

Cohesion and Coherence in EFL Academic Writing: A Case Study of Tadulako University

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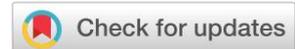
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ABSTRACT

Cohesion and coherence are essential components in academic writing which bridge an academia to create logically organized text and easy to comprehend. Thus, this research aims to identify the use of cohesion and coherence devices in the background section of Skripsi written by students of the English Education Study Program of Tadulako University. This research employs a mixed-method, which involves quantitative and qualitative analysis. The data were taken from ten selected Skripsi backgrounds. The findings of this research present that the most frequently used of cohesive devices is reiteration (48.09%), followed by reference (32.20%), and conjunction 1(9.49%). In contrast, the least frequently used cohesive devices are substitution and ellipsis, each appearing only (0.11%). Furthermore, in terms of coherence, the students dominantly implement repeat key nouns (66.27%), followed by consistent pronouns (22.88%), transition signals (8.88%), and logical order (1.97%). Although some devices appeared less frequently, the students' academic writing still achieved overall textual unity and logical flow. Therefore, these findings indicate that while students have good abilities to build cohesion and coherence in their writing, there remains need to encourage more varied use of devices, particularly substitution, ellipsis, and transition signal, in order to further improve their quality of academic writing.

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KEYWORDS

Cohesion, Coherence, Skripsi background.

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1. Introduction

Cohesion and coherence are two critical components that determine the quality of academic writing. Effective and the success of academic writing needs the mastery of cohesive and coherence devices (Abdul Rahman, 2013). The cohesion refers to the way sentences are connected through the use of linguistic elements such as conjunction, references, and synonym which facilitates the writer to produce a complete and understandable text. Readers can easily catch the point of the text if it uses a good cohesion aspect because the writing is more effective and communicative (Rokhaniyah et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2019; Prihandoko et al., 2022). Whereas, coherence refers to how ideas in paragraphs are linked together to create a logical text in order the reader can understand the topic being discussed in the text. This includes good organization of ideas and smooth transitions between paragraphs. The existence of cohesion and coherence is crucial in a text because it can help understand the information easily. Without them, academic writing may become confusing and lose its effectiveness (Dashela & Mustika, 2021; Weda et al., 2022; Youngsun et al., 2024).

Implementing cohesion and coherence devices in academic writing seems difficult for many students especially for EFL learners based on the investigation of some research. Maintaining cohesion and coherence in the writing process are challenges for some students (Faradhibah & Nur, 2017; Rahman & Widyastuti, 2023; Junaid et al., 2025). Pivotal difficulty of the students in academic writing is constructing ideas cohesively and coherently (Leli, 2020). Thus, it can be interpreted that some students still produce unqualified academic writing.

Several previous studies have explored cohesion and coherence in writing, providing insights that relevant to this current research. Gunas et al. (2020) examined students' writing in descriptive and narrative texts from senior high schools and found that most students demonstrated poor cohesion and coherence, that indicate the need for improved writing instruction. Similarly, Priyatmojo (2021) who analyzed recount texts from high school students in Central Java found that while the texts were cohesive, they lacked coherence due to unrelated clauses disrupting the thematic progression. Lastly, Setiawan & Taiman (2021) who studied explanation texts by medical laboratory students and concluded that the students

effectively used various cohesive devices, especially reiteration, and applied multiple coherence relations such as additives and causals, showing competent writing skills.

Therefore, based on the explanation above, the researchers are interested in conducting research related to how the students of the English Education Study Program of Tadulako University use cohesion and coherence in their academic writing, in this case in their background of *Skripsi* as a final assignment for completing their study. This research is considered crucial to conduct as information for lecturers and students regarding the quality of the students' writing. In addition, the result of this research is expected to be able to guide the student to produce good writing.

2. Methodology

This research utilized mixed methods design which combined qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze cohesion and coherence devices in the background section of *Skripsi* written by the English Education students of Tadulako University. The quantitative approach was used to calculate the percentage of cohesion and coherence devices found in the *Skripsi* written by the students. On the other hand, the qualitative approach was employed to provide descriptions of the use of each cohesion and coherence devices. The categorization of cohesion elements was based on Halliday and Hasan's theory (1976). The grammatical cohesion was focused on reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. On the other hand, lexical cohesion was only limited in reiteration. Next, for coherence devices, Oshima and Hogue's theory (2006) was used, which includes repeating key nouns, using consistent pronouns, using transition signals to link ideas, and logical order. The data were collected through documents in terms of 10 *Skripsi* backgrounds that were printed in the years 2021, 2022, and 2023 as data.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Result

This section presents the findings and discussion of the research examining the use of cohesion and coherence in the background sections of *Skripsi* written by the students of the English Education study program of Tadulako University. Through the application of both qualitative and quantitative analysis, it reveals how students used various cohesion and coherence devices in their academic writing.

a. Qualitative Findings

The findings indicate that the students use various cohesion and coherence devices to create textual unity and logical flow in their academic writing. These include cohesive elements such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion, as well as coherence like repeating key nouns, using consistent pronoun, transition signal, and logical order. The variation use of these devices reflect the students' efforts to construct well-structured and understandable background sections.

1) Reference

Personal reference

Personal reference uses pronouns like *he*, *she*, *it*, and *they* to refer back to nouns mentioned earlier. In students' background sections, this type of reference is commonly used to avoid repeating the same noun anymore. Examples of the use of personal reference found in the students' *Skripsi* background:

...there are several problem which faced by the students in learning process. First, when **they** try to speak English, some of **them** difficult to express what **they** want to say. Second, when **they** try to write in English, **they** get difficult to construct what **they** want to write about. (Background 6, paragraph 4)

When the researcher had observation in December 2021, **she** indicated that the student's paragraph did not explain the object described. (Background 10, paragraph 4)

Curriculum mentioned reading as one of the lessons that have to be taught and learned in Junior high school. **It** helps students to understand reading text, such as recount, narrative, descriptive, etc. through reading, students can improve their knowledge, get information, and experience. Besides, **it** also helps students in other of language skills. (Background 2, paragraph 2)

Demonstrative reference

Demonstrative reference uses *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* to point to something specific. In students' writing, these words help the writer to connect ideas and show which information is being referred to. demonstrative reference found in the students' *Skripsi* background can be seen as follow:

The researcher used Say Structure Context Dictionary Technique to teach vocabulary because it can make the teaching learning process more enjoyable, interesting, and challenging. **This** technique focuses on the long term memory of the students because... (Background 6, paragraph 5)

First, students often use wrong grammar in sentences. Second, they have problems using the past simple form. Where in writing recount text, most students still use the first verb in recount text. The third is related to subject verb agreement, where they often use verbs that do not match the subject. **These** difficulties are very much related to grammar. (Background 3, paragraph 7)

In the Curriculum 13 (K13) in senior high school, **the** students are expected to develop communicative competence in spoken and written language to reach functional literacy. **The** students have to be able to both understand and write various functional texts... (Background 1, paragraph 2)

Comparative reference

Comparative reference is used to compare two things. Words like *same*, *similar*, or *other* are used to show similarities or differences in a text. Comparative references are found in the students' *Skripsi* background as follow:

Indonesian grammar and English grammar are **different**, so most students in Indonesia usually make some errors because... (Background 8, paragraph 1)

A research by Rusmiati (2021) found that auxiliary verb was the most common errors committed by the students. Another research by Hotimah et al. (2022) also showed the **similar** finding that that the students still face problems in differentiating the use of suffix -s/-es in the simple present tense. (Background 8, paragraph 2)

The arrangement of the text can also be a source of difficulty for students, especially in terms of producing clear and cohesive assignments. **Other** problems arise in the topics, vocabulary, and spelling sections. (Background 3, paragraph 5)

2) Substitution

Substitution means replacing a word or phrase with another word to avoid repeating the same expression. It is divided into nominal, verbal and clausal. However, it is least of frequency where there is only found clausal substitution. Example of the use of substitution in the students' *Skripsi* background:

This strategy can explore the potential of student making and answering questions that are combined in the form of snowballs made of paper. By doing **so**, the students might become more involved and understand more detail. (Background 2, paragraph 3)

3) Ellipsis

As the data shows, the use of ellipsis is also the least or very minimally used in the students' *Skripsi*. Ellipsis is the omission of an element which is clearly known from the previous context. The results presents that only verbal ellipsis is found the students' *skripsi* background

Based on the syllabus in the curriculum in 2013, students are expected to be able to understand the social functions of recount texts, the characteristics of recount texts, and be able to write short recount texts. (Background 3, paragraph 4)

4) Conjunction

Additive

These conjunctions add more information with the use of words, such as *and*, *also*, or *in addition*. The examples of usage found in the students' *Skripsi* background are as follows:

To be successful in speaking, the students need to acquire more vocabulary **and** practice English everyday. (Background 9, paragraph 1)

The difficulty in expressing ideas in written form was due to poor vocabulary mastery. **In addition**, they made many mistakes in spelling and punctuation. (Background 10, paragraph 4)

Adversative

These show contrast between ideas, like the use of *but*, *however*, or *on the other hand* as the conjunction. The examples of usage found in the students' *Skripsi* background are as follows:

If the students are silence, it does not mean the students cannot answer, **but** the students need a time to think the answer. (Background 7, paragraph 3)

... when they get consonant letter which is "r" they pronounce that letter so obvious **however** the correct is faint... (Background 5, paragraph 4)

Causal

These explain cause and effect, such as the use of forms *because*, *so*, or *therefore* to connect these statements. The next are following examples of the use in the students' *Skripsi* background:

... so most students in Indonesia usually make some errors **because** they do not understand the grammar of the target language. (Background 8, paragraph 1)

Automatically they are not able to write a paragraph even a sentence. **Therefore**, teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be neglected. (Background 6, paragraph 2)

This strategy is effective in teaching speaking, **so** the teacher should implement this strategy in the teaching and learning activities in order to improve the students' speaking skill. (Background 9, paragraph 3)

Temporal

These show the time or order of events, like use of words *then*, *first*, or *before*. Examples of the use of temporal conjunction found in the students' *Skripsi* background:

Animated videos were chosen for several reasons. **First**, animated video can improve understanding and strengthen students' memory of learning materials. **Second**, animated video to convey learning materials makes teaching and learning activities more exciting. **Third**, the information conveyed is easier for students to understand. (Background 10, paragraph 5)

... that are used as the parameters in assessing the speaking skill **and then** the researcher will discuss these three elements respectively. (Background 9, paragraph 4)

5) Reiteration

Reiteration element in the students' *Skripsi* background shows that this lexical cohesion device is mostly used by the students. It was identified through the use of repetition and synonym.

	Repetition	Synonym
1	There are a lot of students in the schools which still do not know what	1 Readers typically make grammatical knowledge, vocabulary, experience

<p>pronunciation is. They only know to speak but they ignore the elements of it. Many Indonesian students lack pronunciation, when students are speaking in the classroom most of the teacher only focusing on correcting students' grammar but, they do not pay much attention to pronunciation, that is why the students do not know the meaning of pronunciation. (Background 5, paragraph 5)</p>	<p>with the text and other strategies to help them understand written text. The goal of all reading instruction is ultimately targeted at helping a reader comprehend the text. (Background 2, paragraph 1)</p>
<p>2 The teacher gives the time for the students to think the answer from the question. If the students are silence, it does not mean the students cannot answer, but the students need a time to think the answer. (Background 7, paragraph 3)</p>	<p>2 Besides that, by using this strategy, the students will be motivated to speak (Desta, 2017). This strategy also encourages students to think critically (Huyen & Lan, 2021). From all this explanation, it can be concluded that Think-Pair-Share strategy is one of the best method to be implemented in speaking learning activity. (Background 9, paragraph 3)</p>
<p>3 ... the researcher found that the English teachers apply various strategies in teaching English. The strategies of teachers are important to improve the students' speaking skill. The teachers' strategies determine the students' result in following lesson. In addition, the teachers need to have various strategies in teaching and learning process. (Background 1, paragraph 3)</p>	

6) Repeat key noun

This device involves repeating the main noun in a paragraph to maintain clarity and keep the ideas connected. In the students' *Skripsi* background, this technique helps ensure that the reader understands what the paragraph is still talking about. The following is an example of its use:

Writing is one of the productive skills besides speaking because it is an activity that is carried out consciously to produce writing in the form of letters and numbers systematically. Khoiriyah and Mahendra (2017) describe writing as sharing information, thoughts, ideas, and experiences with others in written form. In addition to express opinion, writing is a way to take notes of reading materials or a reminder with a series of sentences that require creativity. Moreover, writing is a communication skill used to convey information and opinion from writer to reader in written form. (Background 10, paragraph 1)

In the example above, the student consistently uses the key noun *writing* to make the text easier to understand and to emphasize the point being presented. The repetition helps readers clearly recognize the topic being discussed throughout the paragraph.

7) Consistent pronoun

Using pronouns like *he*, *she*, *they*, or *it* consistently helps avoid confusion about who or what is being discussed. Students use consistent pronouns to keep their background clear and easy to follow. An example of this can be seen as follows:

When **the students** do listening activity, **they** should understand what the speaker says. If **they** do not know, **they** fail in getting the information. Besides, **the students** should have numbers of words to use fluently. Then, in reading **the students** are not able to understand and comprehend the text if **they** do not know the meaning of words in the text. Also, in writing **the students** find it difficult to generate **their** ideas as **they** have limited words. Automatically **they** are not able to write a paragraph even a sentence. (Background 6, paragraph 2)

In this example, the student applies a consistent pronoun *they* and *their* to refer back to *the students*. This consistent pronoun usage allows the paragraph to flow smoothly by connecting ideas and actions related to the same subject.

8) Transition signal

To guide the reader from one idea to another, students use the transition signals such as *for example*, *in contrast*, or as *a result*. These signals show how sentences or paragraphs in the background section are connected and has logical flow. This example shows how the device is used in students' *Skripsi* background:

From the interview with the students, it was also found that the students at SMPN Model Terpadu Madani Palu also encountered problems in speaking. **The first** problem was most of the students found it difficult to express their thoughts in speaking activities. They didn't know how to arrange sentences to convey their thoughts. **The second** problem was they were unmotivated to speak English. **As the result**, they were not active in speaking learning process. **The third** problem was they had limited vocabulary. (Background 9, paragraph 2)

Based on the example above, the student uses transition signals such as *the first*, *the second*, *the result*, and *the third* to clearly organize the ideas and show the logical connection between them. These signals guide the reader through the sequence of problems discussed, making the paragraph more coherent and easier to follow.

9) Logical order

The usage of logical order in the text is based on the topic and the purpose of the text. Logical order helps the students in creating a paragraph with clear purpose that are understandable to readers. Logical order is classified into three categories, there are chronological order, logical division of ideas, and comparison or contrast. Based on the analysis of the background sections of students' *Skripsi*, there is only one type of use of logical order that is logical division of ideas. Because in all 10 students structured their writing by dividing the background into clear and separate parts.

3.2 Quantitative Findings

Based on the qualitative data, various cohesion devices are identified in the background sections of students *Skripsi*. These qualitative findings then served as the basis for serving quantitative data, which revealed the frequency and percentage of each type of cohesion and coherence devices.

The following table presents the total frequency and percentage of each type of cohesive and coherence devices found in the data:

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Cohesive Devices

Number	Grammatical Cohesion			Lexical Cohesion	Total	
	References	Substitution	Ellipsis	Conjunction		Reiteration
Background 1	19	0	0	12	24	55
Background 2	22	1	0	13	33	69
Background 3	34	0	1	23	70	128
Background 4	18	0	0	11	29	58
Background 5	41	0	0	27	67	135
Background 6	52	0	0	24	61	137
Background 7	30	0	0	19	47	96
Background 8	21	0	0	11	31	63
Background 9	44	0	0	18	57	119
Background 10	23	0	0	26	35	84
Total	304	1	1	184	454	944
Percentage	32.20%	0.11%	0.11%	19.49%	48.09%	100%

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Coherence Devices

Number	Repeat Key Noun	Consistent Pronoun	Transition Signal	Logical Order	Total
Background 1	29	4	4	1	38
Background 2	30	9	1	1	41
Background 3	43	11	8	1	63
Background 4	33	7	2	1	43
Background 5	43	26	3	1	73
Background 6	26	26	4	1	57
Background 7	46	2	4	1	53
Background 8	17	4	2	1	24
Background 9	44	20	8	1	73
Background 10	25	7	9	1	42
Total	336	116	45	10	507
Percentage	66.27%	22.88%	8.88%	1.97%	100%

The data above indicates that there are a total of 944 cohesion ties found in the background sections of 10 students *Skripsi*. Among these, the most frequently used cohesive device is reiteration, which appears 454 times or 48.09%. This is followed by reference, occurring 304 times or 32.20%, and conjunction, with 184 instances or 19.49%. In contrast, the least frequently used cohesive devices are substitution and ellipsis, each appearing only 1 time or 0.11%. Overall, reiteration is the most dominant cohesive device used by the students compared to the others.

In addition, the data indicates the presence of 507 coherence devices identified in the background sections of 10 students' *Skripsi*. The analysis shows that repeat key nouns are the most frequently used which appears 336 times or 66.27%. This is followed by consistent pronouns which occur 116 times or 22.88%. Then, transition signals appear 45 times or 8.88%. Meanwhile, the use of logical order is found 10 times or 1.97%. Overall, it can be interpreted that repeat key nouns are the most frequently used coherence device in the students' *Skripsi* background sections.

3.3 Discussion

Based on the data analyzed, there are 944 ties cohesive devices are identified including reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and reiteration. The use of these devices reflects students' understanding of the importance of establishing connections between sentences in their background sections. However, the distribution of these devices are not balanced. Ellipsis and substitution are rarely used. In contrast, the most dominant cohesive devices were reiterations with a total of 454 occurrences of 48.09%, particularly in the forms of repetition and synonym use. Among these, repetition is the most frequently used form. Students tend to repeat the same words without variation in form or meaning, rather than using synonyms. Synonym usage is also present, but it is minimum. Repetition is the most frequently used form of cohesion devices by students compared to other forms of (Marto & Jaya, 2019). Students tend to use the same words rather than to add variety to their language with synonyms. However, overusing repetition can lead to monotonous writing. Bobihoe et al., (2025) claim that the overuse of the same words can reduce the effectiveness of writing and make it less interesting.

The second most frequently used of cohesive devices are reference, with 304 instances or 32,20%. The types of reference used include personal, demonstrative, and comparative reference. This indicates that students understand the importance of using pronouns to avoid direct word repetition. Harliani et al (2021) emphasizes that appropriate use of reference in academic writing can serve as a strategy to minimize the repetition of names, people, objects, or events, thus making the text more concise and effective.

Next, the frequently used cohesive device after reiteration and reference are in conjunction, with a total of 184 occurrences or 19.49%. The analysis shows that all types of conjunctions such as additive, adversative, causal, and temporal are used in the background sections of the students' *Skripsi* background. However, it is largely used on the word *and*. Students often use *and* as the connector in their sentences. This finding aligns with the research by Sanosi (2024), who presents that the most commonly used type of conjunction among EFL learners is additive conjunction, with *and* being the most dominant form. Therefore, students need to pay attention to other uses of conjunctions, such as the word in *addition* in additive conjunction.

On the other hand, substitution and ellipsis are found in very limited numbers. It is only one of each device with total occurrences just 0.11% of the total data. This finding is in line with the research by Bangsawan et al. (2022), who claim that ellipsis is the least used of cohesive devices in abstract writing. Akbar et al., (2022) also notes that substitution is rarely found in formal writing such as academic articles, as it is considered to reduce clarity and may lead to ambiguity. Both researchers examine abstract sections, which share similar characteristics with this research data source, which are students' *Skripsi* background as part of academic writing. The low use of substitution and ellipsis is also supported by Otta et al., (2022) and Bangsawan et al., (2022), who convey that these two devices are more commonly used in spoken language than in academic writing.

This is important to understand that students' ability to build cohesion affects the overall quality of their writing. When students produce texts, their writing becomes easier to read and understand because the elements within the text are interconnected. However, it is also a fact that not every sentence in a text needs to be connected using all types of cohesive devices. A few appropriate devices are often sufficient to form a sequence of sentences that can be considered a cohesive text. This is consistent with previous research by Ajam et al. (2023), which found that to produce a cohesive text does not require the use of all cohesive devices. This can be achieved by using several adequate cohesive devices. Therefore, even though the students' writing does not contain all of the cohesive devices, it can still be cohesive. In particular, the absence of substitution and ellipsis does not affect the overall cohesiveness of the text. In line with these findings, the research reveals that the background sections of the students' *Skripsi* written by students of the English Education Study Program of Tadulako University the last three academic years can be categorized as high-quality writing due to the accurate and appropriate use of cohesive devices.

Furthermore, the use of coherence devices in the background sections of students' *Skripsi* indicates that most students have made efforts to construct a clear and logical flow of ideas. The findings reveal that the most frequently used type of coherence devices is the repeat key noun, with a frequency of 336 occurrences or 66.27% of the total coherence devices analyzed. The repeated use of key nouns functions to maintain topic focus and ensure the connection between sentences within a paragraph. This aligns with Purwaningtyas et al., (2024) view that the use of repeat key nouns in the text helps to strengthen the main idea in a paragraph, so that readers can easily understand the point of the paragraph. Therefore, students often use this device to make the background of their *Skripsi* easier for others to understand.

Another frequently used coherence device is the consistent pronoun, which appears 116 times or 22.88%. The consistent use of pronouns allows students to refer to the same subject or object without repeating the noun explicitly. This indicates that the students are able to use pronouns effectively in the background sections of their *Skripsi*. Transition signal become the third most frequently used of coherence devices with 45 occurrences or 8.88%. The use of these devices is relatively low when it considers the data. This finding contrasts with the results of a study by Purwaningtyas et al. (2024), which revealed that transition signals were the most frequently used coherence devices to create effectively connected ideas. On the other hand, there is a limited type in the use of logical order, with a total occurrence only 10 times or 1.97%, meaning that each background section only has one type of logical order. The type identified is logical division of ideas, which divides a main topic into several parts. Using this type of logical order can enhance the coherence text, as it helps focus the ideas within the paragraph more clearly.

4. Conclusion

This research has explored the use of cohesion and coherence in the background sections of *Skripsi* written by students of the English Education Study Program of Tadulako University. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, it was found that students applied various types of cohesive and coherence devices to construct their academic writing. The cohesive devices used included reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and reiteration. Among these, reiteration appeared to be the most commonly applied, especially in the form of repetition, while substitution and ellipsis were rarely used. This indicates that although students have a general understanding of how cohesion functions to connect ideas, their application tends to heavily depend on repetition.

In terms of the coherence of students' writing demonstrated a consistent use of certain strategies, particularly the repetition of key nouns and consistent pronoun usage. These strategies helped maintain the focus of their discussion within paragraphs and made their writing more understandable. This is also supported by the use of logical division of ideas. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students show their competence to achieve coherence on their academic writing, especially the *Skripsi* background.

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