



THE USE OF COHESIVE DEVICES IN THE DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS AT SMK BINA NUSANTARA UNGARAN

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of cohesive devices in descriptive texts written by eleventh-grade students at SMK Bina Nusantara Ungaran. Employing a qualitative approach supported by descriptive quantitative analysis, the study involved approximately 60 students. Data were collected through a descriptive writing task and analyzed using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework of cohesion, which includes reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. The findings reveal that conjunction and reference were the most frequently used cohesive devices, while substitution, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion occurred less often. The dominant use of conjunctions and references indicates that students relied primarily on basic cohesive strategies to connect ideas in their writing. Although these devices contributed to clearer organization and improved readability, the limited variety of cohesive devices suggests that students have not yet fully mastered the use of more complex cohesion. The study highlights the need for explicit instruction and regular practice in the use of cohesive devices to improve students' writing quality. Enhancing students' awareness of various cohesive devices can help them produce more coherent, cohesive, and effective descriptive texts.

Keywords: *Cohesive devices, Descriptive text, Vocational EFL students*

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many challenges faced by EFL students in their writing. One of the major challenges is developing well-structured texts, specifically cohesion and coherence (Al Mubarak, 2017; Gunas, 2020). Those two aspects are important components of good-quality writing. Cohesion refers to linguistic connections between sentences and clauses in a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, as cited in Bahaziq, 2016), whereas coherence refers to the logical and consistent ideas of a text that can be fully understood (Maruashvili, 2023; Sherine et al., 2020; Arsita et al., 2022). In this context, cohesion has a role in linking clauses and sentences through various linguistic devices, whereas coherence plays as an aspect in writing that shows the unity and meaningful

ideas. Both aspects make students' writing more understandable (Karadeniz, 2017).

Therefore, students need to be concerned with cohesion and coherence in their writing because these qualities influence writing quality. A previous study indicated that the use of cohesive devices and coherence is effective in improving students' writing quality (RahmtAllah, 2020; Syarif et al., 2023). These studies' findings show that students who employ conjunctions, references, substitutions, and lexical cohesion produce more clearly and logically structured texts. Without strong cohesion and coherence, the text is harder to understand and becomes ambiguous for readers to comprehend the main point (Wang et al., 2024; Mardikaningsih, 2021; Halliday & Hasan, 2014). When students do not use cohesive devices, their writing becomes harder

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to read, and it makes readers confused. Studies have also found a correlation between the appropriate use of cohesive devices and higher scores in writing quality. The appropriate use of conjunctions, references, and substitutions contributes significantly to more coherent and clearer writing (Mauludin et al., 2026; Wiliana & Djajanegara, 2020; Zhou et al., 2022). Therefore, improving students' ability to use cohesive devices effectively is important for producing excellent writing quality.

There are various strategies teachers can use to overcome cohesion and coherence issues in writing to help students express their ideas clearly and logically. One of the effective strategies to support students in expressing their ideas is using the Simple View of Writing in EFL teaching to guide students in producing good writing and connected paragraphs (Fitria et al., 2024; Syarif et al., 2023). These strategies support EFL students in thinking about the connections between sentences and how the ideas are related to each other, which makes the writing more understandable. Teaching how to develop thematic progression can help students organize information in a structured way from one sentence to another in a logical way, which can improve coherence (Kim Nhung & Huu Hiep, 2023; Wiliana & Djajanegara, 2020; Chasi-Solórzano et al., 2025). Additionally, teachers can clearly teach cohesive devices such as references, conjunctions, substitution, and lexical cohesion to ensure students can easily connect the ideas between sentences and paragraphs (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

This research seeks to identify these gaps by investigating the use of cohesive devices in descriptive texts written by eleventh-grade students at SMK Bina Nusantara Ungaran. Specifically, this study aims to analyse how cohesive devices are used and how they contribute to students' writing quality. To achieve this objective, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What types of cohesive devices are used in the

descriptive texts written by eleventh-grade students at SMK Bina Nusantara Ungaran? (2) Why are certain types of cohesive devices used more frequently than others in the students' descriptive texts? (3) How do the types and frequency of cohesive devices used by the students influence the overall quality of their descriptive texts? The results of this research are expected to provide pedagogical insight for EFL teachers, particularly in improving students' ability to produce coherent and well-organized descriptive texts through the effective use of cohesive devices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have discussed the important role of cohesive devices in EFL writing, especially in relation to writing quality. Cohesive devices consist of five main types, namely references, substitutions, conjunctions, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion, which function to connect sentences and ideas into a unified and meaningful text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, as cited in Bahaziq, 2016). Several studies have shown that students who can use these devices appropriately tend to produce writing that is more organized and easier to understand (Karadeniz, 2017; RahmtAllah, 2020). In descriptive texts, the use of cohesive devices becomes even more essential because writers need to maintain a clear and consistent focus on the object being described from the beginning until the end of the text (Purnamasari et al., 2021; Lesiana et al., 2023; Veto Mortini et al., 2023).

However, in the Indonesian EFL context, a number of studies have found that many secondary school students still face difficulties in using cohesive devices effectively. They often rely on simple conjunctions and repetitive words, while more varied devices such as synonymy, substitutions, and ellipsis are rarely used (Gunas, 2020). This indicates that students' mastery of cohesive devices is still limited and needs further attention. Furthermore, the quality of students' writing is closely related to how well cohesive

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devices are applied. Some research has shown that students who use a wider range of cohesive devices tend to achieve better scores in writing, particularly in terms of organization and coherence (Feliks et al., 2024; Syarif et al., 2023).

Among these aspects, organization is the most directly influenced by the use of cohesive devices, since it reflects how ideas are logically connected throughout the text. Without sufficient cohesion, a piece of writing may still contain good ideas, but it can be difficult for readers to follow (Wang et al., 2024). Thus, improving students' ability to use cohesive devices is considered an important step to enhance their overall writing quality, especially in producing well-structured and coherent descriptive texts.

3. METHODS

This research applied a qualitative approach to investigate the use of cohesive devices in the descriptive texts written by eleventh-grade students. A qualitative approach was selected because this research focuses on the analysis of linguistic features in written students' descriptive text through descriptive analysis, rather than measuring variables statistically (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study also uses descriptive quantitative methods to support the form of frequency counts of cohesive devices to strengthen the qualitative analysis.

The participants of this research were eleventh-grade students at SMK Bina Nusantara Ungaran. Specifically, the participants consisted of students from several majors, such as Motorcycle Engineering (TSM), Fashion Design and Production (DPB), and Computer and Networking Engineering (TKJ), totalling approximately 60 students who had previously studied descriptive text. The reason three different majors were included was to get a broader picture of how students with different academic backgrounds and classroom experiences can affect how they organize and connect the ideas. The

participants were selected using purposive sampling, which refers to selecting individuals based on specific characteristics relevant to research objectives (Tajik et al., 2024). In this study, the criteria included students who had experience in writing descriptive texts and had received instruction on cohesive devices.

Furthermore, the data were collected through a writing task given to all participants during their regular English class session. Each student was asked to write a descriptive text in English about a person. The task was completed individually, in class, without any access to dictionaries or reference materials, so that the writing would reflect each student's actual command of the language at that time. Students were given approximately 45 minutes to complete the task. No corrections were made to the students' original writing because the goal was to analyse the texts as authentic products of the students' writing ability.

The unit of analysis in this research was cohesive devices found in students' descriptive texts. The collected writing samples were then analysed through several steps. First, all students' texts were read carefully to get an overall sense of how each student constructed their writing. Second, the identified cohesive devices were classified into five main types, namely reference, conjunction, substitution, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Third, the functions of the identified cohesive devices were analysed to resolve how each type contributed to the coherence of the students' texts. The frequency findings were not used as the main analysis, but as supporting evidence to explain patterns and what most students use of cohesive devices. Lastly, the findings were interpreted to explain patterns and the use of cohesive devices in the students' descriptive writing.

**4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
RESULT**

The study analyses cohesive devices in students' writing of descriptive text about a

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person from three different majors, namely TSM, DPB, and TKJ. Of the total 60 books students collected, only 50 fulfilled the requirements for analysis because the other 10 were too short and irrelevant to the focus of the study. From these 50 valid texts, a total of 255 cohesive devices were identified and categorized based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) theory. According to the data found in the research analysis process, the researcher found various types of cohesive devices used by students, such as reference, conjunction, substitution, and lexical cohesion. It shows that students commonly use basic cohesive devices that have been taught in descriptive text.

In this case study, the researcher also identifies why specific cohesive devices more frequently appeared than others. The result of the study shows that conjunctions and references were dominant in students' writing of descriptive texts. In several cases, students relied more on common references such as (he, she, they, and it) because the main focus of writing descriptive text is describing a person. Meanwhile, substitution and ellipsis appeared less frequently in students' writing, which may be caused by students' limited access to understanding grammar and their lack of knowledge of complex cohesive patterns.

Furthermore, the findings may also suggest that the variation of cohesive devices can affect students' writing quality. The more varied cohesive devices used by students can develop coherent and more connected structures in producing descriptive texts. On the other hand, students who repeatedly use the same cohesive devices, such as conjunctions and references, need to learn more types of cohesive devices to avoid producing inappropriate writing. Even though this study did not use the appropriate rubric measurement to evaluate students' writing skills, the findings might show that cohesive devices help students to present their ideas more clearly and organized.

According to the results of all texts, the analysis shows that conjunction is the cohesive device that is more frequently used with a total of 166 occurrences (65.1%),

followed by reference with 85 occurrences (33.3%). Lexical cohesion only appeared 3 times (1.2%), substitution 1 time (0.4%), and ellipsis was rarely found in students texts. Additive conjunctions were the most frequently occurring subtype, appearing 88 times (34.5%), followed by adversative conjunctions 40 times (15.7%), causal conjunctions 34 times (13.3%), and temporal conjunctions only 4 times (1.6%). Meanwhile, all references only found personal references (33.3%), and lexical cohesion was divided into repetition (0.8%) and collocation (0.4%). The data may confirm that students commonly use simple cohesive devices that are easier to apply in descriptive text.

The use of personal references can be found in student text, for example, Student TSM_11 wrote: *'My friend name is Hendra. He is smart and kind. He is sixteen years old.'* The pronoun (*he*) refers back to "my friend", who was introduced in the first sentence. This type of reference helps in maintaining subject stability by avoiding repeating the full name.

An example of additive conjunctions can be found in Student DPB_09 wrote: *'She is not too tall and has light skin. She is a quiet person but skilled. Moreover, she is polite ...'* In this case, an additive conjunction such as (*and, moreover*) are used to add more information continuously, which is the most common writing pattern in students' descriptive text.

Meanwhile, lexical cohesion as a repetition form can be found in Student DPB_03, wrote: *'My friend Amel has black hair... Amel is a cheerful person...'* The phrase "Amel" is repeated rather than changed into a pronoun, suggesting that the student has not fully used reference variation in their writing.

Based on the findings, references and conjunctions were the most dominant cohesive devices in students' texts rather than other cohesive devices. The findings in this study show that personal reference is the most used because the focus of the text is descriptive text, and mainly focuses on describing a person. Therefore, students often used pronouns such

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as (*she, he, they, and it*) to link sentences and avoid continuously repeating the same nouns.

Personal reference, such as (*she, he, they, it, and his/her*), is the first cohesive device taught in English language learning (Benu et al., 2022). Students have become familiar with its use since they first learned grammar, so naturally, they use it more often and automatically in their writing. Cohesive devices that are familiar and often appear in classroom exercises are likely to be used by second language learners (Karadeniz, 2017; Tussifa & Natasha, 2021).

The genre of text used in this study is descriptive text, specifically about describing a person. Descriptive text generally relies on personal reference to maintain coherence in the subject from one sentence to the next, and on additive conjunctions to add new details and information (Zahra et al., 2021). The text type influences the choice of cohesive devices used by students in writing to a certain degree, while descriptive and narrative texts generally contain more references than argumentative texts (Le et al., 2025).

One of the main reasons why EFL students rarely use a variety of lexical cohesion in their writing is the lack of vocabulary (Nindya & Widiati, 2020). Students are likely to repeat the same words or jump in conjunctions rather than replacing words with synonyms to build richer meanings. Thus, the lack of lexical cohesion, such as collocation and synonymy, may be related to students' limited vocabulary mastery.

Additionally, the rare use of ellipsis and low frequency of substitutions also make a good sense considering the level of difficulty. Ellipsis requires the writer to remove parts of a sentence that can be easily understood from the context, which is need a higher degree to requires it (Abdulrahman, 2018; Zahara et al., 2023). In line with some previous studies, ellipsis and substitutions rarely appear in the formal writing of second language learners because both require more complex grammar than conjunctions and references (Christensen, 2016 as cited in Ahmad, 2019).

A comparison between students' texts that use a wider variety of cohesive devices and those who rely on one type reveals a noticeable difference in the quality of writing. For instance, Student DPB_12 wrote: *'My friend is very talented. She can design beautiful dress and always practice everyday. Besides that, her work is creative and unique.'* The use of personal reference (*she*) links the second sentence to the subject introduced in the first sentence. Also, the use of conjunctions (*and, besides that*) makes the paragraph more fluid and connected meaningfully, and has varied conjunctions to help readers follow the writer's flow of thought.

In contrast to Student_TKJ 08 wrote: *'He is kind and smart and funny, and diligent.'* Although the sentence is understandable, the repeated use of conjunctions (*and*) may make the sentence feel less effective and monotonous. This result may imply that students' writing quality can be low by overusing only one type of conjunction.

This pattern is consistent through all the data, which is students who use more than two types of cohesive devices in one paragraph to produce coherence and make it easier to understand, while those who only rely on additive conjunction to produce texts that feel repetitive and monotonous content. These findings support the variation in the use of cohesive devices is related with overall writing quality, although not always related to the length of the text (Khalil & Abu-ayyash, 2023).

Overall, the result of the study shows that all three majors, namely TSM, DPB, and TKJ, already have the basic understanding of the use of cohesive devices, but it still limited to the simplest and most familiar types. The development of better skills in writing needs to focus on introducing and practicing how to use a wider variety of cohesive devices, especially substitutions, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion. On the other hand, students who applied a wide range of cohesive devices in their writing produced better organization and smoother transitions between ideas. In some cases, this variety of cohesive devices may help readers to

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understand the text more easily because of the relationship between sentences.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Cohesive Devices by Type

Type	Sub-type	Frequency	Percentage
Reference	Personal	85	33.3%
Conjunction	Additive	88	34.5%
Conjunction	Adversative	40	15.7%
Conjunction	Causal	34	13.3%
Conjunction	Temporal	4	1.6%
Lexical Cohesion	Repetition	2	0.8%
Lexical Cohesion	Collocation	1	0.4%
Substitution	Clausal	1	0.4%
Ellipsis	-	0	0%
Total	-	255	100%

Table 2. Comparison Across Major

Type	TSM	DPB	TKJ	Total
Reference	32	19	34	85
Conjunction	52	78	36	166
Lexical Cohesion	0	2	1	3
Substitution	0	0	1	1
Ellipsis	0	0	0	0
Total	84	99	72	255

DISCUSSION

Cohesive devices play a crucial role in creating coherence in students' written texts, and the findings of this study reveal that conjunctions and personal references are the two most dominant types used by vocational high school students majoring in TSM, DPB, and TKJ. A total of 255 cohesive devices were found in 50 relevant students' descriptive texts, 65.1% were conjunctions, and 33.3% were references, while lexical cohesion, substitutions, and ellipsis were just a little. This finding is similar to previous studies, which found that additive conjunctions were more common in students' writing, meaning that learners often choose to add or describe their ideas rather than compare or modify them

(Rahman et al., 2023). This finding may suggest that students' ability to use cohesion is still centred on the most basic devices or more familiar cohesive forms, while organizing ideas in writing practice. At the same time, more complex strategies in using cohesive devices have not yet been well taught in the classroom. In descriptive text, students mostly describe people, places, or objects, so the use of personal references and conjunctions becomes more natural and easier to apply. Therefore, in this study, cohesive devices not only appear as grammatical elements but also as a strategy to help students in maintaining coherence in developing writing quality.

Furthermore, the dominant use of additive conjunctions in this data matches a previous study that found high school students in Indonesia are more likely to use simple conjunctions such as "and" and "but" because these appear most frequently in classroom exercises and textbooks (Gunas, 2020). This pattern is not merely a habit but a result of what students are most frequently introduced to during the English learning process. Second-language learners at the secondary level often overuse conjunctions due to their clarity and easily understandable structure. These also stated that reference is often the most commonly used cohesive device because it helps students avoid irrelevant repetition and helps to connect the ideas. As a result, students become more confident and familiar using those two devices in writing activities.

However, different findings show that lexical cohesion appeared more frequently, especially repetition, which dominated in students' writing at the vocational high school. Students in this study were likely to repeat the same vocabulary rather than use synonyms or relevant words. These differences are likely due to different genres of the text; some previous studies used narrative texts, which naturally contain more repetition, whereas this study uses descriptive texts that rely on additive conjunctions to provide continuous sentences. In some cases, vocational high school students are likely to focus on delivering simple and clear ideas instead of developing lexical variations.

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According to the theoretical perspective based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesive devices theory, which is classified into references, conjunctions, substitutions, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion. The findings of this study show that references and conjunctions are the most dominant and simple to use for students, making them easier to apply. In contrast, ellipsis and substitutions require a higher level of understanding of grammar because students need to understand how to apply and erase elements within sentences. The same applies to lexical cohesion, which requires choosing the right synonym, which requires richer vocabulary mastery that vocational high school students whose majors are not in language may not necessarily have.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings of the study have clear implications for English teachers in vocational high schools. It suggests that English teachers in vocational high schools need to provide more explicit instruction on the use of a variety of cohesive devices, especially in substitutions, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion. Students may need more guidance in using synonyms, avoiding repetitive words, and connecting ideas in more varied ways. Teachers need to begin teaching cohesive devices more clearly, not only by explaining definitions on the blackboard, but through guided writing exercises that encourage students to apply synonyms, collocations, and avoid repetitive words.

Additionally, different writing genres may influence the development of the use of cohesive devices in students' writing quality. Teachers need to introduce students to other genres of writing. By introducing a variety of genre-based writing exercises, students can realize that conjunctions are not the only way to connect ideas (Islami et al., 2022). Thus, overuse of conjunctions can be reduced little by little, and students can produce more coherent texts. Students may have improved their quality of writing and organizing ideas in their descriptive writing. Hence, cohesive devices should not only be taught in a theoretical way in writing classes, but also as

practical tools to help students in producing meaningful and coherent texts.

5. CONCLUSION

This research examines the types of cohesive devices used by eleventh-grade students from three different majors, namely TSM, DPB, and TKJ, in descriptive texts written at SMK Bina Nusantara Ungaran. The findings of this study confirm that references and conjunctions were the most dominant found in students' writing, while substitutions, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion were rarely identified. This condition may indicate that students rely on simpler and familiar cohesive forms when they organize ideas. In addition, lexical cohesion was found in several texts, but the frequency was limited compared to references and conjunctions. The frequent use of references and conjunctions possibly appeared because the text is about describing a person, so personal references and simple conjunctions are most commonly used by students. The findings of this study may confirm that cohesive devices are crucial in enhancing students' descriptive writing quality, especially in creating coherence and unity between ideas.

From a pedagogical view, these findings suggest that English teachers in vocational high schools need to provide clearer explanations and more practice in using cohesive devices properly. Teachers may encourage students to use more varied cohesive forms, such as substitutions, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion, to help students in producing coherent and meaningful texts.

Additionally, this study has limitations; the research only analysed one type of text, which is descriptive text, so the findings may be different if applied in other genres of writing. Future researchers are recommended to explore cohesive devices in other writing genres, involve a large number of participants, and conduct a deeper analysis of how cohesive devices influence students' writing quality.

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