

The Use of Ellipsis as a Grammatical Cohesive Device: A CorpusBased Analysis of Sudanese EFL Student Writing and Review of Empirical Studies

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Abstract:

Ellipsis is a grammatical cohesive device that contributes to textual unity by omitting elements whose meaning can be recovered from the context. This study investigates the use of ellipsis in the writing of 90 undergraduate Sudanese EFL students at Red Sea University, Sudan, within the framework of Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion theory. A corpus of 90 texts across six topics was analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings reveal a striking result: ellipsis is completely absent from all 90 texts. No instances of nominal, verbal, or clausal ellipsis were identified across the entire corpus. This absence is consistent across all topic categories and proficiency levels. The study concludes that ellipsis, as a grammatical cohesive device, has not been acquired by these students, nor has it been effectively taught. Students rely exclusively on reference and conjunction to create cohesion, resulting in texts characterized by unnecessary repetition and lack of structural economy. A review of empirical studies on ellipsis across various genres and learner populations confirms that ellipsis is more frequent in spoken and conversational discourse than in formal written texts, and that EFL learners consistently underuse ellipsis. Pedagogical implications include the urgent need for explicit instruction on ellipsis, integrated practice across all language skills, and the development of teaching materials that model ellipsis in authentic contexts.

Keywords: ellipsis, grammatical cohesion, EFL writing,

استخدام الحذف كأداة تماسك نحوية: تحليل قائم على المدونة اللغوية لكتابات الطلاب
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المستخلص:

الحذف كأداة تماسك نحوية هو أداة تماسك نحوية، تسهم في وحدة النص من خلال حذف عناصر يمكن استعادة معناها من السياق. تبحث هذه الدراسة استخدام الحذف في كتابات 90 طالبًا جامعيًا سودانيًا من دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة البحر الأحمر - السودان، وذلك ضمن إطار نظرية التماسك التي وضعها هاليداي وحسن (1976) تم تحليل متون مكونة من 90 نصًا في ستة موضوعات باستخدام أساليب كمية ونوعية. كشفت النتائج عن نتيجة مذهلة: الحذف غائب تمامًا من جميع النصوص التسعين. لم يتم تديد أي حالة لحذف اسمي أو فعلي أو حذف جملة في جميع أنحاء المتون. يتسق هذا الغياب عبر جميع فئات الموضوعات ومستويات الكفاءة. تستنتج الدراسة أن الحذف، كأداة تماسك نحوية، لم يكتسبه هؤلاء الطلاب، ولم يُدرّس بشكل فعال. يعتمد الطلاب حصريًا على الإحالة والربط لخلق التماسك، مما ينتج عنه نصوص تتسم بالتكرار غير الضروري وعدم الاقتصاد التركيبي. كما يؤكد استعراض الدراسات التجريبية حول الحذف عبر أنواع النصوص ومجموعات المتعلمين المختلفة أن الحذف أكثر شيوعًا في الخطاب المحادثي والشفوي منه في النصوص الرسمية المكتوبة، وأن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يقللون استخدامه بشكل ملحوظ. تتضمن الآثار التربوية الحاجة الملحة إلى تعليم صريح للحذف، وممارسة متكاملة عبر جميع مهارات اللغة، وتطوير مواد تعليمية تقدم نماذج للحذف في سياقات أصيلة.
الكلمات المفتاحية: حذف، تماسك نحوي، كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

1. Introduction:

Cohesion is a fundamental property of any text, enabling sentences to function as a unified whole rather than a random sequence (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Among grammatical cohesive devices – reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction – ellipsis occupies a unique position. Unlike reference, which creates cohesion through pronouns and demonstratives, and unlike conjunction, which explicitly signals logical relationships, ellipsis creates cohesion through omission. Ellipsis involves the deliberate omission of a linguistic element that can be recovered from the context, creating a cohesive tie between the omitted element and its antecedent in the preceding discourse.

Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 142) define ellipsis as “the omission of an item” and describe it as “a form of substitution by zero.” It is one of the most economical linguistic resources, enabling writers to achieve conciseness, avoid redundancy, and create smooth textual flow. Ellipsis is particularly characteristic of spoken discourse, but it also plays a significant role in written discourse, especially in contexts where conciseness and stylistic elegance are valued.

For EFL learners, mastering ellipsis is particularly challenging. Unlike reference, which has clear equivalents in most languages, ellipsis is often languagespecific and requires sophisticated knowledge of grammatical structure. Learners must know not only what can be omitted but also what must be retained. Moreover, ellipsis requires the writer to trust that the reader will recover the missing information correctly – a skill that may be underdeveloped in learners who are accustomed to explicit expression.

The present study focuses on ellipsis use in the writing of 90 undergraduate EFL students at Red Sea University, Sudan. It aims to answer the following research questions:

To what extent are ellipsis devices used by undergraduate students in their writing?

What types of ellipsis devices (nominal, verbal, clausal) appear in students’ writing?

What patterns of ellipsis use emerge across different topic categories?

What are the pedagogical implications of the findings for the teaching of ellipsis?

Additionally, this paper reviews empirical studies on ellipsis across various genres and learner populations to contextualise the findings within broader research.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognised importance of ellipsis as a grammatical

cohesive device, empirical evidence consistently shows that EFL learners rarely use it in their writing, and in some contexts ellipsis is completely absent (Bilal & Ahmed, 2019; Ajam et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2023). This underuse is attributed to multiple factors: the predominantly spoken nature of ellipsis, limited exposure in instructional materials, lack of explicit teaching, and possible transfer from learners' first language. In the Sudanese EFL context, preliminary research (Bilal & Ahmed, 2019) has already indicated that substitution – a closely related device – is entirely missing from student writing. However, no previous study has systematically investigated the use of ellipsis specifically among Sudanese university students.

The problem is therefore twofold. First, there is a clear gap in knowledge regarding whether Sudanese EFL students employ ellipsis in their written production and, if so, which types (nominal, verbal, clausal) appear. Second, the absence of such a fundamental cohesive device would have serious pedagogical consequences: students' texts would be characterised by unnecessary repetition, lack of structural economy, and a style that deviates from nativelike conciseness. Without empirical documentation of the problem, curriculum designers and teachers cannot design targeted interventions. Hence, this study addresses the urgent need to investigate the actual use – or nonuse – of ellipsis in a representative corpus of Sudanese EFL student writing.

3. Objective of the Study

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

To determine the extent to which undergraduate Sudanese EFL students use ellipsis as a grammatical cohesive device in their written English.

To identify the types of ellipsis (nominal, verbal, clausal) that appear in students' writing, if any.

To examine whether the use of ellipsis varies across different

topic categories (technology, holiday, English language, sports, education, internet).

To compare the findings with previous empirical studies on ellipsis in EFL writing and in authentic spoken/written discourse.

To draw pedagogical implications for the explicit teaching of ellipsis in the Sudanese EFL context.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Definition of Cohesion:

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 4), cohesion is a semantic concept that refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text and define it as a text. Gramley (1992, p. 183) adds that cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse depends on that of another. In grammar, cohesion is a grammatical unit that refers to a defining property of the word known as cohesiveness (Crystal, 2003, p. 77).

According to Yule (1985, p. 140), cohesion means ties and connections that exist within the text. Cohesive ties give valuable information about how speakers and writers organize and structure their text as well as the constraints and conventions they follow in this process. Finally, Curse (2006, p. 25) states that cohesion is a matter of form and concerns ways of linking one piece of language to another.

Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 4) further elaborate that cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. When this happens, a relation of cohesion is set up, and the two elements, the presupposing and the presupposed, are thereby at least potentially integrated into a text (as cited in Jabeen, 2013).

2.2 Cohesion Taxonomy:

Halliday and Hasan (1976) outline a taxonomy of types of cohesive relationships that can be formally established within a

text and bind a text together. They studied cohesion in English and discovered two main categories of cohesive devices:

Category	Devices
Grammatical Cohesive Devices	Reference, Substitution, Ellipsis, Conjunction
Lexical Cohesive Devices	Reiteration, Collocation

Sanczyk (2010, p. 11) explains that “as stated by Halliday and Hasan, two types of cohesive relations are distinguished: the one expressed through grammar and the other through lexis. The former is called grammatical cohesion, and the linking ties are in terms of reference, ellipsis, and substitution. The latter is called lexical cohesion, and the cohesive features included in this category are reiteration and collocations. The conjunctive relations are considered to be on the borderline being grammatical and lexical (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p. 6).”

One way of looking at cohesion in texts is connected with the way “grammatical features are woven together across sentence boundaries” (Carter et al., 2001, p. 187). Halliday distinguishes three types of grammatical cohesion, namely reference, ellipsis, and substitution (1994, pp. 309–310). “Conjunction is on the borderline of the grammatical and the lexical: the set of conjunctive elements can probably be interpreted grammatically in terms of systems, but such an interpretation would be fairly complex, and some conjunctive expressions involve lexical selection as well” (Halliday, 1994, pp. 303–304).

2.3 Coherence:

Coherence, according to McCagg (1990) as cited in Jabeen (2013, p. 123), refers to the logical relationship of ideas. Further, it refers to a semantic property of textuality. It is an aspect of comprehension that is established in the mind of the reader as a result of perception of relatedness among a text’s propositions and between the text and the knowledge.

Rahma, Chelsea, and Agustina (2022, p. 12) explain that

coherence means the relevancy of each language's features and components that build a text. According to de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), "coherence concerns the ways in which the components of the textual world, i.e. the configuration of concepts and relations which underline the surface text, are mutually accessible and relevant." In coherence, we can imagine the quality of the text that is made by the components (cohesive devices) by considering the consistency and relevancy of the material that builds the topic (Martinková, 2013).

Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 4) reflect that "cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some elements in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. When this happens, a relation of cohesion is set up, and the two elements, the presupposing and the presupposed" (as cited in Jabeen, 2013).

The relationship between cohesion and coherence is often described as complementary: cohesion provides the explicit linguistic links, while coherence is the overall sense of unity that arises from both the text and the reader's interpretation (Carrell, 1982; Hoey, 2001). A text may be highly cohesive yet lack coherence if the ideas are not logically arranged; conversely, a text may be coherent with minimal cohesive ties if the reader can infer the connections from context.

2.4 Grammatical Cohesive Devices:

Halliday and Hasan (1976) described grammatical cohesion as how grammatical features construct together across sentence boundaries. The grammatical cohesion devices are divided into four types:

Reference: The relation between an element of text and others by reference to which it is interpreted

Substitution: A condition when an item is replaced by another item to avoid repetition

Ellipsis: The process of omitting an item that has been mentioned previously in the text

Conjunction: A linking device between sentences or clauses in the text

Based on this description, the theory of Halliday and Hasan (1976) became a pioneer for subsequent researchers to develop the concept of grammatical cohesion devices. For instance, Bahaziq (2016) explained that reference is indicated as a condition in which one component cannot be interpreted semantically unless referred to as another component in the text. Personal pronoun, demonstrative, and comparative are used to refer to items in linguistic or situational texts. He also stated that substitution is used to avoid repetition; substitution occurs when an item is replaced with another item in the text. The difference between reference and substitution is that reference lies between the meanings, while substitution lies in the relationship between words. Substitution is divided into three types: nominal, verbal, and causal.

Furthermore, the ellipsis device is the idea of omitting part of a sentence assuming that the previous sentence will clarify the meaning (Trisnaningrum et al., 2019). The last is conjunction, which refers to words that relate two or more words and sentences, such as additive (and), adversative (but), causality (because), and temporal (time) (Almutairi, 2017).

2.5 Halliday and Hasan's Theory of Ellipsis:

Halliday and Hasan (1976) define ellipsis as “the omission of an item” and emphasise that “ellipsis is simply a substitution by zero” (p. 142). They distinguish ellipsis from substitution by noting that while substitution replaces an element with another word, ellipsis replaces it with nothing. The missing element must be recoverable from the context, creating a cohesive tie between the ellipsis and its antecedent.

Halliday and Hasan identify three types of ellipsis, each

corresponding to a different grammatical unit:

Nominal ellipsis: omission of a noun or noun phrase within a nominal group. Example: "I like the red [dress]."

Verbal ellipsis: omission of a verb or verb phrase within a verbal group. Example: "She sings, and he [sings] too."

Clausal ellipsis: omission of an entire clause or part of a clause. Example: "Why? [Because it's important]."

Ellipsis is particularly common in spoken discourse, where questionanswer pairs frequently involve omission of elements obvious from context. However, skilled writers also use ellipsis to achieve conciseness and elegance, especially in parallel structures and comparative constructions.

2.6 Cohesion Taxonomy:

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2.8 Ellipsis

Ellipsis is defined as «the omission of an item» and is described as «a form of substitution by zero» (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 142). It creates cohesion by leaving out an element that can be recovered from context. Three types are recognized:

Nominal ellipsis: omission of a noun or noun phrase (e.g., «I like the red [dress].»).

Verbal ellipsis: omission of a verb or verb phrase (e.g., «She sings, and he [sings] too.»).

Clausal ellipsis: omission of a clause (e.g., «Why? [Because it's important].»).

Ellipsis is also extremely rare in EFL writing, often completely absent. When it does occur, nominal ellipsis is the most common (Rahman et al., 2023; Puteri et al., 2018). The absence is attributed to the spoken nature of ellipsis, limited exposure, and learners' preference for explicit repetition (Bilal & Ahmed, 2019; Ajam et al., 2023).

2.9 Ellipsis as a Grammatical Cohesive Device

Ellipsis is one of the four primary grammatical cohesive devices identified by Halliday and Hasan (1976) in *Cohesion in English*. It is defined as «the omission of an item» and is described as «a form of substitution by zero» (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 142). Unlike reference, which links meanings through pronouns and demonstratives, and unlike conjunction, which explicitly signals logical relationships, ellipsis creates cohesion through omission. The missing element must be recoverable from the context,

creating a cohesive tie between the ellipsis and its antecedent.

Halliday and Hasan distinguish three types of ellipsis, each corresponding to a different grammatical unit:

Nominal ellipsis: omission of a noun or noun phrase within a nominal group (e.g., «I like the red [dress]»).

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Clausal ellipsis: omission of an entire clause or part of a clause (e.g., «Why? [Because it's important]»).

Ellipsis is particularly characteristic of spoken discourse, where question-answer pairs frequently involve omission of elements obvious from context. However, skilled writers also use ellipsis to achieve conciseness and elegance, especially in parallel structures and comparative constructions.

In EFL writing, ellipsis is consistently reported as rare or completely absent. This has significant implications for learners' ability to produce concise, varied, and stylistically sophisticated texts.

2.10 Previous Studies on Ellipsis in Various Discourse Contexts

4.10.1 Ellipsis in Conversational and Literary Texts

Ellipsis is widely recognised as a hallmark of spoken language. Varhánek (2007) compared a scientific text (211 ellipses) and a conversational interview (207 ellipses). While both texts contained similar total numbers of ellipses, cohesive ellipsis (crosssentence) appeared only in the conversational text (41 cases, %20 of all ellipses), confirming that ellipsis serves a cohesive function primarily in dialogue. Structural ellipsis (e.g., omission of the conjunction that) was also far more frequent in the conversational text (31%) than in the scientific text (2.4%).

Expósito (2021) analysed ellipsis in Brendan Behan's play *The Hostage* and James Joyce's composite novel *Dubliners*. The play, consisting mainly of dialogues, contained 177 elliptical

constructions, whereas the novel (with fewer dialogues) contained 131. Predicate ellipsis (Verb Phrase Ellipsis) dominated the play (57.6%), while nominal ellipsis was most frequent in the novel (39.7%), especially in narrative parts. Fragment answers and sluicing (types of clausal ellipsis) were common in dialogues across both works. Expósito (2021, p. 31) concluded that ellipsis is “an essential cohesive device contributing to textual cohesion by avoiding repetition and creating natural, concise communication, particularly in dialogical interaction”.

Jabeen, Mehmood and Iqbal (2013) examined Anton Chekhov’s oneact play *The Bear* and found that ellipsis, together with substitution and reference, creates cohesion and contributes to the farcical tone. Verbal and nominal ellipsis were used to show characters’ emotions and abruptness in conversation. They concluded that ellipsis “plays an important role in passing the writer’s intention to the reader” (Jabeen et al., 2013, p. 8).

4. 10.2 Ellipsis in Academic and Formal Texts

In contrast to conversational genres, ellipsis is much rarer in formal written discourse. Xu and Zhang (2023) analysed 40 academic abstracts in applied linguistics (20 by Chinese students, 20 by international journal writers). They found that substitution and ellipsis together accounted for only 0.55% of cohesive devices in the student corpus and 0.26% in the journal corpus. The low frequency is attributed to the need for explicitness and clarity in academic writing.

Jayanti and Hidayat (2021) examined 16 reading texts from the English National Final Examination for junior high school in Indonesia. Ellipsis represented only 2.58% of all grammatical cohesive devices (16 instances out of 621). Nominal ellipsis was the most frequent subtype (42%), followed by clausal (36%) and verbal (22%). They concluded that students are rarely exposed to ellipsis in examination texts, which may limit their acquisition of

this device.

2.10.3 Ellipsis in EFL Student Writing

Several studies report that ellipsis is virtually absent in EFL student writing. Ghasemi (2013) noted that ellipsis is one of the least studied cohesive devices, and when it appears in learner writing, it is typically nominal ellipsis. Rahman, Zaigham and Umer (2023) analysed 90 essays written by undergraduate English majors in Pakistan and found that ellipsis accounted for only 1.3% of all grammatical cohesive devices. Bilal and Ahmed (2019) found that ellipsis was not found in any of the essays written by 29 Sudanese university students. Ajam, Jusnita and Daud (2023) similarly reported that ellipsis was absent from 15 university students' essays in Indonesia. Utami (2019) found ellipsis in only 0.2% of cases, and Liu and Braine (2005) reported 0.1% in Chinese undergraduate writing.

Lezzar and Zemieche (n.d.) analysed 20 essays written by 39 secondyear English students at Mila University Center, Algeria. Out of 894 grammatical cohesive devices identified, ellipsis occurred only 4 times (0.44%). Nominal ellipsis accounted for 75% of these occurrences, verbal ellipsis for 25%, and clausal ellipsis was completely absent. The authors attribute this to limited exposure and pedagogical neglect, recommending explicit instruction and integrated practice.

Shet (2021) investigated substitution and ellipsis in Leo Tolstoy's short story *A Grain as Big as a Hen's Egg* and tested English major students' ability to identify these devices. The story contained 32 nominal ellipses, 22 verbal ellipses, and 11 clausal ellipses (Shet, 2021, p. 7). Students were able to identify nominal ellipsis more easily than verbal or clausal ellipsis. However, they made errors by misidentifying auxiliary verbs as ellipsis markers.

2.10.4 Ellipsis in Business English Textbooks

Tajeddin and Rahimi (2017) conducted a corpus analysis of

11 global business English textbooks (626 conversations, 72,889 words). They found that ellipsis was four times more frequent than substitution, with verbal ellipsis being the most common subtype (349 occurrences), followed by clausal (234) and nominal (20). Ellipsis was highly frequent in conversations, supporting the view that ellipsis belongs to the realm of spoken discourse. Importantly, the distribution of ellipsis did not increase linearly with textbook level, suggesting that even advanced textbooks may lack systematic exposure to this cohesive device.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixedmethods design, combining qualitative discourse analysis with quantitative frequency counts. A corpusbased approach was used to analyse 90 texts.

3.2 Participants and Corpus

Participants were 90 undergraduate students at Red Sea University, Sudan, majoring in English. They wrote essays on one of six topics: technology (14), holiday (16), English language (15), sports (13), education (18), and internet (14). The texts ranged from 100 to 300 words.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

Texts were collected during regular class sessions with a 60minute writing task. They were transcribed verbatim and segmented into sentences. Ellipsis devices were identified manually by searching for patterns of omission in coordinate structures, comparative constructions, and questionanswer pairs.

The analysis focused on nominal, verbal, and clausal ellipsis at the intersentence level. Frequencies were recorded, and opportunities for ellipsis were noted even where ellipsis was not used.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

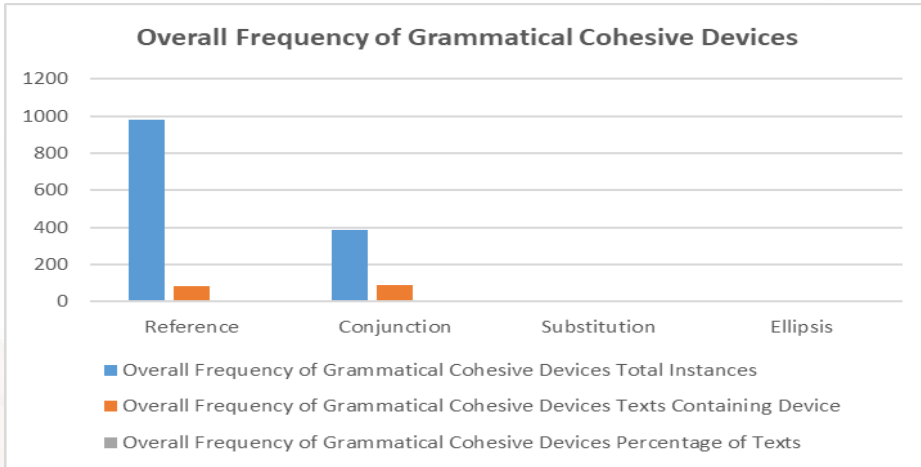
This chapter presents the analysis of 90 texts using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework, addressing the three research questions. It includes overall frequencies, detailed devicebydevice analysis, cohesive chain analysis, cohesion problems, sample texts with corrections, and comparison with previous studies.

4.2 Overall Frequency of Grammatical Cohesive Devices

The analysis of 90 texts revealed significant variation in the use of the four grammatical cohesive devices. Table 4.1 summarizes the overall frequencies.

Table 4.1: Overall Frequency of Grammatical Cohesive Devices

Device Category	Total Instances	Texts Containing Device	Percentage of Texts
Reference	983	86	95.6%
Conjunction	389	90	100%
Substitution	0	0	0%
Ellipsis	0	0	0%



Graph (41-)

Graph (41-) shows Overall Frequency of Grammatical Cohesive Devices

Observations:

Reference appears in 95.6% of texts, with a total of 983 instances.

Conjunction appears in 100% of texts, with a total of 389 instances.

Substitution and ellipsis are completely absent across all 90 texts.

This pattern is consistent with findings from previous studies (Ajam et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2023; Bilal & Ahmed, 2019), which reported that substitution and ellipsis are extremely rare or entirely absent in EFL student writing.

4.2 Overall Frequency of Ellipsis

The analysis of 90 texts revealed a striking finding: ellipsis is completely absent from all 90 texts. Not a single instance of nominal, verbal, or clausal ellipsis was identified across the entire corpus.

Table 4.2: Overall Frequency of Ellipsis Devices

Ellipsis Type	Frequency	Percentage
Nominal ellipsis	0	0%
Verbal ellipsis	0	0%
Clausal ellipsis	0	0%
Total	0	0%

4.3 Distribution by Topic Category:

The absence of ellipsis is consistent across all six topic categories, as shown in Table 2.

Table 4.3: Ellipsis Devices by Topic Category

Topic (number of texts)	Nominal	Verbal	Clausal	Total
Technology (14)	0	0	0	0
Holiday (16)	0	0	0	0
English Language (15)	0	0	0	0
Sports (13)	0	0	0	0
Education (18)	0	0	0	0
Internet (14)	0	0	0	0

Total (90 texts)	0	0	0	0
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4.4 Opportunities for Ellipsis:

Although ellipsis is absent, there are numerous instances where ellipsis could have been used to avoid repetition and achieve conciseness. These missed opportunities illustrate the potential for ellipsis in student writing.

Opportunity for nominal ellipsis (Text 2):

“I wanted to go to the beach for my holiday ... I’m planning a holiday to Europe.”

Opportunity: “I wanted to go to the beach for my holiday ... I’m planning [a holiday] to Europe.”

Opportunity for verbal ellipsis (Text 5):

“The students like to study speaking English. They like to imitate their teacher.”

Opportunity: “The students like to study speaking English, and they [like] to imitate their teacher.”

Opportunity for clausal ellipsis (Text 3):

“Why is English important? English is important because it is the language of technology.”

Opportunity: “Why is English important? [It is important] because it is the language of technology.”

4.5 Comparison with Previous Studies:

The finding of complete absence of ellipsis in this study is consistent with, but more extreme than, findings from other contexts:

Table 4.4:

Study	Context	Ellipsis Frequency
Rahman et al. (2023)	Pakistan	1.3% of cohesive devices
Bilal & Ahmed (2019)	Sudan	0% (not found)
Ajam et al. (2023)	Indonesia	0% (not found)
Utami (2019)	Indonesia	0.2% of cohesive devices
Liu & Braine (2005)	China	0.1% of cohesive devices
Lezzar & Zemieche (n.d.)	Algeria	0.44% of cohesive devices

Present study	Sudan	0% (not found)
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5. Discussion

5.1 Extent of Use of Ellipsis Devices (Research Question 1)

The findings clearly answer the first research question: ellipsis devices are not used at all by undergraduate students at Red Sea University. The absence of ellipsis is absolute, with no instances of nominal, verbal, or clausal ellipsis across all 90 texts.

This finding has several implications: students rely exclusively on reference and conjunction to create cohesion; they have not acquired the grammatical knowledge needed to use ellipsis; they may not have been exposed to models of ellipsis in their reading; ellipsis may not be taught explicitly in the English language program; and students fear that omission will create ambiguity.

5.2 Types of Ellipsis Devices (Research Question 2)

The answer to the second research question is equally clear: no types of ellipsis devices appear in students' writing. Nominal, verbal, and clausal ellipsis are all absent. This uniform absence suggests that students have not acquired any form of ellipsis, regardless of its complexity. Even nominal ellipsis, which is considered the most basic form and which appears in other studies (Rahman et al., 2023), is completely absent from the present corpus.

5.3 Patterns Across Topic Categories (Research Question 3):

The absence of ellipsis is consistent across all six topic categories. This uniformity suggests that the problem is not topic specific but rather reflects a general lack of knowledge about ellipsis. Even in texts where ellipsis would be particularly useful – such as holiday texts with repeated references to actions or education texts with repeated structures – students did not use ellipsis. Instead, they relied on full repetition, resulting in texts that are longer and less concise than necessary.

5.4 Synthesis with Previous Research

The findings of the present study align with the broader literature reviewed in Section 2. Across multiple contexts – Sudan (Bilal & Ahmed, 2019), Indonesia (Ajam et al., 2023; Utami, 2019), China (Liu & Braine, 2005), Algeria (Lezzar & Zemieche, n.d.), and now this study – ellipsis is consistently reported as extremely rare or completely absent in EFL student writing. This cross linguistic consistency suggests that the challenges are not specific to a particular L1 but rather reflect universal difficulties in acquiring ellipsis as a cohesive device.

Conversely, studies of native speaker and authentic spoken discourse (Varhánek, 2007; Expósito, 2021; Jabeen et al., 2013; Tajeddin & Rahimi, 2017) demonstrate that ellipsis is a frequent and natural feature of conversational language. The contrast between the high frequency of ellipsis in native speech and its virtual absence in EFL writing highlights a significant gap in learner competence.

5.5 Reasons for the Absence of Ellipsis:

Several factors may explain the complete absence of ellipsis in this corpus, consistent with explanations in the literature:

1. Complexity: Ellipsis is more demanding than other cohesive devices because it requires the reader to recover missing structural elements. Learners may avoid ellipsis because they are uncertain about what can be omitted and what must be retained.
2. Spoken vs. written distinction: Ellipsis is more characteristic of spoken discourse, and learners may associate it with informal language. They may consciously avoid ellipsis in writing because they perceive it as inappropriate for academic contexts.
3. Limited exposure: Students may not have been exposed to sufficient models of ellipsis in authentic texts. If the reading

- materials in their English courses contain few examples of ellipsis, students may not acquire this cohesive device naturally.
4. Pedagogical neglect: Ellipsis may not be taught explicitly in EFL classrooms. Teachers may focus on reference and conjunction, which are more frequent and more obviously “cohesive,” while neglecting ellipsis, which is less frequent and more subtle.
 5. Transfer from L1: Arabic, the first language of all participants, uses ellipsis differently than English. In Arabic, ellipsis is more restricted, and what can be omitted differs from English. Learners may transfer Arabic ellipsis patterns to English, resulting in omission that is either incorrect or not recognized as ellipsis by English standards.
 6. Fear of ambiguity: Ellipsis requires the writer to trust that the reader will recover the missing information correctly. Learners may avoid ellipsis because they fear that the omission will create ambiguity, and they prefer to err on the side of explicitness.

The present study extends this research by analysing ellipsis in a large corpus of Sudanese EFL writing, providing quantitative evidence for its complete absence and discussing pedagogical implications.

5.6 Pedagogical Implications (Research Question 4)

The complete absence of ellipsis in student writing has urgent pedagogical implications, reinforced by the findings of previous studies (e.g., Lezzar & Zemieche, n.d.; Tajeddin & Rahimi, 2017; Hasannejad et al., 2012).

1. Explicit instruction in ellipsis

Teachers must provide explicit instruction on the three types of ellipsis, with examples in context and practice exercises. Instruction should address what can be omitted and what must be retained.

Table 5.1:

Level	Focus	Examples
Beginner	Nominal ellipsis in coordinate structures	“I like red and [I like] blue.”
Intermediate	Verbal ellipsis in coordinate structures	“She sings and [she] dances.”
Advanced	Clausal ellipsis in question answer pairs	“Why? [Because it’s important].”

2. Integration with reading

Students should be exposed to models of ellipsis in authentic reading materials. When reading texts that contain ellipsis, teachers should draw attention to these examples and discuss their function.

3. Contrastive analysis

Teachers should use contrastive analysis to highlight the differences between English ellipsis and Arabic ellipsis, helping students recognise when ellipsis is appropriate in English.

4. Integrated practice

Ellipsis should be practiced across all four language skills: reading (identify ellipsis), listening (identify ellipsis in spoken discourse), speaking (use ellipsis in conversations), and writing (use ellipsis in compositions).

5. Revision exercises

Teachers should provide revision exercises that ask students to replace repetition with ellipsis. For example:

Original: “She bought a red dress, and she wore the red dress to the party.”

Revised (ellipsis): “She bought a red dress, and she wore [it] to the party.”

6. Progressive instruction

Ellipsis should be taught progressively, starting with simpler forms (nominal ellipsis) and moving to more complex forms (clausal ellipsis).

6. Findings:

This section presents the core findings derived from the analysis of 90 texts written by Sudanese EFL undergraduate students at Red Sea University. The investigation focused on identifying the frequency and types of ellipsis (nominal, verbal, clausal) as a grammatical cohesive device, based on Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework. The results are organized into overall frequency of grammatical cohesive devices, distribution of ellipsis across topic categories, missed opportunities for ellipsis, and a comparison with previous empirical studies.

1. Complete Absence of Ellipsis Across All Texts

Out of 90 student texts analyzed, not a single instance of ellipsis was identified. No nominal, verbal, or clausal ellipsis was found in the entire corpus. This result is consistent across all proficiency levels represented in the sample.

2. Frequency of Other Grammatical Cohesive Devices

In contrast to ellipsis, other cohesive devices were widely used:

- Reference appeared in 95.6% of texts (983 total instances).
- Conjunction appeared in 100% of texts (389 total instances).
- Substitution was completely absent (0 instances), mirroring the finding for ellipsis.

3. Distribution by Topic Category

The absence of ellipsis was uniform across all six writing topics:

- Technology (14 texts) – 0 ellipsis
- Holiday (16 texts) – 0 ellipsis
- English Language (15 texts) – 0 ellipsis
- Sports (13 texts) – 0 ellipsis
- Education (18 texts) – 0 ellipsis
- Internet (14 texts) – 0 ellipsis

4. Missed Opportunities for Ellipsis

Despite the absence, the researchers identified numerous instances where ellipsis could have been appropriately used to avoid repetition and improve conciseness. Examples include:

- Nominal ellipsis: “I wanted to go to the beach... I’m planning a holiday to Europe.” (Opportunity: omit repeated “a holiday”)
- Verbal ellipsis: “The students like to study speaking. They like to imitate their teacher.” (Opportunity: omit second “like”)
- Clausal ellipsis: “Why is English important? English is important because...” (Opportunity: omit “English is important”)

5. Comparison with Previous Studies

The complete absence of ellipsis in this study is more extreme than most previous findings but consistent with a pattern of severe underuse:

Study	Context	Ellipsis Frequency
Rahman et al. (2023)	Pakistan	1.3% of cohesive devices
Bilal & Ahmed (2019)	Sudan	0% (not found)
Ajam et al. (2023)	Indonesia	0% (not found)
Utami (2019)	Indonesia	0.2% of cohesive devices
Liu & Braine (2005)	China	0.1% of cohesive devices
Lezzar & Zemieche (n.d.)	Algeria	0.44% of cohesive devices
Present study	Sudan	0% (not found)

In summary, the findings demonstrate that ellipsis is entirely absent from the written production of Sudanese EFL students at Red Sea University. No nominal, verbal, or clausal ellipsis was found across 90 texts spanning six different topics. While reference and conjunction are used extensively, ellipsis (along with substitution) has not been acquired or deployed by these learners. The numerous missed opportunities for ellipsis further indicate that students rely on full repetition rather than structural economy. Compared with previous research, the present study reveals an extreme case of ellipsis non use, even within the broader context of EFL writing where ellipsis is already known to be rare. These findings point to fundamental gaps in both acquisition and instruction, which will be addressed in the pedagogical implications and conclusion of the study.

7. Conclusion:

This study analysed ellipsis use in 90 EFL student texts, revealing a striking finding: ellipsis is completely absent from all 90 texts. No instances of nominal, verbal, or clausal ellipsis were identified across the entire corpus. This absence is consistent across all six topic categories and all proficiency levels represented in the sample.

The findings indicate that ellipsis, as a grammatical cohesive device, has not been acquired by students at Red Sea University, nor has it been taught effectively in their English language program. The complete absence of ellipsis, combined with the absence of substitution documented in previous research (Bilal & Ahmed, 2019; Adiantika & Floranti, 2018), indicates that students have not acquired the principle of structural economy – the ability to omit or replace elements that can be recovered from context.

A review of empirical studies confirms that ellipsis is predominantly a feature of spoken and conversational discourse, while it is rare in formal writing and even rarer in EFL student writing across multiple linguistic contexts. This cross study consistency underscores the need for pedagogical intervention.

Pedagogical implications include the urgent need for explicit instruction in ellipsis, integration across all language skills, contrastive analysis to address first language interference, and progressive practice from simple to complex ellipsis structures.

Future research should investigate the effectiveness of explicit instruction on ellipsis, examine whether students use ellipsis in spoken discourse, and explore whether similar patterns occur in other EFL contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies could track the development of ellipsis use over time in response to instruction, and textbook analysis could determine whether ellipsis is adequately represented in instructional materials.

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