TEACHING COHERENCE AND COHESION IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Babashova Bibixanum Azamatovna

English teacher of Secondary School No. 23 in Tashkent

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ABSTRACT

Academic writing requires more than grammatical accuracy; it demands clarity, logical organization, and effective textual connectivity. Coherence and cohesion play central roles in achieving these qualities, as coherence ensures the logical flow of ideas, while cohesion provides linguistic devices that link sentences and paragraphs. This article examines the theoretical foundations of coherence and cohesion, analyzes their pedagogical importance, and discusses practical strategies for teaching them in academic contexts. It further highlights the challenges teachers face, including cultural differences in rhetorical traditions, overuse of cohesive markers, and curriculum constraints. Through scholarly perspectives and classroom-based examples, the paper argues that effective instruction in coherence and cohesion equips students with the ability to construct clear, persuasive, and academically credible texts.

Introduction. Academic writing is not merely the act of arranging words into grammatically correct sentences; rather, it is the art of presenting knowledge in a way that is logical, connected, and persuasive. As Halliday and Hasan argue, cohesion acts as the linguistic fabric that weaves sentences together, while coherence ensures that this fabric creates a meaningful pattern [3]. Together, these features distinguish academic texts from informal writing because they provide clarity and intellectual precision. Moreover, Hyland stresses that students who fail to acquire these skills may produce technically accurate texts that nevertheless lack persuasive power [4]. In a similar vein, Connor highlights that textual connectivity reflects cultural expectations of discourse, suggesting that academic literacy is not a neutral skill but one shaped by rhetorical traditions [1]. Therefore, teaching coherence and cohesion is not simply about correcting errors but about guiding learners toward becoming active participants in academic communities where clarity, structure, and logical flow are highly valued.

To begin with, coherence is frequently described as the "global" property of writing because it relates to the overall sense-making process. Readers expect arguments to

develop in a consistent and predictable order. As Witte and Faigley maintain, coherence results from the interaction between text and reader; a passage is coherent not only because of linguistic features but also because the reader can construct meaning from it [7, 189-204]. Consequently, writers must structure their essays around clear thesis statements, well-developed topic sentences, and logically sequenced paragraphs. For example, in a research essay, the introduction should gradually narrow from a general topic to a specific thesis, followed by body paragraphs that progress from background information to evidence, and finally to implications. If this logical order is disrupted, the text may appear fragmented regardless of correct grammar.

Another significant aspect of coherence is the use of signaling devices that guide readers through the argument. Words such as firstly, secondly, in contrast, furthermore, and as a result serve as signposts that orient readers and maintain the flow of ideas. However, coherence is not simply a matter of inserting these markers mechanically. Rather, as Grabe and Kaplan note, effective coherence requires conceptual unity: each sentence must contribute meaningfully to the central idea. Teachers should therefore encourage students to ask themselves whether each paragraph advances the argument or distracts from it [2].

While coherence deals with meaning, cohesion focuses on surface-level textual ties that connect sentences. Cohesion can be lexical, grammatical, or referential. For instance, repetition of key terms maintains topic focus, while pronouns such as this, these, it, and such link back to earlier ideas. Synonyms and collocations provide lexical variety without breaking the chain of meaning. Furthermore, conjunctions like however, therefore, nevertheless, and although reveal logical relationships between clauses.

Halliday and Hasan's taxonomy of cohesion remains foundational in teaching [3]. They classify cohesion into reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. For example:

Reference: "The theory was controversial. It attracted both criticism and praise."

Substitution: "Some students preferred the online course, and others did too."

Ellipsis: "The first study was successful, but the second was not [successful]."

Conjunction: "The sample was small, yet the findings were significant."

Lexical cohesion: "The research, the investigation, and the study all revealed similar outcomes."

By teaching students to identify and apply these devices, instructors help them to construct writing that is semantically connected rather than a loose collection of sentences.

When it comes to pedagogy, coherence and cohesion should be integrated into every stage of writing instruction. Firstly, model analysis is highly effective. By examining published journal articles, students can observe how professional writers structure arguments and use cohesive ties. Teachers may highlight transitions in the margins, asking students to explain how each connector contributes to meaning.

Secondly, guided practice can help learners internalize these skills. For instance, gap-fill exercises with missing cohesive devices force students to consider which

conjunction or pronoun would best preserve meaning. Similarly, paragraph-reordering tasks train students to recognize logical progression.

Thirdly, peer review plays an important role. When students assess each other's drafts, they notice coherence gaps or overuse of certain devices. This reflective process deepens their understanding. Instructors can scaffold peer feedback by providing checklists such as: "Does each paragraph have a clear topic sentence? Are ideas connected by cohesive devices? Do transitions guide the reader?"

Finally, feedback from teachers should move beyond grammar correction to discourse-level issues. For example, instead of pointing out that a student has used however incorrectly, a teacher might explain how nevertheless would create stronger contrast in that context.

Nevertheless, teaching coherence and cohesion is not without obstacles. One difficulty lies in cultural variation. Kaplan observed that different cultures favor distinct rhetorical patterns. English academic writing tends to be linear, moving from point A to point B directly [5]. By contrast, some Asian or Middle Eastern traditions may use digressions or circular structures, which are coherent within their own context but appear disorganized to Western academic audiences. Therefore, teachers should avoid labeling students' writing as simply "wrong" and instead frame the learning process as acquiring the discourse style expected in a specific academic community.

Another challenge is overreliance on cohesive devices. Novice writers often believe that inserting many connectors automatically creates cohesion. Yet, as McCarthy warns, excessive use of linkers may burden the text and reduce readability [6, 96-100]. The real goal is balance: enough devices to guide the reader, but not so many that the writing feels mechanical.

Furthermore, time constraints in curricula often limit teachers' ability to focus on discourse-level instruction. In contexts where exam performance emphasizes grammar accuracy, coherence and cohesion may receive less attention. Overcoming this requires curriculum designers to embed writing tasks that reward logical development and textual connectivity.

Conclusion. In summary, coherence and cohesion form the backbone of effective academic writing. While coherence ensures logical flow and conceptual unity, cohesion provides the linguistic ties that hold sentences together. As demonstrated by Halliday and Hasan, Witte and Faigley and Hyland, neglecting these aspects undermines clarity and persuasiveness, even in grammatically correct texts. Teaching strategies such as model analysis, guided practice, peer review, and discourse-focused feedback can significantly enhance students' skills. Nonetheless, cultural differences, overreliance on cohesive markers, and curriculum limitations remain challenges. Overcoming these requires conscious pedagogical choices and institutional support. Ultimately, by mastering coherence and cohesion, students not only improve their writing but also gain access to the academic community where knowledge is shared, debated, and advanced.

Foydalanilgan Adabiyotlar:

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