# The Effect of Teaching Writing Skills on Ideology Transfer in Academic Writings of EFL Students: The Case of Iranian IELTS Candidates

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## Abstract

One strategy that eases the process of teaching argumentative writing might be teaching them how to express their thoughts, beliefs, and in general, ideologies in academic essays. This study aimed to investigate the effect of teaching writing skills on ideology transfer in the academic writings of EFL students. To this end, a sequential mixed-methods design was used. Participants were 80 male and female IELTS candidates who were selected based on some criteria such as proficiency level, age, and educational background. A sample Mock Writing Task 2 and a sample IELTS Writing Task 2 were used as instruments in the pre-test and post-test respectively. Learners' essays produced during these stages were analyzed based on Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis: description, interpretation, and explanation. To analyze the data, content analysis methods were applied during which discursive strategies used by the candidates were identified and coded, and the frequency and percentage of them were calculated. After the analysis, the following themes were extracted in the participants' writings, as representing ideology transfer: tendency towards representation of identity, use of active voices, use of first-person pronouns, social views, author visibility, ideology-laden concepts, and idea development. Moreover, there were significant changes in the post-test writings of the participants in terms of the number of discursive strategies used to express ideology. This shows that teaching writing skills can significantly affect EFL learners' ability to transfer their ideology into academic writing. The findings can have some implications for EFL learners, teachers, and curriculum planners.

*Keywords*: academic writing, critical discourse analysis, Fairclough's (2001) model, ideology, ideology transfer, discursive strategies

# 1. Introduction

Writing is one of the mediums of communication through which knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies are conveyed. Establishing a connection with a reader by means of diction and layout of ideas puts the writer in a position of influence and instilling perspectives into an addressee's mind (Van Dijk, 2006). One of the constructs that is used to explain the ways in which writers convey their ideas to the readers is critical discourse analysis through which it is possible to see how ideology is transferred to the audience (Fairclough, 1992). The idea that ideologies are frequently expressed and reproduced in and through language suggests that the concept of ideology might be connected to language use; therefore, ideology is transferred through the ways and devices—lexis , syntax, semantics—that a text producer uses to make the ideas and thoughts understood by the reader (Van Dijk, 1998).

While there are some indications in the literature about ideology transfer in writing, few studies have aimed to examine the devices that EFL writers use to transfer their ideologies. In other words, it is not evident what linguistic devices (e.g., lexical, grammatical or discursive) are mainly used by writers to convey their beliefs and attitudes. Moreover, the fact that teachers can improve the ways in which their students can enhance the quality of the transfer of ideologies in their writings has remained rather understudied. As such, the present study followed two main objectives: first, to explore different devices that EFL writers use to transfer their ideologies in IELTS wirings; second, to investigate the effect of teaching argumentative writing skills on the extent to which the learners employ various ideology transfer devices. In so doing, this study used Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis as the theoretical framework for understanding ideology-laden devices in EFL learners' writings.

At first glance, it may seem to novice writers that writing accuracy is what matters in academic writing. However, the fact is that transferring ideology, a set of beliefs, from cognition to performance helps foreign language learners pave the way for making themselves understood, not only in terms of ideas behind words, but also regarding the mentality of different social strata they might belong or adhere to. This shows the significance of ideology transfer in academic writing. Based on the idea that writing is a social practice, it can be easily understood that writing is inevitably embedded in social networks of power relations wherein ideology transfer is one of the main factors, if not the most important one. To reflect the ideology, the writer needs to be familiar with syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and discursive aspects of language. Consequently, analyzing language at both micro levels and macro levels, or from words to discourse, can provide some clues about the beliefs behind each specific style or diction (Van Dijk, 2006).

Discovering, identifying, and even analyzing patterns of transferring a writer's ideology displayed in each text can assist researchers and didactic experts in grasping how it is possible and what could be done to ease the way for writers to be able to set their thoughts free. This can be achieved through extracting the use of specific vocabulary, grammatical structures, connecting

tools, and ways of responding to the questions. The mismatch between the way of thinking and the way of expressing thoughts creates an obstacle in the way of an English learner's progress in writing skills. Knowing these patterns and discovering what the expressed notions lack to convey the true message in a writer's mind could help educationalists develop more practicable courses of action in both teaching and learning another language. Students' awareness of how they can express their beliefs more precisely using words, sentences, and paragraphs in a specific style or form, which is beyond the surface level, can give them the true joy of learning along with achieving their goals by writing an essay. However, apparently, as revealed by reviewing the existing literature, little research has been conducted on teaching writing skills to EFL learners in a way which can be helpful for them in improving their ability to negotiate ideologies when writing. More importantly, the other side of the problem is that writing instructors mostly devote writing class time to teaching grammatical, syntactic, and surface issues rather than teaching ideology negotiation at higher levels than syntax and grammar (Gray, 1988). As a good solution proposed by Gray (1988), writing instructors are recommended to stick more to discursive aspects of writing rather than on the details, such as grammar and spelling. He believes that by paying more heed to the ideological content of students' writings, students learn how to convey and share ideologies through writing.

To pursue this course of research, this study focused on using an analytical model based on critical discourse analysis suggested by Fairclough (2001), known as Fairclough's three-dimensional model. This model seems to be preferred over other popular models such as Van Dijk's (2000) and Wodak's (2001) because Fairclough introduced discourse as social practice and focused on revealing the hidden relationships between language, power, and ideology. He believed that readers' and listeners' interpretations of a communicative event depend on their "socially determined and ideologically shaped" resources (Fairclough, 2001a, p. 9). His framework, by providing three levels at which a text can be analyzed, also helps the researchers reach a more explicit analysis of a writer's production, while Van Dijk (2000) took a psychological perspective toward discourse and Wodak (2001) introduced the most linguistically-oriented model in discourse analysis. To Van Dijk, discourse was a communicative event and his way of analysis is best in media analysis. Wodak, on the other hand, had a historical approach and her focus was on politics and genre analysis.

Most textual analyses focus on power in speech and text, so Fairclough's three-dimensional model is mainly used in the analysis of political texts, and rarely is it used for the purpose of text analysis in a learning stage and for the sake of facilitating language acquisition. This study tried to take a varied path and shift from focusing on power to highlighting ideologies and beliefs by resorting to this model and academic writings as the tools in order to create a clearer picture of what initially happens when learners put their thoughts into words, and what should be done next to lead them toward creating smoother texts which can be a true reflection of their beliefs. This distinctive combination of tools and analysis can make this study a reference for those who intend

to follow a non-conventional method in teaching writing, especially when it comes to teaching writing for exams. The results of this study could help both teachers and learners find the demanding task of writing in English far more manageable and easier to conduct. Through the findings, teachers reach this realization that to be a good writer, learners need to care about something beyond vocabulary and grammar.

Taking the introductory discussions into account, the present study aimed to investigate the effect of teaching writing skills on ideology transfer in academic writings of Iranian IELTS candidates. To achieve this goal, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What discursive strategies do Iranian IELTS candidates use in their writing to transfer their ideology based on Fairclough's model (2001)?

2. Does teaching writing skills have any positive effects on Iranian IELTS candidates' writing to transfer ideology based on Fairclough's (2001) model?

To address the second question, the following hypothesis was constructed to be tested out:

- Teaching writing skills does not have any effects on EFL learners' ideology transfer based on Fairclough's model (2001).

# 2. Review of the Literature

## 2.1. Ideology and Second Language Education

Language ideologies are conceptualizations about languages, speakers, and discursive practices (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). Research on language ideologies, which defines ideology as "a system of entrenched beliefs about aspects of the lived experience which structure one's relationship to that experience" (Seargeant, 2009, p. 27), has found its roots within anthropological and sociological fields. Over the past two decades, the concept of ideology in second language learning has mostly been established in the field of linguistic anthropology, where many fascinating assessments of language use in cultural contexts have been streamlined and expedited. (Woolard, 1998; Milani, 2008). This special trend toward emphasizing ideology more than before shows how focusing on language and ideology can deepen educational research as well. Research into language ideology and education is a sub-category of research on linguistics and education, a research direction that might contribute to a "linguistic anthropology of education". Woolard (1998) defines language ideology as "representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world" (p.3).

Given the discursive nature of language ideologies, an efficient way to probe into them is through analyzing interaction forms and patterns. To date, there have been only a few studies (Anderson, 2009; Bartlett, 2007; De Costa, 2010; Razfar, 2005) that have examined the language ideologies (conceptualizations about languages, speakers, and discursive practices) of L2 learners. For example, Razfar, (2005) through a year-long examination into repair strategies employed by

ESL high school students, discovered that explicit language use, as well as the language habits of teachers and students (i.e., classroom practices), strengthened the idea that English has a single unitary standard. This in turn had an impact on the students' beliefs about English. In brief, language ideologies exist in what learners have to say about a language (metalanguage knowledge) and in their interactions with others (Woolard, 1998).

This line of interaction in language production has also been the focus of some gender-based studies working on meta-discourse. Meta-discourse is a predominant linguistic asset that helps writers manage the stream of propositions in content and lead their position in an argument towards their contents and readers (Hyland, 2005). Aziz et al. (2016) analyzed and compared the use of meta-discourse markers which can show the stance of the writer among male and female learners; various results were achieved. They studied the use of these markers in Malaysian EFL learners' academic writings to understand how they constructed gender identity. Quantitative analyses conducted on the similarities and dissimilarities in the use of discourse markers, namely: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-mentions between male and female ESL learners indicated no noticeable differences in the female and male writers' writing styles in the study. However, the qualitative analyses and results revealed slight discrepancies in the way writers express their agreement and how they place themselves in the reader/writer interaction. Bacang et al. (2019) also aimed to explore linguistic variations, between male and female writers, in the form of putting forward their claims in argumentative essays and in the way they engage and attract their audience. The results revealed that logical appeal in the development of arguments is the strategy used by male ESL learners, while the female learners resorted to emotional appeal. On the other hand, compared to the male learners, the female learners use more hedging and boosting devices in their argumentative essays. In another piece of research conducted by Alqahtani and Abdelhalim (2020), an examination of a sample of academic EFL essays authored by Saudi male and female university students was done to discover the pattern of the usage of interactive meta-discourse markers. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the essays indicated significant differences in the use of markers between males and females. It was shown that female students prioritized text organization above text engagement more than male students did; also, they used more transitions than males. Another claim that was presented in their study implied that gender is not the only factor affecting learners' use of meta-discourse; discourse genre and context also have a huge impact on the choice of markers in essays. These studies mostly focused on the relationship between the use of linguistic items or the use of cohesive devices and gender; they did not consider the way beliefs and thoughts are represented across gender.

Another issue regarding language ideologies which should be considered is that learners' ideologies are malleable and changeable (McGroarty, 2010). This view of ideologies is in line with those of several SLA scholars (e.g., Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Nejmaoui, (2019); Heidari et al., 2022, 2023; Kern, 1995; Sakui & Gaies, 1999) who pointed out that learners' beliefs change over

time. Thus far, this change has been illustrated through a range of methodologies. While Amuzie and Winke (2009) and Kern (1995), for instance, utilized questionnaires to reach the findings to base their claims on, Barcelos and Kalaja (1995) relied on naturally produced data such as ethnographic observations and written letters to portray changes in learners' opinions. Nejmaoui's study (2019) focused on the use of critical thinking in teaching writing and the results showed that learners' ability to utilize more credible evidence, address alternative arguments, support conclusions, and maintain the logical flow of ideas in their essays did not reach a very skilled level, but the average level they attained is encouraging given the brief amount of training they received. This meant that longer-term integration of CT could lead to promising results. These studies showed that ideologies can change over time; however, they did not work on the effect of teaching on bringing about this change.

In Iran, Kiany et al. (2011) probed into some macro matters with regard to foreign language education policies by examining some policy documents as officially held as part of the educational system. A variety of national plans and, in some cases, unfinished documents that included various aspects of Iran's language education programs were examined to find how the plans in the documents have been directed and oriented and the (in)compatibilities among them were discovered. Analysis of these documents indicated that despite a myriad of efforts made in order to improve the educational system of the country over the past years, foreign language education has not been paid enough attention to. Sharifian (2010) wrote about Persian English as an emerging variety. He elaborated on a number of significant Persian cultural schemas, such as âberu (reputation) and târof (formalities), and explored how they form the basis of the semantic and pragmatic aspects of certain words and expressions in Persian English, in contexts where both intercultural and intracultural communications occur. Moving onto the use of English by native authors in textbooks, Baleghizadeh and Motahed (2010) examined six internationally used ELT textbooks in terms of ideological content, three British and three American. Following the theory and procedures of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the researchers examined three aspects of conversations in the textbooks, i.e., content, relations, and positions. Results suggested that in terms of content, entertainment tends to be a bolder feature in British textbooks while American books consist of more occupational and business-related issues.

Wei-Hao Lin (2008) in his study on the identification of ideological perspectives in news texts and videos used a computer system in text analysis and in understanding multimedia content. Based on the model created in the system, the results showed that at the corpus level, ideological discourse and non-ideological discourse can be distinguished to a great extent. At the document level, high-level accuracy can be applied in the identification of the perspective from which a document is devised or a video is produced. At the sentence level, the model was used to summarize an ideology-based document by selecting sentences in which a particular perspective was strongly expressed. Word patterns in texts and emphatic patterns in videos could function as the units of measurement.

Among the four language skills, writing and speaking can help language users demonstrate their ideological perspectives. Lee and Deakin (2016) in their corpus-based study explored interaction in successful and unsuccessful L1 and L2 essays by Chinese learners of English and they found that learners used more hedging devices in successful essays; however, there was no significant difference between the two essays in terms of using attitude markers and boosters. Besides that, writers' authority was more prominent in L1 essays than in L2 texts, which was similar to the findings made by Dontcheva-Navratilova (2023).

Kashkuli et al. (2016) studied the effect of teaching discourse strategies on Iranian EFL learners' writing proficiency according to an innovative model developed based on the principles of critical discourse analysis presented by Van Dijk's (2000) well-known socio-cognitive model. The instruction given to the experimental group in the study included some practical discursive strategies, namely, comparison, example or illustration, explanation, repetition, reasonableness, and context description. The results of the research indicated meaningful differences between the performances of the experimental and control groups which meant that the CDA-oriented approach to teaching writing skills was efficient.

Ideology and gender are also other areas of interest for researchers. Abudalbuh (2012) studied the use of third-person pronouns by native English speakers and Arabic speakers in sentence completion written tasks. The results showed that in comparison to English native speakers (NSs), fewer items were given the "typically female" evaluation by Arabic-speaking English learners, but the percentages of "typically male" and "gender neutral" ratings were not significantly different from NSs. Arabic-speaking L2 learners of English used the masculine pronoun (he) for the majority of both normally male and gender-neutral antecedents, in contrast to English NSs. These English L2 learners employed the feminine pronoun (she) with the majority of usually female antecedents. The way Arabic-speaking L2 English learners tend to utilize generic pronouns may be an indication of a typical sexist linguistic practice, in which men occupy both the male and neutral positions, and women are assigned "the marked, the gendered, the different, and the forever-female position" (p. 133).

The above-mentioned studies focused on either content that were used in ESL classrooms or the comparison between L1 and L2 writings, both of which were rather corpus-based. In fact, they measured and tracked strategies utilized in them over a period of time, regardless of factors contributing to those usages.

In another study conducted by Bacang et al. (2019), linguistic differences and methods of argumentation between male and female writers were explored through corpus analysis using different frameworks. The focus of the study was on rhetorical appeal, boosters, and hedges. The study's categorical variables, such as boosters, hedges, and rhetorical appeals, were first determined using a qualitative approach. The frequency of boosters, hedges, and rhetorical appeals in the ESL students' argumentative writings was also examined using descriptive statistics. According to this study, male ESL students tend to utilize logical appeal while writing

argumentative essays, but female students tend to use emotional appeal. Additionally, compared to male students, female students utilize more hedging and boosting techniques in their argumentative writings. The male students in this study authored essays that were significantly lengthier than those of the female students, but the female students still managed to use more hedging and boosting strategies.

## 2.2. Studies Based on Fairclough's Model

One of the common models used in studies on ideology in CDA is Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model. In this model, every communicative event is thought to consist of three dimensions: first, it is a text which can be in the form of speech, writing, visual images, or a combination of these; second, it is a discursive practice which involves the production and consumption of texts; finally, it is a social practice (109). Corresponding to these three levels of discourse, Fairclough developed three stages of CDA: description, interpretation, and explanation. Therefore, text, interaction, and context are the three main dimensions based on which a discursive production is analyzed. Language elements including text structure (thematic choice), grammar (transitivity, passivization), and vocabulary (wording) decisions should all be examined during the description stage. In the interpretation stage, those elements that have to do with how individuals create and perceive news discourse are taken into account, thereby, the news source and reporting modes should be worthy of exploration in the interpretive stage of news reports. The analysis in the explanation part is in reference to the historical, social, and cultural contexts. Educational, family, and cultural backgrounds are taken into account during this stage.

Asghar (2014) used Fairclough's model to examine some commercials advertising a drink over three time periods. He concluded that this way of examination helps the audience to be aware of the hidden ideologies which emancipate readers from the agendas of the advertising groups or individuals. Following the three levels of analysis-- text, discourse, and social practice-- in the commercials, he highlighted how they changed over time in terms of the language used in them, how they were presented and the conditions of the society in each period of time. He used these analyses to show the increasing complexity of life led by advertising companies.

The use of Fairclough's three-dimensional model can also be seen in studies on gender. Amerian and Esmaili (2014) based their study on gender representation in Iranian high school English textbooks. They applied Fairclough's model to examine gender representation in international ELT textbooks. They based the analysis on eight factors i.e., female and male characters, female and male social roles, female and male's domestic roles, semantic roles, female and male's titles, order of appearance, masculine generic construction, activities of females and males engaged in, and finally the pictorial representation of both genders to detect the ideologies behind an international series of English textbooks. They concluded that a mixture of sexism and capitalism was evident in that series.

A similar line of research focusing on gender representation in teaching materials and textbooks was done showing the dominant role of males in them (Roohani & Heidari, 2012), and prominent, successful, active, independent, expressive and assertive role of females (Sahragard & Davatgarzadeh, 2010). To have an image of gender role in a productive skill like writing, Oktaviani and Jauhara (2014) investigated gender identity in four Indonesian junior college students' academic essays following the CDA framework of Fairclough (1989, 2001, 2010). The findings indicated that all the written products of both male and female writers show masculinity in terms of processes used in their production, which are shaped by the habitual life, environment, discourse and culture. Beiki and Gharaguzlu (2017) also investigated aspects of American English file, a textbook series, in terms of gender relations and positions besides the use of grammar and vocabulary. They used Fairclough's three-dimensional model (2001) as the framework; the findings revealed that images tended to favor men more, whereas women were underrepresented. The positions through the book were gender-biased as duties such as babysitting, housekeeping and household chores were displayed as female jobs while physically demanding jobs were considered masculine.

In a similar direction, Javadi and Mohammadi (2019) studied the effect of critical discourse-based instruction on in-depth reading among Iranian English major language learners'. They carried out an experimental study on undergraduate students of English, using Fairclough's three-dimensional model for their analysis. The instructors made an effort to teach the test-takers how to study the texts' concealed meanings in order to look into and understand how the ideological and discourse structures of the texts interacted with one another. The results obtained from the scores in the post-reading test showed that students whose instruction was based on CDA achieved better scores and this method also strengthened their motivation to learn English.

There has been some research into IELTS writing task 2 (essay writing) focusing on its reliability and validity (Veerappan & Sulaiman, 2012, Priyanti, 2017, Hashemi & Daneshfar, 2018). However, studies focusing on ideology and second language education have mostly concentrated on revealing ideologies in reading passages and textbooks (Javadi & Mohammadi, 2019; Asghar, 2014; Wei-Hao Lin, 2008), and in some cases on speeches (Handayani, Heriyanto, & Soemantri 2018).

Having known about previous aspects of studies, it seems that an area in which English learners' awareness of ideology exhibition needs to be still heightened is writing skills. Detecting ideological clues and being aware of them, besides knowing how to use them, maybe very effective in learning language skills, which is an area worth investigating. One of the significances of expressing ideas in written texts and enhancing the ability to write coherently is when learners are required to use argumentation in international English tests like IELTS. Since learners' success in the writing part of these kinds of tests and teachers' roles in helping them achieve that goal can contribute greatly to their successful educational pursuits, it seems that this line of research can be highly beneficial.

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1. Design of the Study

This study followed a sequential mixed methods design using both qualitative content analysis methods and quantitative procedures (See Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). That is, in the qualitative phase of the study, the content of the participants' writings was qualitatively analyzed (based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model), both in the pre-test and the post-test phases to extract the recurrent themes from them. Moreover, in the quantitative phase, descriptive (i.e., calculation of frequency and percentage of factors representing ideology transfer in writings) and inferential statistics (i.e., chi-square test) were run.

## 3.2. Participants

From among 150 male and female IELTS candidates taking part in the Mock Exams in three exam centers in Tehran, 90 (48 males and 42 females) candidates were selected as the main participants of the present study based on the following criteria: Firstly, the participants were filtered concerning information on their age, gender, educational background, profession, and ethnic group. The reason for this was that, according to Van Dijk (2000), these factors can affect strategies applied by essay writers to exhibit their ideology because ideology provides important social functions such as membership, action, value, belief, and relationships. Secondly, only those candidates whose essays received a band score of 6 and above (out of 9) were chosen as the participants of the study since candidates gaining this band score, which is almost equal to intermediate level and above, or according to IELTS organization, those who are competent, good and very good users, have an adequate command of English knowledge to express their ideas in terms of vocabulary and grammar. However, 10 (8 males and 2 females) candidates refused to continue in the middle of the study. Finally, 80 candidates (40 males and 40 females) remained as the main participants of the study. They were in the age range of 25-40 and had at least a bachelor's degree and a job of their own. The mother tongue of all of the participants was Persian and they did not belong to ethnic minorities. It is worth noting that to observe research ethics, the consent of the authorities of the Mock Exams centers as well as the participants' consent was taken for participation in the study.

## 3.3. Instrumentation

As the research tool, Mock Writing Task 2 was used to measure the participants' ideology transfer rate at the beginning of the study. A Sample IELTS Writing Task 2 was also used for the purpose of measuring the level of participants' ideology transfer at the end of the study.

The instrument for grading the writings and gathering data was *writing task 2 band descriptors* published by International Education Specialists also known as IDP, which is used for

writing assessment in the IELTS exam all around the world. To observe the inter-rater reliability considerations, a second rater re-analyzed the participants' writings based on Fairclough's (2001) model, and the codes given, themes drawn, and the number of them were very close, and in some cases the same.

## 3.4. Data Collection Procedure

To collect the data, first, sampling was done as described above. Then, the participants' Mock writing sample task 2 was collected and analyzed based on Fairclough's (2001) model. Based on this model, the writings of the participants were scrutinized by one of the researchers as the first rater in terms of three levels: content, social relations, and subject positions. To be more specific, the frequency and percentages of the occurrence of themes representing these three categories in participants' writings were calculated. These three levels were examined based on students' use of lexis, syntax, and ideas presented in the text.

Then, the treatment period of the study started wherein the participants were exposed to 20 90-minute educational sessions twice a week. During the sessions which were held online due to the constraints imposed by the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the researchers as an IELTS instructor taught the four criteria of IELTS Writing Scoring rubrics including task response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy- the very same framework that was used by raters to assess students' writing in the first stage. Within this framework, learners were informed about the correct choice of words, connotations of them, usage of active and passive voices, modality, etc. Then, after the end of the treatment period, the participants' essays were collected and analyzed based on Fairclough's (2001) model to extract the patterns of ideology transfer in the participants' writings at the end of the study. Inter-rater reliability issues were also observed similar to the manner explained for Mock writing sample task 2 (the pre-test).

## 3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was conducted at qualitative and quantitative levels. At the qualitative level, the thematic analysis was done on the raw data including the participants' writings in four steps: note-taking, coding data, identifying recurrent patterns, and accuracy checking of patterns. Notes in the first step included the use of personal pronouns, choice of words and pronouns that implied learners' gender representation, use of active and passive verbs, the number of ideas presented in the essay, the use or lack of modals, and the use of softeners in idea developments. The numbers of these items varied as writings styles and lengths were different, so they were somewhere between 10 to 30 items in each essay. Coding was done by making some phrases and sentences of the text bold and categorizing them. The outcome of this level of analysis was an extraction of some recurrent themes representing the pattern of ideology transfer in the writings of the

participants at the outset and the end of the study. At the quantitative level, the frequency and percentage of the identified themes were calculated for the participants' pre-test and post-test writings, then they were compared with each other through Chi-square tests.

# 4. Results

## 4.1. Qualitative Results

The results obtained in both stages (pre-test and post-test) were based on the finding of similar recurring discursive strategies used by candidates, coding them, categorizing them, labeling them, and finally, counting them. Calculating the number of strategies and their frequency was conducted in the quantitative stage, but the other levels of analysis were performed in the quantitative stage. The analysis of writings and extraction of categories were based on vocabulary (word meanings and their choice), grammar (active versus passive verbs, and modality), cohesion (use of pronouns, and use of cohesive devices), and coherence (idea presentation, idea development, and clarity of expression). These were at the text and interpretation levels introduced in Fairclough's model which required linguistic and discursive analysis of the writings. The results of the qualitative content analysis of the participants' writings after the treatment period led to the identification of the following main themes in the participants' post-test writings.

1. The participants showed more tendency towards representation of social, cultural, and gender identity in their writing;

2. The participants used more active voices in their post-test writing compared to their pre-test writing;

3. More uses of first-person pronoun were observed in the post-test writings of the participants compared to their pre-test writing;

4. More prominent social views were mentioned by the participants in their post-test writings;

5. A higher level of author visibility was observed in the post-test writings of the sample;

6. The participants' post-test writings were more replete with ideology-laden concepts such as social justice, fairness, power imbalance in the society, etc. compared to their pre-test writings; finally,

7. The participants clearly developed more ideas in their post-test writings compared to their pre-test writings.

Figure 1 shows the themes extracted from the writings schematically.

**Figure 1**

*The Themes Extracted from the Writings in the Post-test*
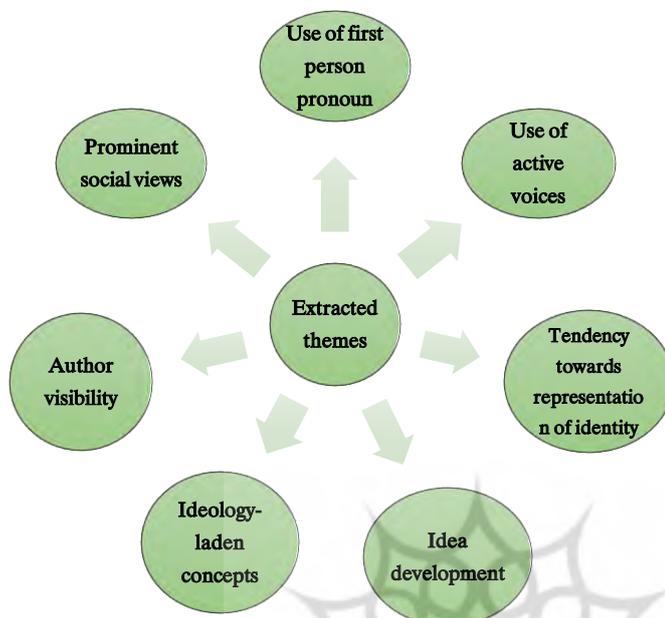


This figure was designed based on the extracted themes which were coded and labeled according to their functions and usage in the writings for the purpose of transferring the candidates' ideologies. Since candidates were more willing to refer to their cultural, social, and gender identity by resorting to their social and cultural background and revealing differences in their way of idea representation based on their gender, examples showing these themes were considered "tendency towards representation of identity". This code was assigned to the chunks used for explicit and subtle expressions of ideas, and representation of ideas based on social and cultural status. Candidates were more willing to express and support an idea considering themselves as social identities, rather than focusing on a holistic view of the issues around them. "Idea development" was chosen since candidates expanded their ideas in the post-test more clearly than what they did in the pre-test. In the pre-test, they seemed to jump from one idea to the next, without regarding the reader as the receiver of the message who might not find it easy to follow the chain of thoughts of the writer. Therefore, essays in the pre-test were shorter; however, in the post-test, they were longer, better organized, and easier to follow. The theme of "ideology-laden concepts" was assigned to the usage of words and phrases that have positive and negative connotations, which were more apparent in the post-test, unlike neutral concepts which were used in the pre-test. In the post-test, ideas were delivered more precisely as the candidates intentionally used phrases that conveyed positive or negative meanings. In fact, the number of neutral concepts which depicted no special siding with or against other groups decreased in the post-test, and candidates tended to be more straightforward regarding what they thought of a statement. Voicing opinions and supporting them from personal standpoints, instead of using other sources,

were labeled "author visibility", and referring to social issues in support of the ideas was categorized as "prominent social views". The former strategy displayed the writer's stand on a topic, without using an external basis to support it, and the latter was observed and marked since social concepts like inequality, health issues, crime and the like were more prominent in the post-test. Candidates' more tendency toward including themselves in displaying their point of view through pronoun "I" and their preference for active verbs rather than passive forms were the basis of the themes "use of first personal pronoun" and "use of active voice". The increased number of words and phrases like "I", "we", "in my opinion", and "from my point of view" along with verbs such as "cause", "make", "think", and "believe" in the post-test, resulted in coding these as examples of strategies for idea presentation.

All of these themes were more evident, more frequent, and more clearly used in the post-test. Specific examples of these changes can be seen in the table in the Appendix.

## 4.2. Quantitative Results

In the quantitative phase of data analysis, descriptive statistics including the frequency and percentage of the recurrent themes were calculated for the pre-test and post-test writings of the participants. Then, at the inferential level, Chi-square tests were run to see whether there was any significant difference between the frequency and percentage of the recurrent themes in the pre-test and the post-test. Table 1 shows the results of descriptive statistics for the recurrent themes in the pre-test and post-test writings.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for the Recurrent Themes in the Pre-test and Post-test Writings*

| Pre-test | Theme | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Tendency towards representation of social, cultural and gender identity | 60 | 23% |
| | Use of active voices | 74 | 28% |
| | Use of first person pronoun | 85 | 32% |
| | Social views | 16 | 6% |
| | Author visibility | 10 | 4% |
| | Ideology-laden concepts | 15 | 5% |
| | Idea development | 6 | 2% |
| | Total | **266** | 100% |
| Post-test | Tendency towards representation of social, cultural and gender identity | 189 | 24% |
| | Use of active voices | 104 | 13% |
| | Use of first person pronoun | 120 | 15% |
| | Social views | 110 | 14% |
| | Author visibility | 90 | 12% |
| | Ideology-laden concepts | 95 | 13% |
| | Idea development | 70 | 9% |
| | Total | **778** | 11100% |

As Table 1 shows, totally, in the pre-test writings, 266 cases of the use of factors representing ideology transfer (i.e., tendency towards representation of social, cultural, and gender identity; use of active voices; use of first-person pronoun; social views; author visibility;

ideology-laden concepts; and idea development) were identified. This is while the content analysis of the post-test writings led to the identification of 778 cases of the use of factors showing ideology transfer. Obviously, the frequency of the use of factors representing ideology transfer in the post-test writings outnumbered the frequency of the use of such factors in the pre-test writings. To check the significance of this difference in statistical terms, a Chi-square test was run, the results of which are shown in Table 2.

Table 1

*Chi-square Test Results*

| Factors | Chi-square | Asymp. Sig. |
|---|---|---|
| Tendency towards representation of social, cultural and gender identity | .114 | .023 |
| Use of active voices | .855 | .003 |
| Use of first-person pronoun | .314 | .006 |
| Social views | .167 | .000 |
| Author visibility | .209 | .007 |
| Ideology-laden concepts | .185 | .047 |
| Idea development | .117 | .003 |

Based on Table 2, there was a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the frequency of the use of discursive strategies representing ideology transfer in the pre-test and post-test writings. This means that teaching writing discursive strategies to students helped them be able to include them more frequently and practically to convey their thoughts. As a result, the hypothesis proposed for the second research question which was "Teaching writing skills does not have any effects on EFL learners' ideology transfer based on Fairclough's model (2001)" is rejected. According to the qualitative and quantitative results, teaching writing skills proved to have a significant positive effect on ideology transfer in academic writings of EFL students since the number of discursive strategies facilitating ideology transfer increased, which is why they applied them in a more consistent and regular pattern.

# 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study sought to answer two research questions. To answer the first question: 'What discursive strategies do the participants use in their writings to represent ideology transfer?', the collected data were qualitatively analyzed. According to the results, generally, the following strategies were used by the participants to represent their transfer: tendency towards representation of social, cultural and gender identity, use of active voices, use of first-person pronouns, social views, author visibility, ideology-laden concepts, and idea development.

With regard to the first discursive strategy, after undergoing the treatment, students were more open and direct in terms of expressing their ideas based on their social identity, cultural background, and gender. By comparison, females were softer and gentler in posing their views by using modal verbs and less definite language pieces, but males tended to express their ideas more strongly and less doubtfully. This was in contrast to the results found by Aziz et al. (2016), which

showed no noticeable difference in the female and male writers' writing styles. However, the result was corroborated by Alqahtani and Abdelhalim (2020) who, in their study, showed that males and females differ significantly in their use of markers and idea connectors. The results of this study were also aligned with those achieved by Bacang et al.(2019) who also revealed that female writers used more hedging and boosting devices than males, which is witnessed in this study as a gentler and more indirect way of representing viewpoints. Females in this study also tended to be less assertive while expressing their beliefs on social matters.

In addition, there were differences in learners' representing social identities and they were more open to reflecting their social status in their writings. A sense of self-marginalization faded away as learners felt more confident about their voice and the way they wanted to present it, which developed gradually during the process of learning writing. Therefore, it was possible to infer if the writers of the essay, after the treatment, could see themselves as important members of the society or not, because their tone of writing and use of ideas were different in terms of certainty and strength. In other words, students expressed their views in different ways depending on their social position. For example, those who belonged to higher social strata or had jobs of higher status represented their views in a more direct way and without worrying about the probable effect of them on the readers. However, those who were still students at university or unemployed were more hesitant. In both cases, it was evident that they were able to reflect their identity as a whole in their writings. These observations and findings were in agreement with the argument made by Anderson (2017) claiming that L2 writers' identity is reconstructed and negotiated in the process of academic writing. A similar argument was made by Flores and Rosa (2015) when they stated that writing skill sets new forms of identity in students and appropriateness-based approaches to language acquisition should no longer be used as the dominant way of teaching.

The second and third strategies were based on the frequency of using 'I' and active verbs in the essay. Having passed the course, students used phrases such as 'I believe' or 'I am of the opinion that' instead of phrases which represented impersonal views, like 'it is believed that' or 'it is thought that'. In other words, they learned that they did not need to generalize their opinion to transfer their way of thinking, and they were allowed to use personal pronouns and active verbs to clearly convey the message. There was not much research into the relation between using 'I' and active voice and ideology in EFL writing, but there were various studies on the frequency of passive voice in the news that focused on the concept of agency and use or lack of use of passive and active verbs. They witnessed passive voice was more frequent because they intended to delete agency and maintain unequal power (Billig, 2008; Bonyadi & Samuel, 2011; He & Zhou, 2015).

Regarding "social views", students moved toward basing their views on social issues and societal matters to develop and support their ideas. Unlike their essays in the pre-test which included examples of personal experiences and repetitive ideas in the supporting sentences, in the final essays written in the post-test, the participants referred to issues like economy, crime rate, health, and inequality in society in order to provide more convincing justifications. In fact, because

of the treatment they received, they understood that in academic and argumentative essays, if they base their ideas on larger-scale and less personal issues, they provide the reader with more relatable concepts, hence showing deeper and better writer-reader relations. The signals used as a representation of "author visibility" were pronouns used in phrases like "we can benefit from" and "I believe that" instead of phrases like "research has shown that" or "according to the latest studies", which were frequently used in the essays written before the course. In other words, the writers realized that they could include themselves in the population making the basis of their views, and they did not need to resort to some mechanical academic phrases to expand their ideas or to isolate themselves from holders of those views. The concept of author visibility was examined in research papers and university theses and dissertations, where extreme formality and author invisibility were found (Msuya, 2016). However, a similar line of research in teaching argumentative writing seemed to be missing.

Regarding "ideology-laden concepts" and "idea development", it was witnessed that students learned to make use of phrases and structures with positive and negative connotations instead of neutral ones. Before the treatment, they used synonyms, adverbs, and sentence structures randomly and only in order to avoid repeating words and sentences. However, after being taught to pay attention to the connotations and additional meanings of those phrases and formats, they utilized them more cautiously and accurately. For example, they learned the difference in meanings between 'cause' and 'lead', or 'impossible' and 'improbable', and realized how these differences could affect the message they were trying to get across. They were also informed that a sentence like 'people are <u>too</u> concerned about their health' carries a negative meaning as there is 'too' in it whereas an almost equivalent sentence like 'they are <u>very</u> concerned about …' does not.

In addition to these changes in text production, they wrote longer and lengthier essays after finishing their course, so their essays of more or less 220 words turned into essays of 350 words or so. Since they were taught how to connect ideas and create a smooth flow of them by providing step-by-step explanations, they learned to expand their ideas and develop their paragraphs by explaining each idea in a sequential manner. Before the treatment, they tended to connect their ideas hastily and incoherently assuming that the reader would easily follow what chain of thoughts they had. After the treatment, however, they found that they were expected to clarify their points irrespective of how clear they thought their point was. As a result, they managed to provide better supporting sentences and easy-to-follow ideas. This supports Kashkuli's findings (2016) as they showed that it is possible to use critical discourse analysis to teach discursive strategies like comparison, illustration, explanation, and reasonableness. Although similar concepts to what Kashkuli used were not analyzed in this study and the themes here were more general in some cases and more specific in others, it can be claimed that the two studies are in line with each other. Becang et al. (2019) also observed that male learners produced longer argumentative essays using logical appeals in the final test.

In general, learners' awareness of the impact of word choice, sentence structure, and the way of presenting and developing ideas was increased through the treatment period, the result of which was essays that were easy to read, comprehend, and communicate with. Participants learned to be more cautious about using synonyms, verb voices, pronouns, use of modality, and expansion of ideas since during each treatment session they were given information about the effect of each strategy on readers' interpretation and inference. They were taught the differences between negative and positive connotations, how the reader might feel if a special phrase or structure is used, and how they can clarify their points by applying discursive strategies categorized in this study.

Concerning the second research question: 'Does teaching writing skills have a significant effect on ideology transfer in academic writings of EFL students?', by the quantitative data analysis, it was revealed that the strategies were significantly more frequent in the post-test writings compared to the pre-test writings. This shows that teaching writing skills (based on the four criteria of IELTS Writing Scoring rubrics including task response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy) had a significant positive effect on ideology transfer in academic writings of EFL students using Fairclough's (2001) model. To be more precise, under the influence of teaching how to use lexis and syntax along with coherence and clarity of message, they learned to utilize language items that transfer their ideologies more frequently and with greater precision. In the same vein, according to Berlin (1988), ideology and writing instruction have always been interconnected. This implies that writing instruction can hardly be imagined as separate from ideology and ideology building. Regarding the teachability of transmitting ideology, the results of this study were similar to those done by Kern (1995), Sakui and Gaies (1999), and Amuzie and Winke (2009). They showed ideology as a malleable concept which can change over time, which might not be exactly what was discovered in this study, but there is a level of similarity regarding the change that appeared in the depiction of ideology in the final production of candidates. It can be claimed that candidates' ideology went through change as they made use of strategies to present thoughts and beliefs that were either missing or vague in their initial writings. Nejmaoui (2019) points out the importance of incorporating thinking critically in teaching writing and how effective this can be if it is applied over a long period of time. This study also proves that critical thinking is teachable and transferrable.

It is worth noting that little research could be found in the existing literature wherein the impact of teaching writing skills on ideology transfer in academic writings of EFL students had been explored, as it was examined in this research. This is because most of the studies focused on ideology in different contexts, and did not analyze how learners conveyed their ideological perspectives in their essays while they were learning English as a foreign language. In fact, the focus of their studies was on ideology representation in textbooks, speeches, news, and in general contents produced by native speakers, material developers, and educators, not learners:

Baleghizadeh (2010), Lin (2008), Asghar (2014), Amerian and Esmaili (2014), Beiki and Gharaguzlu (2017), Javadi and Mohamadi (2019).

Based on what was observed in this study, it can be claimed that the potential of educational materials in any form including teaching writing skills in learners' negotiation of meaning, meaning construction and co-construction should not be easily missed. Among different language skills, writing is strongly associated with ideology formation. Therefore, stakeholders in EFL writing education can benefit from teaching writing skills in different forms to help students verbalize and convey their ideologies effortlessly. Given that EFL teaching at the surface level is not sufficient if one aims at reconstruction of ideology in students, the role of teaching writing skills is worth taking into account.

All in all, based on the findings, it can be concluded that teaching writing skills (based on the four criteria of IELTS Writing Scoring rubrics improves EFL learners' ideology transfer based on Fairclough's (2001) model. It can also be concluded from the findings that ideology transfer does not occur in a vacuum, but it is learnable and it can be changed via teaching writing skills. That is, learners are capable of becoming aware of the effects of their produced texts and meanings on readers who have no prior information about their backgrounds and contexts. Considering how the participants performed in the final stage of this study, it can be claimed that when learners' awareness of language use and impact increases, they are more likely to produce more coherent texts with less difficulty in clarifying the concepts, modifying them, and depicting what they intend to convey. Therefore, people are prone to learn to form arguments conveying their true ideologies in their writings by being exposed to interventions consisting of teaching writing skills.

## 5.1. Implications

Taking the important role of ideology in education and EFL learning, the findings show the necessity to use teaching writing skills in EFL classes so that students reach the ability to transfer their own ideology. Since academic writing, especially the argumentative style requires learners to be able to voice their viewpoints on various topics, teaching them how to do so and informing them about its necessity seems to be imperative. Therefore, the analyses conducted in this study can help EFL teachers and educators view educating EFL learning beyond expanding vocabulary knowledge and widening grammatical range. This attitude toward teaching and learning English seems to have twofold benefits. Firstly, teachers will focus on the process of writing more, since they need to walk students through the process and make them conscious of their choice of syntax and lexicon; secondly, learners may be encouraged to view language more critically and use it more cautiously as they will try to use strategies that help them avoid causing any confusion.

Therefore, educational stakeholders are recommended to incorporate teaching writing skills in their programs in an attempt to enhance the ideology transfer ability of EFL students. Future researchers are suggested to replicate the present study to see if they can extract other

strategies and whether they can be modified or expanded. Moreover, they are recommended to conduct a similar study on intermediate and pre-intermediate EFL learners, not necessarily those preparing for the IELTS exam, in order to familiarize them with various aspects of language and how they can affect their use of that language. Exposing learners of lower levels of English to such teaching techniques might not be as applicable as it is with higher-level learners, but it might give a new perspective to teachers who try to lay the foundation of teaching a new language. Last but not least, it is recommended that the present study be replicated in writing courses taught in different settings including universities and high schools since all students, no matter where they study English, need to be familiarized with the concept of ideology in writing and the discursive strategies they can use to ease the process of writing for themselves.

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# Appendix

| Examples of strategies in the pre-test | Examples of strategies used in the post-test | Codes |
|---|---|---|
| The government **has to** solve this issue…. This **is** because individuals do not pay …. | The government **can** take action in this issue by …. It **seems** that families do not ….. | *Tendency towards representation of identity* |
| Technology **is used** too much these days. This method **should be applied** ……. | People **make use of** technology …. Educators **should utilize** some tools….. | *Use of active voice* |
| **Research has shown** that educating students at home helps them ….. | **In my opinion**, home schooling can be a good alternative ….. | *Author visibility* |
| For example, I take the issue seriously and recycle to help the environment. | For example, people should separate their dry and wet waste if they want to have a contribution…. | *Prominent social views* |
| **Few** suggestions can be made regarding this issue. This **causes** people to change their lives and move toward a different goal. | To tackle this matter, **some/ a few** solutions can be put forward. **This way, people decide to** take different action and …. | *Ideology-laden concepts* |
| It is a good idea to ……. Having enough facilities is necessary for young people …. | **I** am of the opinion that this helps …… I believe if the government provides students with …. | *Use of first-person pronoun* |
| Length of paragraphs **45-60 words** Length of essays **220-250 words** | Length of paragraphs **70- 95 words** Length of essays **300- 350 words** | *Idea development* |