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Investigating Students' Problems with Lexical Cohesion in English Essay Writing: A Case Study of Secondary School Students in Shangla

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Abstract

This research explores how students from Shangla Secondary School struggle with aspects of lexical cohesion while creating essays in English. The study aimed to investigate the problems in lexical cohesion through a survey descriptive design by implying a mixed-method approach for data analysis. The data was collected from a sample of 150 secondary-level students through essay writing and interviews. The statistical analysis of the data shows that students' knowledge of cohesive devices like repetitions, synonyms, antonyms, collocations, and general nouns varies which points to the existence of a deficiency that affects the coherence level of their writing. The findings of the study suggest the idea of molding our ways of teaching in favor of the inclusion of cohesive devices in order to improve the writing skills of students. This study provides valuable information regarding the problem of lexical cohesiveness in the writing of English essays for future studies.

Keywords: English Essay Writing, Student Problems, Lexical Cohesion, Cohesive Devices, Shangla

Authors:

Jalil Ur Rab: (Corresponding Author)

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English Hazara University, Mansehra, KP, Pakistan.

(Email: Captainjalil3414@gmail.com)

Muhammad Aslam khan: M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English, Hazara University, Mansehra, KP, Pakistan.

Asad Ullah: Bs. Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages, University of Swat, Swat, KP, Pakistan.

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Cite Us

**Authors:****Jalil Ur Rab:** (Corresponding Author)

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English
Hazara University, Mansehra, KP,
Pakistan.

(Email: Captainjalil3414@gmail.com)

Muhammad Aslam khan: M.Phil. Scholar, Department
of English, Hazara University, Mansehra,
KP, Pakistan.

Asad Ullah: Bs. Scholar, Department of English and
Foreign Languages, University of Swat,
Swat, KP, Pakistan.

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Title

**Investigating Students' Problems with Lexical Cohesion in
English Essay Writing: A Case Study of Secondary School
Students in Shangla**

Abstract

This research explores how students from Shangla Secondary School struggle with aspects of lexical cohesion while creating essays in English. The study aimed to investigate the problems in lexical cohesion through a survey descriptive design by implying a mixed-method approach for data analysis. The data was collected from a sample of 150 secondary-level students through essay writing and interviews. The statistical analysis of the data shows that students' knowledge of cohesive devices like repetitions, synonyms, antonyms, collocations, and general nouns varies which points to the existence of a deficiency that affects the coherence level of their writing. The findings of the study suggest the idea of molding our ways of teaching in favor of the inclusion of cohesive devices in order to improve the writing skills of students. This study provides valuable information regarding the problem of lexical cohesiveness in the writing of English essays for future studies.

Keywords: [English Essay Writing](#), [Student Problems](#), [Lexical Cohesion](#), [Cohesive Devices](#), [Shangla](#)

Introduction

It has been argued by a globalized society that the ability to write cohesively and effectively in English is crucial for academic success. Lexical cohesion, which refers to the meaningful relationships between words and phrases in a text, plays a vital role in enhancing essay writing skills. There are strong connections established between the students' performances in English language examinations and the

ability of the students to write cohesive essays (Alarcon, [2013](#)). Hence, this study seeks to deal with the problems students experience when trying to achieve lexical cohesion in their writing. An essay has three main sections: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion whereby every section has a particular role to play when advancing an idea. To maintain lucidity and order in an entire passage, there is a need for grammatical and lexical cohesion (Bahaziq, [2016](#)).

By utilizing cohesion devices such as synonyms, antonyms, collocations, and repetitions, writers can improve the organization and integration of their written pieces (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2005). This study demonstrates the importance of providing effective English language teaching to enhance the writing skills of the students. In addition, the study describes lexical cohesion problems that learners of English as a second language encounter in Shangla.

Purpose of the Study

This research study intends to address the issues for secondary-level students in Shangla who face challenges with lexical cohesion when writing English essays. The goal of the study is to categorize the cohesive devices that are employed in English essay writing and explore the problems that students encounter while utilizing cohesive devices. The study tries to investigate practical approaches for boosting cohesive device utilization in English essay writing. The topic is essential because it may help in the formulation of realistic solutions that will boost Shangla secondary school pupils' utilization of coherent devices when writing English essays.

Literature Review

Lexical cohesion, defined as the cohesive relationship between words and phrases in a text, is essential for effective academic writing, especially in essay composition. Research indicates that teaching cohesive devices can significantly enhance the cohesiveness of students' English writing (Zhang, 2007). Brashi (2009) emphasizes that collocational competence represents a high level of linguistic proficiency, while lexical collocation is identified as the best predictor of overall writing ability (Witte & Faigley, 1981). Studies have established a clear link between the use of cohesive devices and writing quality. For instance, Liu and Braine (2005) found that lexical devices comprised the largest proportion of cohesive devices used in EFL students' argumentative essays, followed by references and conjunctions. This supports Palmer's (1999) observation that Spanish English writers often rely on lexical reiteration in their academic writing. Crossley and MacNamara (2010) further corroborate the importance of cohesive devices, noting that their frequency can predict text organization and overall essay quality. However, Crossley and MacNamara (2010) also found that coordinating conjunctions and sentence overlap pronouns were poor indicators of essay quality.

Despite the significance of cohesive devices, many students struggle with their effective application. Some students tend to start essays with general remarks before introducing the topic sentence (Ahmed, 2010) and often prefer grammatical devices over lexical ones, as noted by Coskun (2011). Ampa and Basri (2019) highlighted that while students utilize various cohesive devices in their essays, lexical cohesive devices are used more frequently than grammatical ones. Writing instruction remains one of the more challenging aspects of teaching English as a second language, requiring a solid understanding of grammar, syntax, and punctuation (Panda, 2020). Alsariera and Yunus (2021) explored lexical cohesion in Jordanian EFL students' writing based on Hoey's theory. Their findings indicated that students struggled with identifying repetition linkages and cohesive relationships within their texts.

Iraqi English as a foreign language learners used synonymy as a cohesive device in their essays (Hameed, 2022). The study found out that synonyms were commonly used to enhance essay flow and prevent dull repetition, many students faced challenges differentiating between synonyms and near-synonyms due to limited vocabulary.

Almzaini (2019) examined the difficulties students met in using coherent and cohesive devices in their essays at BENGHAZI University. The study found that students had trouble establishing their arguments logically and using cohesive devices effectively. Furthermore, teachers were mostly unable to offer suitable support for developing students' writing skills. Hameed (2010) conducted a study concerning Egyptian student instructors of English, identifying cohesive issues such as difficulties with thesis statements and transitions between ideas. These challenges were allied to limited background knowledge and uneven writing practices among Arab university students. The research specified that many Arab students frequently began essays with supporting details instead of directly addressing the topic. Additionally, the extreme use of coordination sentences contributed to substandard writing quality. The importance of lexical cohesion in essay writing cannot be exaggerated; it significantly enhances the overall quality of an essay by mixing concepts and refining readability. Students struggle with coherence and cohesion while writing (Anindita, 2024). They can have varying degrees of influence but the use of cohesive devices for English writing is the dominant and significant one (Sidabutar & Tampubolon, 2024). That is why the mastery of cohesive devices is very

important in an academic context (Akif et al., 2024) because cohesive devices have important roles in creating logical connections among ideas in different sentences (Halimah et al., 2024). Cohesion in academic writing can exist in many forms by utilizing different cohesive devices (Luat and Diep, 2024). That is why the use of cohesive devices makes writing meaningful by utilizing lexical and grammatical cohesion (Siregar et al., 2023). Commonly, lexical cohesion is used less than grammatical cohesion (Tuan et al., 2023; Mustafa, 2024). Writers can achieve greater cohesion by using approaches such as repetition, synonymy, antonymy, and other cohesive devices. The cohesive devices were mostly used in conjunction, repetition, and reference (Ngongo & Nandara, 2024). However, modern research also highlights challenges in teaching cohesion effectively to ESL learners. Ghasemi (2013) discovered the use of cohesive devices among Arab students, noticing a leaning to overuse lexical repetition while underutilizing other grammatical and lexical cohesive devices. Alghamdi (2014) studied discourse markers in ESL writings, finding no important differences between native and non-native speakers in their usage forms but highlighting an overreliance on certain markers among non-native writers. Rassouli and Abbasvandi (2013) studied the impact of obvious teaching on grammatical cohesive devices for Iranian learners, revealing that while teaching increased device usage, it did not necessarily improve overall writing quality. Lexical cohesion is vital for effective essay writing but poses significant challenges for many ESL learners. Addressing these challenges requires targeted teaching on cohesive approaches alongside consistent practice and feedback from teachers or peers. By enhancing their understanding of lexical cohesion procedure through overt exercise and practice, students can improve their writing clarity and coherence significantly. Lexical cohesion offers a big challenge for second language learners in English essay writing, typically leading to an absence of simplicity and coherence that obstructs the reader's understanding. This struggle with cohesive approaches causes plentiful negative effects, together with matter opposition, poor arguments, and weakened overall writing quality. The ESL students should be instructed explicitly about cohesive devices. By mastering these techniques, writers will enhance the flow and coherence of their essays making additional sharing and persuasive educational discourse. Ultimately, the event of vigorous lexical cohesion skills is essential for creating clear, coherent, and academic writing in English as a second language.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method technique to explore lexical cohesiveness in English essay writing among secondary school students in Shangla, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The research combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a full picture of students' issues with lexical cohesiveness. This mixed-methods approach, supported by research in the field, provides a sound methodological framework for addressing challenging research topics and integrating multiple views. The mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies increases the depth and breadth of the study's findings, enabling a full assessment of the obstacles experienced by students in applying lexical cohesiveness in their English essays within the Shangla context. Using a survey descriptive design for data collection and analysis, the self-reported practices and attitudes regarding cohesive devices were examined factually examining their real usage in essays. The survey got calculable information regarding students' views of their problems with lexical cohesion, while the essay content investigation collected qualitative data on the actual usage of lexical cohesion in students' writings. The data was collected from a sample of one hundred and fifty students through a non-random convenient sampling technique. The sample comprised secondary school students from both private and public schools in the Shangla district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Participants were supplied with five essay topics and were instructed to produce an essay on their selected topic, enabling a full assessment of coherent devices across multiple thematic contexts. The data obtained through interviews was evaluated using descriptive statistics, while content analysis data underwent thematic analysis to identify patterns related to lexical coherence. The essays were checked for the use of cohesive devices including general nouns, antonyms, repetition, collocation, meronyms, and hyponyms. Descriptive statistics, especially frequencies and percentages, were employed to examine the prevalence of various cohesive devices in the writings. A comparative analysis between government and private school students was done to discover potential disparities in the deployment of cohesive devices.

Results

The essays written by public and private secondary school students were checked for cohesive devices. The following figure shows the data about lexical cohesive devices used by

students in government secondary school students' essay writing.

Table 1

Lexical cohesive devices used by students in government schools

Lexical devices	Percentage of use
Repetitions	68.4%
General Nouns	61.3%
Synonyms	43.5%
Antonyms	39.8%
Collocations	41.4%
Hyponyms and Meronyms	2%

The examination of lexical cohesive techniques employed by secondary school students in government schools in Shangla indicated significant patterns in their essay writing. Repetition emerged as the leading lexical cohesive device, accounting for 68.4% of utilization. The finding fits with prior studies by Ampa & Basri (2019), Andayani et al. (2014), Ekowati et al. (2019), and Hung & Thu (2014), who similarly identified repetition as the most common form of lexical cohesiveness. The general nouns were the second most commonly used cohesive devices by these students. They used 61.3% of general nouns in their essays as cohesive devices. In comparison, collocation was used significantly less frequently, including only 41.4% of the lexical cohesive techniques employed. Hyponyms and meronyms were the least utilized, each accounting for barely 2% of usage. This

tendency is congruent with Khalil's (2019) findings, which also found the limited occurrence of hyponyms. The overwhelming dependence on repetition (68.4%) compared to the collective use of collocation, antonyms, meronyms, hyponyms, and synonyms (less than 50% combined) implies that students have insufficient acquaintance with or ability to use a varied variety of lexical coherent techniques in their work. This imbalance shows a need for more comprehensive teaching in the use of numerous lexical cohesive methods to improve students' writing coherence and quality. The following figure shows the data about lexical cohesive devices used by students in private secondary school students' essay writing. Similarly, the following table shows the data about students from private schools.

Table 2

Lexical cohesive devices used by students in private schools

Lexical devices	Percentage of use
Repetitions	73.21%
General Nouns	57.14%
Synonyms	54.16%
Antonyms	51.11
Collocations	49.12%
Hyponyms and Meronyms	15.14%

The research on cohesive devices utilized by private school students in Shangla reveals significant trends in their English essay writing. Repetition was the most popular approach, utilized by 73.21% of students, followed by General nouns at 57.14%. Synonyms (54.16%), antonyms (51.11), and

hyponyms/meronyms were employed by roughly 15.14% of students, while collocations were used by 49.12%. This distribution shows a heavy dependence on repetition and general nouns, likely for clarity and emphasis. The limited use of more sophisticated techniques like synonyms, antonyms,

and hyponyms demonstrates a foundation in vocabulary diversity, possibly influenced by the private school teaching environment. However, the significant frequency of repetition shows a need for more diversified vocabulary education. These findings provide useful insights into

students' writing patterns and suggest potential areas for improvement in English language teaching in private schools. The following table shows the data of students from both public and private secondary schools.

Table 3

Comparison of lexical cohesive devices used by students in public and private schools

Cohesive Devices	Percentage of use by Students in Public schools	Percentage of use by Students in Public schools
Lexical devices		
Repetitions	68.4%	73.21%
General Nouns	61.3%	57.11%
Synonyms	43.5%	54.16%
Antonyms	39.8%	51.11%
Collocations	41.4%	49.12%
Hyponyms and Meronyms	2%	15.14%

The above table shows that repetition was used more by students in the private sector than in the public sector (73.21% and 68.4%). On the contrary general nouns were used more by students in the public sector than by students in the private sector (61.3% and 57.11%). But synonyms, antonyms, collocations, hyponyms, and meronyms were more used by students from the sector than by students studying in public sector schools. The data as a whole suggest that students from the private sector use more varieties of lexical cohesive devices in their English essay writing than students from public sector schools. Only general nouns were used more by students from public schools.

Discussion

The analysis of the results of the use of lexical cohesive devices by secondary-level students in Shangla reveals a few important observations. The data shows several significant trends in English essay writing. The data of the students from public sector shows that 54.15 occasions per essay, repetition was the most regularly used method, suggesting that students frequently use it to highlight key concepts and improve coherence. However, there are questions regarding the accuracy and diversity of their writing because of this strong dependence. Antonym usage, on the other hand, was moderate, with a median of 13 occurrences, indicating that although some students successfully used this strategy to increase clarity, others would require further instruction. Students' usage of synonyms differed greatly; those who used

them well showed a larger vocabulary and improved lexical coherence, while those who didn't have trouble writing clearly. With an average of 14.40 occurrences, collocations were less frequent, which may have been caused by their unfamiliarity with the idea in their educational setting. The prevalence of general nouns (mean value of 50.65) suggests a desire for simplicity that might result from a lack of exposure to more specific terminology. With an average incorporation rate of only 3.05, the use of meronyms and hyponyms was also markedly low, suggesting that students would need more assistance to make good use of these cohesive elements. All things considered, the results show that focused educational interventions are required to improve students' comprehension and application of different lexical coherent devices, which will ultimately raise the capacity of their English essays.

The analysis of lexical cohesive devices used by private school students in Shangla reveals distinct patterns in their English essay writing: Synonyms were used more frequently in private schools, with an average of 25.24 instances per essay, compared to public schools. This proposes a greater importance on vocabulary diversity in private schools. Antonyms were also used more often, with an average of 23.16 cases, representing a focus on linguistic clarity and variety in private school essay writing. Repetition remained a common approach in private schools, with an average of 50.16 cases per essay, like in public schools. This highlights the universal application of repetition as a cohesive device

across different educational locations. Collocations were used significantly more in private schools, with an average of 25.84 cases, compared to public schools. This proposes a greater prominence on linguistic precision and style in private schools. General nouns were used often in private schools, with an average of 35.64 occurrences, demonstrating a preference for clarity and simplicity like in public schools. Hyponyms and meronyms were employed more efficiently in private schools, with an average of 11.08 cases, signifying a better focus on linguistic accuracy and diversity. These results highlight the variances in language instruction between private and public schools in Shangla, with private schools generally showing a more varied and classy use of lexical cohesive devices. This suggests that private school students may receive more targeted teaching in vocabulary enhancement and stylistic variation in their English essay writing.

Conclusion

This study provides a complete examination of the lexical cohesion problems handled by secondary school students in Shangla, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa when writing English essays. The research studied students from both government and

private schools, see-through significant differences in their knowledge with and use of cohesive devices. Key results designate that students' ability to use cohesive devices varied widely, with repetition and general nouns being the most used. Many students require knowledge of various cohesive devices, contributing to coherence issues in their writing. The study highlights the need for updating courses and curriculums to include obvious education on cohesive devices, enhancing teacher training to improve supervision on lexical cohesion, and lecturing the knowledge gap to improve students' English essay writing abilities. Future research guidelines include investigating teaching approaches, teacher groundwork, and performance differences between government and private schools in Shangla. This research helps as a ground for improving English language instruction in Shangla and beyond, targeting to enhance students' competence in essay writing. The conclusions highlight the continuing nature of improving English language teaching, opening new paths for further examination in this field. By talking about these challenges and fulfilling targeted involvements, educators can help students develop stronger lexical cohesion skills, finally leading to more effective and cohesive English essay writing.

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