
An Assessment of Cohesion and Coherence in Students' Descriptive and Narrative Essays: The Case of Sodo Preparatory School Grade Eleven Students'

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To cite this article:

Abebayehu Anjulo Alaro. An Assessment of Cohesion and Coherence in Students' Descriptive and Narrative Essays: The Case of Sodo Preparatory School Grade Eleven Students'. *English Language, Literature & Culture*. Vol. 5, No. 1, 2020, pp. 45-52.

doi: 10.11648/j.ellc.20200501.15

Received: November 21, 2019; **Accepted:** December 23, 2019; **Published:** March 6, 2020

Abstract: This study is aimed to assess the students' use of cohesion and coherence in their descriptive and narrative essays. It was conducted at Sodo Preparatory School on grade 11 students. The descriptive research design was employed to achieve the intended aim of the study. In this study, 30 grade eleven students were selected as participants through simple random sampling technique. Document analysis was used to collect data from the sample students. The data collected through document analysis was analyzed qualitatively based on the analysis parameters of cohesive devices; such as, substitution ellipsis, reference, conjunction and lexical cohesion to determine meaningfully (coherently) written students' essays. The findings revealed that students' used a variety of cohesive devices in each genre of writing except ellipsis and they employed all the other sub categories of cohesive devices in their (descriptive and narrative) essays. However, among the frequently used cohesive devices, the largest numbers of connectors were inappropriately instanced regarding the total use of devices. The students' inappropriate use of cohesive devices mainly appeared with conjunction, followed by reference, lexical cohesion, and substitution signals. As a result, the essays lacked consistent key expressions, clear purpose of the statement, and the logical shift from one sentence to the other. Based these findings, conclusions and recommendations were made.

Keywords: Cohesion, Coherence, Descriptive and Narrative Essays

1. Introduction

Writing is one of the four language skills that people learn in English language like listening, speaking and reading. It is an important tool of communication. According to Defazio et al writing has become a valuable tool in academic setting for engaging students in thinking, showing understanding, creating things, communicating, and learning [1]. In addition to this, Atkins et al also express writing as a valuable tool for communication and self-expression, so a writer should consider who the reader is, what he knows, and how he will understand and react to what is written [2]. As students learn their preparatory education level, they have to consider the use of cohesion and coherence in writing to produce logically connected ideas or expressions in certain place and time to a reader. Richards and Renandya point out writing skills consists of many constituent parts; such as, content,

organization, unity, cohesion, coherence, fluency, accuracy or using appropriate rhetorical forms of discourse [3]. Thus, understanding the fundamental parts of writing skills provide the preparatory education level students to convey their ideas in coherent way to produce appropriate essays.

The practice of essay writing is one of the basic ways of developing writing skills, whether the form is descriptive, narrative, expository or argumentative and it also involves the rhetorical matters of taking account of cohesion and coherence. In a well-constructed essay, a group of sentences are connected or arranged together to provide an appropriate issue or information in a single topic or theme to a reader. Lee explains coherence as the relationship of varies ideas in essays that are linked together to create a meaningful text [4]. In line with this, Tanawong, Mawardi, and Hessamy and Hamedi emphasize that cohesion is the use of cohesive ties to sequences and connect sentences together, facilitating text to

be understood as connected ideas [5-7]. Karadeniz states the term cohesion for relationships existing between the sentences and clauses within the text [8]. According to him, these relations occurring on a grammatical layer point to certain grammatical and lexical qualities that reflect semiotic discourse structure. In addition to this Senoz, and Witte and Faigly suggest cohesion is a linguistic relation which is developed between sentences and how the surface linguistic elements of the text are linked to each other in order to create unified essays [9, 10]. These show that a coherent essay can be achieved through cohesive ties. Hence, understanding the concept of cohesion and coherence play an integral role to recognize how ideas are composed and expressed in a logical manner in essays. As a result, these two vital terms (cohesion and coherence) are clear to students, they may write a meaningful intended text to a reader in certain contexts.

In general, an assessment of cohesion and coherence in students' essays is the act of collecting valuable information about the situation to identify their writing ability which is associated with essays writing. Harmer claims that writing skill is very important to identify students' practices of basic qualities in essays writing; such as, coherence and cohesion [11]. Therefore, students at preparatory education level are expected to write different types of essays by the knowledge of coherence and cohesion.

2. Statement of the Problem

The use of cohesion and coherence in writing skills play a significant role in students' effective communication and academic success. This is because writing instruction allows students to produce and integrate their emotions or ideas appropriately. Therefore, cohesion and coherence are crucial issues in academic writing by developing students' ability to construct logically connected sentences and paragraphs in essays Sayidina [12].

However it was the case in Woliata Zone at Sodo Preparatory School, majority of students were less familiar with the use of cohesion and coherence in their essays because they did not have clear understanding about the use of appropriate ties to produce coherent essays. Since the case was serious, most students faced challenges to organize their ideas to write an appropriate essay. If students do not have adequate understanding about the use of cohesion and coherence in writing, they may not produce logically connected text to a reader. In this regard, the researcher was interested to assess students' use of cohesion and coherence in their essays in EFL classroom at the target school.

Regarding the problem, some studies were conducted in Ethiopian and international levels in the area of cohesion and coherence of writing. According to the Ethiopian context, the study has been done by (Mohammed [13], Kebede [14], and Tilahun [15]). Mohammed focused on assessing students' paragraph writing skills to examine the common problems of students' paragraph writing. The finding of his study showed that the students had a lot of problems in paragraph writing such as organization, grammar, capitalization, spelling,

punctuation, and unity. Kebede indicated an assessment on cohesion and coherence of students' paragraph writing. The study focused on identifying the factors that impede the cohesion and coherence of students' paragraph writing. The result of the study displayed students could not use appropriate cohesive devices to organize ideas in paragraph writing. Tilahun also investigated on the evaluation of English for Ethiopia Grade ten Students' Text book in cultivating students' paragraph writing skills with particular emphasis on cohesion. The result of his study indicated the occurrences of cohesive devices with their function in grade ten English for Ethiopia student's text book were not sufficient and the paragraphs that students wrote had problems of cohesive devices.

Moreover, internationally, Karadeniz carried the study on Cohesion and Coherence in Written Texts of Students. The purpose of his study was to investigate the relationship between the Faculty of Education Ahi Evran University students' ability to use the tools of cohesion and to form a coherent text. The results of the study indicated students' skills in using cohesive devices, elliptical narrative and conjunctive components are varies significantly depending on the department in which they are receiving their education [8]. Alsaawi focused on written Discourse Analysis and its Application in English Language Teaching. In the study, the researcher aimed to shed some light on the analysis of several written texts by discussing the possibility of applying written discourse analysis in English language teaching contexts. The findings of the study proved that applying written discourse analysis in teaching written texts via the use of a problem solution pattern can increase what to expect in reading texts and the ability to write coherently. Although the author did not have the opportunity to apply this task, generally speaking, most text patterns are highly recommended for students when it comes to shaping their writing and this therefore makes students' writing coherent and easily readable [16]. Furthermore, Tanawong studied the relationship between Cohesion and coherence in writing: the case of THAI EFL students.' His aim was to compare the quality of cohesion and coherence in order to find the relation between them. The result showed a number of cohesive devices errors were found and have been categorized into grammatical and non-grammatical errors [5].

As far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned, the Ethiopian and international studies were conducted in the area of writing focus little about an assessment of cohesion and coherence in students' essays in EFL classroom. In general, the previous studies were related to this study in that they were based on the issues of writing skills. In fact, kebede's and Tanawong's works seem to have some similarities with this study. However, their prime focuses were the use of cohesion and coherence in different writing levels [14, 5]. Their investigations scopes and specific purposes were not similar as the present study. Thus, the present study focused on an assessment of cohesion and coherence in students' descriptive and narrative essays at Sodo Preparatory School level.

3. Objectives of the Study

In this study, the researcher designed the following general and specific objectives.

3.1. General Objective

The overall objective of this study was to assess grade eleven students' use of cohesion and coherence in descriptive and narrative essays at Sodo Preparatory School.

3.2. Specific Objectives

- a. To identify the students' use of appropriate cohesive devices in descriptive and narrative essays, and
- b. To assess the students' ability of composing coherent descriptive and narrative essays.

4. Research Methodology

This part presents the research design, participants of the study, sampling techniques and sample size, data gathering instrument, data collection procedures and methods of data analysis.

4.1. Research Design

The researcher used a descriptive research design to conduct the study because it describes the natural phenomena and real data so as the researcher can get important information for the study. Descriptive research design focus on one (or just a few) instances of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in that particular instance, Denscombe [17]. By the same token, Kothari [18] says that descriptive research design is concerned with describing "the characteristics of a particular individual, or of a group" (p. 36). Therefore, descriptive research is used to describe about problems that exist; process that are going on; effects that are being felt; or trends that are developing.

4.2. Participants of the Study

The researcher conducted the study in governmental Preparatory School which is named Sodo Preparatory School located in Wolaita Zone particularly on grade eleven (11) students. The school was purposely chosen for the study because the researcher had been teaching English language for many years in the school. In this study, grade eleven (11) students were participated to offer information about the general situation of cohesion and coherence in descriptive and narrative essays.

4.3. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Sodo Preparatory School is selected to be the setting of the study. The reason was that the researcher had experience about the presence of the problem. Regarding the case, the researcher used grade 11 students to conduct the study. In

grade eleven, there were six sections. Each section comprises fifty students. The total number of students in these sections is 300. From these, the researcher selected 30 (10%) students (that was, five students from each section) as a sample population for the study through simple random sampling technique. As Dornyei states the simple random sampling gives an equal chance for each member of the population under the study [19].

4.4. Data Gathering Instrument

The instrument that the researcher employed to collect data for the study was document analysis. The main purpose that the researcher used document analysis was to originate valid information about cohesion and coherence in students' essays. According to Brown [20] document analysis is an "efficient and effective way of gathering data because documents are manageable and practical resources" (p. 125). As a result, it was employed to get real data for the use of cohesion and coherence by grade 11 students' in their essays. Thus, the researcher gave topics for participant students' to compose the descriptive and narrative essays to get pertinent information for the study.

4.5. Data Collection Procedures

The data of this study was conducted on the following procedures. That was, the researcher gave writing tasks on descriptive and narrative essays one after the other in two week's interval to the participant students in order to write in 500 words to get data for the study. These tasks were given in the following procedures: first, descriptive essay writing task was given to the sample students. Then, the researcher gave the narrative essay writing task to the sample students.

4.6. Methods of Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data, the researcher used the qualitative content analysis method. As Dornyei states the qualitative content analysis is a procedure for the categorization of verbal or written data, for purpose of classification and tabulation [19]. Hence, the researcher used the following methods to analyze students' use of cohesive devices in their descriptive and narrative essays. This is to mean the researcher first coded for each sample student's as S1, S2, and S3 ---S30 to collect data about cohesive devices in their essays. Next, he concentrated to count the frequencies of students' use of cohesive devices on average use of words and sentences level. Then, the researcher carefully checked appropriately and inappropriately used cohesive devices to determine coherently written students descriptive and narrative essays.

5. Results and Discussions

This section includes the results and discussions of data obtained from students' documents. The data were analyzed thematically based on the criteria of analysis. The analyses of the data (descriptive and narrative essays) were carried out in

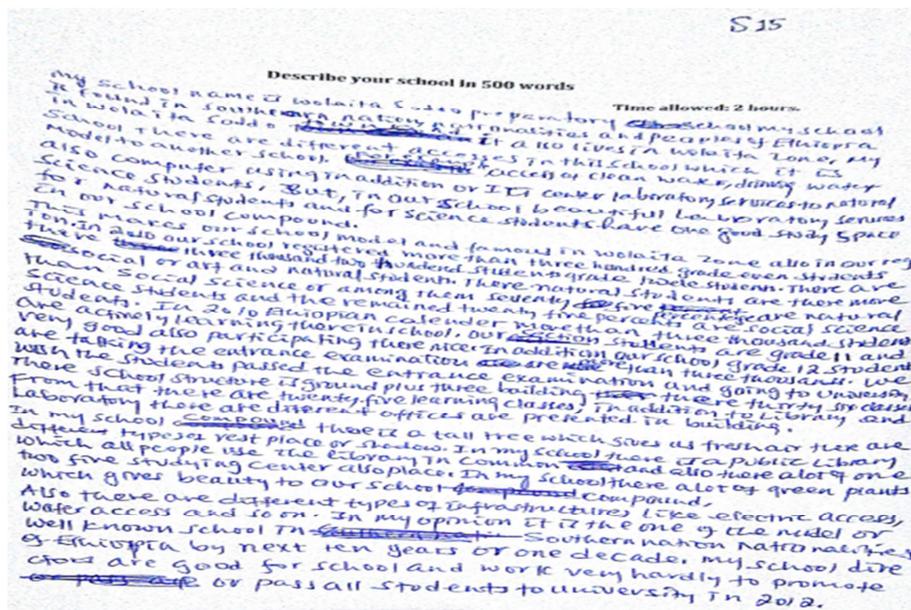


Figure 1. This sample descriptive essay is written by participant student fifteen.

As it is observed, the above sample essay has many problems in accordance with cohesion and coherence. In fact, this essay did not have appropriate hook, thesis statement, building ideas, and conclusion paragraph. It starts talking about one issue and then immediately moves to another subject without concluding the preceding idea. Additionally, the student used a number of cohesive devices in his text without consideration of their accurate functions. As a result, the text characterized the misuse of cohesive devices. For instance, in paragraph one line five, the two additive connections like “in addition” and “or” were occurred in the same time. In similar way, in paragraph one line six, the student employed the adversative conjunction of the word “but” instead of additive one. Moreover, the illogical

instances of reference devices also hinder the sense the text. For example, the demonstrative reference of the word “there” appeared more than fifteen times, and equally the comparative reference of the word “more than” was used without any sense in this essay. Language problems like sentence fragment, subject-verb disagreement, and inconsistent key expressions were observed in this essay. This showed the student unable to use correct cohesive devices to produce a coherent essay. The misuses of cohesive devices unconstructively affect the clear message of the text [5]. In line with this, Karadeniz and Hessamy suggested a coherent paragraph must have well organized introduction, supporting and conclusion paragraphs [8, 7].

5.2. The Instances of Cohesive Devices in Students’ Narrative Essay

Table 2. The average appearance of cohesive devices.

No of students	No of words on average	No of sentences on average	Criteria on cohesion	No of cohesive devices		Sub titles of cohesive devices		Appropriate		Inappropriate					
				Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%				
30	285	18	Reference	23.96	32.46	Nominal	0	0	0	0	0	0			
						Verbal	0	0	0	0	0	0			
						Clausal	0	0	0	0	0	0			
						Nominal	0	0	0	0	0	0			
						Verbal	0	0	0	0	0	0			
						Clausal	0	0	0	0	0	0			
						Personal	10.16	13.77	3.79	5.13	6.37	7.4			
						Demonstrative	7.98	10.81	2.16	2.92	5.82	7.89			
						Comparative	5.82	7.88	1.93	2.61	3.89	5.27			
						Additive	12.96	17.56	5.11	6.92	7.85	10.64			
						Conjunction	36.76	49.81	Adversative	8.01	10.86	3.75	5.08	4.26	5.78
						Causal	8.96	12.14	3.22	4.36	5.74	7.78			
						Temporal	6.83	9.25	3.11	4.21	3.72	5.04			
						Reiteration	7.65	10.37	3.16	4.28	4.49	6.09			
Lexical cohesion	13.08	17.73	Collocation	5.43	7.35	2.13	2.89	3.3	4.46						
Total	30	285	18	73.8	100	73.8	100	28.36	38.4	45.44	61.6				

As shown in table 2, the students produced their narrative essay on average 285 words and 18 sentences in the given topic. Additionally, they used different types of cohesive devices; such as, reference, conjunction and lexical cohesion to compose their narrative essay. In fact, in this essay both the substitution and ellipsis devices were not utilized. Among the frequently instanced cohesive devices, the conjunction took the primary position with 36.76 (49.81%). From these, the 12.96 (17.56%) of additive, followed by 8.96 (12.14%) of causal, 8.01 (10.86%) of adversative and then, 6.83 (9.25%) of temporal conjunction elements appeared. Moreover, the reference devices were instanced with 23.96 (32.46%). Besides, the 10.16 (13.77%) of personal, followed by 7.98 (10.81%) of demonstrative and then, 5.82 (7.88%) of comparative reference devices occurred. Furthermore, lexical cohesive devices were implemented in this with 13.08 (17.73%). Among them, the 7.65 (10.37%) of reiteration and 5.43 (7.35%) of collocation devices appeared in different parts of the text. This implies that students are more familiar with conjunctions than the other cohesive devices.

Based on the data which showed the inappropriate use of cohesive devices, the largest part 45.44 (61.6%) of the students' narrative text concerned the wrong use of signals. Besides, the 7.85 (10.64%) of additive, followed by 5.74

(7.91%) of causal, 4.26 (5.75%) of adversative and 3.72 (5.04%) of temporal devices appeared. In the same way, the wrong use of reference devices were clearly instanced with 6.37 (7.4%) of personal, 5.82 (7.89%) of demonstrative and 3.89 (5.27%) of comparative signals. Furthermore, the lexical cohesion also inappropriately seemed with the 4.49 (6.09%) of reiteration and 3.3 (4.46%) of collocation devices. The students' tended to follow certain techniques to organize their ideas in the text, but most sentences were isolated without any relation to one another, so the essay contained the random collection of sentences in each paragraph. The random collection of sentences made an essay incoherent. These findings are in line with some previous research studies, namely Witte and Faigley, whose findings point out that the wrong use of cohesive devices can negatively affect the quality of writing [10]. The findings in this present study also support other previous research studies, particularly [6, 14, 12]. Their result confirmed that the erroneous use of cohesive devices could not be a reliable indicator of the worth of writing. Therefore, this influenced the general quality of an essay and it also led to difficulty to compose a coherent essay. For instance, it is possible to see the sample narrative essay written by one of the participant student in Figure 2 below.

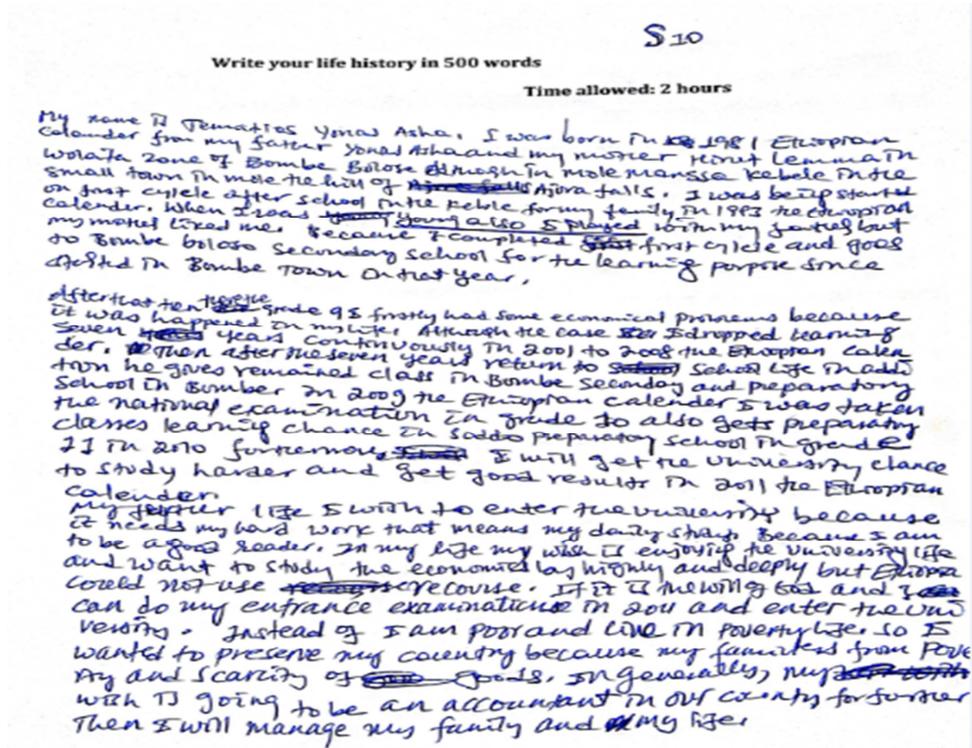


Figure 2. This sample narrative essay is written by participant student ten.

As shown in the student's sample essay, the text erroneously contained plenty of transitional markers. Besides, words like "although" and "but" were occurred in paragraph one line three and six. The intention of the student was to express the additional ideas, but the aim of these words is to express contrasting issues. Additionally, in

paragraph two line one, the phrase like "after that then there" without expressively seemed in the text. In the same paragraph the word "although", "after", "also", "but", "because" and "since" appeared overused and incorrectly. Regarding the key expressions, it was remarkable that in paragraph one line two, the personal pronoun of "I" and

“my” and also in line eight and nine the word “Bombe” were meaninglessly repeated and destructing the message of the text. Moreover, this student missed the basic components of essay writing, such as thesis statement, good introduction and conclusion paragraph. These are considered as the great failure to achieve a coherent essay. It is misleading the clear message of the essay. In general, the result of this study supported by Alsaawi, Lee, and Senoz, as they concluded that the wrong uses of cohesive devices affect the mode of composition; as a result, certain problems such as misuse, overuse, underuse and restriction are identified in the EFL students’ compositions [16, 4, 9]. Along the same line, Karadeniz said EFL students often lack the ability to organize ideas to produce coherent essays [8].

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusions

From this study the following conclusions were drawn:

The results and discussions revealed that students utilized in their descriptive and narrative essays all sub categories of cohesive devices except ellipsis; namely, substitution, reference, conjunction and lexical cohesion. From these, the conjunctive connectors were commonly instanced with a large number of ties and took the primary place compared with the other cohesive devices. In fact, the least percentages of substitution sub categories of cohesive signals appeared in students’ descriptive essay. However, the frequently occurred cohesive devices did not show their correctness. In spite of the fact that students’ tended to utilize a lot of cohesive devices, most of their essays were illogically composed and gave senseless information for a reader. This indicated that students’ essay contained considerable problems of cohesive devices. In case of this, most connectors were missed and overused, but few of them were completely neglected from the essays. This is to mean students’ faced difficulties to employ the appropriate use of connectors in order to construct coherent essays. As a result, the essays left clear purpose of statement, inadequate thesis statement, and concerned illogical shift from one sentence to the other, tended to contain chunks of information which were not linked together as one organized whole, lacked consistent key expressions, and strong conclusion part.

6.2. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn above, the researcher forwards the following recommendations as possible ways to address problems stated above:

- a. Students’ should focus on how to arrange ideas in sentence and paragraph levels using cohesive devices appropriately in order to construct coherent essays. This is because coherent texts are easier and give clearer message for a reader.
- b. In the present study, since the students completely ignored the ellipsis sub categories, and appeared to use substitution devices in a poor manner (which can

negatively affect the information in a text), so they should give more attention to using all cohesive devices when constructing essays. Therefore, students should practice how to use each cohesive device correctly to produce their ideas in a logical manner.

- c. Students’ should practice how to write the important parts of essays regarding introduction, thesis statement, supportive details, and conclusion paragraphs to keep the logical flow of ideas from one paragraph to the next.
- d. The grade level English teachers should also provide as many opportunities as possible to their students’ in order to practice composing essays using correct cohesive devices.

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