Examining The Influence of Using cohesive Devices to Develop Academic Writing to Students at University level

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ABSTRACT

Employing cohesive devices in academic writing to university students is the most significant to connect ideas, enhance and develop their academic writing. It has been observed that there is a lack of using cohesive devices in writing. It is also noticed that using cohesive devices has a positive effect on students' writing. This study aims to examine the influence of using cohesive devices on developingthe academicwriting, and to find out to what extent EFL teachers attempt to help students overcome the problem. The study adopted an analytical descriptive method in analyzing the test was given to (150) university students. The findings revealed that some participants succeeded in the test, theyrepresent approximately 60%, whereas students who failed in the test, they represent about 40%. The students who succeeded in the test, they were capable to use and apply cohesive devices in a various ways efficiently, which confirm the hypotheses of the study. Whereas the failureof other group due totheir incapability touse cohesive devices inwriting efficiently.

Keywords: Cohesion, coherence, text, figurative language

المستخلص

استخدام أدوات الربط في الكتابة الأكاديمية له أهمية قصوى في ربط الأفكار وتحسين وتطوير الكتابة الأكاديمية, ولقد لوحظ أن هنالك بعض المشاكل التي تتعلق باستخدام أدوات الربط في الكتابة الأكاديمية ،كما لوحظ أن استخدام أدوات الربط له اثر ايجابي في كتابات الطلاب تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة اثر استخدام أدوات الربط في تطوير الكتابة الأكاديمية لدى طلاب الجامعات في التخصصات العلمية ، ومعرفة إلى أي مدى يحاول معلمو اللغة الانجليزية مساعدة الطلاب على التغلب على هذه المشكلة. وقد استخدمت الدراسة منهج التحليل الوصفي لتحليل الاختبار الذي أجري لحوالي 150 طالبا جامعيا . كشفت النتائج أن بعض الطلاب قد اجتازوا الاختبار بنجاح حيث بلغت نسبة الناجحين من الطلاب حوالي 60% بينما فشل البعض الآخر في الاختبار،وتقدر نسبتهم بحوالي 40%. الطلاب الذين نجحوا في الاختبار كانوا بارعين في استخدام وتطبيق أدوات الربط بطرق مختلفة وبكفاءة ، مما يؤكد فرضيات الدراسة بينما يعزو فشل الطلاب الآخرين إلى عدم مقدرتهم على استخدام أدوات الربط في الكتابة بدقة .

Introduction

English language is one of the most important skills in English language. But in the traditional approaches to language teaching and learning, writing is considered as secondary skill .Because of this, it received relatively little attention compared to speaking, reading and listening .Silva (1997) states that the dominant teaching method during the 1950 put an undue focus on an oral skills rather than written proficiency. Therefore, writing was not given the same position in language teaching as speaking and listening. On this domain Raimes (1983) points out that during Audio-lingual period, speaking was seen as the central element of language teaching, whereas writing was not given similar position in language teaching – learning compared to speaking. However, Foley and Thampson (2003) emphasize the importance of writing in second language learning by arguing that second language learning is not only the oral languages i.e.

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speaking and listening but it is important to consider how to learn to communicate through writing.

The awareness of importance of writing as a productive skill ,since the present EFL curriculum has given it a great attention in whole levels, basic, secondary and university level. In the context of Sudanese universities, students need to write English and practice English academic writing with correct grammar in cohesive and coherent way, this requires using cohesive devices in the academic writing to communicate effectively in writing, Halliday and Hasan (1976) state that cohesive devices establish cohesive relation within a text and bind ideas together. So the influence of cohesive devices on the academic writing is significant and considerable since they provide text with various kinds of grammatical and lexical devices which make written discourse cohesive and coherent.

2. Objective of the Study

The study tries to achieve the following objectives:

1- To examine to what extent the use of cohesive devices influence the quality of academic writing.

2-To determine the problematic area inhibits students from using cohesive devises in academic writing.

3-To to find out to what extent EFL teachers attempt to help students overcome the problem.

3. Research Questions

Based on the objectives, the following research questions are posed to be answered throughout the study:

1- To what extent does the use of cohesive devices influence the quality of academic writing?

2- To what extent do cohesive devices cause problems for students in academic writing?

3- To what extent EFL teachers can help students overcome the problems of using cohesive devices in academic writing?

4. The writing process

4.1 Definition of process

Based on (Oxford Dictionary) the word process is defined as "a series of thing that are done in order to achieve particular result". (Butler, 2007.p23) defines process as ' a series of steps or actions ' she clarifies that writers take these steps to reach good and get the results they want.

4.2 Definition of writing

Writing as is defined in (Wikipedia) a medium of human communication that represents language and emotion with sign and symbols, in most languages writing is a complement to speech or spoken language .Writing is not language but a tool used to make language read. Writing as a language system relies on many structures as speech, such as vocabulary, grammar and semantics .Writing has been instrumental in keeping history, maintaining culture, dissemination of knowledge through the media and the formation of legal system.

Linderman (2001, p:10) defines writing as a process of communication that uses a conventional graphic system to convey a message to a reader .When people write they use graphic symbols , letters or combination of letters which relate to the sounds people make when they speak. Bussman(1996) also points out that " writing is the means of recording spoken language through a conventionalized system of graphic signs".

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Byrne (1991) writing can be said to be " the act of forming these symbols, making marks on a flat surface of some kind" based on this view , symbols have to be arranged according to certain conventions to form words and words have to be arranged to form sentences . White and Arndt (1991)describe writing as "aform of problem-solving which involves such processes as generating ideas, discovering voice with which to write, planning, goal-setting, monitoring and evaluating what is going to be written as well as what has been written and searching for language with which to express exact meaning". Hedge (2005, p52) as well describes the process of writing as including of three activities or group of activities that take place at different stages of writing. ."The writing process according to Teresa D.O'Donnell & et al (1993) involves a series of tasks, thinking , planning, writing (rewriting) and editing .Writers perform this process in different ways , some begins with thinking and planning before writing, others start with writing. These steps surveyed as follow:

1- Thinking: At thinking stage, many varieties of strategies are used for getting ideas and these ideas can be listed randomly.

2- Planning:On this step can be made outline of idea, or ideas can be put in order, arrange and rearrange ideas for planning.

3-Writing**: A** writing step evaluates how ideas will be presented then reordering ideas before writing down on paper.

4-Revising: in this stage revision has to be mode and determined whether the writing content is logical clear and coherent.

5- Editing: The final stage in writing process is editing and check errors in spelling, pronunciation, sentences' sense, etc.

5. Academic writing

Academic writing is the kind of writing done in classroom and has a particular purpose and a particular audience, because at university level students practice different types of activities such as writing essays,assignments, lectures notes – taking in addition to writing reports for laboratory work in some disciplines .Li (1999) describes academic writing as " the written work done in schools, colleges and universities " . In the same domain another definition is presented by (Oshima and Hogue,2007) as " the kind of writing used in high schools and college classes" , according to them academic writing is different from creative writing and personal writing , which they are informal while academic writing is formal and requires particular vocabulary , using correct grammar and organizing ideas. Myles,(2002) states that academic writing requires conscious effort and much practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas.

In the academic context Dudley –Evans & St John (1998) point out that the students are required to produce specific writing genres such as essay, summary, critical review and research paper; moreover academic writing is used for many purposes such as: essay, reports, translation, conference and academic papers., writing and assessment, consequently, decision makers should consider the impact of assessment methods on students.

The academic writing is characterized by many properties such as planning so as to be organized and analytical, outline to formulate thoughts and formality by avoiding colloquial expressions and choosing vocabulary accurately.

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The writer also can use figurative language to enhance meaning, clarify ideas and expand conception to draw a mental picture to the reader. According to Perrine(1977) "figurative language is broadly defined as any way of saying something than ordinary way." Using figurative can add significance by joining two ideas to stimulate the reader's imagination such as in similes, orcomparing things implicitly as in metaphor. Moreover the writer can use allusion and irony to enrich the meaning

6. Cohesion

The definition of the word cohesion according to Oxford dictionary is "the act or state of keeping together ".The synonym of the word cohesion is "unity". Many scholars consider cohesion is an essential element in writing .Freedenberg and Boardman (2002) emphasize that" there are many ways to give paragraph cohesion by linking words , coordinate conjunction , subordinate presupposition and transition" , this later are considered very common types of linking sentences to another .

Halliday and Hasan (1976) point out that cohesion is one of the linguistic system's major resources for text constriction based on this concept, cohesion represents the presence of explicit cues in the text that allow readers or listeners to find semantic relations within it as a part of linguistic system enhancing the semantic potential of the text .Alarcon and Morales (2011) state that cohesive refers to the linguistic features which help make a sequence of sentences. Halliday and Hasan (1976) also determined written text their communicative status , a set of sentences whether constitute a text or not , depends on the relationships between elements in a text and between sentences where the interpretation of an element depends on the interpretation of the other in the discourse .Connor (1984) also defines cohesion "as the use of explicit cohesive devices that signal relations among sentences and parts of the text".Moreover Hoey(1991) points out that cohesion is an " objective , capable in principle of automatic recognition with the help of explicit linguistic devices" .

Finally cohesion refers to the varied and appropriate use of cohesive devices to assist in making conceptual and referential relationships between and within sentences clear.

7. Coherence

Coherence as it defined in Oxford Dictionary is "the situation in which all the parts of something fit together well. Enkvist (1990) defines the concept of coherence as a hermeneutic phenomenon; the receptor of a text must be able to understand the text to accept it as being coherent. Harmer (2004) coherence refers to all sentences associations together in a logical way by using different relations. (Sherman, 2011) states that the process which sentences and ideas are connected to each other which makes them flow together smoothly achieves text coherence. According to (Sherman, 2011) coherence helps the reader understand ideas in the text meaningfully .In order to achieve coherence in writing.

8. Cohesive devices

Organizing ideas into a unified context requires using cohesive devices to link sentences together cohesively and coherently. Halliday and Hasan (1976:p04) state that cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another.

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Salkie (1995) states that" cohesive devices play the role of the glue that holds different parts of a text together".Based on Halliday and Hasan (1976) there are two types of cohesive devices; grammatical and lexical devices, these will be discussed as follow:

8.1 Grammatical Device

The grammatical devices which were noted by Halliday and Hasan (1976) are reference, substitution , ellipsis and conjunction .Reference concerns the relation between a discourse element and preceding or following element, Halliday and Hasan (1976) it deals with semantic relationship. Reference is classified into two groups: Exospheric reference (situational reference which is not cohesive), this type of reference lies outside the context of situation, so it plays no role in textual cohesion.Endophoric reference (textual reference).Reference is also divided intothree classes: personal, demonstrative and comparative references.Substitution Asit defined by Halliday and Hasan (1976: p86) substitution is the replacement of one item by another .It is a relation between words and phrases rather than a relation between meanings. There are three types of substitution: Nominal, verbal and clausal substitution.Ellipsis: cohesion through ellipsis can be expressed by omitting part of sentences, it is considered as relations within the text .There are three types of ellipsis: nominal, verbal and clausal ellipsis.

Haliday and Hasan (1976, p: 226) certify "conjunction elements are cohesive not in themselves but indirectly, by virtue of their specific meanings, they are not primarily devices for reaching out into the preceding (or following) text, but they express certain meanings which Presuppose the presence of other components in the discourse". Conjunctions differ greatly from other cohesive devices since it adds meanings and creates ties between entire segments of text of various lengths.Halliday and Hasan identify four types of conjunction: additive, adversative, causal and temporal conjunctions.

8.2 Lexical Devices

According to Halliday and Hasan (1996) lexical cohesion is the cohesive achieved by the selection of vocabulary. Theyidentify two types of lexical cohesion devices, reiteration and collocation:ReiterationIt means repetition of a lexical item or the occurrence of synonyms of some kind in the context of reference where the two occurrences have the same reference. Reiteration classified to: repetition, synonym, hyponym, metonym and antonym. Repetition is the act of repeating the same word to denote text cohesion. Synonym is two or more words which have same meaning.Hyponymy means a general word refers back to a lexical item. It is a relation between word which has a part and whole meaning. Antonym is an opposite in meaning. Forexample: They need new clothes because they have old ones.

Another definition to these sub lexical categories was added by Lyons (1968) who defines synonymy, antonym and hyponymy as primitive semantic relation.Collocation it is achieved through the association of lexical items that regularly occur .It also involves pairs of words drawn from the same order series.

9. Methodology

9.1 Participants

A group of (150) undergraduate students at two universities in Khartoum participated in this study, thefirst group, students at University of Science and Technology; they are seventy five students (75) male and   female.

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The second group students study at Ahfad University for Women, they are also seventy five students (75) all of them are female. The age of the whole participants ranged from18 to 23 years old. The main tool of this study is a written diagnostic test (WDT) to students.

9.2 Student's Test

The (WDT) consisted of three sections each one included ten items. Students were asked to answer questions related to cohesive devices, the first questions multiple-choice question, the second question consisted of ten connectors also to identify the function of some cohesive
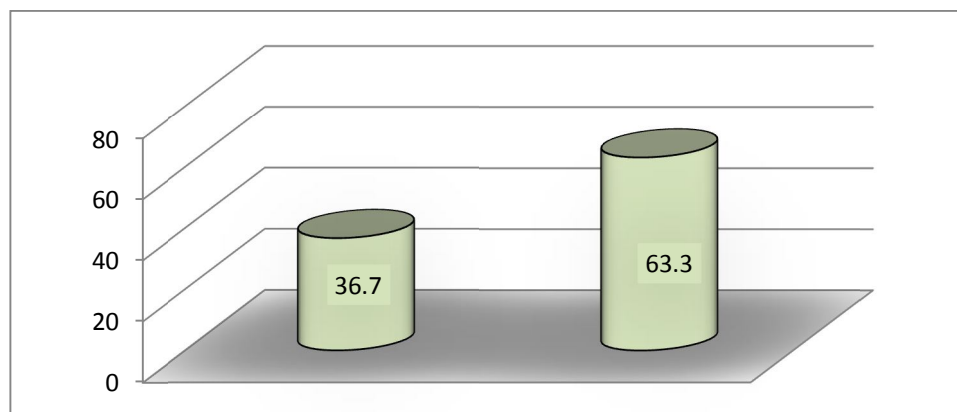
devices, the third one is completion question concerning cohesive devices.

10. Statistical Reliability and validity for student's test

The reliability coefficient was calculated for the measurement, which was used in the test using Alpha - Cronbach coefficient Equation as the following:

For calculating the validity and the reliability of the test from the above equation, the researcher distributed the test to respondents to calculate the reliability coefficient using the Alpha-Cronbach coefficient the results have been showed in the following table:

Table (1)

	Reliability	*Validity*
ALPH – CRONBACH	0.89	0.93

$$\text{Validity} = \sqrt{\text{Reliability}}.$$

From the above table it's shown that the validity of the test is very high (0.93). This indicates that if we repeat the test we are sure with 93% that it's going to give us the same results.

Table (2) the frequency and percentage distribution of the students according to section (1)

Valid	Frequency	Percentage
Success	95	63.3
Failure	55	36.7
Total	150	100

from the above table No.(2) and figure No (1) it's shown that there are as many as (95) students in the study's sample with percentage (63.2 %) have managed to produce the right answer in section number 1 (***Choose the meaning of underlined words or phrases from the given four alternatives***) . There are (55) persons with percentage (have failed)

Nonstandard test items were more difficult for students to answer correctly than the standard test items, provided no enhanced ability to discriminate between higher- and lower-performing students, and resulted in poorer student performance. Item-writing guidelines should be considered during test construction.

Table (3) the frequency and percentage distribution of the students according to section (2)

Valid	Frequency	Percentage
Success	90	60
Failure	60	40
Total	150	100
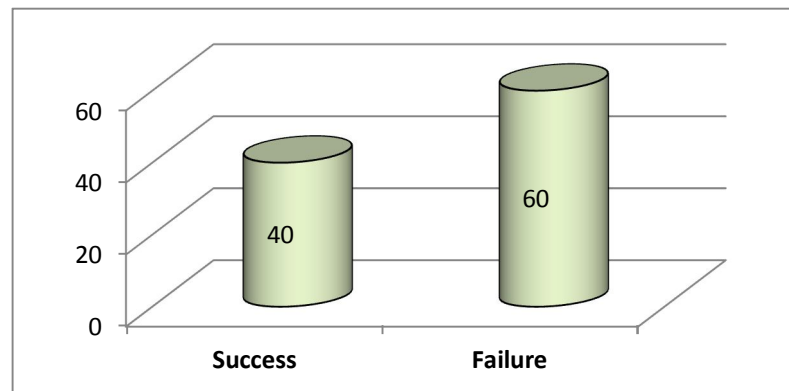
from the above table No.(3) and figure No (2) it is shown that there are (90) students in the study's sample with percentage (60.0%) are success the test in section number 2 (***Choose the right cohesive words below that best complete the sentences in the text:***) There are (60) persons with percentage (40.2 %) are failures.

The students 'performance on this section is noticeably better than any other sections. This is due to the fact that multiple choice questions—also known as fixed choice or selected response items—require students to identify right answers from among a set of possible options that are presented to them. Possible answers are "fixed" in advance rather than left open for the learner to generate or supply.

The advantage of these items is that they can be scored rapidly, providing quick feedback to students and enabling efficient ways to assess large numbers of students over a broad range of content. One drawback is that constructing good multiple-choice items takes time, especially if you are writing questions to test higher order thinking.

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Table (4) the frequency and percentage distribution of the students according tosection (3)

Valid	Frequency	Percentage
Success	96	64
Failure	54	36
Total	150	100
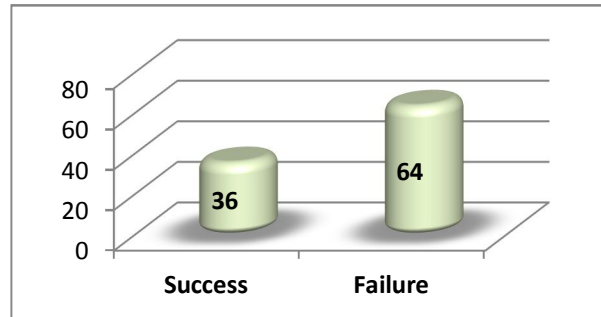
from the above table No.(4) and figure No (3) it is shown that there are (96) students in the study's sample with percentage (46.0%) are success the test in section number 2 *(Choose the words below that best complete the sentences in the text ）* .There are (54) persons with percentage (36.0 %) are failure

Table (5) one sample T-TEST for the questions of the study

Sections	N	Mean	SD	t-value	DF	p-value
1	150	3.6	0.2	14.5	149	0.002
2	150	2.7	1.81	17.1	149	0.001
3	150	3.4	2.44	7.17	149	0.012
For all	150	6.33	4.03	15.50	149	0.032

The calculated value of T – TEST for the significance of the differences for the respondent's answers in the section No (1) was (14.5) which is greater than the tabulated value of T – TEST at the degree of freedom (149) and the significant value level (0.05%) which was (2.34). this indicates that, there is statistically significant differences at the level (0.05 %) among the answers of the respondents . this mean that our hypothesis is accepted . The calculated value of T – TEST for the significance of the differences for the respondent's answers in the section No (2) was (17.1) which is greater than the tabulated value of T – TEST at the degree of freedom (149) and the significant value level (0.05%) which was (2.34). this indicates that, there is statistically significant differences at the level (0.05 %) among the answers of the respondents . this mean that our hypothesis is accepted . The calculated value of T – TEST for the significance of the differences for the respondent's answers in the section No (3) was (7.17) which is greater than the tabulated value of T – TEST at the degree of freedom (149) and the significant value level (0.05%) which was (2.34). this indicates that, there is statistically significant differences at the level (0.05 %) among the answers of the respondents . this mean that our hypothesis is accepted .

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11. Results:

Firstly,a diagnostic test was conductedto university students to examine the influence of using cohesive devices on the academic writing. Secondly, the test was tabulated and computed. Finally, analysis has been done to for the test statistically and discussed.

12. Discussion

The study is an attempt to examine the influence of using cohesive devices on the academic writing .It viewed writing process, academic writing, cohesive coherence and cohesive devices. To achieve the set objectives, the study adopted the descriptive analytical method; this allowed the research instrument to complement each other. Hence, the result of a diagnostic test was utilized to address the research questions and objectives .The (SPSS) program was used for data analysis.

The study found out that the teaching of cohesive devices can help university students develop their writing .The findings were conformity with lot of researches carried out across the globe particularly in Arab counties .The finding further have been in commensurate with the set questions and hypotheses of the study .Moreover the study reveal assessing writing useful in improving teaching and learning .Students should be expose to different types of text to strengthen their knowledge with various aspects of writing .It was also shown the idea of teaching the academic writing is completely indistinct either for the classroom practitioner or clearly presented in the syllabus .Therefore , although treatment of this ailing situation should start right at the grass-roots to lay the foundation for practicing good writing at university level.

Writing activities can be organized by considering aims of the activity preparation, procedure, comments and various activities and this can be resulted in communicating in writing efficiently, composing, crafting and improving.

Concerning cohesive devices the study revealed that some students utilize some cohesive devices excessively and in incorrect way ,and this may due to the confusion to use appropriate grammatical and lexical ties , thus they are incapable to tie relationship between sentences appropriately .On the other hand some students aware of using cohesive devices in their written discourse , these corpus used cohesive devices both , grammatical and lexical in a proper way and they have ability in producing coherent and cohesive text so they had been written well-structured genre.

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