

The Effect of Van Dijk Discourse Strategies on Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Proficiency

Fateme Rasuli Kashkuli

Department of English Language and Literature, Persian Gulf University, Busheher, Iran

Nasim Ghanbari

Department of English Language and Literature, Persian Gulf University, Busheher, Iran

Abbas Abbasi

Department of English Language and Literature, Persian Gulf University, Busheher, Iran

Abstract—This study tried to improve the writing proficiency of Iranian EFL students utilizing an innovative model through implementing and operationalizing the principles of critical discourse analysis which was introduced by Van Dijk's (2000) well-known socio-cognitive model. To this end, 57 intermediate language learners studying English in language institutes for several years were selected as the participants of the study using a version of TOEFL test as the selected proficiency test. The included participants were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control—with 28 students in experimental group (16 females and 12 males) and 29 students in control group (17 females and 12 males). Both groups went through a three-stage model (pre-writing, during-writing and post-writing). The teaching procedure on writing had some differences between the instruction provided for the experimental group and the instruction presented to the control group in which the experimental group received some suitable discursive strategies, namely, comparison, example (illustration), explanation, repetition, reasonableness and context description. After instruction, two groups were asked to write on a topic and their compositions were scored using holistic scoring procedure in order to guarantee the high reliability. The results of the study showed the significant differences between the performances of the experimental and control groups which indicated to the efficiency of the CDA-oriented approach to teach writing skill. However, the result of the study showed non-significant differences between the performances of the two genders as well as the performances of females and males in each group.

Index Terms—critical discourse analysis, writing skill, ideology, micro-discursive strategies, macro-discursive strategies

I. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Writing skill is not "a naturally acquired skill" (Myles, 2002, p.1), but "learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices in formal instructional settings or other environments" (Myles, 2002, p.1). It means that writing skill is acquired by practice and experience. Myles (2002) argued that acquiring writing "involves composing" (p.1) which means getting the ability to present or represent pieces of narrative or descriptive information along with transforming information argumentatively.

Generally speaking, writing skill demands a continuum of activities from the more mechanical to the more specialized form of composing (Hadley & Reiken, 1993). Bereiter and Scardamalia, (1987) emphasized that writing means contributions of the writers in an "interaction between continuously developing knowledge and continuously developing text" (p. 12), through gathering diverse concepts to solve some problems. However, academic writing demands "conscious effort and practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas" (Myles, 2002, p.1).

The aforementioned issues denote the fact that writing is a central communication skill; however, it may not be included in the course objectives of learning English language. There is no doubt regarding the central role of writing in the processes of learning language. Nunan (1991) considered writing not only as the process the writer uses to put words together but also as the resulting product of that process. Hayes (1996) underlines that writing process demands bringing the knowledge of the process writing as well as strategies beneficial in composing.

Considering the fact writing proficiency has made many dilemma and challenges for different learners and even the advanced ones; it is conceivable that traditional teaching writing is ineffective. Accordingly, there is the demand for some investigations on some innovative methods to teach writing in order to promote the writing proficiency in the part of learners.

Considering the aforementioned issues, this study attempts to provide a new trend in teaching writing utilizing the principles of critical discourse analysis and raising consciousness and critical thinking in order to promote writing proficiency on the part of students. To this end, 60 intermediate homogenous EFL undergraduate students were selected

using a proficiency test, namely a version of TOEFL test. Effectively, the main purposes of the study were to answer the following questions:

- Q1. Is there any difference between the performance of the subjects in the experimental and the control groups?
- Q2. Is there any difference between the performances of males and females who receive instruction through CDA?
- Q3. Is there any difference between the performances of males and females who receive through the traditional model?

Based on the raised questions, the following hypotheses were suggested:

- H01. There is no difference between the performance of the subjects in the experimental and the control groups.
- H02. There is no difference between the performances of males and females who receive instruction through CDA.
- H03. There is no difference between the performances of males and females who receive through the traditional model.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This part of the study explicates the review of literature with the centrality of the notion of critical discourse analysis and its relation to teaching language.

A. *Critical Discourse Analysis*

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), according to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), refers to the approaches explore “the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in different social domains” (p. 60). Weiss and Wodak (2003) argue that critical discourse analysis has amalgamated a number of theories especially the social theories and linguistic theories. They concludes that the underlying theory of CDA is, in effect, “a shifting synthesis of other theories” by mediating “between the social and the linguistic” (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p.6). Weiss and Wodak (2003) add that CDA is, in effect, a transdisciplinary framework of discourse analysis through operationalization based on various disciplines like sociology or linguistics. Hence, mediation is the fundamental part of critical discourse analysis which followed by different researchers variously.

Fairclough (1998, 2001a) considers member resources as mediation between discourse and society whereas Van Dijk (2000) considers cognitive structures as mediation. The mediation, according to Weiss and Wodak (2003), is the most challenging part of operationalizing critical discourse analysis.

The common features of different approaches to critical discourse analysis, according to Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p. 271-280), are:

1. CDA addresses social problems;
2. Power relations are discursive;
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture;
4. Discourse does ideological work;
5. Discourse is historical;
6. The link between text and society is mediated;
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory;
8. Discourse is a form of social action (cited in Van Dijk, 2001, p. 353).

Weiss and Wodak (2003) argues that an integrated “theoretical framework” demands “reconciling different (sociological and linguistic) perspectives without reducing them to one another (and this is where we get to the heart of the problem of interdisciplinarity)” (p. 8). To this end, they consider three steps fundamental as follow:

1. Clarification of the basic theoretical assumptions regarding text, discourse, language, action, social structure, institution and society.
2. The development of conceptual tools capable of connecting the level of text or discourse analysis with sociological positions on institutions, actions and social structures.
3. After clarifying the theoretical assumptions and identifying the conceptual tools, the third basic step is the defining of categories, that is, of analytical concepts, to denote the content of specific phenomena Weiss & Wodak, 2003, pp. 8-10).

There are many approaches in operationalizing critical discourse analysis. The following section presents some main approaches to conducting CDA with the centrality of education.

B. *Fairclough's Three-dimensional Model*

Fairclough (1989 & 2001a) has introduced his well-known model called critical language studies (CLS) which has composed of three dimensions of description, interpretation and explanation. Fairclough (2001b) views CDA as “theoretical perspective on language” (p. 121). Fairclough (2001b) argues that CDA is “in a dialogical relationship with other social theories and methods, which should engage with them in a ‘transdisciplinary’ rather than just an interdisciplinary way” (p. 122).

Fairclough's (1989, 2001a) three-Dimensional Model is based on the semiosis perspective considered “as an irreducible part of material social processes” (p. 122). Semiosis, according to Fairclough (2001b) refers to “all forms of meaning making (including) visual images, body language, as well as language” (p. 122). Fairclough (2001b) adds that

every practices is, in effect, a network of productive activity, means of production, social relations, cultural values, consciousness and semiosis.

Hence, Fairclough (2001b) considers these elements not as different factors but as the factors which “are dialectically related (p. 123). CDA, in Fairclough’s (2001b), analyzes “the dialectical relationships between semiosis (including language) and other elements of social practices” (p. 123).

In operationalizing his model, Fairclough (2001b, p. 125) numerates the following steps:

1. Focus upon a social problem which has a semiotic aspect.
2. Identify obstacles to it being tackled, through analysis of
 - a) the network of practices it is located within
 - b) the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice(s) concerned
 - c) the discourse (the semiosis itself)
 - structural analysis: the order of discourse
 - interactional analysis
 - interdiscursive analysis
 - Linguistic and semiotic analysis.
3. Consider whether the social order (network of practices) in a sense needs the problem.
4. Identify possible ways past the obstacles.
5. Reflect critically on the analysis (1-4).

Generally, Fairclough (2001b) assumes five stages in operationalizing his approach. The stages include problem-based dimension, indirect way in recognizing the problem, the role of social order in dealing with the problem, an indirect way to tackling the problem; moving from negative to positive tackling; and finally, reflexivity.

Effectively, Fairclough’s (1989, 2001a) model to CDA has composed of three dimensions of description which deals with the text analysis, interpretation which considers member resources which are compatible with processing analysis, and explanation which analyzes social dimension. The following diagram which was adopted by the researcher sheds light on Fairclough’s (1989, 2001) three-dimensional model.

As the figure shows Fairclough’s (2001a, p. 29) three-dimensional model demands three interrelated dimensions of

- The object of analysis (including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts);
- The processes by means of which the object is produced and received (writing/speaking/designing and reading/listening/viewing) by human subjects.
- The socio-historical conditions which govern these processes.

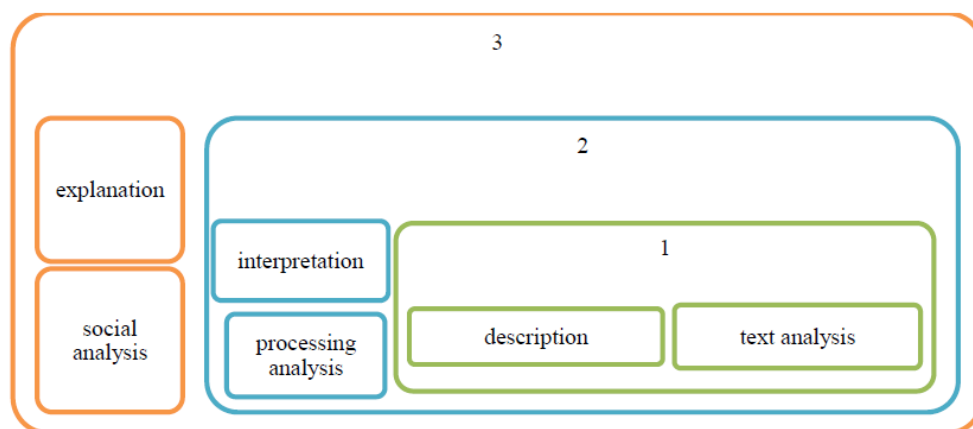


Diagram 1: Fairclough’s (2001a) three-dimensional model

C. Van Dijk’s (2000) Discourse-cognition-society Triangular Model

Following a multidisciplinary perspective, Van Dijk (2001) calls his model as socio-cognitive discourse analysis. Whereas, Fairclough (2001a) considers member resources as the mediating element in conducting critical discourse analysis; for Van Dijk (2001), it is cognition which plays the mediating role. Van Dijk (2000) has introduced forty cognitive micro-structures which shed light on two macro-cognitive structures.

D. CDA and Education

Rogers (2004) regards CDA as a new foundation for educational research. She argues that “CDA can describe, interpret, and explain the relationships among language and important educational issues” (Rogers, 2004, p. 1). Rogers (2004) adds that CDA is, in effect, an orientation for handling “the contradictions (which) emerge and demonstrate how they are enacted and transformed through linguistic practices in ways of interacting, representing, and being” (p. 1).

Burns and Morrell (2014) points out “CDA in literacy research has focused on the level of classroom interactions” (p. 4). They argue that CDA may be implemented in education in micro- or macro-levels. Burns and Morrell (2014), at the

macro-level of analysis, “the examination of archival documents and institutional histories” (p. 5). Hence, Burns and Morrell (2014) argue about the episteme of English education, namely, “the sets of discursive structures as a whole within which [the profession] thinks” (p. 5). Burns and Morrell (2014, p. 6) numerates the following insights in implementing critical discourse analysis in education

- elements of the archive established the privileged position of literature instruction in language arts curriculum;
- dominated by a conception of functional literacy (the decoding and encoding of printed texts);
- focus connected the development of English curriculum policy to a number of historical ideological positions;

E. Writing Skill: Theoretical Definitions

One of the crucial skill which seems to be demanding for any person especially the ones in the higher education is related to writing skill. Writing as a productive skill has defined by Lannon (1989) as “the process of transforming the material discovered by research inspiration, accident, trial or error, or whatever into a message with a definite meaning-writing is a process of deliberate decision” (p.9).

As far as the review of literature is concerned, writing skill is approached differently by different researchers based on their perspective regarding it. Hence, these approaches, according to Yi (2009), can be classified into three main approaches, namely, product/text-oriented, process/cognitive-oriented and reader/genre-oriented. However, Hedge (1998) considers two approaches to teaching of writing, namely, the product approach and the process approach.

Hyland (2002), in a similar vein, considers three approaches to writing teaching arguing that audience and social context are crucial in the process of teaching the writing skill.

Hence, writing skill is a complex and intertwined network of the interactive processes and not a linear activity. Al Souqi (2001) points out that writing skill demands producing and expressing ideas in a coherent way. The following sections clarifies three approaches to teaching writing skill, namely, product approach, process approach and genre approach.

The product approach to teaching writing skill demands that students produce compositions similar to a model essay which has been represented by the teacher (Pincas, 1982). Hence, product or text-oriented approach deals with writing as either "acontextually autonomous objects"(Hyland, 2002, p. 6) which underpins the surface structures of writing at the sentence level, or discourse which gives the crucial role to cohesion and the readability (YI, 2009). Effectively, product approach to writing follows two directions, namely, controlled (traditional) and discourse-based (Nunan, 1999).

Generally, this approach is fruitful in terms of terminology and was called differently by different researchers. In effect, it was called Product-based approach by Nunan (1999), Controlled composition approach by Silva (1993), Controlled-to-free approach by Raimes (1983) and Traditional text-based approach by Tribble (1996).

In a nutshell, product approach to teaching writing skill stresses on the mechanical and structural characteristics of the texts. Yi (2009) argues about four stages of product approach to teaching writing skill, namely, familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing and free writing.

Product approach to writing follows, in effect, the tenets of behaviorism in order to copy and transform models presented by textbooks and teachers (Nunan, 1999; Raimes, 1983; Silva, 1990; Tribble, 1996). Hence, writing, in this approach, refers to "the ability to adhere to style-guide prescriptions concerning grammar, arrangement and punctuation" (Nunan, 1999, p. 59). It is worth mentioning that this approach does not consider any role for the context, audience or processability (Hyland, 2002) which was criticized by the mainstream of discourse analysis.

In fact, the perspective of Texts-as-discourse (Hyland, 2002) was introduced on the ground that "there was more to writing than building grammatical sentences"(Silva, 1993, p. 13) which emphasizes on the ways based on which learners " use their knowledge of grammar in the construction of coherent texts" (Nunan, 1999, p. 290) with the crucial role considered for sentences and paragraphs in discourse. Accordingly, the written compositions were submitted to the teacher to be marked without any evaluation (Sarala, Salam, & Ismail, 2014).

Based on the criticism on product approach to teaching writing skill In the 1960s the process approach to writing was designed and developed (Silva, 1990). Process or cognitive approach was emerged which underscores the processes the writer go through in the process of writing (Johns, 1990; Nunan, 1999; Raimes, 1983; Silva, 1993; Tribble, 1996).

Process approach may be directed into three strands, namely, expressive, Cognitive and Social (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Hyland, 2002; Johns, 1990). Expressive strand, assuming writing as a creative task and discovery-oriented, emphasizes on a non-directive way of teaching writing (Berlin, 1988). Hence, expressive perspective to writing encourages students to express free authentic compositions which mostly encompasses personal essays and journal writing (Johns, 1990).

Cognitive perspective is the most well-known one which stresses on the cognitive processes the writer go through which was mostly covered by Hayes and Flower (1981) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1985) writing models. Generally, there are three main steps in the cognitive strand of the process approach to teaching writing skill, namely, planning, drafting and reviewing. The main shortcoming of the cognitive strand of the process approach to writing, according to Grabe and Kaplan (1996) refers to the fact that

writers are not likely to be uniform with respect to their processing preferences and cognitive abilities; [...] a protocol analysis approach [which was used by Hayes and Flower] may not be a valid primary methodology for the

study of the writing process to the extent that Flower and Hayes claim [...] [or at least from a more moderate perspective] it cannot be the primary source of evidence for a theory of the writing process" (pp. 92-933).

The cognitive strand highly emphasizes on the cognitive processes by neglecting the social context in which writing occurs which was criticized and resulted to the social strand of the process approach to teaching writing. Social perspective to process approach to writing underscores the social context (Hyland, 2002). Hyland (2002) argues that social perspective the process approach to teaching writing demands an integration of the cognitive structures and physical and experiential contexts in which writing occurs.

Sarala, Salam, and Ismail (2014) argue about eight steps in conducting a process approach to teaching writing, namely, brainstorming, planning, mind mapping, first draft, peer feedback, editing, final draft, and evaluation. Hence, in a process approach to teaching writing, teacher plays a facilitator role instead of the model role which played by a teacher in product approach to teaching writing.

Genre approach to teaching writing as a new direction in the field of teaching writing emphasizes on audience (discourse community) and social context which underscores the role played by the rhetorical knowledge like format, style and content (Tribble, 1996).

Genre approach to teaching writing considers writing ability as "the ability to perform writing tasks for a given purpose, satisfy a given discourse community with regard to the structure and content of the discourse, and communicate functionally" (Yi, 2009, p. 61).

III. METHODOLOGY

This part of the paper deals with the methodology based on which this study was conducted.

A. Participants

The participants of the study were 57 intermediate language learners studying English in language institutes for several years, with 28 students in experimental group and 29 students in control group. It is worth emphasizing that all the participants were undergraduate students with the age range of 19 to 24. All participants were Iranian students with Persian as their mother tongue. The participants were from the both genders—33 females and 24 males.

B. Instrumentations

The first instrument utilized in the study was a version of TOEFL test. The selected proficiency test, i.e. the TOEFL test composed of 32 questions—12 language form and meaning questions which test the grammatical features of language along with 20 reading questions which are based on reading comprehension. In fact, this version of the TOEFL test was adopted based on the proficiency level of the subjects and time-efficiency.

The second instrument was Van Dijk's (2000) socio-cognitive model which was selected as a baseline for designing an innovative model for teaching writing to the experimental group. In fact, Van Dijk's (2000) socio-cognitive model was used as a guide which helped the researcher to design her particular procedure for teaching writing skill which was amalgamated with teaching writing skill.

Hence, Compositions written by the participants were the third instruments which were evaluated using holistic scoring. In fact, the participants were asked to write on the topic assigned to them which were scored and analyzed in terms of group and gender.

C. Data Collection Procedure

At the beginning, in order to have a homogenous group, the participants took an adopted version of a TOEFL test. In fact, 69 English language learners who took the TOEFL test out of them 57 ones were those whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean score were included.

The selected subjects were divided randomly into two groups of experimental and control—experimental group with 28 students and the control group with 29 students. It is worth mentioning that the study included both females and males in order to provide more dependable results. Hence, the study was administered by participating 33 females and 24 males out of them the experimental group composed of 16 females and 12 males and control group of 17 females and 12 males.

Both groups received instructions on writing utilizing Zemach and Rumisek's (2003) College Writing during ten sessions. The experimental group received some instruction on several micro- and macro-strategies suggested by Van Dijk (2000) and were encouraged to utilize the strategies in order to manipulate language and express their meanings whereas, the control group didn't.

Generally, both experimental and control groups went through a three-stage model (pre-writing, during-writing and post-writing). In the pre-writing stage, the students' background knowledge was raised about the topic on which the students were supposed to write on a session.

The students' ideas were written on the board (brainstorming). On the during-writing phase, the necessary lexical and grammatical language was presented to the students. Furthermore, the students were allowed to use dictionary or other sources to complete the writing tasks.

The teaching procedure on writing had some differences between the instruction provided for the experimental group and the instruction presented to the control group in which the experimental group received some instruction of some suitable discursive strategies, namely, comparison, example (illustration), explanation, repetition, reasonableness and context description. The experimental group, for example, was instructed to utilize the discursive strategies of explanation, comparison, etc. Then, the both groups of experimental and control went into the post-phase on which they received some feedback about their writing and they were assisted to revise their writing tasks.

After instruction, two groups were asked to write on a topic selected from www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/989563wt.pdf.

The writings were scored using holistic scoring procedure in order to guarantee the high reliability. Holistic scoring is a procedure for scoring of writing in which the effectiveness of the composition is evaluated in terms of a set of overall descriptions. In other words, the score given to the compositions show the overall effectiveness of students' communication.

D. Data Analysis Procedure

In order to analyze the data in this study, the writings were scored holistically by the researcher. In addition, the scores given to the compositions were tabulated and compared through t-tests using SPSS version 22 in order to determine if there was any significant difference between the performance of the experimental and control groups. In fact, t-test is a statistical procedure which determines whether the means of two groups, i.e. experimental and control are statistically different from each other.

IV. RESULTS

A. Results: Proficiency Test and the Performance of Participants

It was mentioned that 69 EFL learners were the potential subjects of the study. These 69 EFL learners took the proficiency test, i.e. a version of the TOEFL test. Hence, 57 homogenous EFL learners whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean score were selected as the participants of the study. Table 4.1 shows the performance of the 69 subjects on the proficiency test:

TABLE 1
PROFICIENCY TEST AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE SUBJECTS

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
TOEFL	69	20.00	32.00	26.0889	3.89077

Considering the information given in Table 1 illustrates that the participated subjects had the mean of 26, standard deviation of 3.89 with the minimum of 20 and the maximum score of 32.

Hence, in order to control the proficiency level of the students, the subjects whose scores were between one standard deviation above and below the mean score were included. It means that the subjects whose scores were between 22 and 30 were selected as the participants of the study.

The selected subjects were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control—28 students in experimental group and 29 students in control group. Hence, the experimental group has composed of 12 males and 16 females. Furthermore, the control group has composed of 12 males and 17 males.

T-test statistic was performed on the performance of each group of experimental and control to determine whether the differences between the mean of the two groups were significant or not. The results are given in table 2:

TABLE 2
T-TEST AND PROFICIENCY TEST: EXPERIMENTAL VS. CONTROL

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
TOEFL	Equal variances assumed	.205	.653	-1.198	55	.236	-.83744	.69906	-2.23838	.56351
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.196	54.373	.237	-.83744	.69995	-2.24054	.56567

The information of the t-test indicated to the non-significant differences between the performances of the two groups since the p-value is 0.23 which is quite above the cut score of 0.05.

This study tried to control the issue of gender. To this end, the performance of the two genders on the proficiency test. As table 3 shows 33 females and 24 males were the subjects of the study. According to table 4.3, female participants had the mean score of 26.27 and the standard deviation of 2.62; whereas, the male participants had the mean score of 25.95 and the standard deviation of 2.72.

TABLE 3
PROFICIENCY TEST AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE TWO GENDERS

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TOEFL	=male	24	25.9583	2.72635	.55651
	=female	33	26.2727	2.62527	.45700

T-test statistic was performed on the proficiency test in terms of the performance of the two genders; its results are given in table 4

TABLE 4
T-TEST AND PROFICIENCY TEST: FEMALES VS. MALES

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
TOEFL	Equal variances assumed	.113	.738	-.439	55	.662	-.31439	.71575	-1.74879	1.12000
	Equal variances not assumed			-.437	48.596	.664	-.31439	.72011	-1.76181	1.13302

Table 4 shows the p-value of 0.66 which is quite above the cut score of 0.05. It indicated to the non-sufficient difference between the performances of the two genders.

B. Results: Post-test and the Performance of Participants

The two groups went under 20 hour instruction in 5 weeks which was followed by a posttest in which they were asked to write on a topic (the effect of TV on children). Their compositions were scored based on holistic scoring procedures out of 10. Table 5 sheds light on the descriptive statics of the results of the post-test.

TABLE 5
POST-TEST AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE TWO GROUPS

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	=experimental	28	7.5714	1.95180	.36886
	=control	29	6.4483	1.91956	.35645

Table 4.5 shows that the experimental group had the mean score of 7.57 and standard deviation of 1.95. Whereas, the control group had the mean score of 6.44 and the standard deviation of 1.91.

TABLE 6
T-TEST AND POST-TEST: EXPERIMENTAL VS. CONTROL

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	.275	.602	2.190	55	.033	1.12315	.51279	.09549	2.15081
	Equal variances not assumed			2.190	54.850	.033	1.12315	.51295	.09512	2.15118

In order to figure out whether there is significant difference between the performances of experimental group and control group, t-test statistic was run which resulted into table 6.

By considering the Sig. (2-tailed) value, it becomes evident that the observed differences between the performances of the two groups on the posttests are significant since the Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.033 which is less than 0.05. Because of this, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean score of the post-tests for the groups of experimental and control.

Considering the greater mean score of the experimental group, it indicated that the experimental group had a better performance on the post-test.

In the second phase, the performance of genders was compared on the posttest which resulted into table 7:

TABLE 7
POST-TEST AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE TWO GENDERS

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	=female	33	6.9697	1.77632	.30922
	=male	24	7.0417	2.31214	.47196

According to table 7, the mean score of the females was 6.96 and their standard deviation is 1.77. In addition, the males had the mean of 7.04 and the standard deviation of 2.31.

TABLE 8
T-TEST AND POST-TEST: FEMALE VS. MALE

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Posttest									
Equal variances assumed	4.779	.033	-.133	55	.895	-.07197	.54131	-1.15678	1.01284
Equal variances not assumed			-.128	41.489	.899	-.07197	.56424	-1.21107	1.06713

Considering the information in table 4.8, it is demonstrated that gender was not a crucial element in writing ability since the p-value is 0.89 which is quite above the cut score of 0.05. It means that difference between the performances of the two genders is non-significant. Hence, there is similar variability in the two performances of the two genders.

Considering the second and third questions of this study, the issue of gender was explored in each group separately which resulted into the following results.

TABLE 9
POST-TEST AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP: FEMALE VS. MALE

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	=female	16	7.0625	1.69189	.42297
	=male	12	8.2500	2.13733	.61699

Table 9 illustrates the performances of the two genders in the experimental group. As the table shows, experimental group composed of 16 females and 12 males. In this group, the females showed the mean of 7.06 and standard deviation of 1.69; whereas, males showed the mean of 8.25 and the standard deviation of 2.13. In order to determine whether gender played a role in the experimental group, t-test statistic was performed its results are given in table 10:

TABLE 10
T-TEST AND GENDER: EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Posttest									
Equal variances assumed	1.843	.186	-1.643	26	.113	-1.18750	.72297	-2.67359	.29859
Equal variances not assumed			-1.587	20.456	.128	-1.18750	.74806	-2.74569	.37069

Considering the information in table 10, it is illustrated that gender had not played any role in writing ability since the p-value is 0.11 which is quite above the cut score of 0.05. It means that difference between the performances of the two genders is non-significant. Hence, there is similar variability in the two performances of the two genders. Table 11 sheds light on the role of gender in the control group in terms of descriptive statistics.

TABLE 11
POST-TEST AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE CONTROL GROUP: FEMALE VS. MALE

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	=female	17	6.8824	1.90008	.46084
	=male	12	5.8333	1.85047	.53418

Table 11 shows that the control group had composed of 17 females and 12 males in which the females had the mean of 6.88 and the standard deviation of 1.90. Moreover, the males had the mean of 5.83 and the standard deviation of 1.85. In a similar vein, t-test statistic was run which resulted into table 12.

As table 12 shows, the p-value is 0.15 which is higher than the cut value of 0.05. It means that the observed differences between the two genders in the control group were non-significant. Hence, the two genders had the same variability in the control group.

TABLE 12
T-TEST AND GENDER: CONTROL GROUP

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Posttest	.029	.866	1.480	27	.150	1.04902	.70884	-4.0540	2.50344
Equal variances assumed			1.487	24.237	.150	1.04902	.70550	-4.0630	2.50434
Equal variances not assumed									

V. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

This study tried to find the answers for the three raised questions based on which this study was conducted.

The first question of this study was:

► Is there any difference between the performance of the subjects in the experimental and the control groups?

The descriptive statistics as well as the results of t-test statistics showed significant differences between the performances of the subjects who went under CDA-based approach in teaching writing and the ones who received instruction based on the traditional approach.

Accordingly, the first hypothesis which states (There is no difference between the performance of the subjects in the experimental and the control groups) was rejected.

In fact, the way the principles of critical discourse analysis following the micro-strategies suggested by Van Dijk (2000) was implemented in teaching writing to the experimental group highlights soft structures which underscore the function of language (Rogers, 2004). Soft structures, according to Rogers (2004), refer to the level of abstraction which are highly emphasized and implemented in CDA. In fact, CDA attempts “to describe, interpret, and explain the relationship between the hard and soft structures of language” (Rogers, 2004, p. 2).

Given this study with its focus on writing skill utilizing the micro-strategies of Van Dijk (2000), it seems to be beneficial to combine a perspective of teaching writing skill with social and critical issues of language.

Put is simply, critical discourse analysis as a representation of discourse analysis may be implemented through analyzing the patterns which according to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) structure language in different ways. In fact, these patterns are followed by people “when they take part in different domains of social life” (Jørgensen & Phillips (2002, p. 1).

The second question this study attempt to answer was:

► Is there any difference between the performances of males and females who receive instruction through CDA?

The descriptive statistics as well as the results of t-test statistics revealed non-significant differences between the performances of the two genders who went under CDA-based approach in teaching writing.

Hence, the second hypothesis which states (There is no difference between the performances of males and females who receive instruction through CDA) was supported.

Finally, the study tried to answer the third raised question which asks

► Is there any difference between the performances of males and females who receive instruction through the traditional model?

The results of descriptive statistics and t-test demonstrated non-significant difference between the performances of the two genders who went under a traditional approach in teaching writing.

As a result, the third hypothesis which states (There is no difference between the performances of males and females who receive through the traditional model) was also supported.

Likewise, gender is one of the variables which may affect the process of writing skill. However, gender, according to Kamari, Gorjian, and Pazhakh (2012, p. 759), is a notion “that contributes different linguistic strategies to both genders based on context”; this study showed that gender is not a variable which influences the way the females and males produce their writings.

Contrary to the argument of Kamari, Gorjian, and Pazhakh (2012, p. 759) who argue that the notion of gender “implicitly presents the social and contextual expectations each society put on part of each gender culturally as well as socially”; this issue seems to be neutral by implementing a CDA-based approach in teaching writing skill.

Considering the review of literature on the relation between writing skill and gender illustrates paradoxical and vague results, for example some studies, according to (Swan, 1992) demonstrates that females outperform the males while others attribute much assertiveness to males. In addition, there are some studies which indicated greater verbal capabilities of females (Halpern, 1986).

Likewise, the results of the study contradict the arguments of Halpern (1986), Mahony (1985), Spender and Sarah (1980) or Swann (1992) who considered superior writing ability for the females. The results of the study may be justified through the implemented writing teaching approach which tried to equip the learners with the appropriate discursive strategies suggested by Van Dijk (2000). The results of the study in terms of relation between writing ability

and gender is in line with Chu-yao, (2008) whose study showed non-significant differences between the performances of the two genders.

In a nutshell, writing skill is approached differently by different researchers based on their different perspectives. Generally, writing skill may be addressed through three main approaches, namely, product/text-oriented, process/cognitive-oriented and reader/genre-oriented.

This study, in a similar vein with Hyland (2002), argued that teaching writing skill should be addressed by considering audience and social context. In fact, a CDA approach to writing skill is text-oriented as well as writer-reader-oriented. It means that writing skill should be approached as an intertwined network of the interactive processes in order to construct different facts and ideas in a coherent way.

It is worth emphasizing that teaching writing skill in this study was not approached just in terms of mechanical and structural characteristics of the texts. Instead, writing skill needs to be regarded as a creative and discovery-oriented activity in which cognitive processes play a crucial role; and this issue seems to be covered utilizing the micro-strategies suggested by Van Dijk's (2000) socio-cognitive approach. However, this study steps further by considering a role for audience (i.e. discourse community) as well as the social context. In fact, the way the principles of critical discourse analysis following the micro-strategies suggested by Van Dijk (2000) was implemented in teaching writing to the experimental group highlights soft structures which underscore the function of language (Rogers, 2004).

VI. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Generally, CDA helps the learners to raise their sensitivity and consciousness regarding the implicit, indicative and even invisible parts of any text which they can also implement in their writing to transmit much more powerful meaning. Hence, different aspects a writer wants to transmit may be handled smoothly through the discursive strategies the learners need to learn, for example socio-political background, historical context, as well as the cultural dispositions which seem to be crucial for critical thinking and self-actualization which in its turn are the utmost purpose of any educational course (Reichenbach, 2001). Furthermore, a CDA-driven approach based on Van Dijk's (2000) framework seems to be pedagogically beneficial for improving the ability of EFL learners for implementing certain ideologies and some particular microdiscursive strategies like explanation, actor description, etc.

This study utilized CDA to improve the writing ability of Iranian EFL learners. Hence, CDA is beneficial in developing the notions of discursive structures to be utilized in writing samples. One role of a CDA-based model for teaching in EFL classes is related to its efficiency for raising awareness of language learners to get access to the hidden strategies of discourses including the discursive strategies.

Utilizing the principles of critical discourse analysis suggested by Van Dijk (2000), Iranian EFL learners were equipped to "tip of the ideological iceberg" (Van Dijk, 1997) which lead them not to consider the text as a real reflection of realities and at the same time using discursive strategies convince the readers from their points of view. In fact, a critical discourse analysis methodology mixed with the principles of teaching writing skill equip the learners to consciously consider even the content of their composition and the way it should be molded. It seems that a CDA-driven approach improve the learners' capability in writing through the appropriate useful strategies. In fact, the utilized CDA-approach in teaching writing in this study help the students to mold their ideas using appropriate lay-out and plan. Hence, the results of the study seem to pedagogically applicable for language learners, language teachers, teacher's trainers and even for syllabus designers.

REFERENCES

- [1] Al-Souqi, S. D. (2009). The effect of using computers in the teaching of L2 composition on the writing performance of tenth grade students in Amman private schools. *The International Arab Journal of Information Technology*, 6(4), 431-439.
- [2] Berlin, J. (1988). Rhetoric and ideology in the writing class. *College English*, 50(5), 477-494.
- [3] Chu-yao, C. (2008). An Investigation of Gender Differences in EFL College Writing. In *Proceedings of the BAAL Annual Conference* (pp. 5-26).
- [4] Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. London: Longman.
- [5] Fairclough, N. (1993). Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse. *Discourse and society*, 4(2), 133-168.
- [6] Fairclough, N. (2001a). *Language and power* (2nd edition). London: Longman.
- [7] Fairclough, N. (2001b). Critical discourse analysis as a method in social scientific research. In Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 121-138). London: Sage Publications.
- [8] Flower, L., & Hayes, J. R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College composition and communication*, 32(4), 365-387.
- [9] Gee, J. P. (2004). Discourse analysis: what makes it critical? In: R. Rogers (Eds.), *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education* (pp. 19-50). NY: Routledge.
- [10] Grabe, W., & Kaplan, R. B. (1996). *Theory and practice of writing: An applied linguistics perspective*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- [11] Hayes, J. R. (1996). A new framework for understanding cognition and affect in writing. In C. M. Levy & S. Ransdell (Eds.), *The science of writing: Theories, methods, individual differences, and applications* (pp. 1-27). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- [12] Heros, S. (2009). Linguistic pluralism or prescriptivism? A CDA of language ideologies in Talento, Peru's official textbook for the first-year of high school. *Linguistics and Education*, 20, 172-199.
- [13] Homstad, T., & Thorson, H. (1994). Writing theory and practice in the second language classroom: a selected annotated bibliography. University of Minnesota: Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing.
- [14] Hyland, K. (2002). Authority and invisibility: Authorial identity in academic writing. *Journal of pragmatics*, 34(8), 1091-1112.
- [15] Johns, A. M. (1990). L1 composition theories: Implications for developing theories of L2 composition. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Second language writing: Research insights for the classroom*, (pp. 24-36). NY: Cambridge University Press.
- [16] Jørgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. J. (2002). Discourse analysis as theory and method. NY: Sage.
- [17] Mahony, P. (1985). Girls Will be Girls and Boys Will be First', in D. Epstein, J. Elwood, V. Hey and J. Maw (eds) *Failing Boys? Issues in Gender and Achievement*, (pp. 37-55). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- [18] Myles, J. (2002). Second language writing and research: The writing process and error analysis in student texts. *TESL-EJ*, 6(2), 1-20.
- [19] Nunan, D. (1999). *Second Language Teaching & Learning*. Florence: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- [20] Pincas, A. (1982). *Teaching English Writing*. London: Macmillan Press.
- [21] Raimes, A. (1983). *Techniques in Teaching Writing*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- [22] Rogers, R. (2004). *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education*. London: Routledge.
- [23] Sarala, T., Salam, A., R., B., & Ismail, F., B. (2014). Comparative Analysis of Process versus Product Approach of Teaching Writing in Malaysian Schools: Review of Literature. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, 22 (6): 789-795.
- [24] Scardamalia, M., & Bereiter, C. (1987). Knowledge telling and knowledge transforming in written composition. *Advances in applied psycholinguistics*, 2, 142-175.
- [25] Silva, T. (1993). Toward an understanding of the distinct nature of L2 writing: The ESL research and its implications. *TESOL Quarterly*, 657-677.
- [26] Spender, D. & Sarah, E. (1980). *Learning to Lose: Sexism and Education*. London: The Women's Press.
- [27] Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [28] Swann, J. (1992). *Girls, boys and language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- [29] Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary study*. London. Sage Publications.
- [30] Van Dijk, T. A. (2000). *Ideology and discourse: A multidisciplinary introduction*. London: Routledge
- [31] Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Multidisciplinary CDA: A plea for diversity. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 95-120). London: Sage.
- [32] Weiss, G. & Wodak, R. (2003). *Theory and Interdisciplinarity in Critical Discourse Analysis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- [33] White, E. M. (1994). *Teaching and Assessing Writing: Recent Advances in Understanding, Evaluating, and Improving Student Performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- [34] Yi, J. Y. (2009). Defining Writing Ability for Classroom Writing Assessment in High Schools. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 13(1), 53-69.
- [35] Zemach, D. E., & Rumisek, L. A. (2003). *College writing: From paragraph to essay*. NY: Macmillan.

Fateme Rasuli Kashkuli was born in Iran in 1988. She received her M.A degree in English Teaching as a Foreign Language (TEFL) from Persian Gulf University of Bushehr in 2015. She has been teaching English to different levels and courses for several years in different English Language Institute in Bushehr. Her areas of interest are sociolinguistics, semantic and discourse analysis.

Nasim Ghanbari holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics. She is an assistant professor at English Department of Persian Gulf University in Bushehr, Iran. Her areas of interest include language assessment, academic writing and writing assessment. Currently, she teaches courses in language testing & assessment, essay writing and research methodology.

Abbas Abbasi holds a PhD degree in Applied Linguistics. He is an assistant professor at English Dept. of Persian Gulf University (PGU) in Bushehr, Iran. His areas of interest are Learner Corpus Research, ESL writing, Language Assessment and Contrastive Analysis. He is currently teaching courses in Writing, Contrastive Analysis and Language Testing to MA and BA students.