

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the background of the research which motivated the researcher to conduct the study. It also embodies the research questions, objectives of the research, significance of the research, definition of key terms, and thesis organization.

1.1. Background of the Research

Students at the tertiary level face more challenging writing tasks as they are required to produce academic papers such as term papers, essays, and reports, which requires a comprehension of specific academic writing styles (Rafik-Galea et al., 2012). In line with this, both undergraduate and postgraduate students must complete their final project reports and engage in research that adds value to their respective fields of specialization to graduate (Yulian, 2017). This final academic report, known as a thesis, is a critical criterion for assessing an institution's accreditation, both at the departmental and university levels (Fendriani, 2020).

Writing an academic thesis is a significant and intricate undertaking, with the thesis grade reflecting the student's academic abilities. Through the process of developing a thesis, students acquire critical thinking skills and systematic writing techniques, which are crucial for their future careers (Tuononen & Parpala, 2021). Additionally, the act of composing a thesis allows students to develop their academic expertise (Wisker, 2019). Furthermore, a high-quality thesis makes a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge in the respective field.

An abstract is a critical part of the thesis because it provides a brief and comprehensive summary of the entire document, allowing readers to quickly grasp the core of the research and its significance (Silvia, 2018). Silvia added that a well-crafted abstract can significantly influence whether a thesis is read and cited by other scholars, highlighting its role in the broader dissemination and impact of the research.

Germano (2013) states that the abstract is the primary vehicle for communicating the value and relevance of your research. It serves as a concise summary that helps readers decide if the thesis is worth their time. Furthermore, the abstract's crucial function in shaping first impressions and guiding potential readers, makes it an essential component of academic writing.

As one of the crucial components of a thesis, an abstract is the first part read by the audience (Pearce, 2005, as cited in Emilia, 2012). Jalalian (2012) claimed that an abstract is a vital part of an article, coming first but often written last. Since writing a thesis abstract is a high-stakes task for researchers, it requires significant attention (Jalilifar & Vahid, 2010).

Abstracts play a critical role in both selection and indexing (Koopman, 2010). Through the selection function, abstracts help readers quickly assess the relevance of a paper to their interests, enabling them to decide whether to read the full document. Additionally, in terms of indexing, abstracts are searchable in most academic databases, making it easier for readers to locate pertinent information. As a result, it is essential to include key terms in the abstract to enhance its accessibility and retrieval.

Despite the importance of the abstract, writing a good abstract is somewhat challenging. Dania (2016) claimed that at least two factors underpinned the difficulty of writing an abstract. First, an abstract is last written and rarely paid attention to by the supervisor. Second, an abstract is a succinct synopsis of the entire thesis, and the students only have a limited word count to be selected in an abstract.

Writing thesis abstracts is crucial, as they are one of the first elements that examiners see, making a strong first impression (Silvia, 2018; Germano, 2013; Emilia, 2012). The abstract should be as thorough as possible while adhering to the word count restrictions set by the journal targeted for submission (Andrade, 2011). However, many writers often overlook the importance of properly arranging the abstract and focusing on its linguistic features. According to Swales and Feak (2009), a well-structured abstract follows five distinct rhetorical moves: 1) Background/Introduction/Situation, 2) Present research/Purposes, 3) Methods/Materials/Subject/Procedures, 4) Results/Findings, and 5)

Discussion/Conclusion/Implication/Recommendation. These moves help to ensure clarity and coherence in presenting the research. Despite this, a study by Andika et al. (2018) found that most postgraduate students only implemented three out of the five recommended moves in their abstracts, highlighting the need for better adherence to these guidelines to improve the quality of thesis abstracts.

Consequently, the abstract plays a significant role in shaping the writer's credibility within the academic community (Ren & Li, 2011). Writing an efficient and structured abstract is challenging but achievable. An abstract must be clear, orderly, concise, well-designed, and cohesive (Jalalian, 2012; Suwandi, 2016). Otta et al. (2022) supported this, claiming that proficient writing requires the effective use of appropriate vocabulary to establish cohesion and consistency between sentences.

Good cohesion in an abstract can be evaluated through grammatical and lexical cohesion, as proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976), which reveals the relationship between words. The process involves not only examining the text but also recognizing and categorizing the thematic selection theme and thematic progression (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This helps understand how these elements contribute to the overall meaning and flow of the sentences.

Several studies have investigated how cohesive devices contribute to the cohesion of thesis abstracts. In this regard, the researches that analyze the application of cohesive devices in abstracts from various levels of tertiary final projects are presented. These studies highlight the importance of cohesive elements in creating clear and coherent summaries that effectively communicate the research content within the constraints of an abstract.

Kirana et al. (2020) researched lexical and grammatical cohesion types in undergraduate thesis abstracts. They found that most abstract writers used repetition as a lexical cohesion type and reference as a grammatical cohesion type, concluding that 99.76% of the abstracts were classified as good, with only three errors in the emission and selection of conjunctions. Dania (2016) examined cohesive devices in the abstracts of undergraduate theses at Bandung State University. The study showed that students used cohesive devices such as reference, conjunction,

substitution, and lexical cohesion in their abstracts, which helped make the abstracts cohesive.

The research conducted outside of Indonesia was done at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, by Afful and Nartey (2014). The research examined the grammatical cohesion of 50 undergraduate dissertation abstracts majoring in Language and Literature. The result showed three points. First, reference and conjunction of grammatical cohesive devices were predominantly used. Second, there are more similarities than differences in using these grammatical devices in the Language and Literature abstracts. Third, while English majors at the University of Cape Coast employ various grammatical cohesive devices, their usage often lacks sophistication. This deficiency may be partly attributed to students' unfamiliarity with the use of comparatives for reference or the limited necessity for such usage in the abstracts examined.

The cohesion of thesis abstracts is significantly influenced by the structure and flow of information, which are shaped by the use of theme and thematic progression. Themes refer to the points of departure within sentences, setting the context for what follows, while thematic progression involves the patterns in which these themes develop throughout the text. These elements contribute to the clarity and coherence of the abstract, guiding the reader through the research's key points in a logical and connected manner (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Paltridge, 2006).

Research on theme and thematic progression in abstracts was conducted at a university in Bengkulu by Lifah et al. (2020). This study examined the thematic progression patterns in thesis abstracts from three fields: linguistics, literature, and language teaching. The results showed that Constant Theme Progression (CTP) patterns were predominantly used, making up 69.4% of the cases, followed by Simple Linear Progression (SLP) patterns at 25% and Split Rheme Progression (SRP) patterns at 5.6%. The prevalence of Constant Theme Progression patterns suggests that the thesis abstracts in these fields were generally well-structured and cohesive. This research highlights the importance of thematic progression in maintaining the flow and coherence of academic writing, particularly in thesis abstracts.

Next research was done by Zhang and Lee (2019) to examine the use of thematic progression (TP) patterns in English abstracts of Korean and Chinese medical students' PhD dissertations. EFL students' dissertation abstracts are compared to American students' dissertation abstracts in the same field. The mixed quantitative-qualitative studies show that all three groups favor the same Theme Progression patterns: simple linear, continuous Theme, and constant Rheme. This indicates a consistent approach to structuring abstracts across different cultural and educational backgrounds.

Several studies have examined cohesion through grammatical and lexical features, as well as theme and thematic progression, across various educational levels. However, these studies often focus on a single aspect of cohesion rather than a comprehensive analysis. At the researcher's university, there is still limited research on the cohesion of postgraduate thesis abstracts, particularly when analyzed through a combination of rhetorical moves, linguistic features, cohesive devices, and thematic progression. This study seeks to contribute to this area by providing a more holistic analysis of the structure and cohesion of thesis abstracts.

The analysis begins by examining the rhetorical moves within thesis abstracts, applying Swales and Feak's (2009) theoretical framework. It then delves into the linguistic features of thesis abstracts, drawing on theories proposed by Zhang et al. (2012). Furthermore, the study analyzes grammatical and lexical cohesion using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework, along with the choice of thematic progression theories from Eggins (2004).

By employing these frameworks, the research investigates how each sentence in the abstract establishes logical relationships with others, contributing to the overall coherence of the text. This comprehensive approach aims to enhance understanding of the structural elements that contribute to effective thesis abstracts in academic writing.

1.2 Research Questions

Related to the problems, this research tries to answer two major questions. They are:

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1. How do postgraduate students utilize rhetorical moves and linguistic features to achieve cohesion in their thesis abstracts?
2. How are cohesive devices and theme progression patterns realized in postgraduate students' thesis abstracts?

1.3 Objectives of the Research

This study, in line with the research questions above, aimed to:

1. To analyze how postgraduate students employ rhetorical moves and linguistic features to establish and enhance cohesion in their thesis abstracts.
2. To analyze the implementation of cohesive devices and theme progression patterns in enhancing coherence within postgraduate students' thesis abstracts.

1.4 Significance of the Research

The analysis of cohesion in postgraduate students' thesis abstracts will significantly enhance their understanding and skills in abstract writing. Additionally, this study is important in four key aspects.

1. Theoretically, the findings of this study are anticipated to serve as a valuable reference for future research in the field, particularly in the analysis of thesis abstract cohesion.
2. Practically, the results of this study are expected to provide postgraduate students with guidance on how to effectively implement rhetorical moves, linguistic features, theme progression, and cohesive devices in their thesis abstracts.
3. Pedagogically, this study will offer comprehensive insights into the cohesion of thesis abstracts, particularly through an analysis of their rhetorical moves, linguistic features, cohesive devices, and theme progression patterns.
4. By policy, the findings of this study are anticipated to inform the development and implementation of guidelines for writing an effective

thesis abstract. These guidelines will be incorporated into relevant courses to ensure consistency and quality in academic writing.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

In the context of this study, several definitions of key terms are defined as follows.

1. Abstract is a research paper's or a thesis's complete body that is succinctly summarized in an abstract (Koopman, 2010). In this study, the abstracts were derived from the postgraduate students' thesis abstracts.
2. Cohesion is the relationship between one element and another in a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). When the parts of a text are connected and the reader understands their significance, the text is cohesive.
3. Rhetorical moves are the ability to process language effectively to make the readers understand and direct the message by moving the sentences from beginning to end. In this study, the rhetorical moves analysis is used from the theory of Swales and Feak (2009) with five moves. Move 1: Introduction; Move 2: Purpose/Present Research; Move 3: Method; Move 4: Results; and Move 5: Conclusion.
4. Linguistic features refer to the employment of grammar, sentence construction, and mechanical aspects of writing (Budiharso, 2006). In this study, the linguistic features of the thesis abstract include voice (active and passive), tenses (present and past), and type of sentence (simple and complex).
5. The theme progression pattern is created by a structured connection between the choices of Theme, Rheme, and experience choices in a text (Yang, 2008). This study uses theme progression pattern categories from Eggins (2004). They are Reiteration, Zigzag, and Multiple Theme patterns.
6. Grammatical cohesion is achieved through the use of grammatical elements that express semantic relationships within and between sentences. In this study, Halliday and Hasan's (1976) grammatical cohesion theory is employed to analyze thesis abstracts. The grammatical elements considered include references, substitutions, ellipsis, and conjunctions.

7. Lexical cohesion refers to how the writer of the text uses lexical items. It functions to establish a semantic connection within a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

1.6 Organization of the Research

This thesis comprises five chapters. Chapter I introduces the research background outlines the research questions guiding the analysis, specifies the research objectives, highlights the significance of the study, defines key terms, and outlines the organization of the research. Chapter II reviews relevant theories and literature used in this study. Chapter III details the methodology, including the research design, research site, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Chapter IV presents the study's findings and discusses their implications. Finally, Chapter V concludes the study and offers recommendations for future research based on the findings.