

A Textual Analysis of Cohesion and Coherence in the Background Sections of Theses by Preservice Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teachers

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Abstract: This study examines the coherence and cohesion aspects of the background sections of theses written by preservice Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teachers. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, five theses were purposively selected from official university repositories. Analysis was conducted using a discourse framework of cohesion and coherence to examine how students structured and connected ideas in their writing. The results indicate that students are good at using cohesive devices, particularly conjunctions and anaphoric references. However, substitution and ellipsis are rarely used, resulting in suboptimal language efficiency. In terms of coherence, most texts have a logical flow; however, the connections between ideas are weak, and the development of ideas is often uneven. These findings suggest that although students possess basic competencies in academic writing, they still require more focused instruction on rhetorical style and text organization. This study has practical implications for improving academic writing pedagogy and curriculum development in teacher education programs, particularly in the context of Islamic higher education.

Keywords: Academic writing, background theses, coherence, cohesion, preservice Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teachers



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A. Introduction

The ability to write scholarly papers is a key indicator of success in higher education because it reflects students' abilities to think critically, reason scientifically, and convey ideas logically. In thesis writing, the background section plays a crucial role as the basis for the argument, rationale, urgency, and direction of the research. Therefore, writing a background requires students to organize ideas systematically, present coherent arguments, and use appropriate academic language (Sharma et al., 2024). These skills serve as benchmarks for students' academic literacy, which focuses not only on content but also on the clarity of structure and logic of scientific reasoning.

With a linguistic perspective, the quality of background writing is related to the application of cohesion and coherence of text. Cohesion relates to linguistic devices that connect sentence elements, such as references, substitutions, ellipsis, conjunctions, and lexical cohesion (Halliday & Hassan, 2014). Meanwhile, coherence relates to the logical relationships between ideas that enable the text to be understood as a unified meaning

(Balossi, 2020; Eggins, 2004). Recent research also confirms that cohesion and coherence are important markers of the quality of scientific writing, as they determine the extent to which a text conveys arguments logically, is structured, and is presented convincingly (Du & Hashimoto, 2025). Thus, mastery of these two aspects serves as the primary basis for students to construct comprehensive and meaningful academic discourse.

Various studies have examined cohesion and coherence in students' academic writing. However, most have focused on general essays, abstracts, or scientific articles, rather than on the background section of theses, particularly in the context of teacher education (Azmi, 2021; Emilia et al., 2018; Inayah et al., 2024a). Additionally, a few studies highlight how these linguistic features are realized in the writing of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education students, who possess unique characteristics: they are required to be both accurate in language and to possess academic reasoning skills grounded in Islamic values. The limitations of this study highlight a research gap in understanding how prospective madrasah teachers apply cohesion and coherence in writing the background section of their theses.

To address this gap, this study aims to analyze the patterns and challenges in the use of cohesion and coherence in the thesis background section of preservice Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teachers at Walisongo Islamic State University, Semarang, in 2024. Specifically, the research identifies the types and frequency of cohesive devices used, as well as the patterns of logical integration and coherence between paragraphs. The study's findings are expected to contribute theoretically to applied linguistics research on academic writing and practically to the development of the pedagogy of academic writing in Islamic higher education. In addition, the results are expected to serve as a reference for designing curriculum and learning strategies for scientific writing that emphasize structural completeness, logical accuracy, and clarity of argumentation in thesis writing.

In the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program at Walisongo Islamic State University, writing a thesis is a graduation requirement that reflects students' academic competence. Based on a review of several thesis manuscripts archived in the university repository, variations in the quality of background section writing were observed. Some students seemed to have identified the research problem and context; many still exhibited weaknesses in linguistic structure, textual cohesion, and argument clarity. This condition suggests that the academic writing proficiency of students in the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program is not uniform, especially in establishing textual integrity and a logical flow in scientific writing.

Several previous studies have investigated the linguistic aspects of students' academic writing. (Cuba-Raime et al., 2025) found that errors in the use of cohesive devices, especially ambiguous references, inappropriate substitutions, and excessive repetition, are common. These findings suggest that although students frequently employ grammatical cohesive devices, such as reference and additive conjunctions, their use is not always effective in maintaining clarity of meaning across sections of the text. Similar results were reported by Azmi (2021), who showed that grammatical cohesive markers, primarily reference, were the most dominant forms used by students, followed by

substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. This suggests that students' abilities are often limited to using explicit and simpler forms of cohesion.

Additionally, another study by Vepreva & Zhibing (2023) highlighted the importance of integrating form and meaning in constructing a cohesive academic discourse. Vepera and Zhibing demonstrated how mistakes in applying cohesive devices can disrupt the continuity of ideas, thereby implying weak textual coherence. According to scholars such as Abalkheel et al. (2025), cohesion and coherence are two fundamental aspects of the integration of structure and meaning in scholarly texts. This point was supported by Du & Hashimoto (2025), who highlighted that using innovative writing assistance systems can improve students' ability to organize ideas, thereby enhancing textual coherence.

Other research has also shown that text characteristics can influence the assessment of students' writing. (Trüb et al., 2025) revealed that the quality of structure and integration of ideas are crucial factors in academic evaluation. In the context of scholarly discourse, Cuba-Raime et al. (2025) found that master's theses tend to employ discourse markers to guide readers through the argumentative flow. Meanwhile, Prillinger (2021) proved that teaching strategies emphasizing logical sequence can improve coherence in students' argumentative writing. Research findings by Inayah et al. (2024b) also indicated that although students are quite capable of using references and conjunctions, their capacity to practice substitution and ellipsis remains low, which reduces the efficiency of linguistic and sentence structure variety. Some previous research indicates that students tend to understand cohesion primarily through the use of conjunctions and repetition, but have not yet mastered more complex cohesive strategies, such as substitution and ellipsis.

Additionally, the aspect of coherence, which concerns the logical continuity between paragraphs, is often omitted. This deficiency underscores the need for more targeted academic writing training, particularly in teacher education programs such as the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program. This research aims to address this gap by examining how cohesion and coherence are realized in the thesis background chapters of students in the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program and how the patterns and challenges of their use can impact the development of scientific writing pedagogy in an Islamic education setting.

Recent studies suggest that cohesion plays a multifaceted role across various text types and communication contexts. Toan (2025) demonstrated that the use of cohesive devices combined with narrative elements can enhance clarity and reader engagement in administrative texts, asserting that effective cohesion benefits not only academic writing but also professional communication. In another context, Alturki (2025) highlighted the function of repetition as a rhetorical and cohesive strategy in the translation of Arabic religious discourse, helping to maintain unity of meaning across languages. Meanwhile, Panahova (2025) found that cohesion plays a vital role in political discourse, particularly in shaping narratives about the European Union's role in the Karabakh peace process. Hill-Madsen (2025) also confirmed the importance of coherence in widespread medical reports, primarily through the precise flow of ideas and a reader-oriented structure. These

findings collectively affirm that mastery of cohesion and coherence is a critical, cross-contextual skill, essential for both academic writing, such as theses, and professional communication.

The findings show that students, particularly those in prospective teacher education programs such as the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program, require targeted training to master diverse strategies for cohesion and coherence. This capability not only enriches the linguistic quality but also strengthens their academic argumentation and rhetoric when writing the thesis background chapter. Therefore, mastery of cohesion and coherence is a strategic competence that should be emphasized in higher education, especially for preservice teachers who will ultimately teach scientific language skills to their own students.

To map the development of research concerning cohesion and coherence, a bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer was conducted on recent journal articles and proceedings. The visualization of the analysis results shows three main clusters: the red cluster focuses on conceptual and policy research, the green cluster on linguistic analysis and discourse structure, and the blue cluster on writing pedagogy and student performance in the context of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The relationships between the clusters indicate a strong connection between linguistic analysis and writing skills, but a weak link between linguistic aspects and the context of educational policy. The results of this mapping serve as the basis for identifying a research gap: the limited research on the application of less frequently used cohesive devices, such as substitution and ellipsis, in the context of Islamic education and students' academic writing.

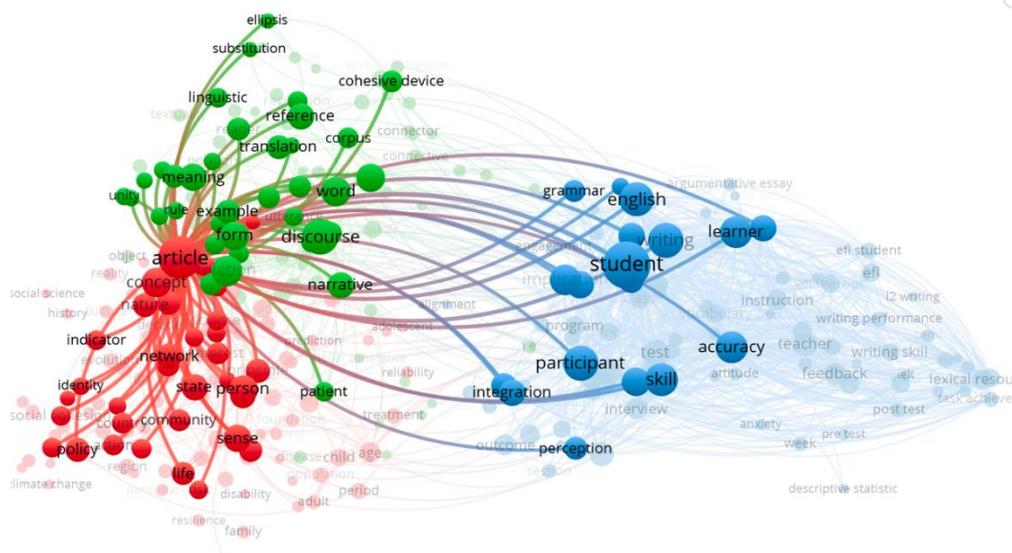


Figure 1. Visualization VOSViewer as a Research Gap Mapping

The limitation above confirms the existence of a research gap that has not been extensively addressed by previous research. Studies on cohesion and coherence have primarily focused on essays, journal articles, or the EAP context. At the same time, the realization of these two aspects in the background chapter of student theses is rarely

investigated. Furthermore, no study has specifically highlighted the context of prospective teacher education in Islamic higher education, where scientific language competence must be aligned with pedagogical and religious values. Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in the linguistic and academic rhetorical analysis of the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program students as they wrote their thesis background chapters. This study offers a contextual contribution by linking cohesion-coherence theory to scientific writing practices in Islamic higher education, while also providing pedagogical implications for the development of academic literacy and more effective scientific writing training.

Some previous studies share a similar focus to this research, specifically examining linguistic aspects of academic writing, particularly textual cohesion and coherence. However, there are several significant differences. Research conducted by Stella and Winda, for example, focused on students from the Indonesian Language and Literature Education program at various universities. Meanwhile, this study analyzes the background chapter written by students from the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program at Walisongo Islamic State University, Semarang, explicitly. In addition, previous research has emphasized the identification of the types and frequencies of cohesive devices. In contrast, this study broadens the analysis to include aspects of discourse coherence, such as logical flow, continuity of ideas, and the overall unity of paragraphs.

This research aims to analyze cohesion and coherence in the background chapters of the theses of students in the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program at Walisongo Islamic State University, Semarang, in 2024. The specific objectives of this research are to: (1) identify the types and functions of cohesive devices used by students, and (2) examine how coherence is realized through the logical flow of thought and the continuity of ideas between sentences and between paragraphs. The research findings are expected to provide a contextual contribution to the development of academic literacy within the Islamic education environment, particularly in improving the linguistic quality of students' thesis background chapters.

Theoretically, this research extends the understanding of cohesion and coherence in academic writing, particularly in an under-researched context: the thesis background chapter in Islamic higher education. While previous studies have generally focused on the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context, argumentative essays, or the overall structure of the thesis, this research narrows its focus to the background section, which serves as the argumentative basis for the study. By identifying how the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program students utilize cohesive devices such as conjunctions, reference, substitution, and ellipsis, this research contributes a new nuance to the theory of linguistic cohesion, demonstrating both the dominant and rarely used devices and their impact on textual coherence. These findings also enrich the discourse analysis framework by situating it in the context of Islamic higher education. In practice, this research has important implications for curriculum design and pedagogical practices in teacher education programs. The results show the need for academic writing training

that not only emphasizes the accurate use of basic cohesive devices but also teaches strategies for using more complex forms of cohesion, such as substitution and ellipsis, to achieve linguistic efficiency and rhetorical variation. Furthermore, the teaching of coherence should focus on developing idea transitions and logical integration, so that students can write a well-structured background. The findings can serve as a reference for lecturers, supervisors, and writing instructors in designing learning activities such as writing workshops, model-based learning, and discourse-based feedback.

More broadly, this research also contributes to the development of academic literacy within the Islamic higher education environment. The findings can serve as a basis for policymakers and curriculum developers to improve academic writing standards, ensuring that prospective *madrasah* teachers possess adequate linguistic competence and critical thinking skills to implement effective learning. Thus, this research asserts the importance of examining academic writing not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a pedagogical and institutional practice that shapes the educational and professional identity of future educators.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze linguistic phenomena in depth across academic texts. This approach was chosen because the research objective demands a detailed understanding of the patterns of cohesion and coherence without variable manipulation, thus allowing the natural characteristics of thesis background writing to be observed in their entirety (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Accordingly, this approach provides a strong methodological basis for describing and interpreting the relationships between sentences and paragraphs in an academic context. The research population includes all theses written by students of the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program at Walisongo Islamic State University, Semarang, published in 2024 and registered in the university's official repository. From this population, five theses were selected as the sample using purposive sampling. This selection considered three main aspects: textual readability, completeness of the background section structure, and relevance of the subject area to the research context. These considerations ensure that the data reflect representative academic writing practices within the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program environment and accommodate the variation in students' research topics.

Data collection was conducted through document tracing in the institutional repository, followed by verification and extraction of the background section as the unit of analysis. Each document was checked for completeness before analysis, and the background sections were then separated into a text corpus for coding. This procedure was carried out carefully to maintain data authenticity and ensure source traceability. The data analysis technique refers to the cohesion framework (Halliday & Hassan, 2014) and the concept of coherence (Vincent, 2021). The analysis was performed through several sequential stages. First, the entire text was read thoroughly to obtain a general overview of the argumentative structure. Second, linguistic markers were systematically coded,

covering the categories of reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Third, the data were classified according to the type of cohesive device and its discursive function, as outlined in the theoretical framework. Fourth, coherence was analyzed through logical relationships, thematic progression, and the integration of paragraphs to observe the continuity of ideas within the text. Fifth, the findings were comprehensively interpreted to explain the patterns and challenges in the use of cohesion and coherence in the thesis background writing of students in the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program.

C. Results and Discussion

Results

The analysis focused on two main aspects: cohesion and coherence. The study of five thesis background sections reveals both strengths and weaknesses in students' use of cohesion and coherence. In terms of cohesion, the results indicate that students predominantly used conjunctions and anaphoric references to connect ideas between clauses and sentences. These devices effectively maintained textual flow and prevented meaning fragmentation. However, the limited use of substitution and ellipsis suggests a tendency toward lexical repetition, which may reduce linguistic economy and stylistic variation. Lexical cohesion was primarily achieved through reiteration and synonymy, but to a lesser extent through collocation, reflecting a limited vocabulary range in academic writing.

Regarding coherence, most texts demonstrated logical sequencing of ideas, progressing from general issues to specific research problems. Nevertheless, transitions between paragraphs were often weak, and thematic development lacks consistency. This finding suggests that students could structure ideas at the sentence level but struggled to maintain continuity of argument across the entire section.

These linguistic findings have direct pedagogical implications. The results can inform the development of targeted writing strategies in teacher education curricula, particularly through explicit instruction on cohesive devices, paragraph linking, and thematic progression. Writing courses could integrate model-based analysis of thesis background sections, peer review exercises, and guided rewriting activities to strengthen students' control over text organization. By translating linguistic insights into instructional practice, teacher education programs can enhance students' academic literacy and prepare them to guide future learners in structured and logical writing.

Cohesion

Drawing on Halliday & Hassan's (2014) framework, the analysis identified five types of cohesive devices in the background sections of the five theses: conjunctions, references, substitution, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion. The findings suggest that conjunctions and references were relatively well established, while substitution, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion appeared less systematic. Conjunctions were consistently employed across all documents, with additive, causal, and adversative forms occurring most frequently. For example, one thesis stated: "*Teachers are not only required to teach*

subject matter, but also to shape students' character" (MQZ/2024/LB-01). Similarly, causal conjunctions were used to strengthen argumentation: "Therefore, it is necessary to introduce new models that can address misunderstanding" (NA/2024/LB-02).

References, particularly anaphoric references, were widely used to maintain textual continuity and avoid unnecessary repetition. For instance: "This is contained in the Ministry of Education Regulation No. 2 of 2006" (NA/2024/LB-03), or "This method is applied by reading the Qur'an directly" (MK/2024/LB-03). By contrast, substitution appeared only in limited cases, with most students opting for noun repetition rather than nominal replacement. An example can be seen in: "The PBL learning model... this model is appropriate to be used"(NA/2024/LB-05). Similarly, ellipsis was rarely applied and tended to be implicit: "If, during the learning process, there is no close interaction with students..." (NA/2024/LB-06).

Lexical cohesion was present primarily through repetition and collocation, but with little evidence of synonymy or variation. For example, one thesis repeatedly emphasized: "Creative thinking ability is essential... creative thinking ability can help students" (MQZ/2024/LB-07). Another displayed collocational ties such as: "The students... the fifth-grade students... the students became more active" (NA/2024/LB-08). Findings indicate that the participants had a functional command of conjunctions and references when structuring their texts. However, the limited use of substitution, ellipsis, and lexical variation suggests that their writing relied heavily on repetition. This indicates a need for more advanced training in the effective deployment of cohesive devices to enhance linguistic economy and stylistic variation.

Textual analysis of five undergraduate thesis background sections identified five major types of cohesive devices: reference, conjunction, substitution, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion. The findings reveal a clear preference for explicit relational devices, with ellipsis and substitution used only minimally, despite their importance for achieving linguistic form.

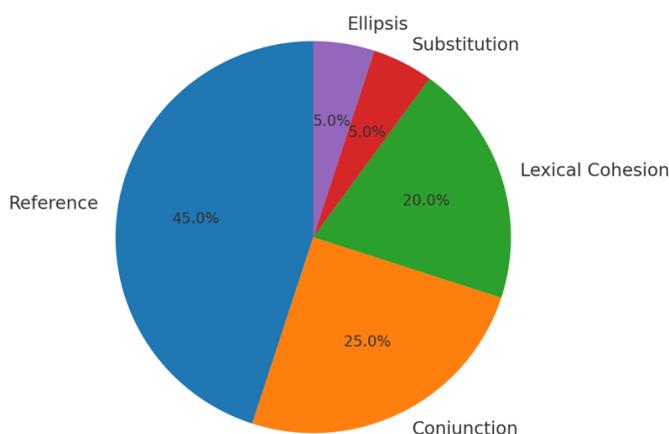


Figure 2. Distribution of Cohesive Devices in PGMI Student Writing

As illustrated in Figure 2, Reference and Conjunction are the devices that clearly dominate, accounting for 70.0% of the total cohesive links. Reference devices lead with 45.0%, primarily consisting of anaphoric and demonstrative pronouns used to format subsequent sentences back to a previously mentioned entity. Conjunctions follow with 25.0%, mostly realized through additive, causal, and adversative relationships, which structure a logistic progression argument. In contrast, more complex devices are less efficient. Substitution and Ellipsis each contribute only 5.0%. This reliance on explicit repetition rather than sophisticated grammatical condensation leads to a compensatory over-reliance on Lexical Cohesion (20.0%), which often manifests as the repetition of thematic keywords (e.g., "Creative thinking skills") and the reiteration of simple phrases.

Coherence

Using Eggins' (2004) framework, coherence was examined through inter-paragraph logical flow, idea continuity, and discourse unity. Overall, the background sections generally displayed a recognisable academic progression, but variation in the depth and integration of ideas was evident. Regarding logical flow, most texts followed a general-to-specific trajectory, moving from a broad context to a local issue, then narrowing to the research focus. A representative sequence reads: "*In line with the era of globalization... → Creative ability... → Mathematics is a field of study...*" (MQZ/2024/LB-01 to LB-04). This pattern suggests an awareness of conventional thesis rhetoric, though the transitions were often formulaic rather than rhetorically elaborated.

Regarding the idea's continuity, several texts demonstrated progressive development, with one proposition motivating the next. "*The ability to read the Qur'an... → The Qiro'ati method emerges as a solution...*" (MK/2024/LB-06 to LB-07). By contrast, other texts tended to recycle the same point without advancing the discussion: "*Learning strategies are a component... → The selection of appropriate learning strategies...*" (DYS/2024/LB-04 to LB-05). Such restatement suggests limited thematic progression and shallow argumentative growth.

Analysis of discourse unity showed that stronger texts concluded with an explicit statement linking the preceding rationale to the study's aim, "*Based on the foregoing... the study entitled...*" (ASS/2024/LB-05). In weaker texts, the closing remained merely formulaic and insufficiently tied to the preceding argument, e.g., "*...the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled...*" (DYS/2024/LB-07). These endings reduced the sense of closure and weakened the alignment between problem framing and research intent. The corpus demonstrated a baseline command of coherence, particularly in establishing a general-to-specific flow; however, it showed uneven maintenance of idea development and unity. The prevalence of formulaic transitions and generic closings indicates a need for more explicit instruction on rhetorical staging and thematic progression to support integrated, reader-oriented background chapters.

The coherence analysis focused on the texts' underlying thematic and logical structures, independent of surface-level cohesion. The findings revealed that although students demonstrated structural awareness, the conceptual integration of ideas remained uneven.

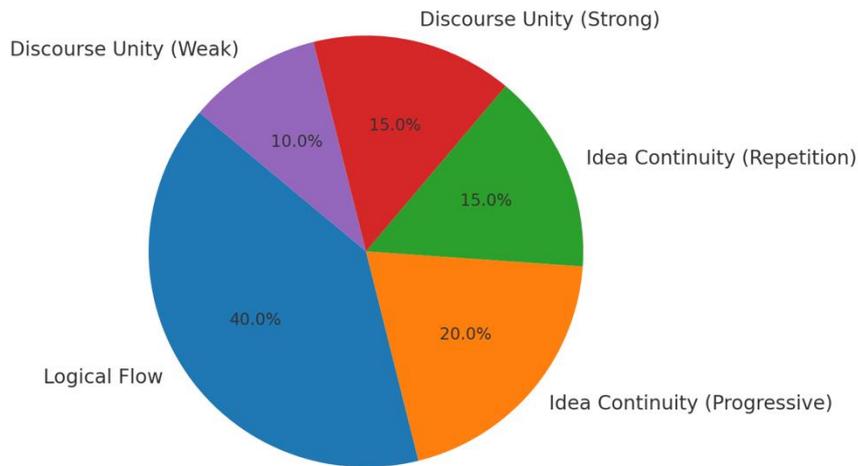


Figure 3. Distribution of Coherence Devices in PGMI Student Writing

Table 2. Cohesion and Coherence in the Text

| Aspect | Indicators | Findings | Student Code |
|------------------|--|---|---|
| Cohesion | Reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunctions | Most texts applied cohesive devices adequately, especially conjunctions, but with limited variation. | “In line with the era of globalization... → Creative ability... → Mathematics is a field of study...” (MQZ/2024/LB-01 to LB-04) |
| | Lexical cohesion (repetition, synonymy, collocation) | Repetition dominated; synonymy and collocation were rarely used. | “Learning strategy is a component... → The choice of the right learning strategy...” (DYS/2024/LB-04 to LB-05) |
| Coherence | Logical Flow (general → local → research focus) | Most texts showed the expected flow, but transitions were often formulaic. | (MQZ/2024/LB-01 to LB-04) |
| | Idea Continuity (progressive idea development) | Some texts developed ideas progressively, while others only repeated the same points. | “The ability to read the Qur’an... → The Qiro’ati method emerges as a solution...” (MK/2024/LB-06 to LB-07) |
| | Discourse Unity (clear closure with research intent) | Strong unity appeared when the closing explicitly stated the research objective; weaker when using only a formal closure. | “Based on the explanation above... this study is entitled...” (ASS/2024/LB-05) vs. “...the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled...” (DYS/2024/LB-07) |

Figure 3 indicates that *Logical Flow* is the most prominent feature, appearing in 40.0% of the texts. This suggests that students generally recognized conventional academic steps in the background section, structuring their arguments from a broad context (e.g., national educational issues) toward a specific research gap. However, closer examination of idea development revealed critical problems in conceptual integration. First, *Progressive Idea Continuity* was found in 20.0% of the texts, marking successful instances in which the theme of one paragraph logically advanced the argument in the subsequent paragraph. Second, *Repetitive Idea Continuity* appeared in 15.0% of the texts, where the thematic thread circled back to the same points or lingered without the forward momentum necessary for argumentative progression. Furthermore, *Discourse Unity* was divided into *Strong Unity* (15.0%), in which the entire background section coherently led to a clearly articulated research objective, and *Weak Unity* (10.0%), in which the concluding statement appeared formulaic or disconnected from the preceding argument. Overall, the texts maintained a recognizable structural flow but struggled to achieve rhetorical depth and persuasive force.

To provide a more straightforward overview of the findings, the analysis results on cohesion and coherence are summarized in the following tables. The first table 2 presents the distribution of cohesive devices, which highlights how reference, conjunction, substitution, and ellipsis were employed to maintain textual connectedness. The second table outlines the patterns of coherence, showing how logical relations among ideas were established and sustained across the text.

Discussion

The empirical findings presented in the previous section, particularly the prominence of explicit cohesive ties alongside persistent difficulties in the continuity of conceptual ideas, do not merely reflect linguistic characteristics. Rather, they reveal deeper pedagogical challenges embedded in the academic writing practices of pre-service Elementary School or Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teachers. This discussion critically examines these findings by aligning them with established theoretical frameworks and recent scholarly literature to clarify their theoretical and practical implications.

The observed failure to achieve efficient thematic progression directly undermines the primary rhetorical function of the background section: to establish research gaps through a seamless and persuasive argument that moves from a general context to a specific focus. Consequently, many texts appear structurally coherent on the surface level, where sections are arranged in the expected academic order; yet, they remain conceptually fragmented, as ideas fail to build upon each other cumulatively and convincingly. This pattern echoes recent research emphasizing that argument structure and conceptual integration are high-stakes variables in academic writing assessment (Bi, 2025; Golparvar et al., 2025)

From a discourse perspective, cohesion alone is not enough to guarantee coherence. While students may successfully deploy explicit cohesive markers, such as transitions or referential ties, these devices do not automatically ensure logical or thematic continuity

between paragraphs. Similar conclusions have been drawn in cross-disciplinary studies of research article writing, which demonstrate that practical coherence relies on the strategic development of ideas rather than on surface-level cohesion alone (Golparvar et al., 2025). In the applied linguistics contexts, further longitudinal evidence suggests that cohesive competence can develop independently from deeper rhetorical and conceptual control, particularly among developing academic writers (Bi, 2025).

In addition, insights from computational discourse studies reinforce this distinction between surface connectivity and conceptual integration. Research on multi-document summarization using deep learning models highlights that logical structuring and idea integration are far more complex than simple lexical or syntactic linkage, requiring higher-order semantic alignment (Zhou et al., 2025). Although situated in different domains, this finding underscores a shared principle: coherence emerges from meaningful relationships between ideas, not just from formal textual connections. Broader psychological and social research on cohesion suggests that coherence functions as an integrative force that shapes interpretive clarity and trust within discourse communities (Zhou et al., 2025). When transposed into academic writing pedagogy, this implies that students' struggles with conceptual coherence may also reflect limited exposure to models of argumentative reasoning and knowledge synthesis, rather than solely linguistic deficiencies.

This analysis makes a novel contribution by bridging macro-level discourse theory (cohesion and coherence) with micro-level pedagogical needs within a specific and under-researched context: pre-service Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teachers. Theoretically, this study argues that simply quantifying cohesive devices is insufficient. Future research should instead focus on the strategic variation and rhetorical effects of these devices in fulfilling the communicative purposes of specific academic genres. Documented deficiencies in substitution, ellipsis, and thematic progression highlight a clear gap between students' technical understanding of sentence-level structure and their mastery of academic discourse rhetoric.

This argument resonates with recent discourse-analytic studies, which demonstrate that students' reliance on overt transitional markers does not necessarily translate into practical coherence or persuasive academic writing (Keivan et al., 2025; Okrah et al., 2025). While transitional devices are often taught as indicators of good academic style, their rhetorical value depends on how they function within a broader argumentative trajectory rather than on their frequency alone. Similarly, investigations into students' writing competence across diverse educational settings reveal that surface-level linguistic accuracy often develops independently from higher-order discourse control (Barbecho et al., 2025)

From a practical perspective, these findings call for a significant shift in the academic writing curriculum for students in the Islamic Elementary School Education Program. First, instruction should move from an emphasis on accuracy to a focus on economy. Rather than merely teaching students about cohesive devices, pedagogy must evolve to demonstrate how a range of devices, particularly substitution and ellipsis, can

be deployed strategically to achieve linguistic economy and reduce unnecessary repetition. This aligns with broader educational arguments that effective autonomy in academic practice emerges not from rigid rule-following but from informed, context-sensitive choices (Buzzacchi, 2025)

Second, greater instructional emphasis must be placed on thematic flow. Writing pedagogy should explicitly incorporate models of thematic progression, guiding students to construct arguments in which the new information (rheme) of one paragraph becomes the topical focus (theme) of the next. Such an approach fosters integrated conceptual development rather than cyclical thematic repetition, a pattern identified as a persistent weakness in beginning academic writing (Keivan et al., 2025). By implementing instruction that foregrounds the rhetorical and conceptual demands of academic discourse, teacher education programs can better prepare future educators not only to write effectively but also to model the rigorous critical thinking required in their professional and scholarly lives.

D. Conclusion

The findings indicate that students have achieved functional control over cohesion, as evidenced by their adequate use of reference and conjunctions to link ideas. However, more substantial challenges emerge at the level of coherence, manifested in weak transitions, fragmented arguments, and suboptimal development of logical connections across paragraphs. This suggests that, while students were capable of maintaining surface-level textual connectivity, they continued to struggle to sustain conceptual unity and a strong rhetorical flow.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the views advanced by Halliday & Hassan (2014) and Eggins (2004), who emphasize that cohesion and coherence are essential components of textual integrity. In practice, the results underscore the need for writing instruction that explicitly integrates coherence-building strategies, such as thematic progression and logical sequencing, into the Islamic Elementary School Education curriculum. Shifting the pedagogical focus from mechanical accuracy toward the development of rational and rhetorical fluency constitutes a critical step in strengthening students' academic literacy.

As a novel contribution, this research offers contextualized insights into how cohesion and coherence are realized in the academic writing of pre-service madrasah teachers. This context remains underexplored in linguistic discourse analysis. By focusing on the background sections of undergraduate theses, the study provides a detailed portrayal of how novice writers construct arguments within an Islamic education environment.

This study is limited to a single cohort and relies solely on textual analysis. Future research should involve multiple institutions and adopt mixed-methods approaches, including classroom observations and interviews, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how coherence-oriented pedagogy influences the longitudinal development of students' academic writing abilities. In the long term, strengthening

instruction in cohesion and coherence prepares future educators to communicate ideas clearly, logically, and with intellectual integrity.

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