Analysis of Cohesion and Coherence in Writing Performance of Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners

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Abstract

The main concern of this study was to identify Iranian intermediate EFL learners' problems in cohesion and coherence of writing performance as well as the extent to which they utilized cohesion and coherence in their writing. The ability to compose a piece of descriptive text is important for EFL and ESL learners. Despite its significance, there is a gap in the literature about how Iranian EFL learners write essays in this genre, which this study intends to fill. The research design involved the utilization of mixed research method in addressing the research questions. The study addressed a corpus of 40 intermediate language learners' descriptive essays, 10 experienced teachers teaching at the intermediate level as the questionnaire respondents, and the answers of four interviewees' from those volunteer experienced teachers. The results of the study revealed that lack of cohesion and coherence in the participants' essays and their writing performance in terms of these two variables was not acceptable. Therefore, the obtained findings, by implication, indicated that they had neither some aspects of cohesive and coherent writing, nor had enough support, practice and feedback on their written text in terms of cohesion and coherence. Some pedagogical implications of this study would be applicable to the language learners' writing in terms of these two aforementioned variables. Moreover, the results were expected to aid in setting the writing sections of classes for improvement of language learners' written texts, particularly in terms of cohesion and coherence.

*Keywords***:** Cohesion, Coherence, Writing Performance, Intermediate EFL Learner

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INTRODUCTION

Writing involves the development of a designed idea and mental representations of knowledge as well as the experience of writers. It is a major challenge for many English as a foreign language learners in Iranian universities where they have to pass many courses in English; nevertheless, they still experience some problems in the cohesion and coherence of their writing. Pointing to the importance of these two concepts, de Beaugrande and Dessler (1981) asserted that cohesion and coherence represent two standards of the text.

Hasan (1984) formulated a theory that cohesion contributes to coherence. In his theory, the degree and frequency of interaction among cohesive ties characterized coherence. Several researchers highlighted that overt markers of cohesion are not enough to make a unified text. In the same vein, they proposed that cohesion and coherence are two clearly separate phenomena without any influence on each other, and they also mentioned that coherence or unity is between the propositional units in the text (Brown & Yule, 1983; de Beaugrande & Dessler, 1981; Ellis, 1992; Enkvist, 1978; Hellman, 1995; Lundquist, 1985; Sandford & Moxey, 1995). Compared to the covert ties created by coherence, overt markers of cohesion are only of second importance in the unity of a text (Enkvist, 1978, 1990; Widdowson, 1978). Researchers with different views considered cohesion and coherence as separate but related concepts. Halliday and Hasan (1976) noted that the most important factors for the coherent text is cohesive harmony or the interaction between chains of cohesive ties. Furthermore, he proposed that cohesive ties should be considered in combination, not in isolation, with other ties.

The rhetorical conventions of English texts - structure, style, organization - are often different from those in Persian language, and consequently, EFL learners are required to recognize and learn the differences. In Iran, the education system emphasizes writing for taking tests. The officials of the educational system conduct different approaches

and remedial programs to overcome the decontextualization of writing, but they have not succeeded. Therefore, the rhetorical conventions of English texts, including cohesion and coherence, are areas which require further research attention with the aim of providing writers with the chance to reveal their true writing competence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cohesion

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 4), cohesion is achieved "when the interpretation of some elements in discourse is dependent on that of another, the one presupposes the other". They believe the major contributors to the text's unity are semantic and syntactic links between pairs of elements in a text. They also proposed the various parts of a paragraph are connected by cohesive ties as well as sentences in a text. They believe the writer establishes the structure of meaning in the related sentences called cohesion. It indicates whether a text is well-connected or merely a group of unrelated sentences. They also stated that cohesion does not concern a text meaning and does not lead to the global flow of a text across paragraphs. "If a passage of English containing more than one sentence is perceived as a text, there will be certain linguistic features present in that passage which can be identified as contributing to its total unity" (p. 2).

Halliday and Hasan (1976) added such "text connectives, which help readers recognize how texts are organized, and how different parts of the text are connected to each other functionally or semantically" are referred to as cohesive ties (as cited in Connor, 1996, p. 49). Cohesion is both a semantic and syntactic phenomenon which is achieved when "a dominant term, explicit or implicit, occupies concurrently the most important semantic position in the paragraph" (Markel, 1983, p. 453). A dominant term should consistently appear in the subject position; otherwise, the cohesion of the paragraph is affected.

According to Hoey (1991), the most important cohesive tie is lexical

cohesion. Thereby, "the study of cohesion in text is to a considerable degree the study of patterns of lexis in text" (p. 10).

Cohesion is provided through the operation of theme-rheme (Lovejoy & Lance, 1991). Considering theme, "the 'point of departure' for the presentation of information", and rheme "constitutes the information the writer wishes to impact about the theme" (Lovejoy & Lance, 1991, p. 256). Theme as old information and rheme as new information presented alternatively in a text or discourse are established to flow along smoothly and to be understood easier by the reader.

Grammatical and Lexical Cohesive Devices

Halliday and Hasan (1976) discovered two categories of cohesive devices: Grammatical cohesive devices which cover reference, ellipsis, substitution and conjunction as well as lexical cohesive devices which consist of reiteration and collocation.

Grammatical Cohesive Devices

***Reference*:** Halliday and Hasan (1976) classified reference into personal reference, demonstrative reference, and comparative reference. Personal references such as *she, he, it, his, her,* and *their* refer to earlier items. As for demonstratives, they are also utilized for referential purposes such as *the, this, that,* and *those.* Comparative reference is represented through general comparison and particular comparison. Any particular feature is associated with general comparison (for example *so, as, equal, similar, different, otherwise, likewise) w*hile comparison that is in respect of quantity or quality refers to particular comparison (for instance *more, fewer, additional, better, equally good*).

Ellipsis and Substitution: Another type of grammatical cohesive devices has two forms: Substitution and ellipsis. Substitution takes three types of nominal, verbal, and clausal. In nominal substitution, the words *one* and

ones are the most typical substitution which always function as the head of a nominal group. The most common word in verbal substitution is the verb *do* which operates as the head of a verbal group and is sometimes used in conjunction with *so*. Examples:

- *Let's go and see the shirts. The small ones are over there.*
- *Did Ali take those papers? He might have done.*
- *She advised him to see a dentist, but he said that he didn't have enough time to do so.*

In clausal substitution, what is substituted is not an element but an entire clause. Examples:

- *I think so.*
- *Everyone thinks she is guilty. If so, no doubt she will resign.*

Ellipsis (zero substitution) is "something left unsaid" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 142). We say that substitution replaces one word with another, whereas ellipsis is the absence of that word which can be found in the preceding text. There are three types of ellipsis, like substitution: Nominal, verbal and clausal. Examples:

- *Do you want to eat another fruit? I have two more (fruit). [Nominal Ellipsis]*
- *Ahmad bought fruits and Reza (bought) food. [Verbal Ellipsis]*
- *Susan ran three miles on the first day and six on the second. [Clausal Ellipsis]*

Conjunction: One way of creating cohesion is through conjunctions which are not a way of simply joining sentences because they provide information for the interpretation of the utterance by the listener/reader. It is the reason to be described discourse markers by some linguists. Implicit conjunctions deduce from correctly interpreting the text. Conjunctions are classified into four main categories: Additive, adversative, causal and temporal. Additive

conjunctions structurally link to the presupposed item and include *and, also, moreover, too, additionally,* etc. Adversative conjunctions indicate contrary to expectation such as *yet, though, only, but, in fact, rather,* etc. Causal conjunctions show result, reason and purpose and include *so, then, for, because, for this reason,* etc. or they are expressed by verbs such as *cause* and *lead.* Temporal conjunctions coordinate by signaling sequence or time. They are signaled by *then, next, after that, next day,* etc. or expressed by means of a verb as in *follow* or *precede that* may reflect stages in the text by *first, second, third,* etc.

Lexical Cohesive Devices

Lexical cohesion is achieved by the selection of vocabulary and is non-grammatical. The two basic forms of lexical cohesion are reiteration and collocation.

Reiteration: Reiteration is the repetition of the same word, or a synonym, an antonym, etc. It is categorized into repetition, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy and metonymy.
Example:
A: *Which dress is she going to wear?*
B: *She will wear her brown frock.*

In the above example, the synonyms *dress* and *frock* are utilized for lexical cohesion.

Collocation: Collocation employs related words that tend to co-occur. It is the most problematic part of lexical cohesion and interpreted based on a general semantic description of English language, e.g., *once upon a time.*

2. The Effect of Grade Level on Learners' Use of Cohesion
All researchers employed Halliday and Hasan's (1976) taxonomy to

determine the developmental aspects of writing quality. It is more effective than error analysis and syntactic analysis. Ferris's (1994) study analyzed a corpus of 160 ESL students' compositions at different levels. The findings showed a range of syntactic and lexical tools as well as a variety of cohesive devices. More lexical repetition is used by less advanced students. Crowhurst (1987) investigated the cohesive ties used at three grade levels. It showed repetition, pronouns, demonstratives, and the definite article as the most frequent kinds of cohesive devices, in addition to significant increase in the use of synonyms and collocation with grade level; whereas, infrequency of causal and temporal conjunctives, exophora, and repetition were revealed with grade level that indicated their vocabulary development as well as an ability to elaborate arguments. His findings corresponded to those of Witte and Faigley (1981), Stotsky (1983), and McCulley (1985). The major similarities between the results of these researchers indicated that the writers employed more lexis as their lexical proficiency level promoted. The differences refer to the population of the study and their level of proficiency as well as the type of writing, whether it is narrative, expository, descriptive, or argumentative, etc.

Liu and Braine's (2005) study analyzed cohesive ties used in argumentative compositions written by 96 first year Chinese undergraduate non-English majors. The findings showed the students were not able to use cohesive devices in writing proficiently and needed teaching materials with a wide range of cohesion and coherence skills, as well as enough writing feedback.

Ahmed (2010) investigated Egyptian student teachers' cohesion and coherence problems in EFL essay writing. A mixed method research design including a questionnaire and a semi-structured in-depth interview was used in his study. Fourteen student teachers of English were selected to be interviewed. In addition, seven essay writing lecturers filled in the questionnaire and were interviewed. The results revealed that there are psychological, sociocultural and context factors, teaching level as well as socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors involved in the lack of cohesion

and coherence of Egyptian EFL essay writing.

Vahid Dastjerdi and Hayati Samian (2011) investigated the use of cohesive devices and also the relationship between the number of cohesive devices and writing quality in the argumentative essays of 40 Iranian graduate non-English majors. After teaching basic writing skills, different genres and styles, they were expected to write different types of essays. The results indicated that they had knowledge of cohesive devices and used them in their essay writing. Regarding cohesive devices, lexical devices had the largest percentage of use, followed by reference and conjunction devices. For the second phase of their study, the results revealed "there was no significant relationship between the number of cohesive devices used and quality of writing" (p. 65). Further research has to be established on descriptive essays of Iranian intermediate EFL learners to determine whether similar results could be obtained.

Coherence

Bain (1890) defined coherence in terms of between-sentence connections that create tightly-structured and autonomous paragraphs. Two approaches to coherence are distinguished, namely text-based and reader-based coherence. Regarding Halliday and Hasan's (1976) view, the text-based approach is associated with semantic unity of text that is achieved by linguistic features or cohesive ties. They employed the term "texture" to refer to coherence. Considering a text-based coherence, the information should be presented in a well-organized way with appropriate cohesive ties.

With respect to the reader-based approach, successful interaction between the reader and the text through the reader's text knowledge and world knowledge make a coherent text (Carrel, 1982; de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981; Morgan & Sellner, 1980; Rumelhart, 1977; Webber, 1980; Widdowson, 1978). In other words, the realization of textual coherence is based on the context, the knowledge, and imagination of an individual reader and not the writer of the text. Therefore, following prior conducted

research, this study investigated the cohesion and coherence problems of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' writing performance.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore Iranian intermediate EFL learners' cohesion and coherence problems as well as the extent to which they observe cohesion and coherence in their writing. EFL learners encounter certain problems in learning writing because learning the writing skill is more laborious than other language skills. In fact, producing a coherent piece of writing is an enormous challenge, especially in one's second language. Thus, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

Q1. To what extend do Iranian intermediate EFL learners observe cohesion and coherence in their writing?

Q2. What are the cohesion and coherence problems of Iranian Intermediate EFL learners in their writing?

METHOD

Participants

The current study was conducted with 59 female participants studying at one of the branches of Kish Language Institute in Tehran, Iran. A homogeneity test was administered, and 40 participants were selected from intermediate level EFL learners, their age ranged between sixteen to twenty five years old.

Instrumentation

To achieve the aim of this study, the following instruments were applied: PET as the homogeneity test, the essays with a certain topic, questionnaire, and interviews.

PET as Homogeneity Test

A version of Preliminary English Test (PET) written by Quintana (2003) was administered on a pool of 59 language learners to homogenize the subjects in terms of language proficiency at the beginning of the study. Therefore, forty intermediate language learners whose scores were one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean score were selected as homogeneous participants for the study.

Essays with a Certain Topic

Taking into account the research questions, the participants were asked to write a descriptive essay with the topic "What are the important qualities of a good son or daughter? Why?". Each essay had to include one paragraph with 250 words. This investigation analyzed coherence and cohesive devices used in the participants' writing.

Questionnaire

The research questions for this study led the researcher to develop a questionnaire. A modified version of the questionnaire with the Likert-type questions and closed-ended items was adopted from Rummel (2005). It was piloted with the participation of four English teachers as university students who were similar to the respondents of the questionnaire for this study in a different region. The 17 questionnaire items included two Likert type questions on the five-point scale: 5 = often; 4 = sometimes; 3 = seldom; 2 = never; 1 = hard to say, and two closed-ended items. These questions were concerned with (1) intermediate language learners' problems in coherent and cohesive writing, (2) the aspects of coherent and cohesive writing for which intermediate language learners require support, (3) the aspects of coherent and cohesive writing that teachers consider important in improving the readability of intermediate language learners' written texts, and (4) the sentences that intermediate language learners prefer to combine. The questionnaire reliability was also estimated as 0.81 using Cronbach's Alpha.

Finally, it was given to 10 experienced teachers in teaching writing at the intermediate level. The self-responding questionnaire helped to answer the questions of this study.

Interviews

Using interviews is deemed to be useful to ensure the reliability of the teachers' responses to the questionnaire. It set the scene to ask the teachers' interpretation of each item as well as their answers. The two following open-ended questions were adapted from the questionnaire.

1. What problems do intermediate language learners have in coherent and cohesive writing?
2. In what aspects of coherent and cohesive writing do intermediate language learners require support?

   Four volunteer teachers who participated in responding the abovementioned questionnaire were individually interviewed.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection of this study described step by step which is as follows:

Fifty nine language learners at the intermediate level were selected from a language institute in Tehran. After administering PET, 40 language learners were selected. The researcher noted they were supposed to write a cohesive and coherent text. Meanwhile, the participants were asked to write a descriptive essay with a given topic. Three teachers who had at least 5 years of experience in teaching composition classes rated the essays and ranked them on the basis of coherence. For the first phase of data analysis, Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion taxonomy was used to examine the kinds of cohesive ties used in descriptive essays. Subsequently, the researcher gave a questionnaire to four experienced teachers in order to pilot the questionnaire. Later, she gave the piloted one to another 10 experienced teachers at this level. Finally, four teachers among those 10 experienced ones were voluntarily interviewed in their language school.

The research design involved the utilization of mixed research method in addressing the research questions. The methodology involved examination of questionnaire responses and interview results of experienced teachers as well as the EFL participants' essays for finding their cohesion and coherence problems besides the extent to which they utilized cohesion and coherence. This study was designed to gain an understanding in the interpretation of cohesion and coherence of participants' essay. It is noticeable that qualitative research offers "the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education," because it is "focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspective of those being studied" (Merriam, 1998, p. 1).

Data Analysis

The data for this study is based on qualitative and quantitative analysis of 40 descriptive essays, qualitative and quantitative analysis of 10 questionnaire responses by teachers, and qualitative data of voluntarily interviews from those experienced teachers. The questionnaire and interview questions provided prompts that helped to identify the difficulties in writing in terms of cohesion and coherence which Iranian intermediate language learners encounter.

RESULTS

This section deals with reliability statistics, homogeneous test results (PET), qualitative and quantitative analysis of language learners' essays, qualitative and quantitative analysis of questionnaire, qualitative data, and discussion. In order to ensure the reliability index of the cohesion and coherence questionnaire test used in this study, a group of four teachers who were similar to the main population of the study participated in the pilot phase. The results show the first draft of the questionnaire included 21 items, and four items which had unacceptable reliability index were deleted. The reliability of the final version of cohesion and coherence questionnaire that

consisted of 17 items was estimated at 0.81 using Cronbach's Alpha, which is a good indicator of internal consistency.

Homogeneity Test Results (PET)

A group of 59 students took PET to be selected as the homogeneous intermediate participants. The descriptive statistics indicate that the mean score (71.20), median (71) and mode (62) with the standard deviation of 9.83 are not very far from each other. The PET scores have normal distribution as the ratios of skewness and kurtosis over their respective standard errors do not exceed the ranges of +/- 1.96. Based on PET results, those students ($N = 40$) whose scores were one standard deviation (9.83) minus and plus the mean (71.20), (scores between 61 and 81) were chosen as homogeneous intermediate participants for the study.

Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Language Learners' Essays

A. Text-Based Coherence

Some common design flaw in the participants' essays are as follows. To begin with, as many as 55% of the participants expressed their thought with minimal development and the sentences lacked coherent relationship. Next, 60% of them did not elaborate on their introduction fully and formulated it in 3-4 sentences. Finally, a common pitfall of their writing was the conclusions within insufficient length, too short and/or incomplete conclusions, as well as the inability to give the reader a sense of finality, which is called *clincher,* while, 32.5% of participants produced conclusions of sufficient length.

Cohesive Devices Used in Descriptive Essays: According to Halliday and Hassan's (1976) cohesion taxonomy, there are five main types of cohesive relations which include pronoun reference (he, she, it, this, etc.), conjunctions (but, also, therefore, etc.), ellipsis, substitution, and lexical cohesive ties. Halliday and Hasan's cohesive framework was used as the

basis to analyze the type and number of cohesive devices in each descriptive essay. Although the highest percentage (67.5%) of participants combined short and long sentences, it is considerable that the participants utilized fewer synonyms as well as less lexical variety. As many as 17.5% of the participants at the intermediate level combined short sentences and 15% of the participants utilized a number of long, complex sentences in their written text. The frequencies and percentages of two subcategories of grammatical and lexical cohesive devices employed in language learners' essays indicate that language learners used lexical cohesive devices (51.59%) more than grammatical cohesive devices (48.41%).

Grammatical Devices Used in Essays: Regarding grammatical cohesion, participants employed reference (56.90%) with the largest percentage, followed by conjunction (41.00%), substitution (2.10%) with a small percentage, and no occurrence of ellipsis.

Lexical Devices Used in Essays: Considering the length of essays, 22.5% of the participants failed to reach the minimum word requirement. They produced texts ranged between 150 to 200 words. As for lexical devices, repetition (79.56%) accounted for a high percentage followed by synonym (7.98%), collocation (6.25%), antonym (4.14%), and superordinate (2.07%).

Reference Devices Used in Essays: The participants used pronominal devices (48.83%) more frequently than the definite article (21.17%) followed by comparative devices (18.02%) and demonstratives (11.98 %) with the least percentage of use.

Conjunction Devices Used in Essay: Four subcategories of conjunction devices are additive, adversative, causal and temporal. Additive devices (43.99%) occupied the largest percentage of use followed by temporal devices (28.13%), the adversatives (15%) and causal devices (12.88%).
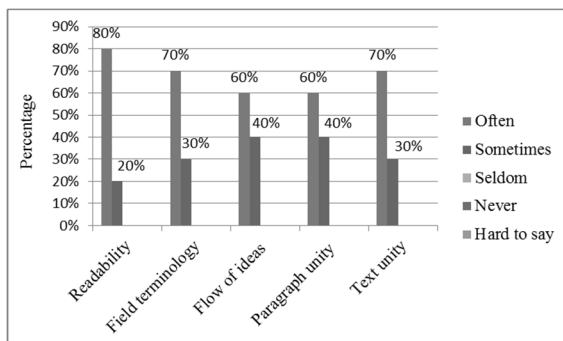
B. Reader-Based Coherence

Reader-based coherence refers to readability of text. It is a difficult task for Iranian intermediate language learners because of their inability to apply the structural principles of text organization in their essays. They loaded the text with irrelevant information not easy for the reader to follow.

Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Questionnaire

The questionnaire was delivered by e-mail to 10 experienced teachers in teaching writing at the intermediate level. In filling the questionnaire, all teachers provided complete responses to Likert-type questions and closed-ended items. The questionnaire questions and responses are as follows:

Question 1: What problems do intermediate language learners have in coherent and cohesive writing?
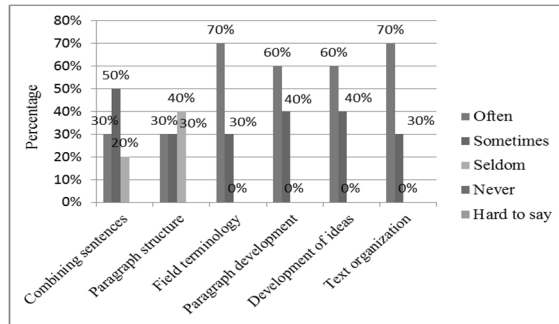
Figure 1 shows that 80% of the teachers considered the issue of text readability as one of the greatest problems in writing which 70% of the answers reflected in *field terminology* and *text unity*. Considering the *flow of ideas* and *paragraph unity*, the responses reflected 60%. The responses are corresponding to the results of the intermediate language learners' essay analysis.

Figure 1. Language learners' problems in coherent & cohesive writing

Question 2: In what aspects of coherent and cohesive writing do intermediate language learners require support?

As can be seen in Figure 2, a significant portion of the responses revealed the teachers' concern about the intermediate language learners' insufficient knowledge of *field terminology* and *text organization* (70%) in addition to *paragraph development* and *development of ideas* (60%). Surprisingly, as much as 40% of the responses indicated   *paragraph structure* and *combining sentences* (20%) are not problematic for the intermediate language learners.
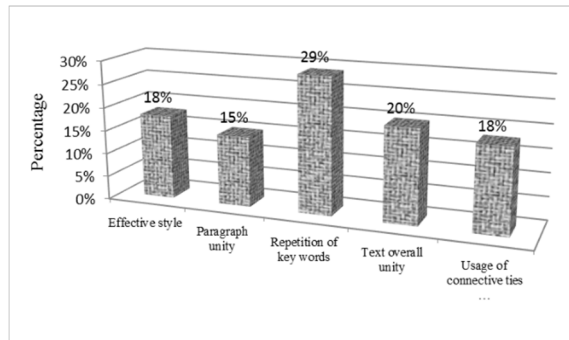

Figure2. Aspects of coherent and cohesive writing that intermediate language learners require support

Question 3: What aspects of coherent and cohesive writing do you consider important in improving the readability of intermediate language learners' written texts?

Figure 3 indicates that 29% of the respondents placed significantly higher value on *repetition of key words*. As much as 20%, 15% and 18% of responses, respectively, were dedicated to *text overall unity*, *paragraph unity* and *effective style* in improving the readability of learners' written texts. The results of intermediate language learners' essay analysis pointed out considerable flaws in these components of writing in terms of cohesion
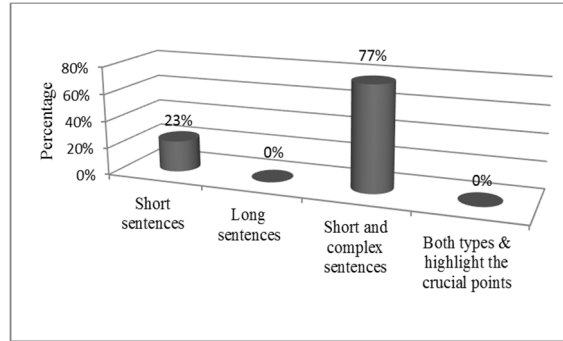
and coherence.

Figure 3. Important aspects of coherent and cohesive writing in improving readability of intermediate language learners' written texts

Question 4: Which sentences do intermediate language learners prefer to combine?

All teachers pointed out intermediate language learners prefer short and long sentences. The result of quantitative and qualitative analysis of intermediate language learners' essays to some extent corresponds with the teachers' responses in this study. As mentioned before, as many as 67.5% utilized both types of sentences in their essays to vary the style, and as many as 17.5% of participants at the intermediate level combined short sentences because of their limited knowledge for combining sentences. Three teachers responded with short sentences as well as to both types of sentences. It indicates that intermediate language learners with a lack of knowledge for combining sentences as well as difficulties in other components of cohesive and coherent writing had to use short sentences in order to make the text clear for the reader.

Figure 4. Sentences that intermediate language learners prefer to combine

Qualitative Data

The interview was designed to seek the interviewees' perception of cohesion and coherence problems of intermediate language learners besides the aspects of coherent and cohesive writing in which they need support. For this purpose, four volunteer teachers who participated in responding the above-mentioned questionnaire were individually interviewed in their language institute. The open-ended informal interviews in Persian were carried out on a voluntary basis after the teachers completed the self-reporting questionnaire. The interviews were recorded, translated and transcribed with the permission of the participants. The self-reporting questionnaires served as a basis for the interviews. Their reflections were expected to contribute towards a qualitative analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire as well as the intermediate language learners' essays foundation in terms of commonalities in teachers' reflections.

The Results of Interview with Teachers

The experienced teachers put forward that the limited time for the writing section in each class was a crucial problem. They believed teaching writing in terms of cohesion and coherence as well as writing skill as a whole require an extended course that language institutes should provide as supporting learning. One of them stated:

Language learners' awareness in all aspects of cohesive and coherent writing is the underpinning reason of their problems in writing. Their problems are development of their ideas, readability, field terminology, and text unity. These problems are closely interrelated. Teaching these aspects takes considerable time and we should extend the writing section of language classes.

Advanced limited reading experience was another cause of the intermediate language learners' written text flaws. Two interviewees respectively mentioned:

Cohesion is actually the essential feature of coherence. Language learners' vocabulary cannot let them convey what they really want to write. Consequently, they cut those expressions off and write new expressions which are easier to explain.

Language learners do not think in English as well as not speaking English outside the class. They do not read enough English materials. Besides those aforementioned reasons, teachers do not concentrate that much on writing in terms of cohesion and coherence regarding time constraints.

All experienced teachers stressed the language learners' flaws in cohesive devices and components of coherent writing. Their statements replicated the intermediate language learners' essays foundation as well as the questionnaire responses. An excerpt from this interview is as follows:

On the one hand, language learners are aware of some aspects of coherence. On the other hand, they do not know all of them; for example, they know their written text should have a topic sentence and each of the ideas in the text should be related to the main idea. Their problems

concentrate on lack of transitional words, text organization and unity, insufficient introduction and conclusion as well as readability. Another problem highlights language learners' lack of lexical knowledge in which they require support.

DISCUSSION

Investigating the First Research Question

The first research question was "To what extent do Iranian intermediate EFL learners observe cohesion and coherence in their writing?" To answer it, 40 descriptive essays were scrutinized in terms of cohesion and coherence. In addition, ten questionnaire responses and four interviewees' answers were analyzed. The results revealed that intermediate language learners' written texts were not cohesive and coherent enough at all and they require support more in text organization and unity, paragraph unity, field terminology, development of ideas, and readability of written text, which are interrelated.

This study corroborates the findings of Vahid Dastjerdi and Hayati Samian (2011) in which reference was the dominant pattern of cohesion observed in the learners' compositions. Conjunction obtained the largest percentage of use after references while ellipsis and substitution occurred less frequently. On the one hand, based on the criterion mentioned in the literature, the low frequency of substitution and the absence of ellipsis might indicate that being able to define these grammatical cohesive devices by language learners might not guarantee they were able to apply them to their writing. On the other hand, ellipsis and substitution occur in responses in spontaneous conversations with the writer's choice and not a compulsory feature (McCarthy, 1991, p. 43). The percentages of cohesive devices of their study were different from those in this study, which refer to the level of participants and genre of essays. Besides, the data collection method was different and their study had both male and female participants (20 male and 20 female).

Investigating the Second Research Question

The second research question was "What are the cohesion and coherence problems of Iranian intermediate EFL learners in their writing?" As mentioned earlier, 40 essays, 10 questionnaire responses, and four interviewees' answers were analyzed. The results indicated Iranian intermediate EFL learners' coherence problems such as difficulty in writing the thesis statement, transition of ideas, and concluding sentences. The high rating attributed by the questionnaire respondents to *field terminology*, *text organization*, *paragraph development* and *development of ideas* as the aspects in which intermediate language learners require support may indicate the learners were not aware of the discourse and rhetorical aspects of language. These findings are compatible with the study of Ahmed (2010). The difference between his research and the current study is qualitative interpretation of Egyptian student teachers' cohesion and coherence problems with respect to psychological, socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-economic, contexts as well as the teaching level. The researcher elaborated psychological causes such as lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation, and writing anxiety in addition to cultural differences between Arabic and English speech communities, which were directly responsible for the lack of coherence as well as different use of cohesive devices in the two languages. Another difference is the triangulated collected data and different research method based on the aforementioned design in the current study.

The interviewees of this study noted the lack of development of the main idea, low English proficiency, limited reading experience, making a broad statement in the opening section of their essay before introducing the topic sentence, overusing coordinate sentences, and misusing topic sentence as the common problems in the intermediate language learners' written texts.

According to the interviewees' assertions, language learners'

problems in expanding their ideas, the introduction, the body, and the conclusion, or local coherence and the lack of development of the main idea have been associated with lack of sufficient knowledge of macrostructures, limited reading experience, low English proficiency and lexical problems, as well as limited time for the writing section of classes. This indicated that being aware of macrostructures of writing does not guarantee language learners apply it to their writing. The results correspond with the claims that coherence is an elusive concept (Johns, 1986; Lee, 1998, 2002a, 2002b). It also corresponds to Carrell's (1982) criticism on cohesion:

> Cohesion is not the cause of coherence; if anything, it's the effect of coherence. A coherent text will likely be cohesive, not of necessity, but   as a result of that coherence. Bonding an incoherent text together won't   make it coherent, only cohesive. (p. 486)

The overuse of additives, especially '*and*' as well as '*also*' and rarely used others like *'furthermore', 'despite this', 'to this purpose'* made the language learners' essays look redundant and misleading. Furthermore, it confirms the fact that they had difficulty with using the other conjunction devices.

Moreover, an inspection of Vahid Dastjerdi and Hayati Samian's (2011) study indicated that the greater use of cohesive devices in writing did not indicate better writing quality, which correspond with this research. Crowhurst (1987) and McCulley (1985), in addition to Guiju's (2005) results, stated that the participants who had more knowledge about using different cohesive ties could write more coherent well-organized compositions. They repeated the vocabulary items less and chose greater variety in words and conjunctions. They stated that the differences in the quality of language learners' persuasive writing are related to the use of certain linguistic devices like cohesive ties. The findings of the current study supports those of Khalil (1989); Zhang (2000); Vahid Dastjerdi and Hayati

Samian (2011) studies in terms of the tendency to repeat words and phrases in addition to a limited knowledge of vocabulary and using them in the text.

The findings of the current study show the questionnaire responses correspond to the results of intermediate language learners' essay analysis and interviews in case of lack of readability in which 80% of those responses belong to this flaw. The essays were as well loaded with irrelevant information not easy for the reader to follow. The interviewees mentioned Iranian intermediate language learners' problems are development of their ideas, readability, field terminology and text unity. As mentioned before, as many as 55% of intermediate language learners had problems with development of ideas, and 60% of those did not elaborate on their introduction fully, while only 32.5% produced conclusions of sufficient length. In the same vein, insufficient knowledge of *field terminology* and *text organization* (70%) in addition to *paragraph development* and *development of ideas* (60%) are the responses of questionnaire respondents. These two parts of evidence are only a section of the collected data in which the interviewees' statements replicate the intermediate language learners' essays foundation as well as the questionnaire responses. Taken together, the results indicated a convergence of collected data among the language learners' essay analysis, questionnaire responses, and interviewees' assertions in terms of intermediate language learners' cohesion and coherence problems in writing performance.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

It is concluded that teaching cohesive and coherent writing appear to be invalid in English language classes. The findings of the study proved lack of cohesion and coherence in the intermediate language learners' essays. Regarding text-based coherence, it was found that Iranian intermediate language learners represented the following flaws:

- 55% of intermediate language learners' problems were paragraph

development and development of ideas.
- A common pitfall of their writing was field terminology. Their essay conclusions did not reword the topic sentence or some of their conclusions were not strong enough.

The collected data from interviews indicated that intermediate language learners were not aware of the discourse and rhetorical aspects of language as well as paragraph and text unity. Their vocabulary could not let them convey what they really want to write as they had not read enough English material.

Considering reader-based coherence, the language learners' greatest problem was text readability because of their inability to apply the structural principles of text organization in their essays. With respect to questionnaire responses, repetition of key words, overall text unity, paragraph unity, and effective style were important in improving the readability of intermediate language learners' written text.

Regarding the cohesion of their writing performance, they used lexical devices with the highest percentage of the total number of cohesive devices followed by reference devices and conjunctions, respectively. Language learners tended to repeat words and phrases because of limited vocabulary knowledge, in which they required support as one interviewee mentioned. They most frequently used some conjunctions and rarely used some others, like *'nonetheless'*, *'on the other hand'*. This confirmed the fact that most of them had difficulty using the other conjunction devices and employed the simple ones as they feel comfortable using them. Substitution with small percentage and no occurrence of ellipsis, as well as the overuse of additives, indicated that being able to define these grammatical cohesive devices by language learners might not guarantee they were able to apply them to their writing.

These results implied intermediate language learners' writing performances in terms of coherence and cohesion were not acceptable. Moreover, they were not aware of some aspects of cohesive and coherent

writing in which they had problems and required support.

The results of this study were expected to aid in setting the course for improvements of language learners' writing in terms of cohesion and coherence. The researcher's interest was to motivate researchers to call for teaching discourse markers and to make learners aware of the importance of coherence and cohesion while writing English. Some pedagogical implications can be drawn which may be applicable to other EFL contexts. A pedagogic model is what is urgently needed and should take into account the following criteria:

- Coherence should be taught explicitly and language learners should be aware of the interface of both text-based and reader-based components of coherence. In other words, their quality of writing corresponds to understanding of the concept, as Lee (1998) proposed.
- The results of the study can inform teachers to focus more on complex conjunction devices in their teaching.
- It is time for English language teachers to consider the implications of local coherence (Swales, 1990) in teaching as well as global coherence or macrostructure of the composition.

Language learners have to be reminded that a good writing has two components of language skills and writing skills. The teacher should make an explicit distinction between the accurate use of grammar as well as a good range of vocabulary and writing skills. Each of the two components of good writing has to be taught in special lessons, provided with opportunities for practice, and given feedback on their written texts. In most cases, language learners are aware of different types of cohesive devices, albeit they simply cannot employ them properly.

The findings can practically concentrate instructors on teaching effective cohesive and coherent writing, particularly in Iran. Exploring the growth of cohesion and coherence in writing performance of language

learners that results from a variety of instructional sources and the time duration of this improvement remains a fruitful area for further research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Essay Topic

What are the important qualities of a good son or daughter? Why?

Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. What problems do intermediate language learners have in coherent and cohesive writing?   often   sometimes   seldom   never   hard to say
   - Readability
   - Field terminology
   - Flow of ideas
   - Paragraph unity
   - Text unity
2. In what aspects of coherent and cohesive writing do intermediate language learners require support?

   often   sometimes   seldom   never   hard to say
   - Combining sentences
   - Paragraph structure
   - Field terminology
   - Paragraph development
   - Development of ideas
   - Text organization
3. What aspects of coherent and cohesive writing do you consider important in improving the readability of intermediate language learners' written texts?
   - Effective style (variety of structures)
   - Paragraph unity (development of the main idea with examples and details)
   - Repetition of key words (with focus on important ideas or details)
   - Text overall unity (logical development of the text; the introduction, the

body and the conclusion; logical flow of ideas, etc.)

- Usage of connective ties and transitional words (logical development of ideas, e.g., by means of *'however'*, *simultaneously'*, etc.)

4.   Which sentences do intermediate language learners prefer to combine?

- They prefer short sentences in order to make the text clear for the reader.
- They prefer long sentences (2-3 lines) in order to handle the issue adequately.
- They combine both types of sentences, short and complex sentences, to vary the style.
- They combine both types of sentences and highlight the crucial points in short sentences