweesh and Kadhim (2016), there are several reasons why students may struggle to use conjunctions properly in their writing. Firstly, they might have limited exposure to well-written texts or lack sufficient practice in identifying and using conjunctions effectively. Secondly, there could be a lack of explicit instruction on conjunction usage in language learning materials or curricula. Thirdly, students may have difficulties understanding the nuanced meanings and appropriate contexts for different conjunctions. Addressing these issues through targeted instruction and practice activities and providing ample exposure to authentic language materials can help students improve their command of conjunctions in writing.

## Over Use of Some Cohesive Devices while Neglecting Others

The students have a tendency to overuse certain types of cohesive devices, including repetition, reference, and connectives, while overlooking the importance of using other types. Unfortunately, this overreliance on specific cohesive devices has negative consequences, making their written work monotonous and repetitive. The findings of the study revealed that students encountered difficulties when using cohesive devices in writing discussion texts. They were not only confused about using references, conjunctions, and lexical cohesion, but they also did not use substitutions and ellipses. It is clear that the students were more familiar with some cohesive devices and found them easier to use. As a result, they relied excessively on repetition and reference in their writing.

### Neglecting the Use of Ellipsis and Substitution

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 88), substitution is defined as the act of replacing one element with another. They argue that this replacement occurs at the lexicogrammatical level, which encompasses grammar, vocabulary, and linguistic form. It is important to note that the substitute item serves the same structural purpose as the element it replaces. On the other hand, Ellipsis contributes to the cohesion of a text and provides valuable insights into the interpretation of its intended meaning. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), ellipsis occurs when something that is structurally necessary is intentionally left unsaid, creating a sense of incompleteness. In certain parts of the text, students had opportunities to use substitutions and ellipses, but they did not utilize them due to their limited knowledge or understanding. As shown in the following examples.

#### Example 5

*Some people think that students should choose to study whatever they like. On the other hand, some people think that they should only be allowed to study subjects that will be useful in the future.*

In the above example, the phrase “some people think” is repeated, which makes the text less coherent. The student could substitute the phrase “some people” in the second sentence with “others,” so the text would look like “Some people think that students should choose to study whatever they like. On the other hand, others think that they should only be allowed to study subjects that will be useful in the future”. Similarly, in another, below, an example where an ellipsis was possible.

#### Example 6

*It is not only limited to interest, but it is also limited to scope.*

In this example, the “it is and limited” could be omitted in the second clause. So, the sentence would become, “It is not only limited to interest but also to scope.” This shows that the students did not use substitution and ellipses properly. According to Alarcon and Morales' (2011), without substitution and ellipsis in writing, the text can become repetitive and less concise. Without utilizing these devices, we may end up using the same words or phrases repeatedly, which can make the writing monotonous. Additionally, the absence of ellipsis can result in unnecessary repetition of verbs or other elements, leading to wordiness and reduced clarity. Substitution and ellipsis play crucial roles in maintaining coherence, avoiding redundancy, and enhancing the overall flow of the written text.

According to Ali's (2016) study, it is observed that substitution and ellipsis are not frequently utilized by instructors in the classroom. As a result, students may not acquire the necessary skills to effectively employ these cohesive devices in their speaking or writing tasks if they are not exposed to them during lessons. The lack of practice with substitution and ellipsis in the classroom further compounds the challenge for students when incorporating these devices into their writing. Additionally, the relative rarity of these devices in written texts, as compared to other cohesive devices, as noted by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Halliday (1977), could also contribute to students' limited usage of substitution and ellipsis.

### Neglecting the Use of Synonyms and Antonyms

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), without using synonyms and antonyms in writing, language becomes limited and less expressive. Without incorporating different words with similar or opposite



meanings, writing may lack variety and depth. Synonyms help us avoid repetitive language and add nuance to our descriptions, while antonyms allow us to highlight contrasts and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. By neglecting synonyms and antonyms, our writing may appear monotonous and less engaging, and it may fail to capture the full range of meaning and complexity. Although students could use synonyms and antonyms, they mostly relied on similar words and repetitions. As shown in the following examples

### Example 7

*Some people are of the opinion that students should be prioritized when it comes to the selection of subjects, whereas others are of the opinion that the subject marker demford should be considered.*

In the above example, the student repeated the word “opinion” twice. He could use “think” in the second sentence, so the sentence would become “*Some people are of the opinion that students well should be prioritized when it comes to the selection of a subject whereas others think that market demand of the subject should be considered.*” This shows that students repeated the same words and phrases instead of using synonyms and antonyms in their writings. The prevalence of repetition in usage could potentially stem from the students' limited vocabulary, leading them to rely on the same words instead of incorporating synonyms and antonyms.

Upon examining the students' writing, a prevalent issue becomes evident, namely, the improper utilization of various cohesive devices. It becomes apparent that in certain instances, the students employ a specific cohesive device where it is not necessary or appropriate. This results in a disruption of the text's coherence and cohesion. On the contrary, in other instances, certain parts of the text require the implementation of cohesive devices to establish logical connections between ideas, but the students fail to employ them. The inappropriate use of cohesive devices poses significant challenges to the clarity and comprehensibility of the student's writing. It hampers the smooth flow of information, hindering the reader's understanding of the intended message. The lack of cohesive devices where they are needed leads to disjointed and fragmented texts, making it difficult for readers to discern the logical progression of ideas. Addressing this issue necessitates a focus on enhancing students' awareness of the appropriate use of cohesive devices. Through targeted instruction and practice, students can develop a better understanding of how cohesive devices function and how to apply them effectively. By mastering the use of cohesive devices, students can significantly improve the cohesion and coherence of their writing, facilitating better communication of their ideas.

### Conclusion

In summary, the analysis of cohesive devices, rooted in Halliday and Hasan's framework, in students' writing reveals a predominant reliance on grammatical cohesive devices, specifically references and conjunctions. Grammatical cohesion is emphasized due to ESL instructors' focus on grammar instruction, directing students toward grammatical accuracy. However, challenges arise in misapplication and overreliance on certain devices, leading to imbalanced cohesion. Notably, excessive use of personal references and additive conjunctions suggests a preference for sequential information presentation, potentially hindering the exploration of contrasting or causal relationships.

Lexical cohesive devices, particularly repetition, are prevalent, indicating a limited vocabulary or awareness of alternative options. Although collocations are utilized, their frequency lags behind repetition, suggesting room for improvement. Antonyms are infrequently employed, reflecting difficulties in integrating contrasting ideas.

Issues arise from improper cohesive device usage, disrupting flow and impeding logical connections. Conjunctions pose significant challenges for students, evidenced by errors within discussion texts. Comprehensive instruction is deemed crucial to address these issues and enhance effective device incorporation, particularly regarding substitution and ellipsis, which are underused due to limited knowledge. Encouraging diversity in the cohesive repertoire, explicit instruction on synonyms, and guidance on appropriate device application can mitigate these challenges, ultimately refining students' writing clarity and coherence within academic contexts.

The term "writing ability" is considered a misnomer as English language learners face challenges in developing writing skills due to various factors. This study focused on examining cohesive devices, specifically lexical and grammatical cohesion, leaving room for future research into other aspects like sentence structure and tense usage. The study utilized Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model, suggesting the potential for researchers to explore alternative models for more comprehensive studies. The study, centered on undergraduates at Islamia College Peshawar, is acknowledged as a case study with limited scope, urging future researchers to broaden investigations to different educational institutions in Peshawar.

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