A Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis of Cohesion and The Writing Quality of Saudi Female EFL Undergraduate Students

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Abstract
This study aims to investigate how frequently Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesive devices were used as well as their relationship with the writing quality of 100 Saudi EFL undergraduate students in Al Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It uses a mixed method approach, where the students’ essays were analyzed using systemic functional linguistics (SFL) in terms of the textual meta-function of cohesive devices. The five types of the cohesive devices are the following: lexical cohesion, reference, conjunction, substitutions, and ellipses. Moreover, each of their subcategories were analyzed in the students’ texts. The NVivo qualitative data analysis software and the corpus analysis (conducted using AntConc) were used to calculate the frequencies of each cohesive device found in the data. The IELTS writing assessment scale was also used to evaluate the students’ writing scores. The results show that the most frequently used device was lexical cohesion, specifically repetition. Saudi EFL undergraduate students tended to repeatedly stay focused on the central idea of the topic. Furthermore, Pearson’s correlation coefficient found a relationship between the students’ writing scores and length of their essays, the use of cohesive ties and the scores, and cohesive ties and the length of the students’ essays. This study recommends that EFL teachers provide Saudi EFL students several cohesive tools in order to help them improve their writing skills and connect their ideas smoothly.

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A Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis of Cohesion and The Writing Quality of Saudi Female EFL Undergraduate Students

A Paper Submitted to The Department of English
in Partial Fulfillment of The Requirements For The Degree of Master’s in Linguistics

Submitted by
Khawater Fahad Alshalan

Supervised by
Dr. Ibrahim H. Almaiman

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Keywords: cohesion, cohesive devices, essay writing, systemic functional linguistics (SFL)
ملخص الدراسة

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة مدى تكرار استخدام أدوات التماسك اللغوي الخاصة بالعالم هاليداي (1976) وعلاقتها بجودة كتابة 100 طالبة في جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية في المملكة العربية السعودية بمدينة الرياض.

سيتم تحليل مقالات الطالبات باستخدام اللغويات الوظيفية النظامية (SFL) من حيث ربط جمل النص ببعضها لبعض، لجمع الكلمات المتكررة وتحليل كل فئة من فئاتها الفرعية في نصوص الطالبات. ثم استخدام برنامج تحليل البيانات AntConc لتقييم درجات الطالبات في كتابة مقالات IELTS المتمرة وsembعد أداة مستخدمة في النصوص. تم استخدام مقياس IELTS لتقييم درجات الطالبات في كتابة مقالاتهم لتقييم درجات الطالبات باستخدام تلك الأدوات اللغوية. أظهرت النتائج أن أكثر الكلمات استخدمة هي من النوع التماسك الخاصية عملية تكرار الكلمات وتميل الطالبات في المرحلة الجامعية في تخصيص اللغة الإنجليزية إلى تكرار الكلمات عند كتابة المقال باللغة الإنجليزية وعدم الخروج عن موضوع النص. وجد معامل ارتباط بيرسون علاقة إيجابية وقوية بين درجات كتابة الطالبات وعدد كلمات مقالاتهم وبين استخدامهم لأدوات التماسك اللغوي ودرجاتهم وعلاقتها بعدد كلمات مقالاتهم. توصي هذه الدراسة أن توفر معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية لطلابهن عدة طرق لعرض وشرح أدوات التماسك اللغوي بشكل واضح من أجل مساعدتهم في تحسين مهاراتهم في الكتابة وربط أفكارهم بسلاسة.

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Dedication

To my mother who loved me unconditionally

To my father who had faith in me
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Chapter one

Introduction

Chapter one introduces this study by clarifying the context of the problem, statement of the problem, the significance of the study, the research questions, the method and procedure briefly and the operational definition of terms.

1.1 Context of the problem

Numerous research studies illustrate that no matter where research is conducted, researchers become more and more concerned about EFL (English as a foreign language) students learning the writing skill in academic contexts (Crossley & McNamara, 2010). Writing is the most fundamental productive skill for undergraduate students to master because it is a thinking tool used for critical thinking and learning in all disciplines (Khuwaileh & Al Shoumali, 2000). However, EFL undergraduate students face some difficulties in employing cohesion in writing argumentative essays that cause failure of creating a smooth flow of information (Sidighi and Heydari, 2012). Cohesive devices tie pieces of text together, such as Reference, Substitution, Ellipsis, Conjunction and Lexical Cohesion (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Al-Yaari, S. A., Al Hammadi, F. S., Alyami, S. A., & Almaflehi, N. (2013) discovered that Saudi EFL students used mainly connectives in their writings and the rest of the cohesive devices were used incorrectly.

Paiva and Lima (2011) explained that it is crucial to have a deeper analysis of students’ writing rather than the traditional surface-level approach. Michael Halliday’s SFL (Systemic Functional Linguistics) approach is a linguistic model that views language as ways of making socially-constructed meaning within a cultural context (Eggins, 2004). In discourse, SFL creates meaning through three meta-functions; ideational, interpersonal and
Textual. Ideational function includes participants and what they are doing. The interpersonal function is concerned about the relationship between the author and his audience within a text. The textual function is related to the mode of communication, which includes cohesion and coherence (Derewianka & Jones, 2010). This paper focuses on textual meta-function, mainly the cohesive devices used by EFL students in writing.

Applying the SFL cohesive analysis has numerous advantages. The improvement of cohesive devices in EFL students’ essays influences the quality of their writing (Crossly, Kyle and McNamara, 2016). Furthermore, cohesive analysis classifies written discourse features that help the reader comprehend text as a whole (Bastrukmen & von Randow, 2014). Because of the crucial use of cohesive devices in argumentative writing, as mentioned, this study will not look at the traditional aspects of writing but the paradigm of Systemic Functional Linguistics.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Writing is one of the toughest skill to adapt in an EFL context. EFL students face some difficulties when they write. Most students have problems with how to generate and organize ideas. Thus, they have no knowledge of cohesion mechanics. Most teachers concentrate on a sentence level more than the discourse level in teaching writing. Therefore, they never focus on cohesion though it is a crucial feature of good writing. Consideration should be made to help EFL students shape their ideas by using suitable cohesive devices in their writings.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This paper would calculate the frequencies of cohesive devices used in EFL students’ essays at Imam University. The study aims to show the relationship between the use of
cohesive devices and the quality of writing. The ability to understand students’ use of cohesive devices would advance their writing skill.

1.4 Research Questions

This research paper seeks to answer the three following questions:

RQ1. What is the most frequently used cohesive device in Saudi female EFL undergraduate students’ writings at Imam University?

RQ2. What are the frequencies of different types of cohesive devices in Saudi female EFL undergraduate students’ writings at Imam University?

RQ3. What is the relationship between Saudi female EFL undergraduate students’ use of cohesive devices and the quality of their writing at Imam University?

1.5 Method and procedure

This study was a mixed method approach. It was built on qualitative data analysis of the cohesive devices and finding their correlation with the writing quality that delivered quantitative data. 100 EFL Saudi undergraduate Students, who were taking a writing course, would write an essay about a topic that is taken from the IELTS exam. The topic was “Many people believe that social networking sites have had a huge negative impact on both individuals and society”. In order to study the textual meta-functions, Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) five cohesive devices were used to analyze the students’ essays; reference, substitution, ellipses, lexical cohesion, and conjunction. Lexical cohesion contained repetition, synonyms, hypernyms, hyponyms, meronyms, and antonyms. Reference is divided into personal pronouns and possessive pronouns. Conjunctions can split into elaboration, extension, and enhancement. Substitution and Ellipses could be nominal, verbal or clausal. NVivo qualitative data analysis software and the corpus analysis AntConc were used to
calculate frequencies of each cohesive device found in the data. The IELTS writing assessment scale was also operated to evaluate students’ writing scores. Moreover, pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the students’ writing scores, length and their usage of cohesive devices.

1.6 Operational definition of terms

Systemic Functional Linguistics is the study of forming meaningful discourse by operating language choices through different functions (Eggins, 1994). One of these functions was Textual, which ties and unifies the whole text together to help the reader understand and recognize its purpose (Humphrey, Droga, and Feez, 2012). Cohesion includes non-structural relations that go beyond the sentence level and is represented by cohesive devices (Martin, 2001). This paper focuses on five main cohesive devices. First, Lexical cohesion has an effect due to certain vocabulary selections. This can be clarified as the repetition of content words; synonyms, co-hyponyms and antonyms (Salkie 1995). Second is Reference that has a semantic relation in a text between one element and another by reference while the referring thing corresponds to the semantic properties of what is being referred to (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Third, Conjunctions join textual elements together to produce a complex semantic unit (Thompson 2004). It can be divided into five categories; Additive, Adversative, Causal, Temporal and Continuative. Forth, Substitution is when an item is replaced by another item (Ramasawmy, 2004). Substitution can be Nominal, such as “there is one there”; Verbal do “He does too” or Clausal, such as “the manager said so”. Usually, “do” or “so” is used as an alternative for nouns or verbs that have already been used (Emilia, 2014). Finally, Ellipsis means the deletion of an item. It leaves an empty hole that could be occupied by the referent (Thompson, 2004). It is also divided into three types; Nominal
Ellipses, Verbal ellipses, and Clausal ellipses, where they all are understood from the context when removed.

1.7 **Summary**

Chapter One illustrated the purpose of this study, defined its terms and summarized its method and procedure after stating the context of the problem. Chapter Two will review past literature, previous studies of cohesive devices and students’ writings as well as the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).
Chapter two

Literature review

The previous chapter presented the fundamentals of this paper; research questions, purposes and method. Chapter two explains the theoretical background of SFL and previous studies related to students’ uses of cohesive devices.

2.1 Theoretical framework of SFL

Systemic linguists are interested in how a person uses language to accomplish social claims every day. The use of language is functional and its function is to create meanings. Social and cultural contexts influence these meanings in which they are exchanged. This process is called a semiotic process, which means making meanings by choosing (Eggins, 1994, p. 2). Systemic functional linguistics theory (SFL) views language as a system of meaning, a “semiotic system” (Halliday, 2007, p. 2). The theory is called “systemic” because language is powerful in having is a massive network of unified choices that are signified in the form of system networks (Halliday, 2007). System networks display a ‘tool-box’ or resource for making meaning through grammatical and lexical choices (Droga & Humphrey, 2003, p. 1). Therefore, to provide meaning, language choices are made.

The main aspect of SFL is not about what people use language for but how to use language (Eggins, 2004). The theoretical framework of SFL observes language as “a strategic, meaning-making resource” (Eggins, 2004, p. 2) and, in social contexts; it discovers how language is used to accomplish specific goals (O’Donnell, 2011).

Language can be used to describe either spoken ideas or written and can share it to one another. Theoretically, these are viewed as three meta-functions of language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks, & Yallop, 2000). Thus, language is
functional. Having ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings in user’s mind, it is able to choose grammatical patterns and words in linguistic units to simplify and organize coding systems as sets of choices (Eggins, 2004).

However, SFL is not only theoretical but also used in practice (Droga & Humphrey, 2003). This allows individuals to accomplish things and to achieve many social purposes in their lives. SFL pinpoints three features; mode, field, and tenor. They have convincing and predictable effects on language usage. In relation to practice, individuals usually make language choices in certain contexts to do three things at the same time; talk about a particular topic (field), communicate with someone (tenor), and create a coherent idea orally or in writing (mode). Thus, achieving the register (Butt et al., 2000; Martin, 2009). Rose & Martin (2012) argue that the interpersonal function has to do with the relationships of who is involved by language, recognized as the tenor of social relations. The ideational function is about the experiences that are interpreted by language. This is considered as the field of the experience. The textual function is the role the language plays in the context and how it creates connected and coherent discourse. This is called the mode of communication, such as in speaking or writing (Rose & Martin, 2012).

These choices can be either through a single clause level or a whole text level (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). While the view of traditional grammar pays attention to the correct language use through rules, the functional view is about how language is able to establish meaning (Butt et al., 2000; Droga & Humphrey, 2003). Language choices must be carefully considered by the writers to convey their message effectively (Hyland, 2003). The tenor, the interaction between the writer and the reader, language choices are employed “to negotiate relationships and to express opinions and attitudes” (Droga & Humphrey, 2003, p. 53). Using pronouns and names in structures of clauses can make statements or questions more or less personal. Also, the tenor of interactions depends on the use of models that show
low, medium or high levels of the writer’s certainty. Students can become critical readers and selective writers if they understand the interpersonal functions of texts as well as tenor’s linguistic resources used to induce readers (Droga & Humphrey, 2003; Martin, 2009). According to mode, language choices make texts cohesive. It shows that the text is organized and signals what the writer will mention next (Droga & Humphrey, 2003).

There are some key aspects concerning SFL. First, language is a resource for meaning. It is a system of choices that users choose from to make meanings suitable to its social context. This may control the number of choices from the linguistic system. This leads to the second aspect that there is a systematic or symbolic relationship between texts and contexts. Social contexts influence language choices and language itself helps in forming these contexts. Third, SFL labels elements of texts in relation to their function in making meanings. For example, the words participant, process, and circumstances are functional labels (Emilia, 2010).

Derewianka and Jones (2010) note that the SFL model tolerates different entry points for teachers and their students. Regarding the tenor within a register, students start to realize that written texts are not only for their teacher to read. It is for a broader audience; a formal audience, such as professionals or colleagues. Those who read the text might have more or less knowledge of the written topic. Thus, language choices rely heavily on the audience. Likewise, the mode of interaction, such as cohesive devices, is within the path of communication.

2.2 Textual Meta-function

The textual meta-function of SFL is used to examine texts. It always overlaps with the ideational and interpersonal meta-functions to make a meaningful language. Textual meta-function straightforwardly relates to the mode of communication. In this study, the mode is
hand-written, argumentative essays. Humphrey, Droga, and Feez (2012) describe textual elements as “threads that tie together...a unified whole text...that an audience can comprehend and recognize as relevant and purposeful” (p. 93). Mainly, textual elements function in two ways. First, it organizes the stream of information at clause and sentence levels, like coherence. Second, it joins several words or phrases in the text, such as references, substitutions and transitions to make it cohesive.

2.3 Cohesion

Cohesion is an internal element that makes the reader while reading; relate the meaning together within the text (Dastjerdi & Samian, 2011). Halliday and Hasan (1976) explained that cohesion is a non-structural unit of textual meta-function that does not rely on the structural unit, like a clause or a sentence, in the text. Cohesion is about the meaning, which is beyond a sentence or a clause. Moreover, cohesion produces a sense of connectedness because the explanation of one part in the text relies on one element to another (Emilia, 2014). For one to accomplish this sense of connectedness, cohesive devices are used to relate between elements as the text grows (Derewianka & Jones, 2012). The main focus of this study is these cohesive devices, which were references, conjunctions, substitutions, ellipses and lexical cohesion.

2.4 Previous studies

Scholars have given attention to EFL undergraduate students’ usage of cohesion in their writings. Some of them came up with similar findings whereas others have been contradictory.

2.4.1 SFL, Cohesion and L2 writing

Abusharkh (2012) investigated cohesion in argumentative essay writing of 60 College Students in Palestine. By observing Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesive ties were identified,
written their number of occurrences and described in relations to the type of cohesion. Participants were labeled according to their levels; high, intermediate, and low. Findings have discovered that the three groups of participants were most likely to use lexical devices but hardly used substitution and ellipses. Furthermore, intermediate and low-level students used reiteration as a cohesive device more than the high-level students. Additionally, intermediate and low-level students used language transfer that hinders cohesion.

Tshotsho (2014) used SFL in exploring 20 undergraduate students’ argumentative essay writing in South Africa. Students who were labeled ‘competent’ used more reference markers and cohesive devices in their writings than those who were ‘not competent’. This study revolves around the register of competent students. It suggests that when students are advanced, they use formal academic English in their language choices. However, less advanced students could not detect the register. Findings show that explicit instruction of textual features is important in English academic writing.

### 2.4.2 EFL Arab students’ misuse of cohesive devices

Written essays that lack cohesion reduce the reader’s comprehension and his concentration. There are some studies that reflect Arab students’ difficulties in English writing. Khalil (1989) studied how Arab undergraduate students used cohesive devices in their writings. The results showed that students repeated the same lexical item as a cohesive device but underused other lexical and grammatical cohesive links. However, Arab students in Kharma’s (1985) study show that all irregular ties and mistakes they made were because of the negative transfer from Arabic.

Sayidina (2010) tried to clarify how first languages interfere in second language acquisition. She compared 50 Arabic research papers with English essays written by Arab students regarding cohesive devices and additive transition words. Results show that native
Arabic additive transition words were highly used in English works. Also, instead of using grammatical cohesion, the same noun is repeated more than once.

Al-Jarf (2001) explored EFL Arab students’ struggles in managing cohesive ties; reference, conjunction, substitution and ellipsis. Students were required to identify cohesive ties in a certain text and write the referent or substitute of each anaphor. Then, students needed to list all conjunctions from the text and stock the ellipted words. Findings suggested that, according to the students, the toughest cohesive tie was substitution followed by reference and ellipses. The easiest device was conjunction.

Also, Al-Shatarat (1990) observed 100 Jordanian intermediate students’ use of cohesive devices in community college. They were given two tests. The first test consists of 57 multiple-choice items and students had to pick the best answer. The second examination contained 500 words and 28 blanks. Students were required to fill these blanks by using cohesive devices. The results have shown that almost 42% of the student's answers were incorrect or unsuitable because of mistreatment of grammatical and lexical cohesive devices.

Furthermore, Kargozari et al. (2012) examined cohesive devices in 180 structures in argumentative essays. The participants were Iranian EFL university students who wrote these essays. Results implied that, in student's writing, lexical devices were greatly used followed by conjunctions and references. Further, problems of misusing, overusing and restriction of reference, conjunction and lexical devices were classified in participants’ structures.

2.4.3 Cohesive devices and writing quality

Wenxing and Ying (2012) observed the use of cohesive devices in Chinese EFL students’ argumentative writing at different proficiency levels. Results indicated that Chinese EFL students used cohesive devices incorrectly. The researchers indicated that the correct uses of cohesive items are associated with the writing quality of students’ texts.
A study was conducted to show the relationship between the use of cohesive devices and the writing quality of students by Crossley and MacNamara (2010). The two researchers established that the amount of cohesive devices used in a piece of writing was an excellent source for organizing a text. However, they discovered that joining conjunctions and sentences overlap pronouns, which is considered a negative indication of the essay quality. They concluded that the number of times the students used cohesive devices in their text alone is not enough to reflect good writing quality. The writing quality depends on other factors, such as the type of cohesive devices used in the writing.

On the contrary, Alarcon & Morales (2011) disagree that the frequency and types of cohesive devices used in students’ writing with the writing quality. They investigated the use of cohesive devices in argumentative essays written by undergraduate students. Halliday and Hasan's (1976) classification was used as an analytical framework. Their findings show that the most frequently used cohesive device that was around 91% out of all devices is Reference. The second most frequent cohesive device was Conjunction that appeared ten times less than reference. However, the researchers did not find a vital connection between the frequent number of cohesive devices and the writing quality of the students’ essays. After analyzing the data, qualitatively, Alarcon & Morales (2011) concluded that the number of times students used cohesive devices in their essays couldn’t be served as good evidence in their writing quality. However, they have recommended that writers need to be familiarized with these cohesive devices for better writing quality.

Similarly, Chen (2008) absorbed the relationship between the total of cohesive features and writing quality. The researcher studied 46 essays written by 23 EFL undergraduate students. Results indicated that students mostly used lexical devices, followed by conjunctions and reference devices. Furthermore, this research paper revealed that there is no significant relationship between the writing quality and the number of cohesive devices.
Coskun's (2011) compared and analyzed EFL Turkish and Uzbek students’ English writing and the findings reinforced the same conclusion of Alarcon & Morales's study, which was showing no relationship between the use of cohesive devices and the quality of writing. However, the differences lied on the preferred usage of cohesive devices by EFL Turkish and Uzbek students. The students used more ellipsis in their writings.

As mentioned, previous studies show dissimilarity between the frequent number and types of cohesive devices in writing. There are not enough studies that examine whether or not Saudi EFL undergraduate students have similar or different usage of cohesive patterns and writing quality through a systemic functional linguistic perception. Thus, this study aims to investigate the relationship between cohesive devices and overall writing quality in argumentative essay writing of Saudi EFL students.

2.5 Summary

Reviewed studies, focused on similar issues of the current study that covered most of the matters theoretically and practically concerning this study's problem. The upcoming chapter, chapter three, will show a detailed description of the method and procedure in order to answer the research questions.
Chapter three

Methodology

This study examines cohesion patterns and the writing quality of female undergraduate students in a Saudi educational context. This chapter will describe the research design, population and sample, data collection, procedure, validity and research ethics.

3.1 Research design

As stated in chapter one, the aim of this study was to examine the most frequently used cohesive device in students' argumentative essays as well as the relationship between the use of cohesive devices and the quality of their writing.

This study followed a mixed method approach. The descriptive analysis of students’ writing was conducted depending on the paradigm of Halliday’s (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics, specifically the textual meta-function. The number of occurrences of Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesive devices, such as reference, ellipses, substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion were calculated by adapting Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2014) analysis schemes.

3.2 Population and sample

The data for this study were collected from the population of EFL Saudi female undergraduates in Al Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The age range of participants was 19-25 with Arabic as their L1. All participants in this study were female due to the existing gender separation in Saudi Arabia and for no other intended reasons. The sample included 100 students from level 5 and level 6 who were specialized in linguistics at the college of languages and translation. They had an English
writing course for Academic Purposes (EAP). The study took place in the second academic semester of 2019. The experiment lasted for 4 weeks.

3.3 Data Collection

This study’s data involved 100 argumentative essays, written by Saudi undergraduate students, with a total word count of 14,200. The students were required to write about the negative impact of networking sites on a society. This particular topic was taken from an IELTS exam.

3.4 Procedure

The objectives of this paper were carefully explained in detail to the students. The researcher asked the students’ permission to use their essays as data sources in this study. The students had only 40 minutes to write an argumentative essay about the given topic. However, they did not get any external assistance that would help them in writing their essays. The researcher attended and only observed the students during the process of writing. After submitting their papers, the researcher typed what the students wrote into a Microsoft word format without correcting any of the errors. However, for this study, participants’ identification markers, such as name and ID number were removed. To calculate frequencies of each cohesive device found in the data, NVivo qualitative data analysis software and the corpus analysis AntConc were used. Then, the IELTS writing assessment scale was operated to evaluate students’ essays and word count. After that, the Pearson’s correlation coefficient would find the relationship between the use of cohesive devices and the quality of the students’ writing.
3.5 Instruments

3.5.1 Data Analysis Tools

For this paper, the data analysis tools were Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) five cohesive devices, which were reference, reiteration, ellipses, lexical cohesion, and conjunction. The reason behind choosing these particular tools was studying the textual meta-functions following Halliday’s (1976) Systemic Functional Linguistics theory. The cohesive devices that tend to connect the text together and make it clear. Furthermore, these cohesive devices were selected because they can be examined from a semantic and a grammatical point of view. Lexical cohesion and reference were inspected through lexical meaning while ellipses and substitution are examined through grammar. As for Conjunctions, they can be explored through both lexical meaning and grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Thus, the five cohesive devices would focus on the aim of this paper by examining the semantic and grammatical textual meta-functions of students’ texts. Moreover, this paper followed Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2014) cohesion analysis schemes because it provided clear and detailed explanations of numerous cohesive ties with examples.

According to Halliday and Hassan (1976), the five cohesive devices were briefly summarized as follows.

3.5.1.1 Lexical cohesion

Lexical cohesion revolves around the writer’s selection of lexicon. Its occurrence, in a discourse, is necessary to get readers' full attention. Lexical cohesion words are explored through the semantic meaning of repetition, synonyms, antonyms, meronyms, hypernyms and hyponyms. In organizing a text, various forms of lexical repetition should be used. Repetition is when a word is repeated twice in a sentence. For example, “your mother is unique and your father is unique”. Synonyms are words that have the same meaning used in a sentence, such
as “Weeping is crying because of a lost friendship”. However, antonyms are words that are the opposite of other words used. A metonym is a word that is a small part of something but refers to a whole thing, such as the word “faces” which refers to “people” in “there were so many familiar faces today”. Hypernyms is a broad word that contains words with precise meanings, for instance, the word “color” is a hypernym of “blue”. Hyponyms, however, are specified words that are included in other words. For example, a “table” is considered a hyponym of “furniture”.

3.5.1.2 Reference

Halliday and Hassan (1976) believe that any association between an element and its source is called a reference. There are three kinds of reference; personal, demonstrative and comparative. Personal reference occurs when it is being referred to a particular person by using pronouns within a text. Personal reference could be divided into personal pronouns, like “he”, “they”, and “them”, and possessive pronouns, such as “their”, “his”, and “her”. Demonstrative is another type of reference, it can be either definite article “the” or “this”, “that”, “these”, “those” or adverbs “here”, “there”, “now” and “then”. Comparative reference, according to Halliday and Hassan, refers to similar referential devices indirectly. This includes adjectives and adverbs, for instance, “better”, “equally” and “likewise”.

3.5.1.3 Conjunctions

Conjunctions were features that could join sentences together that create semantic relations. As said by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), conjunctions could split into three broad categories; elaboration, extension, and enhancement. Elaboration contains three main divisions. The first conjunction is clarifying that can be divided into corrective, dismissive, distractive, resumptive, particularizing, summative, and verificative, like “actually” and “in short” conjunctions. The second conjunction is called appositives that are expository, such as
in other words, that is”. The third conjunction is exemplifying, like “for example”.

Extension involves three different divisions; additive, that are positive or negative, adversative and varying extensions that is sub-divided into alternative, replacive and subtractive, for example “and”, “but” and “instead”. Enhancement contains four different aspects. First, temporal, which can be simple or complex. Second is causal-conditional, such as “otherwise” and “soon”. The third is the manner that includes comparative and means. Finally, matter, which can be positive or negative.

3.5.1.4 Substitution

Substitution is when an element, within a text, substitutes another. Substitution is similar to Ellipses in the sense of lacking three different kinds; nominal, verbal or a clausal. However, substitution substitutes the absent part while ellipses keep it empty (Halliday and Hassan, 1976; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). When a noun or a noun phrase is being replaced by another element is called Nominal substitution. For example, “All the letters were on the table. We promptly wrote one” (“one” equals “letter”). However, when a verb or a verb phrase is substituted by another element it is named a Verbal substitution, such as “He remembered his long-ago memories. He remembered his childhood too”. As for clause substitution, it occurs when a particular clause is replaced by another. For instance, speaker A: ”it is going to snow”, speaker B:”that is right”.

3.5.1.5 Ellipses

Halliday and Hassan (1976) called Ellipses ‘empty’ substitution while no other element takes the empty place (p.88). Ellipsis shortens the sentence due to an occurrence of a repetition of an element in texts. An element is omitted because it was previously mentioned in an earlier written sentence. This helps a text to become more cohesive. Ellipsis can be classified into three different kinds as well: nominal, verbal and clausal. The noun phrases
ellipsis, in the following example, is between brackets. “John lived in a desert, (John) was going to look for water, and suddenly fell into a giant hole”. Verbal ellipsis, such as “Do you think ice cream is good or (you think is) bad?”. Another example that includes ellipsis as a clause, “who is the principle of this school?” “One of the greatest men” (is the principle of this school).

3.5.2 Writing assessment scale

The goal of using a writing assessment scale, in this study, was to mark the students' performances and writing quality. This paper used the IELTS writing assessment scale, which included 9 bands for evaluating essays. The scale involved four criteria; Task Achievement, Coherence and Cohesion, Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy. Each criterion has a number of characteristics. For the students to score high in writing, for example band 7, their essays needed to include the features of that band in all four criteria (see Appendix C). For example, in achieving band 6 in writing, regarding the Task Achievement criterion, students’ essays should have addressed all parts of the task. As for Coherence and Cohesion, the information and ideas provided should be arranged coherently while the progression of their essays is clear and orderly. Lexical Resource, and Grammatical Range and Accuracy involved using a sufficient variety of vocabulary for the task as well as using a combination of both, simple and complex sentence structures.

3.6 Validity and Reliability of instruments

3.6.1 Validity of instruments

This paper followed Mackey and Gass’s (2016) three sides of validity; face, content and construct validity concerning the cohesive analysis tools. Face validity was verified by the general application of the scheme, the way it appears to analyze the students’ essays for cohesive devices. By following Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2014) cohesion scheme, content
validity was accomplished by classifying cohesive devices as well as offering information in detail. Construct validity is calculating the frequency of the students’ usage of the cohesive devices by dividing the sub-total number of every used cohesive device by the total number of its total occurrences and multiply it by 100.

Additionally, the IELTS Test measurements were also reviewed according to; face, content and construct validities. Face validity was realized when the test appeared, to the test-taker, to assess what it is supposed to be testing. If test-takers admitted that their results were precise, then face validity would be accepted (Alderson, Clapham and Wall, 2005). However, in order for a test to be content valid, the test described its items that contained various language structures and language skills. Oller (1979) clarified that content validity helped test-takers show their language abilities, which was what the exam tended to evaluate. Moreover, construct validity tested the relationship between test scores and test taker’s actual language abilities.

3.6.2 Reliability of instruments

The reliability of the IELTS writing assessment was confirmed because test results were considered stable. Usually, test takers score similar results when they take the same exam again in different sessions with different administrations (Brown, 1996). Furthermore, when the researcher evaluated the student’s essays, a three-year experienced trainer who used to give EFL Saudi females introductory courses for IELTS exam preparations reviewed the scores.

Repeatability and reproducibility were studied in order to confirm Reliability (Allen & Knight, 2009). Regarding repeatability, the researcher conducted the analysis by choosing randomly one of the students’ essays and analyzed them. Then, the researcher used the same scheme to reanalyze that essay to confirm its frequencies and percentages.
Concerning reproducibility, a specialized instructor, who had more than a decade of experience in teaching EFL students in King Saud University and was very familiar with the cohesion of texts, helped in reexamining the essays while using the same schemes. Furthermore, the researcher reviewed all the texts again in order to ensure accuracy.

3.7 Summary

This chapter offered the methodology used in this research, involving an overview of participants, data collection, analysis procedures, instruments and their validity and reliability. Chapter Four will examine students’ writing using the textual meta-function to explore students’ language patterns to produce cohesive texts.
Chapter four

Results and data analysis

The earlier chapter shed light on the study’s method and procedure. Chapter four will describe the SFL quantitative data analysis to answer the research questions. The findings of the study will be stated as well.

4.1 Answering question 1 and 2

RQ1 What is the most frequently used cohesive device in Saudi female EFL undergraduate students’ writings at Imam University?

RQ2 What are the frequencies of different types of cohesive devices in Saudi female EFL undergraduate students’ writings at Imam University?

In order to answer the first and the second questions of the study, this chapter will discuss the most obvious overall trend of the cohesive devices the students used. After that, the occurrences of every of Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesive devices; reference, ellipses, substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion and their subcategories were each described separately and in detail.

As shown in Table 4.1 and figure 4.1, the most frequently used cohesive device was lexical cohesion, with the percentage of 48.3% The second most frequently used was reference, occurring 37.4% The third is Conjunctions with the percentage of 13.9% The low percentage of substitution was 0.4% followed by the least used cohesive device, which was ellipses 0.05%

Table 4.1

Total of cohesive devices
| Cohesive Device | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| Lexical Cohesion| 2966      | 48.3%      |
| Reference       | 2298      | 37.4%      |
| Conjunctions    | 853       | 13.9%      |
| Substitution    | 24        | 0.4%       |
| Ellipses        | 2         | 0.03%      |
| Total           | 6143      | 100%       |

*Figure 4.1 Cohesive devices*

### 4.1.1 Lexical Cohesion

The most frequently used cohesive device stated in this study’s data parallels to lexical cohesion with the percentage of 48.3%. Table 4.2 indicates that the most subcategory used of the lexical cohesion device was repetition that was occurred 1916 times. The repeated content words were related to the topic of the essay that was given to the students. The most repeated word that was written in the texts 439 times was the word “Social” followed by the word “people”, which was written 347 times. Other words, such as “Networking, Sites, Negative, Media, Impact, Time, and Society”, each was repeated more than a hundred times.

Meronym came second, which occurred 521 times. This shows the words that were part of a whole, for example, “Sites” is part of (> “Social Networking” and “Social media” >
Technology”. Moreover, 203 Synonym words were found in the students’ essays, such as “Many/a lot”, “reason/cause” and “people/individuals”. Also, students’ essays involved 136 Hypernyms like “Chatting apps” as a general term and “Whatsapp” as a hyponym, which is more specific. There were also 105 of antonyms found in the students’ essays. For instance, the word “Positive” and its opposite, “negative”, “good” and “Bad” “bright” and “dark”. The least number of occurrences was 87 of Hyponym words, such as “Messages, Youtube, Snapchat, Twitter and Facebook”.

Table 4.2

Lexical Cohesion

| Subcategory | Examples | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Repetition  | Social (439), People (347), Networking (215), Sites (167), Negative (160), Media (146), Impact (131), Time (131), Society (103), Network (75). | 1914 | 64.5% |
| Meronym     | Sites (167) > Accounts (8) > Social Networking (198), Social media (141) > Technology (7). | 521 | 17.6% |
| Synonym     | Many (112)/ a lot (42), reason (21)/ cause (10), people (347)/ individuals (55), think (36)/ believe (39), United (1)/ gathered (1), fear (1)/ concern (2), impact (131)/ effect (71), harmful (10)/ damaging (1), post (3)/ share (14), False (2)/ wrong (9) | 203 | 6.8% |
| Hypernym    | Network (75), Parents(11), Network | 136 | 4.6% |
sites(17), Chatting apps (1),
generations(6), Web (1), Education(8),
Religion(1) Applications(13), Device(2),
Country(1).

Antonym

Positive (37)/ negative (160), good (58)/
Bad (68), bright (3)/dark (3), more (42)/
less (2), agree (21)/reject (1), give(8)/
take(18)/ young(4)/old(3), harmful(10),
harmless(3)/ advantages(5)/
disadvantage(5), strong(1)/weak(1)

Hyponym

Messages(1), Youtube (6) Snapchat (22),
Twitter (15), Facebook(22), Whatsapp(3),
Edmodo (1) Phones(17).

TOTAL  2966  100%

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Figure 4. 2 Lexical Cohesion

### 4.1.2 Reference

The second frequently used cohesive device, by the students, was reference with the percentage of 37.4% Personal references, demonstratives, and comparatives were all used in
the students’ essays. However, the most subcategory used was the personal pronoun reference (41.5%). As shown in Table 4.3 and figure 4.3, the personal pronoun “it” occurred 324 times in the students’ texts. Other examples of personal pronouns were “He”, “She”, “They” and “I”. The second frequently used reference was the definite demonstrative reference (41.2%). The definite article “The” was written 499 times. As for, the comparative reference, it occurred with the percentage of 5.3%. The least number of occurrence was the word “Else” that was used only twice throughout students’ essays.

Table 4.3

| Reference       | Subcategory       | Tie Type | Examples | Frequency | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------|-------------------|----------|----------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Personal reference | Pronouns          | It       | 324      | 953       | 41.5%       |
|                  |                   | They     | 171      |           |       |            |
|                  |                   | You      | 122      |           |       |            |
|                  |                   | We       | 86       |           |       |            |
|                  |                   | I        | 78       |           |       |            |
|                  |                   | Them     | 73       |           |       |            |
|                  |                   | One      | 34       |           |       |            |
|                  |                   | Us       | 28       |           |       |            |
|                  |                   | He       | 13       |           |       |            |
|                  |                   | Her      | 11       |           |       |            |
|                  |                   | Him      | 7        |           |       |            |
|                  |                   | Me       | 5        |           |       |            |
|                  |                   | She      | 1        |           |       |            |
| Possessives      | Their             | 124      | 275      | 11.97%    |
| Reference         | Our  | His  | My   | Its  | Mine | Theirs | TOTAL |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|-------|
| Demonstrative     | 79   | 30   | 27   | 13   | 1    | 1      | 2298  |
| Definite          | 499  | 948  | 41.2%| 190  | 83   | 75     | 2298  |
| Reference         |      |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| These             | 83   |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| There             | 75   |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| This              | 64   |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| Here (now)        | 19   |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| Those             | 9    |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| Then              | 9    |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| Comparative       |      |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| reference         |      |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| Other             | 51   | 122  | 5.3% | 42   | 16   | 6      | 2298  |
| More              |      |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| Different         | 16   |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| Same              | 6    |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| Better            | 3    |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| Less              | 2    |      |      |      |      |        |       |
| Else              | 2    |      |      |      |      |        |       |
4.1.3 Conjunctions

As Table 4.4 has listed Halliday & Matthiessen’s (2014) the three main kinds of conjunctions; extension, enhancement and elaboration. It clarifies that the most frequently used conjunction found in students’ essays was extension with the percentage of 71.2%. The positive additive conjunction that was from the extention subcategory, “and” was written down 454 times. The other positive additive conjunctions were two-thirds of “Also” and “Furthermore”, which was used only twice throughout the students’ essays. As for the Adversative conjunctions, “But” was seen 65 times and “However” occurred a dozen times.

The second frequently used conjunction was temporal, which was a subcategory of extention with the percentage of 9.3% From sequential and the concluding conjunctions, the highest number of occurrences was the word “Conclusion” that was written 19 times. The lowest was the simple sequential conjunction “Then” that was used 9 times. Also, one example of the simple causal conjunction, the word “because” that was used 59 times with the percentage of 6.9%

The third most used was the enhancement conjunction with the percentage of 8.8% The only example found for the positive manner enhancement conjunction was “There” that was used 75 times.
The percentage of the elaboration conjunction was 3.75% The exemplifying appositive elaboration shown by the words “for example” that occurred 22 times, and “for instance” that was used only once throughout the students’ essays. One expository appositive elaboration was “That is” that occurred 4 times. As, for the word “Actually”, the verification clarification elaboration conjunction was used 5 times.

Table 4. 4

Conjunctions

| Subcategory     | Tie type   | Sub-tie type | Examples     | Frequency | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Extension       | Additive   | Positive     | And          | 454       | 608   | 71.2%      |
|                 |            |              | Also         | 75        |        |            |
|                 |            |              | Furthermore  | 2         |        |            |
| Adversative     |            |              | But          | 65        |        |            |
|                 |            |              | However      | 12        |        |            |
| Causal          | Simple     |              | Because      | 59        | 59    | 6.9%       |
| Temporal:       | Sequential | Second       | 15           | 79        | 9.3%  |            |
| Simple          |            | First        | 14           |           |       |            |
|                 |            | Then         | 9            |           |       |            |
| Conclusive      | Conclusion |              | 19           |           |       |            |
|                 | Finally    |              | 12           |           |       |            |
|                 | In the end |              | 10           |           |       |            |
| Enhancement     | Matter     | Positive     | There        | 75        | 75    | 8.8%       |
| Elaboration     | Appositive | Exemplifying | For example  | 22        | 32    | 3.75%      |
|                 |            |              | For instance | 1         |       |            |
Expository | That is | 4  
---|---|---  
Clarification | Verification | Actually | 5  
---|---|---|---  
**TOTAL** | | 853 | 100%  

![Pie chart showing distribution of conjunctions]

*Figure 4.4 Conjunctions*

### 4.1.4 Substitution

The second least cohesive tie used in the data was a substitution that occurred 24 times (see Table 4.5). There was very little difference between substitution and ellipses. According to Halliday and Hassan (1976) “Ellipses is substitution by zero” (p. 142). The Nominal substitution was the only kind of substitution found in the data. The Nominal substitution “One” substituted the head noun in the sentence. An example that was taken from the data was the substitution “One” in the following sentence “The bright side is equal to the dark one”. The word one here substitutes the noun “side”.

| Subcategory | Examples | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nominal | One | 24 | 100% |
| **TOTAL** | | 24 | 100% |
4.1.5 Ellipses

The cohesive Ellipses occurred only twice throughout the data, which was the least frequently used. Numerative Nominal ellipsis was the only types of ellipses that was found. For example the word “more” in “It affects people positively and also negatively. I see that its negative side is much more”. “More” is an ellipsis of the form “more ones”.

Table 4.6

| Subcategory | Tie Type  | Examples | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Nominal     | Numerative| More     | 2         | 100%       |

TOTAL 2 100%

Table 4.7 clarifies the main findings of the most frequently used cohesive device in the data to the least. The most prominent used cohesive device was lexical cohesion, specifically repetition then reference, conjunction, substitution and lastly ellipsis.

Table 4.7

| Summary | Cohesive devices | Sub-category | Frequency | Total | Percentage |
|---------|------------------|--------------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Lexical | Repetition       | 1914         | 2966      | 48.3% |
| Cohesion| Meronym          | 521          |           |       |            |
|         | Synonym          | 203          |           |       |            |
|         | Hypernym         | 136          |           |       |            |
|         | Antonym          | 105          |           |       |            |
|         | Hyponym          | 87           |           |       |            |
| Reference| Personal (Pronouns- Possessives) | 1228 | 2298 | 37.4% |
### 4.2 Answering question 3

**RQ3** What is the relationship between Saudi female EFL undergraduate students’ use of cohesive devices and the quality of their writing at Imam University?

In answering the third question of this paper, the students’ essays were analyzed according to length and score. After that, five of the students’ essays were chosen to find the correlation between word count as well as their scores and the usage of cohesive devices.

Table 4.8 shows how the students’ essays varied according to length. The longest essay covered 290 words and the shortest had only 47 words. This means that when students wrote their essays in a forty-minute time limit, their performances diverse completely towards the topic of the essay. The students’ essays that contained the most number of words were nearly five times longer than those containing the least words. After using IELTS writing scale for evaluating students’ essays, the highest score the students achieved from writing the argumentative essay was 5, whereas the lowest band was 1. However, the average was 3.

Table 4.8

| Summary of students’ texts |
|---------------------------|

|        |        |        |        |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Demonstratives (Definite) | 948    |        |        |
| Comparatives                | 122    |        |        |
| Conjunction Extension (Additive-Adversative-Causal- Temporal) | 746 | 853 | 13.9% |
| Enhancement (matter)        | 75     |        |        |
| Elaboration (Appositive- Clarification) | 32 |    |        |
| Substitution Nominal        | 24     | 24     | 0.4%   |
| Ellipses Nominal (Numerative) | 2      | 2      | 0.03%  |
The five essays in table 4.9 included the longest and the shortest in terms of word count. As for the scores, five different bands were chosen for this analysis; from the lowest score 1 to the highest score 5.

Table 4.9

| Student Number | Score | Word count | Cohesive devices |
|----------------|-------|------------|------------------|
| 1              | 5     | 163        | 34               |
| 2              | 4     | 290        | 54               |
| 3              | 3     | 117        | 28               |
| 4              | 2     | 72         | 19               |
| 5              | 1     | 47         | 11               |

Table 4.10

Pearson correlation coefficient

|                 | Scores | Ties  | Length |
|-----------------|--------|-------|--------|
| Scores          | 1      | .781  | .742   |
| Ties            | .781   | 1     | .993** |
| Length          | .742   | .993**| 1      |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson’s correlation coefficients were done in order to measure the relationship between students’ scores, word counts and their usage of cohesive ties. Findings show that there was a strong positive relationship between the students’ scores and word counts ($r =$
It was also revealed a strong positive relationship between the use of cohesive ties and the scores ($r = .781, p < .01$), and between cohesive ties and the length of the students’ essays ($r = .993, p < .01$).

### 4.2.1.1 Relationship between the scores and the usage of the cohesive devices

Figure 4.5 shows that there was a strong uphill positive linear relationship between the students’ scores and their usage of cohesive devices. The frequency of the use of Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) cohesive devices were significantly correlated with the students’ writing performance. The student who scored 4 had the highest frequency usage of cohesive devices among the rest, which was 54. The score of 5 was the second highest in the usage of cohesive devices, 34. The students who scored the lowest had the least number of cohesive devices.

![Figure 4.5. Correlation Between Writing Scores and Cohesive Devices](image-url)
4.2.1.2 Relationship between Word count and cohesive devices

Figure 4.6 shows the correlation between the two variables, which were word count and cohesive devices. The findings revealed that there was a strong positive linear relationship between the length of the students’ texts and their usage of the cohesive ties.

![Figure 4.6 Correlation Between Word Count and Cohesive Devices](image)

4.3 Summary

The results of the frequency of cohesive devices as well as their relationship with the student’s writing performance were described in this chapter. The upcoming chapter, chapter five, would list conclusions and recommendations for this study.
Chapter five

Discussion and implications

This chapter concludes this paper by discussing the study’s findings, limitations as well as recommendations for further research.

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 The students’ usage of cohesive devices

The findings of this study will be discussed in relation to the research questions that were previously specified. The most frequently used cohesive device written by EFL Saudi students was lexical cohesion, especially repetition. Also, Kafes (2012) stressed the point that most Turkish students, in English writing, used repetition. In a productive skill, students tend to repeat words in their writing because they have a limited number of lexicon. EFL Saudi undergraduate students learning English do not have a vocabulary repertoire to help them paraphrase their ideas using other terms. Another reason is because repetition is an easy process for students to engage in their writing (Chanyoo, 2018). Student writers who were not considered advanced or skilled in writing try their best to show the reader that they could manage the topic of the essay by using this strategy. As they tend to progress in their writing, repeating words would help them to stay around the main idea of the topic.

The students need linguistic devices to be alongside them when they produce their own essays because they find it hard to regain their own while writing. Thus, a teacher who is teaching a writing course should assist the students to acquire several cohesive tools to let their written ideas flow easily. Palmer (1999), whose findings also indicated that his non-native English students used more repetition to create cohesion, recommended that teachers should provide students with a variety of texts to read. This would assist the students to learn
more examples of many different cohesive devices to use in writing instead of making their essays sound boring.

Other than repeating words, the students used words with similar meanings in order to connect their ideas together. For instance, a student wrote “individuals” for “people”. However, there is a particular continuum or a scale that is related to synonymy. In terms of meaning, there are words, which are similar or close relative to the main term and words that are more divergent. For example, the word “fear” would hardly be a synonym for the word “harmful”. The students need to learn that the closer they get to the keyword, the more coherent their piece would be. The teachers need to help the students find the closest meaning to what they intend to say. In addition, teachers should provide the students with many texts to read to help them understand that they can still handle the central topic of their essays while writing by using many different cohesive devices other than synonyms. The students’ repetition of certain words and their usage of synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, hypernyms, and meronyms have enriched their essays with lexical cohesion and added more focus to their essays.

As findings indicate, the students used a variety of references in order to help them in referring back and forth to particular aspects in their essays. References mostly refer back to what was written at a clausal or sentence level (Johnson, 1992). Instead of repeating words, the Saudi students could make connections between what they previously mentioned and the current information by a term that clarified their ideas. Moreover, the massive number of personal pronouns used shows that the student writers are unique because usually, writers do not use the word “I” or “we” to refer to themselves. The students used the anaphoric relation type only because they tend to refer to aspects that were already mentioned in their essays. Also, it was considered simpler than the cataphoric relation type where it refers to what comes later in their essays. They did not use this type because it was too advanced for them.
However, when the students add references to their texts, such as anaphoric relations and definite references, they were supporting what they wrote by offering precise information. The students made it clear that the information they mentioned was a definite one because of the massive occurrences of the definite article “The”. Coskun (2011) states that Uzbek and Turkish students, who used a very small amount of references, received low writing scores.

The third most prominent used cohesive device by the Saudi students was the conjunction device. The conjunction “and” and its huge number of occurrences in the data demonstrate its popularity in creating cohesion. The overuse of the conjunction “and” supports Chanyoo’s (2013) study in stating that FL students would rather use conjunctions because they contain literal meaning. Students do not have to further explore the conjunctions’ meaning. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) state that “and” was considered as an extending tie that is positive as well as additive. The conjunction “and” tends to lengthen what was written by giving more information. It is positive since it serves as a backup detail that never contradicts what the writer previously mentioned. The huge number of times it occurred might be because of what McLaughlin (2006) stated that the conjunction “and” is the first to acquire when denoting addition. This signals that the students had a low level of proficiency in using conjunctions. Moreover, it was clear that the students were trying to add more information about what they know about the topic. They included logical as well as creative ideas and clarified them with examples of their own daily life. When the students use the conjunction “and” in essay writing, it shows that the students understand how to add to what is written. Also, students use more conjunctions to link words or clauses together and not worry about their usage of conjunctions if it is on a word level or a clausal level. Conjunctions could be both grammatical and lexical cohesion.

The ellipses and the substitution were among the least used cohesive ties in EFL Saudi student’s writing. According to Halliday and Hassan (1976), the Substitution device
does not tend to provide more meaning, it only refers back to what was already written. It is not like reference though because a reference is seen as meaning whereas substitution is grammatical wording. When the students used the Nominal substitution, it shows that they were supporting their own ideas by using something else instead of writing the same words they already used. As for ellipses, language users tend to use these forms instead of the original form in informal settings (Halliday and Hassan, 1976). Surprisingly though, the ellipses tie was hardly used by the students in this study. The reason behind this is not because they wanted to be more informative, but actually, they do not know how to use the simple styles of language usage. Instead of using a word and assuming that the reader would understand without saying, they tend to write what they refer to again. Apparently, Saudi students do not know how to omit or substitute terms to make it easier for the reader to link their ideas. They believe that in order to write in proper English, they need not delete words but express them clearly. Although, Coskun (2011) investigated how 5th graders used cohesive devices in writing in Uzbekistan and Turkey. The most frequently used cohesive device was ellipsis and the least used devices were references. There might be a reason behind this oddness. Saudi students focus on nouns in their writing. So, they tend to use repetition to form connections in their texts to make it coherent. As for Uzbek and Turkish students, they never make connections through inter-clausal semantic signals of repetition. Instead, they make associations by using inter-clausal syntactic signs, like ellipses. The difference lied on the difference in their mother tongue.

The students were familiar with different kinds of cohesive devices because they tied to use some of them in writing their essays. Yet, it was not enough to only know that the students used lexical cohesion, reference and conjunctions approximately 800 to 3000 times. For instance, some of the students wrote the definite article “the” so many times, while others
rarely used it. This led to the importance of exploring the relationship between the frequency of cohesive devices and the students’ writing quality.

5.1.2 The students’ writing quality

Saudi students’ writing quality, in this study, was evaluated using the IELTS writing scale in which writing experts highly valued. Findings show that the students with the high scores used more cohesive devices in their essays. Basically, a writer could accomplish a high-essay-writing score when a large number of cohesive devices were employed. The findings of the present study were similar to Chanyoo’s (2018) study on Thai undergraduate students’ essay writing. It was discovered that there was a positive correlation between the Thai students’ scores and the number of cohesive devices used. However, a student cannot learn to count how many times they used cohesive devices to achieve a better grade but they need to learn how to apply appropriate cohesion in lexical and at a clause level. On the contrary, the researchers Liu, M. and Braine, G. (2005) stated that the correlations between their student’ writing scores and the overall number of cohesive devices were covaried (r = 0.315).

Additionally, the findings indicate that there was a strong positive relationship between length and cohesive devices. When students tend to use more words in their writing, the number of cohesive devices increases. Similarly, Chanyoo (2018) discovered that the word counts in Thai undergraduate students’ essays were positively correlated with the total usage of cohesive devices (r = .867). Particularly, there was a positive relationship between word count and repetitions (r = .799) as well as word count and references (r = .771). There might be a reason behind this correlation. The longer an essay is, the more lexical items it contains (Liu, M. and Braine, G., 2005).
5.2 Limitations

This study faced some difficulties in generalizing its results on all Saudi female undergraduates for several reasons. The first reason is that the students knew that their essays were not graded and therefore they hardly pay any effort to write at a proper level. This could be one of the limitations of this study. The second limitation is the little number of similar studies. This could affect how the qualities of cohesion in the essays were being judged. When there are more studies that cover a similar issue, it would produce reliable results. Furthermore, the previous studies mentioned in this paper did not exactly relate to what Halliday and Hasan (1976) proposed because they were focused on vocabulary development that could widely differ reliant on numerous reasons. However, this study mainly focused on the textual meta-function of the students’ essays. This might also be considered as a limitation because there are other thematic relations of cohesive devices that needed to be studied. Other SFL tools, such as register, mood, and modality needs to be further explored to discover the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of the texts.

5.3 Implications

This study recommends enrolling EFL Saudi students in a writing course where a teacher focuses on how to make connections between sentences to produce the unity of a written text. Saudi students need to experience the whole process of writing; drafting, revising and proofreading in the classroom as professional writers. In writing courses, FL teachers should improve the students’ writing competence by letting the students practice more in writing. FL teachers need to provide many examples to help the students learn the suitable uses of cohesive devices.

While conducting this study, the research came up with some recommendations for further research. First, this study investigated the students’ writings at Imam University; it
would be compelling to conduct the same study at other universities in Saudi Arabia. Second, this study was conducted on a small-size sample (100 students). It would be useful to examine a larger-size sample to generalize findings.

5.4 Conclusion

This paper aimed to explore the usage of the cohesive devices in essay writing among undergraduate students in Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. 100 texts were analyzed by using systemic functional linguistics (SFL), particularly in terms of linguistic features that have to do with cohesion. All of Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) five types of cohesive devices; lexical cohesion, reference, conjunction, substitutions, and ellipses were found in the students’ essays. These devices tend to tie aspects of texts together in order to make them sound coherent. The most frequently used cohesive tie was lexical cohesion with its highly occurred subcategory repetition. EFL Saudi undergraduate students tend to repeat because they lack English vocabulary repertoire. However, the least used cohesive tie was an ellipsis. Saudi students do not omit words from their texts because they lack the simple usage of the English language. In addition, five of the essays were chosen to find the correlation between the length and the scores of the students’ essays and cohesive devices. There was a strong positive relationship between the usage of cohesive devices and the students’ writing quality. Findings indicate that the students received a high score in writing, had more cohesive devices in their essays. There was also a correlation between the length of the students’ texts and the use of cohesive ties. The more word counts their essays contained, the more cohesive devices were used.
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Appendixes

Appendix A

Consent form for students

Imam Muhammed bin Saud Islamic University
College of Languages & Translation
English Department

A Consent form for your participation in a Writing Research

I am a graduate student working on my master’s thesis at Al Imam Muhammed Ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The topic of my study is “Descriptive Analysis of Cohesive Patterns in Saudi EFL College Students’ Writing at Imam University”. My intention is to conduct research on female undergraduate students’ writings in order to investigate their frequent use of cohesive devices. This is a request for your participation in my study.

If you agree to participate, I will give you a topic to write about in 40 minutes. There is no risk if you choose to hand me your written essays because the research analysis results will be anonymous and confidential. Your identity (name or student ID number) will be removed. You can withdraw any moment without negative consequences.

For participation, sign your name below:

By signing I am saying that I am willing to participate in this study. The process of this procedure was explained clearly and I understand what is required from me.

Signature:...........................................
Appendix B

Writing task

Imam Muhammed bin Saud Islamic University
College of Languages & Translation
English Department

You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.

Write about the following topic:

Many people believe that social networking sites (such as Facebook) have had a huge negative impact on both individuals and society.

To what extent do you agree?

Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge or experience.

Write at least 250 words.
### Appendix C

**IELTS Writing Scale**

**IELTS TASK 2 Writing band descriptors (public version)**

| Band | Task Achievement | Coherence and Cohesion | Lexical Resource | Grammatical Range and Accuracy |
|------|------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 9    | • fully addresses all parts of the task  
      • presents a fully developed position in answer to the question with relevant, fully extended and well supported ideas | • uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention  
• skilfully manages paragraphing | • uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical ‘features’; rare minor errors occur only as ‘slips’ | • uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy; rare minor errors occur only as ‘slips’ |
| 8    | • sufficiently addresses all parts of the task  
      • presents a well-developed response to the question with relevant, extended and supported ideas | • sequentises information and ideas  
• logically  
• manages all aspects of cohesion well  
• uses paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately | • uses a wide range of vocabulary  
• fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings  
• skilfully uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation  
• produces rare errors in spelling and/or word formation | • uses a wide range of structures  
• the majority of sentences are error-free  
• makes only very occasional errors or inappropriacies |
| 7    | • addresses all parts of the task  
      • presents a clear position throughout the response  
      • presents, extends and supports main ideas, but there may be a tendency to overgeneralise and/or supporting ideas may lack focus | • logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout  
• uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use  
• presents a clear central topic within each paragraph | • uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision  
• uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation  
• may produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation | • uses a variety of complex structures  
• produces frequent error-free sentences  
• has good control of grammar and punctuation but may make a few errors |
| 6    | • addresses all parts of the task although some parts may be more fully covered than others  
      • presents a relevant position although the conclusions may become unclear or repetitive  
      • presents relevant main ideas but some may be inadequately developed/unclear | • arranges information and ideas coherently and there is a clear overall progression  
• uses cohesive devices effectively, but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical  
• may not always use referencing clearly or appropriately  
• uses paragraphing, but not always logically | • uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task  
• attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy  
• makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication | • uses a mix of simple and complex sentence forms  
• makes some errors in grammar and punctuation but they rarely reduce communication |
| Score | Marking Criteria |
|-------|-----------------|
| 5     | • addresses the task only partially; the format may be inappropriate in places  
         • expresses a position but the development is not always clear and there may be no conclusions drawn  
         • presents some main ideas but these are limited and not sufficiently developed; there may be irrelevant detail  
         • presents information with some organisation but there may be a lack of overall progression  
         • makes inadequate, inaccurate or overuse of cohesive devices  
         • may be repetitive because of lack of referencing and substitution  
         • may not write in paragraphs, or paragraphing may be inadequate  
         • uses a limited range of vocabulary, but this is minimally adequate for the task  
         • may make noticeable errors in spelling and/or word formation that may cause some difficulty for the reader  
         • uses only a limited range of structures  
         • attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences  
         • may make frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty; errors can cause some difficulty for the reader |
| 4     | • responds to the task only in a minimal way or the answer is tangential; the format may be inappropriate  
         • presents a position but this is unclear  
         • presents some main ideas but these are difficult to identify and may be repetitive, irrelevant or not well supported  
         • presents information and ideas but these are not arranged coherently and there is no clear progression in the response  
         • uses some basic cohesive devices but these may be inaccurate or repetitive  
         • may not write in paragraphs or their use may be confusing  
         • uses only basic vocabulary which may be used repetitively or which may be inappropriate for the task  
         • has limited control of word formation and/or spelling; errors may cause strain for the reader  
         • uses only a very limited range of structures with only rare use of subordinate clauses  
         • some structures are accurate but errors predominate, and punctuation is often faulty |
| 3     | • does not adequately address any part of the task  
         • does not express a clear position  
         • presents few ideas, which are largely undeveloped or irrelevant  
         • does not organise ideas logically  
         • may use a very limited range of cohesive devices, and those used may not indicate a logical relationship between ideas  
         • uses only a very limited range of words and expressions with very limited control of word formation and/or spelling  
         • errors may severely distort the meaning  
         • attempts sentence forms but errors in grammar and punctuation predominate and distort the meaning |
| 2     | • barely responds to the task  
         • does not express a position  
         • may attempt to present one or two ideas but there is no development  
         • has very little control of organisational features  
         • uses an extremely limited range of vocabulary; essentially no control of word formation and/or spelling  
         • cannot use sentence forms except in memorised phrases |
| 1     | • answer is completely unrelated to the task  
         • fails to communicate any message  
         • can only use a few isolated words  
         • cannot use sentence forms at all |
| 0     | • does not attempt  
         • does not attempt the task in any way  
         • writes a totally memorised response |