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Discursive Analysis of the Use of Cohesive Devices in the Written and Spoken Texts of Selected Secondary School Students in Oyo State

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Abstract

Cohesion, the semantic and grammatical interconnectedness of text, plays a fundamental role in effective communication. While previous studies have examined cohesion and its types in students' academic writing, limited attention is given to the contextual appropriateness of cohesive devices in their texts. Most existing studies have focused on identifying and counting cohesive devices rather than analysing whether students use these devices appropriately within specific discourse context or otherwise. This study therefore investigates common cohesive devices in the written and spoken texts of secondary school students, with a focus on their contextual appropriateness and discourse relevance.

Halliday and Hasan's cohesion model served as the study's framework. This study adopted a descriptive research design that combined qualitative and quantitative methods. Data were drawn from students' essays and debates. Thirty students from different schools in a peri-urban area (Iseyin) in Oyo State produced 400-word essays and delivered debate presentations on the same topic, which were audio-recorded and later transcribed. This study reveals that lexical ties emerged as the most prominent cohesive strategy in both written and spoken texts. However, students relied heavily on lexical repetition while underusing other lexical strategies such as synonyms and collocation. Substitution was absent in written texts but appeared in the oral texts, which exhibited a wider range of cohesive devices including ellipsis, reference, conjunctions, and lexical cohesion. Although some students demonstrated effective use of cohesion, others struggled, particularly with referential devices, ambiguous pronouns, and excessive transitional markers. Three discourse functions of cohesion were identified: transitory extension (achieved through additive conjunctions), topicalisation (via lexical ties, deixis, and parallelism), and thematic shift (through adversative conjunctions and

Keywords

Cohesive devices,
Contextual
Appropriateness,
Lexical Ties,
Student-produced
Texts, Transitory
Extension

rhetorical questions). Overall, the students showed good mastery of cohesive devices in written communication than in spoken communication.

1.0 Introduction

Effective communication is a vital skill that enables individuals to express ideas, convey information, and engage in meaningful discourse. The ability to connect ideas seamlessly and maintain a logical flow demonstrates linguistic competence, critical thinking, and effective expression. As ideas build upon one another, transitions and the maintenance of a common thread become essential for coherence, making mastery of cohesion a pivotal component (Ahmad et al., 2019; Diep and Le, 2024). The effective use of cohesive devices is therefore crucial for fluent and meaningful communication in both written and spoken contexts.

Cohesion and coherence serve as foundational pillars in academic and professional writing. Cohesion, on one hand, refers to how ideas are linked at the sentence-to-sentence level through cohesive devices such as reference and transitional markers. Coherence, on the other hand, concerns the overall logical flow and consistency of ideas across an entire text. A coherent piece requires well-organised ideas supported by cohesive devices within and across

paragraphs (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Farida and Arinfin 2020).

The ability to write a clear, logical, and cohesive essay is particularly important for secondary school students. As they advance to higher grade levels, they are increasingly required to produce essays to demonstrate knowledge, present ideas, and construct convincing arguments. Effective use of cohesive devices enhances comprehension by reducing ambiguity and clarifying relationships between ideas (Crossley et al., 2016). When writers intentionally connect ideas, readers expend less effort interpreting meaning. Purposeful use of cohesive devices is therefore essential for crafting comprehensible texts that communicate clearly from sentence to sentence (Kuiken and Vedder, 2017). Secondary school marks a critical stage in learners' cognitive and linguistic development. As students transition toward more advanced academic and professional demands, competence in cohesive device use - both in writing and speaking - should be prioritised.

While cohesion is vital for formal writing, it is equally important in public speaking. Paltridge, (2006) affirms that effective

speeches require a logical flow of ideas similar to coherent written texts. Cohesive language enables speakers to guide listeners through key points, reduce ambiguity, and promote clarity (Crossley et al., 2016). Students are therefore expected to master oral cohesive devices such as transitions, repetition of key terms, referential expressions, and conjunctions.

The present study seeks to investigate the use of cohesive devices in English essays and debates of students and to shed light on the specific challenges that students encounter while striving to produce cohesive and effective written and spoken discourse. It will provide invaluable insight into students' grasp of these critical writing conventions and their ability to compose unified pieces. Moreover, its findings will not only aid better instructions on where and how to improve students' writing and speaking skills but also increase learners' proficiency in communication and other skills vital for their academic and professional success.

1.1 Review of literature

Cohesion is a key concept in text linguistics and discourse analysis, extensively studied since Halliday and Hasan's (1976)

foundational work. The term refers to the lexical and grammatical elements within a text that hold it together semantically and syntactically, create connectivity between words, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs, and contribute to readability and coherence. Decades after Halliday and Hasan defined cohesion, linguists continue to investigate and debate the mechanisms that make a given text cohesive.

A major source of cohesion arises from the semantic ties between words and phrases. Halliday and Hasan (1976) distinguish between grammatical cohesion — reference, ellipsis, substitution, and conjunction — and lexical cohesion, which is created through vocabulary connections. Lexical cohesion occurs when words are semantically related through repetition, synonyms, antonyms, or collocation (Le & Mikolov, 2014). Ituralde (2025) asserts that lexical cohesion is the force binding texts together through patterns of repetition and synonym that form semantic bonds, assisting readers in navigating the text and comprehending author's intention. Beyond lexical links, cohesion depends on grammatical devices that connect clauses and sentences. Halliday and Hasan (1976) identify reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction as key grammatical resources

that establish cohesion, with anaphoric and cataphoric references serving as critical mechanism for linking textual elements across discourse. Studies continue to examine how anaphoric resolution contributes to cohesion and how ambiguity disrupts it (Barnes et al., 2015; Mitkov, 2014). Other studies have explored the cohesive functions of conjunctions, substitution, and ellipsis (Baker, 2012). Collectively, these grammatical and lexical devices interact to strengthen cohesion and contribute to overall coherence.

Scholars argue that cohesion and coherence share an interdependent relationship in which cohesion supports coherence but does not alone determine it (Taboada, 2004; Tanskanen, 2006). Cohesion provides cues that assist readers in forming coherent mental models while background knowledge and inference abilities also contribute significantly. Thus, both written text and spoken forms like dialogues and speeches rely on cohesive devices to build coherence and clearly convey meaning.

In the domain of academic writing, Akindele (2011) examined cohesive devices in two of selected ESL academic conference papers by Nigerian scholars and found that both lexical

and grammatical ties are indispensable for textual unity. In non-academic writing, Choemue and Bram (2021) compared the use of cohesive connectors across 20 academic and 40 non-academic newsletters written by Thai EFL university students. The findings revealed that additive connectors were dominant in both text types. Investigating the prevalence of cohesion types in students' writing, Alotaibi (2015) analysed lexical cohesion in argumentative essays by English literature students and found that over-reliance on same word repetition without variation into synonymy or collocation was associated with lower writing quality. Also, Adonu (2014) investigated conjunction use in Ghanaian secondary school compositions and observed that although students employed logical connectors, their applications were often mechanical rather than contextually appropriate. These findings reveal a critical gap: many studies document the frequency and types of cohesive devices students use but overlook whether these devices are deployed appropriately within specific discourse contexts. In other words, high frequency does not guarantee correct use; inappropriate application can hinder comprehension. This gap highlights the need

to examine not just usage but appropriateness in students' written and spoken texts.

Further, while cohesion in writing has received substantial attention, fewer studies investigate cohesion in oral communication. Akogun (2012) analysed coherence in debate speeches by English majors at a Nigerian university, examining how speakers maintain thematic cohesive ties. Ratnasar (2016) explored cohesive devices in oral presentation by ESL learners, finding that speakers struggled with referential cohesion and often relied on repetition rather than varied cohesive strategies.

The predominance of writing-focused studies creates an imbalance, leaving gaps in understanding students' cohesive competence across communication contexts. Assessing students' use of cohesive devices in both writing and oral discourse, such as debates, will help identify areas needing improvement and strengthen their academic and professional communication skills. This study therefore addresses three specific gaps in literature: the limited attention to contextual appropriateness rather than mere frequency of cohesive device use, the scarcity of research examining cohesion in oral discourse compared to writing, and the

absence of comparative analyses between written and spoken cohesion in the same student population. By investigating cohesive devices in both essays and debates produced by Nigerian secondary school students, this research provides insights into how learners deploy cohesion across modalities and whether their competence transfers between writing and speaking context.

2.0 Methodology

This study used a descriptive research design, deploying both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Iseyin is purposefully selected as research area for this study because it represents a transitional educational context between urban and rural settings. As a peri-urban area, Iseyin has characteristics of both urban development (including access to educational resources) and rural communities. While much educational research in Nigeria has focused on either fully urbanised areas like Ibadan or distinctly rural communities, peri-urban context like Iseyin remain underrepresented. Thus, this study collected data from three purposefully selected secondary schools in Iseyin Local Government Area.

Thirty SS3 (final-year) students participated, with ten drawn from each school via stratified

random sampling to ensure gender balance and varied academic abilities. Each participant produced a 400-word argumentative essay under supervised classroom conditions and delivered a debate presentation on the same topic. Debate sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent, yielding 30 recordings averaging seven minutes each. The essays and transcribed debate texts constitute the primary data.

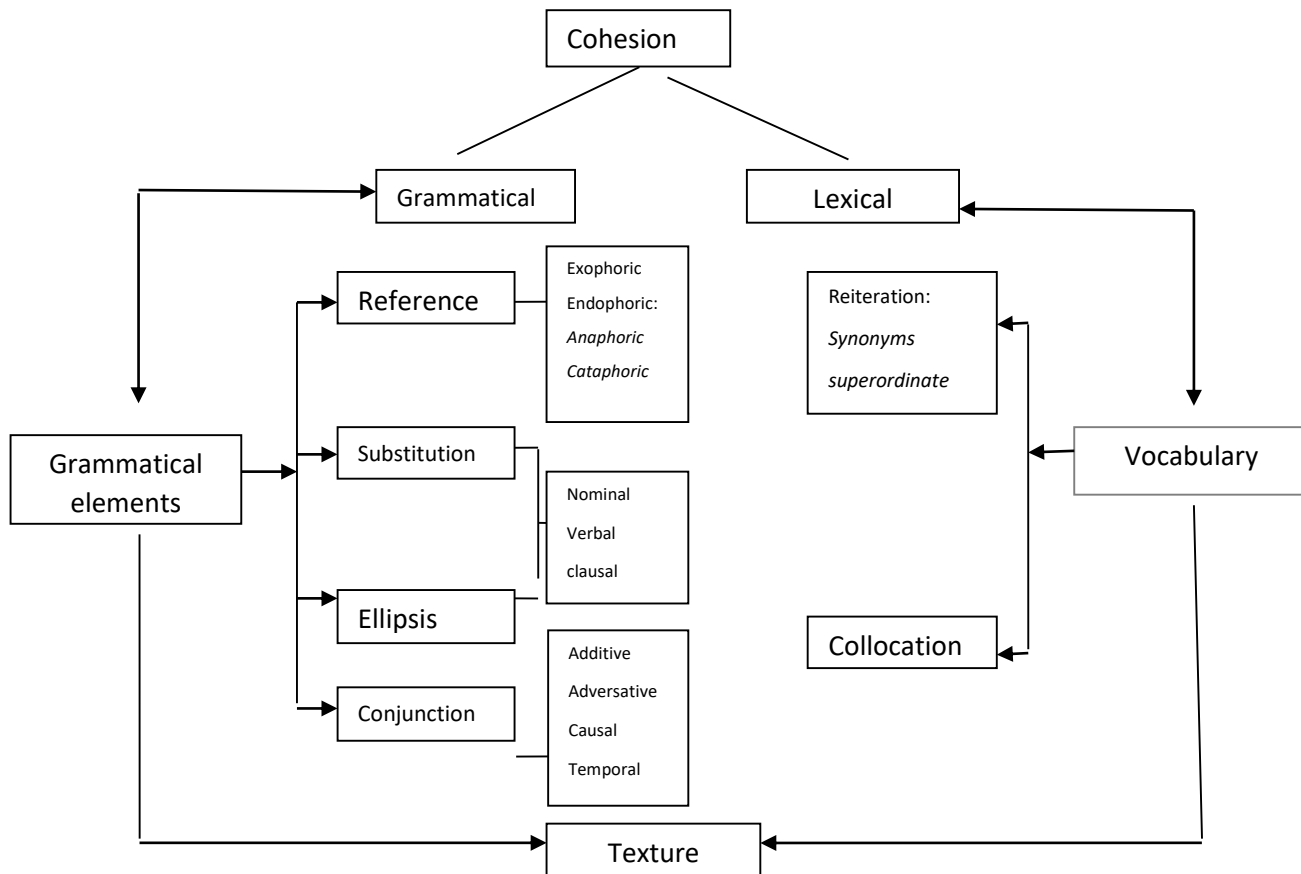
Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion framework guided the analysis. Debate recordings were transcribed verbatim, and all texts were coded for identification. Each text was analysed sentence by sentence to identify instances of the five cohesive device categories. The contextual appropriateness of each device was assessed qualitatively, based on whether it enhanced textual coherence or introduced ambiguity.

3.0 Conceptual Framework: Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion

The framework for this study is Halliday and Hasan's approach to cohesion, which serves as the foundational lens for analysing textual connectedness. Their influential work *Cohesion in English* introduced cohesion as a central concept in systemic functional linguistics, gaining prominence in the 1970s. Halliday and Hasan identified cohesion as a key element of text analysis and distinguished between grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion, a classification that offers a solid analytical structure for examining cohesive devices in students'

written and spoken texts. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), texts achieve coherence through cohesive relationships that link phrases and sentences. Thus, the effectiveness of any text depends on the cohesive mechanisms employed within it. For a group of sentences to form a cohesive text, specific linguistic elements must contribute to its overall coherence. This framework is also grounded in the assumption that language use involves making choices. Writers and speakers select from available linguistic options to construct meaning and produce unified texts. Cohesion analysis highlights how these choices shape coherence.

3.1 Diagrammatic summary of Halliday and Hasan’s cohesion framework



Cohesion can be imagined as a sturdy building, with the roof representing the overall unity that holds every part of a text together. This structure rests on two essential pillars: grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Grammatical devices include reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. Reference uses pronouns, demonstratives, and comparatives to point back to earlier ideas; substitution replaces previously mentioned words or clauses; ellipsis omits repeated elements that can be understood from context; and conjunctions connect words, phrases, and sentences through logical links such as “and,” “but,” and “because.”

The second pillar, lexical cohesion, focuses on vocabulary choices that connect ideas across a text. This is achieved through repetition, synonyms, superordinates, collocations, and related word

patterns that create continuity. Together, grammatical and lexical devices provide the structural support necessary for cohesion and without them, a text would feel fragmented and difficult to follow. This framework therefore presents an ideal conceptual lens for this study; the five ties facilitate robust analysis of students' usage and mastery of cohesive elements in secondary students' English essays and debates.

4.0 Data Analysis and Discussion

This section presents an analysis of the cohesive devices employed by secondary school students in their written essays and oral debates. The analysis focuses on three key areas namely: the common cohesive devices utilised by the students, appropriateness and otherwise of the

cohesive devices in the students' texts, and the discourse relevance of the cohesive devices within the broader contexts of the essays and debates.

4.1 Common cohesive devices used by secondary school students

This section discusses the common cohesive devices used in essays and debates of secondary school students, as categorised in Halliday and Hasan's cohesion framework. The categories of cohesive devices identified are lexical ties, reference, conjunctions and ellipsis. The density of cohesive devices identified in the students' essays and speeches is presented (in Tables 1 and 2) and discussed afterwards. Each essay and debate is coded (with "E" for essays and "D" for debates) for specific identification and reference.

Table 1A: Categories of Cohesive Devices in Students' Essays

Essay	Reference (%)	Substitution (%)	Ellipsis (%)	Conjunction (%)	Lexical (%)	Total number of cohesive devices
E1	7 (39.1)	0	0	5 (28.1)	6 (33.3)	18
E2	5 (14.3)	0	0	4 (11.4)	26 (74.3)	35
E3	7 (18.4)	0	0	1 (2.6)	30 (79.0)	38
E4	6 (22.2)	0	0	3 (11.1)	18 (67.1)	27
E5	5 (14.1)	0	0	3 (8.3)	28 (78.1)	36
E6	2 (11.1)	0	0	5 (28.1)	11 (61.1)	18
E7	4 (17.4)	0	0	7 (30.4)	12 (52.2)	23
E8	8 (22.0)	0	1 (2.7)	8 (22.0)	20 (54.1)	37
E9	5 (21.0)	0	0	6 (25)	13 (54.1)	24
E10	7 (21.2)	0	0	8 (24.2)	18 (54.5)	33
E11	8 (22.2)	0	0	8 (22.2)	20 (56.1)	36
E12	5 (21.3)	0	0	6 (25)	13 (54.2)	24
E13	5 (21.3)	0	0	5 (21.3)	14 (58.3)	24
E14	3 (10)	0	0	4 (13.3)	23 (77.1)	30
E15	4 (17.4)	0	0	7 (30.4)	12 (52.2)	23
E16	2 (12.2)	0	0	5 (29.4)	10 (59.1)	17
E17	5 (19.2)	0	0	4 (15.4)	17 (65.4)	26
E18	4 (15.1)	0	1 (4.1)	6 (22.2)	16 (59.3)	27

E19	2 (11.1)	0	0	2 (11.1)	14 (78.1)	18
E20	6 (35.3)	0	0	3 (18.1)	8 (47.1)	18
E21	4 (44.4)	0	0	2 (22.2)	3 (33.3)	9
E22	8 (44.4)	0	0	2 (11.1)	8 (44.4)	18
E23	6 (16.1)	0	0	3 (8.1)	29 (76.3)	38
E24	7 (21.1)	0	1 (3.1)	8 (24.3)	18 (53.1)	34
E25	7 (20)	0	0	8 (23.1)	20 (57.1)	35
E26	4 (44.4)	0	0	2 (22.2)	3 (33.3)	9
E27	4 (14.3)	0	0	5 (17.1)	19 (68.1)	28
E28	5 (21.3)	0	0	5 (21.3)	14(58.3)	24
E29	5 (21.3)	0	0	3 (12)	16 (67.1)	24
E30	7 (21.2)	0	0	8 (24.2)	18 (55.1)	33
Overall Total	157 (21.1%)	0 (0%)	3 (0.4%)	146 (19.4%)	477 (59.4%)	753

Table 1B: Percentages of Cohesive Devices Used by Participants

Cohesive devices Category	1 – 49%	50-100 %	Total number of participants
Lexical	5 participant	25 participants	30
Reference	30	0	30
Conjunction	30	0	30
Ellipsis	3	0	3
Substitution	0	0	0

Table 2A: Categories of Cohesive Devices in Students' Speeches

Debate	Reference %	Substitution %	Ellipsis %	Conjunction %	Lexical %	Total number of cohesive devices
D1	5 (25)	0	2 (10)	4 (20)	11 (55)	20
D2	7 (21.1)	1 (3.4)	0	7 (21.1)	19 (56.1)	34
D3	5 (19.2)	1 (4.4)	1 (4.4)	7 (27.2)	12 (46.2)	26

D4	7 (30.4)	0	0	6 (26.1)	10 (44.0)	23
D5	6 (19.3)	0	3 (10.1)	8 (26.1)	14 (45.1)	31
D6	5 (19.2)	2 (8.1)	1 (4.4)	6 (23.1)	12 (46.2)	26
D7	5 (17.2)	0	0	3 (10.3)	21 (72.4)	29
D8	8 (23.1)	2 (6.1)	2 (6.1)	5 (14.3)	18 (51.4)	35
D9	5 (29.4)	0	0	4 (24.3)	8 (47.1)	17
D10	6 (27.3)	0	0	6 (27.2)	10 (46.1)	22
D11	5 (19.2)	0	0	7 (27.1)	14 (54.1)	26
D12	3 (15)	1 (5)	0	5 (25)	11 (55)	20
D13	8 (27.1)	0	0	6 (20)	16(53.3)	30
D14	7(24.1)	0	2 (7.1)	7(24.1)	13(45.1)	29
D15	5 (24.1)	0	1 (5.1)	4(19.1)	11 (52.4)	21
D16	4 (21.1)	0	0	5 (26.3)	10 (53)	19
D17	6 (21.4)	2 (7.1)	1 (4.1)	4 (14.3)	15 (54.1)	28
D18	8 (21)	0	1 (3.1)	6 (19.1)	17 (53.1)	32
D19	3 (12.1)	0	0	6 (25)	15 (63)	24
D20	5 (16.1)	0	0	7 (23.1)	19 (61.3)	31
D21	8(32.1)	1 (4.1)	0	3 (11.1)	14 (54.1)	26
D22	8 (18.1)	0	0	8 (23.1)	20 (59.2)	34
D23	4 (14.3)	2 (7.1)	0	5 (18.1)	17 (61.1)	28
D24	4 (17.4)	0	0	5 (22.4)	14 (61.1)	23
D25	7 (23.1)	1 (3.2)	0	6 (19.4)	17 (55.1)	31
D26	6 (23.1)	0	0	5 (19.2)	15 (58.1)	26
D27	7 (26.1)	0	0	4 (15.1)	16 (59.3)	27
D28	8 (22.2)	0	0	8 (22.2)	20 (56.1)	36
D29	7 (21.1)	0	1 (3.4)	7 (21.1)	19 (56.1)	34
D30	5 (21.3)	0	0	6 (25)	13 (54.)	24
Overall Total	177 (22.1%)	13 (2.1%)	15 (2.4%)	170 (21.3%)	441 (50.4%)	

Table 2B: Percentages of Cohesive Devices Used by Participants

Cohesive devices Category	1 – 49%	50-100 %	Total number of Participants
Lexical	7 participants	23 participants	30
Reference	30 participants	0	30
Conjunction	30 participants	0	30
Substitution	9 participants	0	9
Ellipsis	10 participants	0	10

The results presented in the tables show clear variation in how students employ cohesive strategies in written and spoken communication. The Table 1A breaks down the use of cohesive devices in the students' written essays. Reference appeared 157 times across all participants while substitution recorded no usage resulting in a total of zero instances. Ellipsis was used minimally as it appeared only three times. Conjunction was one of the most frequently applied cohesive devices, with 146 instances across all written texts. Lexical ties, however, were the most dominant, accounting for 59.4% of all cohesive devices identified in the essays, indicating a heavy reliance on this strategy for creating connectivity.

Table 1B further examines these devices by categorizing participants based on density of use. Most participants (25 out of 30) fell within the high-usage range of 50–100% for lexical cohesion and this demonstrate a strong dependence on lexical ties. In contrast, ellipsis was scarcely used, with only three participants appearing in the 0–49% category and the remaining 27 not using ellipsis. Substitution was completely absent, with no participant recording any usage in either density category.

Tables 2A and 2B present cohesive device use in the participants' debate presentations. The data shows substantial variation in the distribution of cohesive devices among the 30 speakers. Lexical ties once again emerged as the most frequently used devices, with a total of 441 instances, suggesting that participants had considerable awareness of using lexical cohesion to maintain coherence in oral communication. Reference and conjunction were also widely used with cumulative totals of 177 and 170 instances respectively. However, ellipsis and substitution remained limited in spoken discourse as well. Ellipsis appeared only 15 times while substitution was used merely 13 times across all participants. This indicates restricted competence in applying these two devices during oral presentations.

4.2 Appropriateness and otherwise of cohesive devices in students' texts

This section focuses on contextual appropriateness and/or inappropriate use of cohesive devices in essays and debate speeches of secondary school students. Findings from this study reveal some common challenges students face in using cohesive devices effectively in varying written and spoken domains.

4.2.1 Appropriateness of cohesive devices in written essays

This section examines the contextual appropriateness of cohesive devices in written and spoken texts of the students. The analysis reveals that most of the students have a good mastery of cohesive devices in their texts, especially lexical cohesion, reference and transition words/phrases.

Excerpt 1

*Social media has had... positive impacts on youths today. **For one**, it has allowed **them** to stay connect..., keeping relationships with other people in long distances. **In addition**, social media provides educational benefits...*

In the excerpt above, the student employed cohesive devices such as reference and transitional words appropriately in several instances. For example, words such as “*it*” and “*them*” clearly refer back to the initial subject “*Social media*” and “*youths*” introduced in the opening line. Using these referential words allows the writer to avoid repetitive re-mentioning of the key term and establishes coherence across paragraph. Additionally, transitional phrases like “*For one*,” and “*In addition*” connect ideas

logically, signaling to the reader how one detail builds upon another. Repetition of crucial nouns like “*social media*” and “*use/usage*” also ties the different thoughts together through lexical chains.

Excerpt 2

*“I stand here today to argue that... **Firstly**... [pause]... to clarify, by youth **I** mean teenagers.... **In the first instance**, social media have caused...*

Additionally, exposure to fake standards...

The excerpt above is another instance that showcases an effective application of cohesive devices in the students’ oral texts. Referential words like “*I*” and other pronouns, clearly denote the speaker’s voice throughout the text. Transitional phrases additionally connect central ideas in a structured flow, with “*Firstly*” indicating the opening argument and markers like “*In the first instance*” and “*Additionally*” sequencing the key claims about social media’s impacts.

4.2.2 Inappropriate use of cohesive devices in students’ texts

While the analysis in the prior section reveals the appropriateness of cohesive devices in the students’ texts, there are also some instances

of inappropriate usage of these devices. Thus, this section examines the wrong use of cohesive devices in the texts of the students. The three categories identified are incorrect use of referential devices, ambiguous pronouns and overabundance of transition words/phrases. The excerpts below are instances of incorrect use of reference devices.

Excerpt 3

*Youths of nowadays are now scammers **which** make use of social media to target innocent people...So in summary...*

The excerpt above demonstrates an inappropriate use of reference as analysed in D12. As observed above, the reference “**which**” in the excerpt does not index the referent. The referent requires a description of +human feature. Hence, “**who**” would have been the appropriate reference in this context.

Excerpt 4

*Social media have exposed most young people to many ungodly acts because the majority of **this platform** are filled with bad and corrupt contents...*

The use of “**this platform**” in the excerpt above lacks a clear referent. The deictic expression is intended to refer back to the previously mentioned “**social media**”. However, the use of the singular demonstrative “**this**” is inappropriate because “**social media**” is a plural noun which requires a plural demonstrative “**these**”. Therefore, the appropriate way to refer back to “**social media**” would be “**these platforms**”.

Apart from the cases of incorrect use of referential devices, other notable inappropriate use of cohesive device is ambiguous use of pronouns without clear referents. The following excerpts are some of the instances.

Excerpt 5

*“When most **Nigerian parents** complain about how **their children** use social media, **they** are always harsh and rude”*

The excerpt above lacks clarity because of the ambiguous use of the pronoun “**they**.” In the sentence, “**they**” could refer either to the Nigerian parents or to their children, making it difficult for the reader to determine who is being described as “**harsh and rude**.” This

ambiguity disrupts the intended meaning and creates confusion.

If the writer intends to describe Nigerian parents as harsh and rude when complaining about their children's use of social media, the sentence should be rewritten as: "*When most Nigerian parents complain about how their children use social media, they [the parents] are always harsh and rude.*" This version clearly identifies the parents as the referent.

Conversely, if the intended meaning is that the children are the ones who react harshly and rudely to their parents' complaints, the sentence should be revised as: "*When most Nigerian parents complain about how their children use social media, they [the children] are always harsh and rude in their response.*" This clarification removes any uncertainty about the pronoun's reference. Ultimately, the absence of a clear referent for "*they*" forces the reader to guess the intended meaning. Such ambiguity can lead to misinterpretation and weaken the coherence of the text.

4.3 Discourse relevance of cohesive devices in students' texts

Cohesive devices are essential elements that serve crucial function of connecting ideas

and maintaining the flow of information for the reader. In addition to aiding in coherence, these devices also play a significant role in performing specific functions within a text. This section, therefore, focuses on the discourse relevance of cohesive devices utilised in written and spoken texts of the participants. The attention is on how these devices contribute to the discourse functions of transitory extension, topicalisation and thematic shift.

4.3.1 Transitory extension

Transitory extension involves temporarily moving away from the main topic to provide additional information or details, before reconnecting back to the primary line of discussion (Sanders and Spooren, 2015). The term is an important discourse function served by certain cohesive devices in written and spoken communication. The skilled use of transitory signals is key to guiding the reader's comprehension effectively (Crossley et al., 2016). However, if transitory extensions are overused or misused, they can actually make the discourse more confusing by suggesting connections that aren't really there.

As noted in the excerpt below, the students demonstrate a good mastery of this discourse

strategy to extend and support information earlier stated in their writings and speeches without interrupting the overall flow and coherence.

Excerpt 6

*... The excessive use of social media...to **poor academic performance**. Students mostly find themselves distracted...on their studies. **Additionally**, the constant exposure to **fake standard of living**a sense of distraction and **low self esteem**.*

***Furthermore**, the addicted nature of...physically inactive and...issues...*

In this excerpt, the word “**additionally**” is employed to introduce an extension or additional aspect related to the negative impact of social media on Nigerian youths. Specifically, it transitions from discussing poor academic performance to elaborating on the potential psychological effects, such as “**self-esteem**”. The use of the additive conjunction helps the writer to signal a transitory extension, adding to the existing line of thought without shifting to a completely new theme. Similarly, the cohesive device “**Furthermore**” is used to transition to another related negative impact – physically inactive and potential health issues. This device indicates a further

extension or elaboration of the current theme, allowing the writer to gradually build upon the discussion of social media’s detrimental effects. These devices therefore contribute to the coherence and flow of the discourse by maintaining thematic continuity while adding to the existing thought.

Excerpt 7

*My dear listeners, social media have been criticized for...**unrealistic beauty** among Nigerian ladies. The constant exposure...with physical appearance. **Also**, the presence of social media influencers...marketing this kind of content...to **dissatisfaction** with one’s own body*

The transition word “**Also**” used by speaker in the excerpt above signals an additional point relates to the theme of **unrealistic beauty** promoted on social media. It extends the discussion to include the influence of the social media influencers marketing this kind of content, which can eventually lead to body **dissatisfaction**.

While the students attempt to employ transitory extension devices, their misuse and overuse result in a disjointed and incoherent discourse, failing to maintain a clear and

coherent flow of ideas as shown in the excerpts below.

Excerpt 8

*Social media have...important part of modern life especially...**Furthermore**, these platforms offer many opportunities or personal growth and development. **Additionally**¹...[pause] **additionally**², social media has...and share information. **Also**, it is helping...and online businesses. **Additionally**³, social media allows us to connect with good people...*

In the excerpt provided above, the speaker attempts to showcase the positive impact of social media on Nigerian youths. However, the use of transitory extension such as “**Furthermore**”, “**Additionally**”, and “**Also**” is poor and often misplaced, leading to lack of coherence and smooth flow in the discourse. The excerpt begins with a general statement about the integral role of social media in modern life, followed by the use of “**Furthermore**” to introduce an additional point. While this usage is appropriate, the subsequent employment of “**Additionally**” and “**Also**” in a quick succession disrupts the natural flow of the discourse. These devices are meant to introduce new but related aspect or extension of the main idea, but their

overuse and close proximity to each other create a sense of repetition and confusion.

4.3.2 Topicalisation

Topicalisation is a discourse strategy used in the process of highlighting or bringing to the forefront a particular element or topic in discourse (Taboada, 2004). It contributes to the thematic structure of a text where the writer or speaker signals what the discourse is all about. When used effectively, topicalisation can enhance the overall coherence and comprehension of a text, and it can also have a detrimental effect on the clarity and readability of a text when used incorrectly or overused.

It is observed from the excerpts below that the students mostly achieve topicalisation in their texts through the use of lexical repetition and deixis.

Excerpt 9

***Social media**¹ has undoubtedly transformed the lives of Nigerian youths with platforms like **TikTok**, **Facebook**, ...(pause) *hmm* **Twitter** and so on. Nigerian youths have now found new ways for expressing themselves, networking and access to informations... It is **this** impact on connectivity...and that make it*

stand out...social media² for Nigerian youths.

From the excerpt above, the speaker effectively topicalizes the “*positive impact of social media on Nigerian youths’ connectivity*”. The speaker employs repetition in the excerpt to emphasize the central topic being discussed. The phrase “social media” is repeated twice to reinforce its importance and ensuring that the listeners attention remains focused on this concept throughout the speech. Similarly, the speaker utilises parallelism as a cohesive strategy to highlight the specific social media platforms being discussed. The parallel structure “*with platforms like TikTok, Facebook,...Twitter*” draws attention to these platforms as examples of the broader topic of social media, contributing to the topicalisation of the impact of social media on Nigerian youths.

Deixis, the use of deictic expression like demonstratives, is another cohesive devices employed for topicalisation. In the excerpt, the demonstrative pronoun “this” is used to directly point to the concept of connectivity, reinforcing its prominence and centrality within the discourse.

Excerpt 10

These days, social media play a big role for Nigerian youths. These platforms let them connect, relate and share thoughts easily. Social media offers many good chances to learn and develop oneself. Yes, some worry about the downsides, but the upsides are bigger. Nigerian youths use these online spaces to find support, gain knowledge and learn new things. Social media enables them to also have a voice on key issues, This belonging helps their personal growth.

The excerpt effectively topicalizes the discourse on the positive impact of social media on Nigerian youths through the strategic use of lexical repetition, deictic expression and parallelism as cohesive devices. Lexical repetition is employed through the repeated use of words like “*social media*” “*these platforms/online spaces*” and “*connect/share*”. This repetition of key terms consistently reinforces the central topic and creates lexical cohesion throughout the excerpt.

Deixis is achieved through expression like “*these days*”, “*these platforms*” and “*this belonging*”, which ground the discourse in the present context and relate it to the reader’s perspective. For example, “*these days*” establishes the immediate relevance of the

topic, while “*these platforms*” and “*this belonging*” refer back the previously mentioned on “social media” and its impact. Parallelism is evident in structure like “*These platforms let them connect, relate and share thought...*” and “*...online spaces to find support, gain knowledge and learn new things.*” These parallel constructions create a sense of balance and emphasis, highlighting the positive impact in structures manner. In all, the strategic combination of lexical repetition, deictic expressions, and parallel structures effectively topicalizes the discourse by consistently drawing the listeners’ attention back to the central topic of social media’s positive impact on Nigerian youth.

4.3.3 Thematic shift

Thematic development is an essential feature of texture (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) which contributes to the unity and connectedness of a text. Thematic shift is thus a structural change in the thematic organization of discourse (Damanik, 2017). Understanding how cohesive devices facilitate smooth thematic transition is crucial for producing well-structured and cohesive written and spoken discourse.

As evident in the texts analysed, the students demonstrate effective use of cohesive devices to achieve thematic shift, especially through the use of adversative conjunctions and rhetorical question.

Excerpt 11

..social media gives us many advantages such as connection of people and it makes information exchange easier. However, for Nigerian youths, these platforms have many risks that cannot be overlooked. One important aspect of it is that...

From the excerpt above, a single cohesive tie is used by the student to signal thematic shift within the text. In the first instance, the word “*However*” introduces a thematic shift from the discussing the benefits of social media to its negative impact on Nigerian youths. This contrastive transition signals a change in the direction of the discourse, moving away from the positive aspect to focus on the problematic consequences. This helps the writer to effectively set up subsequent discussion of the risks associated with the use social media among Nigerian youths.

Excerpt 12

According to my opponent, majority of

social evils we have in our generation are caused by social media.

In contrast to this, social media have provided Nigerian youths with so many opportunities in terms of education and learning, self-expression and ability to connect with different people worldwide

The first sentence in the excerpt above presents the opposing viewpoint, which attributes various social problems or “*evils*” to the influence of social media. This sets the stage for the thematic shift that follows. The cohesive device “***In contrast***” is then used to introduce the speaker’s perspective, which counters the initial negative portrayal of social media.

This structure allows the speaker to acknowledge the opposing idea initially, but then seamlessly shift to presenting her own stance, which emphasizes the positive aspects of social media, such as providing opportunities for education and learning, self-expression and global connection.

Excerpt 13

I want to agree with the fact that social media used to help in spreading news and

*information among youths. But to me, that is not enough to say that it has any positive impacts on youths. **Have you ever consider the rate of fake news spreading on social media everyday?** Yes! Most social media blogs usually create fake and unverified news which most Nigerian youth carry on to spread among themselves.*

From the excerpt above, the rhetorical question “***Have you ever consider the rate of fake news spreading on social media everyday?***” serves as a cohesive technique that facilitates a thematic shift in the discourse. It acts as a bridge, linking the initial acknowledgment of social media’s positive role in spreading news and information among the youths to the subsequent critique of the negative consequences of fake news on social platforms.

The rhetorical question signals a transition, prompting the listeners to consider an opposing viewpoint after the initial agreement with the positive impact of social media. By posing this kind of question, the speaker engages the audience, inviting them to reflect on the prevalence of fake news, thereby setting the stage for the discussion that follows.

.4.3.4 Causal Relation

Establishing logical connections between ideas and events is a fundamental aspect of coherent discourse. Causal relations play a pivotal role in achieving this coherence by explicitly linking causes and effects, thereby enhancing the comprehensibility and flow of the text. Understanding how cohesive devices facilitate the expression of causal relationships is crucial for producing well-structured and cohesive written and spoken discourse.

As revealed in the excerpts below, the students show an effective use of cohesive devices to achieve causal relation especially through the use of different causal conjunctions.

Excerpt 14

As common nowadays, social media have become a place for blackmailing and online harassment. As a result of this, many Nigerian youths have experienced low self-esteem, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. Therefore, the negative psychological impact of social media...

In the excerpt above, the causal phrase “**As a result of this**” is used to establish a clear cause-and-effect relationship between the

first and second statements. The initial sentence identifies the cause - social media platforms becoming breeding grounds for blackmailing and online harassment. The phrase “**As a result of this**” then introduces the effect of this cause: the negative psychological impact on Nigerian youths, specifically low self-esteem, depression, and suicidal thoughts.

Excerpt 15

Social media platforms usually give Nigerian youths enough access to information and different perspectives. Due to this, they have become more aware of global trends and opportunities for self-development. Due to this increased exposure, many Nigerian youths have been inspired to pursue entrepreneurial ventures or acquire new skills.

In the excerpt above, the speaker uses the causal phrase twice to establish clear cause-and-effect relationships between statements. The first usage links social media’s increased access to information and diverse perspectives with Nigerian youths’ heightened awareness of global trends and self-development opportunities. The second connects this exposure to their inspiration for entrepreneurial pursuits and skill acquisition.

Excerpt 16

*Social media platforms have enabled Nigerian youths to connect with educational resources and experts from around the world. **For this reason**, they are now having access knowledge different from what they are being thought in class. **Because of this also**, many students have improved in their academic performance ...*

In the excerpt given above, the writer employed two the causal phrase “**For this reason**” and “**Because of this**” to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the points made. For example, the first causal phrase links the ability of Nigerian youths to connect with educational resources and experts globally, facilitated by social media, to their access to a wealth of knowledge and insights that complement their formal education. The second usage of “**Because of this reason**” connects the previous statement about accessing additional knowledge and insights to the improved academic performance and deeper subject understanding reported by many students.

Excerpt 17

Social media platforms have become a major distraction for many Nigerian youths,

*causing them to spend... and engaging in unproductive activities online. **Because of this**, their academic performance and real-life skills have suffered significantly. Furthermore, the constant...*

Just like the instance given earlier, the writer employed a causal phrase “Because of this,” to create a cause-and-effect relationship between the excessive use of social media and its negative impacts on Nigerian youths. The first sentence presents the cause: Nigerian youths spending too much time on social media platforms, engaging in unproductive activities. The second sentence, starting with “**Because of this**,” introduces the effects of this cause, namely the decline in academic performance and real-life social skills.

Excerpt 18

*Social media is widely known for misinformation and fake news. Many Nigerian youths consume this fake news content without checking make research on them. **Consequently**, they develop false perceptions of reality and make poor life choices based on falsehoods.*

In this excerpt, the causal phrase “**consequently**” is used to establish a clear

cause-and-effect relationship between two contrasting ideas. The first two sentences present the **cause**: Nigerian youths consume misinformation and fake news on social media without verifying the accuracy of what they read. The third sentence introduces the **effect**, using “consequently” to show that their false perceptions and poor life choices directly result from this behavior.

The causal phrase functions as a **cohesive device**, creating a logical link between the two parts of the text and guiding the reader’s understanding of how the ideas connect. It strengthens coherence by signaling that the effect follows naturally from the cause.

Additionally, “*consequently*” helps establish a **temporal and logical sequence**, implying that the negative outcomes occur after and because of exposure to misinformation. This chronological progression further enhances the clarity and overall coherence of the discourse, making the cause-and-effect relationship easy to follow.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that secondary school students display varying levels of proficiency in using cohesive devices to achieve coherence in written essays and oral debates.

While some effectively apply referential devices, transitional markers, and lexical ties, others struggle with incorrect references, ambiguous pronouns, and excessive lexical repetition. The findings further indicate that cohesion reflects the vocabulary proficiency of L2 English learners, as students with limited vocabulary rely heavily on repetition to create cohesion.

The study also establishes that the number of cohesive relations in a text does not guarantee coherence; inappropriate use of cohesive devices can result in disjointed ideas. This supports McNamara’s assertion that the presence of cohesive markers does not necessarily produce coherence, as a text may contain many cohesive elements yet remain incoherent. Finally, cohesive markers are multifunctional, serving not only to link text but also to perform important discourse functions.

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