

Graduate Students' Ability in Constructing Coherence in the Review of Related Theories of Thesis Proposal

Dessy Atika Suri Hutasuhut^{1*} and Muhammad Al Hafizh²

¹ English Department, FBS Universitas Negeri Padang, Padang, Sumatra Barat 25131, Indonesia

² English Department, FBS Universitas Negeri Padang, Padang, Sumatra Barat 25131, Indonesia

*Corresponding author. Email: dhutasuhut8@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Coherence is one of the elements that should be considered in writing, especially in writing a review of related theories of the thesis proposal. Furthermore, it is also known if the review of related theories is one of the main sections in the thesis proposal since the students' understanding of the topic of study can be seen in this section. Their knowledge in this section can be seen when they have to find out, explain, and review the theories from some experts. However, some coherence issues occur in writing a review of related theories of the thesis proposal. The matters are the students often lack in using the transitional signals to connect the ideas in writing the review of related theories, grammatical problems, and the way students organize the ideas. Related to these issues, this article has the aim to seek the ability of graduate students to construct coherence in the review of related theories of thesis proposals. The descriptive research design was used in this study to describe their ability to create coherence. To determine their ability, 24 reviews of related theories from different thesis proposals were chosen using purposive sampling. It was found that most of the graduate students had good ability in constructing coherence in their review of related theories of thesis proposal. Thus, it can be interpreted if graduate students understood well and could apply the coherence well enough in writing a review of related theories.

Keywords: *Coherence, Review of related theories, Thesis proposal*

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing a thesis proposal is known as a must for graduate students as one of the stages to finish their master's education. Regarding this, there is a thing that should be considered by the students when they write their thesis proposal, namely coherence. Coherence is the relation among the sentences that can unify the ideas. Viewing the coherence in writing the thesis proposal can help the readers understand the students' thesis proposal. Hadla supports it; she states that the text can be said coherent if the ideas and sentences fit appropriately and the readers can understand it easily [1]. From the previous statement about coherence, it can be seen that the students should pay attention to coherence when writing the thesis proposal to create a coherent thesis. Moreover, Suwandi also has a similar opinion about coherence. He notes that coherence is a unity of the sentences and paragraphs in the text that can help the readers read and understand the text [2]. Suwandi's opinion is similar to the previous one (Hadla's opinion), in which both of them say that coherence is about the unity of sentences in the text. To that, coherence, as stated by Celce-Murcia and Olshtain, is essential in writing that unifies the language elements

of text [3]. Thus, it can be concluded if coherence is a foremost thing that should be considered in writing the thesis proposal since its existence can assist the readers in avoiding misunderstanding.

Related to a thesis proposal, it consists of three main sections: (1) Introduction; (2) Review of Related Literature; and (3) Research Method. Each part has its essential role in the thesis. For instance, the introduction section is the place to put the background of the problem and the purposes of the research. It is reasonable since the readers can read the reason of the researchers in choosing a particular topic to be studied and know the researcher's purposes in conducting the research. Another critical part of the thesis proposal is the Review of Related Literature. In this part, the researchers can put the theories from many experts and the previous related findings to strengthen their reason in choosing the particular topic to be researched. The last part of the thesis proposal is the Research Method in which the researchers write their research design, data, instrumentation, data collection technique, and technique of data analysis in this section.

In writing each part of the thesis proposal, the students face different difficulties, such as writing the

Introduction section. In this section, they have to raise the problems and correlate them with the previous research. Then, writing a review of related literature, specifically a review of related theories, the students must understand the theories from many experts and give further explanations using their own words.

By seeing the students' issues above in writing the thesis proposal, it is reasonable if some coherence problems were found when they wrote a review of related theories. The first problem is the lack of transitional signals. The students often forgot to write the transitional signals in their thesis proposals. For example:

Speaking is an ability to orally express opinions, thoughts, facts and feelings to audience and even to oneself. Mart (2012:91) says speaking is "a productive oral skill which consists of constructing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning". Speaking is a skill of conveying words or sounds of articulation to express or to deliver ideas, opinions, or feelings. Brown (2004:140) points out that "speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information".

A student wrote the paragraph above. She wrote her opinion and experts' opinions about speaking; nevertheless, she did not write the transitional signal to correlate the idea of her sentences. It will be better if the student puts the transitional signal in order that the readers can understand the correlation of her sentences.

Secondly, the issue is a grammatical problem. The example is displayed below:

In addition, perceptions is defined as the process of receiving information and make a sense of the world around people (Lahlry cited Muna, 2019); McShane and Glinow cited Mahdum et al, 2019).

It can be seen that the student matched the subject 'Perceptions' with 'is.' Grammatically, it is false since the plural subject should be with 'are.' Therefore, her writing would be better if written: "...perceptions are..."

The last problem found in the student's writing is they tended to jump the ideas, as follow:

The concluded that, the several types of speaking is relate. In speaking need an action and response between speaker and listener. Based on types of speaking, every should related to the content on the topic.

Based on the previous paragraph, it is shown that the students did not consider the connection of ideas among the sentences. In the first sentence, she wrote about types of speaking, but she discussed another thing in the second sentence. Therefore, her writing can be seen as incoherent since it was not arranged logically.

Furthermore, many studies discuss coherence and students' writing. The studies were conducted by Lismay [4], Hasanah [5], Karjono [6], Apriliya [7], and Farida and Rosyidi [8]. Even though the topic of their research is about coherence, they have different research purposes. For example, Lismay tried to figure out the students' understanding of coherence through their mid-

term test; meanwhile, Hasanah had the goal to find out the students' ability related to coherence on the students' exposition writing. Karjono and Apriliya also had the purpose of finding out the students' ability to construct coherence. However, Karjono tried to analyze the students' ability in a specific part of the thesis (Background of the problem); Apriliya studied the students' argumentative essay. The previous research was conducted by Farida and Rosyidi in which they wanted to know the students' writing quality, particularly coherence, in their recount text.

The paragraph above has explained the previous studies related to coherence, and the researchers figured out the students' ability, competence, or writing quality in constructing coherence in the short text or particular part of the thesis (Background of the problem). It can be seen that they did not study students' ability in constructing coherence in the review of related theories of thesis proposal yet. Finding out the students' ability to create coherence in the review of related theories of thesis proposal is also important since their understanding of their topic of study can be seen in this section. In addition, they also tried to understand, compile, and explain the theories from many experts in writing the review of related theories. Therefore, the researcher studied the students' ability to construct coherence in the review of related theories written by English Education graduate students of Universitas Negeri Padang.

2. METHODS

The descriptive research design was used in this study to describe the students' ability to construct coherence in their review of related theories of thesis proposal. Thus, document analysis was used as the instrument of this study. The researcher chose a review of related theories of thesis proposal from 24 graduate students of Universitas Negeri Padang in the academic year 2019/2020. They were selected by using the purposive sampling technique since they had conducted their thesis proposal seminar.

In finding out the graduate student's ability in constructing coherence in their review of related theories of thesis proposal, the researcher analyzed their writing based on the coherence devices stated by Oshima, they are: (1) Repeating key nouns; (2) Using of consistent pronoun; (3) Using transitional signal; and (4) Arranging ideas in a logical order [9]. Moreover, to assess their ability, the scoring of writing introduced by Hamp-Lyon was used by the researcher which the scoring is displayed as following [10] :

Table 1. The Category of Writing Ability

Score	Category
6	High/Excellent
5	Good
4	High Average
3	Low Average
2	Weak
1	Very Weak

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the result of the analysis, it was found that most graduate students have good ability in constructing coherence in the review of related theories of thesis proposal. The result can be seen in the table as follows:

Table 2. Student's Ability in Constructing Coherence in the Review of Related Theories of Thesis Proposal

No	Category	Number of Students
1	Very Weak	0
2	Weak	0
3	Low Average	0
4	High Average	4
5	Good	20
6	Excellent	0
Total		24

Table 2 shows the number of students in each category of ability in building coherence in the review of related theories. It represents that 20 students are included in the good category, and 4 students have the high average ability. On the other hand, no one is included in the very weak, weak, low average, and excellent category. Thus, it can be said if most students have good ability in building coherence in the review of related theories of thesis proposal. Regarding this finding, Syafnida, and Ardi, who researched coherence in the exposition text, also found that the students have good ability in building coherence in the text [11].

To further know the students' ability to build coherence in the review of related theories of thesis proposal, the table below presents the average score of students' ability for each of the coherence devices.

Table 3. The Average Score of Students' Ability (Each of Coherence Devices)

No	Coherence Devices	Average Score	Category
1	Repetition of Key Noun	4,7	Good
2	Using Consistent Pronouns	5,1	Good
3	Transitional Signal	4,6	Good
4	Logical Order	5,1	Good

The table points out the average score of students' capability in applying all of the coherence devices. It is shown that the average score of students' ability in using consistent pronouns is 5,1, and this average score is similar to the average score of their ability in ordering ideas logically. It means that their ability to use consistent pronouns and logical order is better than two other coherence devices. Moreover, the average score of students' ability in the repetition of the key noun is 4,7. Lastly, their average score in using the transitional signal is 4,6. Even though the average score of repetition of key nouns and the transitional signal is lower than two other coherence devices, the student's ability in applying each of the coherence devices is categorized into good categories. The finding of this study is similar to the research finding from RahmtAllah

since he saw the result of his analysis is most of the students applied the pronouns in their writing [12]. Furthermore, Dasril, Zaim, and Ningsih analyzed the students' coherence in the background of the problem of the thesis proposal [13]. Then, they found that most of the students had built coherence in their writing. Karjono also conducted a similar study with Dasril, Zaim, and Ningsih in which he tried to find out the students' coherence in the introduction part of the thesis proposal [6]. His finding is the students had applied the coherence devices in the introduction part of their thesis proposal.

Related to the finding of this study, it is known that coherent writing can be achieved by applying four coherence devices, namely, (1) Repeating key nouns; (2) Using consistent pronouns; (3) Using transitional signals; and (4) Arranging ideas in logical order. Therefore, the example below is the student's writing which can apply all of the coherence devices well.

The rise of technology becomes the main fundamental thing that is existed in humans' life. ICT (Information and Communication Technology) as the one of technology products in communication and information also has rapidly increased over the years. Esteras and Fabre (2007) define that ICT as a system that is not only focused on the computer, it encompasses the use of computers and any kind of hardware that aims to meet a specific need. Another definition of ICT comes from Fallows and Banoth that ICT is the combination of computers (information technology) with telecommunications technologies. So, ICT tools provide and process both information and communication.

The previous paragraph represents that the student had applied all of the coherence devices in a paragraph. It is shown if the key noun of her paragraph above is 'ICT,' then she wrote it repeatedly in her writing. She also used the consistent pronoun such as 'it,' which refers to 'ICT.' In the last sentence, she applied the transitional signal 'so' to conclude the ideas written in the previous sentences. Her writing also shows that she ordered the ideas logically since she still discussed ICT from the first until the last sentence. Her effort in constructing the coherence can be included into a good category based on the previous explanation in which the readers can understand her writing easily. Xhepa supports this finding, and he said that the existence of coherence applied logically can give the correct information to the readers [14]. Therefore, by considering the coherence devices in writing the text, the information conveyed to the readers can be understood well by them.

Furthermore, as the information provided in Table 2, some students are categorized into high average ability in constructing coherence in the review of related theories of thesis proposal. One of the students' writing is presented as follow:

The 2013 curriculum mandates students to be familiar with HOTS issues (Kemendikbud, 2016).

HOTS is a knowledge and skill developed during learning in the context of a conceptual application that has not been thought of before, but the concept has been taught (Brookhart, 2010). According to Brookhart (2010) is the ability to think at a high level in the process of cognitive domain that is analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

*In accordance with the 2013 curriculum, the questions made for the high school level must achieve the stage of create of the cognitive process. In Bloom's taxonomy, **for example**, skills involving analysis, evaluation and synthesis (creation of new knowledge) are thought to be of a higher order than the learning of facts and concepts which requires different learning and teaching methods.*

The previous writing gives information about the students' ability to build coherence. In writing a review of related theories, the student repeatedly wrote the key noun in which her writing above is about 'HOTS.' She also wrote the transitional signal 'for example' to give the example of her explanation. On the other hand, pronouns are absent in her writing, whereas it can replace the key noun of her writing with a pronoun. Moreover, it can also be seen if the pronoun misses the last sentence of the first paragraph. The missing pronoun in this sentence can trigger a misunderstanding when the readers read it since they do not know the intention of the student's writing. In addition, the use of the pronoun is essential in the text since the writer can create the sentence effectively and choose the suitable pronoun which refers to a particular object [15].

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, constructing the coherence well in writing, especially review of related theories, is notable since the readers can understand the information well. The result presents that the graduate students have a good ability to build coherence in their review of related theories of thesis proposals. The findings also show that their average score in using consistent pronouns and logical order is better than applying repetition of key noun and transitional signals. However, it still can be stated if they are categorized into good categories using each coherence device.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper presents the result analysis of students' ability in constructing coherence in the specific part of the thesis proposal, namely a review of related theories. In reaching the goal of this study, the researcher analyzed the students' ability based on the coherence devices introduced by Oshima; then, the scoring of writing presented by Hamp-Lyon assessed it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher would like to thank Allah SWT, who has given healthy and all the things to the researcher in accomplishing this paper. The researcher also does not forget to thank the advisor, Dr. Muhammad Al Hafizh,

S.S., M.A., who has guided the researcher in writing the paper. Moreover, the researcher would like to express sincere gratitude and great thanks to the researcher's parents, family, and friends, who always pray and support the researcher.

REFERENCES

- [1] L. S. Hadla, "Coherence in Translation," *Res. Humanit. Soc. Sci.*, vol. 5, no. 5, pp. 178–184, 2015.
- [2] Suwandi, "Coherence and Cohesion: An Analysis of the Final Project Abstracts of the Undergraduate Students of PGRI Semarang," *Indones. J. Appl. Linguist.*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 253–261, 2016, doi: 10.17509/ijal.v5i2.1349.
- [3] M. Celce-Murcia and E. Olshtain, *Discourse and Context in Language Teaching: A Guide for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- [4] L. Leli, "Analysis of Coherence and Cohesion on Students' Academic Writing: A Case Study at the 3rd Year students at English Education Program," *Alsuna J. Arab. English Lang.*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 74–82, 2020, doi: 10.31538/alsuna.v3i2.980.
- [5] I. N. Hasanah, "A Cohesion and Coherence on Students' Exposition Writing," Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, 2017.
- [6] J. C. S. Karjono, "Coherence in Thesis Proposal Writings of Undergraduate Students," *JELLT*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 17–30, 2020.
- [7] M. A. Aprilia, "THE STUDENTS' ABILITY OF BUILDING COHERENCE AND UNITY IN ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING AT ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF UIN SUNAN AMPEL SURABAYA," Sunan Ampel State Islamic University, 2016.
- [8] A. N. Farida and M. I. Rosyidi, "Students' Writing Quality: Its Coherence and Cohesion," *Lang. Circ. J. Lang. Lit.*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 121–129, 2019, doi: 10.15294/lc.v14i1.21505.
- [9] A. A. H. Oshima, *Third Edition Academic English*, 3rd ed. New York: Longman, 1998.
- [10] L. Hamp-lyons, "Holistic Writing Assessment for LEP Students," *Proc. Second Natl. Res. Symp. Ltd. English Proficient Student Issues Focus Eval. Meas. Obem.*, vol. 2, pp. 1–35, 1992.
- [11] Y. Syafnida and H. Ardi, "Students' Ability in Developing Generic Structure, Cohesion and Coherence in Writing Hortatory Exposition Text," in *The Eighth International Conference on Languages and Arts (ICLA-2019)*, 2020, vol. 463, pp. 220–223, doi: 10.2991/assehr.k.200819.043.
- [12] E. A. E. RahmtAllah, "EFL Students' Coherence Skill in Writing: A Case Study of Third Year Students of Bachelors in English Language," *English Lang. Teach.*, vol. 13, no. 8, pp. 120–126, 2020, doi: 10.5539/elt.v13n8p120.

- [13] Dasril, M. Zaim, and K. Ningsih, “Coherence and Unity of Students’ Writing on Background of the Study of Research Proposal,” *1st Int. Conf. Educ. Soc. Sci. Humanit. (ICESSHum 2019)*, vol. 335, pp. 399–404, 2019, doi: 10.2991/icesshum-19.2019.65.
- [14] O. Xhepa, “The importance of Accurate Cohesion and Coherence in the Text,” *Int. Conf. Linguist. Lit. Cult.*, pp. 316–322, 2016.
- [15] R. Putriani, “Students ’ Abilities in Using Personal Pronouns in Their English Sentences,” Semarang State University, 2015.