



ANALYZING COHERENCE STRATEGIES IN SENIOR INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS IN RANGAREDDY DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Coherence in writing is a fundamental aspect of effective communication, yet it remains one of the most challenging dimensions of composition for second-language learners. This study investigates the coherence strategies employed by senior intermediate students (Class XI and XII) in the Rangareddy district of Telangana, India. Using a mixed-methods research design, 150 students from 10 government, private, and semi-private junior colleges were sampled through stratified random sampling. Data were collected through structured writing tasks, coherence assessment rubrics adapted from Bamberg (1983) and Connor (1984), and semi-structured interviews with 20 selected participants. The analysis reveals that students predominantly rely on surface-level cohesive devices such as additive conjunctions and lexical repetition, while higher-order coherence strategies—including thematic progression, topical structure analysis, and macro-level organizational patterns—remain significantly underdeveloped. The findings further indicate that medium of instruction, exposure to reading habits, and pedagogical approaches adopted by instructors are statistically significant predictors of coherence quality. The study concludes with pedagogical recommendations for curriculum designers, textbook authors, and classroom practitioners aimed at fostering deeper coherence competence among intermediate learners in the Telangana state board context.

KEYWORDS: Coherence Strategies, Cohesion, Writing Competence, Senior Intermediate Students, Rangareddy District, Second Language Writing, Discourse Analysis, Telangana

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is widely regarded as the most complex of the four fundamental language skills, demanding the simultaneous orchestration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, and rhetorical awareness (Hyland, 2003). Within the domain of written discourse, coherence occupies a pivotal position, functioning as the underlying semantic and pragmatic thread that binds a text into a unified, interpretable whole. While cohesion refers to the surface-level linguistic devices that connect sentences—such as conjunctions, referencing, and lexical chains—coherence operates at a deeper level, involving the logical organization of ideas, thematic consistency, reader expectations, and the overall communicability of the writer's intended message (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Enkvist, 1990).

In the Indian educational context, particularly in the state of Telangana, English occupies a dual role as both a medium of instruction and a subject of study at the intermediate level (Classes XI and XII). The Board of Intermediate Education (BIE), Telangana, prescribes a curriculum that emphasizes grammatical accuracy and literary appreciation, but explicit instruction in discourse-level writing skills—including coherence—remains conspicuously peripheral. This curricular gap is particularly consequential for students in semi-urban and rural areas of districts such as Rangareddy, where access to English-rich environments, qualified language instructors, and supplementary learning resources is often limited.

Rangareddy district, which encircles the state capital Hyderabad, presents a unique sociolinguistic landscape. While its proximity to the metropolitan center exposes segments of its student population to English through media, technology, and commerce, a substantial proportion of senior intermediate students come from Telugu-medium schooling backgrounds and encounter English academic writing as a formidable challenge. This demographic heterogeneity makes Rangareddy an ideal site for investigating how coherence strategies manifest across diverse learner profiles.

The present study is situated within this context and seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What coherence strategies do senior intermediate students in Rangareddy district employ in their expository and argumentative writing?
2. To what extent do these strategies reflect surface-level cohesion versus deep-level coherence?
3. What sociolinguistic and pedagogical factors influence the quality of coherence in student writing?
4. What pedagogical interventions can be recommended to improve coherence competence at the intermediate level?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to the growing body of research on second-language writing in Indian regional contexts and offers evidence-based recommendations for improving writing instruction at the intermediate level.



2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Coherence

The conceptual distinction between cohesion and coherence has been a central concern in discourse analysis since the seminal work of Halliday and Hasan (1976), who identified five categories of cohesive ties: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. While their framework provided a robust taxonomy for analyzing surface-level textual connectivity, subsequent scholars argued that cohesion alone does not guarantee coherence. Carrell (1982) demonstrated that texts could be cohesive without being coherent, and conversely, that coherent texts could function with minimal explicit cohesive markers.

Enkvist (1990) proposed that coherence is fundamentally a cognitive phenomenon, residing not solely in the text but in the interaction between the text and the reader's interpretive processes. This perspective was further developed by the Topical Structure Analysis (TSA) framework of Lautamatti (1987), which examines how sentence topics progress through a text, creating patterns of parallel progression, sequential progression, and extended parallel progression. Bamberg (1983, 1984) operationalized coherence assessment through the identification of thematic unity, structural organization, and logical connectivity in student essays, establishing evaluation criteria that have been widely adopted in L2 writing research.

Connor (1984) and Connor and Farmer (1990) extended this work by applying topical structure analysis to ESL student writing, finding that successful writers employed more varied progression patterns, while weaker writers tended to rely on repetitive or disjointed topical chains. These findings have been replicated across multiple L2 contexts, including studies by Lee (2002) in Korea, Liu and Braine (2005) in China, and Wahby (2014) in Egypt.

2.2 Coherence in Indian ESL Writing Contexts

Research on coherence in Indian English writing contexts has gained momentum over the past two decades, though it remains underrepresented relative to studies from East Asian and Middle Eastern ESL/EFL settings. Bhatia (2014) examined coherence patterns among undergraduate students in Delhi, reporting a heavy reliance on additive conjunctions (“and,” “also,” “moreover”) and a paucity of adversative and causal connectors. Similarly, Krishnamurthy and Koshy (2016) investigated coherence in the writing of engineering students in Bangalore, finding that thematic progression patterns were largely parallel, with minimal sequential or extended development.

In the Telangana context, Reddy and Rao (2018) analyzed writing samples from degree-level students in Hyderabad, observing that coherence breakdowns were most frequently attributable to

abrupt topic shifts, inadequate paragraph development, and the absence of thesis-support organizational frameworks. However, no study to date has specifically examined coherence strategies among intermediate students in the Rangareddy district, a gap that the present investigation aims to fill.

2.3 Factors Influencing Coherence in L2 Writing

The literature identifies several factors that influence coherence in second-language writing. Cumming (2001) emphasized the role of writing expertise and L2 proficiency as interacting variables, noting that even proficient L2 users may lack discourse-level organizational skills if they have not received explicit instruction. Sasaki (2000) highlighted the influence of L1 rhetorical patterns on L2 writing coherence, a phenomenon termed “rhetorical transfer” by Connor (1996). In the Indian context, the influence of Telugu rhetorical conventions—which often favor cumulative, elaborative patterns over the linear, thesis-driven structure preferred in Anglo-American academic prose—may be a significant factor in the coherence patterns observed among Rangareddy students.

Additionally, pedagogical variables such as process-based versus product-based writing instruction, the availability of feedback on discourse-level features, and the nature of examination-oriented writing practice have been identified as influential factors (Raimes, 1991; Silva, 1993). The intermediate education system in Telangana, with its emphasis on rote memorization and model-answer reproduction for board examinations, may inadvertently constrain the development of authentic coherence strategies.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative analysis of coherence features in student writing samples with qualitative insights gathered through semi-structured interviews. The convergent parallel design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) was employed, wherein quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and integrated during the interpretation phase.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised senior intermediate students (Classes XI and XII) enrolled in junior colleges across Rangareddy district during the academic year 2024–2025. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 150 students from 10 junior colleges, with stratification based on three variables: (a) type of institution (government, private, semi-private), (b) medium of instruction (English medium, Telugu medium with English as a subject), and (c) stream (Sciences, Commerce, Arts/Humanities). The sample distribution is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Sample Distribution by Institution Type and Medium of Instruction**

Institution Type	English Medium	Telugu Medium	Total
Government	19	23	42
Private	28	15	43
Semi-Private (Aided)	24	18	42
Residential/Model	14	9	23
Total	85	65	150

For the qualitative component, 20 students were purposively selected from the larger sample to represent a range of coherence proficiency levels (high, mid, low) as determined by their writing task scores.

3.3 Instruments

Three primary instruments were used for data collection:

Structured Writing Tasks: Participants completed two writing tasks—one expository (describing the importance of digital literacy in education) and one argumentative (arguing for or against the implementation of a uniform examination pattern across Indian states). Each task required a minimum of 250 words and was completed within 45 minutes under supervised conditions.

Coherence Assessment Rubric: A composite rubric was developed by adapting the frameworks of Bamberg (1984) and Connor (1984). The rubric assessed coherence across five dimensions: (a) thesis clarity and consistency (scored 1–5), (b) topical progression patterns (scored 1–5), (c) paragraph-level unity and development (scored 1–5), (d) use of cohesive devices (scored 1–5), and (e) overall communicative effectiveness (scored 1–5). The maximum composite score was 25. The rubric was validated by a panel of five experts in applied linguistics and ESL pedagogy, and inter-rater reliability was established at Cohen's Kappa = 0.84.

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule: A set of 12 open-ended questions was designed to elicit students' self-reported writing strategies, perceived difficulties with coherence, prior instruction in writing organization, and reading habits. Interviews were conducted in English, with code-switching to Telugu permitted to ensure authentic and comprehensive responses.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out over a period of eight weeks (August–September 2024). Institutional permissions were obtained from the principals of selected colleges, and informed consent was secured from participants and, where applicable, their guardians. Writing tasks were administered in classroom settings during regular English periods to minimize ecological disruption. Interviews were conducted individually in a quiet room within the college premises and were audio-recorded with participants' consent.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequency distributions) and inferential statistics (independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and multiple regression analysis) through SPSS. Topical Structure Analysis was performed manually on 60 randomly selected essays (30 per task) following Lautamatti's (1987) procedure, with inter-coder reliability established at 0.81. Qualitative interview data were transcribed, coded thematically using NVivo 12, and analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis procedure.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overall Coherence Performance

The mean composite coherence score across the 150 participants was 13.42 out of 25 (SD = 4.37), indicating a moderate-to-low level of coherence competence. Table 2 presents the dimension-wise mean scores.

Table 2: Dimension-Wise Coherence Scores (N = 150)

Coherence Dimension	Mean	SD	Max Score
Thesis Clarity and Consistency	2.68	1.12	5
Topical Progression Patterns	2.34	1.08	5
Paragraph Unity and Development	2.75	1.15	5
Use of Cohesive Devices	3.18	0.97	5
Overall Communicative Effectiveness	2.47	1.21	5
Composite Score	13.42	4.37	25

The highest mean score was observed in the use of cohesive devices (M = 3.18), while topical progression patterns received the lowest mean (M = 2.34). This pattern is consistent with

findings from Bhatia (2014) and Krishnamurthy and Koshy (2016) and suggests that students are more adept at deploying



surface-level cohesive markers than at constructing deep-level coherence through sustained thematic development.

4.2 Predominant Coherence Strategies

Analysis of the writing samples revealed that students employed the following coherence strategies with varying frequency:

Additive Conjunction Overuse: The most frequently used cohesive devices were additive conjunctions, particularly “and” (mean frequency: 8.7 per essay), “also” (4.2), and “moreover” (2.1). Adversative (“however,” “on the other hand”) and causal (“therefore,” “consequently”) connectors were significantly less frequent (mean: 1.3 and 0.9 per essay, respectively). This over-reliance on additive connectors created a cumulative, list-like quality in many essays, undermining argumentative and logical development.

Lexical Repetition over Substitution: Students predominantly maintained topical continuity through verbatim lexical repetition rather than through pronominal reference, synonymy, or superordinate substitution. While repetition can serve coherence, excessive verbatim repetition without elaboration contributed to a perception of redundancy and stagnation in idea development.

Parallel Topical Progression: Topical Structure Analysis of the 60 selected essays revealed that 67.5% of topical progressions were parallel (the same topic maintained across successive sentences), 21.3% were sequential (the comment of one sentence becoming the topic of the next), and only 11.2% were extended parallel (a topic reintroduced after intervening material). The dominance of parallel progression indicates a tendency to circle around a single point rather than advancing the argument through sequential idea development.

Absence of Macro-Level Organizational Frameworks: Only 22.5% of essays demonstrated a recognizable macro-structural pattern (introduction–body–conclusion with a discernible thesis statement). The majority of essays (58.1%) exhibited a “knowledge-telling” approach (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987), in which ideas were presented in the order of retrieval rather than organized around a rhetorical plan.

4.3 Influence of Sociolinguistic and Pedagogical Variables

Independent samples t-tests revealed a statistically significant difference in coherence scores between English-medium students ($M = 15.23$, $SD = 3.89$) and Telugu-medium students ($M = 11.09$, $SD = 3.76$), $t(148) = 6.47$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen’s $d = 1.08$. This large effect size underscores the substantial impact of medium of instruction on coherence competence.

One-way ANOVA indicated significant differences across institution types, $F(3, 146) = 7.21$, $p < 0.001$, with post-hoc Tukey HSD tests revealing that private college students scored significantly higher than government college students (mean difference = 3.14, $p < 0.001$). No significant difference was found between private and semi-private institutions.

Multiple regression analysis identified three significant predictors of coherence scores: (a) medium of instruction ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), (b) self-reported reading frequency in English ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$), and (c) reported exposure to process-based writing instruction ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$). Together, these variables accounted for 41.3% of the variance in coherence scores ($R^2 = 0.413$, $F(3, 146) = 34.18$, $p < 0.001$).

4.4 Qualitative Insights from Student Interviews

Thematic analysis of the 20 semi-structured interviews yielded four major themes:

Theme 1: Coherence as an Invisible Skill. A majority of interviewees (16 out of 20) reported that they had never received explicit instruction in how to organize ideas coherently in writing. Several students equated “good writing” exclusively with grammatical accuracy and vocabulary richness, with no awareness of discourse-level organizational features. As one student noted, “My teacher says if grammar is correct and I use good vocabulary, my writing is good. Nobody told me about how to connect paragraphs or make a structure.”

Theme 2: Examination-Driven Writing Practices. Students consistently described their writing preparation as centered on memorizing model answers and “important questions” for board examinations. This examination-oriented approach leaves little room for authentic writing practice or the development of planning, drafting, and revision strategies that foster coherence. One participant stated, “We only write what we memorize. In the exam, there is no time to think about organization—you just write fast.”

Theme 3: Limited Reading Exposure. Interviewees who scored higher on coherence measures reported more frequent and diverse reading habits in English, including newspapers, fiction, and online content. Lower-scoring students reported reading exclusively from textbooks, and several indicated that they read English material only during examination preparation periods.

Theme 4: L1 Influence on Writing Organization. Several students acknowledged that they “think in Telugu and translate” when writing in English. While this cognitive process is natural for bilingual writers, it may contribute to the transfer of Telugu discourse patterns—which tend to be more recursive and elaborative—into English academic writing, where linear, hierarchical organization is conventionally expected.

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study carry significant implications for English language pedagogy at the intermediate level in Telangana, particularly in districts like Rangareddy where sociolinguistic diversity creates uneven learning landscapes. The following recommendations are proposed:

5.1 Explicit Instruction in Discourse-Level Coherence

The curriculum and teacher training programs must move beyond sentence-level grammar instruction to incorporate explicit



teaching of discourse-level coherence strategies. This includes instruction in thesis statement formulation, paragraph structuring (topic sentence, supporting details, concluding sentence), transition strategies between paragraphs, and macro-level organizational patterns (comparison-contrast, cause-effect, problem-solution). Teachers should use model texts to illustrate how coherence operates at multiple levels and engage students in analyzing and evaluating the coherence of sample essays before producing their own.

5.2 Process-Based Writing Pedagogy

The current product-oriented, examination-driven approach to writing instruction should be supplemented with process-based pedagogy that emphasizes pre-writing planning (brainstorming, outlining, clustering), multiple drafting, peer review, and revision. Research consistently demonstrates that process-based approaches improve discourse-level writing quality (Zamel, 1983; Raimes, 1991). In practical terms, this would require allocating dedicated time within the English curriculum for writing workshops, even if this necessitates some restructuring of the existing syllabus.

5.3 Integration of Reading and Writing Instruction

Given the significant correlation between reading habits and coherence quality, a reading-writing integration approach is recommended. Students should be exposed to diverse genres of English texts—editorials, essays, reports, opinion pieces—and guided to notice how authors achieve coherence through organizational choices, transitional devices, and thematic development. Reading journals, summary-response tasks, and text-structure analysis activities can serve as bridges between receptive and productive skills.

5.4 Scaffolding for Telugu-Medium Students

Telugu-medium students require targeted scaffolding to bridge the gap between their L1 rhetorical competence and the expectations of English academic discourse. This may include contrastive rhetoric activities that make explicit the differences between Telugu and English text organization, bilingual graphic organizers for pre-writing planning, and graduated writing tasks that progressively increase in discourse complexity. Additionally, teacher education programs should sensitize instructors to the phenomenon of rhetorical transfer and equip them with strategies for supporting bilingual writers.

5.5 Reforming Assessment Practices

As long as board examinations reward memorized reproduction over original, coherent composition, students will have little incentive to develop genuine coherence strategies. Assessment reform should include the introduction of rubrics that explicitly evaluate coherence as a distinct dimension of writing quality, the inclusion of unseen writing prompts that require on-the-spot organization, and the reduction of predictable “important question” patterns that encourage rote learning.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has provided a systematic analysis of the coherence strategies employed by senior intermediate students in Rangareddy district, revealing a pattern of surface-level cohesive reliance coupled with underdeveloped deep-level coherence competence. The findings underscore that coherence in writing is not a skill that develops incidentally through grammar instruction or literary study alone; it requires deliberate, sustained, and explicit pedagogical attention. The sociolinguistic and institutional variables identified as significant predictors—medium of instruction, reading habits, and pedagogical approach—point to systemic factors that must be addressed through coordinated curricular, pedagogical, and assessment reforms.

While this study focused on the Rangareddy district, its findings are likely generalizable to similar semi-urban and rural educational contexts across Telangana and other Indian states where English is taught as a second language at the intermediate level. Future research may extend this investigation through longitudinal designs that track the development of coherence competence over time, intervention studies that test the efficacy of specific pedagogical approaches, and comparative analyses across districts and states to identify best practices.

Ultimately, fostering coherence competence is not merely an academic exercise—it is a gateway to effective communication, critical thinking, and meaningful participation in the knowledge economy. For the students of Rangareddy, and for the thousands of intermediate learners across India, the ability to write coherently in English is not just a curricular requirement; it is a life skill with profound implications for academic achievement, professional success, and social mobility.

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