

Level of Coherence in L2 Written Text: A Gender Perspective

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: Coherence Development, Coherence Devices, , Gender, L2 Written Text</p>	<p>Writing is an essential skill for EFL learners to be able to communicate effectively. Achieving effective communication is condemned by the degree of developing text coherence. Reviewing the related literature shows that coherence, unlike other text features, posits a significant problem with L2 learners, males and females. Due to biological and cultural differences between males and females, both sexes may bring variety to coherence development in text writing. This case has not received a due account in discourse analysis studies, creating a gap in the literature. Accordingly, the present study aimed to identify the level of coherence in L2 written texts from a gender perspective. To achieve the objectives of the study, all 40 graduates of English, 20 males, and 20 females, Faculty of Education, Ibb University, Yemen, in the academic year 2019 – 2020, participated in this study. A writing test was used as a research tool to collect the required data. Using both descriptive and inferential research approaches, a number of findings were revealed. The most important ones are: there was a lack of coherence in both males' and females' written texts ($M = 15.45/30$, $SD = 4.56$); and there were no statistically significant differences between the mean score of male and female graduates ($M = 16.10 > 14.80$, $SD = 4.96 > 4.14$, $t = -0.90$, $P > 0.05$) attributed to the variable of gender. Based on the findings of the study, a number of pedagogical implications were introduced; most notably, policymakers, course designers, and teachers should pay ample attention to the contents of writing courses focusing on text coherence to sensitize EFL learners to such a text feature to be able to produce coherent texts.</p>
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1. Introduction

To begin with, writing skill is not merely editing words on a piece of paper but is a complex means of communication in the purest form of words. In the past, writing was considered as a product because grammar and vocabulary are the main elements in text writing; the case *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 8(2), 2023

that requires writers to achieve accuracy at word or sentence level (Kroll, 2001; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). This notion is lately vanished into being a dynamic process in that writing a text requires adequate grammatical and structural resources that can be learnt through conscious exposure (Fageeh, 2003). Due to this complexity, the writing skill posits the last rank among language skills to be acquired by EFL learners. This position, away from disregarding other skills, comes from intricate processes needed to be followed by learners when they write such as verbalization of abstract ideas in brain into written messages through paying attention to idea development, vocabulary, grammar, style (Khunaifi, 2015), text organization, etc. This inclusively means writers need high-conscious-language- knowledge to produce a meaningful readable text.

According to Widdowson (2007), a text is not merely expressing ideas by words but is a piece of language having a communicative purpose. This *in turn* requires close consideration to meet readers' needs beginning from, *and ending with*, grasping the writer's intended meaning. In this relation, Thornbury (2005) and Hyland (2006) argued that cohesion and coherence are essential ingredients for achieving text meaningfulness in an academic text. This necessitates university students to learn how to produce academic texts to be meaningful to readers. In other words, if there is no cohesion or coherence, text may lose its meaningfulness and accordingly may fail to achieve its communicative purpose. In this connection, Rahmtallah (2020) argued that EFL learners are not competent in achieving text coherence because they lack certain devices that help them develop coherence. This means, it is unnecessary for EFL learners to be equipped with all coherence devices; rather, some basic ones can be enough for achieving the global coherence of text such as unity, theme progression, repetition of keywords, etc. In support of this view, Nguyen (2022) pointed out that if there is a connection between thesis statement and body part and between topic sentences and supporting sentences, coherence can be achieved. In other words, EFL learners can develop coherence if they are aware of coherence knowledge and practice it in the classroom; otherwise, they may produce incoherent texts.

Violating coherence in text is a major problem of Arab EFL learners of English (Alkrisheh, et al., 2019), whether males or females, fostering a distorted picture of meaning and creating a communication problem with readers. This fact does not forgive Yemeni EFL learners from this problem; the case that requires investigation to show the extent of committing this problem, on the one hand, and whether it is committed more by males or females, on the other. The vast majority of discourse studies in relation address text coherence from different angles. For example, Ryan (2023) attempted to develop learners' writing in terms of coherence and cohesion through employing an FOMT strategy. However, Nagao (2022) focused on the text structure employing a genre-based approach (GBA) to analyse descriptive reports written by Japanese university students of English to understand text structure and ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings. However, Mohseni and Samadian (2019) attempted to identify Iranian intermediate EFL learners' problems in cohesion and coherence of writing in general. From a metacognitive point of view, Nguyen (2022) investigated how metacognitive trainings, based on Rhetorical Structure Theory, impacts the establishment of global coherence in students' writings. Focusing on coherence aspects only, Kusumawardani (2018) attempted to identify the extent of using some coherence strategies (e.g., transition signals, consistent pronouns, repetition of keywords, etc.) with EFL learners. That is to say, no study, to the best knowledge of the researcher, has attempted to address coherence in

students' written texts from a gender perspective. What Rahmtallah (2020) attempted was to examine coherence in essays written by EFL Saudi female students only ignoring the male ones.

So, all previous studies show that "gender" has not received a due account in discourse analysis studies; the case that creates a gap of "gender" studies in general and coherence in particular. This problem has motivated the researcher to conduct this study in an attempt to bridge this gap through investigating the level of coherence development in males and females' written texts of EFL graduates at Ibb University, Yemen.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Coherence

Due to continuing hot debates recurred by many linguists and researchers, of different perspectives, coherence becomes a complex concept that gets approached from different angles showing different definitions, accordingly (Bublitz, 2011). For example, Sherman et al. (2010) considered coherence as an aspect of writing skill through which effectiveness can be achieved because sentences, concepts, and associative ideas get combined and overflowed together. In a similar vein, Castro (2004) argued that coherence is a technique used by the writer to connect ideas in text to make the reader move from one sentence to another and from one idea to another smoothly. That is, it is the responsibility of the writer to develop text coherence through using devices that help in connecting ideas together to make text more accessible to readers. This inclusively means, as Rahman (2013) and Hyland (2006) argued, coherence is a means for making text understandable as it creates sense-making sentences. This can be achieved, according to Min (2010), through developing, integrating, and then organizing ideas logically in a text. In this relation, cohesive devices are used to organize ideas making "cohesion is the foundation on which the edifice of coherence is built" and "the basis for textual coherence lies in cohesion" (Halliday & Hasan 1976, p. 210). That is, there is a closer connection between coherence and cohesion in achieving text coherence. This relationship is clarified by Hoey (1991) and Thompson (1994) who admitted that coherence depends on cohesion. Nonetheless, Yule (2009) argued that cohesion does not qualify a text to be coherent resulting in the readers' lack of understanding it. In a similar fashion, Widdowson (2007) believed that a cohesive text may lack coherence which does not help the reader reach to any familiar schema of an interpersonal kind.

Therefore, in reaching coherence, the need arises to develop a context to build schema to help readers relate their socio-cultural knowledge to be able to understand the entire text (Thornburry, 2005), achieving the communicative purpose of text. In this sense, Bublitz (1997) believed that a text may show comprehension variance depending on the level of coherence used by the writer and the level of the reader's background schemata used to relate ideas. In other words, text comprehension depends on the level of strategies used by both writers and readers (cf. interlocutors). Thus, coherence is not text-based but is context-based which, in this case, requires it to be cohesive and consistent with the context (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Therefore, coherence development can be approached linguistically and non-linguistically. Non-linguistically, coherence is developed through the interaction of the reader with the text structure or genre (cf. formal schemata) and with the text itself (cf. content schemata) which

help in interpreting the text (Thornburry, 2005; Wang & Guo, 2014). Linguistically, it is developed through using cohesive devices to link text ideas together, repeating keywords, to remind the reader with the main ideas ranged in text, referencing, to guide the reader to track essential sentence elements, developing unity of topic through discussing one idea along text, and progressing themes to guide the reader to comprehend the intended meaning (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). In support of this view, van Dijk (1977, p. 95) admitted that coherence is represented at two levels: linear or sequential coherence and global coherence. Linear coherence refers to "coherence relations holding between propositions expressed by composite sentence and sequences of those sentences" while global coherence refers to the general nature that considers a text as a whole or a larger unit.

As the topic of this study suggests, this study focuses on the linguistic development of coherence only through, based on the above argument, discussing unity, repeating keywords, reference, cohesive devices, thematic progression, and ideas logical order.

2.2. Coherence Development

2.2.1. Unity

Unity refers to the oneness of thought in a text to convey meaning to the reader. In line with Oshima and Hogue (2006, p. 18), unity means "a paragraph discusses one and only one main idea from beginning to end". While Clare and Hamilton (2004, p. 41) stated that "unity is to do with forming the separate parts of the text into a whole". That is, a text should confirm unity in all main parts that compose it: topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence.

As regards to the topic sentence, it is the first sentence of the body paragraph which explains the specific point of the main idea in the paragraph. It shows briefly what the paragraph is going to be discussed. This in turn helps both the writer and reader to see information to include or exclude, and know what is about, respectively. The supporting sentences are statements that explain the topic sentence. That is, many statements are brought by the writer in support of the topic sentence to ensure unity and convince the reader. However, the concluding sentence is the one that ends the paragraph to summarize the key points to the reader. However, it is not always needed in every paragraph. All these sentences can tell the reader about one main idea along a text ensuring coherence, as a result.

2.2.2. Thematic Progression

Thematic progression is a term emanated from two separate terms: "Theme" and "Rheme". The former refers to the starting point of a message (Halliday, 2014, p. 89). However, the latter refers to "aboutness" or what relates to the first point (or theme), which is "part of the assembly of the new information that the text offers" (Cummings, 2003, p. 133). On this base, the thematic progression means "how speakers construct their messages in a way which makes them fit smoothly into the unfolding language event" (Thompson, 2014, p. 117). It is the internal organization of text developed by the writer based on a textual plan (Danes, 1974). The textual plan, according to Danes, can be ensured in a text when arranging sentences through following three patterns of thematic progression: *linear progression*, where the rheme of a sentence becomes the theme of an immediate succeeding one, *progression with constant theme*; where the same theme is repeated at the beginning of each

sentence, and *progression with derived theme*, where subsequent themes are derived from a superordinate item at the beginning of a text.

A number of studies (e.g., Bloor & Bloor, 1992; Christie & Dreyfus, 2007; Rorvik 2012) argued that the thematic progression is a means used by the writer to link and arrange themes in a text ensuring coherence. In turn, this helps the reader know the internal organization of the text, guiding him/her to understand the intended meaning (Dejica, 2010, p. 48-59). In this relation, Schleppegrell (2004, 2009) and Vande Kopple (1991) considered the thematic progression as a crucial aspect of writing which should be introduced to EFL/ESL learners in academic writing courses to develop their writing skills through organizing information in a way that sounds more coherent.

Pedagogically speaking, Cheng (2002) admitted that teaching the thematic progression to learners can compromise coherence in learners' writing. In a similar vein, Alonso and McCabe (2003) argued that focusing on the thematic progression can help learners develop coherent texts. On this base, Wang (2007) claimed that the thematic progression is a valuable tool for teachers to diagnose their learners' difficulties in coherence through showing them how to arrange old and new information.

2.2.3. Repetition of Keywords

Keywords are words carrying significance in a text which are intended by the writer to make the reader focus on them along the text. For Oshima and Hogue (2006), keyword repetition is the repetition of the main words or nouns indicated in the topic sentence over and over in a text creating a sense of coherence. This in turn helps the reader stay focused and headed in the right direction.

To ensure statement variety, keywords can be replaced by synonyms or expressions of the same meaning. There is no fixed rule about how often to repeat or substitute keywords. That is, it depends on the need to create interest with the reader without going far away from the main topic (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). In so doing, the reader keeps reminded of the topic being discussed without becoming repetitive which may distract the him/her and get him/her rather irritated. Put another way, repeating keywords or substitutes ensures coherence in a text as its relates the reader to the significant carry-information.

2.2.4. Reference

A reference is an item which refers to the same thing in a text. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 31), there are three types of references: personals (e.g., I, you, we, he, them, us, her, who, mine, etc.), demonstratives (e.g., this, that, these, those, here, there, there is, there are, etc.), and comparatives (e.g., same, identical, similar(ly), such, different, other, else, as, etc.). Using them in a text helps the writer avoid the repetition of the same noun (or referent) over and over monotonously, connect between sentences, and add some variety to the text. Moreover, they are used to denote relations in sentences between them and their referents either within or outside the text ensuring some coherence (Paltridge, 2011). These relations, according to McCarthy (1991) and Brown and Yule (1983), can be either anaphoric, cataphoric, or exophoric which help the reader track essential sentence elements and trace a unified sequence of ideas. The anaphoric reference describes an item which refers back to another word or phrase used earlier in a text. The cataphoric reference describes an item which refers to another word or phrase used later in a text. However, the exophoric reference

describes an item that refers to something outside a text to identify the item being referred to. All these references create a sense of coherence in a text as they form a mental map in the reader's mind helping him/her identify the relationships between referents and making the text clearly understandable (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). That is, using referents in a text helps in connecting ideas with each other (cf. coherence) which in turn makes the text accessible and smooth enough to readers (Mohseni & Samadian, 2019; Al-Qahtani, 2020).

2.2.5. Transitional Devices

Certainly enough, in a text writing, the writer adds, contrasts, compares, justifies, refutes, etc. ideas to satisfy the reader of argumentation. To achieve this, the writer needs to use certain words or expressions explicitly to connect between ideas and tell the reader what is going on. These connective words are referred to transition devices (e.g., however, in addition, but, first, etc.) (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). That is, the writer uses such devices explicitly to connect ideas in a text to one another and to the overall theme of a text, ensuring text coherence. Without these devices, ideas appear fragmented and sound abrupt to the reader, detaining him/her from identifying the type of relationship (i.e., comparison, contrast, addition, etc.), ensuring text incoherence. For example, conjunctions are a text-connecting relation where *because* is used as a connector between two clauses functioning as a signal to the reader that the second clause is an explanation of the first one. That is, *because* always means that there is a causal coherence relation. Therefore, using such devices develops coherence as they link text ideas with each other based on a certain relationship. Accordingly, the reader can relate ideas written to his/her schema for interpretation and may or may not interpret them as being intended by the writer. In other words, the reader may create another discourse determined by his/her own coherence devices and/or references (Sarangi, 2004). On this base, a written text may create a different discourse (by a reader) of whether a bad or good style depending on the reader's type of coherence devices and references used. This in turn creates a sense of interaction between both the writer and the reader.

2.2.6. Logical Order of Ideas

According to Wolf and Gibson (2005), logical order of ideas refers to the way text ideas are arranged based on a certain relation or principle such as temporal sequence (e.g., then, second, after, etc.) cause-effect (e.g., because, so, etc.), similarity (e.g., similarly, the same as, etc.), condition (e.g., if, then, as long as, etc.), contrast (e.g., in contrast, but, however, etc.), elaboration (e.g., also, furthermore, in addition, etc.), example (e.g., for example, for instance, such as etc.), attribution (e.g., according to, said that, claimed that, etc.), generalization (e.g., in general, all in all, etc.), and violated expectation (e.g., although, but, etc.). To ensure relationship, Lee (2002a) argued that text ideas need to be sequenced and arranged in a clear and logical way to develop coherence. According to Fairooz (2019), coherence is a clear, smooth, and logical flow of ideas to allow readers move from a paragraph to another smoothly. In support of this view, Oshima and Hogue (1999) confirmed that coherence can be developed when moving from one sentence to the next is logical and smooth without sudden jumps. In this connection, Hatch (1992) pointed out that using sentences randomly in a text does not produce a coherent text. Similarly, Boardman and Frydenberg (2008) argued that a paragraph has coherence when supporting sentences are sequenced according to a principle that allows the reader to understand ideas easily. On the

other hand, Hinkel (2004) argued that a logical arrangement at sentence level develops coherence which in turn facilitates the reader's comprehension of the message conveyed.

However, Thornburry (2005) attracted the attention of readership when claiming that the logical order of ideas in a text develops both macro and micro-structural levels of discourse. At the macro-structural level, sequencing ideas on a specific genre appropriately creates text global coherence. In support of this idea, Connor and Farmer (1991, p. 128) argued that the global coherence is concerned with "what the essay is about" in that information is connected at the discourse level. At the micro-structural level, ideas are organized through internal connectives showing a theme-rheme pattern and a logical relation in each sentence based on a communicative dynamism to develop thematic progression. In this case, a local coherence is achieved. To conclude, a text is perceived to be coherent to the reader when the ideas hang together in a logical and meaningful manner.

2.2.7. Gender Differences in Coherence

Due to the falsely synonymity of both "gender" and "sex" used by some researchers, it sounds demanding firstly to show the vast differences between both terms. According to Giddens (1989), "sex" refers to human biological and anatomical differences between males and females while "gender" refers to psychological, social and cultural differences between them. On this base, "sex" is a reproductive potential we are born with while "gender" is a social property constructed by cultural norms. In this connection, Butler (1990) believed that "gender" is a social elaboration of "sex" which exaggerates biological differences carrying them into social domains. Since society is a primary factor in this conceptual argument, it, say, affects "gender" rather than "sex". Because language is a social construction, "gender" is more appropriately concerned with language learning and teaching in a social domain to record the type of effect between them.

As the topic of this paper suggests, Money and Hampson (1955) defined "gender" as speech or actions of a person through which his/her status, as a boy or girl, man or woman, (i.e. masculinity or femininity) is revealed. This entails that the meaning of "gender" extends to dressing styles, communication techniques, moving patterns, etc. and not limited to biological sex.

Over years, a hot debate has been intrigued between essentialists and social constructionists over the nature of gender whether it is a merely biological sex or a social construct happening in a social and cultural discourse. The social constructionists use the social psychology as a field where discursive psychology is used as a technique/approach of discourse analysis to analyze gender. In this respect, Edley (2001) argued that the discursive psychology adopts language as social practice and a way to examine ways of expressing attitudes, emotions, memories, etc. This view is supported by Lorber and Farrell (1991, p. 7) in that gender is "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category". According to this view, gender is influenced by cultural and social norms, making it nurtured enough. Put another way, the other meaning of gender, as a biological aspect, does not fit into this argument because a boy is biologically gendered as a boy while he is socially gendered as a girl due to his extensive exposure to society where he lives, affecting his way of talking.

In her book "Women, Men, and Language", Coates (1993) admitted that women and men use language differently which is attributed to differences in communicative competence, showing that "women and men may constitute different speech communities" (p.140). If this is the case, it should have fateful implications in language testing since it implies that the construct of communicative competence is not gender neutral.

Since men and women differ biologically, they differ psychologically. These differences affect the way they think, talk, act, and influence others because each sex has different needs, goals, and values in the way they communicate (Gray, 1992). Due to gender differences, a certain topic is viewed differently and get responded to differently. As a result, they show major stylistic differences in communication, notably communication styles, during discussions, though they are less touched in written language due to the absence of spontaneity.

However, Basow and Rubenfield (2003) admitted that when women discuss a topic, they appear as more expressive, tentative, and polite in an attempt to enhance a social relationship while men appear more assertive, and power-hungry in an attempt to enhance social dominance. Specifically speaking, Lakoff (1975) argued that the culture of society enforces some hierarchy status between the two sexes affecting the way each sex produces language. This hierarchy makes women, for example, feel less confident and capable language users because they feel that they are lower than men. As a result, women produce tentative expressions (e.g., maybe, can be, could be, I see, etc.) due to using tag questions and intensifiers extensively (Thorne & Henley, 1975). This phenomenon allows more fragmented and interrupted expressions to be used in a text making it a hedge-based and incoherent one. In this connection, Tannen (1990) argued that women use hedges extensively because they prefer writing on social topics to display their own personal aspects to reduce force and protect feelings, notably rhetorical questions. In effect, this is reflected in women's lack of repeating the same pronouns and keywords, producing incoherent texts; the case that distracts readers' attention.

In contrast, men feel that they are superior than women which in turn makes them confident and capable users of language. As a result, they use assertive expressions (e.g., of course, well, it is good/bad/beautiful, etc.,) because they are less seekers for information, resulting in the lack of using hedges. In so doing, a lack of fragmented and abrupt expressions may take place, creating text coherence. This is confirmed by Gray (1992) in that men are goal-oriented as they define their language use to achieve results. This leads them to repeat the same pronouns and keywords to keep consistency on the main topic itself, producing a coherent text.

Gender differences are investigated by a number of studies. For example, Yazdani and Samar (2010) aimed at investigating differences between native and non-native male and female students at some Iranian universities in using pronouns. The findings of the study revealed that non-native females used significantly more pronouns than non-native males; and there is no statistically significant difference between non-native males and non-native females in the use of specifiers, or pronouns specifiers.

Ishikawa (2015) conducted a study to investigate gender differences among university students in argumentative essays. The students were required to write an essay of 200-300 words in a controlled condition where the topic choice was restricted to two topics. The

findings of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences between males and females in using nouns, prepositions, personal pronouns, and modifiers (intensifiers and quantifiers) in favor of females; and numerals were in favor of males.

Ning and Dai (2010) investigated a topic selection in males' and females' politics and economics texts. They found that males selected politics and economics topics while females selected education and family topics. According to Meunier (1996), this difference can be attributed to the fact that men prefer "serious" topics to discuss while women prefer "trivial" ones. Another study was conducted by Peterson (1986) on the extent of using pronominal reference by male and female writers and found that females used pronominal references more than males.

Finally, Lakoff (1975) found that females used more intensifiers (e.g. so, awfully, pretty, terribly, quite, etc.) and tag questions (cf. Wenjing, 2012), and hedges than males. However, many studies (e.g., Carli, 1999; Carothers & Allen, 1999; Lamude, 1993) showed that language use differences are not attributed to gender differences but to contexts. That is, when women show a supportive view on a certain topic, they display apparent coherence showing the feature of repetition exhibiting syntactic, lexical, and semantic repetitions to develop solidarity with readers (Coates, 1996). In contrast, when women discuss a topic displaying a negative view towards it, they display incoherence.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

The current study attempts to identify the level of coherence in L2 written texts of Yemeni graduates of English from a gender perspective. To achieve this objective, the study attempts to address the following research questions:

1. What is the overall level of coherence development in L2 written text of Yemeni graduates of English?
2. To what extent do *male* graduates develop coherence in written texts?
3. To what extent do *female* graduates develop coherence in written texts?
4. Are there any statistically significant differences at the level of $p < 0.05$ in coherence development between the mean scores of *male* and *female* graduates' written texts attributed to the variable of gender?

3.2. Sample and Procedures

The study targeted all 40 graduates (20 males and 20 females) of English, Faculty of Education, Ibb University, Yemen, in the academic year 2019-2020. Such students completed all *eight* obligatory semesters of the B.A. program of English in the assigned four-year period (2016-2020). That is, they had, *assumingly*, adequate writing skills that might enable them to express ideas in a written mode coherently to/and communicate arguments meaningfully. To collect the required data, a test was designed by the researcher as a research tool where the sample was required to write at least a 300-word essay on ONE topic of the two given ones: *Problems Encountered when Studying English* and *War in Yemen* (see Appendix I). The criteria behind selecting such topics were "familiarity" and "interest" so as to reduce possible theme difficulties that might encounter the sample during writing. If this was fruitful, the sample might be able to write freely; the case that might allow enough space to the researcher to test coherence development in their written texts. The time allotted to complete the task was

60 min. When the sample completed all obligatory exams of the second semester of the final year, the researcher looked for permission from the Department of English to allow him to conduct the study. After permission, the sample was announced the test to take their consent of participation in this study and know when and where to take it.

3.3. Assessment of Coherence Development

A due consideration was paid by the researcher to the accuracy of the sample's coherence development in written texts. That is, text coherence, based on literature review, can be developed when coherence devices (i.e., unity, thematic progression, repeating keywords, reference, transitional devices, ideas logical order) are available. Drawing on Xu (2018) rubric, the researcher assessed the sample's coherence development in written texts, changing some items of the rubric to be in line with the objectives of the study and the sample's performance. That is, the overall score given was 30; that is, each coherence device received 5 scores based on the availability of elements listed in the example of rating texts (Appendix II). To assess the level of text coherence, Table 1 below shows the scoring criteria followed:

Table 1: Scoring Criteria

Degrees	Score	Level
0	0 - 5	Weak
1	6 - 11	Average
2	12 - 17	Good
3	18 - 23	Very good
4	24 - 30	Excellent

3.4. Testing Validity and Reliability

To test the validity of the research tool, the test was introduced to an expert panel which was *then* pilot-tested on 10 graduates of English at the Faculty of Arts of the same university to test the appropriateness of topics and time given to achieve the writing task. To test reliability, two raters were employed to evaluate the students' written essays. Then, all scores, of both raters, were calculated, through using Pearson Correlation (PC), to determine the degree of agreement between scores. The results showed that the reliability of the test was *high* (PC = 928-, confidence interval = 93%, $p < 0.05$).

4. Results

To address the questions of the study, both descriptive and referential statistics were used. Listing the results is guided by the research questions below.

4.1. Overall Level of Coherence Development

Q.1. What is the overall level of coherence development in L2 written text of Yemeni graduates of English?

To address this question, descriptive statistics, represented in calculating means (M) and standard deviations (SD), was employed. Table 2 summarizes the results:

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Coherence Development in Graduates' Texts

Statistical Techniques	Unity	Thematic Progression	Repeating Keywords	Reference	Transitional Devices	Ideas Logical Order	Total
M	2.40	2.70	2.73	2.70	3.65	1.28	15.45
SD	1.17	0.72	1.11	1.02	0.86	1.13	4.56

Table 2 clearly depicts that the overall mean score in developing coherence in the graduates' written texts ($M = 15.45$, $SD = 4.56$, $N = 40$) was *average*. Comparing the graduates' overall mean scores with the full score ($S = 30$) showed that the graduates achieved 51.5 % of text coherence quality.

Specifically speaking, the overall mean score in developing *unity* in the graduates' written texts ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.17$) was *average*; i.e., the graduates enhanced unity in 48% the text topics written. Concerning *thematic progression*, the overall mean score in progressing themes in the graduates' written texts ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.72$) was *average*; i.e., the graduates progressed 54% of themes in their written texts. In regard to *repeating keywords*, the overall mean score in repeating keywords in the graduates' written texts ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.11$) was *average*; i.e., the graduates repeated 54.6% of keywords mentioned in their written texts. Regarding *reference*, the overall mean score in referencing in the graduates' written texts ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.02$) was *average*; i.e., the graduates provided 54% of references mentioned in their written texts. In regard to *transitional devices*, the overall mean score in using *transitional devices* in the graduates' written texts ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.86$) was *good*; i.e., the graduates used 73% of *transitional devices* required in their written texts. Accordingly, this coherence device scored the top rank between the other devices. Finally, the overall mean scores in *ordering ideas logically* in the graduates' written texts ($M = 1.28$, $SD = 1.13$) was *weak*; i.e., the graduates *ordered logically* 25.6% of ideas indicated in their written texts. Accordingly, this coherence device scored the last rank between the other ones.

On average, these results accord with those of Rahmtallah (2020), Mohseni and Samadian (2019), Nguyen (2022), and Al-Qahtani (2020), which showed an unsatisfactory level of achieving coherence in the participants' essays. In contrast, they do not accord with those of Nagao, A. (2022), Tywoniw and Crossley (2019), Ryan (2023), Nguyen (2022), and Kusumawardani (2018) which found that the participants developed a satisfactory level of coherence development.

4.2. Male Coherence Development

Q.2. To what extent do *male* graduates develop coherence in written texts?

To address this question, descriptive statistics, represented in means (M) and standard deviations (SD), was employed by the researcher. Table 3 summarizes the results:

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Coherence Development in Male Graduates' Texts

Statistical Techniques	Unity	Thematic Progression	Repeating Keywords	Reference	Transitional Devices	Ideas Logical Order	Total
M	2.10	2.65	2.65	2.60	3.60	1.20	14.80
SD	1.12	0.75	0.88	1.05	0.75	0.95	4.14

Table 3 depicts that the overall mean score in developing coherence in *male* graduates' written texts ($M = 14.80$, $SD = 4.14$, $N = 20$) was *average*. This means, the *male* graduates achieved 49.33% of text coherence quality. Below is a detailed description of results obtained in each device of coherence used.

4.2.1. Unity

The mean score ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.12$, $N = 20$) of developing unity in male graduates' written texts was *average*. This indicates that the *male* graduates provided unity in 42% of the text topics written.

4.2.2. Thematic Progression

The mean score ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.75$, $N = 20$) of progressing themes in male graduates' written texts was *average*. This indicates that the *male* graduates progressed 53% of the themes developed in written texts.

4.2.3. Repetition of Keywords

The analysis revealed that the mean score ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.88$, $N = 20$) of repeating keywords in male graduates' written texts was *average*. This shows that the *male* graduates repeated 53% of the keywords indicated in written texts.

4.2.4. Reference

The mean score ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.05$, $N = 20$) of referencing in male graduates' written texts was *average*. This shows that the *male* graduates provided 52% of references mentioned in written texts.

4.2.5. Transitional Devices

The mean score ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.75$, $N = 20$) of using transitional devices in male graduates' written texts was *good*. That is, the *male* graduates used 72% of the transitional devices required in written texts.

4.2.6. Ideas Logical Order

The mean score ($M = 1.20$, $SD = 0.95$, $N = 20$) of ordering ideas logically in male graduates' written texts was *weak*. This indicates that the *male* graduates ordered 24% of the ideas logically in written texts.

The overall results of *male* graduates showed that there was a lack of achieving coherence in their written essays. This problem might be attributed to the lack awareness of written coherence devices, producing incoherent texts.

4.3. Female Coherence Development

Q.3. To what extent do *female* graduates develop coherence in written texts?

To address this question, descriptive statistics, represented in means (M) and standard deviations (SD), was employed by the researcher. Table 4 summarizes the results:

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics for Coherence Development in Female Graduates' Texts

Statistical Techniques	Unity	Thematic Progression	Repeating Keywords	Reference	Transitional Devices	Ideas Logical Order	Total
M	2.70	2.75	2.80	2.80	3.70	1.35	16.10
SD	1.17	0.72	1.32	1.01	0.98	1.31	4.96

Table 4 depicts that the overall mean score in developing coherence in *female* graduates' written texts ($M = 16.10$, $SD = 4.96$, $N = 20$) was *average*. This shows that the *female* graduates achieved 53.66% of text coherence quality. Below is a detailed description of results obtained in each feature of coherence used.

4.3.1. Unity

The mean of *female* graduates' score ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.17$, $N = 20$) shows that the extent of developing unity in female graduates' written texts was *average*. This shows that the *female* graduates provided unity in 54% of the text topics written.

4.3.2. Thematic Progression

The mean score ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.72$, $N = 20$) of progressing themes in female graduates' written texts was *average*. This shows that the *female* graduates progressed 55% of the themes developed in written texts.

4.3.3. Repetition of Keywords

The analysis revealed that the mean score ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.32$, $N = 20$) of repeating keywords in female graduates' written texts was *average*. This means, the female graduates repeated 56% of the keywords indicated in written texts.

4.3.4. Reference

The mean score ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.01$, $N = 20$) of referencing in female graduates' written texts was *average*. This indicates that the *female* graduates provided 52% of references mentioned in written texts.

4.3.5. Transitional Devices

The mean score ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.98$, $N = 20$) of using transitional devices in female graduates' written texts was *good*. This shows that the *female* graduates used 74% of the transitional devices required in written texts.

4.3.6. Ideas Logical Order

The mean score ($M = 1.35$, $SD = 1.31$, $N = 20$) of ordering ideas logically in female graduates' texts was *weak*. This shows that the *female* graduates ordered 27% of the ideas logically in written texts.

The overall results of *female* graduates showed that there was a lack of achieving coherence in their written essays. This problem might be attributed to the lack of explicit exposure to the devices of coherence in the classroom; the case that renders them unaware of producing coherent texts.

4.4. Coherence Development Differences in Male and Female Graduates

Q.4. Are there any statistically significant differences at the level of $p < 0.05$ in coherence development between the mean scores of *male* and *female* graduates' written texts attributed to the variable of gender?

To address this question, inferential statistics (i.e., t-Test for Two Independent Sample) was used. Table 5 summarizes the results:

Table 5 Inferential Statistics for Coherence Development Differences in Male and Female Graduates' Texts
Independent Samples Test

Coherence Features	Gender	N	M	SD	t	df	sig.
Unity	Male	20	2.10	1.12	- 1.65	38.00	0.11
	Female	20	2.70	1.17			
Progression	Male	20	2.65	0.75	- 0.43	38.00	0.67
	Female	20	2.75	0.72			
Reference	Male	20	2.60	1.05	- 0.62	38.00	0.54
	Female	20	2.80	1.01			
	Male	20	3.60	0.75	- 0.36	38.00	0.72

Trans. Devices	Female	20	3.70	0.98				
Ideas Logical Order	Male	20	1.20	0.95	- 0.41	38.00	0.68	
	Female	20	1.35	1.31				
Total	Male	20	14.80	4.14	- 0.90	38.00	0.37	
	Female	20	16.10	4.96				

Table 5 depicts that there were no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of male and female graduates ($M = 16.10 > 14.80 <$, $SD = 4.96 > 4.14$, $t = -0.90$, $P > 0.05$) in developing coherence in written texts attributed to the variable of gender. However, the differences available between the mean scores of both sexes were in favor of the female graduates ($M = 16.10 > 14.80$, $SD = 4.96 > 4.14$, $t = -0.90$, $P > 0.05$). This indicates that the female graduates were better than the male ones in developing coherence in written texts.

5. Discussion of the Results

5.1. Overall Level of Coherence Development

Based on the results shown in Table 2, there was an overall lack of developing coherence in all graduates' written texts. This indicates that the graduates had a problem in developing coherence in written texts. This problem was manifested in the lack of using most of the coherence devices as needed in texts, namely unity, thematic progression, repetition of keywords, reference, and ideas logical order. That is, the graduates could not provide well-coherent written texts. This problem might be attributed to the lack of awareness in using such devices to provide coherent texts (Mohseni & Samadian, 2019). However, there was no problem in using *transitional devices* which was manifested in using a similar number of transitional devices appropriately in texts. This merit might be attributed to the very nature of such devices as being functional words which can be used to necessarily link between sentences to show additions, contrast, comparison, etc. (Nagao, 2022; Ishikawa, 2015). Put simply, such words were learnt earlier by the graduates in grammar which helped them produce correct grammatical statements (Tywoniw & Crossley, 2019). In other words, their use of such devices was required by grammar in the first run. Such findings are discussed below in relation to theoretical tenets introduced in literature.

The findings of this study corroborate the findings of Rahmtallah (2020), Mohseni and Samadian (2019), Nguyen (2022), and Al-Qahtani (2020) where there was a lack of coherence in participants' written essays. In contrast, the findings of this study are incompatible with those of Nagao, A. (2022), Tywoniw and Crossley (2019), Ryan (2023), Nguyen (2022), and Kusumawardani (2018) which found that the participants developed a satisfactory level of coherence.

5.2. Male Coherence Development

Based on the results shown in Table 3, there was a lack of developing coherence in males' written texts. This finding is discussed below in each coherence device.

5.2.1. Unity

The male graduates' mean score in developing unity in texts showed that the male graduates had a problem in providing topic sentence in texts that direct the reader to the main idea of

the topic discussed. This problem resulted in the lack of providing supporting statements that support the topic sentence to convince the reader, showing fragmented sentences along texts. This problem might be attributed to the lack of awareness in the need to provide a topic sentence for a text topic written about (Mohseni & Samadian, 2019). In this connection, Hiatt (1977) observed that the lack of awareness in the way academic texts are written leads to violating all norms of effective coherent texts such as unity, repetition of keywords, etc. However, Boice and Kelly (1978) found that the lack of practicing writing by EFL learners render them provide irrelevant statements, misleading readers from the main idea of text.

5.2.2. Thematic Progression

The mean score of thematic progression in male graduates' written texts showed that there was a lack of providing sufficient statements that support the main idea of the text to satisfy the reader. Besides, most of themes provided had no rhymes that completed thought in texts, showing fragmented statements, as a result. Such a case showed that the male graduates could not discuss the topics given satisfactorily due to the lack of either vocabulary in this register (Ning & Dai, 2010) or information in this trend (Hiatt, 1977).

5.2.3. Repetition of Keywords

The male graduates' mean score in repeating keywords indicated that there was a lack of repeating keywords in texts. This problem might be attributed to the lack of sufficient information (cf. thematic progression) in texts. Nagao (2022) and Ishikawa (2015) found that the number of keywords in texts are condemned by the size of themes provided. While Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) argued that the absence of keywords in texts might be attributed to the use of synonyms used by writers. But this idea might be silent when writers provide synonyms to all keywords used, the case that is not applicable in this study.

5.2.4. Reference

The male graduates' mean score in referencing indicated that there was a lack of using personal pronouns, demonstratives, comparatives, etc. showing a lack of coherence relations in texts. This problem might be attributed to the use of fragmented sentences that have different themes. This problem rendered the male graduates deal with each statement as a new one which did not require any type of cohesion devices (e.g., reference). McCarthy (1991) and Peterson (1986) argued that fragmented sentences are always provided by novice writers producing incoherent texts due to the absence of connectives, references, etc. (Lakoff, 1975).

5.2.5. Transitional Devices

The male graduates' mean score in using transitional devices indicated an average rate of such devices used. This was manifested in the availability of explicit connectives (notably conjunctions) to connect ideas, ensuring text coherence. This indicates that the male graduates had no problem in using such devices because they were familiar with them as being functional words. However, there was a lack of using other connectives that show, for example, contrast, comparison, etc. to make texts more coherent. In this connection, Ishikawa (2015) argued that using conjunctions and tag questions are used obligatory to link between ideas in text but are not enough to render texts coherent.

5.2.6. Ideas Logical Order

The mean of male graduates' score in ordering ideas logically indicated that the extent logic order of ideas in texts was *weak*. This was manifested in writing statements randomly in texts as they did not follow any criteria or principle such as temporal sequence, condition, contrast, etc. This problem might be attributed to, firstly, the lack of sufficient information (cf. thematic progression) provided in texts; that is, no enough statements (content) to be ordered logically. Hiatt (1977) believed that extensive texts sound easier to be ordered by EFL learners due to clear relations noticed. Second, *even though*, there was a lack of awareness in the necessity of ordering text statements logically to produce coherent texts.

All in all, the findings of this study concerning the *male* participants corroborate the findings of Rahmtallah (2020), Mohseni and Samadian (2019), Nguyen (2022), and Al-Qahtani (2020) where there was a lack of coherence in participants' written essays. This problem was attributed to the lack of exposure to coherence development in written performance in the classroom. This in turn created a sense of subconsciousness with the participants in this relation. In contrast, the findings of this study are incompatible with those of Nagao (2022), Tywoniw and Crossley (2019), Ryan (2023), Nguyen (2022), and Kusumawardani' (2018) which found that the participants developed a satisfactory level of coherence. Unlike the current study, these studies developed planned training programmes to expose students explicitly to the way they could develop coherent essays in the classroom; the case that improved the participants' performance. This indicates that exposing students to classes on coherence development explicitly is effective as it improves students' performance.

5.3. Female Coherence Development

Based on the results shown in Table 4, there was a lack of developing coherence in female written texts. This finding is discussed below in each coherence device.

5.3.1. Unity

The mean of female graduates' score in developing unity indicated that the majority of female students neglected topic sentences and supporting statements. This problem might be attributed to the lack of awareness in the need to provide a topic sentence for the text topic written about. This problem *in turn* rendered the female graduates provide irrelevant supporting sentences along texts, violating text coherence. Hiatt (1977) observed that the lack of awareness in the way academic texts are written leads to violating all norms of effective coherent texts such as unity, repetition of keywords, etc. However, Boice and Kelly (1978) argued that the incoherent texts provided by EFL learners might be attributed to the lack of practice in writing skill.

5.3.2. Thematic Progression

The mean score of thematic progression in female students' written texts indicated that most females provided ideas but most of statements did not support thesis statements to satisfy the reader with the idea introduced and develop text coherence. This problem might be attributed to lack of managing discourse within the main idea of the text paradigm due to the lack of practice of writing skill (Boice & Kelly, 1978).

5.3.3. Repetition of Keywords

The female graduates' mean score in repeating keywords indicated that there was an *average* rate of repeating keywords in females' texts (e.g. war, casualties, destruction, etc.). This rate occurred as a result of the ideas (cf. thematic progression) discussed in text which involved multiple ideas; the case that rendered some females repeat keywords (Ishikawa, 2015; Hiatt 1977).

5.3.4. Reference

The female graduates' mean score in referencing indicated that the extent referencing in their written texts was *average*. This was manifested in the presence of personal pronouns, demonstratives, comparatives, etc. showing a sense of coherence relations in texts. This merit showed that the female graduates were aware of the need to avoid repetition of the same nouns (or referents) over and over monotonously. This might be attributed to the simple language used by females which facilitated using such referents (Peterson 1986; Yazdani & Samar, 2010).

5.3.5. Transitional Devices

The female graduates' mean score in using transitional devices indicated that the extent use of such devices was *good*. This was manifested in the presence of explicit connectives (i.e., comparison, contrast, additions, etc.) that connected ideas ensuring text coherence. This means that the female graduates had no problem in using such devices because they were familiar with them as being functional words in language.

5.3.6. Ideas Logical Order

The mean of female graduates' score in ordering ideas logically indicated that the extent of ordering ideas logically in female graduates' texts was *weak*. This was manifested in writing statements randomly in texts as they did not follow criteria or principles such as temporal sequence, condition, contrast, etc. This problem might be attributed to the lack of awareness in the need to order text statements logically to produce coherent texts although their texts were informative enough to allow ease of ordering ideas logically (Hiatt, 1977).

The findings of this study concerning the *female* participants corroborate the findings of Nguyen (2022), Rahmtallah (2020), Al-Qahtani (2020), and Mohseni and Samadian (2019) which found that there was a lack of coherence in participants' written essays. This problem was attributed to the lack of exposure to coherence development in written performance in the classroom. However, the findings of this study are incompatible with those of Ryan (2023), Nguyen (2022), Nagao (2022), Tywoniw & Crossley (2019), and Kusumawardani (2018) which found that the participants developed a satisfactory level of coherence. Unlike the current study, these studies developed planned training programmes to expose students explicitly to the way they develop coherent essays in the classroom; the case that helped in improving the participants' performance. This indicates that exposing students to classes on coherence development explicitly is effective as it improves students' performance.

5.4. Coherence Development Differences in Male and Female Graduates

Based on the results shown in Table 5, both sexes showed weaknesses in developing coherence in written texts but the female graduates showed better performance than the

males. This indicated that "gender" had no effect on the graduates' coherence development in their written texts. That is to say, since both male and female students were classmates for four years of study where they were exposed to the same leaning situations along their study, they introduced similar incoherent texts. This means, differences in the participants' habits, attitudes, social and religious factors in the Yemeni context did not affect their performance.

This means, writing practice and context are the main variables that affect EFL learners' coherence development in written texts (Carli, 1999; Carothers & Allen, 1999). This reason might stand behind the favorability of female graduates revealed in this study rather than their gender.

6. Conclusion

First, this study might reduce the gap in literature concerning "gender" in discourse analysis studies in general and coherence in particular. The findings of the study might work as a base for researchers, scholars, and interested people to conduct other related topics so as to enrich this particular literature. Second, writing a coherent text forms a great problem for EFL learners in general and Yemeni graduates of English, males in particular. This generalization is incompatible with Labov's generalization which states that "women might be better at L2 learning than men as they are likely to be more open to new linguistic forms in the L2 input and they will be more likely to rid themselves of interlanguage forms that deviate from target-language norms" (Ellis, 1994, p. 202). This study recommends policy makers, course designers, and teachers to pay ample attention to the need to include text coherence to sensitize EFL learners to such a text feature to produce effective writing.

Second, the unsatisfactory performance of both male and female graduates in developing coherent texts, especially in ordering ideas logically, necessitates EFL teachers to pay ample attention to reconsider the contents of writing courses in the programme concerning text coherence and cohesion to enable students to gain good inputs in this relation to be able to write coherent texts.

Third, it was found that the females showed *some* text accuracy, notably in providing related supporting and concluding statements in texts. This implies that teachers should reinforce these text features with female students in the classroom through attracting their attention, together with males', *explicitly* to the very need to provide related statements to enforce text coherence. In addition, the overall favorability of female graduates in developing coherence in their texts better than males necessities EFL teachers to pay more attention to *male* students through providing feedback to every activity produced when correcting their activities. Most notably, more feedback should be given on how to develop a topic sentence in a text and provide related supporting statements that help expand it as satisfactory as needed.

Finally, further investigations are needed to study the level of coherence in male and female graduates' speech to identify if there are significant differences between both sexes, on the one hand, and between spoken and written texts, on the other.

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