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**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Cohesion in ESL Argumentative Essays: An SFL Analysis of  
University Students' Writing Across Punjab**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates how ESL learners in Punjab, Pakistan, utilize cohesive devices in writing argumentative essays to achieve textual cohesion and unity. It employs a qualitative textual analysis within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), specifically Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion, which encompasses reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Data were drawn from nine argumentative essays (600- 700 words) collected from various universities in Punjab. The chosen essays were examined using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework. Findings indicate that students primarily employed reference and lexical cohesion in their writing, which significantly contributed to coherence and thematic unity. Conjunctions were also employed to establish logical sequencing. However, substitution and ellipsis were underused, resulting in unnecessary repetition and reduced conciseness. The study concludes that while students demonstrated some control over the use of cohesive devices, there is a clear need for pedagogical strategies to enhance their awareness and effective use of cohesive devices for improved writing fluency and clarity.

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**KEYWORDS** Cohesion, Argumentative Essays, SFL, Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Framework

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**Introduction**

Argumentation can safely be presumed to be the most commonly practiced genre for university learners, particularly in the arts, humanities, and social sciences (Hirvela, 2017; Wingate, 2012). Although the nature of argument may vary across disciplines, the development of a sound argument is an important feature of effective writing in any field (Lea & Street, 1998). Hence, argumentative essays are the central component and determinant of second language acquisition and writing skills to improve the critical stance of the graduate students at the university level. The current study examines a number of binding forces, such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical structure as described by Halliday and his associates. References help in maintaining continuity of the participants of a text, while substitution and ellipses are aimed at avoiding repetition because they provide grammatical alternatives. Conjunctions are used to connect clauses and disclose the underlying semantic relationships that are divided into additive, adversative, causal, and temporal. Finally, lexical cohesion, which is accomplished by way of reiteration and collocation, reinforces the cohesive impact on the text by linking words at different places in the text through lexical repetition and collocation. The reason behind such an in-depth analysis of cohesive devices is to help clarify and put them into practice when

writing academically, and especially for students studying English as a second language. It is also possible to talk about the argument structure by examining the essay writing make-up. In simple words, we can refer to two international tests, i.e., IELTS (International English Language Testing System), which states that an argumentative essay must include clear and systematic arguments to get a better idea of the stand. Second, an argumentative essay as a component of writing tasks of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) must presuppose a definite position on the issue backed by persuasive arguments and credible data (Test of English as a Foreign Language, 2020). Thus, the above-stated methods and their parameters provided with regard to the essay writing and the evaluation will make us understand the important requirements for the write-up of argumentative essays.

To conclude the requirements laid in the argumentative composition, cohesion, the bond created by all textual segments, and coherence, the appropriacy of any text, in a given discourse community, are the two conclusive elements that can ensure consistency of ideas, which have the relationship to each other (Eggins, 2004). Textual unity considers the improvement of the text's readability by incorporating other logically stacked ideas (Martin, 1989). Therefore, the current research has used the grammatical metaphor, specifically the ideational grammatical metaphor (IGA), to investigate the discourse-level strategies of cohesion and coherence in Pakistani university-level argumentative essays of university level. As Liardet (2016) argues, IGM is made by means of nominalization, i.e., the transformation of the items not typically of the noun form into a noun (Bloor and Bloor, 1995), and it can, therefore, result in the production of the connection of the meanings among the clauses, sentences, and the paragraph as well. Such interrelations between the elements of the discourse of Thompson (2014) are built based on three linguistic means of IGM, such as condensation achieved through nominal groups (i.e., transformation of interjectively co-occurring meanings into a nominal dense structure), encapsulation (i.e., schema of reasoning between the clauses), and the depersonalization (i.e., causality in the clause).

Various previous studies (Halliday & Martin, 1993; Halliday, 2004; Humphrey, Dogra & Feez, 2012; Martin, 2008; Thomas & To, 2016) have examined IGMs as a linguistic tool that could be used to create extremely persuasive written discourse. However, a gap remains in the past research. The present study intends to fulfill this gap and contribute to the existing literature on coherence and cohesion in second-language academic writing.

## **Literature Review**

The section of the literature review deals with the concepts related to the present study. It explains cohesion and Halliday and Hasan's framework (1976). It also critically evaluates the past research conducted on coherence and cohesion. At the end, it also states the research gap.

## **Cohesion**

The cohesion is, without a doubt, an amazing aspect of essay writing. The majority of the research comes to the conclusion that cohesion is a huge-scale phenomenon that is completely associated with thoughts connection. It is associated with interfacing, combining the expressions and sentences to deliver the message. In order to create cohesion, the sentences may be disjoined and may lead to any variation of disjoined sentences. The theoretical framework followed is described below in detail.

## Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the theoretical framework of the monumental work, *Cohesion in English* (Halliday and Hasan, 1976), as it covers most spheres of the internal structure of texts. It is the theory framed in the wider context of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and in regard to cohesion, it stresses the importance of the notion, which is defined as textuality, or the aspect when the set of sentences is turned into a singular entity instead of a succession of utterances. Halliday and Hasan have described that cohesion is attained with the help of certain linguistic resources which generate semantic connections between clauses and sentences, and hence, continuity and coherence in discourse. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesive devices are of five types, namely reference, ellipsis, substitution, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. All these types are the various forms of how cohesion is achieved in a text.

- Reference is when the elements of pronouns, demonstratives, and other reference items are used to refer to items which have been mentioned earlier, or known through context.
- Ellipsis happens when some element in the sentence is left out, as it can be deduced by the context before it.
- Substitution would substitute a word that was mentioned earlier with another word, say, and one or do so that a word is not repeated.
- Conjunction refers to the use of expressions of conjunction (and, but, so, because, etc.) to mark logical connections like addition, contrast, cause-effect, or time sequence among clauses or sentences is called conjunction.
- The lexical cohesion is achieved with the help of the words that are somehow related together, the synonyms, the antonyms, the repetitions, or the same semantic field words. This coordination plays a very significant role in developing continuity of the topic and strengthening uniformity of themes of the text.

This theory forms the theoretical perspective of this study because it will be used as the analytical framework through which it will analyze the use of cohesive devices in ESL argumentative essays by university students in Punjab. Through the implementation of the cohesive categories posited by Halliday and Hasan, the research would determine the kind, frequency, and purpose of the cohesive devices in student writing, hence determining how effectively learners are in developing coherent arguments in English as a second language.

**Table 1**  
**Personal Reference Items (adopted from Halliday 2014)**

Head	Premodifiers	Things: Pronoun (Determinative)	Deictic: Determiner
Singular	Masculine	He/him	His
	Feminine	She/her	Her
	Neutral	It	Its
Plural	—	They/them	Their

## Past Studies

The issue of cohesion in producing texts is described by Jassim (2023) when the author emphasizes the significance of cohesive devices in making texts comprehensible and well-produced. Bhartia, Sehrawat, & Sharma (2023) discuss the measure of global

and local coherence as well as the psychological effects of cohesion upon the students and found out how cohesion can be used to enhance the idea of the text quality or assessments thereof. The paper by Benshams et al. (2023) discovers the coherence analysis of the English writer with Iranian MA students' understanding and their production of the relative clauses in English, indicating that a good knowledge of the cohesive mechanism in the given domain has the potential to remarkably improve the academic writing skills of the students. It is reflected in the discussion provided by Daud et al. (2023) on cohesion in grammar in an essay, where the authors outline several main aspects a student can fall short of when using the strategies of working with effective cohesion. It can be further investigated in more detail, as presented by Sitio et al. (2023) and Ariwibowo et al. (2023), about the occurrence of cohesive devices both in The Jakarta Post news editorials and recount text writings by students. Such studies reveal how effective and variable cohesive strategies are in text texture building, and examine how prudently used cohesive strategy devices can make a big difference in the readability and understandability of academic text. Nunan & Choi (2023) and Ramzan et al. (2023) identify the issues of academic writing among learners whose first language is not English (English as a Second Language- ESL) and explain the importance of cohesion in clarity and coherence in academic writing. The author (Umarova, 2023) also provides a distinctive outlook in terms of the pandemic perspective of online learning and cohesion usage, as it entails strategies of adapting to the use of coherence in writing.

As far as cohesion and coherence are concerned, ideational grammatical metaphor has also been used by Liardet (2016) to study the lexical density and text cohesion as well as the cause-effect relationships of the texts of five successful and five unsuccessful argumentative texts. The number of words that were present in the high and low-scoring essays was 5821 and 5277, respectively. She observed that the texts with higher scores effectively applied the IGMs to transform the separate co-occurring meanings in the form of the nominal groups to proceed to achieve the Given-New prosody using IGMs as anaphoric references. The movement of the Theme to Rheme is the Given-New prosody. The topic is the clause departure, and Rheme is the leftover of the clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The Rheme of the foregoing clause is then constricted into the nominal groups of lexical density, which will remain as the Theme of the next clause. The third of the tools that have been controlled by the professional writers was the metaphorical chain of causes and effects. The linguistic choice of cause and effect (i.e., cause, leads to, contributes to, etc) was inserted between the extended nominal groups to achieve the textual cohesion in the argumentative essays' clauses. It normally has more clauses in its content of the spoken language as a means to supply the lexical material. On the contrary, a more densely patterned level of lexicalized material is usually the source of information in the written language, i.e., it is typified by "a much denser pattern of lexicalized content" (Halliday, 1989, p. 76). The research works have evaluated that not many fundamental problems are aligned with Pakistani learners by cohesion. Some experts in the field of differentiation in Pakistan have been drawing our attention to unique glimpses of cohesion problems, on which learners lament. The majority of the studies have come to the conclusion that only the significant importance and the fact of the noteworthiness of cohesion in writing or composing arguments in the essay. The concept of cohesion is semantic; thus, some meanings are supposed to be conveyed in the text. By consolidating these facts, it can be ascertained that cohesive devices are critical in the improvement of textural quality in the academic writings of undergraduate learners. Reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion help in textual coherence, but not only: they contribute to the expression of complex ideas of students through the better use of this facility.

Although the model of analyzing cohesion proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976) has gained a lot of recognition and has been used in numerous studies across the linguistic domains, lack of any study or research focusing on the ability to apply it particularly in the argumentative essay written by ESL learners, especially at the university level, is noticeable. Much of the literature already considered has concentrated on narrative writings, conversational use, or general academic writing without isolating the argumentative type of writing, which has very specific structural and rhetorical issues to contend with by the learner of a second language. Besides, there is a limited number of studies that have explored cohesion in argumentative writing, as far as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is regarded as having explored cohesion in various types of texts. This area has not been addressed, leading to a gap in our knowledge of how ESL learners apply cohesive devices in the organization of logical argument and upholding coherence in multi-paragraph written discourse. Thus, the current research attempting to address this research gap aims to apply the SFL model, that is, the model Halliday and Hasan propose for cohesion in an argumentative essay written by students at universities in Punjab, Pakistan. In such a way, it will help to add to the literature on cohesion in ESL writing, offer pedagogical input into teaching writing, and give a more detailed response to cohesion in the argumentative genre in terms of functional linguistics.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Research Design**

The present study is descriptive and situational. The research takes a qualitative form of textual analysis of the research idea based on systemic functional linguistics (SFL). It seeks to explore how cohesion and coherence are attained in argumentative essays composed by various students attending the university using the same number of words. They concentrated on their general structure and organization with sense sense-making process.

### **Data collection**

These data entailed nine argumentative writing compositions composed by the undergraduate university students of Punjab, Pakistan, who were pursuing various subjects in various domains. They were asked to give their essays, and this was anonymized to provide confidentiality. The essay on each topic has been dealt with as a special entry on writing skills in various fields of inquiry, since it was a writing evaluation exercise. In the data selection criteria, a sufficient time of 1.5 hours was given to the students with the right environment. They are all second English language learners, and the essay consisted of 600 to 700 words.

## **Results and Discussion**

The data was analyzed by employing the framework of cohesion developed by Halliday and Hasan. Cohesive devices were observed in each essay based on Halliday and Hasan's framework (1976). A sheet was formulated to note and demonstrate the use of cohesive ties like reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunctions, and lexical cohesion.

**Table 2**  
**SFL-Based Cohesive Analysis of Essay No. 01 Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976)**  
**Cohesion Framework**

Total Ties	Reference	Conjunction	Lexical Cohesion	Substitution	Ellipsis
42	16 (38.1%)	11 (26.2%)	12 (28.5%)	2 (4.8%)	1 (2.4%)

The essay analysis is eloquent, as the reference and lexical cohesion are intense features of this essay. It implies that the essay is well-maintained and smooth. In regard to strengths, problems such as the use of conjunctions such as but, and, etc, and lexical chains establish a strong topic unit. With the use of reference elements, one is assured of the continuity of a paragraph. With regard to the essay, the presence of lack of syntactic variations and natural cohesiveness, Ellipsis or substitution is not used to the full extent. Some ambiguous referents are also used, showing some pronouns that can disrupt the clarity. The cohesion element of the stylistics can be enhanced by the use of substitution and ellipsis properly and carefully.

**Table 3**  
**SFL-Based Cohesive Analysis of Essay No. 02 Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976)**  
**Cohesion Framework**

Total Ties	Reference	Conjunction	Lexical Cohesion	Substitution	Ellipsis
50	21 (42%)	13 (26%)	12 (24%)	3 (6%)	1 (2%)

When the same analysis method of the Halliday framework is applied to essay No. 02, it is quite apparent that the use of again reference is too high, i.e., again reference is used in 42%, particularly demonstrative (this, those, their) and personal (this, my) pronoun in essay. Through this process, unity and preservation of the lexical is guaranteed in the essay. The conjunction is used on the 2nd number (26%), mostly used are the additives (and, also), adversative (however, although), causal (so, thus), and lastly, temporal. All this helps in the logical arrangement of the essay and comparative arrangement. However, the use of simple structures like also, so, etc, is excessive to an extent. Lexical cohesion is by 24 percent compared to conjunctions, which is 26 percent. Semantic unity is achieved through effective repetition and chaining of the pure ideas (classroom, learning, teacher, course). The awareness of variation is exhibited by the use of synonyms (interact, communicate, question, queries); there is, however, some redundancy (learn, learning, and knowledge). Underutilized substitution and ellipsis appear at a range of 6 and 2 per cent only. To a larger extent, both these features sound natural and are concisely built-up sentences. The aspect of cohesion can be increased by using it in its appropriate and right use.

**Table 4**  
**SFL-Based Cohesive Analysis of Essay No. 03 Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976)**  
**Cohesion Framework**

Total Ties	Reference	Conjunction	Lexical Cohesion	Substitution	Ellipsis
34	15 (44.1%)	9 (26.5%)	7 (20.6%)	2 (5.9%)	1 (2.9%)

Due to the application of the method of the Halliday framework of essay No. 03, it is quite clear that the use of reference is again excessive, like in 44.1, but in this essay, the aspect of ambiguity and mistakes of agreement also occur. In a certain example of the text analysis, one mistake is: This would be both issues... mismatched demonstrative and plural word. The other example is where we have: He is also responsible... which is generic, though there is no clarity on who he is talking to. It indicates that the students still lack the basic knowledge of cohesion; they will need time to realize it and practice much. Conjunction 26 is used, and some errors are also found there, as with the use of conjunctions like, etc. Another feature of Halliday framework analysis is the Lexical cohesion, 20 percent of and central vocabulary of the

essay has been repeated again and again. The writer has not paid much attention to the use of synonyms and semantic variation. The proportion of the Substitution and ellipsis elements is 2-6%, which indicates the fact that it was underused, resulting in unjustified repetition and absence of fluency. It has to be detailed and vivid through practice to accommodate the element of cohesion in the essay. General evaluation of the essay based on the Halliday framework indicates that the student was at an entry level of cohesion knowledge, though it can further be enhanced as they use and practice it.

**Table 5**  
**SFL-Based Cohesive Analysis of Essay No. 04 Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976)**  
**Cohesion Framework**

Total Ties	Reference	Conjunction	Lexical Cohesion	Substitution	Ellipsis
32	14 (43.8%)	10 (31.3%)	6 (18.8%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)

This time, when using the Halliday system to break down essay No. 04, there is evidence through the analysis exhibit that the referencing aspect comprises 43.8 percent in an argument writing essay by a female writer. To keep the aspects of continuity and inclusivity in view, the frequent use of I, we, you, and this is maintained, but after four to five lines, one can observe the aspect of ambiguous shift in subjectivity, which makes apparent that there is no consistency of point of view. The element of conjunction is 31.3%, which implies adequate usage of additives (and) adversatives (but, on the other hand), and causal (because, so) have been used considerably. However, on another aspect, abrupt and informal facets of transition have been observed. The level of lexical cohesion aspect is 18.8 per cent used centre vocabulary used, but there is a lexical item repetition aspect on the education online topic, as terms are found in each paragraph, which is a synonym type usage aspect. Needs have a variation with respect to the use of synonyms (e.g., digital learning, e-learning, instruction, growing, etc.). There is a combination of substitution and ellipsis in 6.2 percent of instances, which means that they have been used rarely which causing longer and awkward or braided sentences to be generated. However, stylistic cohesion can be used to improve it by means of appropriate and adequate employment of substitution and use of ellipsis.

**Table 6**  
**SFL-Based Cohesive Analysis of Essay No. 05 Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976)**  
**Cohesion Framework**

Total Ties	Reference	Conjunction	Lexical Cohesion	Substitution	Ellipsis
45	22 (48.9%)	10 (22.2%)	9 (20.0%)	2 (4.4%)	2 (4.4%)

In the essay No. 05, the level of cohesion is moderate, but it can be seen that some difficulties in clarity and consistency may be observed. Most research makes use of reference devices that cover approximately half of all cohesive ties. Personal pronouns like: they, it, this, facilitate the textual flow; however, numerous references are vague or otherwise uncontrolled. Another example is the sentence: they should charge of challenge them; in this case, the audience cannot be sure just who, what, or who is being meant. Very often, conjunctions that form logical relations between clauses are used, such as because, such as, due to, also, etc. Nevertheless, they are commonly used in the wrong forms or infinite way that undermines the persuasive power. To illustrate, in non-causal situations, words and phrases like due to are used too much, and at other points, they fail to present the right linkers to different points that further relax the points. Lexical cohesion is manifested in the repetition of the main words, environmental issues, government, factories, and petrol. Although this is an indication of lexical continuity, insufficient vocabulary and poor word choice or use of wrong words and construction in phrases such as destruction of atmosphere, peak level do not provide adequate support. There is little indication of semantic field

development or the use of synonyms to make lexical richness. The use of substitution is very limited and mostly informal and vague references to pronouns. For example, the phrase *this is because the water is not clean* makes use of *this* in a generalizing character; however, there is nothing specific in the last clause to define an exact antecedent. Ellipses are used rarely and are only at occasionally absent in compound sentences, which might puzzle the readers. As an example, the phrase, perhaps, should be understood as, “These days, this problem is going to reach the boiling point which are touching upon all spheres including agriculture”.

Among the strengths of the essay, one can distinguish the endeavor of incorporating a wide range of cohesive devices and the adherence to the main theme of environmental issues. The student demonstrates that he is cognizant of cause and effect, and this is in line with the argumentative purpose. Nevertheless, the drawbacks are poor grammar, wrong usage of cohesive markers, and overuse of failure in reference and lexical control. Most of the cohesive relationships are not explicit, and the repetition of poor or abused words obstructs the flow of text and the understanding of the reader. Argument is not easy to drill across through cohesive links that are applied mechanically without semantics.

**Table 7**  
**SFL-Based Cohesive Analysis of Essay No. 06 Using Halliday and Hasan’s (1976)**  
**Cohesion Framework**

Total Ties	Reference	Conjunction	Lexical Cohesion	Substitution	Ellipsis
37	17 (45.9%)	11 (29.7%)	6 (16.2%)	2 (5.4%)	1 (2.7%)

The most common device in essay No. 06 is reference, where demonstratives such as *these*, *those*, and personal pronouns such as *he*, *they*, and *it* are used in order to keep track of the participants across clauses. Nevertheless, other times referential cohesion is undermined by some form of ambiguity or non-reference, e.g., in *they don't know what money is like*, how can it be got, and the antecedent of *they* is too vague or overgeneralized. The second cohesive device is used most frequently used conjunctions. The most common additive and adversative conjunctions (such as *and*, *but*, *because*, and *so*) are used to keep the logical links. But certain conjunctions get abused or overabused without proper syntactic usage, and these result in a run-on or fused sentence, like in the present example, underlying the production of bad time, lacking permission coming with it: “because bad time does not come with our permission.” There is lexical cohesion that is undeveloped. The author greatly depends on the repetition of general nouns like *money*, *people*, and *life*. Synonyms or superordinates are limited, implying that there is lexical poverty. There are no metaphorical or figurative forms, and the repetition is deprived of semantic abundance. Substitution is hardly seen. In isolated cases, e.g., *something of the money that remains*, but with nominal substitutes (e.g., *one*, *do so*), the learner repeats full nouns, rather than having a complete grammatical cohesion developing. The least recurrent device is the use of ellipsis, and only one case, which could be assumed to be ellipsis of verb or noun groups, was registered. The learner has been observed to incline to include every lexical item in an overt way, perhaps because she was not certain of the rules of ellipsis in the English language.

With these weak points, however, the essay demonstrates a sense of unity in English academic writing. The paper has tried to compare the opinions and come to an objective stand, which indicates the organization and consistency at the macro level. Nonetheless, cohesion sometimes fails on account of grammar mistakes, verbiage and absence of command in the use of cohesion strategies, especially in the management of



substitution and ellipsis. Pedagogically, this discussion indicates there is a need to teach and practice ESL learners with cohesive devices with emphasis on lexical cohesion, substitution and ellipsis, which tend to be ignored early on when teaching writing. The teachers need to guide the learners to widen their vocabulary, employ suitable referents, and test coherent strategies by suggesting individual rewriting and example assignments. An emphasis on functional grammar in the discourse framework may provide students with more empowerment to formulate more fluent and coherent writing in academics.

**Table 8**  
**SFL-Based Cohesive Analysis of Essay No. 07 Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976)**  
**Cohesion Framework**

Total Ties	Reference	Conjunction	Lexical Cohesion	Substitution	Ellipsis
32	14 (43.8%)	10 (31.3%)	6 (18.8%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)

It is also shown in the analysis that the learner uses reference devices like personal pronouns (they, those, it, this) and demonstratives very often, which was an attempt to establish a continuity between sentences. Some of these references are, however, general or inaccurate in number and accord, such as "those people that are absent his houses" (incorrect there for their) and also, the referral to students who are in their teens, comprising both plural and singular forms, thus weakening consistency. A conjunction is also used, but in most cases, inaccurately. To give an example, the learner employs such devices as but, because, and so to combine clauses; still, there are some illogical or repetitive connections (e.g., just because of social media, this difficulty has been completed). Such problems harm the logic of the essay, but show knowledge of the conjunctive role. The lexical cohesion is achieved by the use of repetition of major terms such as social media, people, and students. Although the repetition of the phrase "social media" contributes to staying on the topic, it is too monotonous without being varied, which makes the essay plagiarized and not stylistically powerful. Lexical variety and coherence might have been enhanced by using synonyms or superordinates (e.g., "networks") at the expense of lexical variety and coherence. And the one example of substitution is the word of a situation which is replaced by this word, such as in This is the disadvantage of social media but the grammar is not accurate. Substitution is also a handy tool to prevent repetition, and the small amount of use of this device with a few mistakes is an indicator that the learner requires additional exposure to this tool. Ellipsis is scarcely practised. The first potential example is in a case where a clause is missing: I just wanted to scroll the whole day, which might mean I just wanted [to spend time] scrolling. The form, however, is not grammatical, and the ellipsis is not very effective. Poor use of ellipses might be a sign of poor syntactic control and low cohesion.

Among the strengths of the essay, one can list having a regular structure in the topical focus, as well as an effort made to make links frequently and primarily with the referential and conjunctive ties. The learner shows that he or she understands how to continue a topic in different sentences and paragraphs through the use of cohesion devices. Its weaknesses are narrowness of the vocabulary, the lack of grammatical accuracy, and incorrect use of cohesive ties. There are a lot of unclear references, improper usage of conjunctions or their excessive usage, lack of variation in lexical repetition. The little substitutions and ellipses have further lowered the cohesion and coherence of the essay.

**Table 9**  
**SFL-Based Cohesive Analysis of Essay No. 08 Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976)**  
**Cohesion Framework**

Total Ties	Reference	Conjunction	Lexical Cohesion	Substitution	Ellipsis
<b>32</b>	14 (43.8%)	10 (31.3%)	6 (18.8%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)

Since the essay No. 08 exhibits moderate performance of cohesive devices, with the predominance of reference and conjunctions, this is consistent with the average L2 writing in which learners were using simple cohesion devices. Use of personal pronouns is quite precise, which helps the orientation of the reader in the communication. Logic flow is supported by the use of conjunctions, which is, however, undermined by logic-inexplicable changes of conjunction and failure to use a clear writing style. Lexical cohesion is achieved to a considerable extent via repetition as opposed to synonymy or semantic chaining. This inhibits lexical diversity and helps to achieve a monotonous tone. Others (such as known as online education known as online education) probably are not intended, and indicate laxity in editing or conciseness of thinking. Substitution and ellipsis are the minimum used meaning that which is a poor understanding of additional coherent measures. Such characteristics are important in preventing redundancy and making the writing more stylish, and their lack is typical of a developmental trend in ESL learners' writings.

**Table 10**  
**SFL-Based Cohesive Analysis of Essay No. 09 Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976)**  
**Cohesion Framework**

Total Ties	Reference	Conjunction	Lexical Cohesion	Substitution	Ellipsis
<b>32</b>	14 (43.8%)	10 (31.3%)	6 (18.8%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)

Essay No. 09 shows some knowledge of how an argument should be structured, and the argument is developed towards a central theme entitled The Two Faces of Technology. Most of the cohesive bonds are formed by reference and this is specifically applied to the personal and demonstrative pronouns like it, we, they, and this. When effective, these references are found helpful in contributing to the textual flow by referring backward to already introduced ideas, but at certain times they are either used too much or they are used incorrectly (ambiguous use of it with a non-clear antecedent). Conjunctions are also very even and contribute much to arranging logical connections, e.g., additive (and), adversative (but), and causal (so, e.g.). What is more, it is too regularly relying on simple conjunctions and improper coordination of clauses undermines a logical flow. There are also run-on clauses or those that exist without the necessary conjunctions, which break the cohesion. The other cohesion, lexical one, is presented through repetition (e.g., technology, use, people) and collocation (e.g., knife-cutting, internet-communication). Nevertheless, not all lexical connections are necessary; they are too diverse or specific, which restricts lexical diversity and stylistic impact. There is also some evidence of a collocation chain with attempts to develop a theme, especially by repetition of terms referring to technology. The occurrences of substitution are not common. An example of a weak one is: a thing would be a good thing; here, substitution would have enhanced variety in style and minimized repetition. There is no nominal and verbal substitution in the essay, implying the lack of developed grammatical integrity. Ellipsis is reduced to a minimum, and any single instance of omitting the subject or the verb is implicit. As an example, in "Same in the case of technology," the ellipse might be able to be deduced, yet it makes the sentence grammatically awkward. It implies that the use of ellipsis as a means of cohesion is not maximised and comprehended as much as it should be.

## **Discussion**

In the evaluation of the academic writing of argumentative essays by aspirants, the elements of continuity and unity upheld in terms of cohesive devices such as reference, lexical cohesion, conjunction, substitution and ellipsis were of paramount observance, as it is very critical to watch. With the assistance of Halliday and Hasan's theory of cohesive devices, it was revealed that the use of reference occurs mainly in written language. These three types of reference were personal, demonstratives and comparative, and they were dominated.

The implication of this research is that it shows a great deal about the cohesive skills of Pakistani ESL university students, which presents an intricate picture of the strengths and weaknesses of these students in terms of writing argumentative essays. The frequency of reference and lexical cohesion found indicates that students can easily achieve participant tracking and maintenance of the theme cohesion with the help of direct repetition of lexical items or pronouns, wherever and demonstratives. This means that there is a basic notion of one stating how to explicitly connect ideas in a piece of writing. There is also the consistent use of conjunctions in demonstrating a capacity to create clear logical associations, sometimes of a restricted scope, especially when it comes to addition and causal associations. The latter strengths, in their turn, highlight that students can generate texts that are, to a certain extent, unified and comprehensible. The much underuse of substitution and ellipsis, however, refers to an area where the students are very weak. Such cohesive devices are paramount in attaining texts' conciseness, lack of repetition, and developing the natural flow of written discourse, and their sophistication. This means that they are not frequently used and result in wordy and, to an extent, repetitive sentences, resulting in a reduction of fluency and readability of the essays. It means that, whereas students can relate the ideas, they tend to do it in a less stylistically sophisticated way, perhaps because they are not conscious of doing it, or they have little practice in the use of these higher grammatical abilities. The doubts relating to ambiguous references as well as incorrect grammar are also definite conversions pointing to the necessity to have a more accurate control over the syntactic structures on which the cohesive ties are based. It implies that the problems do not lie in the presence or absence of cohesive devices, but also in the correctness and efficiency of their use. Such findings align with a previous study of ESL in academic writing. As an example, we can refer to the study conducted by Liardet (2016) who had to examine ideational grammatical metaphor (IGM) and found that texts with better scores at the argumentative level were highly effective at using IGMs to compress possible multiple meanings into nominal groups, which were later employed as anaphoric references to produce Given-New prosody. Conversely, the results of the present research attributed to the poor use of the strategy of substitution and ellipsis indicate that Pakistani ESL learners may be less competent in using these high-level strategies of lexical density and cohesive chaining. The fact that they rely on more direct means of cohesion (reference, direct lexical repetition) can be seen as a feature of a less mature way of writing, which has not yet developed the entire capacity to condense the information or adopt cohesive ties more implicitly than can be used by highly developed writers. This is also a clue to possible minimal exposure or training in such subtleties of cohesive strategies.

Moreover, the identified struggles in the work come in line with Daud et al.'s (2023) broader issues of grammatical cohesion. Exploration of grammatical cohesion in essay writing also revealed the major weaknesses that they (students struggle with in effective cohesive options. Underused substitution/ellipsis, as well as ambiguous use

of pronouns in the presented research, are just examples of the specific problems that fully support the findings of Daud et al. that grammatical cohesion is also one of the stumbling blocks many ESL learners must deal with. Such common results in a variety of contexts point to the necessity to consider specific pedagogical measures beyond simple linking words and aimed at the construction of higher-level vocabulary comprehension and practical use of all spectrums of cohesive devices.

## **Conclusion**

This research aimed to provide a rigorous investigation into the complex techniques through which Pakistani ESL students at university use cohesive devices in their argumentative essays by achieving a dual objective of learning how to create unity in text and excluding most of the challenges that face them in their academic texts. Using strict qualitative textual analysis, based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory by Halliday and Hasan (1976), this study enlightened the prominent tendencies in the cohesion usage by the students at the college. Across the board, the results showed that there was a heavy use of reference and lexical cohesion as the main tools of creating coherence and flow of ideas in their essays. The active use of such devices was involved in advancing the topic continuation and textual unitary base to a certain degree of sufficient foundation. Conjunctions were also in wide use and played their perfect role in structuring the logical sequences between the sentences and paragraphs, thereby fostering the structure of the whole arguments presented. But, in the analysis, a significant lack of utilization of substitution and ellipsis was also demonstrated. Such a gap in the overall cohesive repertoire of the students often led to the repetitiveness of the phrasing and the general lack of conciseness, which only hurt the overall stylistic quality of the writing and fluency thereof. Moreover, the paper has found examples of elliptical use of pronouns and other such grammatical errors that, at times, made their discourse in argument a little inaccessible and unclear. Such concerns indicate that the students have acquired a basic idea of certain cohesive norms, but they have not been advanced in their courses to achieve supremacy in academic writings. The meaning of these results is multilevel, which is directed to certain levels where the pedagogical interventions can be most successful. It is quite obvious and urgent to incorporate specific teaching on the use of cohesive devices efficiently and effectively, and especially on the substitution and ellipsis into the ESL writing programs. To guarantee that students have mastered a larger set of coherent strategies, teachers will also have to do more than just expose them to these concepts and should offer more time on various guided practice, allowing students to internalize them, thus being able to skillfully apply a more extensive set of coherent strategies. Moreover, it is quite necessary to teach the principles of distinguishing between attributes, as well as clean up any grammatical errors, to bring the quality and persuasiveness of their argumentative essays up to a higher level. Incorporating strategy to overcome these particular language and structural deficiencies, the educational approach can be adjusted to promote a more fluent, clear, and more polished performance of Pakistani ESL students in their writing. Not only would this improve their instant writing performance, but also, inculcate in the students important skills needed to survive in future academic and professional life.

## **Implications**

The implication of the findings is twofold in that it identifies critical areas where pedagogical intervention can be efficient. There is an urgent need to implement specific recording on how to use cohesive devices assertively and diversely, especially focusing

on substitution as well as ellipsis in ESL writing coursework. Instead of teaching these concepts only, teachers ought to ensure that they include more guided practice to help learners absorb and master a wider variety of consistent strategies that they can later on masterfully use. In addition, instruction on disambiguation of references and improving grammatical accuracy is necessary in order to improve the overall quality of argument sequence and persuasiveness in their argumentative essays. Through the identification of these particular areas of strength and weakness at the linguistic and structural level, the means of improving fluency, clarity, and sophistication of the academic writing of Pakistani ESL learners can be adjusted accordingly. Not only would this improve their actual writing ability, but it would also give them essential skills in their future academic and employability prospects.

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