

The Use of Intra-/Inter-Sentential Cohesion by Secondary School Students in Written Texts: A Case Study of One School in Eswatini

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Abstract A survey of the pass rate of English language in Eswatini revealed that many candidates fail to credit the subject. Therefore, the opportunity to enroll in tertiary institutions or immediately seek for employment is either lost or delayed (for those who credit English after several upgrading attempts). The examination reports also revealed that many candidates failed the essay type of questions, which carry weight because many fail to construct cohesive and coherent texts (<http://www.exams council.org.sz/>). This report ignited our interest to investigate the linguistic resources available for teaching cohesion in English in secondary schools in the Kingdom of Eswatini. Therefore, we analysed the nature of content on cohesion in secondary school textbooks used in Eswatini, and examined students' ability in using grammatical cohesive devices to combine ideas within and across sentence boundaries (intra-/inter-sentential cohesion). Secondary school students were given language exercises drawn from sampled simplified texts to combine ideas into cohesive texts. Linguistic and document analyses were employed to analyze data on language experimental exercises and the content in prescribed textbooks. The range of conjuncts used and frequency of their use to realize inter-/intra-sentential cohesion were evaluated. The occurrences of grammatical cohesive devices in the textbooks were also rated. The results showed limitations in the depth of content on grammatical cohesive devices in both prescribed textbooks and their use in students' sampled simplified

texts. The significance of conjuncts in intra-/inter-sentential cohesion is not given much attention in prescribed textbooks in Eswatini. There is a need to purposefully add content on grammatical cohesive devices in the design of English language textbooks used at this level since English is used as a second language.

Keywords Intra-/Inter-Sentential Cohesion, Grammatical Cohesive Devices, Clause Combining, Conjuncts

1. Introduction

To get admission to tertiary institutions offering undergraduate and graduate programmes in Eswatini, a prospective student needs to obtain a credit or better in English in the general certificate for secondary education. Passing English language also opens employment opportunities for those students who are immediately employed by sectors that do not necessarily require tertiary academic qualifications, but offer in-service training or just use the language for interaction in businesses.

The aim of language studies, whatever the approach, is to improve the understanding and use of language. Such studies are even more helpful in settings where the language of education and commerce is a second language.

According to Deveci and Nunn [1], authors' language and communication competence influence whether or not the message is conveyed to readers successfully. Therefore, authors need to be meticulous in sentence construction.

Sentence construction involves a number of processes, such as learning the sentence types: the simple and non-simple sentences [2], and how to use these effectively in written texts. Simple sentences only express single ideas, but they can be very complex in terms of structure. For example, the most common type, the declarative statement, can be used in nine different patterns or clause types. Other simple sentences are derived from the basic declarative type through the application of transformational rules which change the sequence of the clause elements in each type of the non-basic simple sentence structures depending on the purpose of each. These include imperatives, questions, passives, clefts and others. Simple sentences may also be expanded through pre-modification, post-modification, subordination, coordination, apposition and the addition of optional adverbials [3]. The non-simple sentences have multiple ideas connected intra-sententially by grammatical cohesive devices.

It is therefore crucial to pay attention to the teaching and learning of sentence complexity and logical connection of ideas within and across English sentences to learners at secondary school level so that they learn these language skills before they complete secondary school level.

The ability to employ sentence complexity and connectedness of ideas in written English is one of the important skills tested in secondary school examinations in Eswatini and in other Cambridge accredited examinations globally. Cambridge University Assessment Unit accredits the Examination Council of Eswatini.

An analysis of the Examinations Council of Eswatini's reports on students' performance in the English Language General Certificate in Secondary Education examinations shows that many of the students struggle to write varied correct English sentences to express their knowledge, and to connect ideas cohesively beyond sentence boundaries. The use of cohesive devices is also rare. If used, only the basic coordinators are used and the range of other grammatical cohesive devices is hardly used. This limitation has a negative impact on many students' academic performance in the English which is a compulsory subject.

A quick survey of the students' performance in the Eswatini Junior Certificate Examination indicates that English Language is one of the subjects in which the majority of students perform below average [6]. The following statistics show the failure rate in English language in some schools drawn from the four regions in Eswatini in 2019.

A. Statistics from the Region 1

Name of School	Failure Rate (%)
School 1	69%
School 2	61%

School 3	68%
School 4	100%

B. Statistics from Region 2

Name of School	Failure Rate (%)
School 5	83%
School 6	62%
School 7	75%
School 8	51%

C. Statistics from Region 3

Name of School	Failure Rate (%)
School 9	53%
School 10	53%
School 11	61%
School 12	73%

D. Statistics from Region 4

Name of School	Failure Rate (%)
School 13	65%
School 14	55%
School 15	82%
School 16	100%

The examination reports revealed that poor performance in sentence complexity seems to contribute to the poor performance in students' written texts. This then motivated the authors to investigate one aspect of sentence complexity: intra-sentential and inter-sentential cohesion in learning materials designed for teaching English language at this level, and also determine the capacity of selected students in using a range of grammatical cohesive devices in text construction [7].

2. Problem Statement

The Examination Council of Eswatini Report of 2019 on Subject Performance shows that many candidates did not obtain a credit in English language. Such performance in English has been a topical issue in the country over the years. The competencies examined in the English language papers include the assessment of candidates' knowledge and use of varied English sentences and the use of cohesive devices within and across sentence boundaries. Failing English language limits students' access to tertiary education and it limits their fluency when they use the language if employed immediately after graduating from secondary school. Comments from practitioners in tertiary institutions also reveal that even those students who credited English language and enrolled in tertiary institutions continue to struggle with expressing their ideas succinctly in their academic texts because of limitations in sentence construction and cohesion. The failure of students to learn adequate sentence construction processes and text connectedness may result in miscommunication of ideas since English is used in all formal settings in the country.

3. Literature Review

A sentence is the largest unit of the syntactic structure. Finch [8] points out that the traditional definitions of sentences describe them as grammatically complete units of language capable of standing on their own and being semantically independent. This shows that sentence structure forms the basis for text construction; hence, it is very important that it is given attention in the study of language and research on language use.

Radford [9] observes that misinformation and confusion are likely to occur when students or other users of English language express themselves in structurally incorrect sentences. As a result, the message can be lost between the ignorance of the writer and the perplexity of the reader. Moreover, incorrect sentences in written texts are likely to lead to all sorts of misinterpretation of the message being conveyed. This affirms the need for a study investigating the difficulties students face when constructing a range of sentences when writing texts in English. Longknife and Sullivan [10] argue that composing sentences is one foundational component of writing where many students struggle. Glencoe [4] explains that sentence combining enables students to find clear ways to express their ideas. He further states that to write effectively, students must construct good sentences consistently; thus, lessons on sentence combining can help them achieve this goal. Radford [9] further observes that many students continue to have difficulty in communicating their written messages effectively due to their inability to express their thoughts clearly through correct sentence structures and cohesion within larger texts. It is crucial that writers are able to link their ideas within the sentence and across sentence boundaries to produce a meaningful text. It is thus very important that in this section we explain the different processes one can use to combine clauses and sentences and make the text cohesive within and across sentence boundaries.

The English sentence may either be a simple sentence (which has a single idea), or a non-simple sentence (which consists of two or more ideas) [5].

The simple sentence has a single idea, but it can have a very complicated structure which is achieved by making the phrase units within the clause very complex by using various processes that make the simple sentence complex despite its purpose of expressing a single idea. The complexity of the English simple sentence is created by the fact that single ideas may be expressed in nine different ways, using different clause types/patterns. These clause patterns are created by the sequence and nature of clause elements within that clause. Clause elements are syntactic functions of phrases, and they include: subject, predicate, object, complement and adverbial. The constituent structure of the clause elements may also be more complex thus adding more information to the simple idea which further makes the simple sentence complex. Phrasal coordination, optional adverbials (the adjunct, disjunct and

conjuncts), apposition, post-modification and pre-modification create complex constituent structures of clause elements [2, 3].

The non-simple sentences, on the other hand, have two or more ideas connected through cohesion. Sentences within larger texts are often connected within and across the sentence boundary. Such a connection is made possible by the use of grammatical and lexical cohesive devices (Egins) [11]. Grammatical cohesive devices include coordination and subordination, ellipsis, substitution, anaphoric reference, esphoric reference, cataphoric reference and structural pararellism. Lexical cohesive devices include repetition, synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, etc. The focus in this study was only on the use of conjunctions and conjuncts as cohesive devices, which we now describe in detail.

According to Collins and Hollo [12], coordination is the relationship between elements (phrases or clauses) that are of equivalent rank. Greenbaum and Quirk [3] state that coordination involves the linking of units that are at the same syntactic level. In text creation, coordination plays an important part in constructing complex simple sentences and creation of non-simple sentences using phrasal coordination, and clausal coordination. The coordination of independent clauses results in paratactically related ideas structurally referred to compound sentences. Coordination is also essential in connecting ideas beyond the sentence boundary; thus creating cohesion within texts. Phrasal coordination only makes clause elements complex; it does not result in cohesive texts. Only when it is used intra-sententially and inter-sententially does coordination create cohesion within text.

Coordination is divided into three types: syndetic, asyndetic and polysyndetic [3]. Syndetic coordination uses three types of conjunctions: coordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs. Asyndetic coordination uses punctuation marks such as the colon, comma, dash and semi colon to connect independent clauses. Polysyndetic coordination uses both syndetic and asyndetic linkers and sometimes they are repeated in-between clauses [3].

The grammatical structures commonly used for syndetic coordination to expand the phrase unit are coordinating and correlative conjunctions. Those that are often used to connect ideas within and across sentences include: coordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, adverbs that function as conjuncts and prepositional phrases functioning as conjuncts.

Punctuation plays an important role when linking phrases and clauses. It is used within phrases to list elements within a phrase, and here we often use a comma and in this context, it is not cohesive. To connect ideas within sentences we use the comma, semi-colon, colon and dash. In this case, these punctuation marks are cohesive.

The comma (,) marks a brief break between two or more phrases or clauses. Many people are uncertain about the use of commas, though they often sprinkle them

throughout their writing. The comma is used between independent clauses in compound sentences where a comma is placed before coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, yet or for) [13]. Many writers tend to omit the comma before the coordinating conjunction if the sentence is very short; and this limits its effect on the emphasis on the coordinating conjunction that connects two or more ideas. In addition, teachers tend to encourage students not to place a comma between very short main clauses that are connected by a coordinating conjunction to achieve a fast flow of ideas in text. Commas are also used to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses in a series [4]. Other uses of a comma include: in direct speech, comma used to set off adverb clauses and antithetical phrases.

The semi-colon marks a longer pause between two or more ideas. Glencoe [4] states a semi-colon is used to separate independent clauses that could easily be joined by coordinating conjunctions.

The colon's function within sentences is to introduce elements, and they also have other conventional uses [13]. A colon always follows an independent clause in a sentence, but unlike a semicolon, the element that follows it is not always necessarily another independent clause. Glencoe [4] argues that a colon is used to introduce a list, especially after a statement that uses such words as: *the following, as follows, as, include* or statement that give an explanation of the previous independent clauses, or present a statement that restates the preceding material.

The dash is a punctuation mark that is similar in appearance to the hyphen and a minus sign, but differs from these symbols in function. Aremo [2] discusses numerous uses of a dash, which include: (1) to mark off an informal insertion, particularly one with internal commas; (2) to introduce an afterthought; (3) to introduce a list, when a less formal mark than a colon is required, and (4) to introduce a summary statement after a list.

The other process we often use to connect ideas within text is subordination. Though Greenbaum and Quirk [3] do not mention this, but we note from their definitions that the process of subordination is also a type of syndetic coordination because it always uses overt subordinating conjunctions when connecting the independent and dependent clauses to create complex sentences. Glencoe [4] simply defines a subordinating conjunction as a conjunction that joins two clauses, or ideas, in such a way as to make one grammatically dependent upon the other. Greenbaum and Quirk [3] state that subordination is generally marked by a signal in the subordinate clause.

Therefore, for writers to understand and to identify coordination and subordination in text, they need to know the various kinds of grammatical cohesive devices. We have discussed only these two grammatical cohesive devices because they constitute the focus of this study.

It is important to note that when we connect ideas within and across sentences, such ideas are structurally connected and semantically related. This connection and relationship

is technically referred to as *cohesion*, a term introduced by Halliday et al. [7]. Collins and Hollo [12] define cohesion as the type of organization in a text that is created by the presence of distinctive and recognizable linguistic items which connect ideas within that text intra-sententially and inter-sententially.

Cohesion is very important in academic writing; it is one of the linguistic features tested in exams of academic English at both secondary and tertiary levels. It holds a text together and gives the text additional meaning.

When students have limited knowledge of cohesive devices they are bound to construct uninteresting texts which might also be marred by a range of sentence errors. The major syntactic errors that this study focused on were *comma splices, run-on sentences* and *sentence fragments*. We chose to focus only on these syntactic errors because they emanate mainly from incorrect use of the cohesive devices or no use of the cohesive devices at all as well as errors in the use of punctuation marks within non-simple sentences.

A comma splice is a syntactic structure that constitutes at least two independent clauses that are incorrectly connected by a comma to make one sentence [14]. A comma splice shows that the writer lacks the capacity in using asyndetic and polysyndetic coordination in text construction.

A run-on sentence has a series of complete ideas, but the independent clauses in it are not properly punctuated or lack necessary cohesive devices [14]. Run-on sentences are usually resolved by inserting a semicolon, a conjunction or by writing two separate sentences. However, not all long sentences are run-on sentences. Run-on sentences have a series of complete ideas (independent clauses) which are squashed together without using any form of connection device to link such ideas. Thus, run-on sentences can be short or long. A run-on sentence is a serious grammatical error because it shows limited knowledge about clause combining and the processes of combining clauses within sentences.

Sentence fragments refer to a group of words that begin with a capital letter and end with a period, question mark, or exclamation point, but express incomplete ideas. Simply defined, a sentence fragment is often a dependent clause that may be missing a superordinate clause to complete a particular the idea of the dependent clause. Kaplan [15] defines a superordinate clause as an independent clause to which the dependent clause is embedded to complete its idea.

Having briefly highlighted these syntactic errors, we see the importance of knowledge of clause combining in creating texts in English. When a student is not well-informed about clause combining and connection of ideas beyond the sentence boundary, the student is likely to have some deficiencies in the construction of cohesive, well-constructed sentences that are not fragments, comma splices or run-on sentences or larger texts [16].

4. Research Questions

The study aimed at surveying the content in prescribed textbooks and examining the secondary students' ability to use intra-sentential and inter-sentential cohesion in their written texts.

The study's was guided by the following questions:

- Do students use a range of grammatical cohesive devices in their written texts?
- What kind of syntactic errors committed when linking clauses intra-/inter-sententially?
- Do the prescribed textbooks contain adequate content on sentence construction and grammatical cohesion?

5. Methodology

The focus of the study was to identify and evaluate the depth of content on cohesion in prescribed textbooks, and test the capacity of the students using such books when using cohesive devices for intra-/inter-sentential cohesion. Hence, for the language exercises, we employed Simensen's [17] notion of simplified texts to illustrate specific language features in participants' written texts. According to Simensen simplified texts lack idiosyncratic elements and accurately reflect what the reader already knows about the target language being studied. Using simplified texts has a benefit of enabling the user to acquire the capacity to unconsciously extend the knowledge of the structure being studied to their use of the target language (Crossley, Louwse, McCarthy & McNamara) [18].

Twenty participants, who were conveniently selected from one school, were tested on their ability to use cohesive devices within and across sentences. Although a few participants were selected, their performance gave an insight on the role played by prescribed resources in circumstances where such textbooks are the only resource to learning English as a second language. These participants were drawn from a rural, under-resourced school. We chose such an environment because we wanted to determine how much content on sentence construction and cohesion is given in the prescribed textbooks, and how such contributed to learning the role played by grammatical cohesive devices in constructing varied cohesive sentence structures and connection in larger written texts.

Names of participants, the school and regions are not identified for ethical reasons.

Experimental tests and a survey of specific linguistic content [19] from the books were used to collect data. The experimental tests included two exercises: the first exercise required students to combine jumbled ideas to produce a coherent essay allowing participants to creatively add on the given ideas to display their skill in using a range of English sentence structures in situated creative writing. The second exercise required participants to join clauses using a range of cohesive devices to create meaningful and

structurally correct sentences.

This research employed the guide used for linguistic and content analyses as the data was mainly in a form of a text. Content analysis is used to analyze documented information in the form of texts, media, or even physical items [20]. The analysis examined the texts carefully to determine the students' capacity in the use of grammatical cohesive devices in clause combining intra-sententially and when linking of ideas inter-sententially in the discursive construction of texts.

To analyze the data in exercises 1 and 2, we: (1) read each response from all the participants, (2) noted evidence of clause combination and cohesion, (3) identified levels and the frequency of use of all cohesive devices used, (4) identified and highlighted errors in sentence construction, if any, tabulated them and then analyzed the nature of such errors. Then the nature of content on intra-/inter-sentential cohesion contained in prescribed texts was evaluated.

The statistics presented were manually calculated since the sample size was smaller than the minimum required for using the SPSS analysis package.

6. Findings and Analysis

Data is presented in three sections. The first section constitutes an analysis of the use of cohesive devices in students' essays given as exercise 1. The next section analyses the capacity of participants to use cohesive devices to connect ideas intra-sententially. The last section evaluates the nature and depth of content on intra-/inter-sentential cohesion in prescribed texts.

6.1. Range of Cohesive Devices Identified in Students Essays

The results presented in this section were drawn from the first exercise given to participants. This exercise required participants to write a one-page essay about their biography, family and background. The purpose of the exercise was to pick the use of varied sentence structures and cohesive devices. To determine the use of varied sentence structures, we identified all grammatical cohesive devices that were used intra-sententially to construct compound, complex and multiple sentences and inter-sententially (across sentence boundaries).

Cohesive devices which authors checked from each text included: conjunctions (coordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, subordinating conjunctions), prepositional phrases that function as conjuncts, adverbs that function as conjuncts and punctuation marks (comma, colon, semi-colon, dash).

In each table, there are four columns. Column 1 contains cohesive devices that were found in the data, column 2 shows the number of participants who used that cohesive device, column 3 shows the instances in which that item was used intra-sententially to construct one of the

non-simple sentences, and the last column shows instances where that item was used to connect ideas inter-sententially.

6.1.1. Coordinating conjunctions

Table 1 below presents a list of six coordinating conjunctions: *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. We show the statistics of frequency in which the participants used coordinators as cohesive devices (i.e., intra-sentential cohesion and inter-sentential cohesion).

The data in Table 1 shows that the coordinating conjunction; *and*, is mostly used by students. Other coordinating conjunctions like *but*, *yet*, *so* are less used. And the coordinating conjunction; *for* and *nor*, are not used at all. As the table shows, all twenty students were able to use the coordinator; *and*, in their essays in 143 instances they used it to join clauses, and it was used in only six instances inter-sententially. Fourteen students were able to use the coordinating conjunction, *but*, in thirty two instances in the intra-sentential position, and in only two instances in the inter-sentential position. The conjunction; *or*, was used to join clauses fourteen times. Only two students used the conjunction; *yet*, to join ideas intra-sententially in three occurrences. Lastly, the conjunction; *so*, was used by only six students seven times intra-sententially and two times inter-sententially.

The results show that the participants know these conjunctions and some are able to use them as intra-sentential cohesive devices used to construct compound sentences as well as joining ideas beyond the sentence boundary.

6.1.2. Correlative conjunctions

Table 2 shows the use of correlative conjunctions by students in their essays. According to Table 2, only one candidate made use of correlative conjunctions. This demonstrates that participants lack knowledge of these type conjunctions. Content in this type of conjunctions was not found in the prescribed textbooks for teaching English in secondary schools; hence, the participants could not use such words in their writing.

6.1.3. Conjunctive adverbs

Table 3 shows the use of conjunctive adverbs in the participants' essays.

The data reveals that there is less use of conjunctive adverbs in the students' essays. The conjunctive adverbs; *moreover*, & *furthermore*, were used once by two participants. While "*also*" was used by 4 students with one using it twice in his/her essay. The results showed a gap in the use of conjunctive adverbs in this context.

Table 1. Coordinators as cohesive devices

Coordinating Conjunction	No. Participants who used each example	Intra-sentential	Inter-sentential
For	0	0	0
And	20	143	6
Nor	0	0	0
But	14	32	2
Or	8	14	0
Yet	2	3	0
So	6	7	2

Table 2. Correlative conjunctions as cohesive devices

Correlative Conjunctions	No. Participants who used each example	Intra-sentential	Inter-sentential
Either...or	0	0	0
Both...and	1	1	0

Table 3. Conjunctive adverbs as cohesive devices

Conjunctive adverbs	No. Participants	Intra-sentential	Inter-sentential
Moreover	1	0	1
Furthermore	1	0	1
Also	4	5	2

Table 4. Subordinating conjunctions as cohesive devices

Subordinating conjunctions	No. Participants	Intra-sentential	Inter-sentential
After	1	1	0
Although	1	1	0
As	1	1	0
Because	15	56	0
Though	1	0	1
Even though	1	1	0
What	3	3	0
When	16	37	1
Which	8	14	0
While	4	5	1
Who	10	19	0
So...that	1	1	0

6.1.4. Subordinating conjunctions

The English language has a range of subordinating conjunctions. They play an important part in text creation in that they set off dependent clauses which are embedded to superordinate clauses to form complex sentences. Table 4 shows an inexhaustive list of subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns that were used by students in their responses.

Table 4 shows that the subordinating conjunction; *because*, is the most used followed by the relative pronoun; *when*. The others are less used as shown by the data on the table. The relative pronoun; *when*, was used by sixteen students in 37 instances, and the subordinating conjunction; *because*, is the one that was generally known by participants. It was used by fifteen students in 56 instances. Despite the fact that English has a range of subordinating conjunctions only seven items were identified and only a few relative pronouns were also used. The limited use of these conjunctions suggests that students have a limited range of subordinating conjunctions in their mental lexicon. Hence, there is a need for explicit teaching for them to acquire the range of subordinating conjunctions.

6.1.5. Prepositional phrases as conjuncts

Only one candidate used a prepositional phrase, “*in addition*” as a cohesive device in his essay. The minimal use of prepositional phrases by the majority of candidates indicates that this structure is not one they can easily pick naturally, so it needs to be taught explicitly.

6.1.6. Punctuation

Table 5 shows the punctuation marks used by students on their essays to join clauses.

Table 5. Punctuation as asyndetic coordination

Punctuation	No. Participants	Intra-sentential
Comma	19	49
Semicolon	1	0
Colon	0	0
Dash	0	0

This table shows that nineteen students were able to use the comma in their essays in 49 instances. Only one student was able to use the semicolon, and even then, it was incorrectly used. The participant used the semi-colon to separate phrases – instead of coordinating independent clauses. The colon and the dash were not used in any essay.

6.2. Nature and Rate of Syntactic Errors in Participants' Essays

The frequent errors identified in participants' essays included structures such as run-on sentences, comma splices and sentence fragments. We concluded that these errors resulted from lack of capacity in using intra-sentential, syndetic and asyndetic coordination.

The following graph shows the rate of occurrence of each type of error across the participants' essays. These were noted each time they occurred according to type.

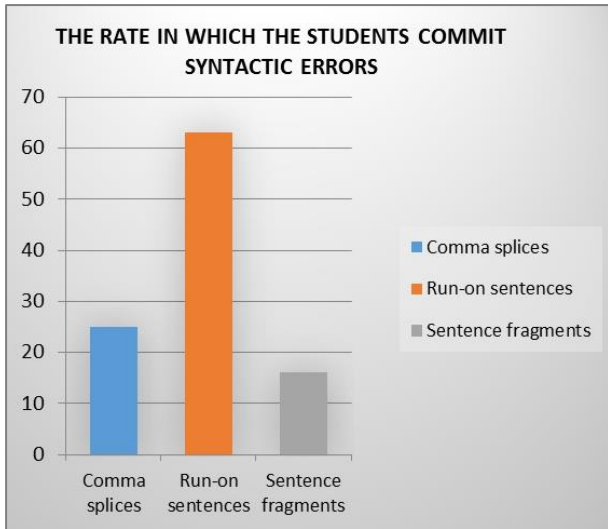


Figure 1. Rate in which syntactic errors are committed

The clustered column in Figure 1 shows that 61% of the syntactic errors the participants made are run-on sentences, then 24% are comma splices then 15% are sentence fragments. The high rate on the use of run-on sentences could be attributed to the limited knowledge on the grammatical structures of non-simple sentences as well as the role of punctuation and cohesive devices in constructing a range of English non-simple sentences.

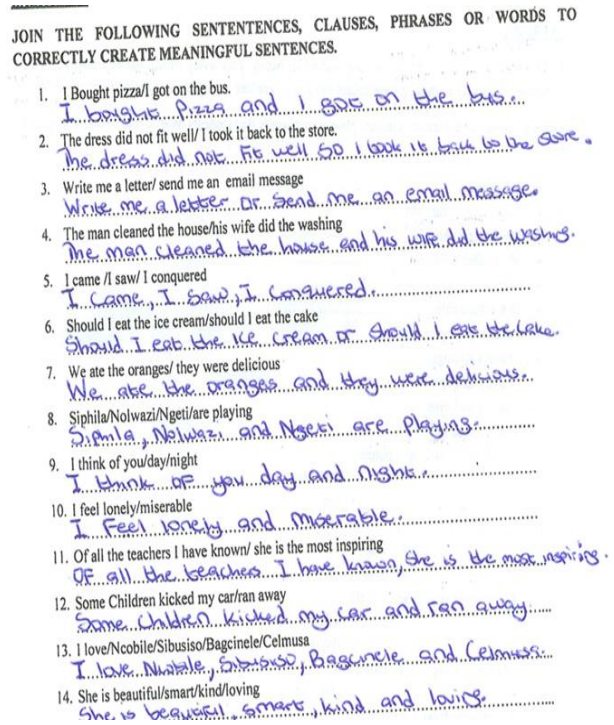
6.3. Ability to Use Cohesive Devices in Sampled Simplified Texts

Data in this section was drawn from exercise 2. In this exercise, participants were given sentences, clauses and phrases to join and construct meaningful sentences. Some statements were simple sentences so phrasal coordination not as cohesive devices was expected. This mix of structures (simple and non-simple sentences) enabled us to determine the students’ ability to use cohesive devices. We wanted to evaluate their skills on using different types of grammatical cohesive devices.

The sentences formed in exercise 2 needed to have the following features: A grammatical cohesive device used correctly in the given context; that is, it had to be embedded with an appropriate semantic value required by the statements being connected. Such use of the cohesive device needed to be punctuated correctly - whether occurring in the initial position or mid-sentential position. Each type of punctuation marks had to be used according to the type of cohesive device selected. For instance, a comma should precede a coordinator in compound sentences while a conjunctive adverb is preceded by a semi-colon and followed by a comma in mid-sentential position, etc. The task also required participants to recognize phrases, and display the ability to incorporate them into the sentence structure as well as not making an error of viewing them as clauses.

One example of students’ responses on exercise 2

looked like this:



Literature on coordination shows that phrases can be coordinated to create compound phrases which function as elements within the clause, but that phrasal coordination does not make the coordinators (or correlatives) cohesive devices that connect ideas within and across sentences [6,18]. Cohesive devices were not provided in this exercise because we wanted to determine whether each participant had adequate vocabulary items that function as grammatical cohesive devices in English.

The Performance of participants in creating meaningful sentences using acquired cohesive devices is presented in Figure 2.

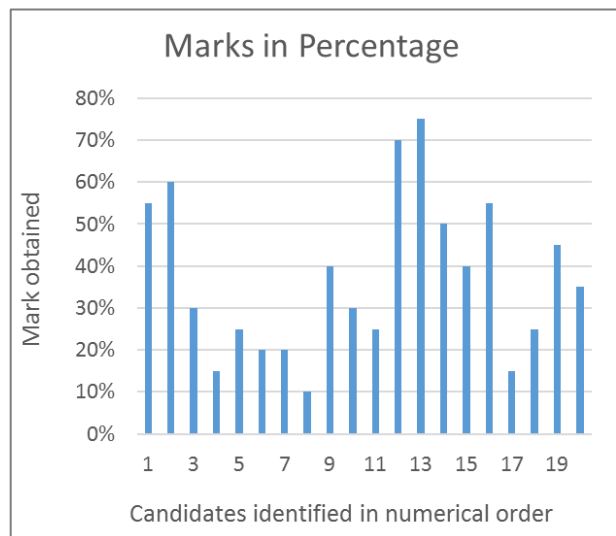


Figure 2. Marks obtained in test in Percentage

The overall performance of the students in this exercise was not that impressive. As you can see from the bar graph that the lowest score was 10% and the highest was just 75%. Only 40% of students were able to score 40% and above which is a passing mark for secondary students, and 60% scored a grade below 40% which is the passing mark, but below the credit grade needed to be admitted into tertiary institution. This shows that some students still struggle to create structurally correct sentences. Those that were punctuated correctly were not used with semantically appropriate cohesive devices in the given text.

5.4. Range and Depth of Content on Cohesion Included in English Textbooks Used in Secondary Schools in Eswatini

Two prescribed textbooks were selected for analysis. These textbooks are used by the students for three years before they write the mid-level secondary school examinations taken after three years of enrolling in secondary school. Book 1 was used in year 1 and Book 2 was used in years 2 and 3. There was Book 3 for this level, but it only focused on guiding learners on examination requirements, so it was not selected for this analysis.

This analysis shows that all the grammatical structures used as cohesive devices are taught in secondary schools in Book 1 and Book 2 [22, 23]. Punctuation marks are taught, but not extensively. The use of the dash (-) is not included as a form of punctuation mark, which explains why the students did not use it at all in their writing. The data suggests that many participants had no idea that a dash is a punctuation mark.

The presentation of the content in the books also indicates that the principles of the prescriptive grammar approach are extensively used. For example, some prescriptive rules are still being taught despite the fact that they are contrary to the way speakers of the language use the language. Such rules include: *one cannot begin a sentence with a conjunction*. Yet, we do begin sentences with conjunctions as in this very same statement where we have used the conjunct, *yet*.

Content on coordinating conjunctions is dominant and the other types of conjuncts are not given much prominence. Thus, many participants only used coordinating conjunctions when combining independent clauses in both exercises to construct compound sentences. The use of other conjuncts such as, correlative conjunctions, conjunctive adverbs, prepositional phrases and adverbs that function as conjuncts was not included in the content in the textbook.

The limited content in the resource is clearly reflected in the participants' limited use of other conjuncts other than the coordinating conjunctions. The majority of the students used the common coordinating conjunctions to form compound sentences. Complex sentences were hardly used in the students' text and the content on books did not address this structure. This suggests that the teaching of the

use of subordinating conjunctions is very limited if it is taught. Hence, we noted that errors on sentence fragments were common in participants' responses.

7. Discussion

The findings show that the majority of selected participants in this study had limited input in their organizational competence (Bachman) [24] on intra-/inter-sentential cohesion. Therefore, their written work reflected a minimal use of a range of English sentences and varied cohesive devices. We believe that this limitation was exacerbated by the fact that the content on cohesive devices and their use was limited in the textbooks, which were the only source for their learning in that environment.

We therefore argue that the limitation in the ability to use a range of sentence structures and grammatical cohesive devices can be improved even for children who learn English in under-resourced environments if the content is given attention in the textbooks used since those aspects that were taught were visible in the data. We argue that there is an adequate link between the knowledge on cohesion the students displayed and the content in their textbooks.

The literature shows that to construct English non-simple sentences effectively, one needs to employ both syndetic and asyndetic coordination [2] in their texts. Hence, secondary school students in a second or foreign language setting may benefit if they are explicitly taught about the syntactic categories that create cohesion in texts. That is the four types of conjunctions, adverbs and prepositional clauses that function as conjuncts and using the comma, semi-colon, dash and colon as clause linkers.

Having such knowledge is a linguistically demanding task which requires that students possess a certain level of vocabulary in their mental lexicon and organizational linguistic competence [24]. Nagy and Townsend argue that the acquisition of vocabulary items is essential for academic writing [25]. Hence, we argue that teaching and learning grammatical cohesive devices need to be prioritized in the secondary level to enhance students' skills in writing cohesive texts. A cohesive text enables the reader to process the content with ease. Therefore, the first impression of the reader is inevitably influenced by the way the message is communicated (Deveci & Nunn,) [1].

8. Conclusions

Despite the fact that the study sampled a few participants and analysed two textbooks, students' responses showed a correlation with depth of the content that was in the prescribed textbooks.

The literature on intra-/inter-sentential cohesion shows that the content in the textbooks need to be adequate to

assist the learners to expand their vocabulary of cohesive devices. We also argue that such content should be arranged in a particular order, starting with the overview of the grammatical structures we use to connect ideas. The first level therefore needs to address the four types of conjunctions, adverbs as conjuncts, prepositional phrases as conjuncts and asyndetic coordination [2]. The second level would be teaching the clause as a grammatical representation of an idea. Then the last level would entail the creation of compound, complex and multiple sentences to illustrate intra-sentential clause connection and to use the cohesive devices to connect ideas beyond the sentence boundary.

Such an arrangement in the prescribed textbooks could support material designers, teachers' preparation of lessons, as well as the learners themselves because they would easily learn how to construct cohesive texts after going through the content on intra-/inter-sentential connection of ideas within texts.

The content on intra-/inter-sentential cohesion is quite extensive as Eggins [11] and Halliday [7] illustrate in their books on the notion of cohesion. Therefore, such content cannot be adequately addressed at the lower level of secondary school. Hence, we recommend that other types of grammatical cohesion, such as ellipsis, substitution, anaphoric reference, cataphoric reference, esphoric reference and structural parallelism are taught at a higher level; that is, the last two years of secondary school and first level courses at tertiary level. This is because the content on clausal coordination and clausal subordination, as recommended as areas of focus at lower level classes in secondary schools, are adequate to enable a learner to construct varied sentences in written texts, and would be able to use grammatical cohesive devices to communicate effectively.

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