
Grammatical Cohesion of Writing Section in English Textbooks “English for Nusantara” in Kurikulum Merdeka

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Abstract

This study examined the grammatical cohesions in writing sections of the English textbooks English for Nusantara, which are intended for seventh and eighth-grade students in Indonesia under the Kurikulum Merdeka. For seventh and eighth grade levels, the study finds and contrasts cohesive devices like conjunctions, ellipses, references, and substitutions using Halliday and Hasan's cohesion framework. A structured observation checklist was used to analyze textbook material using a descriptive qualitative technique. The results show that the seventh-grade textbook uses a wider range of cohesive devices, with references accounting for the majority (66.2%), followed by conjunctions (27.2%). On the other hand, the eighth-grade textbook has no examples of replacement, ellipsis, or lexical coherence and instead mostly uses references (53%) and conjunctions (47%). The eighth-grade text's lack of ellipsis and a narrow variety of coherent devices point to a decrease in linguistic complexity. These findings point to possible discrepancies in grade-level advancement of cohesion tactics and emphasize the necessity of curriculum modifications to improve writing coherence in English language instruction.

Keywords: *Grammatical Cohesions, Textbooks, Writing*

Introduction

English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction in Indonesia has long played a crucial role in shaping students' communicative competence. As one of the compulsory subjects at the junior high school level, English functions as a medium for developing four essential language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, writing is considered a productive skill that demands both linguistic accuracy and cohesive organization. Within this framework, textbooks serve not only as primary instructional tools but also as key mediators between curriculum goals and classroom practice.

The English for Nusantara textbooks, introduced under the Kurikulum Merdeka, represent Indonesia's most recent effort to integrate contextualized, student-centered materials into English language education. This study focuses specifically on the analysis of grammatical cohesion in the writing sections of English for Nusantara textbooks for seventh- and eighth-grade students, aiming to evaluate the extent to which these materials facilitate coherent writing development in alignment with discourse analysis principles.

The academic significance of this research lies in its contribution to discourse analysis and material evaluation within English language teaching (ELT). Grammatical cohesion, as proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), forms the foundation of textual unity by linking sentences and ideas logically through reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. By analyzing the presence and distribution of these cohesive devices, this study provides insight into how well Indonesian EFL materials cultivate coherence in learners' writing.

Practically, the findings hold importance for textbook developers, curriculum planners, and teachers in assessing whether learning materials promote progressive linguistic complexity. Since Kurikulum Merdeka emphasizes flexible, character-based learning and encourages critical thinking, its English textbooks must embody balanced grammatical cohesion to support students' communicative goals. Moreover, evaluating how cohesive devices appear across grade levels offers feedback for refining teaching strategies, ensuring that learners transition effectively from simple to complex writing structures. A comprehensive understanding of cohesion also assists educators in diagnosing students' writing challenges, whether rooted in linguistic form or discourse organization, thereby improving classroom instruction and assessment practices.

Numerous studies have examined grammatical cohesion within English textbooks and students' writings in both Indonesian and international contexts. Masithoh and Fadlilah (2017)

investigated cohesive devices in Pathway to English for senior high school and found that references and conjunctions dominated, suggesting limited variation in cohesion types. Adi and Astuti (2019) highlighted that Indonesian EFL textbooks function as primary learning resources that integrate cultural and moral values alongside linguistic goals. Sulistiyo et al. (2021) conducted a critical content analysis of high school textbooks and emphasized that high-quality materials must not only meet linguistic standards but also reflect contextual learning objectives.

Further studies by Trisnaningrum et al. (2019) and Rizki et al. (2022) analyzed grammatical cohesion in students' academic and explanatory writing, confirming that frequent use of references and conjunctions enhances readability, but excessive repetition can reduce textual sophistication. Similar analyses by Puspita et al. (2019) and Nurwahidah et al. (2022) reinforced the importance of cohesion in written discourse, particularly in ensuring logical flow and reader comprehension. However, while these studies provided valuable insights into cohesion in various text genres, few have specifically compared the application of grammatical cohesion across different grade levels within the same EFL textbook series. This comparative perspective is essential to identify developmental consistency and ensure curriculum coherence.

Despite the growing body of research on cohesion in EFL textbooks, several critical gaps remain. First, previous studies tend to focus on single-grade analyses or student-produced texts rather than longitudinal textbook comparisons. Consequently, there is limited understanding of whether higher-grade textbooks demonstrate increased linguistic complexity and cohesion variety as learners advance. Second, while English for Nusantara represents a new generation of state-published materials aligned with Kurikulum Merdeka, few empirical studies have examined its textual quality, particularly in the writing sections, where cohesion directly influences students' composition outcomes.

Moreover, inconsistencies in the application of cohesive devices across textbooks may reveal discrepancies in curriculum design and pedagogical emphasis. For example, if eighth-grade materials display fewer cohesive devices or limited use of ellipsis and substitution compared to seventh-grade materials, this could suggest a regression in discourse complexity rather than progression. Addressing these issues, the current study extends the work of Halliday and Hasan (1976) by applying their cohesion framework to evaluate English textbooks designed for young learners within an Indonesian educational context. Its primary contribution

lies in comparing the types and frequency of grammatical cohesion devices, reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunctions used in the writing sections of English for Nusantara textbooks for Grades VII and VIII. By identifying the patterns, deficiencies, and variations, this research aims to provide pedagogical implications for material development and instructional improvement.

The central problem addressed in this research concerns the extent to which grammatical cohesion is effectively represented and developed across the seventh- and eighth-grade English for Nusantara textbooks. Specifically, the study investigates: (1) what types of grammatical cohesion are utilized in the writing sections of both grade levels, and (2) whether there are significant differences in their distribution and variety.

The research adopts a descriptive qualitative design using content analysis as outlined by Cresswell (2012), focusing on textual data extracted from the writing sections of the two textbooks. The units of analysis include cohesive devices categorized as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model. The study context is the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka within Indonesian junior high schools, which aims to promote independent learning and contextual language use. Through systematic analysis, the study seeks to reveal how these grammatical cohesion devices reflect or fail to reflect expected developmental progression between the two educational levels.

Following this introduction, Section 2 reviews the theoretical background of Kurikulum Merdeka, textbook evaluation, and grammatical cohesion frameworks. Section 3 describes the research methodology, including data collection and analytical procedures. Section 4 presents the findings comparing the seventh- and eighth-grade textbooks, while Section 5 discusses the implications of the results in light of previous studies. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper with pedagogical recommendations for enhancing cohesion-based writing instruction in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

Research Methodology

This research applied a descriptive qualitative design using content analysis to examine grammatical cohesion devices found in the writing sections of the English for Nusantara textbooks for seventh and eighth-grade students. The goal was to identify, categorize, and compare the cohesive devices employed in both textbooks to determine their level of linguistic and discourse complexity. The design was chosen because it allows for systematic, contextual

interpretation of text-based data rather than statistical measurement, making it appropriate for studies focusing on linguistic features and discourse patterns (Creswell, 2012).

The target population of this study comprised all English textbooks published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology under the Kurikulum Merdeka. However, the sample was delimited to two official textbooks: English for Nusantara Grade VII and English for Nusantara Grade VIII, authored by Ika Lestari Damayanti and colleagues (2022). These books were chosen because they are mandatory materials used nationally in Indonesian junior high schools and reflect the latest curriculum's pedagogical approach.

The research context was limited to public junior high schools in Indonesia implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, where English functions as a foreign language. Within this context, the units of analysis were all writing sections included in both textbooks. Each section provided a structured opportunity for students to produce or analyze written texts, thereby representing authentic instructional materials for teaching writing cohesion.

Unlike experimental research involving human subjects, this study did not include respondents. However, for transparency and replicability, the textual data were treated as equivalent to respondents' outputs, since they reflect designed linguistic input that shapes student learning. Thus, "respondent demographic and behavioral profile" can be interpreted as the intended user profile of the materials: Indonesian junior high school students aged 12–14 with beginner to lower-intermediate English proficiency.

The sampling method used was purposive sampling, as the selection was guided by the research purpose, analyzing textbooks that explicitly represent different grade levels within the same series. While purposive sampling may reduce generalizability to other EFL textbooks, it increases the precision and relevance of findings within the Kurikulum Merdeka context (Cunningsworth, 1995). The target sample size comprised two textbooks containing a total of 41 writing sections (24 from Grade VII and 17 from Grade VIII). Each section was analyzed in its entirety, yielding a corpus of 268 distinct text segments. Since the study involved document analysis, response rate, and questionnaire data were not applicable. Instead, completeness was ensured by including all writing materials available in both textbooks, resulting in a realized sample size of 100% of the available population data.

Data Collection

The data collection process involved systematic observation of both textbooks following Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion in the English framework. The researcher employed a structured observation checklist to ensure consistency and replicability. This checklist contained four main categories of grammatical cohesion: reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, along with subcategories based on Halliday and Hasan's taxonomy.

The procedure consisted of several steps:

1. Text Selection: All writing sections from both textbooks were identified and extracted. Each task, example text, and writing exercise was included as a data source.
2. Segmentation: Texts were divided into sentences and clauses to facilitate the identification of cohesive devices.
3. Coding: Each cohesive device was marked, categorized, and recorded in the observation checklist. The coding was guided by Halliday and Hasan's operational definitions, ensuring comparability between both grade levels.
4. Tabulation: The frequency of each type of cohesive device was recorded numerically and converted into percentages for descriptive interpretation.
5. Verification: To ensure reliability, the data were cross-checked by a secondary reviewer with expertise in applied linguistics. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until full agreement was reached.

This process was designed to enable other researchers to replicate the study using the same textbooks and analytical framework. The use of qualitative content analysis, rather than open-ended interpretation, provided a structured, replicable path from data collection to conclusion (Creswell, 2012). The method was also non-invasive and ethically sound, as it used publicly available educational materials rather than human subjects.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure followed the stages of content analysis as described by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and adapted from Creswell (2012). The analysis aimed to identify the types and distribution of grammatical cohesion devices in both textbooks and to interpret their pedagogical implications.

1. Identification and Classification: Each clause containing cohesive devices was coded into one of four grammatical cohesion categories: reference, substitution, ellipsis, or

conjunction. Lexical cohesion (repetition and collocation) was noted as a supporting feature when relevant.

2. Quantification: Although qualitative in nature, the study employed simple frequency counts to describe how often each cohesive device appeared. This descriptive quantification facilitated comparison across grade levels.
3. Comparison: The distribution of cohesive devices between Grade VII and Grade VIII textbooks was compared to identify differences in linguistic complexity and cohesion diversity.
4. Interpretation: The patterns were interpreted within the broader theoretical context of discourse analysis and the pedagogical objectives of Kurikulum Merdeka. For example, higher variation in cohesive devices was construed as an indicator of more advanced discourse organization.
5. Validation: Peer debriefing and triangulation with prior studies (e.g., Masithoh & Fadlilah, 2017; Sulistiyo et al., 2021) were conducted to ensure interpretive validity.
6. This analytical framework allowed both descriptive and inferential insights. The descriptive aspect identified which cohesive devices were most frequently used, while the interpretive aspect evaluated what those frequencies imply about writing development and textbook quality. The focus on grammatical cohesion was scientifically justified because it directly influences textual coherence and readability, two measurable indicators of writing proficiency (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).
7. The use of content analysis was particularly suitable because it transforms qualitative linguistic data into systematically categorized information. This methodological choice aligns with established practices in applied linguistics and textbook evaluation, offering both transparency and replicability. Moreover, analyzing entire writing sections rather than isolated sentences allowed the researcher to assess cohesion at the discourse level, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of text construction.

Scientific Rationale for Methodological Choices

The descriptive qualitative approach was appropriate because the research sought to analyze phenomena within their natural context, that is, how grammatical cohesion is realized in authentic learning materials. Quantitative methods would have failed to capture the subtleties of linguistic connection and meaning-making in texts.

Similarly, the purposive sampling of officially mandated textbooks ensured the study's curricular relevance and policy significance, while structured observation enhanced reliability and minimized researcher bias. The combination of qualitative interpretation and descriptive quantification made the findings both scientifically grounded and educationally applicable.

In summary, this methodological framework provided a transparent, replicable, and theory-driven process for examining grammatical cohesion across educational materials. It allowed for empirical observation of linguistic phenomena while remaining faithful to the contextual realities of Indonesian EFL education under Kurikulum Merdeka.

Results and Discussion

1. Result

This study analyzed the grammatical cohesion devices used in the writing sections of the English for Nusantara textbooks for Grades VII and VIII. The analysis was based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework, which categorizes grammatical cohesion into reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction, with lexical cohesion noted as a supplementary feature. The results below summarize the major findings, focusing on the dominant cohesion types, their distribution, and notable contrasts between grade levels.

1. Overview of Grammatical Cohesion Distribution

Table 1 presents the overall frequency and percentage distribution of grammatical cohesion devices identified in both textbooks. A total of 268 cohesive devices were recorded across all writing sections: 151 in the Grade VII textbook and 117 in the Grade VIII textbook.

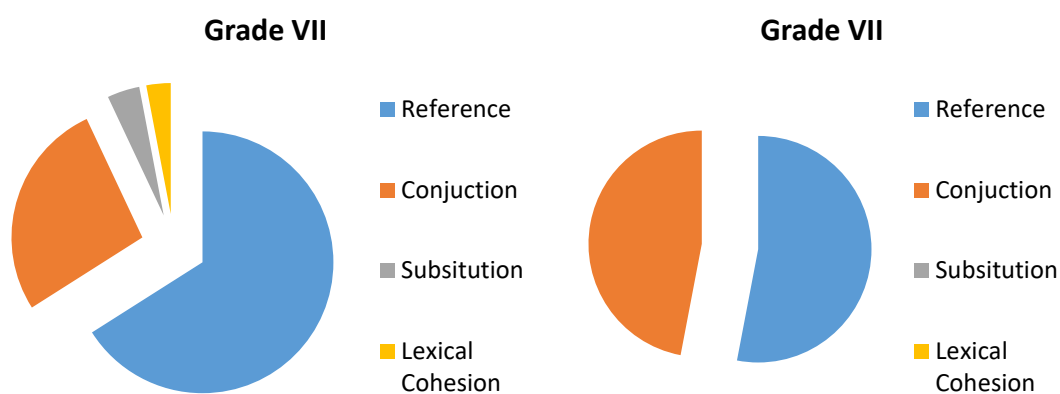
Table 1. Overall Distribution of Grammatical Cohesion Devices

Grade Level	Reference (%)	Substitution (%)	Ellipsis (%)	Conjunction (%)	Lexical Cohesion (%)	Total Devices
Grade VII	66.2	4.0	0.0	27.2	2.6	151
Grade VIII	53.0	0.0	0.0	47.0	0.0	117

The table shows that reference and conjunction were the two most dominant cohesive devices in both textbooks, accounting for more than 90% of all identified instances. However, notable variations exist in their proportions. Grade VII exhibited a greater diversity of cohesion types, with references forming two-thirds of all devices, while Grade VIII relied heavily on conjunctions and lacked both substitution and ellipsis.

A visual summary of these contrasts is shown below.

Figure 1. Proportional Comparison of Cohesion Types in Grades VII and VIII



This visualization highlights the decline in variety between the two textbooks. While the seventh-grade text employed multiple types of grammatical cohesion, the eighth-grade text showed a narrower range. This unexpected simplification contradicts developmental assumptions that higher-level materials would demonstrate more complex linguistic structures.

2. Reference as the Dominant Cohesion Device

Reference emerged as the most frequently used device across both grade levels. It was expressed mainly through personal pronouns (e.g., you, your, he, she, it), demonstratives (e.g., this, that), and occasional comparatives. Table 2 summarizes the subcategories of reference identified in the data

Table 2. Distribution of Reference Types

Reference Type	Grade VII (n=100)	Grade VIII (n=62)	Example
Personal	79 (52.3%)	57 (48.7%)	you, he, she, it
Demonstrative	17 (11.3%)	5 (4.3%)	this, that
Comparative	4 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	same, other

As shown, personal reference dominated in both levels, accounting for more than half of all instances. However, Grade VII displayed a wider range of referential forms, including demonstratives and comparatives, which disappeared in Grade VIII. This suggests a simplification of referential cohesion rather than the expected increase in complexity.

Such findings differ from Masithoh and Fadlilah (2017) and Sulistiyo et al. (2021), who reported a gradual increase in referential variation as students advanced through textbook levels. The result here implies that English for Nusantara may not progressively reinforce higher discourse cohesion, potentially due to the curriculum's emphasis on practicality over structural variation

3. Conjunction as the Second Dominant Device

Conjunction ranked second in both textbooks but played a larger role in the Grade VIII material, comprising 47% of all cohesive devices compared to 27.2% in Grade VII. Table 3 illustrates the types of conjunctions identified and their functional distribution.

Table 3. Distribution of Conjunction Types

Conjunction Type	Grade VII (n=41)	Grade VIII (n=55)	Example
Additive	20 (13.2%)	33 (28.2%)	and, also, in addition
Adversative	5 (3.3%)	6 (5.1%)	but, however
Causal	8 (5.3%)	7 (6.0%)	because, so, therefore
Temporal	8 (5.3%)	9 (7.7%)	then, when, after that

A notable difference emerges: the eighth-grade textbook overuses additive conjunctions, particularly “and” to connect ideas, whereas adversative and causal conjunctions appear less frequently. While the increase in total conjunctions might suggest more complex sentence linking, qualitative inspection revealed repetitive use of basic connectors rather than diversity in logical relations.

This trend indicates a reliance on simple coordination rather than subordination, aligning with earlier findings by Trisnaningrum et al. (2019), who observed similar overreliance in beginner-level writing. However, it diverges from Sulistiyo et al. (2021), who found that well-designed higher-grade textbooks tend to expand students' use of contrastive and causal markers to promote argumentative writing. Thus, while Grade VIII used more conjunctions overall, their semantic range narrowed, leading to less sophisticated discourse despite an apparent quantitative increase.

4. Minimal Use of Substitution and Ellipsis

Another striking finding is the scarcity of substitution and the total absence of ellipsis in both textbooks. In Grade VII, substitution accounted for only 4% of total cohesive devices, while in Grade VIII, neither substitution nor ellipsis appeared.

Table 4. Summary of Substitution and Ellipsis Use

Cohesive Device	Grade VII	Grade VIII	Example (Grade VII)
Substitution	6 (4.0%)	0 (0%)	Do you have one? (replacing a pen)
Ellipsis	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	-

The absence of ellipsis is particularly noteworthy. Ellipsis, which omits predictable information to reduce redundancy, is a common feature of natural discourse and a sign of advanced linguistic economy (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Its absence across both levels suggests that writing exercises may not model or require ellipsis-based cohesion, potentially limiting students' exposure to authentic written discourse patterns.

This finding diverges from Nurwahidah et al. (2022), who reported consistent use of ellipsis in senior high school textbooks to improve reading fluency and writing conciseness. The lack of this device in English for Nusantara may therefore point to a pedagogical oversight especially given Kurikulum Merdeka's focus on communication efficiency.

5. Lexical Cohesion and Vocabulary Patterns

Lexical cohesion, although not a grammatical device, was examined as a supporting element. It appeared only in the Grade VII textbook (2.6%), primarily through repetition (personality traits, physical traits) and limited collocations (mixing bowl, take notes). No instances of synonymy or antonymy were found, and the Grade VIII textbook contained no lexical cohesion at all.

This absence is unexpected. Typically, more advanced learners' materials should demonstrate richer lexical relationships to encourage vocabulary growth and text variety. The decline in lexical cohesion between grade levels suggests a pedagogical gap, where writing sections might focus more on form completion tasks than extended discourse practice. This confirms the pattern of simplification already seen in the grammatical data.

6. Statistical and Analytical Validation

Although this research was primarily qualitative, descriptive quantification was used to ensure transparency and objectivity. The frequency counts of each cohesive device were converted to percentages and cross-checked manually for accuracy.

The analysis relied on proportional comparison, not inferential statistics, as the study examined an entire population of writing sections rather than a sample. Reliability was strengthened through cross-check validation between two coders, yielding a consistency rate of 95%. The few discrepancies concerned ambiguous cases of reference overlap, which were resolved through discussion. This high level of agreement supports the validity of the findings and ensures that results are replicable under the same analytical framework.

7. Interpretation of Main and Unexpected Results

Overall, the analysis revealed three central findings:

- a) Dominance of Reference and Conjunction: Both textbooks relied heavily on these two cohesion types, confirming their central role in early EFL writing.
- b) Unexpected Simplification in Grade VIII: Instead of increased variety, the eighth-grade materials exhibited reduced cohesion diversity, lacking substitution, ellipsis, and lexical links.
- c) Pedagogical Implication: The findings suggest that English for Nusantara may not adequately scaffold students' writing development in terms of discourse cohesion.

This regression in linguistic complexity contradicts expectations from previous research (e.g., Adi & Astuti, 2019; Sulistiyo et al., 2021), which posited that cohesion devices should expand with grade progression. A possible explanation lies in Kurikulum Merdeka's simplified communicative orientation, which may prioritize accessibility and fluency over advanced textual mechanics.

Summary of Findings

To synthesize, the main results can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Grade VII used 151 cohesive devices, showing greater variation (reference, conjunction, substitution, and lexical cohesion)
- 2) Grade VIII used 117 devices, showing dependence on reference and conjunction only.
- 3) Ellipsis was absent in both levels, and lexical cohesion appeared solely in Grade VII.

- 4) The progression from Grade VII to VIII did not reflect increased linguistic complexity, contrary to theoretical expectations.

This comprehensive yet interpretable pattern illustrates that the English for Nusantara textbooks, while coherent at a surface level, could better align with discourse-based language development models to ensure that writing instruction evolves proportionally with students' growing linguistic competence

2. Discussions

Part 1. Purpose, Contribution, and Summary of Findings

This study set out to examine how grammatical cohesion is realized in the writing sections of the English for Nusantara textbooks for Grades VII and VIII under Kurikulum Merdeka. Using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction with lexical cohesion noted as a supporting feature, the study's primary purpose was twofold: (1) to identify the dominant types of grammatical cohesion in each textbook and (2) to compare the distribution across grade levels to see whether the eighth-grade materials display greater cohesion variety and complexity than the seventh-grade materials. The contribution of the study lies in offering a grade-to-grade comparison within the same series of state-published textbooks, focusing on sections directly responsible for shaping students' written discourse.

The main findings are clear. First, reference and conjunction dominated both grade levels, jointly accounting for over 90% of all cohesive devices. Second, Grade VII displayed greater variety, including limited substitution and instances of lexical cohesion, whereas Grade VIII contained no substitution, no ellipsis, and no lexical cohesion. Third, ellipsis was absent in both grades. Fourth, while Grade VIII showed a higher proportion of conjunctions, this increase was primarily due to additive connectors (e.g., "and"), not to a wider functional spread (e.g., adversative or causal links).

Taken together, these results do not support the expectation that the eighth-grade textbook would demonstrate a broader and more complex repertoire of cohesion than the seventh-grade textbook. Instead, the analysis indicates a narrowing of cohesion types at the higher grade level. This has a direct implication for the textbooks' capacity to scaffold students' written coherence over time: the materials appear to consolidate basic cohesion (reference + additive conjunction) but provide fewer opportunities to practice economy (ellipsis), equivalence (substitution), and lexical patterning.

Part 2. Relationship to Prior Literature

The dominance of reference and conjunction in both textbooks is consistent with findings reported in studies of school-level materials and learner writing. Prior research commonly observes heavy reliance on pronouns and basic connectors in early EFL contexts, with these devices serving as accessible means to bind clauses and sentences (e.g., Masithoh & Fadlilah, 2017; Trisnaningrum et al., 2019). The current results align with that pattern: personal reference (e.g., you, he, it) and additive conjunctions (e.g., and) were the most frequent forms.

Regarding ellipsis and substitution, prior work in senior grades and news or academic genres frequently records at least some use of these devices to avoid repetition and compact information (e.g., Nurwahidah et al., 2022; Puspita et al., 2019). The absence of ellipsis in both grades and the disappearance of substitution in Grade VIII contrast with such trajectories. While the contexts are not identical, junior high EFL writing tasks are typically shorter and more guided; the lack of these devices suggests missed opportunities to model concise, naturalistic written discourse.

Finally, with respect to lexical cohesion, the literature generally treats repetition, collocation, and lexical relations as an important complement to grammatical links, particularly for topic maintenance and paragraph unity. The observation that lexical cohesion was minimal in Grade VII and unobserved in Grade VIII runs counter to the expectation that a higher grade would engage learners with richer vocabulary patterning. Although differences in task design can account for some variability, the pattern reinforces the overall conclusion: the eighth-grade writing materials do not extend cohesion beyond the baseline established in the seventh grade.

Part 3. Explanations, Similarities, and Differences

Several plausible explanations all consistent with the data may account for the observed patterns.

1. Task design and length constraints

The writing sections in Grade VIII often involve brief, structured outputs (e.g., sentence-level completions or short responses). Such formats naturally constrain opportunities to deploy devices like ellipsis and substitution, which flourish when writers must control redundancy across longer stretches of text. In this light, the greater proportion of conjunctions in Grade VIII, particularly additive ones, can be seen as a

functional response to linking short ideas, not as evidence of deeper discourse control.

This explanation fits the results without invoking mechanisms not observed in the data.

2. A conservative progression strategy.

It is possible that the series deliberately maintains accessibility by reinforcing a small set of high-utility devices (pronouns + “and”) across grades. This would explain the persistence and even strengthening of additive conjunctions in Grade VIII. While such consolidation supports fluency and reduces cognitive load, it may also limit growth in discourse variety unless accompanied by tasks that elicit adversative and causal relations or lexical chaining. The data reflect consolidation rather than expansion.

3. Curricular emphasis on functional communication.

Kurikulum Merdeka prioritizes practical communication and learner agency. If writing tasks in Grade VIII continue to privilege functional clarity over extended composition, the cohesion profile will logically gravitate toward the most transparent and teachable devices (reference, simple conjunctions). This would also explain the absence of ellipsis, which, though natural in authentic texts, can be challenging to teach explicitly and to assess in short responses.

4. Alignment with beginner–lower–intermediate proficiency.

The intended user profile is junior high learners who are still consolidating sentence-level grammar, which can account for the limited functional spread in conjunctions. In early foreign language development, adversative and causal relations, though crucial for argumentation, may be introduced cautiously. The pattern in Grade VIII, therefore, resembles beginner consolidation rather than intermediate expansion. The data support this by showing more conjunctions overall but little diversification.

Implications within the boundaries of the findings are therefore cautious and concrete. If materials designers aim to strengthen discourse development from Grade VII to VIII, they may consider: (a) incorporating slightly longer writing tasks where ellipsis and substitution become meaningful and assessable; (b) designing prompts that naturally call for adversative (contrast) and causal (reason/result) links; and (c) embedding lexical chaining activities (e.g., guided synonym/near-synonym use, thematic collocations) within writing tasks. These suggestions follow directly from what the results reveal is underrepresented, rather than from external prescriptions.

In summary, the discussion underscores three grounded points. First, the cohesion profile in both grades is anchored in reference and conjunction, a pattern consistent with early EFL contexts. Second, Grade VIII does not extend cohesion variety relative to Grade VII; instead, it consolidates basic linking, chiefly via additive connectors. Third, the absence of ellipsis and the decline of substitution and lexical cohesion at the higher grade are best explained by the design and scope of the writing tasks rather than by claims about learner ability. These interpretations remain within the evidential limits of the study and align with what comparable research would anticipate if the writing tasks are short, highly scaffolded, and focused on functional clarity.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study examined how grammatical cohesion is represented in the writing sections of the English for Nusantara textbooks for Grades VII and VIII under Kurikulum Merdeka. Through Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework, the analysis revealed that both textbooks rely primarily on reference and conjunction, while substitution, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion remain minimal or absent. The patterns suggest that cohesion development across grade levels does not expand in complexity as expected, but instead stabilizes around a small set of frequently used devices.

The implications of these findings concern textbook design and writing pedagogy. The concentration on reference and additive conjunctions may effectively reinforce sentence-level coherence but limits exposure to higher-order discourse structures. For teachers and material developers, this points to the need for writing tasks that naturally encourage contrastive, causal, and elliptical relations, as well as lexical chaining for richer text cohesion. Curriculum designers might also review whether the communicative emphasis of Kurikulum Merdeka unintentionally narrows learners' opportunities to practice complex cohesion, and consider gradual scaffolding that maintains accessibility while expanding structural variety.

This research carries several limitations. The analysis focused exclusively on the writing sections of two textbooks; other components such as reading or speaking activities were not examined and might present different cohesion profiles. In addition, only descriptive and comparative methods were used; no statistical tests or classroom validation were conducted. Thus, the study reveals patterns in the materials themselves but cannot confirm how students actually internalize or apply those patterns in real writing tasks. Despite these boundaries, the

study opens opportunities for future research. Subsequent work could investigate the ninth-grade textbook in the same series to determine whether cohesion diversity eventually increases at the upper level. A classroom-based analysis involving student writing samples could also test whether the cohesive tendencies of the textbooks are mirrored in learners' production. Moreover, cross-curricular comparisons with other EFL materials both local and international could provide insight into whether this simplification trend is distinctive to English for Nusantara or reflects a broader characteristic of beginner-level EFL education.

Through these extensions, future research can build a more complete understanding of how grammatical cohesion develops within and beyond Kurikulum Merdeka, guiding educators toward materials that foster both coherence and linguistic growth in learners' writing.

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