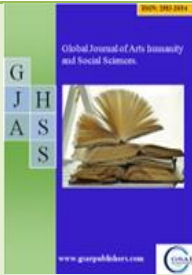
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The Effectiveness of Teaching Conjunctions on the Cohesion of EFL Students' Writing: A Case Study at Nguyen Binh Khiem High School in Quang Nam Province

BY

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Abstract

A well-crafted piece of writing is not only grammatically accurate but also cohesive and coherent. Conjunctions play a crucial role in ensuring text cohesion and should be emphasized in writing courses. This study examines how conjunctions contribute to cohesive and coherent writing and their effect on the written output of EFL students. Initially, 62 students' attitudes toward learning and using conjunctions were evaluated through a questionnaire, which highlighted their awareness of the importance of conjunctions and their eagerness to learn. The main objective was to determine whether teaching conjunctions would improve students' ability to write cohesive texts. Using a pre-and post-test design with 50 students from Nguyen Binh Khiem High School in Quang Nam Province, the research found that conjunction use improved, along with higher mean scores, following the instruction. The findings provide recommendations for teaching conjunctions and suggest further exploration of cohesion elements in language education.

Keywords: writing composition, conjunctions; EFL students

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Introduction

Cohesion plays a critical role in the effectiveness of written communication, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where students often struggle with structuring their writing coherently. Conjunctions, as cohesive devices, are essential in linking ideas and ensuring a logical flow within and between sentences. Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework on cohesion has long highlighted the importance of conjunctions in maintaining textual coherence. However, many EFL learners misuse or underuse conjunctions, leading to disjointed writing that fails to convey ideas effectively (Granger & Tyson, 1996).

Recent studies have shown that explicit instruction in conjunction use can significantly improve the cohesion of EFL students' compositions. For example, a study by Alawerdy and Alalwi (2022) demonstrated that Saudi university students who received focused teaching on conjunctions as cohesive devices produced more coherent and logically organized paragraphs. Similarly, corpus-based studies in different EFL settings have reinforced the positive impact of teaching conjunctions on students' writing (Liu,

2021; Hassoon, 2023). This research paper aims to investigate further the effects of teaching conjunctions on the cohesion of EFL students' compositions, contributing to the understanding of how targeted instruction can enhance writing proficiency in foreign language learners.

Literature Review

The teaching of conjunctions as a cohesive device has gained attention in recent years as a way to improve the writing skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Cohesion, defined by Halliday and Hasan (1976), refers to the grammatical and lexical relationships within a text that link sentences and ideas together, thus providing a smooth reading experience. Conjunctions are a key element of cohesion, helping to connect clauses, sentences, and paragraphs logically. This literature review explores recent research on the role of teaching conjunctions in enhancing the cohesion of EFL students' compositions.

Conjunctions and Cohesion in EFL Writing

Conjunctions play a pivotal role in achieving textual cohesion by linking ideas and creating logical connections. Halliday and Hasan



(1976) categorized conjunctions into four types: additive, adversative, causal, and temporal, each serving to indicate different types of relationships between ideas. EFL students, particularly those from non-English-speaking backgrounds, often struggle to use conjunctions effectively, leading to incoherent writing. Granger and Tyson's (1996) seminal study highlighted that non-native speakers frequently misuse or underuse conjunctions, which can disrupt the flow of writing. They found that EFL learners tend to overuse basic conjunctions like "and" or "but" while avoiding more complex connectors, resulting in writing that lacks sophistication.

Teaching Conjunctions in EFL Contexts

A number of recent studies have demonstrated the positive impact of teaching conjunctions on improving the cohesion in EFL students' writing. For instance, Alawerdy and Alalwi (2022) conducted an experimental study with Saudi university students and found that those who received explicit instruction on the use of conjunctions produced more coherent and logically structured essays than those who did not receive such instruction. The study concluded that teaching conjunctions directly improved students' understanding of how to link ideas effectively, enhancing the overall cohesion of their compositions.

Similarly, Liu (2021) conducted a corpus-based study comparing the use of conjunctions in argumentative essays written by Chinese EFL students and native English speakers. The findings revealed that Chinese students often over-relied on additive conjunctions and failed to use more complex causal and adversative conjunctions, which contributed to less cohesive writing. Liu suggests that targeted teaching of conjunction types could significantly enhance EFL learners' ability to produce more cohesive texts.

Hassoon (2023) explored the effects of teaching conjunctions in an Iraqi EFL classroom, specifically focusing on media students. The study found that students who were taught conjunctions in a contextualized and interactive manner demonstrated significant improvements in both the quantity and quality of their conjunction use. This led to more logically organized and cohesive compositions, particularly in argumentative writing tasks.

Conjunctions and Cohesion Across Cultures

Cultural and linguistic backgrounds can also influence how EFL students use conjunctions. Research by Liu (2021) and Hassoon (2023) underscores the importance of understanding how students' native languages influence their use of conjunctions in English. For example, Liu found that Chinese students often transferred patterns from their native language, resulting in overuse of certain conjunctions. This phenomenon of L1 transfer highlights the need for culturally sensitive teaching approaches when instructing EFL learners on cohesion.

A corpus-based study by Özçelik (2023) further supported these findings by comparing Turkish EFL learners' use of conjunctions with native English speakers. The results indicated that Turkish students relied heavily on a narrow set of conjunctions, which

limited the variety and complexity of their writing. Özçelik recommends that teaching strategies should focus not only on the form but also on the function and nuance of different conjunctions in order to improve overall writing quality.

Research Methodology

To investigate students' perspectives on learning and using conjunctions in writing, the researcher adopted a descriptive research method, employing a questionnaire to collect detailed information on students' attitudes, challenges, and expectations. A quasi-experimental quantitative design was used to assess the relationship between teaching conjunctions and the coherence of students' writing. This method allows for testing causal relationships by manipulating the use of conjunctions (independent variable) and evaluating their effect on composition cohesion (dependent variable).

The study took place at Nguyen Binh Khiem High School in Tam Ky City, Quang Nam Province. The school, a public institution, follows the high school English curriculum set by the Ministry of Education.

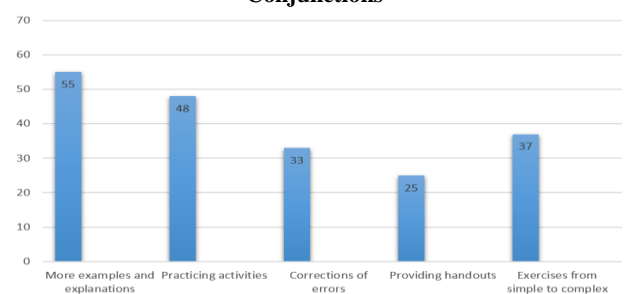
The research involved 62 grade 12 students across four classes (12A1 to 12A4) who participated in the questionnaire to assess their attitudes toward learning conjunctions and writing. For the experimental part, 50 intermediate-level students from two of the researcher's classes were selected via convenience sampling. These students were randomly assigned to either a control group (CG) or an experimental group (EG). The researcher provided instruction on conjunctions to the experimental group, and a pretest indicated no significant difference in performance between the two groups before the intervention.

Findings and Results

Students' Recommendations for Teaching Conjunctions

Regarding specific suggestions for teaching conjunctions, students offered a range of recommendations. The following summarizes the responses gathered:

Figure 1.1 Students' Recommendations for Teaching Conjunctions



As shown in Figure 1.1, students expressed a strong desire for more examples and explanations when learning conjunctions. The majority (55 out of 62) highlighted the need for clear and straightforward examples to better understand the distinctions between conjunctions and how to use them correctly. They also asked for practical strategies for identifying and applying

conjunctions, suggesting that explanations in Vietnamese could enhance their understanding.

Beyond thorough explanations, 37 students preferred interactive practice activities. They recommended including games in exercises to make the learning process more enjoyable and motivating. Additionally, 33 students emphasized the value of teachers pointing out common errors during corrections, as this would help them learn from their mistakes and prevent repetition.

Another suggestion from 37 students was to organize grammatical exercises in a progressive manner, starting with simpler sentence-level tasks and gradually advancing to paragraph and composition exercises. Finally, 25 students proposed that teachers provide handouts summarizing key points and notes from each lesson, offering a helpful resource for review and reinforcement.

The students’ results of the pretest

The pretests were designed to evaluate the English proficiency and conjunction usage in writing for both the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG), serving as a baseline for comparison with the posttests. Conjunction density was measured by dividing the number of correctly used conjunctions by the total number of T-units in each composition. To compare the conjunction density between the two groups, an Independent Samples Test was performed. The null hypothesis (H0) stated that the median conjunction density between the two groups was not significantly different. The descriptive statistics for the pretest results of both groups are presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Descriptive statistics of the two groups Pretest

		EG	CG
N	Valid	25	25
	Missing	0	0
Mean		0.66	0.66
Std. Error of Mean		0.05	0.04
Std. Deviation		0.27	0.22
Minimum		0.32	0.32
Maximum		1.44	1.08
Sum		16.84	16.40

In table 1.1, the mean of the two groups was the same, which enabled the conclusion that the average density conjunctions of the two groups was equivalent. Additionally, their standard deviations and standard error of mean were also not much different. This also indicated that there was no single group whose density of conjunctions was more bunched or more scattered about its mean.

Table 1.2 Independent Sample test for the two groups pretest

	TEST
Sig. of Levene’s test for Equality of Variances	0.46
Sig. (2-tailed) of T-test for Equality of Means	0.79

In Table 1.2, the p-value from Levene’s test was 0.46, which exceeded the 0.05 threshold, allowing for the assumption of equal variances. Subsequently, the 2-tailed p-value from the T-test was 0.79, also greater than 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis (H0) was accepted, indicating no significant difference in conjunction density between the control group (CG) and the experimental group (EG).

In summary, the Independent Samples Test was used to compare the conjunction density in the pretests of both groups. The results showed no significant difference in conjunction usage between the two groups, confirming their homogeneity prior to the intervention.

The analysis of the pretests for both groups confirmed their homogeneity. The results indicated that both the control group (CG) and the experimental group (EG) exhibited similar levels of conjunction usage in English writing. This implies that any subsequent improvement in conjunction use in either group can be attributed solely to the experimental teaching methods applied by the researcher.

The students’ results of the posttest

After establishing that the levels of conjunction usage in English writing were comparable between the two groups, only the experimental group (EG) received targeted instruction and review on conjunctions. Following this, both groups completed the posttests. The researcher utilized Independent Samples Tests to compare the conjunction density between the control group (CG) and the experimental group (EG) in the posttest, with the null hypothesis (H0) positing that the medians of the two groups were similar. Descriptive statistics for the posttest results can be found in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 Descriptive statistics of the two groups’ Posttest

		EG	CG
N	Valid	25	25
	Missing	0	0
Mean		0.79	0.65
Std. Error of Mean		0.04	0.04
Std. Deviation		0.21	0.22
Minimum		0.35	0.33
Maximum		1.33	1.007
Sum		19.99	16.22

Table 1.3 illustrates that the mean conjunction usage was greater in the experimental group (EG) at 0.79, compared to 0.65 in the control group (CG). The EG also demonstrated higher minimum and maximum values, with a notable difference in the total number of conjunctions used—19.99 for the EG versus 16.22 for the CG. Furthermore, the control group's standard deviation was higher than that of the experimental group, suggesting greater variability in conjunction usage among the CG compared to the EG.

Table 1.4 The Independent Sample test for the two groups' posttest

	TEST
Sig. of Levene's test for Equality of Variances	0.75
Sig. (2-tailed) of T-test for Equality of Means	0.03

Table 1.4 indicates that Levene's test for equality of variances yielded a significance (Sig.) value of 0.70, which is greater than the p-value of 0.05, confirming that the assumption of equal variances was satisfied. The two-tailed significance (Sig.) from the T-test was 0.03, which is less than the p-value of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis of median equivalence was rejected, revealing a significant difference in the median conjunction density between the control group (CG) and the experimental group (EG). This finding suggests that the treatment had a positive impact on the EG's use of conjunctions in their English writing compositions.

This section aimed to analyze and compare the post-test performances of the two groups. The results confirmed that the experimental group (EG), after receiving the treatment, outperformed the control group (CG) in their use of conjunctions in compositions. Initially, both groups were homogeneous regarding their background, English proficiency, and ability to use conjunctions. Given that the experimental teaching was the sole variable influencing the EG, it can be concluded that this treatment was the primary factor contributing to the EG's enhanced use of conjunctions.

The EG's results of the pretest and posttest

In this section, the researcher assessed and validated the progress in conjunction usage in English writing within the experimental group (EG) by analyzing their pretest and posttest results. The EG consisted of 25 students, resulting in 25 pretests and 25 post-tests being completed. The Shapiro-Wilk tests confirmed that the data followed a normal distribution. As a result, parametric tests, specifically Paired Samples T-tests, were employed to evaluate the density of conjunctions before and after the treatment. The null hypothesis (H0) posited that the medians of the pretest and posttest results were equivalent. Descriptive statistics for the EG's pretests and posttests are presented in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5 Descriptive statistics of the EG's pretest and posttest

EG	N	Mean	Median	Std.Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Sum
Pretest	25	0.65	0.65	0.27	0.32	1.44	16.83
Posttest	25	0.78	0.75	0.21	0.35	1.33	19.98

In Table 1.5, the experimental group (EG) showed significant improvement in its mean conjunction usage, increasing from 0.65 in the pretest to 0.78 in the posttest. The minimum and maximum values between the two tests also differed. Additionally, Table 1.4 revealed a change in the EG's median, which rose from 0.66 in the pretest to 0.75 in the posttest, reflecting an increase of nearly one point after the treatment. Furthermore, the total number of conjunctions used by the EG increased substantially from 16.83 to 19.98.

Overall, this section aimed to investigate, compare, and explain the differences in the EG's performance in using conjunctions before and after the intervention. The students in the EG demonstrated improved ability to use conjunctions appropriately, as evidenced by the increase in their conjunction density.

The CG's results of the pretest and posttest

In this part, the results of the pretest and posttest achieved by the students in the CG were taken into consideration for any possible progress without the treatment. A number of 25 pretests and 25 posttests were investigated. Due to the normality of the data, the researcher utilized the Paired Samples T-tests to check the equality of the medians. Then, H0 was stated that the medians of the two variables were similar. The descriptive statistics of the CG's pretests and posttests was presented in Table 1.6.

Table 1.6 Descriptive Statistics of the CG's pretests and posttests

CG	N	Mean	Median	Std.Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Sum
Pretest	25	0.65	0.70	0.22	0.32	1.007	16.39
Posttest	25	0.63	0.62	0.21	0.33	1.007	16.20

As outlined in Table 1.6, the control group (CG) showed a slight increase in the minimum conjunction density, rising from 0.32 in the pretest to 0.33 in the posttest, while the maximum value remained constant at 1.007. In contrast, other metrics displayed a slight decline. The mean conjunction density dropped marginally from 0.65 to 0.63, and the median decreased from 0.70 to 0.62. Similarly, both the standard deviation and the total sum decreased slightly, from 0.22 to 0.21 and from 16.39 to 16.20 respectively.

Discussion

The questionnaire results revealed that while most students acknowledged the importance of writing skills, they faced several challenges. They reported limited instruction on writing in high school, insufficient practice time, and that many writing tasks did not effectively enhance their composition skills.

Regarding conjunctions, most students understood their function but some remained unclear about what conjunctions are. Although students recognized the importance of conjunctions in writing and did not consider them particularly difficult, they felt their

instruction was insufficient and often fragmented, resulting in an incomplete understanding.

These findings are consistent with previous studies (Uzun, 2018; Martínez, 2015; Kondal & Bairi, 2016; Purba & Pulungan, 2017), which suggest that while students generally find learning conjunctions manageable, instruction often leads to overuse, misuse, or illogical application. Moreover, many students approach writing with less emphasis on coherence and cohesion, focusing more on expression and memorization than on creating smooth, concise writing.

In contrast to earlier research, this study found that students ranked temporal conjunctions as the most challenging, a departure from previous studies where this type was not identified as particularly difficult. The questionnaire also gathered student suggestions for improving conjunction and writing instruction, offering valuable insights for educators aiming to better address students' needs.

The pre-and post-test results indicated a strong correlation between explicit instruction on conjunctions and improved application in students' writing. This suggests that direct teaching of conjunctions can significantly enhance students' ability to connect sentences and paragraphs, improving composition coherence.

These findings align with prior research (Tran, 2007; Tahsildar & Yusoff, 2018; Uzun, 2018; Martínez, 2015), all of which highlight the positive impact of conjunction instruction on language accuracy and writing cohesion. The quantitative analyses in these studies affirm a substantial link between conjunction density and text coherence.

However, research on the effect of conjunction instruction on writing skills in Vietnamese high schools remains limited. This thesis, along with Tran's (2007) work, contributes important insights, advocating for better-designed teaching practices for conjunctions in Vietnam's high school education system.

Conclusion

The responses from the student questionnaire provided a detailed overview of their backgrounds, including age, gender, and English proficiency. Despite being in grade 12 and having studied English for 10-12 years, many students still struggled with writing cohesive texts. This underscores the need for targeted support to improve their writing skills.

Most students recognized the importance of conjunctions in creating cohesive compositions and agreed that understanding conjunctions could enhance their ability to link sentences, paragraphs, and essays effectively. However, some students remained unsure about the concepts of "conjunctions" and "cohesion" and did not prioritize coherence in their writing. They tended to focus more on expressing ideas rather than ensuring smooth, concise writing. This points to the need for more detailed instruction and opportunities for practice both inside and outside the classroom.

Students also provided meaningful and creative suggestions to improve the teaching of writing and conjunctions, offering

recommendations that spanned various aspects of the teaching process, from engagement to post-lesson activities.

In summary, the study highlights the importance of teaching conjunctions, which are often overlooked but essential for improving writing skills. By emphasizing conjunctions, students can further develop their writing abilities and apply this knowledge in future practice.

The Effectiveness of Teaching Conjunctions on the Cohesion of EFL Students' Writing

The intervention benefited the experimental group (EG) in several ways. Students became more aware of the role of conjunctions in writing and learned how to use them effectively. They gained a clear understanding of different types of conjunctions and recognized their importance in creating cohesive texts. Additionally, students developed the habit of using conjunctions to connect their ideas more fluidly.

In terms of conjunction usage, the explicit instruction helped students acquire a detailed understanding of conjunction functions and distinguish between similar conjunctions. They became more proficient in using conjunctions appropriately and flexibly, with a noticeable reduction in misuse. However, there was a tendency among some students to overuse conjunctions.

Overall, the study demonstrates that explicit instruction on conjunctions can significantly enhance writing cohesion, though careful attention should be given to managing the potential for overuse.

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