

**Analysis of the Use of Conjunctions as Cohesive Devices by 100 Level Students of the College Of Humanities at Al-Qalam University Katsina State**

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**Abstract**

English as a language of education and instruction in Nigeria continues to remain a rich ground of enquiry for linguists and language educators. The examination of its use by the teeming population often reveals the level of mastery of this language that is spoken in most places in Nigeria, especially on Nigerian tertiary institution campuses. From its word classes to its meaning, proficiency in English is considered as a positive stride in Nigeria. This study focuses on the analysis of the use of conjunctions as cohesive devices by 100 Level students of the College of Humanities at Al-Qalam University Katsina State. Halliday and Matthiessen's Conjunctions Theory was adopted for the study. The research employed a mixed method research design on five students' essays randomly collected. The findings of the research show that investigating the use of conjunction is essential for students as it provides them with effective writing skills. Consequently, the results of the study reveal that students use different



types of conjunctions in their written essays including additive, causal, temporal and clarification. The study concludes that the correct use of conjunctions helps to create coherence in sentences as shown in the sampled essays. The study recommends that ESL learners should improve on the appropriate use of conjunctions as cohesive devices to achieve coherence in their essay writing. It could be done by learning processes to prevent incoherent text of students writing.

**Keywords:** Conjunction, Cohesive, Devices, Students, Writing.



## **Introduction**

Language is an essential means for humans to communicate, to convey messages, to express thoughts, ideas, and viewpoints. In other words, it is the method of expressing ideas and emotions in the form of signs and symbols. These signs and symbols are used to send or receive the message. Students' writing especially in an English language classroom context needs to show their awareness of communicative goals and of the writing context. To achieve this, there is need to consider cohesive devices which are essential for maintaining coherence in written texts. Halliday and Hasan (1976) emphasized the importance of cohesion in language. Cohesion is a semantic concept, and refers to the way different parts of a text are related to each other by means of explicit and implicit connections. Cohesive devices, like conjunctions, contribute to the construction of meaning within a text.

Conjunctions are fundamental cohesive devices that bind different parts of a text together. They help to establish logical relationships between sentences and paragraphs. According to Halliday and Hassan (1976:10), "Conjunctions are central to the textual function of language, enabling the organization of information and establishing coherence in texts." Also, Quirk (1985:23) states, "Coordinating conjunctions facilitate the linking of grammatical equivalents, whereas subordinating conjunctions introduce subordinate elements, providing information that is dependent on the main clause." Biber. (1999:5) highlights that "Conjunctions contribute to the overall rhetorical structure of texts, indicating relationships between propositions and helping readers discern logical connections.

Effective communication and coherence are essential components of successful academic writing. Cohesive devices, particularly conjunctions, play a pivotal role in facilitating seamless connections between ideas and ensuring the logical flow of information within a written text. Despite their significance, many students often struggle to utilize conjunctions appropriately, leading to fragmented and disorganized writing. Thus, the paper aims to investigate the challenges faced by 100 Level students at Al-Qalam University Katsina in employing conjunctions as cohesive devices in their academic writing. The paper delves into the various types of conjunctions commonly used by students, their correct and erroneous usage patterns, and the impact of these cohesive devices on the overall clarity and coherence of their written work. Through its analysis and findings, the paper attempts to dissect the level of English grammar proficiency of the target audience.

## **The Conjunction**

Conjunctions are cohesive by semantic connection and are typically realized at the lexicogrammatical level by adverbs, adverbial and prepositional expressions. Bryson (1997) sees conjunction as a word that links words, phrases or clauses. There are three types of conjunctions. Coordinating conjunction may join single words or they may join groups of words, but they must always join similar elements e.g. subject + subject, verb phrase + verb phrase sentence + sentence. A coordinating conjunction is used to join elements, the element become a compound element. Correlative conjunctions also connect sentence elements of the same kind: however, unlike coordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions are always used in pairs.



Subordinating conjunctions, the largest class of conjunctions, connect subordinate clauses to main clause. These conjunctions are adverbs used as conjunctions. Halliday and Hassan (1976) argue that conjunction is not the same as the elementary logical relation that are expressed through the structural medium of coordinating but textual. Textual coordination connects or binds sentences. There are four basic categories of conjunctions namely additive, adversative, causal and temporal.

Additive conjunctions are used to add more meaning to a clause, they include: and, furthermore etc, adversatives show contrast between clauses which has the following examples - but, however, on the other hand, nevertheless etc. Causals are used to explain reason between clauses and the examples include - so, consequently, for this reason, etc. Temporal conjunctions are time related and they are - then, often, that before, later, after, at last, finally, etc. Aliyu (2006) views conjunction as "an uninflected word employed to link some words or some part of a sentence". The two main classes of conjunctions are the coordinating and subordinating conjunctions. The coordinating conjunctions are introduced by such words as 'and' 'but' 'or' and 'nor'. The subordinating introduced by such words like: when, if, because and while. Lester (1994) sees conjunctions as single words used to connect parts of a sentence such as 'and', 'but' and 'or'. He added that conjunctive adverbs are special kinds of adverbs used instead of a coordinating or correlative conjunction to join the simple sentence in compound sentences. Conjunctive adverbs are at times stronger and more precise than coordinating conjunctions e.g. however, equally, besides etc.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Conjunctions play a vital role in connecting ideas, sentences, and paragraphs, creating coherence and ensuring a smooth flow of information in written texts. Previous researches (such as Osagie, 2018; Adeleke, 2019) have emphasized the significance of conjunctions as cohesive devices, highlighting their contribution to the overall effectiveness of academic and non-academic writing. These studies underscore that students' ability to use conjunctions correctly and appropriately is crucial in producing well-structured and coherent writing. Ajayi (2015) analyzed conjunction usage in essays written by Nigerian undergraduate students. The research found that students frequently used coordinating conjunctions to connect sentences and ideas, but they tended to underuse subordinating conjunctions, leading to less complex sentence structures. In another study, Olatunji and Adebawale (2017) examined conjunction errors in writing samples of Nigerian secondary school students. The research reveals common mistakes, such as using incorrect conjunctions to link ideas and misplacing conjunctions within sentences. The study recommends targeted grammar instruction and feedback to address these errors effectively.

Osagie (2018) explored the role of conjunctions in achieving coherence in research papers written by Nigerian university students. The study identified a significant positive correlation between effective conjunction use and the overall coherence of the papers. The research highlights the importance of conjunctions as essential cohesive devices in academic writing. Also, Adeleke (2019) study compared the conjunction proficiency of Nigerian English language learners from different proficiency levels. The research reveals that advanced learners demonstrated more sophisticated use of conjunctions, employing a wider range of conjunction



types to convey various relationships between ideas. The findings underscore the developmental nature of conjunction usage in language learning.

Similarly, Ogunleye and Bello (2020) examined the use of conjunctions in argumentative essays written by Nigerian students. The study identified variations in conjunction usage based on the students' academic disciplines, with some disciplines favoring specific conjunctions to structure arguments. The research highlights the genre-specific nature of conjunction usage in students' writing. Another study by Nwabueze (2009) focused on the role of conjunctions as coherence markers in Nigerian academic writings. The research analyzes how conjunctions were used to connect ideas and maintain logical flow in academic texts. The study emphasized the significance of conjunctions in achieving coherence and effective communication in Nigerian academic writing. Furthermore, Sisulu (2012) explored the use of conjunctions in South African political discourse. Sisulu analyzed speeches and written statements of political leaders to understand how conjunctions were employed to structure arguments, emphasize points, and create persuasive discourse. The research highlights the role of conjunctions in shaping the rhetorical strategies of South African political communication. These studies reviewed show the relevance of conjunctions in students' writings which varies in terms of their appropriateness. Inappropriate uses of conjunctions by the students show that applying conjunctions in writings was problematic for ESL learners.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Conjunctions Theory by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) is used as the theoretical framework in this study to analyze and interpret the data. A conjunction is concerned with rhetorical transitions between whole 'messages', or even message complexes (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). It is a resource for marking transition in the unfolding of a text (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). It indicates the relations through which such textual transitions are created. Conjunctive elements are cohesive not in themselves but indirectly by virtue of their specific meanings; they are not primarily devices for reaching out into the preceding (or following) text, but they express certain meanings which presuppose the presence of other components in the discourse (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

### **Research Methodology**

The study adopts a mixed-method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Thus, the analysis is done through conceptual explanation as well as through statistical means using a table and percentile. The participants of this study are 100 level students enrolled in various academic programs within College of Humanities at Al-Qalam University Katsina. A purposive sampling method is used to select participants to ensure representation from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Students were approached to write essays about campus life in Al-Qalam University Katsina and five out of the pool of essays received were randomly selected for analysis. Each essay was titled by the student who wrote them to reflect the topic of their choice.



## Presentation of Data, Analysis and Comments

The following essays are presented as they were collected, then a table of categorisation is employed to analyse the categories of conjunctions that are in each essay and finally a commentary is given on each text of essay presented.

### Text of Essay 1: Friends' Becoming Families

In this university I have met many people. In fact, some of them I cannot remember where we met but I know it is because I am here in Al-Qalam. So, after meeting many times in lectures or in the campus, we become friends. We now talk every day and do things together. We even lived in the same hostels. Many of these friends have now become like family members to me because of their kindness and support. I always like to share my things with them rather than to take it to other people. Friends have now become my family here and I like them so much.

**Table 1: Text Analysis for Conjunctions**

Essay 1: Friends' Becoming families	Enhancement	Extension	Elaboration
1. In this university I have met many people.			
2. <b>In fact</b> , some of them I cannot remember where we met but I know it is because I am here in Al-Qalam			(In fact) CLARIFICATION
3. <b>So</b> , after meeting many times in lectures or in the campus, we become friends.	(So) CAUSAL		
4. We now talk every day <b>and</b> do things together.		(and) ADDITIVE	
5. We even lived in the same hostels.			
6. Many of these friends have now become like family members to me because of their kindness <b>and</b> support.		(and) ADDITIVE	
7. I always like to share my things with them <b>rather</b> than to take it to other people.			(rather) CLARIFICATION
8. Friends have now become my family here <b>and</b> I like them so much.		(and) ADDITIVE	
TOTAL	1	3	2

**Comments:** The essay contains eight sentences. The writer employs a number of conjunctions at various parts of the essay as a means to bring cohesion into their flow of thought. The essay focuses on friendship extended to deeper levels in the university. There is a kind of a dependency on 'additive' conjunctions in an attempt to keep the flow. This reflects the average grasp of English vocabulary by the writer.



### Text of Essay 2: Fixed Lectures

Firstly, I think a university should be like your secondary school where your teacher can come in according to their periods on the time table. But here at Al-Qalam, one of the things I hate the most is the fixed lectures. You are thinking of doing something after your lecture then someone will just come and say there is another lecture you have to do in the afternoon. In the end, the lecture may not even come for that lecture and you must for them until they call the class rep and say I am not coming anymore I have another meeting. At least, when you already know a lecturer is not coming you will not waste your time waiting for them.

**Table 2: Text Analysis for Conjunctions**

Essay 2: Fixed Lectures	Enhancement	Extension	Elaboration
1. <b>Firstly</b> , I think a university should be like your secondary school where your teacher can come in according to their periods on the time table.	(Firstly) TEMPORAL		
2. <b>But</b> here at Al-Qalam, one of the things I hate the most is the fixed lectures			
3. You are thinking of doing something after your lecture <b>then</b> someone will just come <b>and</b> say there is another lecture you have to do in the afternoon	(then) TEMPORAL	(and) ADDITIVE	
4. <b>In the end</b> , the lecture may not even come for that lecture and you must for them until they call the class rep <b>and</b> say I am not coming anymore I have another meeting.		(and) ADDITIVE	(In the end) CLARIFICATION
5. <b>At least</b> , when you already know a lecturer is not coming you will not waste your time waiting for them.			(At least) CLARIFICATION
<b>TOTAL</b>	2	2	2

**Comments:** The essay has five sentences. The categorization of ‘in the end’ as ‘clarification’ instead of ‘temporal’ is due to the fact that the statement is specific to the fact that the writer meant to sum up a thought and not merely disclose the time of an event. The essay contains six conjunctions.



**Text of Essay 3: Socialisation on Campus**

If you come to Al-Qalam, they will teach you how to socialise here. You will see so many things that you do not know before and you will start to feel like you want to try it too. During my first semester here in Al-Qalam, I always sit at the administrative block side and see many students coming in. Some come in with their friends while some are coming alone. One thing I noticed is that the students that come in groups are always laughing. They always look happy. After a while, I started to see that most of the girls wear their hijabs in a similar pattern like scarfs at the top. Because of that I too soon started wearing my own like that. Now, I have a belief that in the university you will see so many types of behaviours and they will make you copy some and some of them you will not like personally.





**Table 3: Text Analysis for Conjunctions**

Essay 3: Socialisation on Campus	Enhancement	Extension	Elaboration
1. If you come to Al-Qalam, they will teach you how to socialise here.			
2. You will see so many things that you do not know before <b>and</b> you will start to feel like you want to try it too.		(and) ADDITIVE	
3. <b>During my first semester here in Al-Qalam</b> , I always sit at the administrative block side <b>and</b> see many students coming in	(During my first semester here in Al-Qalam,) TEMPORAL	(and) ADDITIVE	
4. Some come in with their friends while some are coming alone.			
5. One thing I noticed is that the students that come in groups are always laughing.			
6. They always look happy.			
7. <b>After a while</b> , I started to see that most of the girls wear their hijabs in a similar pattern like scarfs at the top.	(After a while) TEMPORAL		
8. <b>Because of that</b> I too soon started wearing my own like that.	(Because of that) CAUSAL		
9. <b>Now</b> , I have a belief that in the university you will see so many types of behaviours <b>and</b> they will make you copy some and some of them you will not like personally.	(Now) TEMPORAL	(and) ADDITIVE	
<b>TOTAL</b>	4	3	0

**Comment:** the essay has nine sentences. It looks at how students pick up behaviours on campus. The writer uses seven conjunctions in total.

#### **Text of Essay 4: Aiming for Excellence**

I want to write about excellence. Since I was in the secondary school, I was always the first in my class and so I have the hope that wherever I go I will continue the same efforts. I have now gained admission into Al-Qalam University Katsina and I take my studies very serious. In fact, we have a study group where we meet to reteach ourselves courses that are difficult. Also, I and



my friends visit the library a lot. We believe that we can get more knowledge by reading more books than others. My ambition is to graduate with first class and I will keep working hard to make it In sha Allah.

**Table 4: Text Analysis for Conjunctions**

<b>Essay 4: Aiming for Excellence</b>	<b>Enhancement</b>	<b>Extension</b>	<b>Elaboration</b>
<b>1.</b> I want to write about excellence.			
<b>2.</b> Since I was in the secondary school, I was always the first in my class <b>and so</b> I have the hope that wherever I go I will continue the same efforts.	(So) CAUSAL	(and) ADDITIVE	
<b>3.</b> I have now gained admission into Al-Qalam University Katsina <b>and</b> I take my studies very serious.		(and) ADDITIVE	
<b>4. In fact</b> , we have a study group where we meet to reteach ourselves courses that are difficult.			(In fact) CLARIFICATION
<b>5. Also</b> , I and my friends visit the library a lot.		(Also) ADDITIVE	
<b>6.</b> We believe that we can get more knowledge by reading more books than others.			
<b>7.</b> My ambition is to graduate with first class <b>and</b> I will keep working hard to make it in sha Allah.		(and) ADDITIVE	
<b>TOTAL</b>	1	4	1



**Comment:**

The essay has seven sentences. There is a grammatical error in the use of ‘and so’. The use of ‘so’ to indicate the cause of the next point of action is the most appropriate without necessarily using ‘and’ which the writer resolved to use. Also, the essay relies so much on ‘additive’ conjunctions.

**Text of Essay 5: Family’s Bread Winner**

I am from Kwara state and my uncle works here in Katsina, so I gained admission into this university to quickly finish my studies and start to work. At the moment, I feel like I am the bread winner of my family because my parents prefer to send me to a university as the only boy in the family. They expect that if I become a graduate and serve, I will have better work opportunities than others. My other sisters are learning different apprentice work in Lagos and they also pray for me to become successful. I am determined not to let them down so I take my studies here serious. I am also trying to learn Hausa language so that I can have more connection with people for work. I am happy with Al-QalamUniversity because they do not go to strike like other universities.



**Table 5: Text Analysis for Conjunctions**

<b>Essay 5: Family's Bread Winner</b>	<b>Enhancement</b>	<b>Extension</b>	<b>Elaboration</b>
<b>1.</b> I am from Kwara state <b>and</b> my uncle works here in Katsina, <b>so</b> I gained admission into this university to quickly finish my studies <b>and</b> start to work.	(so) CAUSAL	(and) ADDITIVE (and) ADDITIVE	
<b>2. At the moment</b> , I feel like I am the bread winner of my family <b>because</b> my parents prefer to send me to a university as the only boy in the family.	(At the moment) TEMPORAL (because) CAUSAL		
<b>3.</b> They expect that if I become a graduate <b>and</b> serve, I will have better work opportunities than others.		(and) ADDITIVE	
<b>4.</b> My other sisters are learning different apprentice work in Lagos <b>and</b> they also pray for me to become successful.		(and) ADDITIVE	
<b>5.</b> I am determined not to let them down <b>so</b> I take my studies here serious.	(so) CAUSAL		
<b>6.</b> I am also trying to learn Hausa language <b>so that</b> I can have more connection with people for work.	(so that) CAUSAL		
<b>7.</b> I am happy with Al-Qalam university <b>because</b> they do not go to strike like other universities.	(because) CAUSAL		
<b>TOTAL</b>	5	3	0

**Comments:** the essay has seven sentences. The writer focuses on the idea of being the breadwinner of their family. There appears a dependency on 'causal' and 'additive' conjunctions in the essay.

### Discussion of Data

Based on the findings of the five analysed essays written by 100 level students of college of humanities at Al-Qalam University Katsina, it is evident that extension conjunctions, like "and," "but," were the most frequently used. These conjunctions play a pivotal role in connecting ideas within sentences, aiding in the overall coherence and flow of the essays. Despite their extensive use, it is crucial to note that students encountered difficulties, particularly in the technical application of correlating conjunctions like "neither nor" or "either or." This deficiency



suggests a gap in their understanding of these specific conjunctions, leading to their avoidance in essays due to unfamiliarity. The results of this study correlates with that of Osagie (2018) who explored the role of conjunctions in achieving coherence in research papers written by Nigerian university students. Furthermore, the inadequate use of conjunctions as paragraph linkers was also noticeable, indicating a need for more explicit guidance on their utilization for broader text organization.

The prevalent errors or challenges faced by students in the proficient use of conjunctions indicate a need for focused educational interventions. The students' lack of expertise in applying correlating conjunctions demonstrates the necessity for targeted instruction to enhance their technical understanding. This is in line with the study conducted by Ajayi (2015) who analyzed conjunction usage in essays written by Nigerian undergraduate students. Additionally, encouraging students to incorporate conjunctions strategically as paragraph linkers could significantly enhance the overall coherence and structural integrity of their essays. These interventions might involve structured exercises, practical examples, and explicit explanations to familiarize students with the diverse functions of conjunctions in written discourse. This correlates with the results of the study conducted by Ogunleye and Bello (2020) who examined the use of conjunctions in argumentative essays written by Nigerian students.

## **Findings**

The findings of the research show that investigating the use of conjunction is essential for students as it provides them with effective writing skills. Consequently, the results of the study reveal that the students use different types of conjunctions in their written essays including additive, causal, temporal and clarification. These textual organizations were the results of the text cohesion brought about the use and frequencies of the different types of conjunctions in the written essays produced by 100 level students enrolled in various academic programs within College of Humanities at Al-Qalam University Katsina. The results reveal that the presence and absence of any of the conjunctions affected the overall cohesion of the written essays.

## **Conclusion**

Conjunctions are essential grammatical elements that serve as connectors in a sentence or between different parts of a sentence. They play a crucial role in establishing relationships between words, phrases, and clauses, contributing to the coherence and flow of written and spoken language. Scholars in linguistics have extensively studied conjunctions and classified them into various types based on their functions and uses in communication.

## **Recommendation**

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that ESL learners should improve on the appropriate use of conjunctions as cohesive devices to achieve coherence in their essay writing. It could be done by learning processes to prevent incoherent text of students writing.



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