

AN ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF COHESIVE DEVICES IN PALESTINIAN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' ESSAY WRITING

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History Submission: May, 13 2026 Review: June, 5 2026 Revised: June, 18 2026 Accepted: June, 19 2026 Published: June, 20 2026	This study investigated the use of cohesive devices in personal profile essays written by Palestinian undergraduate EFL students. The study aimed to identify the types of cohesive devices used, examine their frequency, and analyze the challenges encountered in their use. A qualitative descriptive design with content analysis was employed based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework. The participants consisted of three Palestinian undergraduate EFL students at As-Syafi'iyah Islamic University, and three personal profile essays were analyzed. A total of 100 cohesive devices were identified in the essays. Reference devices were the most frequently used, accounting for 51.0% of the total cohesive devices, followed by conjunctions (25.5%) and lexical cohesion (23.5%). The findings indicate that the students relied heavily on personal references, additive conjunctions, and lexical repetition. At the same time, limited variation and the overuse of certain cohesive devices affected the coherence of their writing. Although the students demonstrated a basic understanding of cohesive devices, several problems were identified, including excessive repetition and inappropriate use of conjunctions. These findings suggest that explicit instruction in cohesive devices is essential for improving students' writing coherence and overall discourse competence in academic writing.
Keywords Cohesive Devices Palestinian Students EFL Writing Reference Conjunction Lexical Cohesion	

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Research

Writing is commonly considered one of the most difficult and essential skills for students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in academic settings. In order to produce effective academic writing, several elements must work together, including grammatical accuracy, coherence, and cohesion. The linguistic resources that link sentences and phrases inside a text to allow it to function as a cohesive and meaningful whole are referred to as cohesion. Cohesion, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976), is the semantic relationship between textual elements that enables readers to understand how concepts are connected throughout sentences and paragraphs. Reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesiveness are the five primary categories into which cohesive devices are further divided. Textual readability, logical flow, and clarity are greatly enhanced by the proper application of these technologies (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

Cohesion is considered a key component of discourse competence in the context of teaching English. According to Harmer (2004), EFL students frequently suffer because they are not aware of how concepts should be integrated at the discourse level, rather than because they lack grammatical expertise. Because of this, students may write grammatically correct texts that lack clarity, unity, and a seamless flow of ideas. This problem emphasizes how crucial it is to explicitly teach coherent devices in writing training (Harmer, 2004).

Several studies have shown that EFL students often struggle to use cohesive devices appropriately and consistently. Investigations have shown that EFL students often struggle to use coherent devices appropriately and consistently. Although students frequently employ a variety of cohesive devices in their writing, Alarcon and Morales (2011) discovered that many of these devices are applied improperly or repeatedly, which has a detrimental effect on the overall coherence of the text (Alarcon et al., 2011).

According to Kyle Crossley et al., (2016), second language learners often produce written texts that are considered to be of lower quality compared to those written by native speakers. One of the main reasons for this issue is the limited use of lexical cohesion in their writing. Lexical cohesion refers to the way words and vocabulary items are used to create connections between sentences and ideas within a text, such as through repetition, synonyms, antonyms, or related terms. When lexical cohesion is not used effectively, the text may appear fragmented and less coherent, making it more difficult for readers to follow the flow of ideas. In addition, as stated by (Alarcon et al., 2011), second language learners tend to rely excessively on conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, *because*, and *so* to connect sentences. Although conjunctions are important grammatical devices for linking ideas, overusing them without sufficient lexical variation can make the writing sound repetitive and overly simple. As a result, the overall cohesion and quality of the text may decrease. Therefore, the development of lexical cohesion is considered an important aspect in improving the writing ability of second language learners, as it helps create clearer relationships between ideas and enhances the readability of the text (Crossley et al., 2016).

These difficulties are especially noticeable in EFL settings such as Palestine, where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom environment. In many cases, English is primarily learned through formal instruction at school rather than through daily communication or interaction with native speakers. As a result, students have fewer opportunities to practice using English in authentic contexts, which can affect the development of their writing skills. Moreover, the rhetorical conventions of Arabic differ significantly from those of English, particularly in terms of how ideas are organized and connected within a text. Arabic writing often relies on different patterns of cohesion and rhetorical structures compared to English academic writing. Consequently, these differences can influence the way Palestinian EFL students construct their written texts in English. When learners transfer rhetorical patterns from their first language into their English writing, it may result in texts that do not fully align with the conventions of English academic discourse. Therefore, Palestinian EFL students, who mainly acquire English in formal educational settings, may encounter additional challenges in producing coherent and cohesive writing in English (Awwad et al., 2025).

According to A. K. A. Othman (2019), Arabic-speaking EFL students tend to show an imbalance in their use of cohesive devices in writing. In particular, they often underuse substitution and ellipsis, which are important cohesive strategies that help avoid repetition and make a text more concise and cohesive. Substitution refers to the replacement of a word or phrase with another element to prevent unnecessary repetition, while ellipsis involves

omitting certain words that can be understood from the context. When these devices are not used effectively, students may repeat the same words or phrases throughout their writing (Othman, A. K. A. (2019)., n.d.).

At the same time, many Arabic-speaking EFL learners tend to rely heavily on additive conjunctions, such as *and*, *also*, and as well as personal references like *he*, *she*, *they*, or *it* to connect ideas. Although these cohesive devices are useful, excessive reliance on them can lead to writing that appears repetitive and less varied in structure. As a result, the text may lack clear logical development and coherence, making it more difficult for readers to follow the progression of ideas. These tendencies may ultimately affect the overall quality of students' academic writing, particularly in contexts where clear organization and effective cohesion are essential (Othman, A. K. A. (2019)., n.d.).

Several studies on Palestinian EFL students have highlighted ongoing issues with cohesion in their writing. For example, Khalil (2020) discovered that Palestinian students often misuse adversative and causal conjunctions and overuse conjunctions like *and* and *also*. Students' essays frequently have less coherence and worse arguments as a result of this limited diversity and incorrect use of cohesive methods. Despite these results, rather than offering a thorough examination of their correctness and contextual appropriateness, the majority of current research tends to highlight the frequency of cohesive device usage (Khalil & Abu-Ayyash, 2023a).

بِالْعَدْلِ كَاتِبٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَلِيُكْتَبَ

“Let a scribe write it down between you with justice.”

Writing is also seen as a crucial instrument for guaranteeing responsibility, precision, and clarity in communication from an Islamic educational standpoint. Surah Al-Baqarah (2:282) in the Qur'an highlights the significance of accurately and fairly documenting information. The verse's larger theme emphasizes the importance of clear and organized written communication, even though it particularly deals with financial transactions. This idea is in line with the goals of academic writing, which place a high value on coherence, clarity, and logical linkages (Mohammad Raouf Moini, 2016).

Thus, this study uses the cohesion framework developed by (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) to examine how cohesive devices are used in the English writing of Palestinian students. This study uses a qualitative descriptive content analysis to determine the kinds of cohesive devices used, look at how frequently they occur, and assess how accurately they are used. It is anticipated that the results of this study will deepen our understanding of the discourse competency of Palestinian EFL students and offer pedagogical insights for bettering writing instruction, especially when it comes to teaching cohesiveness and textual organization (Rokhaniyah et al., 2022).

Based on the issues discussed above, it is evident that cohesion plays a crucial role in determining the quality and clarity of EFL students' writing. Previous studies have revealed

that Palestinian EFL students continue to face difficulties in using cohesive devices appropriately, particularly in terms of variation and contextual accuracy. Moreover, most existing research focuses primarily on the frequency of cohesive device use, while providing limited analysis of how accurately these devices are applied in students' written texts. Therefore, there is a need for a more comprehensive investigation that examines not only the types and frequency of cohesive devices but also their accuracy in actual student writing. For this reason, the present study is conducted under the title "An Analysis of the Use of Cohesive Devices in Palestinian Undergraduate Students' Essay Writing" to gain deeper insights into students' discourse competence and contribute to the improvement of EFL writing instruction, particularly in relation to textual cohesion and organization (Friston et al., 2005).

B. Research Question

The problems of this research are formulated in the following research questions:

1. What types of cohesive devices are used by Palestinian students in their English writing?
2. How frequently does each type of cohesive device appear in the students' writing?
3. How accurately are cohesive devices used in the students' texts?

C. Objective of the Research

Based on the background above, several problems can be identified as follows:

1. To identify the types of cohesive devices used by Palestinian students in their English writing.
2. To examine the frequency of each type of cohesive device used in the students' writing.
3. To analyze the obstacles in the use of cohesive devices in Palestinian students' written texts.

D. Delimitation of the Research

This research is limited to the analysis of cohesive devices in English written texts produced by Palestinian undergraduate EFL students. The study focuses only on three types of cohesive devices based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework: reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion (Siregar, n.d.).

The data are limited to handwritten paragraphs or short essays in the form of personal profiles written by Palestinian students applying to As-Syafi'iyah Islamic University in the first and third semesters. This study does not examine other aspects of writing, such as grammar, vocabulary range, or overall coherence beyond cohesion (Rahman et al., 2023).

E. Significance of the Research

The findings of this study are expected to provide contributions to several aspects of English language learning, particularly in the area of EFL writing (Adiantika, 2015).

First, theoretically, this study contributes to the development of discourse analysis and cohesion in Palestinian undergraduate students' writing. The results expand existing knowledge regarding how cohesion is constructed in EFL contexts, especially among learners from an Arabic linguistic background.

Second, for English teachers, this study provides insights into students' common tendencies and difficulties with the use of cohesive devices. The findings may help teachers develop more effective instructional strategies, particularly for teaching cohesion, textual organization, and logical flow in academic writing.

Third, for students, this study may increase awareness of the importance of cohesive devices in producing coherent written texts. By understanding common patterns of overuse, underuse, or limited variation, students may improve the clarity and effectiveness of their writing.

Fourth, for institutions and curriculum developers, the findings may serve as input for improving writing instruction and materials design. Greater emphasis on cohesion and discourse competence may enhance students' academic writing proficiency.

Fifth, for future researchers, this study provides a reference point for further investigations into cohesion devices. The findings may serve as a foundation for studies examining other types of cohesion, different genres of writing, comparative analyses, or alternative research approaches.

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDY

A. The nature of Cohesive Devices

Reference occurs when one linguistic element refers to another for its interpretation. This type of cohesion helps writers avoid unnecessary repetition while maintaining continuity of meaning. References may be anaphoric (pointing backward) or cataphoric (pointing forward) within a text. Additionally, reference is classified into personal, demonstrative, and comparative types, each functioning to connect ideas and guide readers through the discourse (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, n.d.)

Personal reference involves pronouns such as *he*, *she*, *it*, and *they*, which refer to participants already mentioned or understood from context. Demonstrative reference uses forms like *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* to indicate proximity in terms of space, time, or discourse. Comparative reference expresses similarity or difference using items such as *same*, *different*, *more*, and *better*. These types collectively contribute to textual cohesion by establishing semantic relationships across sentences (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, n.d.).

In academic writing, the effective use of references is essential for ensuring clarity and logical progression of ideas. Proper referencing allows writers to produce texts that are both grammatically accurate and semantically connected, facilitating reader comprehension. In contrast, unclear or inappropriate references may lead to ambiguity and disrupt coherence (Rokhaniyah et al., 2022).

In the context of Palestinian undergraduate students' essay writing, the use of references is a key factor influencing writing quality. As EFL learners, students may face difficulties in selecting appropriate reference forms and maintaining consistent referential ties, resulting in overuse, underuse, or misuse of cohesive devices. Therefore, analyzing references as part of cohesive devices is important to understand how these students construct meaning in their essays (Ali Ashgar Rostami Abusaeedi, 2009).

This study examines the patterns and functions of reference used by Palestinian undergraduate students, aiming to identify common strengths and weaknesses. The findings are expected to provide insights into their writing competence and contribute to improving the teaching of cohesive devices in EFL contexts (McCarthy, n.d.).

Halliday and Hasan (1976) define cohesive devices as linguistic features that establish semantic relationships between elements in a text and contribute to textual unity. Halliday and Hasan (1976) define cohesive devices as linguistic features that establish semantic relationships between elements in a text and contribute to textual unity. According to them, cohesion occurs when the interpretation of one linguistic item depends on another item within the discourse. They emphasize that a text is not merely a collection of separate sentences but a meaningful and connected whole formed through cohesive relations. Halliday and Hasan classify cohesive devices into two broad categories: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Grammatical cohesion includes reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, while lexical cohesion consists of reiteration and collocation.

For example, reference can be seen in the sentences "*Sara bought a new book. She read it every evening,*" where the pronouns *she* and *it* refer to *Sara* and *a new book*, respectively. Substitution is illustrated in "*I need a pen. Do you have one?*", where *one* substitutes for *pen*. Ellipsis occurs in "*John likes coffee, and Mary Ø tea,*" where the verb *likes* is omitted in the second clause because it is understood from the context. Conjunction links ideas through connectors such as *and*, *but*, *because*, and *however*, for example, "*She studied hard because she wanted to pass the exam.*" In lexical cohesion, reiteration is shown through repetition or synonymy, as in "*The car was expensive. The vehicle was beyond my budget,*" where *vehicle* reiterates *car*. Meanwhile, collocation refers to words that commonly occur together, such as *doctor–patient*, *teacher–student*, or *question–answer*. These cohesive devices help writers organize ideas clearly and enable readers to understand the relationships between ideas throughout a text.

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understanding the relationship between ideas throughout the text (*Halliday and Hasan, 1976, n.d.*).

Alarcon and Morales (2011) explain that cohesive devices are important indicators of writing quality because they help writers organize ideas systematically and create meaningful connections between sentences and paragraphs. In their study on students' academic writing, they found that the effective use of cohesive devices contributes significantly to the coherence, clarity, and readability of essays. They also argue that students who are able to apply cohesive devices appropriately tend to produce more organized and understandable texts. Furthermore, Alarcon and Morales point out that the misuse, overuse, or insufficient use of cohesive devices may negatively affect the flow of ideas and make the text difficult to follow. Their study highlights that conjunctions and references are among the most frequently used cohesive devices in students' essays, showing how these devices function to connect arguments and maintain continuity of meaning. Therefore, the analysis of cohesive devices is important for assessing students' writing competence and identifying common weaknesses in academic essay writing. (Alarcon et al., 2011).

Othman (2019) states that cohesive devices play a crucial role in helping readers understand the progression of information and relationships between ideas within a text. According to Othman, cohesion is an essential element of academic writing because it ensures that ideas are logically connected and systematically developed throughout the essay. Othman further explains that the use of grammatical and lexical cohesion reflects students' ability to construct coherent discourse and communicate ideas effectively in written form. In addition, the study reveals that many ESL and EFL students experience difficulties in using cohesive devices appropriately, especially in maintaining consistency and clarity in their writing. Othman also emphasizes that cohesive devices not only connect sentences structurally but also support the overall meaning and organization of the text. Therefore, analyzing cohesive devices can provide valuable insights into students' writing proficiency and their ability to produce coherent academic essays (*Othman, A. K. A. (2019).*, n.d.).

Based on the theories proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), Alarcon and Morales (2011), and Othman (2019), this study focuses on the analysis of cohesive devices used in Palestinian undergraduate students' essay writing. Halliday and Hasan's theory is adopted as the primary framework because it provides a comprehensive classification of cohesive devices into grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Through this framework, the researcher analyzes the use of reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, reiteration, and collocation in students' essays (Rahman et al., 2023).

In addition, Alarcon and Morales (2011) support the idea that cohesive devices are important indicators of writing quality, coherence, and readability in academic essays. Their theory helps explain how the effective or ineffective use of cohesive devices can influence the organization and clarity of students' writing. Meanwhile, Othman (2019) emphasizes that cohesive devices reflect students' ability to construct coherent discourse and logically develop ideas in academic contexts. Othman's theory also highlights the challenges

commonly faced by ESL and EFL students in applying cohesive devices appropriately (Alarcon et al., 2011).

Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze the types of cohesive devices used by Palestinian undergraduate students in their essay writing. The study also examines the frequency and appropriateness of cohesive device usage as well as the contribution of cohesive devices to the coherence and unity of the essays. Through this analysis, the researcher expects to gain a deeper understanding of students' academic writing competence and provide insights into how cohesive devices function in creating coherent written discourse (McCarthy, n.d.).

B. Conjunction

In the present study, examples of the four types of conjunctions were identified in the students' essays. An example of an additive conjunction is the sentence, "*I like reading books, **and** I enjoy writing stories,*" where **and** functions to add related information. An example of an **adversative conjunction** is found in the sentence, "*I wanted to join the competition, **but** I was not confident,*" in which **but** expresses a contrast between two ideas. A **causal conjunction** appears in the sentence, "*I study English **because** I want to communicate with people from different countries,*" where **because** indicates a cause-and-effect relationship. Meanwhile, a **temporal conjunction** is illustrated in the sentence, "*First, I introduced myself. **Then**, I described my hobbies,*" in which **then** signals the sequence of events. These examples demonstrate how conjunctions contribute to creating logical connections and coherence in students' writing (Friston et al., 2005).

Conjunctions are crucial for preserving coherence in academic writing because they serve as textual markers that guide readers through the logical flow of ideas and help establish clear relationships between clauses, sentences, and paragraphs (Carston, 1992).

C. Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion, which is thought to be the most meaningful type of cohesion, is attained by vocabulary relationships within a document. It happens when words are connected not by grammatical structure but by meaning. Collocation and repetition are frequently used to achieve lexical coherence. Repetition of the same word as well as the use of synonyms, antonyms, superordinates, or related phrases are examples of repetition. The tendency of several words to occur together because of their semantic relationship is known as collocation. Lexical cohesion allows readers to follow the main idea throughout sentences and paragraphs by preserving subject continuity and semantic unity (Sidabutar, n.d.).

Alarcon and Morales (2011) investigated cohesive devices in EFL students' academic writing and found that lexical cohesion was mainly achieved through repetition rather than synonymy or other lexical relations. The study reported that excessive repetition without

sufficient lexical variation reduced textual sophistication and overall coherence (Alarcon et al., 2011).

Crossley, Kyle, and McNamara (2016) examined lexical cohesion in second language writing using computational analysis. The study found that higher-quality essays tend to demonstrate greater lexical diversity and more varied lexical connections, while lower-proficiency writers rely heavily on repetition of the same lexical items. The findings suggest that limited lexical cohesion is often associated with developing writing proficiency (Crossley et al., 2016).

Khalil and Abu-Ayyash (2023) analyzed cohesive devices in Palestinian EFL students' essays and observed that lexical cohesion appeared less frequently compared to grammatical cohesion. The study noted that students showed limited use of synonymy, superordinates, and collocation, indicating restricted vocabulary flexibility. The researchers emphasized the need for explicit instruction in lexical cohesion strategies (Khalil & Abu-Ayyash, 2023b).

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design using content analysis as the primary method of analysis. A qualitative descriptive approach is considered appropriate because the purpose of this study is to describe, interpret, and understand the use of cohesive devices in students' written texts as they naturally occur, rather than to test hypotheses or establish causal relationships.

Qualitative research emphasizes meaning, context, and detailed description of phenomena. In line with this perspective, the present study focuses on how cohesion is constructed in the writing of Palestinian EFL students using cohesive devices. By adopting a descriptive orientation, the study aims to provide a clear and systematic account of the linguistic features present in students' texts, without manipulating variables or employing experimental procedures.

By recognizing and classifying particular linguistic components, content analysis serves as a methodical approach to the analysis of written texts. In this study, coherent devices may be examined in an organized and consistent way thanks to content analysis. Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework, which divides cohesive devices into five primary categories—reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion—serves as the basis for this analysis. This study only looks at three sorts of cohesive devices—reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion—despite the framework's five categories. These three elements were chosen because they are seen to be the most pertinent to reflect textual cohesiveness in EFL academic writing and because they are the cohesive methods that students utilize most frequently in their writing.

Through this qualitative descriptive content analysis, the researcher is able to identify patterns, tendencies, and recurring issues in the use of cohesive devices, such as overuse, underuse, or inaccurate application. Furthermore, this research design allows for an in-depth

and contextualized understanding of students' discourse competence in English writing, particularly in relation to textual cohesion and organization.

Research Variables

The research object of this study is the English written texts produced by Palestinian undergraduate EFL students who are enrolled in English-related study programs at a university in Palestine. The study is conducted in a higher education context where English is taught as a foreign language and where students are expected to develop academic writing skills as part of their formal education.

The participants of this study are undergraduate students who have received instruction in academic writing and have experience producing written texts such as paragraphs or short essays in English. This ensures that the texts analyzed in this study represent students' actual performance in using cohesive devices rather than early-stage or beginner-level writing.

The selection of Palestinian undergraduate EFL students as the object assumes that students in this context frequently encounter linguistic and discourse-related challenges in English writing. Limited exposure to English outside the classroom and differences between Arabic and English rhetorical conventions may influence the way students construct cohesive and coherent texts. Therefore, examining their written work provides a relevant context for analyzing the use of cohesive devices in EFL writing.

By focusing on students' written texts rather than individual learners, this study treats the texts themselves as linguistic products that reflect patterns of cohesion. The analysis of these texts, based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework, allows the researcher to gain insights into how cohesive devices are used to connect ideas and maintain textual unity in Palestinian EFL students' writing.

Research Samples

The research samples of this study consisted of three Palestinian undergraduate EFL students at As-Syafi'iyah Islamic University. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on criteria that were closely aligned with the objectives of the study. Specifically, the participants were first- and third-semester students enrolled in English-related academic programs who had experience in writing English texts as part of their academic activities. The data analyzed in this study consisted of three English personal profile essays, with one essay collected from each participant. These essays were selected because they provided authentic examples of the students' writing performance and contained various cohesive devices that could be systematically analyzed. The analysis focused on three types of cohesive devices based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework, namely reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. The selected essays also reflected how the students organized ideas and established coherence in their writing through the appropriate use of cohesive devices.

The written texts analyzed in this study are in the form of personal profile paragraphs and short essays written independently by the students. These texts were chosen because they provide authentic examples of students' actual writing performance and contain various cohesive devices that can be analyzed systematically. The texts also reflect how students organize ideas and connect sentences in English writing through the use of reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion.

The researcher applied purposive sampling in selecting the data because not all students' texts met the criteria required for the study. Only texts written completely in English, consisting of connected sentences or paragraphs, and produced individually without teacher correction were included in the analysis. In addition, the selected texts were considered appropriate because they contain sufficient linguistic features needed to identify the patterns of cohesive device usage.

The research samples were collected from students' handwritten documents submitted during academic and administrative processes at the university. After the texts were collected, each sample was coded to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. The coding system also helped the researcher organize the data systematically during the process of analysis.

Overall, the selected research samples provide relevant and reliable data for examining the use of cohesive devices in Palestinian undergraduate EFL students' writing. Through these samples, the researcher is able to analyze the types, frequency, and accuracy of cohesive devices as well as identify common patterns and difficulties experienced by students in constructing cohesive written texts.

Data Collection Methods

The data were collected through several systematic steps to ensure the relevance and credibility of the research data. First, students' written texts were selected based on predetermined criteria aligned with the objectives of the study. These criteria included the students' academic level, the type of writing assignment, and the completeness of the written texts. The participants of this study were undergraduate students who are currently enrolled in the English Education program at As-syafiiyah Islamic University.

Only texts that are written independently by undergraduate students and composed in English are included in the data. This selection process ensures that the data accurately represent students' individual writing performance and their actual use of cohesive devices.

After the texts are selected, each document is organized and coded to maintain students' anonymity and facilitate systematic data management. Coding is used to label the texts without revealing students' identities, allowing the researcher to analyze the data objectively and ethically.

Through this data collection procedure, the researcher ensures that the collected texts are suitable for content analysis and provide consistent and comparable samples for examining cohesive devices in Palestinian EFL students' writing.

Data Analysis Method

The data are analyzed using a qualitative descriptive content analysis approach. The analysis follows several systematic steps to ensure consistency and accuracy in identifying cohesive devices in students' written texts.

First, all written texts are carefully read to gain a general understanding of their content. Next, cohesive devices found in the texts are identified using a cohesion analysis checklist based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework. Each cohesive device is examined within its textual context to ensure accurate identification.

Second, the identified cohesive devices are classified into two major categories: grammatical cohesion, which includes reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction; and lexical cohesion, which includes repetition, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and collocation.

Third, the frequency of each type of cohesive device is calculated to determine which devices are most frequently used by the students. This step addresses the second research question concerning the frequency of cohesive device usage. Finally, a qualitative descriptive analysis is conducted to evaluate the accuracy and appropriateness of cohesive device usage. Instances of misuse, overuse, or limited variation are identified and interpreted. This stage of analysis addresses the third research question and provides insights into students' cohesion competence in English writing.

Through these analysis steps, the study provides a detailed description of the use of three specific cohesive devices—reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion—in Palestinian students' writing and their contribution to textual cohesion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of cohesive devices identified in three personal profile essays written by three Palestinian undergraduate EFL students at As-Syafi'iyah Islamic University. The analysis was conducted using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework, focusing on three categories of cohesive devices: reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. The purpose of the analysis was to identify the types of cohesive devices used by the students, determine their frequency of occurrence, and examine how these devices contributed to the coherence of the students' writing. A total of 100% cohesive devices were identified across the three essays. Among the three categories, reference was the most frequently used cohesive device, accounting for 51.0% of the total occurrences. This was followed by conjunction, which represented 25.5%, while lexical cohesion accounted for 23.5%. These findings indicate that the students relied more heavily

on grammatical cohesion, particularly reference, than on lexical cohesion to connect ideas throughout their writing.

The analysis revealed that personal reference was the dominant type of reference used by the students. Pronouns such as I, my, we, he, she, and they were frequently employed to avoid unnecessary repetition and maintain continuity between sentences. For example, in one student's essay, the sentence *"My name is Ahmad. I am nineteen years old. I live with my family."* demonstrates the use of the pronoun I to refer consistently to the writer, thereby creating cohesion between successive sentences.

In terms of conjunction, the findings showed that students employed additive, adversative, causal, and temporal conjunctions to establish logical relationships between ideas. Among these, additive conjunctions were used most frequently, particularly the conjunction and, which was commonly used to add information. For example, the sentence *"I like reading books, and I enjoy learning English."* illustrates the use of an additive conjunction. Adversative conjunctions such as but were used to express contrast, causal conjunctions such as because indicated reasons or cause-and-effect relationships, while temporal conjunctions such as then and after that were used to indicate sequences of events.

Regarding lexical cohesion, repetition was found to be the most dominant lexical device. Students frequently repeated the same lexical items throughout their essays rather than using synonyms or semantically related words. For instance, the repeated use of the word family in several consecutive sentences maintained topic continuity but also indicated limited lexical variation. Only a few instances of synonymy and other lexical relations were identified in the analyzed essays. Overall, the findings suggest that the students demonstrated a basic understanding of cohesive devices and were able to establish connections between ideas. However, several weaknesses were also observed, including the overuse of personal references and additive conjunctions, excessive lexical repetition, and limited variation in cohesive devices. These patterns indicate that although the students could produce coherent texts, further instruction is needed to develop a wider range of cohesive strategies in academic writing.

Discussion

The findings of this study support previous research on cohesive devices in EFL students' writing. These findings are consistent with Halliday and Hasan's framework, which suggests that grammatical cohesion, particularly reference, is often acquired earlier than lexical cohesion. Similar patterns have also been reported by Ahmed (2020) and Alshammari (2022), who found that EFL learners relied predominantly on reference devices and additive conjunctions while demonstrating limited lexical variation. However, unlike studies conducted among more proficient EFL learners, where lexical cohesion appeared more frequently due to broader vocabulary knowledge, the present study indicates that Palestinian undergraduate students continue to depend primarily on grammatical cohesive devices. This difference may be attributed to variations in language proficiency, educational context, and exposure to academic English. This pattern reflects a common tendency among EFL learners to rely on basic grammatical cohesion rather than more complex lexical strategies.

The dominance of reference devices reflects students' reliance on personal pronouns and possessive forms to maintain textual continuity. One possible explanation for the predominance of reference devices is that they are cognitively less demanding than lexical cohesion. Reference markers such as personal pronouns and demonstratives allow writers to maintain continuity without requiring a wide range of vocabulary. In contrast, lexical cohesion depends on the ability to use synonyms, superordinates, and semantically related words, which requires greater lexical knowledge and vocabulary flexibility. Since EFL learners often experience limitations in vocabulary size, they tend to rely on reference as a safer and more familiar strategy to achieve textual cohesion. This finding also suggests that students prioritize grammatical cohesion over lexical sophistication. While reference devices successfully prevent unnecessary repetition of nouns, excessive dependence on them may reduce textual richness and limit the development of more advanced academic writing skills. Meanwhile, conjunction usage is largely characterized by additive connectors, indicating limited variation in expressing logical relationships. Lexical cohesion, primarily realized through repetition, appears less developed. Excessive repetition without sufficient lexical variation suggests restricted vocabulary flexibility.

Overall, the findings indicate that Palestinian undergraduate EFL students possess a functional understanding of grammatical cohesion but continue to experience difficulties in employing lexical cohesion effectively. Their reliance on reference and conjunction reflects both linguistic competence and vocabulary limitations, while possible first-language transfer from Arabic may further shape these cohesion patterns. Compared with previous studies, the results reinforce the view that lexical cohesion remains one of the most challenging aspects of academic writing for EFL learners. Therefore, English writing instruction should emphasize not only the accurate use of cohesive devices but also vocabulary expansion, lexical variation, and discourse-level organization to improve writing quality.

TABLES, FIGURES AND FORMULAS

Types of Cohesive Devices Used in Students' Writing

The analysis reveals that Palestinian undergraduate EFL students employ three major types of cohesive devices in their essay writing, namely reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion, based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework.

Reference devices are predominantly realized through personal pronouns and possessive forms, which function to maintain continuity of meaning across sentences. Conjunction devices are used to connect clauses and ideas, particularly to additive, temporal, and causal conjunctions. Lexical cohesion is observed mainly through repetition of key lexical items, with limited use of synonymy or other lexical cohesion.

These findings indicate that students demonstrate a basic awareness of cohesive devices in constructing connected texts. However, the range and variation of cohesive devices remain limited, suggesting that students rely more on simple and frequently used forms rather than employing diverse and complex cohesion strategies.

Frequency of device usage

The frequency analysis shows variations in the occurrence of cohesive devices across the students' texts.

Table 4.1 Raw Frequency of Cohesive Devices.

Cohesive devices	Frequency
Reference	50
Conjunction	25
Lexical Cohesion	23

The table shows that reference devices occur most frequently, followed by conjunction and lexical cohesion. To provide clearer proportional interpretation, the frequencies were converted into percentages.

In addition to the numerical data, several examples from the students' essays illustrate how these cohesive devices were used. To illustrate the use of cohesive devices identified in the students' essays, the following representative examples are provided.

Reference. Reference devices were the most frequently used cohesive devices. For example, in one student's essay:

“Many students use social media every day. **They** believe that it helps them communicate with friends.”

The pronoun **they** refers back to **many students**, creating cohesion within the text.

Conjunction. Conjunctions were used to connect ideas and indicate logical relationships. For example:

“Social media provides many benefits; **however**, excessive use may reduce students' productivity.”

The conjunction **however** signals a contrast between the two clauses.

Lexical Cohesion. Lexical cohesion was achieved through repetition or semantically related words. For example:

“Education is important for every individual. A good **education** can improve a person's future and provide better opportunities.”

The repetition of the word **education** contributes to lexical cohesion by maintaining the topic throughout the text.

Examples are presented from the students' essays to illustrate each category of cohesive devices.

These examples demonstrate that students relied primarily on reference devices to maintain textual continuity, while conjunctions and lexical cohesion were used to establish logical connections and reinforce topic development.

Figure 4.1 Percentage Distribution.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the proportional distribution of cohesive devices used in Palestinian undergraduate students' writing. Reference devices account for the largest proportion (51.0%), followed by conjunction (25.5%), and lexical cohesion (23.5%). This distribution indicates that students rely more heavily on grammatical cohesion, particularly reference, than lexical cohesion.

Accuracy of Cohesive Devices Usage

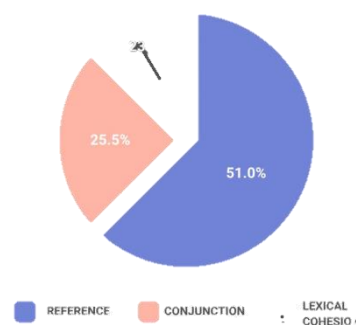
Regarding accuracy, most cohesive devices identified in the students' texts are used correctly at the sentence level. However, several issues are observed in the way cohesive devices are applied across the texts.

The most common problems include overuse of additive conjunctions, limited variation in the use of cohesive devices, and occasional misuse of conjunctions that result in unclear logical relationships between ideas. In addition, excessive repetition of lexical items without sufficient lexical variation reduces the overall effectiveness of lexical cohesion.

These findings indicate that although Palestinian EFL students possess fundamental knowledge of cohesive devices, their ability to use these devices accurately and appropriately at the discourse level is still limited.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the



use of cohesive devices in Palestinian undergraduate EFL students' essay writing.

First, the study reveals that students employ three major types of cohesive devices, namely reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Among these, reference and conjunction are the most frequently used cohesive devices. Reference is primarily realized through personal pronouns, while conjunctions are mainly used to connect clauses and sentences. Lexical cohesion appears less frequently and is largely limited to the repetition of lexical items.

Second, in terms of frequency, reference and conjunction occur more frequently than lexical cohesion. Additive conjunctions, particularly simple connectors, are predominantly used, while other types of conjunctions are less varied. Lexical cohesion is mostly achieved through repetition, with minimal use of synonyms, collocations, or other lexical relations. These findings indicate that students rely heavily on basic cohesive strategies and demonstrate limited variation in their use of more sophisticated cohesive devices.

The findings also have important pedagogical implications for the teaching of Academic Writing in EFL contexts. Since students tend to depend on personal references and simple conjunctions, writing instructors should provide explicit instruction on a wider range of cohesive devices, including adversative, causal, and temporal conjunctions as well as lexical cohesion strategies such as synonymy, collocation, and paraphrasing. Classroom activities should incorporate guided writing practice, text analysis, and revision exercises that focus on improving cohesion and coherence in academic essays.

Furthermore, Academic Writing courses should encourage students to use a greater variety of cohesive devices appropriately, rather than relying excessively on repetition and simple connectors. By developing students' awareness and mastery of cohesive devices, instructors can help them produce more coherent, organized, and academically effective writing.

Finally, future studies may investigate the relationship between the use of cohesive devices and writing quality, as well as explore cohesive device usage across different genres of academic writing and larger samples of EFL learners.

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