

## Pedagogical Practices in Teaching Cohesive Devices in EFL Writing Courses: A Case Study at Fezzan University

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### OPEN ACCESS

#### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:

(31-03-2026)

Revised:

(19-05-2026)

Accepted:

(20-05-2026)

#### KEYWORDS

Academic Writing; Cohesive Devices; EFL Writing; Writerly Reading; Reading-Writing Integration

#### ABSTRACT

Academic writing remains a challenge for university-level EFL learners, particularly in producing coherent texts through the effective use of cohesive devices. In the Libyan EFL context, previous studies have mainly examined cohesion errors in students' writing, while limited attention has been given to the pedagogical and curricular practices that shape students' use of cohesive devices. This study investigates how cohesive devices are taught within the writing curriculum of the English Department at Fezzan University. Using a descriptive qualitative case study design, the study involved syllabus analysis of five writing courses, questionnaires administered to 20 undergraduate students, and semi-structured interviews with five writing lecturers. The analysis was guided by Renandya et al.'s (2021) "Bridging the Reading-Writing Gap" framework to examine reading-writing integration across curriculum, teaching practices, and student learning experiences. The findings revealed that although the writing courses follow a logical progression from sentence-level writing to advanced academic writing, cohesive devices are mostly addressed implicitly rather than through systematic discourse-level instruction. Lecturers primarily emphasized grammar and vocabulary, while cohesion was treated as a secondary skill acquired through writing practice. The study suggests that integrating reading and writing instruction with explicit teaching of cohesive devices may better support students' academic writing development.

#### Citation:

Albayyan, A. A. A., Nur'aini, S., Setyaji, A., & Abdulwahhab, A. (2026). Pedagogical Practices in Teaching Cohesive Devices in EFL Writing Courses: A Case Study at Fezzan University. *Datokarama English Education Journal*, 7(1), 17-34. <https://doi.org/10.24239/dee.v7i1.160>

## INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is a central component of ESL/EFL learning because it enables students to construct knowledge, develop arguments, and participate in academic discourse communities. In higher education, academic writing is particularly important because students are often evaluated through their ability to produce accurate, coherent, and rhetorically appropriate written texts (Azmar & Razali, 2024). Academic writing can be described as a complex integration of several language elements and language aspects. Mallia (2017) reported that the essential elements of academic writing are paragraph structure, basic components of an essay, and the function of each essay type, and these elements align with the aspects of language, such as sentence structure, cohesive devices, avoiding plagiarism, level of formality, hedging and caution, and supplying evidence. The complexity of these processes may reveal why academic writing is a challenge for EFL students. Similarly, Hyland (2019) described learning academic writing as a complex process through which writers move beyond simple writing structure to complex academic literacy.

In EFL academic writing, cohesion is especially important because learners must connect clauses, sentences, and paragraphs into a unified text. However, many EFL students rely on sentence-level grammar instruction and receive limited explicit guidance on how cohesive devices function across discourse. According to Tahsildar and Yusoff (2018), cohesive devices are among the basic elements of writing, particularly in academic writing. Halliday and Hasan (1976) define cohesive devices as linguistic resources that establish semantic relations within and across sentences, thereby contributing to textual unity and interpretability. Suwandi (2016) defined cohesive devices as reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion, which help build coherent texts by connecting ideas across sentences and paragraphs. Moreover, Chanyoo (2021) and Tahsildar and Yusoff (2018) found an association between L2 writing quality and learners' ability to use cohesive devices appropriately. Their findings suggest that accurate and contextually appropriate use of cohesive devices can contribute to clearer textual organization and improved writing quality.

### 1.1 Explicit vs Implicit instruction of cohesive devices

Instructional approaches to cohesive devices in second language (L2) writing can be positioned along a continuum between implicit exposure and explicit instruction. In implicit approaches, learners are expected to acquire cohesive patterns through repeated engagement with reading and writing tasks, without direct metalinguistic explanation. This may foster a rudimentary understanding of textual flow, but it is often insufficient for mastering the complexities of formal academic discourse. In contrast, explicit instruction involves direct explanation, modeling, and guided practice of cohesive resources such as conjunction, reference, substitution, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion. Such instruction has been reported to improve the accuracy and range of cohesive ties in students' writing (Rassouli & Abbasvandi, 2013). Experimental studies in Algeria and Saudi Arabia found that learners who received targeted instruction and

corrective feedback showed greater improvement in the use of cohesive devices than those in comparison groups who relied on implicit acquisition processes (Alawerdy & Alalwi, 2022; Yamaai, 2023). Explicit teaching draws the learner's attention to each cohesive device's function, facilitating the learner's cognitive transition from input to intake (Abid, 2017). Taken together, these studies suggest that explicit instruction can be particularly useful for addressing persistent cohesion-related challenges in EFL writing because it provides learners with the metalanguage and conscious awareness needed to use cohesive devices more accurately and appropriately.

### **1.2 Sentence-level grammar teaching vs discourse-level writing pedagogy**

Previous studies on second language (L2) writing instruction have highlighted a recurring tension between sentence-level grammar teaching and discourse-level writing pedagogy. Sentence-level instruction often emphasizes the repetition, imitation, and correction of grammatical forms, with the aim of developing formal accuracy in students' writing (Gofurova, 2025). In this view, writing is essentially perceived as an extension of grammar, focusing primarily on producing error-free sentences through multiple structures such as subject-verb agreement or the placement of an adjective (Amran & Panicker, 2026). In contrast, discourse-level writing pedagogy shifts attention to the macro-rhetorical organization of texts, including how propositions are sequenced, connected, and developed to achieve coherence (Waqas et al., 2026). Sentence-level accuracy is a necessary component in writing a text, but it is insufficient for academic success. Some instructional models, such as the Essay Structure-Instructional Strategy (ESIS), attempt to bridge this divide by integrating micro-level grammatical instruction with macro-level discourse organization (Amran & Panicker, 2026). These approaches argue that providing learners with a clear organizational framework not only improves coherence but also reduces the cognitive load required for sentence-level monitoring, thereby facilitating simultaneous improvements in both discourse flow and grammatical precision (Amran & Panicker, 2026; Gofurova, 2025).

### **1.3 Bridging the Reading-Writing Gap in Second Language Learning**

Renandya, Tangkiengsirisin, and Floris's (2021) framework for bridging the reading-writing gap conceptualizes writing as a complex literacy practice that develops through sustained interaction between receptive and productive skills. This framework recognizes that academic writing requires writers to understand context, readers' expectations, and specific communicative purposes. Regarding teaching cohesion and coherence, this framework leverages Halliday and Hasan's (1976) concept of texture, focusing on how cohesive devices create semantic links within a text to form a coherent text. According to Renandya et al. (2021), EFL classrooms should involve a pedagogical cycle where reading serves as the primary source of comprehensible input, making students engage with authentic text that is slightly above their current proficiency. Such input serves as an important source for developing writers' syntactic and

rhetorical knowledge. Because the input alone is not enough for productive mastery, the framework incorporates Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis, which emphasizes that instructors must guide learners to notice specific linguistic and generic features to enhance their language acquisition. In this instructional model, the teacher guides students in "writerly reading," through which they analyze written texts to notice how authors achieve linguistic and rhetorical effects. Students are also encouraged to engage in "readerly writing" by reviewing their own drafts from the reader's perspective to ensure that their texts are coherent and accessible. According to this framework, transforming receptive reading experiences into active strategic resources may support the development of linguistic accuracy and coherence in EFL academic writing.

In the present study, this framework is used as an analytical lens to examine whether the writing syllabi provide input-rich exposure to cohesive devices, whether lecturers guide students to notice cohesion in model texts, and whether students experience reading and writing as integrated rather than isolated classroom practices.

#### 1.4 Previous Studies

In the Libyan context, Alghazzali (2025), Megaia (2023), Dirbala (2026), and others have reported that EFL undergraduate students face many difficulties in using cohesive devices effectively and producing coherent academic texts. Taken together, these studies suggest that Libyan EFL students' writing difficulties are not only linguistic but also pedagogical and curricular, as they are shaped by how cohesion is taught, practiced, and assessed in writing courses. Megaia (2023), in a quantitative study guided by Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion theory, investigated the Libyan students' errors in using cohesive devices to achieve textual harmony. The study emphasized that EFL lecturers in Libya should move from isolated vocabulary teaching to teaching cohesive chains and discourse connections through practical classrooms. The study highlighted the importance of discourse-level writing as an effective instructional strategy to enhance students' writing accuracy. However, Alkhboli (2021) argued that many Libyan teachers continue to treat language learning primarily as the acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, particularly syntactic sentence structures. Whereas Megaia (2023) focused primarily on practical cohesion instruction and discourse connections, Alkhboli (2021) critically linked these difficulties with instructional strategies within EFL classrooms in Libya. This perspective suggests that heavily relying on sentence-level grammar instruction may limit students' opportunities to develop coherence in their writing. In addition, recent empirical evidence suggests that writing difficulties among Libyan EFL undergraduates may stem from a complex interaction between students' linguistic limitations and instructional factors. Bakori (2026) study indicates that a rigid instructional overemphasis on structural grammatical accuracy made Libyan students struggle deeply with vocabulary retrieval and discourse organization.

In the English Department at Fezzan University, the researcher, as a teaching assistant in the department, observed that although students

complete several writing courses, they still experience difficulties in producing coherent texts and using cohesive devices effectively. This observation is supported by Bakori (2026) finding that 54.5% of EFL learners in the English Department at Fezzan University struggled to organize ideas coherently, partly because they relied on their first language when attempting to achieve coherence in English writing. This underscores a critical need to examine the pedagogical frameworks that shape this problem.

Building on this framework, the present study examines how cohesive devices are represented in the writing curriculum, how lecturers teach cohesion in writing courses, and how students experience reading-writing integration. This focus allows the study to move beyond error identification and toward a pedagogical analysis of the curricular and instructional conditions that shape students' use of cohesive devices.

Despite the growing body of research on cohesive devices in EFL writing, an important gap remains in understanding the instructional and curricular factors that shape students' difficulties in producing cohesive academic texts. While numerous studies have quantified the frequency of cohesive errors in student essays, there is a marked scarcity of research investigating the instructional source, specifically, the internal logic of the syllabus and the real-time pedagogical strategies employed by lecturers. Crucially, no known study has yet applied the Renandya et al. (2021) framework to evaluate the academic writing curriculum within the English Department at Fezzan University. This study seeks to occupy this gap by pursuing three primary objectives: first, to analyze the current writing syllabus regarding its explicit and implicit coverage of cohesive devices; second, to identify the specific pedagogical strategies used by lecturers to facilitate the acquisition of these devices; and third, to evaluate the degree of alignment between these local practices and the principles of an "input-rich" pedagogical model. To this end, the study is guided by the following research questions: RQ1. What instructional strategies do lecturers at Fezzan University use to teach cohesive devices in EFL writing courses?; RQ2. How do students experience reading-writing integration, particularly writerly reading, in writing courses?; RQ3. How do local pedagogical practices converge with or diverge from the reading-writing framework proposed by Renandya et al. (2021)?

This study provides evidence-based insights that may inform the redesign of writing syllabi and classroom strategies at Fezzan University, particularly in relation to the explicit teaching of cohesive devices and the integration of reading and writing instruction. By shifting the focus from error quantification to instructional analysis, this study offers a more contextual explanation of the sources of disunity in students' writing identified by previous Libyan scholars (Alkhaboli, 2021; Megaia, 2023). This study was designed as a qualitative case study involving syllabus analysis, student questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with lecturers in order to capture the curricular and pedagogical dimensions of cohesive device instruction. Together, these data provide a contextualized view of the pedagogical landscape of academic writing instruction at Fezzan

University. Following this introduction, the paper presents the qualitative methodology, reports the findings from syllabus analysis, lecturer interviews, and student questionnaires, discusses the findings in relation to writerly reading and reading-writing integration, and concludes with pedagogical implications for EFL writing instruction.

## **METHOD**

### **2.1 Research design**

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative case study design to examine the instructional and curricular factors shaping the teaching and learning of cohesive devices in EFL writing courses at Fezzan University. Awan, Yahya, and Arif (2023) note that qualitative research is useful for exploring complex pedagogical contexts and understanding educational practices in depth. A case study design was appropriate because the research focused on a bounded educational context, namely the English Department at Fezzan University, and sought to examine how syllabus design, lecturer practices, and student experiences interact within that local setting (Yin, 2018). A case study therefore provides an appropriate framework for understanding how specific instructional strategies and curricular designs shape students' difficulties in using cohesive devices within the Fezzan University context.

### **2.2 Participants and Sampling**

The participants in this study consisted of two groups: five EFL writing lecturers and twenty undergraduate students. The five lecturers were selected because they had direct experience teaching writing-related courses in the English Department at Fezzan University, including writing, reading, and EFL pedagogy courses. Their teaching experience ranged from five to twelve years, and each lecturer had taught at least three writing courses within the department. The second group consisted of twenty undergraduate students who had completed all writing courses offered by the English Department. These students were in their pre-final or final semesters, the 7th and 8th.

The selected students were considered information-rich participants because they had completed the full sequence of writing courses and were preparing research proposals or final research projects at the time of data collection. Therefore, they were able to describe the difficulties they had encountered in producing coherent and cohesive texts and to identify their writing-related needs. They can also describe teaching practices and classroom experiences related to cohesive devices and cohesion.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Barkhuizen, (2014) emphasized that the purposes and goals of the study are the most essential factors that contribute to selecting the participants and the number of participants. Purposive sampling is used in qualitative research to identify participants who can provide a detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation (Barkhuizen, 2014). According to this view, the researcher established specific purposive sampling criteria. First, the lecturer should be a member of teaching writing courses within the English

Department. Second, students should have completed all five writing courses in the English department at Fezzan University. These criteria ensured that two groups could effectively describe the instructional process and learning experience to address the study's focus on the teaching and learning challenges in cohesive device use in EFL writing.

### **2.3 Researcher Reflexivity**

The researcher was a teaching assistant in the English Department at Fezzan University. This insider position facilitated access to participants and syllabus documents, but it also created the possibility of interpretive bias during data collection and analysis. To minimize subjectivity, the researcher employed standardized interview procedures with all lecturers as participants, maintained participant confidentiality, and focused on representing participants' perspectives accurately. To strengthen analytical impartiality, the researcher shared the transcripts, questionnaire summaries, and syllabus coding with the fourth author, who reviewed the data, checked the accuracy of the coding, and discussed emerging interpretations with the researcher.

### **2.4 Research Instruments**

To understand the pedagogical landscape of writing instruction in the English Department at Fezzan University, this study used three data collection instruments: document analysis, student questionnaires, and semi-structured lecturer interviews. Document analysis was used to examine the syllabi of the five writing courses, with particular attention to course objectives, content sequencing, learning outcomes, classroom activities, and assessment components related to cohesion and cohesive devices. The syllabus analysis criteria were developed based on Renandya et al.'s (2021) input-rich reading-writing framework and Abbas and Syarif's (2021) criteria for effective L2 writing syllabus design.

The Semi-Structured Interview Protocol was designed to explore the instructional perspectives of five lecturers in the English department of Fezzan University. The interview questions were designed as open-ended, focusing on their pedagogical rationale, implementation of the departmental syllabus, and perceived challenges in teaching cohesion and coherence within the five writing courses. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to explore participants' responses in depth while maintaining alignment with the core research questions. Examples of interview questions included: "What instructional strategies do you use to teach cohesive devices in writing classes?" and "How are reading activities integrated with writing instruction within writing courses?" To encourage explanation and elicit participants' experiences and perceptions, the researcher avoided yes/no questions.

The Student Questionnaire was designed to investigate students' experience in EFL writing learning within the English department of Fezzan University to support the qualitative interpretation of the study findings. It comprised 15 multiple-choice items designed to obtain descriptive insights about: (1) students' learning experiences regarding lecturers' instructional

strategies, (2) the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing their writing quality, and (3) self-assessment of their ability to produce coherent academic texts. The questionnaire was presented bilingually in English and Arabic to reduce possible misunderstanding and improve response clarity. It was reviewed by all four authors to check item clarity, relevance to the research questions, and consistency with the study's focus on cohesive device instruction.

## 2.5 Data collection

The researcher, who served as a teaching assistant in the same department, collected the syllabi of the five writing courses from the English Department's online academic system at Fezzan University. The semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed for thematic analysis. The researcher distributed the questionnaires manually to the selected students during the 2025-2026 academic year to ensure that only eligible participants completed the survey.

## 2.6 Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the types of data to be collected, and their right to withdraw from participation. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all lecturers and students involved in the study. To protect confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymized in the reporting of interview and questionnaire data. The collected data were used only for research purposes. Institutional permission was obtained from the English Department at Fezzan University before the syllabus documents, lecturer interviews, and student questionnaires were collected.

## 2.7 Data analysis

Data from the three sources were analyzed qualitatively to examine how curricular design, lecturer practices, and student learning experiences shaped the teaching and learning of cohesive devices across the five writing courses at Fezzan University. Each data source was analyzed according to its function in the study and then compared through triangulation. The syllabus analysis provided evidence of curricular coverage, the lecturer interviews revealed pedagogical practices, and the student questionnaires offered complementary insights into learners' experiences of cohesion instruction.

The analysis of the five writing course syllabi was guided by Renandya et al.'s (2021) framework of reading-writing integration and Abbas and Syarif's (2021) criteria for effective L2 writing syllabus design. particularly, the analysis focused on examining course objectives, instructional content, learning outcomes, classroom activities, and assessment practices to describe the syllabus instructions of cohesive devices and provide evidence about whether these instructions integrate between reading and writing through writing courses.

The syllabus was systematically coded according to analytical categories, including: (1) explicit instruction of cohesive devices, (2) implicit instruction of cohesive devices, (3) integration activities of reading and writing, (4) scaffolding instructional strategies in writing courses, and (5) writing cohesion as a learning goal. For example, syllabus references to “linking words” without further explanation or guided practice were coded as implicit instruction, whereas activities requiring students to analyze model texts before producing their own writing were coded as reading-writing integration. This coding process was developed based on Renandya et al.’s (2021) framework and Abbas and Syarif’s (2021) criteria for effective L2 writing syllabus design in order to evaluate the extent to which the writing curriculum supported the development of coherent and cohesive academic writing. To enhance trustworthiness, the researcher compared findings across the three data sources and discussed the coding and preliminary interpretations with the other authors. This process was used to check consistency between the extracted data, the coding categories, and the research questions.

The interview data collected from the five lecturers were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step process: transcribing data, coding data systematically, gathering all relevant data, generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis, generating clear definitions and names for each theme, and final analysis of selected extracts. The following table explains Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step process and the researcher’s procedures in each step

**Table 1. Summary of data analysis steps.**

Analytical Steps	Analysis procedures
Transcribing data	The interviews were transcribed and organized. The researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to become familiar with the data.
Coding data systematically	The researcher generated initial codes related to the research objectives and recurring patterns in the data.
Gathering relevant data	Relevant extracts were grouped under the corresponding codes and analytical categories.
Generating a thematic map	The researcher reviewed the coded data and organized related codes into broader themes.
Defining and naming themes	Each theme was refined, defined, and named according to its relevance to the research questions.
Producing the final analysis	The researcher interpreted the themes in relation to the literature review, theoretical framework, and research questions.

The researcher summarizes these six steps in three analysis processes. First, the researcher repeatedly read the transcripts of lecturers’ interviews to identify primary instructional and curricular issues related to

EFL writing pedagogy. Second, initial codes were generated systematically through statements connected to the objectives of the study. Examples of initial codes included “dependence on home assignments,” “sentence-focused instruction,” and “limited writing practice.” These codes represented recurring instructional patterns identified across participants’ responses. Third, the initial codes were grouped into broader analytical themes. For example, the code “limited writing practice,” under the Classroom activities theme, and “sentence-focused instruction” under the Instructional strategies theme. The researcher manually reviewed students’ questionnaire responses to identify recurring patterns in three analytical areas: learning experiences, perceived instructional effectiveness, and self-assessment of cohesive writing ability. Each analytical area was categorized into two contrasting codes, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 The students’ views and initial codes**

<b>Analytical View</b>	<b>Code1</b>	<b>Code2</b>
The strategies that students face during their learning experience in the English department	sentence-level grammar teaching	Discourse-level writing pedagogy
The students' feelings about the effectiveness of the instructions to enhance their writing quality	Insufficient cohesion instruction	Effective cohesion instructions
how much the students feel comfortable writing a coherent academic text	Low confidence in cohesive writing	Middle or High confidence in cohesive writing

Finally, each student’s responses were reviewed and summarized according to the three analytical areas.

## **RESULTS**

The document analysis examined whether the five EFL writing course syllabi at Fezzan University addressed cohesion and cohesive devices as explicit components of course objectives, content, classroom activities, and learning outcomes. The findings revealed that the syllabi introduced writing components in a logical sequence. Writing Courses 1 to 5 progressed from sentence structure to paragraph structure, essay structure, correspondence writing, and academic writing. Furthermore, those syllabi focused on structural unity and logical coherence as an important aim. The following paragraphs introduce the syllabus of each course individually.

Writing Course 1 focused on sentence structure and sentence types. It aimed to improve students’ confidence in writing in English and develop their ability to address sentence-level problems such as run-on sentences, fragments, and dangling modifiers. Under this course content, there is an implicit understanding of the cohesive devices. The course description asks the instructor to provide the student with a variety of suitable materials for developing writing.

Writing Course 2 focused on paragraphs and paragraph structure. It aimed to train students to use prewriting techniques in writing practice.

There is one section that addresses "Achieving Coherence," including time coherence of sentence order and coherence between paragraph sentences. This section explicitly repeats important words, persistent pronouns, synonyms, and substitutions, and transitional expressions.

The Writing Course 3 syllabus focused on short essays, including essay structure, organization, introductions, body paragraphs, conclusions, and essay types. It aims to improve students' ability to write coherent essays by revisiting paragraph organization and the writing process. It also emphasizes practice writing through full short essays.

From writing sentences to paragraphs and essays, Writing(4) shifted to more advanced academic writing styles. The syllabus of this course focused on advanced writing skills such as paraphrasing, summarizing, and the correct use of quotations. The content of this course indicated cohesion implicitly through academic writing skills. Practically, the syllabus document asked the instructors to show students how to write in different academic styles successfully and effectively.

The last course in the writing courses series is creative writing. This course focuses on short stories and their organization (beginnings, endings, and narrative variety). Cohesion was implicated through the narrative flow of story events by narrating various verb tenses

**Table 3. Analytical findings of the Writing courses document.**

Courses Number	The primary focus	Main content	Indicating Cohesive devices and cohesion
Writing 1	sentence	Sentence structure, capitalization, and punctuation	Implicit
Writing 2	paragraph	Pronouns, synonyms, and transitional words	Explicit
Writing 3	essay	Essay paragraphs' structure	Explicit through review
Writing 4	report	Paraphrasing and referencing	Implicit
Writing 5	creative	Events narrative flow	Implicit

The syllabus findings can be summarized in three main points. First, the five writing courses follow a logical progression from sentence-level writing to more advanced writing tasks. Second, coherence is introduced at different course levels, although its treatment varies across the curriculum. Third, cohesion is recognized as part of writing development, but it is addressed mainly implicitly. Explicit attention to cohesive devices appears most clearly in Writing Course 2, while the other courses treat cohesion indirectly through broader writing tasks.

The lecturer interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedures. This section reports themes related to cohesive device instruction, lecturer feedback practices, and the integration of reading and writing in the target writing courses.

The lecturer interviews indicated that instruction was primarily oriented toward grammatical accuracy and vocabulary development rather than the discourse-level use of cohesive devices. They explained this by saying that most students suffer from weakness in writing due to a lack of understanding of grammar rules and a severe weakness in acquired vocabulary. Most of them prioritized this because they cannot guide students to secondary aspects before achieving primary ones, and they described the proper use of cohesive devices to produce coherent text as a secondary matter. This grammar-oriented emphasis is illustrated in the following lecturer response:

- (1) "Most of the lecture time is spent explaining basic sentence boundaries and building students' vocabulary. I teach cohesive devices to help students avoid run-on sentences rather than to develop complex arguments."

This response suggests that cohesive devices were often introduced as tools for avoiding sentence-level errors rather than as discourse resources for constructing argumentation and textual coherence. Although the lecturers acknowledged the importance of cohesion in academic writing, four of them viewed cohesive device use as a skill that students could acquire naturally through repeated writing practice. Furthermore, they explained that feedback on cohesion was usually provided only when students made errors in using cohesive devices.

- (2) "My focus is more on the students' writing overall content and my feedback related to what they write, not what they should write."
- (3) "We don't have a lesson titled Cohesive Devices, but still I ask students to use words like 'and, but' in the correct way and correct place in the sentence during classroom practices."

These responses indicate that cohesion was not consistently treated as an explicit instructional focus. Instead, it was addressed reactively through correction or brief references to basic connectors when students produced errors. The interview data also showed that reading and writing were generally treated as separate curricular domains. Two lecturers explicitly described reading and writing as separate courses, while others assumed that students' exposure to reading courses would indirectly support their writing development.

- (4) "In our department, reading and writing are taught separately; certainly, they are dependent on students' overall language accuracy and fluency."
- (5) "In lectures on writing skills, we don't have time to read and analyze written texts, but I encourage students to read in their homes to enhance their ability to write, and students' handouts provide many academic texts. I asked them to analyze them and notice their overall organization."

This finding indicates a limited implementation of writerly reading. Although reading materials were available, they were not systematically used in writing classes to guide students in noticing cohesive ties, discourse organization, or rhetorical movement in model texts. Lecturer strategies

showed limited variety in classroom activities and relied heavily on individual assignments. Feedback was generally provided on students' written assignments, with limited opportunities for classroom discussion or guided revision.

- (6) "In lectures, I explain the type or structure of a paragraph or essay, then I ask students to memorize the description of that type or structure, and they have to do an assignment related to using the instructions in a real written text (this is only a general description of my instruction in writing courses, practically)."

**Table 4. Summary of lecturers' interview findings.**

Theme	Key findings
Instructional strategies	Instruction primarily focused on basic grammar rules and vocabulary building rather than discourse-level use of cohesive devices.
Instruction of cohesive devices	Lecturers asked students to use basic connectors, such as and and but, mainly to avoid sentence-level errors such as run-on sentences.
Cohesion as an academic writing component	Lecturers acknowledged the importance of cohesion but tended to assume that students would acquire cohesive skills naturally through writing practice.
Integration of reading and writing	Reading and writing were generally treated as separate skills, with limited systematic use of reading texts to support cohesion-focused writing instruction.
Classroom activities	Classroom activities relied heavily on lecturer explanation, structural practice, and individual assignments, with limited interactive discussion and guided feedback.

The student questionnaire was used to complement the syllabus and interview data by identifying students' perceptions of writing instruction, cohesion-focused learning experiences, and their confidence in producing coherent academic texts.

The questionnaire findings supported the interview data. Sixteen students reported that writing instruction focused primarily on grammar exercises and sentence-level correction, whereas only four students indicated that they had experienced discourse-level writing instruction. Eighteen students reported that the writing courses provided insufficient instruction on cohesive devices and coherence, while only two students viewed the instruction as adequate. In terms of self-assessment, thirteen students reported low confidence in producing coherent academic texts, whereas seven students reported moderate or high confidence. These findings suggest that students perceived a gap between their knowledge of sentence and paragraph structures and their ability to use cohesive devices effectively in academic writing.

Table 5. Summary of students' responses

Analytical View	Findings	Number of Students
Learning Experiences	Writing instruction focused primarily on grammar exercises and sentence-level correction	16 students
Learning Experiences	Writing instruction included discourse-level writing	4 students
Instructional Effectiveness	Writing courses provided insufficient instruction regarding cohesive devices and coherence	18 students
Instructional Effectiveness	Writing courses' instructions effectively supported cohesion and coherence development	2 students
Self-Assessment	Students lacked confidence in producing coherent academic texts	13 students
Self-Assessment	Students reported moderate or high confidence in producing coherent academic texts	7 students

## DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Implicit Treatment of Cohesion Across the Writing Curriculum

The syllabus analysis demonstrated that the writing courses are logically ordered from sentence-level writing toward paragraph writing, essay writing, and academic or creative writing. While Writing Course 2 includes explicit attention to cohesive devices, the other writing courses address cohesion indirectly through general writing activities. The syllabus appears to leave decisions about explicit or implicit cohesion instruction largely to individual lecturers, which may contribute to inconsistent instructional practices across writing course levels. This finding is consistent with Renandya's (2013) view that successful foreign language learning depends on several instructional factors, including input, output, fluency, formulaic expressions, motivation, grammar, vocabulary, and the amount and intensity of instruction. However, the implicit treatment of cohesion identified in this study contrasts with Rassouli and Abbasvandi's (2013) finding that explicit instruction can enhance the accuracy and variety of cohesive ties in students' writing. From the perspective of genre-based pedagogy, Hyland (2019) emphasizes that academic writing develops through scaffolding and guided interaction with discourse structures. This perspective supports the need to reinforce cohesion across writing course levels rather than treating it as a skill addressed only at the paragraph-writing stage. Recent studies have also reported that explicit instruction in cohesive devices can support students' writing development, as shown in the experimental studies by Alawerdy and Alalwi (2022) and Yamaai (2023). Similarly, Chanyoo (2021) suggests that knowledge of cohesive devices plays an important role in improving the quality of EFL writing.

### 5.2 Grammar-Focused Instruction

The findings support Tahsildar and Yusoff (2018), who report that many EFL writing classrooms focus primarily on grammatical correctness

with limited attention to discourse-level writing. The grammar-centered instructional practices identified in the current study may explain why many students struggle with using cohesive devices. Waqas et al. (2026) emphasize that sentence-level accuracy is a necessary component of writing, but it is insufficient for academic writing. Furthermore, the findings indicate limited evidence that the writing courses integrate micro-level grammatical instruction with macro-level discourse organization. This suggests that instructional models such as the Essay Structure-Instructional Strategy (ESIS), which attempt to connect grammatical accuracy with discourse organization, have not been systematically reflected in local writing pedagogy (Amran & Panicker, 2026; Gofurova, 2025). However, this reliance on structural, sentence-level grammar instruction may also reflect contextual constraints, such as limited classroom time, limited instructional resources, and established lecture-based teaching routines.

### 5.3 Limited Integration Between Reading and Writing Instruction

The empirical findings reveal a distinct lack of classroom activities that integrate reading and writing instruction. This may explain the students' challenges in producing coherent text. According to Renandya et al. (2021), reading provides learners with meaningful exposure to cohesive structures and discourse patterns in authentic texts, which can later support students' writing development. Similarly, Benu, Baun, & Nenotek (2022) emphasized that lecturers of writing courses in EFL must develop a strategy that enables students to recognize and understand all elements of writing, including cohesive devices as tools and as functional elements. Renandya et al.'s (2021) framework suggests that treating reading and writing as isolated skills may limit students' exposure to the textual, rhetorical, and cohesive resources needed for academic writing. Furthermore, heavy reliance on home assignments may reduce students' opportunities to discuss their writing processes, receive immediate feedback, and observe how cohesive devices function in authentic model texts. As emphasized by Hyland (2019) and Renandya et al. (2021), successful L2 academic writing instruction should involve classroom-based practice, guided noticing, explicit explanation, and meaningful feedback.

### CONCLUSION

This study examined pedagogical practices in teaching cohesive devices and promoting textual coherence in undergraduate EFL writing courses at the English Department of Fezzan University. The findings indicate that writing instruction in the department is largely characterized by grammar-focused teaching and sentence-level correction, while cohesive devices are less consistently addressed as discourse-level resources. The student questionnaire data also indicated that reading and writing were generally experienced as separate skills, with limited implementation of writerly reading activities. Finally, the study revealed that local pedagogical practices partially diverge from the reading-writing integration framework proposed by Renandya et al. (2021). Although the writing syllabi demonstrate a logical progression from sentence-level writing to more

advanced forms of academic and creative writing, they provide limited explicit opportunities for students to analyze authentic texts as models of cohesion, coherence, and discourse organization.

This study provides a contextualized understanding of how syllabus design and instructional strategies may shape EFL students' opportunities to develop coherent academic writing. The findings suggest that traditional grammar-oriented strategies may support sentence-level accuracy, but they appear insufficient for developing students' discourse-level control of cohesion and coherence. The study has several limitations. It was conducted in a single institutional context with a limited number of lecturers and students, which may restrict the transferability of the findings to other EFL settings. Future research could examine students' actual writing performance through classroom-based intervention studies that integrate reading and writing instruction and explicitly teach cohesive devices as discourse resources.

### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT**

ALA conceived and designed the study. ALA and ANA collected the data, ALA analyzed the data, and SN and AS contributed to manuscript drafting and revision. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

### **AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

The authors used Gemini during manuscript preparation to organize the manuscript. All outputs generated by the AI tool were critically reviewed, revised, and verified by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

### **COMPETING INTERESTS STATEMENT**

The authors declare no competing interests.

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