Coherence in Bachelor Degree Theses in a Public University

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Abstract

There has been a lot of studies of coherence in academic writing. Many previous studies have focused on coherence in research articles, newspapers, books, and literary works. There is not much research on coherence in undergraduate student thesis. This study aims to respond to the knowledge gap. This aims to identify the coherence in bachelor thesis writing in English department of a public university. The case study used 171 of students' thesis who graduated from 2016 to 2018. The findings of the study are that coherence becomes one of the main problems in thesis writing especially lack of consistency, low quality, logical orders, and organization of writing. Therefore, the findings of the research have significant pedagogical implications for lecturers, researchers, and students. It is suggested that students need be aware of thesis guidelines, the standard quality of academic writing, attend academic writing training, regular meetings with thesis supervisors, and the writing practice. It also informs thesis supervisors to critically evaluate supervision management and procedures.

Keywords: coherence, academic writing, bachelor degree thesis, public university, Indonesia.

Introduction

Coherence in academic writing becomes one of the pivotal issues for learners who learn English as a second or foreign language. Coherence contributes to academic writing in a number of ways: it helps writing readable, understandable, and comprehensible. Coherence provides clues and guidance for readers to understand academic writing smoothly. For these reasons, the coherence in academic writing is worthy for further research.

Coherence is approached as a multifaceted phenomenon comprising conceptual connectedness, evaluative and dialogical consistency, and textual relatedness (Dontcheva-navratilova, 2017). This means that coherence guides writers to connect one sentence with another sentence, one paragraph with other paragraphs, one main idea with supporting ideas. The coherence helps writers and readers to evaluate the connection and the flow of the writing. In addition, the coherence assists readers and writers to decipher the textual relatedness.

A study conducted by Chanyoo (2018) on coherence and cohesive devises used by undergraduate students in Thailand university contexts. Chanyoo identified three forms of coherence: form relatedness, reference relatedness, and semantic relatedness. The form relatedness is a grammar and ellipsis focus, the reference relatedness includes lexical references, and semantic relatedness can be measured via conjunctions that show meaningful connection of each part of the sentences and paragraph. These forms of coherence are important to see the connectivity of the ideas and flows in the sentences.

A more recent studies have highlighted the importance of coherence in writing sentences and paragraphs. Eltayeb, Ahmed, & Khalid (2019) investigate errors of unity and coherence in Saudi Arabian EFL university students' written paragraph. They found that there are several types of

coherence errors such as repetition of keywords and parallelism; b) consistent use of pronoun reference; c) consistent use of transition signals or cohesive devices; d) arranging ideas in a logical order. Another recent study conducted by Wang and Zhang (2019) explored lexical cohesion and coherence in academic research. Wang and Zang identified that the adoption of repetition, synonymy, and metonymy can enhance the coherence and cohesiveness of the sentences and paragraphs.

In practice, coherence becomes a significant issue and challenge for undergraduate students. This case occurs in one of the English departments in a public university. This article explores issues and problems faced by students in bachelor thesis writing. This study is significant because it helps lecturers, academic supervisors, and students to identify common patterns of coherence occur in the thesis writing. In addition, this research can contribute to providing suggestions and recommendations for policy makers in academic context to assist the students for future.

Research methodology

The research design for this study is a case study approach. There are two types of data collected: primary data and secondary data. For the purpose of this paper, thesis documents were reported and analyzed. The case study used 171 of students' thesis who graduated from 2016 to 2018 from a public university in Makassar. From the total of the thesis, three samples are presented below as the representation of each year: one from 2016, 2017, and 2018. The presentation of the findings use the portraits of individual thesis sample. This article analyses the introduction section as a sample of the article writing. The portraits analysis of each individual has been used by Abduh & Andrew (2017) and (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2018).

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study will describe three samples as the representation of students' thesis: Novi, Rijal and Yuli (short names).

The first example is Novi's bachelor thesis who a student graduated in 2016. In her thesis there is lack of consistency of ideas between one sentence and the other sentences. It is stated below:

> (1) It has been generally believed that writing in English means the ability to express idea, feeling, opinion, imagination, and knowledge into written form more freely. (2) Although it seems to be more freely, in fact, writing process is still considered as one language skill that is mostly difficult to perform. (3) Many complicated requirements should be included to produce good writing result. (4) A writer must master such an enough vocabulary even though synonym or antonym of the word to express good and understandable thought or idea. (5) Furthermore, as we know some words or vocabulary items have different meaning when they used in different occasion (First paragraph of the Thesis Introduction Chapter, Novi, 2016).

Novi investigates students' interest in writing recount text. The writing recount text is the main topic of her thesis. In her thesis writing, especially in the paragraph of the introduction chapter (see above sample) shows inconsistency of ideas among sentences. The idea in sentence (1) has no connection with the idea in sentence (2). The first sentence discusses the function of the writing which can be used to express ideas, imaginations, feeling and opinion. On the other hand, the second sentence describes the difficulty in writing process. The sentence (3) relates to the theme of requirement in producing good writing, while the sentence (4) elucidates the importance of vocabulary in writing. In addition, the sentence (5) relates to different meaning of the vocabulary.

From the Novi's thesis sample, there are five different ideas on one paragraph: function of writing, challenge in writing process, requirement of good writing, the importance of vocabulary in writing,

and different meaning of vocabulary. In Novi's thesis, it shows the lack connectivity among sentences which causes this piece of thesis lack of coherence.

The second example is taken from Rijal who graduated from English Department in 2017. His thesis title relates to *the use of BUSUU application to improve students' vocabulary mastery*.

> 1) Accelerating globalization and digitalization, English has increasingly been
>
> used as an international language, English has give (given) a big impact from the economy, from culture, sport, technology, science, and education. 2) English as one of the languages in the world is very important to learn because it can be used in giving or receiving information, to communicate with other people around the world, and for the development of education, economy, technology, and others. 3) In this globalization era learning English is an obligation, because English language is one of the requirements and support for admission to enter in some university, to find a suitable job and etc. 4) In the field of education, to preparing young learners to study English as early as possible is very crucial because their brain and memory are ready for learning and most them can learnt quite well. 5) Furthermore, they have to acquire English that involves four language skills those are, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. (6) However, being able to master the skill, they need vocabulary (First paragraph in the introduction chapter, Rijal, 2017).

The findings show that there has been inconsistency of ideas among six sentences provided in one paragraph. Every sentence in a paragraph has its own theme so that it does not connect to one in another. From the extract above, it indicates that the first sentence (1) discusses two issues English used as an international language and the impact of English in several aspects of life including economy, culture, and education. The second sentence (2) describes the importance and function of English. The third sentence (3) relates to the requirement and obligation of learning English and the fourth sentence (4) deals with the crucial reason why English is important to be learnt as early as possible. The sentence number five (5) describes four skills of English: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Finally, the sixth sentence has the theme of vocabulary.

The last example is the thesis of Yuli who graduated in 2018. Her thesis title is using Realia as teaching aid to develop students' vocabulary mastery**.**

> (1) Learning English is very important. (2) Everybody may speak English everywhere and every time because it is the important language in the world. (3) That is why we should learn English briefly. (4) English language learning has four language skills that must be mastered if someone wants to be successful in English. (5) There are speaking skills, writing skill, listening skill, and reading skill. (6) In this case, the researcher will discuss writing skill, especially writing text. (7) As one of the four language skills, writing has always occupied a place in most English language course. (8) People not only need spoken English but also use written the English language (The first paragraph of the introduction chapter, Yuli, 2018).

From the paragraph sample above, the first sentence relates to the importance of English. Then the second sentence relates to the possibility of speaking English in the context of time and space. The third, fourth, and the fifth sentence deals with four skills of English. The sixth sentence, the researchers discuss he aims of the research and the seventh deals with the writing as the most difficult subject, and finally it deals with the spoken and written English.

In addition, the three undergraduate students' thesis seem lack of logical orders and ineffective organization due to different ideas in one paragraph (Eltayeb et al., 2019). The lack of lexical cohesions and the connection among ideas has contributed all three examples as problems of

coherence (Wang & Zhang, 2019). These coherence problems lead to the low quality of thesis and low quality of academic writing. Therefore, the coherence problems have significant pedagogical implications for both students and thesis supervisors. For example, students and thesis supervisors need to work on the common agreement and platform in order to establish shared understanding of expected outcomes of the thesis.

Conclusion

It appears that coherence becomes one of the main problems in thesis writing especially lack of consistency, low quality, logical orders, and organization of writing. This finding has implication for thesis supervisors to critically evaluate supervision management and procedures. Future research is important to be conducted in many different settings with larger samples so that it can provide a comprehensive understanding the issues of coherence occurred in university academic writing. Despite using sample from one department in a public university, this research article provides useful and insightful references for students and researchers.

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