

**Reconstructing Narrative Coherence in EFL Writing:
A Cognitive-Rhetorical Framework for Event Causality Mapping,
Referential Consistency, and Affective Trajectory Control**

Margaret Stevani

margaretstevani19@gmail.com

Universitas Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia

Alexander Adrian Saragi

alexander.adrian.saragi@unm.ac.id

Universitas Negeri Makassar

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Corresponding Author:

margaretstevani19@gmail.com

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This study investigated narrative coherence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing through a cognitive-rhetorical framework that integrated event causality mapping, referential consistency, and affective trajectory control. Conducted at two private universities in North Sumatra, the study involved 24 third-year EFL students enrolled in academic writing courses. Using discourse analysis of student narratives and targeted revision tasks, the study revealed frequent disruptions in logical event sequencing, inconsistent referent tracking, and unstable emotional flow. Findings indicated that guided instruction using cognitive-rhetorical strategies significantly enhanced students' ability to construct coherent narratives. The proposed framework supported deeper rhetorical awareness and cognitive control in written storytelling. It offered practical implications for EFL pedagogy in Indonesian university contexts.

INTRODUCTION

In the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction, narrative coherence remains a persistent yet often underestimated challenge. While grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction receive consistent pedagogical focus, many learners continue to produce narratives that are structurally fragmented, emotionally flat, and cognitively disorganized. This problem has been widely documented in recent empirical studies across Asian EFL contexts, including Indonesia, Thailand, and China, which report recurring issues such as abrupt temporal shifts, unclear referents, and emotionally inconsistent event development (Stevani, 2025; Wongsasawat & Waewchimplee, 2025). For instance, an Indonesian university learner may write, *“Yesterday, he had walking in the market and tomorrow he buy fish again,”* blending mismatched tenses and chronological confusion that undermine causality and temporal clarity. These patterns suggest that the coherence problems do not merely arise from discrete grammatical errors but reflect deeper cognitive and rhetorical challenges inherent in foreign-language narrative production.

Previous research on coherence has primarily emphasized cohesion, such as the use of linking devices, pronoun reference, and lexical chaining, which has shaped the majority of classroom practice (Stevani, 2024; Ismi et al., 2025). While these studies provide foundational insight, they often fail to address the cognitive scaffolds learners must activate to produce a logically structured, emotionally engaging, and referentially stable text. Eid (2025) emphasized that coherence is more than textual linkage: it is the rhetorical effect that emerges when a reader perceives unity, progression, and intentionality in a text. Meanwhile, studies such as Agha (2025) and Dewi & Saputra (2025) have highlighted the implications of misused reference and disjointed sequencing for meaning-making in learner writing, yet offer limited insights into the affective dimension of coherence. For example, a learner writes such as *“He cried then he happy again because the rain is stop,”* shows emotional dissonance and unclear referential identity that compromise narrative readability. Similarly, Zhou & Wang (2025)

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introduced the role of knowledge-telling versus knowledge-transforming models, yet the application of such cognitive frameworks to EFL writing remains underdeveloped, especially in narrative contexts.

Addressing this gap, the present study proposes a cognitive-rhetorical framework that integrates three core dimensions: (1) event causality mapping, (2) referential consistency, and (3) affective trajectory control. This approach is distinct from previous models because it explains not only what coherence features appear in learner texts but how learners cognitively organize narrative meaning while drafting. Recent studies in foreign writing cognition support the need for multi-dimensional frameworks that examine the mental processes underlying narrative construction (Husain et al., 2025). Furthermore, few frameworks incorporate the role of metacognition, modal stance, or emotional pacing: all of which are essential for narrative authenticity and coherence. Observational data collected over multiple semesters from EFL classrooms at universities in North Sumatra, Indonesia reveal recurring patterns of narrative breakdown that cannot be resolved through grammar correction alone. These include frequent mismanagement of time frames (e.g., misuse of past perfect or future-in-the-past), unclear pronoun tracking (e.g., *“Then the girl left. It was sad but he didn’t know why he go”*), overuse or underuse of intensifiers, and emotional incongruities between events and tone (e.g., *“I was very sad. I go shopping and it was nice.”*). These examples highlight the learners’ difficulty in sustaining narrative perspective and logical development across a text.

The novelty of this study lies in its proposal of a cognitive-rhetorical framework for reconstructing narrative coherence in EFL learner writing; however, this contribution must be understood in relation to previous work that has examined coherence deficits among foreign language writers. Earlier studies have typically focused on isolated linguistic features such as cohesion markers, reference chains, and transitional devices as the primary indicators of coherent writing (Eid, 2025; Lapadat & Lapadat, 2025). Other research has explored sequencing errors and temporal disruption, noting that EFL learners often struggle to maintain chronological logic across narrative events (Raza et al., 2025). For

example, when a learner transitions from “*He couldn’t find his wallet*” to “*The market was big and noisy,*” the referential link and causal logic are not automatically apparent unless modulated with clearer event reasoning or affective bridging. None of these studies, however, have offered an integrated account that simultaneously addresses event causality mapping, referential identity management, and emotional trajectory control as interconnected cognitive-rhetorical processes. The present study extends this body of research by synthesizing these dimensions into a unified framework, thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of why narrative incoherence emerges and how it can be reconstructed through explicit pedagogical intervention.

The significance of the study is twofold. Theoretically, it advances the understanding of narrative construction as a cognitively and affectively integrated process in foreign-language writing (Cakmak & Andujar, 2025; Ferdiansyah, 2024). Pedagogically, it provides practical classroom tools such as causality flowcharts, epistemic stance markers, affective cueing techniques, and referent chaining strategies that help learners move beyond formulaic story structures toward more logically patterned and emotionally resonant narratives. For example, the learner sentence “*The boy go fast. His friend fall. He not help,*” can be reconstructed into “*As the boy rushed forward, unaware that his friend had slipped, he failed to notice the accident unfolding behind him,*” demonstrating improved causal clarity, referential alignment, and emotional coherence. Given the increasing importance of narrative competence in digital storytelling, academic discourse, and professional communication, equipping learners with the ability to construct coherent narratives is essential rather than optional.

This study is grounded in classroom-based observations conducted over multiple semesters in EFL writing classes at two universities in North Sumatra, Indonesia. These observations revealed recurring patterns of coherence breakdown such as mismanaged time frames, unclear pronoun tracking, inconsistent emotional escalation, and abrupt narrative transitions that persisted despite conventional grammar-centered instruction. Based on these empirical classroom data and the synthesized theoretical foundation, the present study addresses the following

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research questions: (1) What types of coherence breakdowns most frequently occur in the narrative writing of Indonesian EFL learners? (2) In what ways can a cognitive-rhetorical framework help reconstruct coherence across narrative drafts? These questions are designed to uncover both the observable symptoms and the underlying cognitive causes of incoherence, thereby providing a pathway toward more transformative and cognitively informed EFL writing instruction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Narrative Coherence in EFL Writing

Narrative coherence refers to the reader's ability to perceive a story as logically connected, temporally organized, and emotionally resonant. In EFL writing, it goes beyond grammatical correctness, involving discourse-level decisions about sequencing, intent, and emotional flow (Ammaturo & Cevasco, 2024; Stevani, 2024). Unlike cohesion which links sentences through conjunctions or pronouns, coherence reflects deeper rhetorical unity (Marigliano & Carley, 2024). For example, the sentence chain "*He was happy. He went to the store. The storm came*" is cohesive but lacks causal or emotional continuity, weakening overall coherence. Agustini et al. (2025) distinguished cohesion as a surface textual feature and coherence as a mental construct shaped by the reader. In EFL pedagogy, especially in contexts like Indonesia, students may master grammar yet struggle to build coherent discourse. Later studies (Rifai et al., 2024) showed coherence results from genre knowledge, planning, and audience awareness elements not taught through grammar exercises alone. Therefore, coherence must be developed through instruction in narrative structure, sequencing logic, and rhetorical planning.

Event Causality and Temporal Sequencing in Foreign Language Narratives

Event causality mapping refers to organizing events through cause-effect logic rather than simple chronology. Anthony et al. (2024) argue that coherence depends on readers constructing causal links between ideas. Yet, many Indonesian EFL learners write temporally ordered but logically fragmented sentences, for

example: “*He left the room. The teacher was angry. The bell rang,*” without clarifying how events are connected. Ammaturo & Cevasco (2024) showed that advanced learners use richer causal links, while novices rely on basic temporal markers like *then* or *after that*. Indonesian EFL writing often reflects this pattern, with superficial transitions and minimal semantic depth. To strengthen narrative coherence, instruction should focus on using subordinators (e.g., *because, so that*) and causative verbs (*trigger, lead to, result in*) to clarify inter-event relationships.

Referential Consistency and Textual Identity

Referential consistency is key to narrative coherence, ensuring characters or entities are clearly and consistently tracked throughout the text. Al-Jubouri & Al Azzawi (2024) identified reference as a cohesive tool that builds continuity and contrast. In learner writing, common errors include ambiguous pronouns (“*The boy saw the man. He ran fast.*”), unclear referent shifts (“*The cat chased the dog. Then it barked.*”), and inconsistent naming (“*John went to the store. The man was tired.*”). Qatrinada & Apoko (2024) found that such referential issues lowered coherence ratings in Chinese EFL narratives: a pattern also observed among Indonesian learners. They often alternate between *he, the man, or that person* without stable anchors, causing referential drift and disrupting thematic flow. Teaching strategies like referent mapping, consistent noun phrase tracking, and guided revision can help maintain narrative identity and improve overall coherence.

Affective Trajectory and Emotional Structuring

Narrative coherence relies not only on logical sequencing but also on a well-paced emotional trajectory. According to Umedilloevna & Gafurovna (2025), affective stylistics emphasizes how emotionally modulated cues guide reader engagement through empathy and tension. However, EFL learners often show abrupt or incoherent emotional shifts, as in: “*He was sad. Then he laughed. Then he cried. He is okay now,*” lacking psychological transitions or contextual grounding. Kindenberg (2025) stresses that effective narratives require emotional

escalation, resolution, and resonance. In Indonesian EFL writing, emotional development is often flat or erratic, marked by either repetition or unjustified extremes. Learners rarely use precise evaluative language (e.g., *relieved*, *devastated*) or intensifiers (e.g., *suddenly*, *painfully*) to shape affective flow. Instruction in sequencing emotional triggers, aligning tone with events, and using affective lexis is key to improving emotional coherence in narrative writing.

Cognitive-Rhetorical Integration in Narrative Writing

Recent pedagogical developments highlight the need to integrate cognitive planning with rhetorical awareness in foreign-language writing. Paramboor et al. (2025) distinguish between knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming approaches, the latter requiring learners to plan, structure, and monitor their writing for coherence and impact. In narrative contexts, this means organizing events not just chronologically, but rhetorically. Hassan et al. (2024) underscores the importance of modality and stance-taking in establishing narrative credibility and authorial control. Learners must make deliberate choices about connectors, referents, and evaluative language. Diep & Le (2024) found that metadiscursive training by using tools like self-monitoring checklists and rhetorical scaffolds can enhance coherence in learner writing. However, Indonesian EFL instruction often prioritizes grammatical accuracy over rhetorical planning. This study responds to that gap by promoting a cognitively rich and rhetorically informed framework for narrative coherence.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative interpretive design, grounded in a cognitive-rhetorical perspective on discourse analysis. This approach was chosen to examine how EFL learners construct, disrupt, and reconstruct narrative coherence in written texts. Rather than quantifying surface-level features, the research investigated deeper meaning-making processes, specifically the learners' cognitive mapping of event causality, management of referential chains, and control over affective sequencing. The study is situated within the tradition of discourse-based writing

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research (Sanosi, 2024), which foregrounds writer intention, reader inference, and context-sensitive language choices.

The participants comprised 24 undergraduate Indonesian EFL learners, enrolled in intermediate academic writing courses at two private universities in North Sumatra, Indonesia. All had completed prerequisite grammar and paragraph-writing courses to ensure basic sentence-level competence. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select students with average to high writing engagement, but with varying levels of coherence proficiency. Ethical clearance was obtained from both institutions, and all participants gave informed consent. Identities were anonymized using coded identifiers to ensure confidentiality and voluntary participation.

The research procedure unfolded in three major stages. In the first stage (Week 1), learners were asked to compose an initial narrative essay based on a structured prompt involving personal conflict, emotional change, or critical decisions. These prompts were intentionally designed to require the use of causal relationships, character development, and temporal transitions. This pre-instruction writing served as the baseline data. In the second stage (Weeks 2–3), a four-week pedagogical intervention was implemented, consisting of cognitive-rhetorical scaffolding sessions. These included guided instruction on event causality mapping, reference tracking activities, and affective trajectory planning. During each week, students revised parts of their initial narratives using targeted tools, including event-logic diagrams, pronoun chain matrices, and emotion-mapping worksheets. In the third stage (Week 4), participants submitted a revised version of their narratives. Additionally, students' interview and reflective learning journals were collected to gather introspective data on their writing process and perceived changes in coherence.

The data analysis followed a systematic multi-layered approach. In Stage 1 (Pre-Instruction Text Analysis), each initial narrative draft was segmented into discourse episodes, and coded based on a custom-built rubric addressing three domains: (1) event causality (logical progression and subordinated relationships), (2) referential consistency (continuity of character/object tracking), and (3)

affective trajectory (emotional pacing, tonal logic). Coders identified gaps such as broken causality, unclear pronoun reference, or abrupt emotional transitions. In Stage 2 (Process Analysis During Intervention), students' worksheet outputs, revision logs, and instructional responses were examined to track changes in rhetorical awareness. This included analysis of peer review dialogue and instructor feedback loops. In Stage 3 (Post-Instruction Text Analysis), revised narratives were re-coded using the same rubric to measure improvement. Comparative analysis was conducted between pre- and post-instruction texts to assess the impact of the intervention. Finally, in Stage 4 (Metacognitive Data Analysis), interview transcripts and journal entries were thematically coded to identify learners' insights regarding coherence construction, rhetorical planning, and emotional storytelling. These reflections were cross-referenced with text-based changes to ensure interpretive validity.

The pedagogical intervention functioned as both an instructional mechanism and a data generation platform. Designed according to Bobihoe's et al. (2025) knowledge-transforming framework, the intervention promoted recursive reflection and goal-oriented revisions. Learners were encouraged to visualize the causal and emotional logic of their stories before rewriting them. Instruction was differentiated weekly, moving from event logic (Week 2), to referential clarity (Week 3), and emotional control (Week 4). The writing tasks, group feedback sessions, and one-on-one consultations provided formative checkpoints to align their narrative strategies with coherence targets. Overall, this integrated methodology allowed for rich, authentic data grounded in pedagogical reality while capturing the layered nature of coherence development in Indonesian EFL writing contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

Event Causality Mapping: Identifying Disrupted Logical Sequences in Narrative Progression

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This subsection explores how EFL learners construct or fail to construct cause-effect relationships in narrative writing. Based on a diagnostic prompt requiring learners to recount a conflict-resolution experience, the data revealed disruptions in event progression. While some learners listed events in sequence, they failed to establish causal logic, resulting in narratives that were temporally coherent but semantically disconnected. The analysis draws on Prasetianto & Maharddhika's (2025) situation model theory, which highlights the mental construction of event networks. Incoherent causality often reflects limited mastery of conjunctive relations and lexical causality markers. Instruction should therefore focus on cognitive-linguistic scaffolding to support logical narrative flow.

Student interviews support these observations. One student noted, *"I can write the story, but I don't know how to connect the reason and the result clearly in English."* Another admitted, *"Sometimes I just write the events step by step, but I don't know which one is the cause or the result."* These insights reveal not only linguistic limitations but also a need for metacognitive awareness in how learners mentally organize narrative sequences.

Table 1. Causality Mapping Errors and Pedagogical Repairs

Faulty Causal Construction	Intended Meaning	Causal Marker Error	Structural Disruption	Suggested Repair	Function Restored
<i>I lost the key. I stayed home.</i>	<i>Because I lost the key, I stayed home.</i>	Absent marker	Clausal fragmentation	Add causal clause	Coherence established
<i>I was late. My alarm didn't ring.</i>	<i>I was late because my alarm didn't ring.</i>	Reversed logic	Temporal over causal	Reorder clause	Event logic clarified
<i>He angry. I said sorry.</i>	<i>He got angry after I said something wrong.</i>	Missing transition	Lexical gap	Add explicit cause	Emotional causality shown
<i>I passed the exam. I study hard.</i>	<i>I passed the exam because I studied hard.</i>	Tense mismatch	Aspectual error	Tense correction	Sequential logic restored
<i>She cried. The story sad.</i>	<i>She cried because the story was sad.</i>	Noun clause	Emotional trigger	Use causative	Affect-consequence

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	story was missing unclear phrase marked	
<i>We went to home. The rain stopped.</i>	<i>After the rain stopped, we went home.</i>	Time logic ignored Inverse sequencing Embed time clause Temporal-causal link made

Referential Consistency: Managing Pronoun Clarity and Lexical Repetition

Referential consistency is essential for maintaining reader orientation in narrative progression, especially in texts with multiple characters or events. Analysis reveals that learners often use pronouns without clear antecedents or shift references abruptly, disrupting comprehension. Drawing on Ahmadvour’s (2025) theory of cohesive ties, particularly reference and substitution, this subsection highlights how learners tend to rely on lexical repetition rather than cohesive reference, resulting in unnatural discourse flow. Ambiguous referents also weaken character identity and narrative focus. Pedagogically, raising referential awareness through contrastive textual modeling can enhance referent tracking and overall cohesion.

One student reflected, “*In my mind, I know who I talk about, but when I write, I forget the reader doesn’t know.*” This illustrates a gap between internal mental representation and external linguistic encoding. Another commented, “*I don’t like to repeat names, so I use ‘he’ or ‘she’ a lot, but sometimes even I get confused who is who.*” These insights suggest that the issue is not only technical but also cognitive: a result of narrative economy clashing with clarity.

Table 2. Referential Consistency Errors and Suggested Revisions

Faulty Reference	Ambiguous Antecedent	Disruption Type	Lexical Problem	Revised Version	Cohesion Strategy
<i>She was angry. Then she said it.</i>	What is “it”?	Vague referent	Deictic misfire	<i>She was angry. Then she said the news was disappointin g.</i>	Lexical clarification
<i>He helped John and Mike. He was fast.</i>	Which “he”?	Identity confusion	Overlapping pronoun	<i>John helped Mike, and he did it quickly.</i>	Disambiguation
<i>They left</i>	“He” or	Role	Switching	<i>The students</i>	Clarified role

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<i>after the teacher entered. He was late.</i>	“they”?	ambiguity	referents	<i>left because the teacher was late.</i>	
<i>It broke. I took it to him.</i>	What broke?	Elliptical loss	Object vagueness	<i>My phone broke, so I took it to the technician.</i>	Lexical explicitness
<i>I met Sarah. She told me she saw her.</i>	Who “her”?	is	Multiple female referents	<i>I met Sarah. She told me she saw her friend, Diana.</i>	Named referent insertion
<i>After I fed the cat, it ran.</i>	“It” unclear	Cat or food?	Referential split	<i>After I fed the cat, the cat ran outside.</i>	Lexical repetition

Affective Trajectory Control: Structuring Emotional Flow and Narrative Climax

A coherent narrative depends not only on factual sequencing but also on regulating affective shifts to sustain reader engagement. Analysis of learner texts shows that many narratives display flat or erratic emotional curves, often jumping from tension to resolution without buildup. Drawing on affective stylistics and emotional sequencing (Umedilloevna & Gafurovna, 2025), this pattern reflects learners’ limited awareness of emotional transitions, resulting in abrupt tonal shifts. Modeling narrative pacing and affective tension graphs can help learners craft smoother emotional development. Teaching affective markers (e.g., “suddenly,” “gradually,” “with relief”) supports more intentional emotional structuring.

Student responses provide further insight into this issue. One learner reflected, “*I know what I feel in the story, but I don’t know how to make the reader feel it with me.*” Another commented, “*In my writing, the sad part just comes too fast like there is no reason for it. I didn’t realize I need to prepare the emotion first.*” These responses highlight a gap in affective planning and signal the importance of instruction on emotional buildup and narrative timing.

Table 3. Emotional Disruption Patterns and Narrative Flow Repair

Emotional Arc Issue	Transition Problem	Affect Marker Missing	Reader Effect	Revised Version	Flow Strategy
Sudden sadness	No lead-up	Missing trigger phrase	Disorientation	<i>He felt a sudden sadness as he read the letter.</i>	Trigger build-up
Flat emotional tone	No peaks	No affective verbs	Reader disengaged	<i>She was nervous, anxious, and finally relieved.</i>	Affective layering
Resolution too early	No tension	Lacks suspense cues	Weak climax	<i>The problem escalated until she finally found peace.</i>	Suspense modulation
Emotional reversal abrupt	Opposing shifts	No transitional link	Confused response	<i>At first, he was excited. But then fear crept in.</i>	Contrast marker
Joy inserted suddenly	Abrupt tone shift	Unsignaled emotion	Illogical happiness	<i>She cried. Then, out of nowhere, she laughed.</i>	Emotional buffer added
No emotional closure	Open ending	Absent resolution frame	Reader feels incomplete	<i>They talked, cried, and finally forgave each other.</i>	Closure signaling

Temporal Shifting: Managing Narrative Time Across Embedded Flashbacks

In narrative writing, managing shifts between present action and past events is crucial for temporal clarity and stylistic maturity. Learners often fail to signal flashbacks, leading to tense confusion and narrative dislocation. Drawing on analepsis and tense hierarchy (Khan et al., 2024), the analysis shows frequent violations of temporal layering. Common issues include mixing past perfect and simple past without context, and abrupt shifts to present tense without transitions. These errors reduce narrative readability and weaken thematic impact. Teaching adverbial cues and consistent temporal referencing can strengthen learners' control over time shifts.

One learner admitted, *"I want to tell what happened before, but I'm afraid to change the tense because I might make it worse."* Another reflected, *"When I write flashback, I just continue the story. I don't know how to tell the reader I'm going back in time."* These comments illustrate not only linguistic uncertainty but also a

deeper narrative insecurity, where students avoid temporal shifts altogether to reduce perceived risk.

Table 4. Flashback Integration Errors and Repair Strategies

Faulty Shift	Tense Misuse	Disrupted Sequence	Flashback Signal Missing	Revised Version	Repair Device Used
<i>I walked home. I see my father leave.</i>	Present in past	Timeline conflict	None	<i>I walked home. Earlier, I had seen my father leave.</i>	Past perfect cue
<i>She sat down. She think about the trip.</i>	Present verb	Mood confusion	None	<i>She sat down and thought about the trip.</i>	Verb tense match
<i>He was scared. He remember the night.</i>	Bare past	No anchor	No signal	<i>He was scared because he remembered the night it happened.</i>	Causal anchor
<i>We talked. I was in Bali before.</i>	Dislocated tense	Abrupt memory	No marker	<i>While we talked, I recalled my trip to Bali.</i>	Embedded clause
<i>They ate lunch. He fell before.</i>	Unmarked flashback	Sequence illogical	Absent phrase	<i>They ate lunch. Earlier, he had fallen on the stairs.</i>	Analepsis marker
<i>I was happy. I cry when I was young.</i>	Tense reversal	Incoherent affect	Flashback unclear	<i>I was happy, but I remembered crying a lot as a child.</i>	Temporal anchor + contrast

Syntactic Rhythm and Narrative Fluency: Controlling Sentence Length and Clause Variation

Syntactic rhythm, or the balance and variation of sentence structures is essential for narrative flow and stylistic engagement. Learner data reveals a tendency toward either fragmented or overly long run-on sentences. This analysis draws on syntactic maturity theory and fluency development models (Wang et al., 2024). Common errors include repetitive simple sentences or dense clauses without punctuation, which can tire readers and obscure key events. Targeted instruction in clause combining, sentence variety, and pacing is vital to improve coherence and readability.

One participant stated, “*I feel like if I stop my sentence, my story becomes too slow, but if I don’t stop, it becomes confusing.*” Another added, “*In Bahasa Indonesia, we can just keep adding ‘and then...’ but in English, I get lost in the long sentence.*” These comments reflect learners’ struggle to balance fluency and clarity, particularly when translating narrative logic into syntactic form.

Table 5. Syntactic Rhythm Errors and Fluency Repairs

Faulty Rhythm	Fragment or Run-on	Structural Weakness	Affected Meaning	Revised Version	Repair Strategy
<i>He ran. He fell. He cried.</i>	Fragmented	Monotonous pattern	Event urgency lost	<i>He ran, fell, and cried in pain.</i>	Clause chaining
<i>They were excited they danced they shouted</i>	Run-on	No punctuation	Event blur	<i>They were excited. They danced and shouted.</i>	Sentence segmentation
<i>I see him. He looked sad. He talk.</i>	Fragmented	Lack of embedding	Mood unclear	<i>I saw him looking sad as he spoke.</i>	Embedding clause
<i>We go we sit we eat we talk</i>	Run-on	No structure	Flat tone	<i>We went there, sat together, ate, and talked for hours.</i>	Coordinated sequencing
<i>The cat sleep. The boy laugh.</i>	Simple repetition	Rigid rhythm	Playfulness missing	<i>While the cat slept, the boy laughed happily.</i>	Subordination
<i>I walked she smiled the car passed</i>	Run-on	Event blend	Focus confusion	<i>As I walked, she smiled, and the car passed by slowly.</i>	Event layering

Narrative Framing: Opening, Closure, and Thematic Anchoring

Framing a narrative with purposeful openings and endings enhances thematic unity and reader impact. However, learner texts often start abruptly or end without resolution to reduce narrative satisfaction. Drawing on sociolinguistic framework and narratology (Tanoli et al., 2024), the analysis examines how learners construct narrative borders. Common issues include generic openings (“*One day...*”), abrupt endings (“*And that’s it*”), or a lack of thematic framing. Instruction should

emphasize setting orientation, emotional closure, and thematic echoing to deepen narrative quality.

Student reflections reveal a lack of confidence in how to “*start or finish with meaning.*” One student reflected, “*I don’t know how to start a story with something that makes people care. I just start with what happened first.*” Another insightfully noted, “*I feel like my story ends because the event is finished, but I’m not sure how to make the reader feel what I learned.*” These responses suggest a disconnect between narrative chronology and thematic resonance to emphasize the need for scaffolded instruction in symbolic framing and reflective closures.

Table 6. Framing Errors and Narrative Enhancement Techniques

Weak Opening or Ending	Thematic Inconsistency	Missing Framing Device	Reader Effect	Revised Version	Repair Approach
<i>One day I woke up... The end.</i>	Flat arc	Generic start & end	Unmemorable	<i>I woke up unaware that the day would change my life.</i>	Thematic foreshadowing
<i>My story is over.</i>	No closure	Closure missing	Reader confusion	<i>That was the moment I understood what trust meant.</i>	Thematic closure
<i>He was there.</i>	Vague start	Missing context	No setting	<i>He appeared at the exact place we once promised to meet.</i>	Orientational opening
<i>I was tired. Then I slept.</i>	Minimal resolution	No significance	Reader uninvolved	<i>After days of conflict, I finally found peace in sleep.</i>	Emotional closure
<i>They talked. Nothing changed.</i>	Anti-climax	Lacks reflection	Reader disinterest	<i>Though the words were few, the silence meant forgiveness.</i>	Symbolic framing

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<i>And that was all.</i>	Unframed end	Lack of moral/theme	Reader disconnection	<i>That was how I learned to choose silence over anger.</i>	Moral closure	echo
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Perspective Control and Focalization: Shifts in Narrative Point of View and Voice Stability

Narrative coherence also relies on consistent perspective and focalization, which many EFL learners struggle to maintain. Data show frequent shifts between first- and third-person narration within the same narrative, often without clear justification. Drawing on theory of represented consciousness (Cockerill et al., 2024), the analysis shows that inconsistent narrator stance disrupts character alignment and weakens reader empathy. Learners often start with a subjective narrator but shift into omniscient or external viewpoints, losing character depth. Instruction should include modeling of internal focalization and raising metapragmatic awareness to stabilize point of view.

One participant remarked, “*When I try to explain the story, I see it in my head like a movie, so I jump between what I feel and what others do.*” Another observed, “*I want to tell what all the characters think, but sometimes I forget who is talking.*” These statements illustrate not only linguistic struggle but also the cognitive difficulty of managing narrative voice while maintaining consistent focalization across time and scenes.

Table 7. Perspective Disruption and Focalization Repair

Shifted POV	Voice Instability	Narrative Function Lost	Affected Reader View	Revised Version	Repair Strategy
<i>I was tired. She felt sad.</i>	1st to 3rd	Interiority lost	Emotional disconnection	<i>I was tired, and I sensed she was feeling sad too.</i>	Maintained 1st person
<i>He knew he failed. I felt sorry.</i>	POV fusion	Focal overlap	Reader confused	<i>He knew he failed. The others, including me, felt sorry.</i>	Multi-perspective anchoring
<i>We left.</i>	External to	Temporal	Unclear group	<i>We left, not</i>	Focalization

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<i>They followed us.</i>	internal	identity blur	boundary	<i>knowing they were about to follow.</i>	layering	
<i>I think he was wrong. He thinks I lied.</i>	Reflexive POV	Subject-object loop	Logical confusion	<i>I thought he was wrong, but he believed I had lied.</i>	Reported thought strategy	
<i>The teacher entered. I was nervous.</i>	Objective to subjective	Shift too fast	Role conflict	<i>When the teacher entered, I immediately felt nervous.</i>	Embedded focal cue	
<i>He ran fast. You could see it.</i>	Detached omniscience	Reader inclusion unclear	Undefined narratee	<i>He ran fast as if trying to outrun something no one could see.</i>	Recast person anchor	3rd

Modal Density and Epistemic Judgment: Expressing Certainty and Hypotheticality in Narrative Discourse

The use of modal expressions in EFL narrative writing reflects learners' control over epistemic stance and their ability to express possibility, obligation, or volition. Analysis shows an overuse of "can" and "will," and avoidance of variance modals like "might," "should have," or "couldn't." Drawing on epistemic modality typology (Hollmann et al., 2024), it examines modal precision in learners' texts. Limited modal variation restricts affective and evaluative stance to reduce narrative depth. Training learners to apply epistemic scales and speculative verbs can enhance cognitive sophistication and rhetorical credibility in their writing.

One participant reflected, "I always write 'can' because I don't want to sound wrong: 'might' or 'could' feels like guessing." Another admitted, "In Bahasa Indonesia, we don't use many words to show doubt. So when I write in English, I just go straight to 'will' or 'can' to make it strong." These comments reveal how linguistic confidence, cultural norms of certainty, and metapragmatic awareness all shape learners' modal choices.

Table 8. Modal Misuse and Stance Clarification

Modal Error	Epistemic Level Ignored	Misrepresented Meaning	Reader Interpretation	Revised Version	Modal Function Restored
<i>He can be angry.</i>	Possibility underused	Sounds factual	Perceived certainty	<i>He might have been angry.</i>	Modal uncertainty added
<i>She will run.</i>	Future fact	Eliminates doubt	Reader sees rigid plan	<i>She may run if she gets the chance.</i>	Hypothetical tone added
<i>They can lost it.</i>	Incorrect form	Tense conflict	Low intelligibility	<i>They could have lost it earlier.</i>	Epistemic past restored
<i>I can forget things.</i>	Habitual modal	+ Sounds careless	Speaker's reliability questioned	<i>Sometimes, I might forget things.</i>	Self-assessment tone refined
<i>She will maybe go.</i>	Double modal	Awkward phrasing	Reader confused	<i>She might go later.</i>	Modal simplification
<i>You can not stop crying.</i>	Lexical negation error	Emotion misrepresented	Reader unsure of agency	<i>You might not be able to stop crying.</i>	Emotionally aligned certainty

Lexico-Grammatical Compression: Overgeneralization, Undergeneralization, and Nominal Overload in EFL Narratives

Lexico-grammatical compression refers to the overuse or underuse of nominal structures in an attempt to appear concise, often leading to information loss or distortion. Learners tend to compress complex events into noun phrases without sufficient modification, limiting narrative expressiveness. Based on Kantzou's (2025) academic compression theory and structural complexity indexes, the analysis explores how nominal compounding, vague nouns, and passive forms impact narrative fluency. Learners require training to balance conciseness with elaboration for effective narrative communication.

Student responses confirm this tension between brevity and clarity. One student reflected, "*I try to write short because long sentences confuse me, but then my meaning feels too empty.*" Another stated, "*Using noun phrases makes me feel academic, but sometimes I forget to explain what really happened.*" These

comments highlight the learners' awareness of formality pressures and the resulting compromises in meaning.

Table 9. Compression Errors and Narrative Expansion Techniques

Faulty Nominal Use	Type of Compression	Information Loss	Reader Effect	Revised Version	Expansion Strategy
The conflict resolution failure	Overloaded noun	Agent/action unclear	Reader disengaged	<i>The failure to resolve the conflict caused more problems.</i>	Clausal unpacking
His guilt emotion	Unnatural compound	Lexical awkwardness	Inauthentic emotion	<i>He felt a deep sense of guilt.</i>	Decomposition + emotion phrase
The team decision-making issue	Dense nominal group	Role ambiguous	Reader lost in structure	<i>The issue happened when the team failed to decide.</i>	Process verb restoration
The student stress problem	Lexical redundancy	Abstract noun stack	Weak narrative tone	<i>The student was under pressure and felt overwhelmed.</i>	Concrete experience added
Teacher's announcement confusion	Nominal pile-up	Event obscured	Reader misled	<i>The announcement made by the teacher confused us all.</i>	Active clarification
Parent conversation avoidance	Subject-action blur	Motivation hidden	Reader puzzled	<i>The child avoided talking to her parents.</i>	Verbalization of intent

Cohesion Chain Disruption: Tracking Thematic Progression via Lexical and Grammatical Chains

Thematic progression is maintained through cohesion chains: sequences of lexical items and referents that develop discourse topics across clauses. Based on cohesion chain theory and thematic-rheme analysis (Eustace & Muganda, 2024),

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the analysis shows how learners often disrupt these chains through inconsistent lexical substitution. Errors in pronoun use, collocation, and synonym choice often fracture discourse. Teaching students to recognize and sustain these chains through visual discourse mapping improves narrative continuity and cognitive flow.

Student responses further illuminate these cohesion breakdowns. One student reflected, “*I changed the word because I didn’t want to repeat, but then I forgot who or what I was talking about.*” Another noted, “*Sometimes I use ‘she’, then ‘the girl’, and then I lose the connection. I think I’m making variety, but actually it’s confusing.*” These statements reveal an important tension between stylistic variation and referential clarity, highlighting the need for metalinguistic awareness in managing referent chains.

Table 10. Cohesion Chain Breakdowns and Repair Mechanisms

Chain Disruption	Lexical Inconsistency	Grammatical Error	Topic Lost	Repaired Version	Chain Strategy
<i>The boy → he → the kid</i>	Uncontrolled substitution	Role confusion	Identity lost	<i>The boy... he... the boy continued walking.</i>	Stable referent maintenance
<i>My mother → the woman → she → her</i>	Chain divergence	Over-substitution	Thematic scatter	<i>My mother... she... my mother was proud.</i>	Referent anchor repeat
<i>The accident → that → the mess</i>	Abstract switch	Event mistaking	Focus deflated	<i>The accident... it... the accident changed everything.</i>	Chain tightening
<i>Our plan → the idea → we</i>	Pronoun ambiguity	Syntactic mismatch	Action blurred	<i>Our plan... the plan... we followed it closely.</i>	Pronoun alignment
<i>The teacher → the lecturer → he → Mr. Tom</i>	Multi-role confusion	Naming variation	Reader lost	<i>Mr. Tom, the teacher, continued his lecture.</i>	Naming consistency
<i>It → that → this one</i>	Referential drift	Deixis vagueness	Meaning unclear	<i>The box... the box... the box finally opened.</i>	Deictic consistency

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study show that Indonesian EFL learners' difficulties with narrative coherence stem from interrelated problems involving event causality, referential consistency, and affective trajectory. These results are consistent with earlier research demonstrating that coherence is not solely determined by grammatical correctness but emerges from the orchestration of logical sequencing, discourse awareness, and emotional framing (Eustace & Muganda, 2024; Eid, 2025). The analysis of event-causality patterns further reveals learners' limited use of causal connectors and insufficient understanding of cause-effect logic, which makes it challenging for readers to construct a clear mental model of narrative events. This supports the view of Sukendra & Rani (2025), who argue that constructing a coherent mental model requires more than listing temporally ordered events: it demands cause-effect linkage to structure meaning.

Furthermore, referential consistency problems suggest that learners are not yet proficient in managing discourse-level reference tracking, often mismanaged pronouns and lexical substitutions. This echoes Agustini's et al. (2025) cohesion theory, in which reference and substitution are identified as key cohesive devices. The data demonstrate that when these devices are mishandled, narratives become fragmented, and character continuity breaks down. This finding parallels Qatrinada & Apoko (2024), who found that referent mismanagement in Chinese EFL student narratives significantly disrupted cohesion and narrative identity. These parallels indicate a need for explicit instruction in discourse-level reference management, with scaffolding that contrasts effective and ineffective referential chains.

The affective trajectory, an understudied aspect of foreign-language writing, was also found to be unstable. Learners often displayed abrupt tonal shifts or a flat emotional arc. These patterns resonate with Umedilloevna & Gafurovna's (2025) concept of affective stylistics, where reader response is shaped by carefully constructed emotional cues. Affective incoherence leads to shallow reader engagement, a problem confirmed by Wongsasawat & Waewchimplee (2025), who highlighted the necessity of emotional modulation in narrative writing. The

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findings suggest that writing instruction must integrate affective pacing strategies, including the controlled use of intensifiers, evaluative adjectives, and temporal adverbs to signal emotional progression.

Patterns of modal mismanagement were also evident, particularly in students' inconsistent use of epistemic and deontic meanings. This supports Hollmann et al. (2024), who argue that modal density is a key indicator of epistemic stance. Learners' unmarked certainty, overly general claims, or confusion between habitual and hypothetical expressions weakened narrative reliability. Hassan et al. (2024) similarly found that inaccurate modal use disrupts interpersonal meaning and weakens evaluative authority. Thus, explicit instruction on epistemic scaling and modal contrasts is crucial for enhancing narrative coherence.

Moreover, the data indicate that some learners overgeneralized lexico-grammatical compression, particularly through unnecessary nominalization or the excessive use of abstract nouns. This aligns with Kantzou (2025), who notes that novice writers often attempt to emulate academic tone without fully mastering its structural requirements, resulting in obscured meaning and reduced narrative vividness. In line with this, instruction should help learners balance elaboration and compression by tailoring lexical choices to narrative function.

Furthermore, the breakdown of cohesion chains, especially through referential drift and inconsistent lexical chaining undermines the global progression of ideas. As Tanoli et al. (2024) emphasizes, cohesion chains maintain thematic development across discourse spans. Inconsistent chaining impairs reader inference and results in a disjointed narrative structure. Teaching students to visually map their thematic chains during writing and revision stages can mitigate such issues and foster metadiscursive awareness. Collectively, the findings affirm the value of a cognitive-rhetorical framework that integrates textual, cognitive, and affective dimensions to support coherence in EFL narrative writing.

Extending these findings, the data further indicate that learners exhibit a lack of narrative metacognition: the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate the coherence of their own narratives. As noted by Hellystia & Hermawati (2024), expert writers

routinely engage in recursive self-monitoring during text production, a strategy that is underdeveloped in novice EFL learners. Our data show that many learners proceed linearly without rereading or restructuring previous sentences to maintain cohesion. This insight implies that instruction must not only focus on product-based correction but also promote process-based scaffolding where learners are taught how to use writing logs, outline structures, and revision guides as cognitive tools.

Moreover, the integration of discourse markers in students' texts is often superficial or formulaic, leading to unnatural or forced transitions. This aligns with research by Sanosi (2024), who noted that EFL learners tend to over-rely on a limited set of cohesive devices such as “*then*,” “*because*,” and “*but*,” neglecting more varied or context-sensitive alternatives like “*nevertheless*,” “*in turn*,” or “*subsequently*.” Our data corroborate this, showing repetitive or misplaced discourse markers that hinder rhetorical flow. Addressing this requires a corpus-informed teaching approach where learners are exposed to authentic narrative structures and instructed to build a diverse repertoire of cohesive signals.

Additionally, inconsistencies in narrative voice, especially in handling internal monologue or shifts in character perspective demonstrate that learners have not yet developed pragmatic awareness of how voice influences point of view. Drawing on the concept of dialogism and Vygotskian sociocultural theory (Tanoli et al., 2024), narrative writing must be viewed as a dialogic space where voice negotiation is crucial. The failure to maintain a coherent narrator stance undermines reader empathy and narrative plausibility. Thus, educators should emphasize perspective-taking tasks and dramatization exercises to train learners in sustained voice management across temporal and spatial boundaries within texts.

In conclusion, the broader set of findings confirms that a cognitive-rhetorical approach which brings together linguistic patterns, emotional structuring, and socio-pragmatic awareness provides a solid foundation for improving narrative coherence in EFL writing. To translate these insights into practice, instructional activities need to be expanded beyond conventional error correction. Learners benefit from guided metacognitive routines that help them evaluate the clarity of

their event sequences, contrastive analyses that reveal how different discourse communities shape narrative logic, and corpus-informed examples that model effective referential and affective progression. Classroom dialogue through peer-review or collaborative story reconstruction also encourages students to negotiate meaning and refine their narrative decisions. When applied systematically, these interventions equip learners not only to avoid coherence failures, but to produce narratives that are logically connected, emotionally consistent, and sensitive to the reader's expectations, an outcome that reflects strong authorial intention and deliberate rhetorical planning.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study shows that Indonesian EFL learners continue to struggle with narrative coherence because several discourse components such as event causality, referential tracking, and affective progression do not yet function in an integrated manner in their writing. The analysis makes clear that learners often sequence events without establishing logical dependencies, shift referents in ways that confuse character identity, and move abruptly between emotional states. These coherence issues are further influenced by inconsistent use of modality, unstable narrative voice, and limited metacognitive monitoring during drafting and revision. By applying a cognitive-rhetorical framework, this study contributes a clearer picture of how learners organize narrative meaning at multiple levels, not only through linguistic forms but also through cognitive planning and rhetorical intention. The findings reinforce the need for instructional practices that strengthen recursive writing habits, provide explicit guidance on perspective management, and expose learners to a wider repertoire of discourse markers drawn from authentic narrative data. Several limitations must be acknowledged. The participant group represents a specific institutional and regional context, which restricts broader generalization. Moreover, the study focuses solely on written narratives and does not examine coherence as it unfolds in spoken or multimodal storytelling. The cross-sectional design also limits insight into how coherence skills develop over time. For these reasons, future research should adopt

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longitudinal approaches and incorporate experimental classroom interventions that track changes across multiple drafts or semesters. It would also be valuable to include learner reflections, peer interaction, and teacher feedback as part of the analytical lens, enabling a more dynamic understanding of how coherence emerges, stabilizes, or shifts within the narrative writing process.

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