

## APPLYING COHESION THEORY TO TEACH READING COMPREHENSION TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Received:</b> 04/02/2023</p> <p><b>Revised:</b> 23/3/2023</p> <p><b>Published:</b> 23/3/2023</p>	<p>This paper investigated the impact of cohesion teaching on students' reading comprehension. In order to achieve the goal, two key objectives were set for the study. Firstly, it was anticipated that the study would shed light on students' prior understanding of cohesiveness and cohesion in reading. Secondly, the researcher expected to find out whether the teaching of cohesiveness to students could help them become better readers. Therefore, an action research was conducted to accomplish the aim. To carry out this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed with two questionnaires, a pre-test, a post-test, field notes and observation of the experimental group. The overall result showed that the intervention had a significant positive impact on the experimental group's reading ability. After the experimental teaching phase about cohesion, the students' scores in the reading test improved remarkably compared with the scores in the test they did before. Despite the limited understanding of cohesion in reading, all the students admitted that cohesive devices played a crucial role in a written passage and it was necessary to learn about cohesive devices while practising reading skills.</p>
<p><b>KEYWORDS</b></p> <p>Cohesion</p> <p>Reading</p> <p>Cohesive devices</p> <p>Cohesion theory</p> <p>Action research</p>	

## ÁP DỤNG LÝ THUYẾT VỀ LIÊN KẾT VĂN BẢN TRONG VIỆC DẠY ĐỌC HIỂU TIẾNG ANH CHO HỌC VIÊN HỌC TIẾNG ANH NHƯ MỘT NGOẠI NGỮ

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
<p><b>Ngày nhận bài:</b> 04/02/2023</p> <p><b>Ngày hoàn thiện:</b> 23/3/2023</p> <p><b>Ngày đăng:</b> 23/3/2023</p>	<p>Bài viết này nghiên cứu về ảnh hưởng của việc giảng dạy phép liên kết đến kỹ năng đọc hiểu của học viên. Nghiên cứu có hai mục tiêu chính. Trước hết, nghiên cứu làm sáng tỏ sự hiểu biết trước đó của học viên về phép liên kết và phép liên kết trong văn bản. Bên cạnh đó, nhà nghiên cứu mong muốn tìm ra liệu việc giảng dạy phép liên kết có thể cải thiện khả năng đọc của học viên hay không. Để thực hiện nghiên cứu này, cả hai phương pháp định lượng và định tính đều được sử dụng, bao gồm hai bảng câu hỏi trắc nghiệm, một bài kiểm tra đầu vào, một bài kiểm tra cuối khoá, ghi chú cũng như quan sát nhóm thực nghiệm. Kết quả của nghiên cứu cho thấy rằng học viên có động lực cao với việc học về phương tiện liên kết trong văn bản trong các giờ đọc hiểu, sau giai đoạn dạy thử nghiệm, điểm số của học sinh trong bài kiểm tra đọc được cải thiện rõ rệt so với bài kiểm tra mà các em đã làm trước đó. Mặc dù sự hiểu biết về liên kết văn bản còn hạn chế, tất cả các học viên thừa nhận rằng các phương tiện liên kết đóng vai trò quan trọng trong một đoạn văn bản và cần thiết phải tìm hiểu về các phương tiện liên kết văn bản trong khi thực hành các kỹ năng đọc.</p>
<p><b>TỪ KHÓA</b></p> <p>Phép liên kết</p> <p>Kỹ năng đọc</p> <p>Phương tiện liên kết văn bản</p> <p>Lý thuyết liên kết văn bản</p> <p>Nghiên cứu hành động</p>	

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.7283>

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Statement of the problem

Teaching reading has always been receiving a lot of attention. However, after conducting extensive research in this area, we are aware that despite studying English for years, many students frequently fail to understand the passages they are requested to read. After spending years of practicing reading, many learners still struggle to understand the materials they wish to read. One of the causes, as many scholars have noted such as Cook [1] and Nuttal [2], is the failure to accurately interpret the functional significance of individual phrases as well as their link to one another and the overall composition.

Numerous studies on cohesion, coherence, and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) reading have been conducted in recent decades. These studies have demonstrated the critical role that cohesion and coherence play in improving reading comprehension. Chapman [3] discovers a correlation between reading proficiency and anaphoric connection in a cloze test, and he draws the conclusion that mastering certain textual elements, particularly cohesive ties, is a key component of fluent reading and reading comprehension. Similar arguments are made by Mackay [4] and Cowan [5] that the ability of readers of second languages to gather information depends on their ability to recognize conjunctions and other intersentential linguistic techniques [6], [7].

In the view of Tomlinson [8], having strong reading skills is essential for anyone using English for academic or professional purposes. As a result, many curricula dedicate a significant amount of time to intensive and extended reading courses in order to help students develop these skills.

The continuity that cohesive relations produce, in accordance with Halliday and Hasan [9], is a semantic continuity. This enables cohesive patterns to play a significant role in how a reader or listener receives content. Because those chains indicate organizational patterns of various sorts of text, it is important to teach our students how to recognize the many kinds of cohesive relations that serve as the foundation of those texts.

Muto [10] explores the significant impact that comprehending lexical cohesion has on readers' comprehension of the tale. By focusing on the connections between words, the writers' hints to the necessary information might be revealed.

Many other studies, like [11] – [14], have also reached the same conclusion that all forms of textual coherent conjunctions aid reading comprehension in the same way.

The researcher was motivated to explore "applying cohesion theory in discourse analysis to the teaching of reading comprehension to foreign language learners" as a result of all these circumstances. This is an action research project in which the researcher used cohesion theory to teach reading comprehension and assisted students in using the information they learned to improve their reading skills.

### 1.2. Aims of the study

The study aimed to investigate the effect of cohesion competence on students' reading comprehension. In order to achieve the goal, two key objectives were set for the study. Firstly, it was anticipated that the study would shed light on students' prior understanding of cohesiveness and cohesion in reading. Secondly, the researcher expected to find out whether the teaching of cohesiveness to students could help them become better readers.

### 1.3. Scope of the study

This study primarily focuses on examining the different types of cohesion that arose in reading texts. Additionally, the researcher would instruct coherence not only theoretically but also actually by helping students identify and analyze cohesive elements in reading passages.

The study's 29 participants were students in an English class. They were all at the Common European Framework of Reference's A2 level for English. These students were chosen because

they were all in the same class where the researcher was in charge of imparting reading skill. Most of the participants were students at colleges or universities in Thai Nguyen.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research questions**

The two research issues below were addressed by the study:

(1) *What kind of prior knowledge regarding cohesion and cohesion in reading comprehension did the study participants have before the experimental teaching phase?*

(2) *How can teaching cohesion to second language learners help their reading comprehension?*

### **2.2. Research procedure**

The research procedure consisted of two cycles, each comprising planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. In the first cycle, the focus was on gathering information about the students' prior knowledge and experiences with cohesion in reading comprehension. The second cycle focused on teaching cohesion to the students and evaluating its impact on their reading comprehension.

In the first cycle of the research, data was collected to determine the students' prior knowledge and experiences with cohesion in reading comprehension. This was done to establish a baseline understanding of the students' existing comprehension skills and to identify any potential knowledge gaps or misconceptions that needed to be addressed before teaching cohesion.

During the planning phase, the researchers identified the research questions, selected the participants, and determined the procedures for data collection and analysis. The acting phase involved implementing the planned interventions and collecting data through various methods such as survey questionnaire, and observations.

In the observing phase, the researchers analyzed the collected data to identify patterns and themes. This process helped to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants and to identify the factors that influenced their behavior.

Finally, in the reflecting phase, the researchers reviewed the findings of the study and drew conclusions based on the data. This phase also involved evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions and identifying areas for improvement.

The second cycle of this research focused on teaching cohesion to the students and evaluating its impact on their reading comprehension. The cycle began with the planning phase, in which the researchers developed a cohesive lesson plan to teach the students about the importance of cohesion in reading comprehension. This phase also involved selecting appropriate reading materials that would allow the students to practice identifying and using cohesive devices.

In the acting phase, the lesson plan was implemented in the classroom. The students were taught about cohesive devices, such as conjunctions, transitional words, and pronouns, and were given opportunities to practice using them in their own writing and reading. The teacher provided feedback and guidance to the students as they worked on the lesson activities.

The observing phase involved collecting data on the students' progress in understanding and using cohesive devices. The researchers observed the students as they worked on the lesson activities and conducted pre- and post-tests to measure the students' reading comprehension skills.

Finally, in the reflecting phase, the researchers analyzed the data collected in the observing phase to evaluate the effectiveness of the cohesion lesson.

Overall, the research procedure for this study was carefully planned and executed in a systematic manner, with a focus on identifying and addressing the research questions.

### **2.3. Research approach**

Action research was chosen as the research methodology to address the two research questions as it meets the aim and objectives of the study. Action research is a great method for educators who want to modify student learning appropriately and assess any potential repercussions [15]. The researcher, who is also a teacher, is right in believing that this strategy

will provide immeasurable advantages to them. Action research has three key benefits, according to Johnson [16], including fostering professional and personal development, enhancing practice to improve student learning, and advancing the teaching profession.

#### **2.4. Data collection instruments**

Reading comprehension tests, survey questionnaires, observation, and field notes were the study's four primary data collection tools.

A specific observation checklist was created to evaluate the students' engagement and motivation during the reading lesson. The researcher made notes regarding the students' performance in class using the observation checklist as a guide.

There were two reading comprehension tests: A pre-test was administered prior to the intervention, and a post-test was administered following the intervention. Regarding timing, number of questions, number of texts, length, passage structure, and vocabulary level, both assessments were the same level of difficulty.

To collect information for the investigation, two survey questionnaires were designed. Before the intervention, a questionnaire was distributed to students to learn more about their prior knowledge, experiences, and beliefs regarding learning cohesion. The other was given out following the intervention in order to gather information on how the experimental teaching was received by the learners.

#### **2.5. Data collection procedure**

The three stages of the data collection process included pre-intervention, while-intervention, and post-intervention. As shown in table 1 below, the data collection instruments were adopted flexibly for each phase:

**Table 1.** *Three phases of data collection*

<b>Pre- intervention</b>	<b>While – intervention (8 weeks)</b>	<b>Post- intervention</b>
Survey questionnaire Pre-test	Observation Field notes	Survey questionnaire Post-test

There were three phases for piloting, delivering, collecting the survey questionnaires and reading comprehension tests. Throughout the eight-week experimental teaching period, observations and field notes were made to assess the students' interest in and engagement in the reading lessons.

#### **2.6. Data analysis methods**

In order to analyze the data, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed. In particular, a quantitative approach was employed to examine objective data from tests and survey questionnaires. Meanwhile, open-ended survey questions and data from field notes were used in the qualitative method [17].

Additionally, the data collected were also subjected to statistical analysis. In terms of the study scope and the researcher's own capabilities, simple descriptive statistics are the most appropriate method to present the findings of this study.

#### **2.7. Significance of the study**

In general, the study may have some advantages for educators, educational administrators, and researchers focusing on related issues. First, the researcher was given a priceless opportunity to reflect on her own teaching, research a new teaching approach, and make other instructors aware of such an approach.

In addition, this study may provide references to interested individuals who wish to pursue future research on the use of cohesiveness in teaching reading skills to second language learners.

### **3. Results and Discussions**

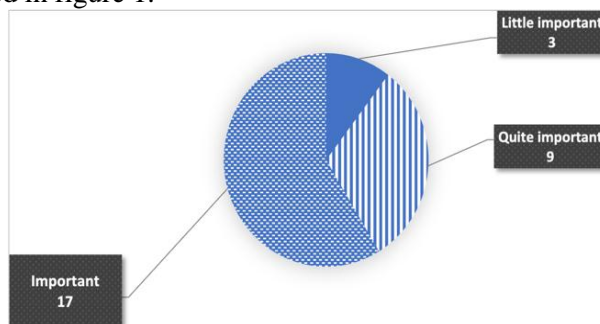
### 3.1. Student's prior knowledge about cohesion in reading

Taking into account the surveys, twenty seven out of twenty nine students claimed that they had not learnt or read about cohesion before. One of the other two students explained that they noticed the existence of cohesion when translating reading texts and referring to Vietnamese language. The other said he knew about cohesion in written text through the feedback of a teacher in one of his writing task. As a result, when answering the question of “*What do you think can make a text coherent?*”, the answer of most of the students was limited to primarily two factors, namely *linking words* and *repetition*. Several students mentioned synonyms. The options of ellipsis, substitution and collocation were rarely chosen.

More noticeably, all the students stated that they had never done any exercises related to analyzing cohesion in reading lessons.

As to the result of the pre-test, it was shown that the students did poorly with questions related to cohesion or cohesive devices, even those who got quite good marks.

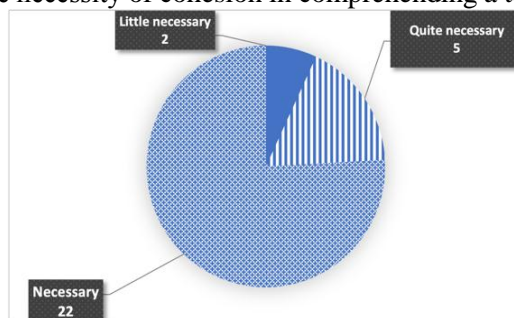
According to the survey, although the students had poor knowledge about cohesion in English, most of them considered cohesion important in a written text. The students' rate of the importance is illustrated in figure 1.



**Figure 1.** *The significance of cohesion in a written text*

Above a half of the surveyed students stated that cohesion played an important role in reading passages. Cohesion was perceived as “quite important” by nearly third of the students. Meanwhile, only three students said that cohesion had little to do with the development of a written text.

The students' rate of the necessity of cohesion in comprehending a text is illustrated in figure 2.



**Figure 2.** *Necessity of understanding cohesion for reading comprehension*

Although the students attached different levels of importance to the role of cohesion, all of them agreed that cohesive devices had a significant role in a written text. Therefore, all the students stated that it was necessary to understand about cohesion when comprehending a reading passage with two students said “little necessary”, five “quite necessary” and twenty-two “necessary” because understanding about cohesion helped them to follow the reading text more easily, as responded by the majority of the students.

Overall, it can be seen that the students had strong motivation to learn about cohesion since they all believed this would help them improve their reading ability.

### 3.2. Students' improvement in reading comprehension

The improvement in reading performance of the students was strikingly demonstrated through the contrast between their reading scores on the pre-test and post-test. In order to examine the effect of the cohesion competence on students' reading comprehension, SPSS software, more specifically the Paired Sample T-tests, was employed to analyze and compare the students' results in the pre-test and the post-test. The result of the analysis process is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Group's performance in the pre-test and post-test

		Paired Samples Statistics			
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	4.7414	29	0.76322	0.14173
	Post-test	5.8103	29	0.92980	0.17266

As can be seen, there was a significant rise in the average score of the whole students. In the pre-test, the mean stood at 4.7414. After 8 week training, this figure rose to 5.8103, which is an indicator of the students' general improvement.

The effectiveness of the experimental teaching phase in improving the students' reading ability and awareness is further supported by the results of the Paired-Sample T-tests, which are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Results of the Paired-Sample T-tests

		Paired Samples Test						Significance		
		Paired Differences				t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Pre-test – Post-test	-1.06897	0.80981	0.15038	-1.37700	0.76093	-7.109	28	<0.001	<0.001

As the level of significant shows, it was smaller than 0.05 in the results of the groups. Therefore, the experimental teaching phase did have positive effects on the studied students' awareness and reading ability.

The data gathered from the direct observation and field notes revealed that students were actively interested in the practice of analyzing cohesion in class. The students were eager to scan the reading passages to find out cohesive devices, especially when this task was designed in the form of competitive group activities. All the homework assigned was accomplished successfully.

The success of the experimental teaching phase was also revealed in the students' answer in the survey questionnaire after the intervention. In fact, all the students stated that the experimental teaching phase was effective for their study with twenty five students choosing "effective" and four choosing "quite effective".

The majority of the students confessed that they were satisfied with the eight-week learning session as through it they gained considerable knowledge about cohesion that they had never learnt about before. Twenty students felt excited when they had the chance to experience a new way of analyzing reading passages and practicing reading skills. Twelve students could realize the improvement in their reading performance.

In short, the students' improvement was evidently shown, which demonstrated the necessity and effectiveness of teaching cohesion to enhance students' reading ability.

### 3.3. Recommendations

With the so far success of the experimental teaching phase, several suggestions are put forward to enhance the effectiveness of the model teaching as well as to make a step toward a new way of teaching reading comprehension.

First, it is important to raise teachers' awareness of the application of cohesion teaching in reading lessons. This can be achieved by holding seminars and professional meetings, in which teachers share their experience in working with cohesion and reading teaching. Creative techniques together with difficulties during the exploitation will be exchanged and; therefore, pedagogical suggestions will be raised in order to better the new method. Besides, competitions on designing and teaching reading lessons based on cohesion instructions among teachers should be encouraged. In such competitions, different teaching techniques will be introduced and shortcomings will be detected, thus providing helpful guides for teachers to better apply the new method.

Second, one of the difficulties in teaching cohesion to improve students' reading comprehension was the source of materials, especially reading texts. Thus, one way to enhance the application of this method is to form cohesion-reading materials banks. Teachers of the same professional groups should share their reading materials in which they focus on analyzing one types of cohesive devices that appears the most evident in the passages with one another and build up a bank. Once the materials in such banks are regularly revised and updated, they can be reused for a long time. Furthermore, for better exploitation, teachers are advised to run workshops in which they look at and reflect on samples of cohesion-reading materials with references to classes they teach. In addition, serious studies should be conducted to have deeper insights into the use of the materials as well as to provide theoretical base and references for better exploitation.

These are the two recommendations which provide great incentives for educational administrations and teachers to expand the teaching of cohesion to improve reading ability.

With regard to material selections and question design, in case of improving the reading text, one can suggest adopting Nuttal's advice to "preserve whatever in the original will appeal to the intelligence of students" and to "retain as much as possible of the textual quality and discourse structure of the original" [18, p. 32]. Accordingly, cohesive devices should be retained in the texts and the students' attention should be drawn to these devices as feature of discourse in real life. In addition, exercises and questions should activate all the students' reading comprehension skills. Consequently, we should make them varied and extended to cover all students' skills taking into account the fact that reading is an active skill, it constantly involves guessing, predicting, checking and asking oneself question.

### 4. Conclusion

In general, the research could be helpful for researchers, teachers and educational administrators working on related issues.

First, this study provided the researcher with a golden opportunity to reflect on her own teaching and at the same time investigate a new way to enhance students' reading comprehension. Besides, the study raises teachers' awareness of the application of teaching cohesion in enhancing reading comprehension. In addition, the experimental teaching phase can also be used as a model for teachers who want to adapt and develop this new method to better fit their particular educational circumstances.

In addition, as mentioned above, there has not been much research on applying cohesion to the teaching of reading skills for second language learners. This research could provide references about updated and trustworthy information about a context of applying cohesion in teaching reading skills for second language learners to those who are interested in conducting further research.

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