

Factors That Hinder Grade 10 English Second Language Learners' Efficiency in the Use of Grammatical Cohesive Devices, A Case Study of 6 Selected Schools in the Eastern Cape Province – South Africa



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ABSTRACT

Grammatical cohesion plays a crucial role in the construction of coherent and effective written communication. It refers to the way linguistic elements within a text are interconnected to create a sense of unity and flow, facilitating the readers' understanding of the text. In essence, it encompasses various linguistic devices and techniques that establish a relationship between sentences and paragraphs, guiding readers through the text. Halliday and Hassan's Theory of Cohesion, which proposes that effective use of cohesive devices allows writers to construct logical connections between propositions, thus contributing to the text's overall cohesiveness, strengthened this investigation. A descriptive qualitative approach, embedded in an interpretive paradigm, underpinned this paper. Semi-structured interviews were administered to 6 English First Additional Language (EFAL) while document analysis, in the form of essays, was used to collect data from 36 conveniently chosen grade 10 EFAL learners in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Thematic analysis enabled the author to categorise the data into themes, which formulated the findings of this inquiry. Outcomes of this inquiry indicated that learners' essays lack grammatical coherence due to their inadequate knowledge about the use of grammatical cohesive markers, resulting in lengthy and disjointed sentences. Learners' restricted acquaintance with these structures could derail efforts aimed at producing comprehensible discourse. It is recommended that the Text-based Approach, which can help learners understand grammatical cohesion indicators by exposing them to real texts, should be the subject of professional development. This study will contribute to the development of learners' good writing skills, which enable them to be communicatively competent.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is an extremely multifaceted language skill. Without accomplished, efficient teaching, learners may not become proficient and competent writers. According to the Department of Education, despite several interventions, learners' writing competence skills are still a problem in the South African

context.¹ Similarly, the 2018/2019 Chief Marker's report for the National Curriculum Statement states that teaching artistic writing and language building is still an issue because there are many factors to consider while teaching English First Additional Language. Good writing skills include correct sentence structure, use of correct tenses, spelling proficiency, and use of cohesive devices that bind the text together.² Several studies have shown that many children struggle to attain writing skills.³ Written communication is often seen as a challenging English skill by students from non-native English-speaking countries.⁴

Halliday and Hassan introduced the concept of cohesion, highlighting its two main components: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion.⁵ Grammatical cohesion is mainly concerned with the grammatical and structural elements that hold sentences and paragraphs together, whereas lexical cohesion relates to the use of words and phrases that connect various parts of a text together.⁶ Conjunctions, transitional words, and pronouns are examples of cohesive devices that help to establish a logical flow and eliminate ambiguities. A text may become jumbled and difficult for readers to follow without proper grammatical cohesiveness.⁷ Grammatical coherence maintains reader engagement while simultaneously improving comprehension.⁸ Research conducted by Martin and White suggests that readers may get disinterested in texts that lack grammatical coherence because they seem disjointed and difficult to understand. In academic and professional settings, coherence is essential to developing a coherent argument.⁹

Various writing styles and genres place countless values on grammatical coherence. For example, to achieve the necessary levels of accuracy and clarity, academic and scientific texts frequently rely significantly on coherent devices.¹⁰ Conversely, for stylistic effect, creative writing may purposefully deviate from precise grammatical coherence. Grammatical coherence is important in contexts other than academic and professional writing. Focusing on cohesiveness in language learning and teaching helps students advance their writing abilities. Since cohesiveness preserves the flow of ideas from one textual portion to the next, it is an essential component of written work.¹¹

Raputri purports that the greatest way to teach grammatical cohesiveness is to have a solid understanding of pragmatics.¹² The discipline of pragmatics is renowned for examining language

¹ Department of Basic Education, "National Curriculum Statement (NCS): Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS): Home Language: Intermediate Phase. Pretoria: Government Printing Works," 2018.

² M. Said Husin and Ety Nurbayani, "The Ability of Indonesian EFL Learners in Writing Academic Papers," *Dinamika Ilmu*, December 31, 2017, 237–50, <https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v17i2.725>; Eleni Meletiadou, "Profiling the Writing Competency of BAME Undergraduate Students," 2022, 20–48, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-9628-9.ch002>.

³ P. Moresebetoa, *Learners' Challenges in Reading and Writing in English First Additional Language in the Intermediate Phase in Mankweng Circuit*. (University of Limpopo, 2016); Christopher James Anthony and James Clyde DiPerna, "Examining the Psychometric Properties of Maximally Efficient Items From the Social Skills Improvement System–Teacher Rating Scale," *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment* 37, no. 3 (June 30, 2019): 307–19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282917743335>; Josephine Atieno Ogano, "Teaching Learners with Reading and Writing Problems in the Classroom: An Interview Study with Teachers in Norwegian Schools" (2012).

⁴ Ari Prasetyaningrum et al., "Grammatical Cohesion in Students' Undergraduate Thesis," *Premise: Journal of English Education* 11, no. 2 (June 15, 2022): 297, <https://doi.org/10.24127/pj.v11i2.4744>.

⁵ M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English*. (London: Longman, 1976).

⁶ A.W. Aziz, "Pemarkah Kohesi Leksikal Dan Kohesi Gramatikal: Analisis Pada Paragraf Dalam Skripsi Mahasiswa Pend," *Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia. Dialektika* 1, no. 1 (2015): 71–85; Afnan Bahaziq, "Cohesive Devices in Written Discourse: A Discourse Analysis of a Student's Essay Writing," *English Language Teaching* 9, no. 7 (May 16, 2016): 112, <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n7p112>.

⁷ C. Puspita, "Students' Difficulties in Writing Thesis: A Mixed Methods Research at Eight Semester of English Study Program in IAIN CURUP." (2019).

⁸ Andi Tenri Ampa and D Muhammad Basri, "Lexical and Grammatical Cohesions in the Students' Essay Writing as the English Productive Skills," *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* 1339, no. 1 (December 1, 2019): 012072, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1339/1/012072>.

⁹ J.R. Martin and P.R.R. White, *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*. (New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2005).

¹⁰ J.M. Swales and C. Leeder, "A Reception Study of the Articles Published in English for Specific Purposes from 1990–1999," *English for Specific Purposes* 31, no. 2 (2012): 137–46.

¹¹ Ainiyah Ekowati, Aceng Rahmat, and Fathiyy Murtadho, "Gramatical Cohesion and Letical Cohesion in Text Report on Student Observation Results," *JETL (Journal Of Education, Teaching and Learning)* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 169, <https://doi.org/10.26737/jetl.v4i1.991>.

¹² Egi Raputri, "Pragmatics Study on Deixis Analysis in Narrative Texts in a Textbook of SMP Nasima Semarang," in *6th International Conference on Science, Education and Technology (ISET 2020)* (Atlantis Press, 2021), 390–93.

meaning in relation to context.¹³ Cohesive devices include the appropriate use of conjunctions, deixis, reference, and substitution.

Reference occurs when a word in a text is mentioned within the text. Two types of commonly used references are anaphoric and cataphoric references.¹⁴ An anaphoric reference, in contrast to cataphora, refers to anything inside a text that has already been identified.¹⁵ A literary reference to something that has yet to be discovered is known as a cataphoric reference. Raputri, therefore, equates the instruction of grammatical cohesion with pragmatic knowledge, which recognises the relationship between language and context.¹⁶ In the context of a sentence, the relationship between the nouns and pronouns that form grammatical cohesion is comprehensible. Substitution suggests that speakers occasionally refrain from using the same terms that they had previously mentioned. For example, "do" can be used in place of a verb.

Mgqwashu contends that students' language competence can only be achieved if the language is taught in multiple kinds of texts.¹⁷ Learners are introduced to language choices and acceptable grammatical expressions in the Text-based approach, for example, which, when employed successfully, make an impact in a text. These include rhetorical conjunctions like "but," "however," and "furthermore," which are frequently used in texts. When utilized correctly in texts and context, these gain and convey meaning. Mgqwashu makes a distinction between the use of rhetorical conjunctions, which are sometimes misused by students.¹⁸ In context, 'however' is a rhetorical conjunction intended to imply agreement with the prior assertion, even though the phrase after 'however' appears to negate the first. Mgqwashu states that the usage of 'but' indicates that the writer disagrees with the prior statement, whereas 'furthermore' provides more information regarding the point presented.¹⁹ In isolation, these conjunctions, which serve as grammatical cohesive devices which bind the text, cannot convey meaning.

Nordquist describes deixis as an expression or a word used to refer to a specific time, place, or person in context.²⁰ If a word's semantic meaning is consistent but its designated meaning changes with context, that word is said to be deictic. Stapleton contends that deictic expressions such as personal pronouns and demonstratives like this, that, these, those -etc, and adverbs like now, here, then, there, etc, are easily understood when used in context.²¹ Nordquist discusses four types of deixis that are analysed in casual conversation. They are spatial deixis, textual deixis, temporal deixis, and person deixis.²²

The most frequently occurring deixis is person deixis, which uses the pronouns 'I' and 'You.' Since there is no involvement of the third person, the use of these pronouns suggests that the conversation is casual rather than gossiping. Appropriate use of person deixis can best be achieved through such activities as role-play and dialogue. Dialogues illustrate person deixis because they employ the use of the first pronoun 'I' and the second person singular 'you'. It shows how the use of dialogue can facilitate communicative competence. In this regard, learners will learn how these personal pronouns are used in context.

Raputri contends that deixis needs to be learnt by the learners.²³ Person, time, location, social, and discourse deixis are among the five categories of deixis.²⁴ Learners who master deixis will be able to employ deictic words appropriately. Using descriptive qualitative methods, Raputri investigated the

¹³ G. Yule, *The Study of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

¹⁴ Citra Amiliani Abdul Gani, "Discourse Competences: A Case of English Foreign Language Students in Graduate Program," in *English Language and Literature International Conference (ELLiC) Proceedings*, vol. 1, 2017, 302–8, ;Meletiadou, "Profiling the Writing Competency of BAME Undergraduate Students."

¹⁵ Gani, "Discourse Competences: A Case of English Foreign Language Students in Graduate Program."

¹⁶ Raputri, "Pragmatics Study on Deixis Analysis in Narrative Texts in a Textbook of SMP Nasima Semarang."

¹⁷ E.M. Mgqwashu, "English Language and English Literature Controversy: Hostility Could Mar English Studies," *Progressio* 35, no. 2 (2013): 177–92.

¹⁸ Mgqwashu, "English Language and English Literature Controversy: Hostility Could Mar English Studies."

¹⁹ Mgqwashu, "English Language and English Literature Controversy: Hostility Could Mar English Studies."

²⁰ R. Nordquist, "Deictic Expression (Deixis)," 2018, <https://www.thoughtco.com/deicticexpression-deixis-1690428>.

²¹ A. Stapleton, "Deixis in Modern Linguistics," *Essex Student Journal* 9, no. 1 (2017).

²² Nordquist, "Deictic Expression (Deixis)."

²³ Raputri, "Pragmatics Study on Deixis Analysis in Narrative Texts in a Textbook of SMP Nasima Semarang."

²⁴ N. Williams, *Deixis; Deixis and Indexicals* (Preprint, Universität Potsdam, 2019).

deictic words employed in narrative passages in a textbook. Data were gathered using three narrative texts that were taken from a specified text.²⁵ The results showed that the texts make use of every kind of deixis. It was revealed that "He" is the most often used deictic word in writings. This type of deixis is person-centered, particularly in the third person. The reason for this is that narrative texts typically involve the narration of the story by someone. All the types of deictic words have their own roles in written or spoken languages.

With the urge to produce communicatively competent learners, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) endorses that errors are part of learning; therefore, learners should not be penalised for committing grammatical errors.²⁶ This is one of the major criticisms of CLT, which is a gap that has been identified by this paper. Oral language proficiency skills precede writing skills; therefore, strict measures should be exercised to avoid the occurrence of errors and facilitate good writing skills. In persuasive and argumentative texts, grammatical cohesion plays a crucial role in presenting a cohesive and persuasive argument. It helps to connect evidence, examples, and reasoning in a way that reinforces the main point. The authors argue that since communication also entails the acquisition of good writing skills to communicate ideas, grammatical cohesion should be given a renewed look to equip learners with good writing skills.

The objective of this paper is, therefore, to examine factors that impede grade 10 learners' effective application of grammatical cohesion in essay writing. This paper is guided by the following research questions:

- Why do learners struggle with grammatical cohesion in creative writing?
- How can learners' knowledge of grammatical cohesion be strengthened to improve their academic writing skills?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grammatical cohesion plays a crucial role in ensuring clarity and coherence in written texts. It describes the syntactic and grammatical components that join various textual sections, creating a smooth flow of ideas and aiding comprehension.²⁷ Proper grammar helps convey ideas clearly and accurately. When sentences are grammatically cohesive, readers can easily understand the intended meaning without confusion. Several studies have been conducted on the issue of grammatically cohesive sentences.²⁸

Prasetyaningrum, et al., coherence in their English language education program theses, ranging from the most dominant to the least dominant forms at Hamzanwadi University. Data was collected from the students' undergraduate theses, who did their theses as a partial fulfilment task in their bachelor's degree. Results showed that reference, followed by conjunction, was the most common type of grammatical cohesion. Ellipsis and substitution were the least common forms of grammatical cohesiveness. According to this study, students should exercise caution when writing their undergraduate theses by concentrating on language that highlights the importance of the grammatical coherence devices present in English paragraphs, as this will help them write thesis statements that are relevant.²⁹

In another study conducted by Aziz, it was indicated that students writing their theses ignored the application of cohesive links in their texts.³⁰ It was revealed that the focus of these students was on the completion of their thesis, thereby producing incomprehensible texts. The goal of another study by Abduraman was to determine the kinds of grammatical cohesive devices that students most frequently employed when writing their theses and how these devices contribute to coherent speech.³¹ The research

²⁵ Raputri, "Pragmatics Study on Deixis Analysis in Narrative Texts in a Textbook of SMP Nasima Semarang."

²⁶ Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁷ Meletiadou, "Profiling the Writing Competency of BAME Undergraduate Students."

²⁸ N.H. Abduraman, "Grammatical Cohesion Analysis of Students' Thesis Writing." (Tanjungpura University, 2013); Nurwahidah Nurwahidah et al., "A Discourse Analysis of Grammatical Cohesion in News Item Text of 'Symphony 3' XII Grade English Textbook," *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics* 7, no. 1 (April 15, 2022): 171, <https://doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v7i1.764>; Nini Harliani, Ahmad Zamzam, and Nurachman Hanafi, "A Study on Grammatical Cohesion in the Descriptive Essays by the Third Semester Students of English Education Program in the University of Mataram in the Academic Year 2019/2020," *Jurnal Lisdaya* 17, no. 1 (2021): 49–58.

²⁹ Prasetyaningrum et al., "Grammatical Cohesion in Students' Undergraduate Thesis."

³⁰ Aziz, "Pemarkah Kohesi Leksikal Dan Kohesi Gramatikal: Analisis Pada Paragraf Dalam Skripsi Mahasiswa Pend."

³¹ Abduraman, "Grammatical Cohesion Analysis of Students' Thesis Writing."

background section of ten theses submitted by English Education Study Program students was used as a data gathering tool in this study. According to the results, students were able to generate a variety of grammatical devices. Referential and conjunctive cohesive devices accounted for 82.25% and 17.12% of the students' devices, respectively. Ellipsis and replacement, two other forms, only made up 0.39% and 0.24% of the total. It was also revealed that students frequently abused singular pronouns when referring to multiple items. This indicated that students had a lack of knowledge about the classification of pronouns into singular and plural. This impediment contributes to a lack of cohesion in texts.

Findings of Othman's inquiry demonstrated that the written paragraphs produced by the Saudi English major students contained faults in reference, substitution, and conjunction, the three main categories of cohesive devices. It was indicated that the Saudi undergraduates made these kinds of mistakes because of their limited vocabulary, mother tongue interference, poor grammatical understanding of these techniques, and lack of language background. Thus, to improve grammatical cohesive device awareness, explicit instruction of these structures is critical.³²

In Indonesia, as part of discourse analysis, Afriato Afrianto investigated the kinds of coherent devices used in students' writing.³³ Students' improper usage of cohesive devices, such as additive, adversative, and temporal conjunctions, was discovered through document analysis. Additionally, it was observed that students' improper usage of cohesive devices is a result of their lack of knowledge and awareness regarding cohesion, particularly grammatical cohesion. The semantic relationship between the text's ideas is then questioned. Instructors can thus learn about the students' areas of concern from this input. Thus, this feedback provides instructors with information about the students' areas of concern.

The Theory of Cohesion, advocated by Halliday and Hasan, which is a keystone in the study of discourse and text linguistics, particularly concerning how texts achieve coherence and unity, underpinned this inquiry.³⁴ Halliday and Hasan proposed that cohesion is a crucial linguistic device that connects parts of a text, thereby making it semantically coherent. They argued that cohesion is realized through specific linguistic elements that function to link ideas and structures within a text, allowing readers to interpret the text as a unified whole rather than a sequence of unrelated sentences. They categorized cohesion into five main types: lexical cohesion, substitution, reference, ellipsis, and conjunction. This theory distinguishes between cohesion and coherence. While cohesion refers to the explicit linguistic means that connect sentences, coherence pertains to the overall sense or meaning of a text as interpreted by the reader. Thus, a text can be cohesive without being coherent if the connections fail to make logical sense. This suggests that learners should be able to create a text with both cohesive and coherent text.³⁵

METHODOLOGY

An interpretive paradigm, which was based on the notion that reality is socially constructed, enabled the authors to gain a deep understanding of learners' challenges in the effective implementation of cohesive devices. A qualitative approach, which provides deeper insights into experiences and viewpoints, was used because of its ability to help people make sense of personal experiences as meaning-makers in their everyday lives.

Research Design

The authors employed a case study design to focus attention on the specific group of participants.

³² Ahmed Khider Ahmed Othman, "Investigation of Grammatical Cohesive Devices Errors Made by Saudi EFL Students in Written Paragraphs: A Case Study of the University of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia," *European Scientific Journal ESJ* 15, no. 2 (January 31, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2019.v15n2p1>.

³³ Afrianto Afrianto, "Grammatical Cohesion in Students' Writing: A Case at Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia," *Leksema: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra* 2, no. 2 (November 15, 2017): 97–112, <https://doi.org/10.22515/ljbs.v2i2.899>.

³⁴ Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*.

³⁵ Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*.

Study Sample and Population

Participants for this study were 36 grade 10 learners and 6 grade 10 EFAL teachers of a selected school in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. A convenient sampling technique was used to select the participants due to their proximity and accessibility to the researchers.

Data Collection

Data collection instruments for this enquiry were semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were administered to grade 10 teachers to investigate the factors that contribute to learners' inefficiency in the application of grammatical cohesive devices. To investigate the effectiveness of grammatical cohesion on students' essays, an argumentative essay, titled 'Cell phones are the main reason that learners perform poorly in schools', was administered to 36 grade 10 learners during the trial examinations. Learners were given two and a half hours to write one chosen essay and a letter.

Data Analysis Procedure

Learners' essays were marked using a rubric that allows mark allocation to be guided by the learners' ability to organise the essay, that is, sentence construction skills, content, and language usage. During analysis, the author looked for similar patterns and categorised them. This was done by identifying the most occurring types of cohesive devices. This categorisation developed the themes that are discussed below.

Ethical Considerations

The authors adhered to the institutions' Human Research Ethics laws that must be followed prior to data collection. The authors first obtained permission to conduct the study from the Department of Education. Participants were requested to sign informed consent forms, which granted them the privilege to withdraw from the study at any time they felt doing so. Participants' anonymity was confirmed as pseudonyms were used. Schools were referred to as School A, B, C, and D, while participants were also referred to as Participant A, B, C, D, E, and F.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this analysis was to investigate reasons why learners struggle with grammatical cohesion in essay writing. Another objective was to establish ways by which learners' knowledge of grammatical cohesion can be strengthened to improve their academic writing skills. Themes that emerged from the process of data analysis were: inefficient knowledge about the use of cohesive devices, and the use of the Text-based Approach.

Objective 1: To investigate the reasons why learners struggle with grammatical cohesion in essay writing

Inefficient knowledge about the use of cohesive devices

One of the key findings of this study was learners' inefficient knowledge about the use of cohesive devices, due to, among other factors, the teachers' focus on grammatical competence. The ability to identify a language's lexical, morphological, syntactical, and phonological characteristics and to apply these characteristics to the interpretation, encoding, and decoding of words and sentences is known as grammatical competence (Asaad & Shabdin, 2021). Some participants revealed that in ESL classrooms, the tendency is to focus on grammatical competence, which is perceived as the learners' major struggle. Thus, teachers overlook grammatical cohesion. One participant articulated that:

The greatest challenge experienced by learners is the agreement of the subject and the verb. When there are two subjects in a sentence, they do not know which subject the verb should agree with. (Participant B)

The participant's response above revealed that the most challenging factor is the agreement of the subject and the verb. This suggests that teachers have a strong feeling that before learners master

grammatical cohesion, they should be grammatically competent. Grammatical competence is a strong predictor of the creation of grammatically correct sentences. Learners need to master the agreement of the subject and verb to improve their academic writing skills. For example, they should have grammatical knowledge of how agreement should be achieved when two subjects are joined with such conjunctions as, 'like', 'and', 'as well as', 'neither...nor', 'either.....or'. This is in line with Asaad and Shabdin, who state that spelling mistakes and a small vocabulary can seriously hinder the writing process; therefore, mastery of grammar and vocabulary is essential.³⁶ To communicate the intended meaning and guarantee readability, grammatical accuracy, which includes subject-verb agreement, tense usage, pronoun reference, and sentence structure, is essential.³⁷ Effective academic writing is therefore, based on language proficiency; deficiencies in this area might cause readers to become frustrated and confused. EFL students viewed grammar as a crucial component of writing that aids in the construction of proper sentences and the creation of meaningful material.³⁸

It was also revealed that the most used type of cohesive device was the conjunction. Most students used the conjunctions 'and' and 'because'. One of the participants had this sentiment:-

Learners mostly use conjunctions when they write essays. Even then, they rely on the use of 'and' and because. (Participant D)

Also, learners' essays had very little evidence that grammatical cohesive devices are taught in schools, as the most occurring were 'and' 'but' and 'because'. These were overused, resulting in lengthy sentences, which spoiled their writing. Some sentences were too long with many connectors.

Most children have cell phones and they use them at school during class time because they know the teacher will not see them they hide the cell phones under the desk and they do not listen and that causes them to fail the tests. Some learners they send videos to other learners in class and that distracts the other learners because they concentrate on his cell phone. (L8)

The submission above employs many connectors, like 'and', and 'because'. This suggests that the writer has knowledge about cohesive devices, but they have been used in creating a lengthy sentence carrying many ideas. In the sentence above, although the causative conjunction 'because' has been used appropriately, it is used excessively as it appears twice in the same sentence. The use of a causal conjunction is to show the effect of the previous information. Similarly, the additive conjunction 'and' also appears twice. Additionally, it is seen that students' incorrect usage of cohesive devices is a result of their ignorance of cohesion, particularly grammatical cohesion. The semantic relationship between the text's ideas is then compromised.³⁹

In student essays, additive conjunctions are utilised to add new information to previously written material. This suggests that the essays' concepts are consistent with one another. As a result, students should be taught a range of conjunctions to help them avoid writing in a repetitive or redundant manner. Furthermore, students must understand that using too many conjunctions might detract from the essay's goal and affect the way the text reads.⁴⁰ This result is consistent with earlier studies that show many L2 learners use excessive amounts of additive conjunctions.⁴¹ Harliani et. al. contend that there are other alternatives that can be used to express additive conjunctions, such as 'in addition', 'moreover', and

³⁶ Hani Qasem Mohammed Asaad and Ahmad Affendi Shabdin, "The Predictive Role of Morphological Awareness and Productive Vocabulary Knowledge in L2 Postgraduate Students' Academic Writing," *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, April 8, 2021, 24–44, <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.911149>.

³⁷ Yaotong Wei, Nur Ainil Sulaiman, and Hanita Hanim Ismail, "Academic English Writing Challenges in a Blended EFL and ESL Learning Environment: Insights from Chinese International High School Students," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 23, no. 2 (February 28, 2024): 275–93, <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.2.13>.

³⁸ A. Normawati, "How EFL Learners Perceive Grammar in Speaking and Writing," *Journal of English Educational Study* 6, no. 1 (2023): 23–30.

³⁹ Afrianto, "Grammatical Cohesion in Students' Writing: A Case at Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia."

⁴⁰ A.K. Junina, "Grammatical Cohesion in Argumentative Essays by International EAP Learners in New Zealand.," *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature, Al-Kindi Centre for Research and Development* 5, no. 2 (2022): 98–108.

⁴¹ Zhang Meisuo, "Cohesive Features in the Expository Writing of Undergraduates in Two Chinese Universities," *RELC Journal* 31, no. 1 (June 1, 2000): 61–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003368820003100104>.

‘additionally’. The restricted use of the additive conjunctions suggests that the students’ knowledge of additive conjunctions is weak.⁴²

Furthermore, L8’s response above revealed that learners could not use substitution appropriately. Instead of using the pronoun ‘they’, the word ‘cell phones’ has been used redundantly. Nouns and pronouns should not be used in the same environment. Instead of using the pronoun ‘them’ in place of the noun ‘cell phones,’ the learner repeated the noun twice in the same environment, that is, at the beginning of the sentence. Thus, the learner began the sentence with ‘some learners they…….’ This suggests that the appropriate use of cohesive devices needs to be taught to achieve good writing skills.

Another finding was the excessive use of the adversative conjunction ‘but’. The use of adversative conjunctions in essays is to add opposing information to the previous information. For example, the conjunction ‘but’ indicates the negative effect as opposed to the positive information beforehand.

Cell-phones must not be allowed at school because they are the source of distraction because cell phones have games that the learners enjoy watching but these games are not part of the lesson but the learners like them because they entertain them in fact they do not know that they are also disturbing others. (Participant F)

Students can use various types of conjunctions to add additional information to the previous one. However, the use of the conjunction ‘but’ was quite frequent. They could also use ‘yet’ rather than ‘but’ the most. Furthermore, in their essays, the students also used other kinds of adversatives to create cohesiveness, such as ‘in fact’, ‘nevertheless’, and ‘nonetheless’. Even though most ESL teachers are frequently irritated by their students’ illogical writing in writing classes, they are unable to effectively foster students’ creativity and help them develop cohesive writing skills.⁴³

Educators must instruct and motivate EFL students to utilize precise tools to produce texts that are more effective.⁴⁴ Teachers must be aware of the gadgets that could be used by their pupils to provide them with the appropriate technological tools. This suggests that learners should be taught the appropriate use of conjunctions. Harliani et. al. posit that since English is a Foreign Language (EFL), students sometimes get confused about the cohesiveness of the writing process; thus, they tend to put their entire focus only on the content.⁴⁵ However, students should consider the information that will be presented in the writing, how it is organized to preserve the discourse meaning and value, such as cohesion and coherence.⁴⁶

Some students displayed elementary knowledge about the use of substitutions, which are used to avoid repetition. The sentence below shows excessive use of the word ‘cell-phones’, which could have been substituted with an appropriate pronoun to avoid repetition and redundancy of the same words.

Cell phones are part of life because everyone carries cell-phones and if you know when and where to carry your cell-phone is the best thing you could do for yourself. Learning to hide your cell-phone there is also the best thing you could do because everyone carry the cell-phone at school and they should know when to use it so that they do not disturb others (L13)

Words may be substituted with either pronouns or verbs. For example, in the sentence above, the word ‘cell-phones’ could be substituted with the pronoun ‘them’ in the first sentence. It would also be appropriate for the writer to substitute the phrase ‘carry the cell phone’ with the verb ‘does’ such that

⁴² Harliani, Zamzam, and Hanafi, “A Study on Grammatical Cohesion in the Descriptive Essays by the Third Semester Students of English Education Program in the University of Mataram in the Academic Year 2019/2020.”

⁴³ M. F. F. Abbas and H. Herdi, “Investigating EFL Learners’ Ability in Applying Writing Mechanics in an Argumentative Essay,” in *Proceedings of ISELT FBS* (Universitas Negeri Padang, , 2018), 45–50; Harliani, Zamzam, and Hanafi, “A Study on Grammatical Cohesion in the Descriptive Essays by the Third Semester Students of English Education Program in the University of Mataram in the Academic Year 2019/2020.”

⁴⁴ Natthapong Chanyoo, “Cohesive Devices and Academic Writing Quality of Thai Undergraduate Students,” *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 9, no. 5 (September 1, 2018): 994, <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0905.13>.

⁴⁵ Harliani, Zamzam, and Hanafi, “A Study on Grammatical Cohesion in the Descriptive Essays by the Third Semester Students of English Education Program in the University of Mataram in the Academic Year 2019/2020.”

⁴⁶ Harliani, Zamzam, and Hanafi, “A Study on Grammatical Cohesion in the Descriptive Essays by the Third Semester Students of English Education Program in the University of Mataram in the Academic Year 2019/2020.”

the first sentence reads ‘.....because everyone does.....’. Such errors contribute to unintelligible sentences. Substitution, therefore, improves the learners’ academic writing skills. The effect of argumentative essays lies in the efficient use of cohesive devices that bind the text together. A study conducted by Rudiana, which examined how Indonesian English Foreign Language students achieve grammatical cohesion in argumentative essays, found that the students predominantly used personal references and additive conjunctions.⁴⁷ The author found that employing such grammatical cohesive devices enhances the quality of students’ writing.

Objective 2: To establish ways by which learners’ knowledge of grammatical cohesion can be strengthened

Use of the Text-based Approach

The use of the Text-based Approach to language learning and teaching was recommended as the most appropriate method that could be used by teachers to facilitate the instruction of grammatical cohesion in learners’ writing. Participants’ responses indicated that teaching grammatical cohesive devices in isolation can be meaningless.

It is very difficult to teach grammatical cohesive devices because on their own they do not convey meaning. When teaching other texts like stories and drama, you must also direct the learners’ attention to how these devices function in sentences. It becomes easy to teach them when they see them in a text. (Participant E)

Participant E’s response above indicates that grammatical cohesive devices can best be taught through explicit instruction. Explicit instruction in grammatical cohesion is a pedagogical approach that involves direct teaching of cohesive devices to enhance learners’ writing and comprehension skills.⁴⁸ This method focuses on providing clear explanations, examples, and guided practice to help students understand and effectively use linguistic elements that link sentences and ideas within a text. Research indicates that explicit instruction significantly improves learners’ ability to apply grammatical cohesive devices in their writing. For instance, a study by Behbahani et al. examined the effects of explicit teaching of grammatical cohesive devices on students’ application of these devices.⁴⁹ The study involved 60 intermediate EFL learners who received 15 hours of instruction over 10 sessions. The findings revealed that the group receiving explicit instruction demonstrated a marked improvement in their use of cohesive devices compared to groups receiving implicit or incidental instruction.

Participants also indicated that the use of texts allows for the identification of cohesive devices that the teacher knows pose challenges to learners. Using texts, the teacher focuses on specific cohesive devices. Moreover, instruction of these devices also facilitates comprehension of other language structures like sentence construction. For example, this can facilitate the use of relative pronouns, which act as conjunctions.

The use of texts has beneficial gains. Learners usually struggle with the identification of clauses, that is, adverbial clauses and adjectival clauses. Learners struggle with joining sentences using relative pronouns. (Participant D)

Participant D’s response above indicates that using texts enables learners to manipulate other linguistically related structures, such as the identification of adverbial and adjectival clauses. This suggests that while tackling the use of grammatical cohesive devices through texts, the byproduct is the construction of grammatically correct sentences. Moreover, explicit instruction has been shown to enhance learners’ metalinguistic awareness, enabling them to consciously recognize and manipulate cohesive elements in texts. This heightened awareness facilitates better comprehension and production

⁴⁷ R. Rudiana, “The Realization of Grammatical Cohesion Devices in EFL Students’ Argumentative Essays. JALL,” *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy* 5, no. 1 (2021): 101–8.

⁴⁸ Zeynab Bagheri and Asgar Mahmoudi, “Differential Effects of Explicit, Implicit, and Incidental Teaching on Learning Grammatical Cohesive Devices,” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 5, no. 11 (November 22, 2015): 2348, <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0511.20>.

⁴⁹ Mahdiyeh Behbahani et al., “Effects of Mindful Parenting Training on Clinical Symptoms in Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Parenting Stress: Randomized Controlled Trial,” *Iranian Journal of Medical Sciences* 43 (November 1, 2018): 596–604.

of coherent discourse. Abdi and Wind emphasize that explicit instruction aids in developing learners' metalinguistic knowledge, which is crucial for successful second language acquisition.⁵⁰

In practice, implementing explicit instruction involves several key steps. Educators begin by introducing various types of cohesive devices, such as conjunctions, references, lexical cohesion, substitution, and ellipsis. Through detailed explanations and illustrative examples, students learn how these devices function to create unity within a text.⁵¹ Subsequently, learners engage in activities that involve identifying and analyzing cohesive devices in authentic texts, followed by exercises that require them to incorporate these elements into their own writing. This structured approach ensures that students not only understand the theoretical aspects of cohesion but also apply them practically to enhance the clarity and coherence of their writing.⁵² Thus, explicit instruction in grammatical cohesion is a highly effective strategy for improving learners' writing quality and comprehension. By providing direct teaching and ample practice opportunities, educators can equip students with the necessary tools to construct cohesive and coherent texts, thereby enhancing their overall language proficiency. Exposure to texts can eliminate this deficit as texts are woven together by a diversity of cohesive devices. For example, texts use a variety of additive conjunctions like, moreover, additionally, furthermore etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this paper, the authors recommend that developing specific, scaffolded lesson plans dedicated solely to teaching different types of cohesive devices could be beneficial. Additionally, encouraging peer review where students focus on providing feedback on cohesion in each other's work should be encouraged. Integrating vocabulary-building exercises that specifically highlight how words are related to each other semantically is essential in promoting awareness and use of cohesive devices. The authors also recommend teacher training programs that equip teachers with effective strategies for teaching these concepts. Revising curriculum guidelines to place more emphasis on the explicit teaching of cohesive devices as a distinct writing skill should be considered. This could provide a clear pathway for addressing the identified problems.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper was to investigate factors that hinder grade 10 learners' effective application of grammatical cohesion in essay writing. Findings of this enquiry indicated that learners' writing skills are greatly affected by inefficient knowledge about the use of cohesive devices and their incompatible usage. Consequently, lengthy, loosely joined, and fragmented sentences resulted in disjointed texts, which spoiled the learners' writings. Although the essays displayed the learners' ability to interpret topics by providing relevant content, their argumentative skills were restricted by the application of redundant conjunctions. Furthermore, it was revealed that learners are most familiar with conjunctions and reference, although the way these were applied spoiled their writing.

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⁵⁰ Mahmoud Abdi Tabari and Attila M. Wind, "Dynamic Development of Cohesive Devices in English as a Second Language Writing," *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 63, no. 1 (March 26, 2025): 433–69, <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral-2022-0205>.

⁵¹ Ahmed M. Abdulla et al., "Problem Finding and Creativity: A Meta-Analytic Review.," *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 14, no. 1 (February 2020): 3–14, <https://doi.org/10.1037/aca0000194>.

⁵² Wei, Sulaiman, and Ismail, "Academic English Writing Challenges in a Blended EFL and ESL Learning Environment: Insights from Chinese International High School Students."

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