

Article

An Appraisal of Paragraph Unity and Coherence in Writing

Joseph Amonoo Sekyi ^{1,*}, Gifty Emma Gyima-Aboagye ², Abudulai Rauf ²¹ Department of Languages, Komenda College of Education, Komenda, Ghana² Department of Humanities and Social Science Education, University for Development Studies, Tamale, Ghana

*Correspondence: Joseph Amonoo Sekyi (amonoosekyi@gmail.com)

Abstract: Good academic writing requires a good combination of cohesive ties and coherent features in the text. This study aimed to assess whether paragraph unity and coherence in writing were achieved among students of the Komenda College of Education concerning gender. Lakoff's Theory underpinned the study. The quantitative approach and a descriptive research design were used in the study. The sample size was 60 (40 males and 20 females). Level 200 students from the Komenda College of Education Department of English were selected using census techniques. The instruments used for data collection were text items and questionnaires. Paragraphs written by the students were analysed using narratives, and quantitative data was analysed using mean, standard deviation and the independent samples t-test. The study revealed that male students have a higher mean score than female students. The study also concluded that there was no significant difference between male and female students regarding achieving paragraph unity and coherence in writing. In other words, gender does not influence how paragraph unity and coherence are achieved in writing – males and females are statistically the same. It is recommended that the principals of the various colleges of education in Ghana encourage the college tutors and the Student Representative Council (SRC) leadership to introduce a programme which engages college students in competitive writing without gender barriers. This programme will ensure that students compete by writing academic papers, demonstrating their knowledge of achieving unity and coherence in writing. This programme can be done every academic year, and an equal number of males and females are presented yearly.

Keywords: Paragraph, Unity, Coherence, Writing**How to cite this paper:**

Sekyi, J. A., Gyima-Aboagye, G. E., & Rauf, A. (2024). An Appraisal of Paragraph Unity and Coherence in Writing. *Universal Journal of Literature and Linguistics*, 4(1), 55–71. Retrieved from <https://www.scipublications.com/journal/index.php/ujll/article/view/1077>

Received: May 5, 2023**Revised:** September 1, 2023**Accepted:** July 24, 2024**Published:** September 22, 2024

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1. Introduction

Gender is the relationship between men and women, both perception and material [1]. Gender is neither biological nor has anything to do with the sexual characteristics of either men or women. From these, it can be inferred that gender encompasses sex issues [2]. Since there are gender differences in speech patterns of both sexes, there is the need to note and understand them to avoid unnecessarily blaming others or damaging the relationships and the effects of contrasting conversational styles [3]. Language is a principal communication system used by a particular group of human beings within a particular society of which they are members. There are variations in how people use language to present their messages [4]. Women's speech can be distinguished from men's in different ways. As Lakoff says, women hedge their language more often than men do. In addition, language plays a vital role in students' academic lives in tertiary institutions as it serves as the scholarly medium through which academic community members interact. One aspect of language taught in schools is writing. Writing is crucial to English for Academic Purpose (EAP) since it is used to communicate and express the learners' ideas [6, 7].

One aspect of writing that is essential is paragraphing. According to Zemach, the paragraph is a group of related sentences dealing with a specific topic. A paragraph is a unit of information unified by a central idea as a topic sentence [8, 9]. Good academic writing requires a good combination of cohesive ties and coherent features in the text. According to Halliday, cohesion refers to the relations of meaning within the text and is expressed through the strategic organisation of the texts. The writer further posits that cohesion is expressed partly through grammar and text vocabulary. Therefore, it means there can be two types of cohesion: grammatical and lexical. Grammatical cohesion is the tie expressed through a language's grammatical system, such as reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction [10].

However, attention has yet to be given to the comparison of paragraphs written by male students and female students of colleges of education since these colleges' attainment of tertiary status in 2012. Even though male and female students at the colleges of education have yet to achieve paragraph unity and coherence consistently, this, from the researcher's experience as a college tutor, has influenced students' writings. Existing studies have mainly focused on features such as concord, spelling and grammar found in essay writing, with no attention given to paragraph writing and how male students achieve coherence and unity in paragraphs compared to female students, even though concord, spelling and grammar that prior studies looked at are all required in the construction of coherent and unified paragraphs. Thus, it is not easy to ascertain how the findings from those prior studies have been applied to writing coherent and unified paragraphs and how they have shaped how coherence and unity are achieved in paragraphs.

This situation has compelled the researchers to fill the gap created by examining how students compose their paragraphs and the extent to which they achieve unity and coherence in their writing. The study particularly attempts to find out how male and female students in colleges of education write their paragraphs and the extent to which they achieve coherence and unity in their writing. It further looks at how students structure their paragraphs regarding topic sentences and supporting sentences (major and minor support). The study aimed to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between male and female students at Komenda College of Education regarding achieving paragraph unity and coherence in writing. A research question and a hypothesis guided the study; research question - Is there a statistically significant difference between male and female students at Komenda College of Education regarding achieving paragraph unity and coherence in writing? Research hypothesis - To help fully accomplish the study objective, a theory was formulated to statistically analyse whether there are significant differences between male and female students about paragraph unity and coherence in writing. H_0^1 : There is no statistically significant difference between male and female students at Komenda College of Education in achieving paragraph unity and coherence in writing.

1.1. Review of the Literature

Several studies have been conducted on the writing of paragraphs, the achievement of paragraph unity and coherence, and other paragraph-related topics. The relationship between gender and academic writing has also been a focus of theoretical and empirical attention in applied and sociolinguistics for decades, with debates continuing around the extent and specific ways in which language is gendered. This is to say that studies that empirically focused on achieving paragraph unity and coherence about gender are limited in the literature. Thus, this section reviews studies on paragraph unity and gender, paragraph coherence and gender, and gender differences concerning paragraph writing [11, 12].

However, it should be pointed out that prior studies did not consider paragraph unity and gender separately from paragraph coherence and gender and gender differences for paragraph writing. These studies looked at gender, writing and other related concepts and discussed them together, making it untenable to break this section into the various thematic areas, as doing this would result in duplication of reviews or presenting reviews of a study more than once. Considering this, the different themes have been reviewed together, employing the chronology review approach – building the arguments based on the years the various studies were conducted. Writers focused on investigating the nature of gender differences in writing self-beliefs of elementary school students. The study used 363 students. Interviews were used, and essays from both boys and girls from the elementary school were analysed. The results showed girls to be superior writers, but no significant differences were found in gender writing after controlling for writing aptitude.

On the other hand, the girls averred that they were better writers than boys or other girls, to a higher degree than claimed by boys. Though their study did not specifically talk about paragraph unity and coherence, it focused on academic writing and considered gender differences regarding academic writing as well. This explains some characteristic differences in male and female writing skills [13]. This means that their study could provide reasonable grounds for further studies to be carried out. However, the gap in literature as far as gender differences in academic writing, such as paragraph unity and coherence, is concerned remains.

Thus, to find out the gender differences on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, writers carried out a study in that regard. Gender differences for a nationally representative sample of graduates from the American College drawn from the Baccalaureate and Beyond 1993-1994 study were used on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, taken at the age of about eighteen years, and scores ascertained in College at the ages of about 18-22 years. The results showed that males obtained significantly higher average scores on the two tests for college entrance, and females obtained significantly higher average scores in College [14]. The writers considered gender differences, which is one of the main focus areas of the current study. However, the current study considered aptitude tests instead of academic writing [14]. This confirms a gap in the literature regarding paragraph unity and paragraph coherence achievement in writing. The current study is going in the right direction as it seeks to fill this gap in the literature. Mau and Lynn's study was also limited to a specific age group, thereby excluding participants who might have contributed in a way that positively influenced the study's overall findings.

Other writers conducted a study on automatically categorising written texts by author gender. The data used included both non-fictional and fictional texts. In all, 566 texts from the British National Corpus were analysed to identify the linguistic features more commonly used by one or the other gender. All non-fictional texts were used, and 75% and 25% of fictional texts were from 1975-1993 and 1960-1974, respectively. Overall, the findings revealed that males mostly use specifiers, whilst females mostly use negation, pronouns, and particular prepositions. Men used more *than one*, and women used *for*, *with*, *not*, and more frequently in non-fiction texts. Like those reviewed thus far, their study studied gender differences in writing. However, about writing, both fictional and non-fictional texts were used for their analysis. On the other hand, the current study focused on paragraph writing and achieving paragraph unity and coherence, which Koppel *et al.*'s study should have considered. This means that the gap in the literature concerning achieving paragraph unity and paragraph coherence will be filled as the current study purposely focused on academic writing, focusing on paragraph unity achievement and paragraph coherence [15].

In another study, writers analysed gender and genre in writing style in formal written texts. The study analysed 604 texts from various genres in the BNC. The results revealed that women used more pronouns, such as *I*, *you*, *she*, *her*, *their*, *myself*, *yourself*,

herself, and men used more noun specifiers, including determiners, such as *a, the, that, these*, and quantifiers, such as *one, two, more, some*. These authors argue that pronouns and specifiers are used in different conditions, although both are used to encode information about the things presented as nominals. Pronouns are used when the identity of the “thing” involved is known to the reader, whereas specifiers are used when the author assumes the reader does not know the “thing” [16]. They claim that the different use of these grammatical categories by females and males indicates that they tend to present things differently in their writing. This study only confirms that males and females are different in different ways, and one of these differences can be found in the way they write. Similarly, the current study sought to determine gender differences in achieving paragraph unity and coherence, which was not considered in their study, thereby causing a gap in the literature [16].

A study was conducted to assess gender differences and determine whether there are significant differences in academic performance among undergraduate students in a large public university in Turkey. The analysis was based on indicators such as university entrance scores, performance in English preparatory and the programme the student wants to major. The results revealed that only some females managed to enter the university despite low scores. Nonetheless, and somewhat surprising, it was also revealed that once they enter the university, they excel and outperform their male counterparts [17]. Though academic performance generally encompasses many activities in academic settings that may have something to do with academic writing, the measurement approach defers academic writing and, more specifically, paragraph unity and coherence [17]. This is to say that academic performance, in its general term, cannot be used as a replacement for academic writing; thus, the current study is imperative in filling this gap in the literature, as it focuses specifically on paragraph unity and paragraph coherence achievement in academic writing concerning gender.

Further, to examine men’s and women’s ESL academic writing in their assignments at the University of Melbourne, a writer studied the differences between men’s and women’s ESL academic writing. The methodical procedures involved analysing the academic writing of three sets of men and women. Features focused in the analysis included syntactic complexity, means of integrating cited information, and methods of presenting arguments. The findings revealed significant differences between men’s and women’s texts in the aspects analysed. Women’s text structure was found to be more complex compared to men’s. Women were also found to have presented more organised arguments and, thus, have more advantages for success in academic writing [18]. Though considering academic writing and gender differences regarding academic writing, the study did not specifically consider how men and women achieve unity in paragraph writing. However, the study revealed the differences between men’s and women’s academic writing [18]. The current study, therefore, focuses on paragraph writing, taking cognisance of gender differences. This will enable the filling of the gap in the literature as far as the achievement of unity in paragraph writing is concerned.

Again, to analyse gender differences in language use, writers conducted a study and compiled a large corpus to study gender differences in language use. The data contained various texts, including spoken texts (3%) and fiction written in the 17th century. The results showed that women used more words related to psychological and social processes and verbs. In comparison, men discussed current concerns and used more words related to object features and impersonal topics. The results also revealed that women used more pronouns, such as *I, my, me, she, their, and them*; social words, such as *sister and friends*; psychological processes, such as *mad, uneasy, remember, and nervous*; verbs, negations, and references to the home.

Conversely, men used more numbers, articles, and prepositions, such as *on, to, and from* [19]. As articles and prepositions are typically used with nouns, it was concluded that men tend to focus more on conveying information, and women focus more on social

connections. It has become clear that some lexical items have been identified as linguistic features of female writing in some studies but not in others. However, these studies still miss the elements of paragraph writing. Thus, it is imperative to conduct a study which takes into consideration both gender and paragraph writing, with a specific focus on paragraph unity and paragraph coherence in academic writing [19].

To find the impact of gender differences on students' academic performance, a writer conducted a study using five secondary schools in Kenya. The study used 80 participants, including students, teachers, head teachers, and directors. The questionnaires and interviews were employed for data collection. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. The results revealed a significant gender difference in performance, with males doing better than their female counterparts. Also, it was revealed that, on average, males can score higher marks than females involved in the study. This study considered gender differences, but nothing about male and female writing strategies was said. This, again, just like the preceding reviewed studies, confirmed a gap in the literature as far as achieving paragraph coherence concerning gender is concerned. This shows that studies explicitly focused on gender and achievement of paragraph coherence are necessary to fill the gap in the literature. Therefore, the current study is relevant to filling this gap in the literature, where gender differences would be considered concerning the achievement of paragraph coherence in writing [20]. Also, to assess gender differences and writing performance, writers conducted a study using the review approach. The study reviewed prior studies conducted to assess gender and writing. The results revealed that, though many studies have been conducted to examine gender in relation to language learning and writing, the results showed inconsistencies. The results then showed that as some studies reported females outperforming their counterpart males in writing, others reported males outperforming females in academic writing. However, some studies reviewed revealed no difference between females and males regarding writing and language learning [21]. Their study was to have implications for policymakers and curricula developers.

The above study was a synthesis of studies; this means that the study did not focus on any original purpose and specific objectives. Also, their study needs an empirical approach, making replication easier for future researchers who might want to refer to their study. However, the current study practically employed research methods, which would make it easy for future researchers to reproduce similar work by following the procedures used. This indicates the significance of the current study to literature. To evaluate the effect of gender on academic achievement, a writer conducted a study among secondary school students. The quasi-experimental design was employed using the 2x2 non-randomised pretest-posttest control group. One hundred and eighty students made up the sample size for the study. The Social Studies Achievement Test was the instrument used for data collection. The data collected were analysed using the means, standard deviation, and the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). The findings revealed that gender, defined as male or female in Dania's study, had no statistically significant effect on students' achievement in Social Studies. However, a significant interaction effect was reported on treatment and gender on students' performance in Social Studies. In the study, Dania (2014) did not consider paragraph unity and coherence in academic writing [22]. This is to say that studies are needed to close this literature gap. On the other hand, the writer was quite interesting as it thoroughly assessed gender difference, as well as considered interaction effects; but, since the discipline focused on Social Studies but not anything related to academic writing – more specifically, paragraph unity and coherence – it is imperative to carry out further studies which will consider the achievement of paragraph unity and coherence concerning gender.

Further, to examine gender differences in general knowledge, writers conducted a study on gender differences in general knowledge, focusing on residential status and type of school. The study included 817 participants, comprising both males and females. The

110-item version of the General Information Test was adopted. Comparing the results of their study to those of previous studies, they reported better performance and more significant variation of male participants in overall scores on the General Information Test compared to female participants [23]. In this study, apart from the fact that it considered gender differences, nothing was said about academic writing. Also, the study did not employ any straightforward design, as it was more of a comparison of participants' scores. This calls for a study which focuses on gender and academic writing, with a specific emphasis on paragraph unity and paragraph coherence.

Thus, the current study is relevant as it focuses on gender and academic writing, specifically on achieving paragraph unity and coherence in academic writing. The current study also makes clear the design it has employed to make references to it more accessible for future studies. In another study, writers sought to assess student performance differences at the Ghana National College in Cape Coast. This study focused on performance in mathematics. A quasi-experimental research design was used, and experimental and control groups were involved. Forty-two and forty students were used for the experimental and control groups, respectively. Data from the students were collected using an open-ended mathematics test. Considering their performances, the findings showed no significant difference between males and females [24]. This implies that teachers should use performance assessment tasks in lessons. Though the writers studied gender differences, they did not consider paragraph writing, let alone the achievement of paragraph unity and coherence. The study focused purposely on mathematics. Even though Arhin and Offoe's study was conducted within the local context, it focused on high school students and a discipline different from what the current study focuses on. This means local literature lacks studies on gender differences and the achievement of paragraph unity and coherence in writing. Thus, the current study is imperative as it focuses on gender and paragraph unity and coherence in writing. It appeared that most of the studies, which considered gender difference, focused on performance in disciplines other than what the current study focuses on; both were conducted outside and within the local setting.

Nonetheless, they all sought to assess differences in males and females regarding one discipline or the other, including general academic writing. Besides the studies discussed above, several other studies considered gender differences [24]. For instance, writers conducted a study to examine the effect of gender on students' academic performance in computer studies. The sample size used was 275 students. A questionnaire containing multiple-choice past questions was used. The responses were scored and analysed employing the independent t-test.

The study results showed that, on average, males had a better performance than their female counterparts; however, this difference in performance, regarding gender, was not statistically significant. The study then recommended that parents provide the proper education they deemed affordable for their wards regardless of gender. Just as posited earlier, and just as some of the prior studies reviewed thus far showed gender performance in computer studies instead of academic writing with a particular focus on paragraph unity and coherence [25]. This means studies are needed to fill this gap, and the current study is going in just that direction to contribute to filling this gap. A similar study sought to provide insight into the influence of gender on students' academic achievement in government subjects. A sample size of 412 out of a population of 822 was used for the study. The multistage technique was used for the sampling method. The research design employed was the ex-post-facto research design. The examination proforma was the main instrument used for the data collection. Frequency counts and percentages were used for data analysis. The study's findings generally concluded that gender differences exist in academic achievement; however, most were insignificant [26].

Like other prior studies, the writer's research focused on academic achievement instead of paragraph unity and coherence, which the current study sought to study. Their

study was also conducted outside the current study area, whose educational and economic environment might differ from the environment in which Unity and Igbudu conducted their study. The current study area needs studies like the current study; thus, there is a need for the current study to fill gaps in the local literature and general literature [26]. A study investigated the gender differences in language use in argumentative essays. These essays were written by male and female university students on designated topics under controlled conditions. The study analysed a corpus of written essays by the students involved. The essays comprised 200 texts written by 100 native English-speaking students. The sample size was 56 males and 44 females. The topics considered were "College students need to have a part-time job" and "Smoking should be completely banned at all the restaurants in the country". Each student was given 20-40 minutes to write 200-300 words. The results of the study revealed that there are genuinely gender differences in language use in essay writing; male students were found to use more nouns to convey information and facts about the given topics, whilst females tend to use more pronouns, more intensifiers, and words related to psychological, cognitive processes; females used these words so that they might convey their feelings and build good relationships with others. Nevertheless, Ishikawa's study did not specifically test male and female paragraph writing strategies. This study is still relevant to the current study because it partly considered elements of the current study, such as gender and academic writing [27].

A writer conducted a study to investigate the effects of gender using collaborative instructional strategy on students' achievement in English essay writing. The study employed the quasi-experimental pretest-posttest non-equivalent control group design. A sample size of 191 students from a population of 1,797 Form Two (2) students from four secondary schools was used. The EEAT achievement test was used. Descriptive statistical tools used to analyse the research questions were the mean, standard deviation, and the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) used to test the hypothesis formulated. Though the writer's study considered gender differences in writing, the focus was on general essay writing but not on achieving unity and coherence in paragraph writing. This justifies the significance of this study to literature as it focuses on gender differences in the achievement of paragraph unity and coherence. Also, to ensure triangulation of the research findings, the current study, unlike Fidelia's study, employed descriptive statistical tools such as the mean and standard deviation and hypothesis testing tools aside from the extensive use of the qualitative research method. Further, his study focused on Secondary School students whose academic writing skills might be low compared to the college students considered by the current study [28]. A gap here needs to be filled; therefore, the current study is relevant.

To ascertain the effect of gender and proficiency level on the writing strategy used among high school students, other writers conducted a study and employed the quantitative approach. The results showed a low frequency of strategy use, and no significant difference was recorded between students' high and low proficiency strategies. Finally, the findings revealed a statistically significant difference between females and males in their writing strategies; females were found to have used more writing strategies than their male counterparts. Gender difference was considered, but paragraph unity and coherence were not considered. Their study did not touch on how each gender group developed their paragraphs regarding achieving unity and coherence. This shows that though studies abound on gender differences in many disciplines, there has, so far, not been any study which specifically studied gender concerning the achievement of unity and coherence in paragraph writing [29]. This study is, therefore, crucial to filling this gap in the existing literature.

Additionally, the interaction of gender, use of writing strategy, and discourse type showed a significant difference in the usage of the strategy of language switching. Similarly, a vast difference between males and females was found in the strategies

investigated and their overall writing behaviours. This study was detailed, employing qualitative and quantitative approaches; however, the study did not specifically touch on how males and females achieve unity in paragraph writing. Thus, the current study is imperative to fill this lacuna in the literature. In summary, all the studies reviewed considered gender differences in performance or achievement in one discipline or the other. Though no study has yet been conducted on gender and paragraph writing skills, all related studies were conducted outside the current study locale, and no study has thus far considered institutions of higher education, such as the colleges of education and most of the prior studies employed only one research method. Thus, this study sought to fill all these gaps identified in the literature by explicitly examining gender and paragraph writing skills among College education students, employing the mixed research method to ensure triangulation of the study findings.

1.2. Conceptual Framework

Having reviewed related literature and being aware of the study objectives, the framework in Figure 1 has been developed. Most of the studies reviewed pointed out a relationship between gender and academic writing. Also, paragraph development has been identified to be an integral part of academic writing as it forms the basis of most write-ups for academic purposes. Further, throughout the literature reviewed for the study, gender has been operationalised as being male, as masculinity is mainly associated with males or a female, and femininity is usually associated with the female sex. Literature also shows that writing is a process that involves a lot of skills and strategies acquired through learning. Therefore, it is in the right direction to say that writing skills and strategies are acquired in an organised teaching environment, such as the classroom, also resourced by literature.

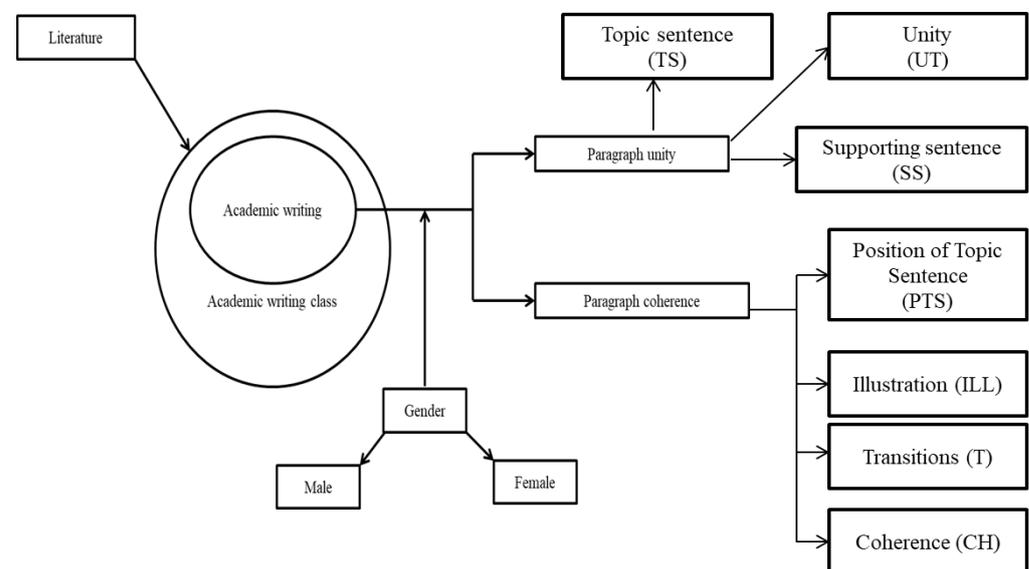


Figure 1. Conceptual framework (Source: Authors construct (2023))

In Figure 1, the relationship between gender paragraph unity and paragraph coherence is displayed. The arrow connecting "literature" to "academic writing class" indicates the source of materials and knowledge used to teach academic writing at the College. Per this study, "literature" includes all the teaching and learning materials used to deliver knowledge in the classroom. This may revolve around textbooks, articles on academic writing, and theories on writing in general. The academic writing class, on the other hand, represents the setting where the knowledge impartation takes place. Here, men and women are given the same level of treatment and taught writing skills using the

same teaching methods. They are encouraged to apply a similar learning method to understand the skills and strategies of academic writing.

Also, the academic writing class ensures that every participant is protected regarding access to needed materials to enhance their writing abilities. This is to ensure that, on average, both men and women have the same abilities in terms of academic writing. Thus, the "academic writing" position in the framework indicates where the strategies and skills of academic writing are acquired – academic writing class. Per this study, paragraph writing is placed as a subset of academic writing. More specifically, paragraph writing is focused on the achievement of unity and coherence; hence, the bifurcated arrow extends from the "academic writing" oval to the "paragraph unity" and "paragraph coherence" rectangles.

Further, the arrow extending from "gender" meets the bifurcated arrow connecting "academic writing" and "paragraph unity – which is conceptualised as TS, SS and UT" and "paragraph coherence – operationalised as PTS, ILL, T and CH". This indicates the influence of gender on the achievement of paragraph unity and coherence. In essence, men and women from the same academic writing class are expected to have the same academic writing skills and strategies and, hence, the same skills to achieve both paragraph unity and coherence in writing. However, the current study sought to assess whether the gender of a participant in the academic writing class influences how s/he achieves paragraph unity and paragraph coherence; hence, the arrow from "gender" intercepts the bifurcated arrow. Additionally, the current study also defines gender as being a male or a female [21, 28]. These are indicated by the two arrows extending from "gender" to "male" and "female" in Figure 1. This is to say that achieving paragraph unity and paragraph coherence is expected to be influenced by being a male or a female, and that is the main focus of the current study – to find out how paragraph unity and paragraph coherence are achieved concerning gender, and whether there is any significant difference in how paragraph unity and coherence is achieved with regards to gender.

1.3. Lakoff's Theory

This Theory posited that women's language or speech can be distinguished from men's speech or language in several ways [5]. According to Lakoff, women's speeches are different from that of men in several ways as women tend to use hedges, such as "sort of", "kind of", and "it seems like", to mention a few, empty adjectives, such as "divine", "adorable", "gorgeous", among others; super-polite forms, such as "would you mind...", "if it's not too much to ask", "Is it okay if...?"; apologise more, "I am sorry, but..."; speak less frequently; avoid curse expletives; use tag questions, "You do not mind sleeping here, do you?"; use hyper-correct grammar and pronunciation; use indirect requests, such as "Wow, I am starving" –asking for food; speak in italics – using tone to stress certain words such as "so", "quite", "very", among others [5]. Lakoff's Theory sought to draw a line of difference between men's and women's language or speeches, and the Theory was used because its assertions are closely related to the current study's aim. It can, therefore, be inferred that men's and women's writings are different in that, to a large extent, the ways of speaking are reflected in writings [5]. This is to say that students at the colleges of education, especially Komenda College of Education, have different writing styles as far as gender is concerned. The difference may be drawn from how male and female students achieve paragraph unity in their writing and how coherence is achieved in their writing. Considering the current study objectives and hypotheses, these differences might be confirmed.

2. Materials and Methods

Quantitatively, the study employed the descriptive research design. The population was second-year female and male students who read English Language Studies during

the 2022/2023 academic year. The total population was 60, consisting of 40 males and 20 females. The researchers considered only the English Language Studies students because they were deemed relatively knowledgeable in academic writing due to their course contents. He Komenda Edina Eguafo Abrem Municipality in the Central Region of the Republic of Ghana. Considering this, the study employed the census sampling technique to include 60 English Language Studies students from all the units. A census technique was used to select all the study respondents. The study sought to ensure accurate information without bias and sampling errors, thus ensuring more reliable findings [31].

The qualitative data were the paragraphs written by the 60 Second Year English Language Studies students sampled for the study. The total number of words in each paragraph was between 200 and 300. The maximum number of paragraphs each student was made to write was three paragraphs made up of 08 – 12 lines each. These word and paragraph restrictions were based on prior related studies, as it is believed that too lengthy or wordy content may result in students writing off-topic [15, 27]. Also, salient points are said to have been presented in the early paragraphs of a piece of a write-up [27]. Also, the quantitative data were collected from the same respondents. The data were based on the students' paragraph unity and coherence knowledge. Thus, they were to read a set of paragraphs and indicate whether they were unified and coherent or not. This approach was used because students who can write unified and coherent paragraphs or know how to achieve paragraph unity and coherence should, under normal circumstances, be able to recognise unified and coherent paragraphs. Their responses were then quantified using binary codes of "1" and "0" for correct answers.

The tools used for the present study were what the researchers dubbed the "Paragraph Writing Achievement Exercise (PWAE)" and the survey questionnaire. The PWAE was an argumentative essay on "SRC Week Celebration Should be Banned in Colleges of Education." This instrument solicited paragraphs written on the topic for the English Language Studies students sampled for the study. The instrument was to collect between 200 and 300 words in a maximum of three paragraphs. Each paragraph was made up of between 08 and 12 lines. This instrument followed a similar approach [27]. The researchers developed an online version of the survey questionnaire using Google. This was done to avoid, as much as possible, physical contact with the student respondents due to the global pandemic COVID-19. This instrument contained five (5) standard unified and coherent paragraphs adapted from the Collegial Centre for Educational Materials Department's 2010 Preparing for English Exit Exam. Two options were provided: "acceptable" and "unacceptable" regarding whether a given paragraph is unified and coherent, and respondents were to choose the correct answer using their knowledge of how paragraph unity and coherence are achieved. For statistical analysis, right and wrong answers were scored "1" and "0", respectively. A perfect score would then be five (5) (1×5); otherwise, 0 (0×5). This means a respondent could score between zero (0) and five (5). The researcher employed descriptive statistical tools such as mean and standard deviation and two- independent sample t-tests to analyse the quantitative data collected to achieve the research objective. The mean and standard deviation were computed to measure variability in males and females based on the quantitative data collected from them. Further, the two-independent sample t-test was used to assess the equality of variances for the variable (paragraph unity and coherence) calculated for the two groups – males and females. This was also to test the hypothesis and ensure it complied with the framework in Figure 1.

3. Results and Discussion

This study objective sought to assess the difference between male and female students regarding achieving paragraph unity and coherence. The researchers carried out two independent sample t-tests to achieve this objective. However, before discussing the main output of the analysis, it is imperative to discuss the overall distribution of the data

to provide background to the primary analysis. Consistent with this, the researchers, therefore, presented the individual descriptive statistics – mean, standard deviation (SD), maximum (Max.), minimum (Min.) and range – the boxplots, the group statistics, and the independent samples test (the hypothesis test). These are presented in Table 1, Figure 2, Table 2, Table 3 and 4, respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Paragraph Unity and Coherence in Writing and Gender

	Variable	Mean	SD	Max.	Min.	Range
How paragraph unity and coherence is achieved	Both	1.97	1.008	4	0	4
	Female	1.95	1.050	4	0	4
	Male	1.98	1.000	4	0	4

Source: Field survey (2023); $N = 60$

Table 1 provides the mean and standard deviation, maximum, minimum, and range for male and female students together, with only female and male students. From this result, both male and female students together had a mean score and standard deviation of ($X_{mf} = 1.97$, $\sigma_{mf} = 1.008$), maximum of ($Max_{mf} = 4$), minimum of ($Min_{mf} = 0$) and a range score of ($Range_{mf} = 4$), concerning how paragraph unity and coherence is achieved among both genders.

Also, the mean score and standard deviation, maximum score, minimum score and range score were ($X_f = 1.95$, $\sigma_f = 1.050$), ($Max_f = 4$), ($Min_f = 0$) and ($Range_f = 4$), respectively. For the male students, the mean and standard deviation were ($X_m = 1.98$, $\sigma_m = 1.000$); the maximum and minimum scores were ($Max_m = 4$) and ($Min_m = 0$), respectively, and a range score of ($Range_m = 4$). Concerning objective three, these results showed a fair difference between male and female students regarding how paragraph unity and coherence are achieved. Figure 2 was presented to assess the differences further.

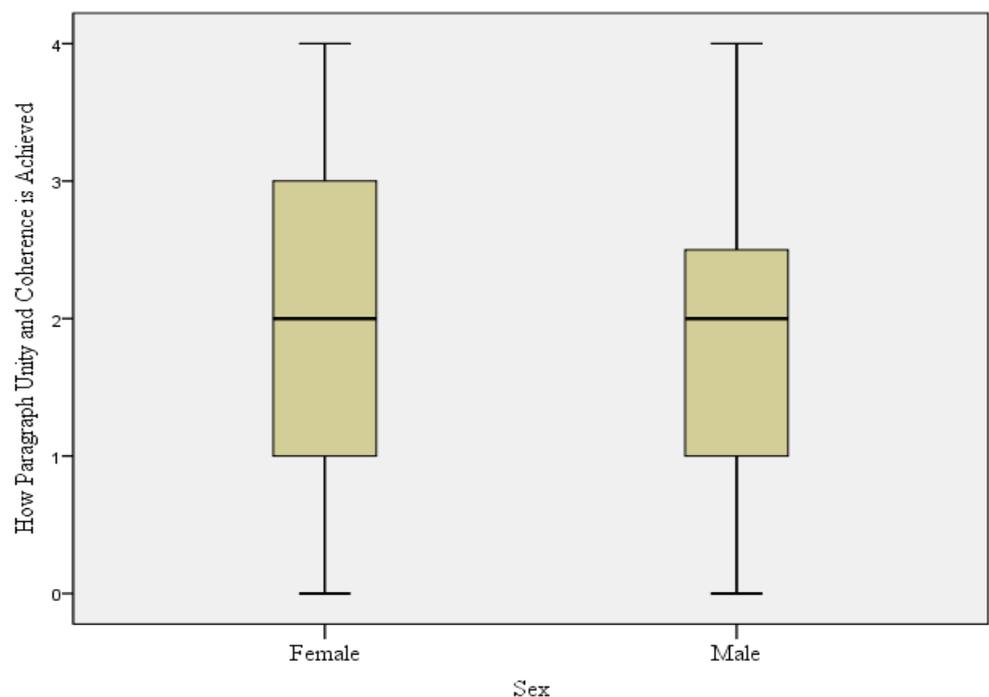


Figure 2. Boxplots (Field survey (2023))

From [Figure 2](#), by simple observation, it could easily be seen from this boxplot that the spread of observations for female students was much greater than the spread of observations for their male counterparts. Coupled with the results in [Table 1](#), it could be estimated that the variances for these two groups were quite different, implying that male and female students are different, considering the third research objective. However, a conclusion can only be drawn once the test analysis is performed. Nevertheless, a summary of the group (male and female) statistics should be presented before test analysis is performed. [Table 2](#), therefore, presents the group statistics.

Table 2. Group Statistics

	Sex	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
How paragraph unity and coherence is achieved	Female	1.95	1.050	.235
	Male	1.98	1.000	.158

Source: Field survey (2023); $n_f = 20$; $n_m = 40$

As shown in [Table 2](#), the group statistics form part of the primary analysis, leading to the succeeding test analysis. This statistically summarises the overall descriptive results. The results presented in [Table 2](#) were the basic information about the group comparisons; these included the sample size (n), mean (\bar{X}), standard deviation (σ), and the standard error for how the group achieves paragraph unity and coherence. Beneath the Table are several female students ($n_f = 20$) and several male students ($n_m = 40$) who made up the total sample ($N = 60$) for this study. The mean score for female students was ($\bar{X}_f = 1.95$, $\sigma_f = 1.050$) and that for male students was ($\bar{X}_m = 1.98$, $\sigma_m = 1.000$). From these results, it could be inferred that there was a fair difference between male and female students concerning how paragraph unity and coherence are achieved in academic writing. However, the significance of this difference could only be affirmed by the results of the hypothesis test presented in [Table 3](#) below.

Table 3. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Dif.	Std. E. Dif.	95% CI of the Dif.	
									Lower	Upper
How paragraph unity and coherence is achieved	Equal variances assumed	.888	.350	-.090	58	.929	-.025	.278	-.582	.532
	Equal variances are not assumed.			-.088	36.47	.930	-.025	.283	-.599	.549

Source: Field survey (2023); $N = 60$

[Table 3](#) displayed the results most relevant to the Independent Samples t -test. From the Table, two main parts with different pieces of information can be seen. The first part is Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, and the second is the t -test for Equality of Means. The Levene's Test for Equality of Variances contains the test results for the Levene's Test. From the results, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances showed a significant value of $P > 0.05$; this implies that the variability in male and female students at the Komenda College

of Education concerning how paragraph unity and coherence are achieved in academic writing is not significantly different. Hence, failure to reject the hypothesis that '*There is no statistically significant difference between male and female students, concerning how paragraph unity and coherence is achieved in academic writing.*'

Also, looking at the 2-tailed significant value in the first row, the result produced was $P > 0.05$. This result further confirmed that there was no statistically significant difference between the means of male and female students concerning how paragraph unity and coherence are achieved in academic writing. From these results, it could be stated that the differences between the mean scores of male and female students were likely due to chance and not likely due to the independent sample manipulation. This was also confirmed by the results in Table 2 supported by results in Table 3 – which, though, showed a slightly lower score in the female group (1.95 ± 1.050) compared to the male group (1.98 ± 1.000), a mean difference of $-.025$ (95% CI, $-.582$ to $.532$), $t(58) = -.090$, $P = .929$. It could also be seen that the 95% confidence interval included a zero (0), still implying an insignificant difference between males and females.

Drawing from all the results presented regarding how to achieve paragraph unity and coherence, male students of the College seemed to have much higher knowledge of how to achieve unity and coherence in paragraph writing than their female counterparts. However, this difference was only due to chance, as the results also revealed that this difference was insignificant. Both male and female college students are similar in writing paragraphs and strategies used to achieve unity and coherence in paragraph writing. In other words, gender does not significantly influence how paragraph unity and coherence are achieved in academic writing.

This finding is unsurprising as both male and female students involved in the study were taught by the same English tutor or using the same teaching materials at the College. This will likely influence their understanding of paragraph writing and how to achieve unity and coherence. Also, since there are standard techniques to employ, in most cases, when writing pieces for academic purposes, it could be that these students, males and females, have studied these techniques and, thus, follow them in writing their paragraphs to achieve unity and coherence. Interestingly, this finding showed consistency with the findings of prior studies. For instance, a similar study revealed that males perform better in academic-related activities than their female counterparts; nevertheless, the difference between males and females was insignificant, implying that gender does not impede successful educational attainment [28]. Considering Fidelia's findings compared to the current findings, it could be inferred that slight differences are expected when comparing these groups – male and female – but that these differences are primarily insignificant [21, 28]. This is to say there is an insignificant difference between male and female students about strategies employed in academic writing [21].

This finding is also in line with the findings of [30]. A similar study found that the study participants, both male and female students, used different writing strategies regarding type and frequency. It was also revealed that each gender group used some writing skills more frequently than the other group; nevertheless, the difference in frequency was statistically insignificant [30]. All this explains that gender does not remarkably influence achieving paragraph unity and coherence in academic writing among Komenda College of Education students.

Further, this finding corroborates the findings of a similar study concerning performance, which focused on the difference between male and female students. Their study showed no significant difference in performance concerning gender [24]. Similarly, other writers showed that, on average, males perform better than their female counterparts; however, this difference in performance, about gender, is not statistically significant [25]. Additionally, this current finding is consistent with the findings of a similar study, which revealed no significant difference between males and females regarding academic achievements [22]. Furthermore, this finding relates to an earlier

study, which found girls to be superior writers. However, no significant differences were found in gender writing after controlling for writing aptitude.

On the other hand, the girls averred that they were better writers than boys or other girls, to a higher degree than claimed by boys. Their finding shows the typical position of students, where each group – male or female – seems to feel they are better than the other in terms of activities related to academics; however, findings like the current one have brought to bear the statistical significance of this professed difference [13]. Though the current finding only showed that the difference between males and females regarding how to achieve paragraph unity and coherence was not statistically significant, many other prior studies showed a similar result [26].

In addition, this finding is consistent with the performativity theory, which posits that males and females can perform equally, given equal opportunity, without any remarkable influence of gender. On the other hand, there were few studies whose findings are inconsistent with the current finding [32]. For instance, a writer found a statistically significant difference between men's and women's texts in the writings analysed. This contrasting finding is unsurprising as environmental factors could likely influence performance [18]. Another writer found a significant difference between males and females in performance and writing strategies [20]. Further, some writers found a statistically significant difference between females and males in their writing strategies; females were found to have used more writing strategies than their male counterparts [29]. These differences could be due to chance or other factors beyond the scope of the prior studies.

Besides, Lakoff's theory distinguished women's language from men's, just as Tannen 1990 presented male and female as separate cultures linguistically [5]. To some extent, these may explain the contrasting findings of some of the prior studies. However, as stated earlier, the fact that the difference between males and females concerning how to write unified and coherent paragraphs is not significant does not mean the average scores of male and female students, at every point in time, are equal. As reported in this study, males have slightly different approaches to achieving paragraph unity and coherence from their female counterparts; this difference is not statistically significant.

However, there have been diverse findings regarding the significance of the difference between males and females concerning academic writing. Some of the prior studies found significant differences, but others found insignificant differences between males and females in academic writing and related activities. The current study showed that, statistically, there is no significant difference between male and female students at the Komenda College of Education regarding how to achieve paragraph unity and coherence in academic writing; hence, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. In other words, the alternate hypothesis has been rejected. Table 8 summarises the hypothesis tested, results, decisions, and conclusion.

Summary of Hypothesis Tested, Results and Conclusions

This section summarises the hypothesis tested, the decision made, and the conclusion drawn by the researcher based on the results. This summary is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Summary of Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis statement	Results	Decision	Conclusions
<i>Independent samples test</i>			
<i>H₀: There is no statistically significant difference between male and female students at the Komenda College of Education regarding achieving paragraph unity and coherence in writing.</i>	<i>F-stats = .888 t(58) = -0.090 p > 0.05</i>	Failed to reject H ₀	Statistically insignificant difference between male and female students concerning how paragraph unity and coherence are achieved in academic writing

Source: Field survey (2023)

As can be seen in Table 4, the p-value ($p > 0.05$) is greater than the alpha value ($\alpha = 0.05$); thus, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female students at the Komenda College of Education with regards to achieving paragraph unity and coherence in writing. This implies that the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant difference between male and female students at the Komenda College of Education about achieving paragraph unity and coherence in writing is rejected.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study objective sought to determine whether there is a significant difference between male and female students at Komenda College of Education concerning achieving paragraph unity and coherence in writing. Though the results showed male students to have a relatively higher mean score than their female counterparts, it was revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female students when it comes to achieving paragraph unity and coherence in writing. In other words, gender does not influence how paragraph unity and coherence are achieved in writing – males and females are statistically the same.

The principals of the various colleges of education in Ghana should encourage the college tutors and the Student Representative Council (SRC) leadership to introduce a programme which engages college students in competitive writing without gender barriers. This programme will ensure that students compete by writing academic papers demonstrating their knowledge of achieving unity and coherence in writing. This programme can be done every academic year, and an equal number of males and females are presented yearly.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, JAS, GEGA, and AR; methodology JAS, GEGA, and AR; validation; formal analysis JAS, GEGA, and AR; investigation JAS, GEGA, and AR; resources JAS, GEGA, and AR; data curation JAS, GEGA, and AR; writing—original draft preparation JAS, GEGA, and AR; writing—review and editing JAS, GEGA, and AR; visualisation, JAS, GEGA, and AR; supervision JAS, GEGA, and AR; project administration JAS, GEGA, and AR; All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: "This research received no external funding."

Data Availability Statement: Data is available on request from the corresponding author.

Acknowledgements: We acknowledge the selected speeches used in this study.

Conflicts of Interest: "The authors declare no conflict of interest." "No funders had any role in the study's design; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results".

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