

## The Effect of Instruction on the Development of Voice in EFL Argumentative Writing

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### Abstract

While a growing body of research has analyzed how voice is deployed in argumentative writings, much work remains to be done in instructing voice elements. Therefore, the present study examined the effect of instruction based on Martin and White's (2005) engagement framework and Hyland's (2008) interactional model on voice construction. To this end, a control group (20) and two treatment groups (40) were formed. Each treatment group was taught voice elements, based on a different model. The gain score analysis and the SPANOVA were employed to analyze the change in the use of voice elements between the treatment groups and the control group after the treatment. The results indicated that EFL learners benefited from instruction in both treatment groups. However, learners who were aware of voice-based on the engagement framework could construct a more considerable defensive voice in making an argument challenging. Findings from this study could provide implications for teaching by broadening instructors' knowledge of voice to cultivate learners' awareness of voice and help them to employ it effectively in IELTS writing task 2.

**Keywords:** Argumentative writing, IELTS writing task 2, voice, instructing voice

## INTRODUCTION

English is the research language and a prerequisite for knowledge development. Admission to universities depends on learners' proficiency in English usually measured through tests such as IELTS. For EFL learners, one of the daunting parts of the IELTS test is the writing, because they not only have to pay attention to grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, and coherence simultaneously, but also they should clearly express their position on the topic and elaborate on it in the thesis. In addition, they have to argue for different positions in their writings by utilization of evaluative language (Miller & Pessoa, 2016; Pessoa, Mitchell, & Miller, 2018).

For academic achievement and to increase the quality of learners' writing, voice plays an important role (Zhao, 2013). The importance of voice in the first language (L1) is so noticeable that is considered as part of some analytical rubrics (e.g., Helms-Park & Stapleton, 2003; Zhao, 2013) for evaluation of writing. For Hyland (2008, p. 5) voice is a "representation of the writer" in the written text. He argued that voice can be found in writing; therefore, it is not "optional extra" implying that writers can manifest themselves through the use of linguistic features. Research on voice draws on different theoretical lenses (Zhao & Llosa, 2008): Some studies have considered voice as an individual accomplishment (e.g., Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999), and others had a social constructivist view in analyzing it (e.g., Hyland, 2002, 2008). As an individual accomplishment, voice is the sound of an individual that is recognizable in the written text (Elbow, 1981). It is defined as "an ideal metaphor for individualism" (Elbow, 1999, p. 334). In a social-constructivist view, voice is related to writers and readers who attempt to connect themselves to specific groups (Matsuda, 2001). Hyland (2008) emphasized that for having a comprehensive definition of voice both representations of self and readers' engagement that are manifested through deploying voice elements in an argument should be considered. Writers could take a stance in relation to what is discussed in the text or deny or support a viewpoint concerning

other positions which are elaborated on those issues. In other words, understanding voice is possible through perceiving the negotiation between the writers and readers. In this study, a text-oriented definition of voice was adopted following Hyland (2008), and voice instruction was operationalized through employing Hyland's (2008) interactional model of voice and Martin and White's (2005) engagement framework (Appendix B).

Voice has an essential role in academic writing. It constructs the interaction between the writer and the reader (Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012). However, learners may not be aware of the role it plays (Jou, 2019) in improving the quality of their writing. The focus of previous studies on voice (Babaii, Atai, & Mohammadi, 2016; Genge & Wharton, 2016, 2019; Humphrey & Economou, 2015; Hyland, 2008, 2012; Loghmani, Ghonsooly, & Ghazanfari, 2020; Lorés-Sanz, 2011; Starfield et al., 2015; Tajeddin & Alemi, 2012; Xie, 2017) has been mainly on the analysis of texts to identify how voice elements are deployed in argumentative writing. Few studies have examined the effect of teaching voice elements on developing learners' voices in writing. Therefore, in the present study first, an attempt was made to teach voice in EFL writing classrooms. To this end, Hyland's (2008), and Martin and White's (2005) models were employed to examine how instruction could raise learners' awareness. The second purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of these two models in improving voice elements in IELTS writing classes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies focusing on the Martin and Whites' (2005) engagement framework or Hyland's (2008) interactional model can be categorized into *text-oriented studies* and *practice-oriented studies*. While text-oriented studies aim to explain how voice is used in different contexts (Cumming, 2013; Hyland, 2013; Nunn, 2008; Zhao, 2013; Xia, 2017), *practice-oriented studies* concentrate on how teaching voice can influence learners' writing (Chang, 2010; Fogal, 2015; Jou, 2019).

Text-oriented studies which have examined voice features in academic writing based on the Hyland's (2008) interactional model and Martin and White's (2005) engagement framework fall mainly into two groups:

1. Studies examining the effect of socio-cultural histories on the development of voice; and,
2. Studies focusing on the linguistic features of voice and how writers construct their positions in the academic writing.

In the first group of studies, the focus is mainly on the effect of the personal histories, discourse communities, and social and cultural aspects on the development of voice. In these studies, researchers mostly consider the effect of different languages, fields of study, cultural backgrounds, level of exposure to target language and culture on the construction of voice (Stock & Eik-Nes, 2016). Mastuda (2001) in his case study of Japanese students showed that even L2 learners with different cultural backgrounds could build a voice in their writing. He concluded that L2 learners' cultural background may not have any significant effect on the construction of voice in L2 writing. The effect of culture was emphasized by Zhao (2019) who examined the relationship between writers' background, culture, and voice elements in argumentative writing. She found that apart from Hedges and Boosters, learners' background does not have any significant effect on the voice strategies employing by learners.

Other *text-oriented studies* focus on linguistic features through which learners can take a position and build their voice in written texts (Zhao, 2017). These studies focus on different linguistic features used by writers to construct an authorial voice or evaluate others' positions in written text. In one such study, Zhao (2017) emphasized how effective constructing an authorial voice can be in increasing the quality of the TOEFL iBT test. Zhao rebuilt Hyland's (2008) interactional model and analyzed TOEFL writing test samples based on "ideational, affective, and

presence” dimensions (p. 3). She noted that awareness of voice in an argumentative essay like TOEFL can have a positive effect on the quality of writing, and voice can be used as a predictor of TOEFL essay’s scores.

In another study, Xie (2017) employed Martin and White’s appraisal framework to examine how writers construct their voices in the literature review. Findings indicated that learners were aware of using evaluative language resources in their writing and they did not struggle with contracting or expanding a dialogue. However, they did not have sufficient strong arguments for persuading readers; they faced difficulties expressing their attitudes and distancing themselves from theories and consequently could not extend the literature review. In a more recent study, Loghmani et al. (2020) found that native English speakers predominantly preferred to limit other voices in their writing by employing voice elements in a contractive category, in particular, Disclaim ones. Regarding the expansive voice, learners predominantly expanded their dialogic space by using Entertain.

In *practice-oriented studies*, researchers mainly focus on raising learners’ awareness of voice using Hyland’s (2008) interactional model and Martin and White’s (2005) engagement framework. According to Hyland (2008), writers need different evaluative resources in academic writing to express their ideas, positions, and feelings. As he notes, these evaluative resources, which include Hedges, Boosters, and Attitude markers are essential for building dialogue in the written context. To raise the awareness of Mandarin learners of these evaluative elements in academic text, Chang (2010) used a web-based approach. Authorial voice elements in an introduction section of research papers that had specific move structures and clear evidence of voice development were highlighted. Learners’ writings were evaluated based on Hyland’s conception of Hedge and Booster. The result revealed that there was an improvement in learners’ writing in terms of assertiveness. He emphasized that stance is an essential aspect of argumentative writing.

Fogal (2015) employed Zhao’s (2013) analytical rubric to teach

authorial voice. She focused on pedagogical stylistic and concept-based instruction (CBI) to teach voice to learners who wanted to take the TOEFL iBT writing test. In the intervention that lasted for three weeks, advanced Japanese volunteers were given English literary texts with samples of Hedges, Boosters, Attitude markers, Self-mention, and Direct reader references. They were required to employ lexical choices in their writing to construct voice. The findings indicated that learners' writing progress was noticeable in quality and expressing authorial voice. Similar to Fogal (2015), Jou (2019) highlighted the effect of instruction of voice on the development of learners' writing. He focused on the engagement system of Martin and White's analytical framework to raise L2 learners' awareness of how they can express their voice and evaluate others' ideas by expanding or contracting a dialogue. Analyzing interviews and writing samples showed that instruction was effective in helping L2 learners to deploy voice effectively in summarizing.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

While previous research has emphasized the need to identify voice elements in published articles, empirical data on the effectiveness of specific models for teaching voice elements on developing L2 learners' academic voice in IELTS writing in EFL context remains unexplored. Consequently, more research is required to examine how instruction could benefit learners to construct voice in their writing. Therefore, in the present study the following questions were addressed:

1. Does instruction make a difference in participants' use of voice?
2. Is there any significant difference in students' use of voice in the two experimental groups?

## **METHOD**

In the present study, a quasi-experimental design was employed to check the improvement of constructing voice in L2 learners' IELTS argumentative

writings based on Hyland's (2008) interactional model of voice and Martin and White's (2005) engagement framework.

## Participants

The sample consisted of 60 graduate EFL learners participating in an IELTS preparation course in a private language institute on Kish Island. Before the instruction, all learners had passed the IELTS test. Learners who had taken the IELTS test and had scored 5.5 or above writing band score in IELTS writing participated in this study so that they could argue, evaluate, and employ voice elements in their writing (Hyland, 2004). The age of learners ranged from 21 to 34 (32 females and 28 males). They were randomly assigned to three groups: the first experimental group received treatment based on the Martin engagement framework ( $n=20$ ), the second experimental group was instructed based on the Hyland model ( $n=20$ ), and the control participants were required to write essays on argumentative topics ( $n=20$ ). On the importance of maintaining confidentiality, codes were assigned to each learner's writing.

In order to check for the comparability of the groups, the writing samples at the onset of the study were coded and evaluated by two raters. The rater reliability indices for the evaluation of the writing samples are presented in Table 1. Regarding the detection of the use of voice elements, two different raters were asked to examine the writing samples in the pretest and posttest. As intra-rater reliability is more important than inter-rater reliability in studies such as this one (Chandler, 2003), the data provided by the rater with higher intra-rater reliability was used for the data analysis. The indices for both raters are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Rater Reliability Indices

	Intra-Rater Reliability		Inter-Rater Reliability
	Rater 1	Rater 2	
<b>Writing Evaluation</b>	0.91	0.85	0.89

<b>Voice Elements</b>	0.97	0.91	0.95
	Total	128	100.0

## **Instrumentation**

Learners were required to write on three different topics from IELTS Cambridge books, discuss their views, and express their positions. The first writing was an indicator of their general writing proficiency. The second writing was completed after the IELTS training sessions (after five sessions) to check learners' awareness of voice. Finally, the last writing sample (after ten sessions) served as a posttest enabling the researchers to examine the effect of the instruction on improving voice (Appendix A).

The main instruments employed to measure voice were Hyland's (2008) interactional model of voice and Martin and White's (2005) engagement framework (Appendix B). The models were used to identify the components of authorial and evaluative voice in IELTS writing samples. The models were also used to highlight voice elements in the five writing samples taken from IELTS published books such as Collins for writing and IELTS Cambridge books, which were used to instruct voice elements (Appendix C).

## **Data Collection Procedure**

Learners were required to write three essays during the experiment. Before the instruction, they wrote an essay on a topic chosen from the IELTS Cambridge books to allow the researchers to check their homogeneity in terms of writing ability. Only those who scored 5.5 and above participated in the experiment. They received instruction which lasted for five sessions; during the treatment, the teacher familiarized learners with different parts of writing task 2 (e.g., introduction, body, conclusion, and specific sentences and phrases).

During the instruction, learners were instructed on how to organize



their ideas and write an introduction. They were taught how to paraphrase an IELTS question effectively and take a position by writing a clear thesis statement based on the information they had. In addition, they were instructed to write well-organized supporting paragraphs by presenting different ideas. They learned to support their ideas by providing arguments depending on the type of essay. Useful phrases (e.g., *research has found that numerous studies have consistently found that*, etc.) or words (e.g., *initially, consequently, regarding*, etc.) were presented to learners to achieve this aim. Furthermore, they were taught how to employ logical sequencing using cohesive devices (e.g., *furthermore, conversely, moreover*, etc.) to make their writing more coherent. Finally, the focus shifted to summarizing key points in supporting paragraphs and restating the main ideas in the last paragraph. Learners were obliged to write an essay for an IELTS writing task 2 at the end of the instruction. After the second writing, they were randomly assigned to a control and two experimental groups.

In the second phase of the study, learners in the experimental groups received instruction on how to construct their voice in writing. In the first group, the lesson plan was developed based on Martin and White's (2005) engagement framework. The teacher defined voice and explained how each component can be employed in the text to build a voice. To raise learners' awareness of neutral sentences and components of the contractive and expansive voice, sentence and paragraph level examples in which voice elements were presented in boldface were presented to learners during the five treatment sessions (Appendix C). They read and discussed the passages in class to understand how voice elements should be employed. The teacher was available to monitor their discussion and check their understanding.

During the instruction, firstly contractive voice was introduced to learners. Learners were encouraged to narrow down a dialogic space by either expressing their agreement or disagreement with a specific position in their writing. To reach this end, they learned to close down a dialogic space and reject other voices by employing negative sentences (e.g., *I do not agree, it does not have any significant effect on*, etc.) or using Counter (e.g.,

*although, however, yet, etc.*) in their sentences to express disagreement. They also analyzed and discussed sentences including Concur, Pronounce, and Endorse (e.g., *naturally, clearly, admittedly, reportedly, prove and declare, etc.*) to learn how to restrict a dialogic space with their readers by challenging a position in an argument.

Secondly, the focus of instruction shifted to the expansive voice. Learners were required to open up space for more dialogue and alternative voices. Sentences including modal auxiliaries (e.g., *may, could, can, etc.*), modal adjuncts (e.g., *perhaps, definitely, properly, etc.*), and modal attributes (e.g., *it is likely, it is possible, it is feasible, etc.*) were introduced to learners to enable them to expand their voice and discussion. They were also encouraged to construct an authorial voice (e.g., *I think, I am not convinced that, etc.*). Words indicating uncertainty (e.g., *seems, suggests, apparently, etc.*) were introduced in different sentences to help them respect other voices and open up space for more negotiation.

After discussing and rewriting sentences including Entertain components, learners' attention was drawn to Attribute which was presented with sentence examples including reporting verbs (e.g., *say, declare, state, etc.*), adverbs (e.g., *reportedly, presumably, assumedly, etc.*), and phrases (e.g., *according to, it is said that, etc.*). At the end of the intervention, the focus of instruction shifted to paragraph level examples. Teachers asked learners to identify the contractive and expansive voice in paragraphs chosen from IELTS writing samples. After being aware of voice elements, learners were encouraged to write for the third topic.

For the second experimental group, the lesson plan was developed based on Hyland's (2008) model. Regarding stance, adequate sentence and paragraph level examples including Hedges (e.g., *can appear, relatively, tend to, and other voice elements that can help learners to distance themselves from other positions*), Boosters (e.g., *very, absolutely, never, must, and other voice elements by which learners can express their certainty*), Attitude markers (e.g., *surprisingly, amazingly, and other voice elements by which learners can show their attitude like surprise or*

*frustration*), and Authorial Self-mention (e.g., *I, me, our, etc.*) were provided in each session. Regarding engagement, learners were informed about how they can involve readers by employing Reader pronouns (*you, we, us, etc.*). Questions, Directives, Personal asides, and Reference to share knowledge which is commonly employed in other argumentative writings such as published academic texts cannot be used in IELTS argumentative writing task 2 (Zhao, 2013). Learners read and discussed sentence and paragraph level examples, including voice components. The teacher observed them to ensure they appropriately used each component. For the third group (control), learners were encouraged to practice writing without receiving any instruction on voice. They read different IELTS samples and practiced paraphrasing, employing cohesive devices, and making complex sentences. After five sessions, they were required to write for the third topic.

## **Data Analysis**

As part of the research questions, what follows is the examination of the effect of two different models on the development of voice in learners' writing in the present study. The quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics. The frequency of the use of voice elements in each participant's writing sample was checked in the pretest and posttest. In addition, we compared each treatment group with the control group to examine between-subjects effects and within-subjects effects. To normalize the data, the frequency of the use of voice elements was considered in every 1,000 words. For the rest of the data analysis, whenever a significant difference was observed between the control and experimental group at the pretest, the gain score analysis has been used rather than the SPANOVA test.

## **RESULTS**

### **Comparability of the Groups Prior to the Study**

To check if the three groups were comparable at the onset of the study,

learners' first writing was evaluated with respect to overall writing quality. No significant difference was found among the three groups in their overall writing quality. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics.

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics for the Performance of the Three Groups Before the Study

		<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Overall Score</b>	Control	5.50	6.50	5.83	.3354
	Treatment (Martin)	5.50	6.00	5.83	.2447
	Treatment (Hyland)	5.50	6.00	5.88	.2221

Table 3 presents the results of the One-Way ANOVA among the three groups; no significant difference was observed among the three groups in terms of overall writing ability,  $F(2, 57) = .23, p = .80$ .

**Table 3:** One-Way ANOVA Comparing Groups' Writing Performance at the Onset of Study

		<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Overall Score	Between Groups	.033	2	.017	.226	.799
	Within Groups	4.213	57	.074		
	Total	4.246	59			

## Voice Elements in Martin and White's Engagement Framework

Regarding the Contraction category, the control group had a mean of 52.79 in the pretest and a mean of 52.77 in the posttest. However, the treatment group starts with a mean of 60.25 and improves to 98.64. While the two groups did not significantly differ in the pretest, ( $t(38) = -1.34, p = .19$ ), they differed from each other over time as the result of the instruction they received.

The results of the SPANOVA test showed a statistically

significant interaction between Group and Time (Wilks' Lambda =.64  $F(1, 38) = 21.01, p < .005$ , partial eta squared =.36). There was also a significant effect for Time (Wilks' Lambda =.65,  $F(1, 38) = 20.96, p < .005$ , partial eta squared =.36). In addition, the main effect for Group, comparing the effect of the intervention, was also statistically significant ( $F(1, 38) = 28.53, p < .005$ , partial eta squared =.43), suggesting that the learners in the treatment group employed more contractive voice compared to the learners in the control group.

**Table 4:** Learners' Use of Voice Elements in the Contraction & Expansion Categories

		<b>Group</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Contraction</b>	Pretest	Control	16.67	82.07	52.79	15.34
		Treatment Martin	26.20	100.88	60.25	19.58
	Posttest	Control	24.02	104.87	52.77	21.59
		Treatment Martin	57.14	150.00	98.64	24.79

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for the learners' use of voice elements in the contractive voice elements over time from pretest to posttest.

**Table 5:** The Participants' Gains in the Use of Disclaim & Proclaim Voice Elements

		<b>Group</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Disclaim</b>		Control	-29.16	46.18	-2.97	16.49
		Treatment	-14.49	16.58	4.69	7.28
<b>Proclaim</b>		Control	-15.75	42.02	2.95	17.51
		Treatment	-2.56	81.54	33.69	23.71
<b>Deny</b>	Pretest	Control	3.33	28.13	13.53	6.63
		Treatment Martin	3.65	21.37	11.74	5.47
	Posttest	Control	2.88	33.71	11.37	7.66
		Treatment Martin	.00	10.00	5.32	3.53
		Control	6.67	29.41	15.44	5.42

<b>Counter</b>	Pretest	Treatment Martin	.00	22.52	8.25	7.20
		Control	3.00	30.30	14.63	7.92
	Posttest	Treatment Martin	.00	35.71	19.36	8.08
<b>Concur</b>	Pretest	Control	.00	11.76	2.10	3.45
		Treatment Martin	.00	24.19	5.49	7.23
	Posttest	Control	.00	19.38	1.27	4.36
		Treatment Martin	.00	25.00	8.02	6.96
<b>Pronounce</b>	Pretest	Control	6.67	42.55	20.44	9.64
		Treatment Martin	.00	49.81	26.20	13.02
	Posttest	Control	6.37	47.06	24.50	11.13
		Treatment Martin	24.49	75.00	47.78	15.54
<b>Endorse</b>	Pretest	Control	.00	4.81	1.28	1.83
		Treatment Martin	.00	20.16	8.59	5.78
	Posttest	Control	.00	7.49	1.00	2.45
		Treatment Martin	.00	47.62	18.17	10.91

As seen in Table 5, learners in the control group had a negative gain over time in the case of the Disclaim category and a marginal gain in the case of the Proclaim category. However, learners in the treatment group, while showing a small gain in the Disclaim category, had a significant improvement in the use of voice elements in the Proclaim category.

Regarding the contractive voice, both groups showed a decline in the use of Deny over time. While the mean score of the control group at the outset of the study was 13.53, it decreased to 11.37 at the posttest. The treatment group had a steeper decline from 11.74 to 5.32. In the case of the Counter, the pattern was a little different. The two groups did not have the same information regarding the Counter voice elements in the pretest, so the gain score procedure was employed for this analysis. Table 6 presents the related descriptive statistics for the participants' gains in the use of Counter voice features.

**Table 6:** Participants' Gains in the Use of the Counter Voice Features

<b>Counter</b>	<b>Control</b>	-13.72	15.81	-.81	7.52
	<b>Treatment</b>	-7.46	27.17	11.11	8.17

As seen in Table 6, the control group had a slight decline over time in the use of counter voice features. However, the treatment group had significant progress after the treatment. The independent samples t-test run between the gains of the two groups showed a significant difference ( $t(38) = -4.80, p < .005$ ), indicating that instruction helped learners to improve the number of Counter in their writing significantly.

In the case of the Concur voice elements, we faced a decline in the use of features from pretest ( $M = 2.10$ ) to posttest ( $M = 1.27$ ) for the control group. The treatment group, on the other hand, showed an improvement in such use from a mean of 5.49 at the pretest to a mean of 8.02 at the posttest.

Regarding the Pronounce subcategory, both groups showed an improvement over time from pretest to the posttest with the treatment group showing a more dramatic change. However, regarding Endorse, the picture was different. While the control group showed a decline from 1.28 at the time of the pretest to 1.00 at the posttest, the treatment group showed an increase in the use of voice features from pretest ( $M = 8.59$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 18.17$ ). In addition, the results of the independent samples t-test run to ensure the comparability of the two groups at the pretest showed a significant difference ( $t(38) = -5.39, p < .005$ ).

The gain score analysis showed a significant difference between the two groups in the case of Endorse ( $t(38) = -3.16, p = .01$ ). Table 7 presents the related descriptive statistics for the two groups' gains in the case of the Endorse subcategory.

**Table 7:** Participants' Gains in the Use of the Endorse Voice Features

	Group	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Endorse	Control			-.28	3.47
	Treatment			9.58	13.51

Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics for the learners' use of voice elements in the Entertain.

**Table 8:** Voice Elements in the Entertain

		Group	Min	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Expansion</b>	Pretest	Control	.00	23.33	9.10	7.27
		Treatment Martin	.00	24.19	11.27	7.06
	Posttest	Control	.00	26.22	9.06	6.51
		Treatment Martin	4.76	44.64	19.47	10.13

The SPANOVA run between the two groups' performance over time from pretest to posttest revealed a statistically significant interaction between Group and Time (Wilks' Lambda =.87  $F(1, 38) = 5.91, p = .02$ , partial eta squared =.14). There was also a significant effect for Time (Wilks' Lambda =.87,  $F(1, 38) = 5.79, p = .02$ , partial eta squared =.13). Moreover, the main effect for Group, comparing the effect of the instruction was statistically significant ( $F(1, 38) = 11.92, p = .00$ , partial eta squared =.24) indicating that learners in the treatment group employed more voice elements in Expansion category.

Learners in the control group and the treatment group did not use Attribute both in the pretest and posttest. It means that the data for the Expansion category is just related to Entertain.

### Voice Elements in Hyland's Model

Regarding stance, the control group showed a very slight decline in the use of Hedges over time from the pretest to posttest while the treatment group showed an almost large growth from 35.16 at the pretest to 45.83 at the posttest. The descriptive statistics for the two groups' use of voice elements instance at the pretest and posttest are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9:** Learners' Use of Voice Elements in the Stance Category

Group	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
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<b>Hedges</b>	Pretest	Control	.00	23.33	11.49	7.70
		Treatment	20	4.29	35.16	12.82
	Posttest	Control	.00	29.96	10.31	6.84
		Treatment	20	8.81	45.83	22.37
<b>Boosters</b>	Pretest	Control	7.84	45.59	21.95	10.25
		Treatment	4.81	46.22	27.86	11.84
	Posttest	Control	3.18	47.06	23.55	12.38
		Treatment	27.27	81.82	46.23	14.34
<b>Attitude makers</b>	Pretest	Control	.00	23.53	8.96	5.47
		Treatment	3.83	31.75	14.03	8.53
	Posttest	Control	.00	15.92	6.81	4.42
		Treatment	4.55	31.41	16.10	8.38
<b>Self-mention</b>	Pretest	Control	.00	34.38	9.51	8.30
		Treatment	2.99	23.92	8.17	5.27
	Posttest	Control	.00	23.49	7.37	5.30
		Treatment	.00	10.53	5.89	2.80

In the case of Boosters, both groups showed a positive change from the pretest to the posttest, but this progress was more considerable in the treatment group. While the control group's use of voice elements increased from 21.95 to 23.55, that of the treatment group changed from 27.86 to 46.23. It indicated that the treatment group receiving instruction on the use of voice elements could significantly make more use of Boosters over time.

The control group made less use of the Attitude markers, while the treatment group showed a slight increase from the pretest to posttest. Table 10 presents the related descriptive statistics. No significant difference was found between the gain scores of the two groups, suggesting that the instruction could not cause any significant difference between the two groups in their use of voice elements in the Attitude marker category.

**Table 10:** Participants' Gains in the Use of the Attitude markers

	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Attitude markers</b>	Control	20	-15.69	11.76	-2.15	6.96
	Treatment	20	-17.00	21.47	2.06	9.06

Considering Self-mention, the two groups showed a decline in the use of it from pretest to posttest. The results of the SPANOVA run between the

two groups showed that the intervention could not help learners deploy more Self-mention.

Regarding the use of Reader pronouns, the pattern of use change was completely different for the two groups. While the control groups' use of these voice features almost doubled over time from 14.82 at the pretest to 28.78 at the posttest, the treatment groups' use of these features almost reduced to half from 32.46 at the pretest to 15.62 at the posttest. Table 11 presents the descriptive statistics for the use of voice elements in the two groups.

**Table 11:** Learners' Use of Voice Elements in the Engagement Category (n=20)

		<b>Group</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Reader pronouns</b>	Pretest	Control	.00	43.14	14.82	12.88
		Treatment	3.88	95.24	32.46	26.14
	Posttest	Control	.00	108.53	28.78	31.36
		Treatment	3.94	40.91	15.62	11.00

The results of the independent samples t-test run between the two groups' means at the pretest showed a significant difference ( $t(28) = -2.71, p = .01$ ). The comparison of the gain scores in Table 12 showed a significant difference between the changes in the two groups' use of such features ( $t(28) = 3.30, p = .00$ ).

**Table 12:** Participants' Gains in the Use of the Reader pronouns

		<b>Group</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Reader pronouns</b>	Control		-25.75	94.46	13.96	32.94
	Treatment		-84.77	36.56	-16.84	25.59

In the case of the other four subcategories, both groups almost made no use of such voice elements. None of the participants in the two groups used even one instance of voice elements in the Personal Asides and the Directives either at the pretest or posttest, making data analysis unnecessary.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study indicated that instruction could increase the use of voice elements in IELTS argumentative task 2. These results go beyond previous reports, showing that this increase was more considerable in the Martin and Whites' engagement framework. Voice elements in the contraction and expansion categories increased significantly over time in the treatment group. However, no progress was detected in the control group indicating that the IELTS writing course was not helping learners deploy voice elements in their writing.

Findings revealed that dialogic contraction was the most preferred way to construct voice and create argumentation after instruction. In broad terms, instruction raised learners' awareness of dialogic expansion and contraction, but contractive voice elements occurred more frequently in learners' writing. Accordingly, it can be argued that EFL learners mostly tended to restrict other voices in the IELTS writing test. One of the justifications for this restriction could be related to time-management. It seems that instruction helped learners to become more skillful in providing an argument for rejecting other perspectives; therefore, they preferred to have defensive positions to increase their writing band score. In other words, they did not want to take a risk and open space for alternative views; therefore, they constraint deploying voice elements in the expansive category. Previous studies (Geng & Wharton, 2016; Loghmani et al., 2020) also reported that learners in published research articles and doctoral dissertation literature review tended to mostly limit other perspectives to construct voice in an argument.

Regarding the contractive voice, learners relied on voice elements in the Proclaim category predominantly Pronounce ( $M=47.78$ ) and Concur ( $M=8.02$ ), respectively. Contrary to previous studies (Geng & Wharton, 2016; Lancaster, 2011; Loghmani et al., 2020) which showed that Chinese and Native English writers employed Disclaim more frequently than Proclaim in their writing, our study revealed that Iranian preferred Proclaim.

It suggests that instruction helped learners to gain sufficient knowledge of voice elements in this category; therefore, they could deploy them to make more assertive arguments in their writing. It is worthwhile to mention that this result was not detected in the control group.

Regarding the expansive voice, we found that learners incorporated more varied Entertain voice elements in their writings after the treatment; this suggests that instruction helped learners to improve authorial voice and modesty in their writing. However, the effect of instruction on employing contractive voice elements was more significant than employing expansive voice elements. This result was consistent with the result of Zhao (2019) which showed that employing voice elements for improving modesty in argumentative writing is difficult for learners. They need more knowledge and practice to open dialogic space for creating argumentation. Furthermore, Hyland, (2013) and Jaw (2018) reported that assertiveness could be deployed more naturally by employing contractive voice elements in L2 learners' writing. Contrary to the findings of Jou (2019), in our study, learners rarely relied on Attribute because the citation is not common in IELTS writing task 2 as it is in research published articles, theses, and dissertations. Considering the performance of the control group, it can be argued that IELTS training courses only helped learners to avoid employing negative words like *not* to reject other voices; it can also be noted that IELTS courses were not effective in helping learners employ other voices. It is also likely that IELTS training courses do not have a significant effect on helping learners increase their use of either contractive voice or expansive voice elements.

The findings showed that instruction based on Hyland's model led to an increase in Hedges and, in particular, in Boosters. This model could help learners to improve both assertiveness and modesty in their writing. However, the instruction could not help learners employ more Attitude markers and Self-mention. Besides, employing Reader pronouns decreased in learners' writing after the treatment. We speculate that employing some voice elements in Hyland's model was affected by IELTS writing rules.

Because in IELTS writing classes, learners are notified to limit using pronouns in their writing to have a formal academic style (Williams, 2015). Also, they are mostly recommended to use personal pronouns to express their opinion only in an introduction or conclusion paragraphs. These rules hamper employing Self-mention and Reader pronouns in learners' writing.

The instruction was effective in both experimental groups. Based on our findings, learners employed a wide range of voice elements which increased modesty and assertiveness in their writing. However, the effectiveness of the instruction based on the engagement framework was more noticeable regarding engaging readers and other perspectives in the arguments. It helped learners make their writing more challenging by taking defensive positions toward other voices. This finding seems to be reasonable because the engagement framework provides different voice elements including *even though, although, however, admittedly, undeniably, apparently, etc.* in Disclaim, Proclaim, and Entertain which are appropriate for IELTS writing task 2. These voice elements could help learners deploy, expand, and restrict different voices and positions appropriately. While this framework led learners to avoid employing pronouns, it helped them engage other voices more arguably (Jou, 2019).

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the present study indicated that instruction could raise learners' awareness of voice. However, it seems that instruction based on Martin and White's engagement framework was more effective in helping learners employ more varied voice elements. To be more specific, instruction broadens learners' awareness of voice and helps them emphasize on assertive, defensive, and modest voice elements to construct convincing arguments. Learners went beyond using just factual and voiceless sentences in their argumentative writing even when they were under time-pressure.

Among limitations in the present study, time-pressure to write for an argumentative topic and allocating just a semester to instruct voice which

may affect the learners' writing ability to construct voice could be mentioned. The result of this study can be useful for language instructors. It could help them to acquire a deep understanding of evaluative and authorial voice and be equipped well-enough to raise learners' awareness of how voice can be employed in writing. Material developers also could allocate a chapter to enrich writing books. Therefore, they could create a more meaningful ground for instructing voice elements based on Martin and White's (2005) engagement framework and help learners to become more sensitive to the concept of voice. Consequently, when they write for argumentative topics, they could employ appropriate voice elements consciously even when they are subjected to time constraints.

The use of the engagement framework for instruction has just begun. This flexible framework can give insight to instructors to raise learners' awareness of voice elements in academic writing. The way voice is built varies wildly depending on the context; thus, the instruction based on the mentioned framework is left open for the future. One direction for further studies could be on the effect of instruction on the other kinds of argumentative writings such as the discussion section of published academic articles, theses, or dissertations that have been ignored in the present study research. Additionally, further research could examine the effectiveness of instruction based on the mentioned models on how effective constructing voice can be in increasing the quality of the learners' writing test which is missing in the present study. Another important direction for future research could be extending could extend this study qualitatively by interviewing and evaluating learners' understanding of voice. Interviews could provide sufficient information on the challenges that learners face while they want to construct their voices and evaluate different positions in their writing.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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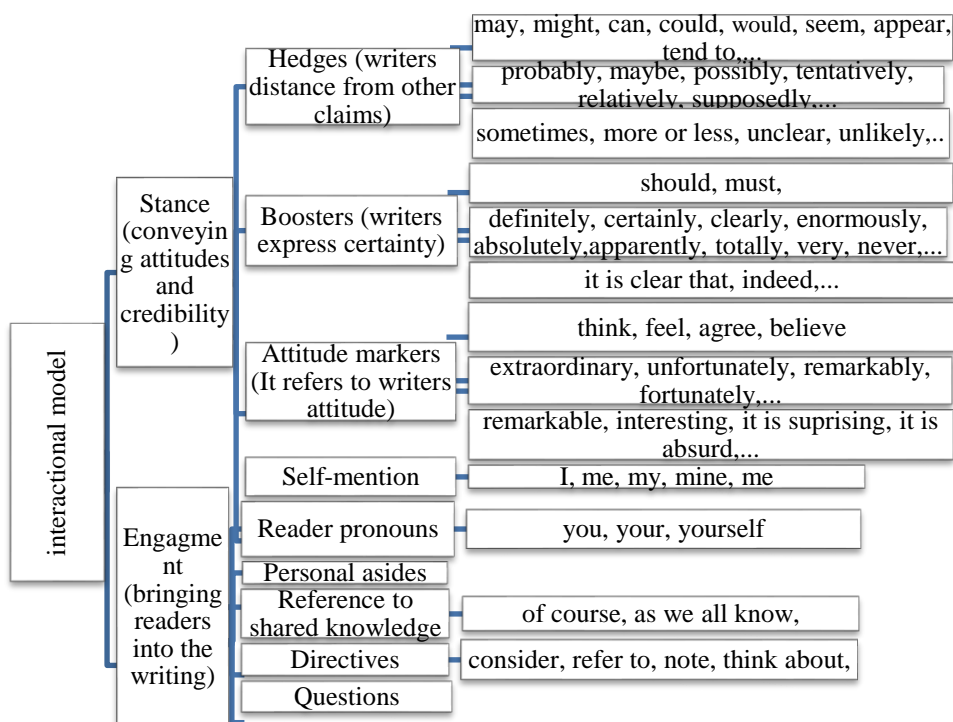
## Appendix A:

### IELTS Topics for Writing

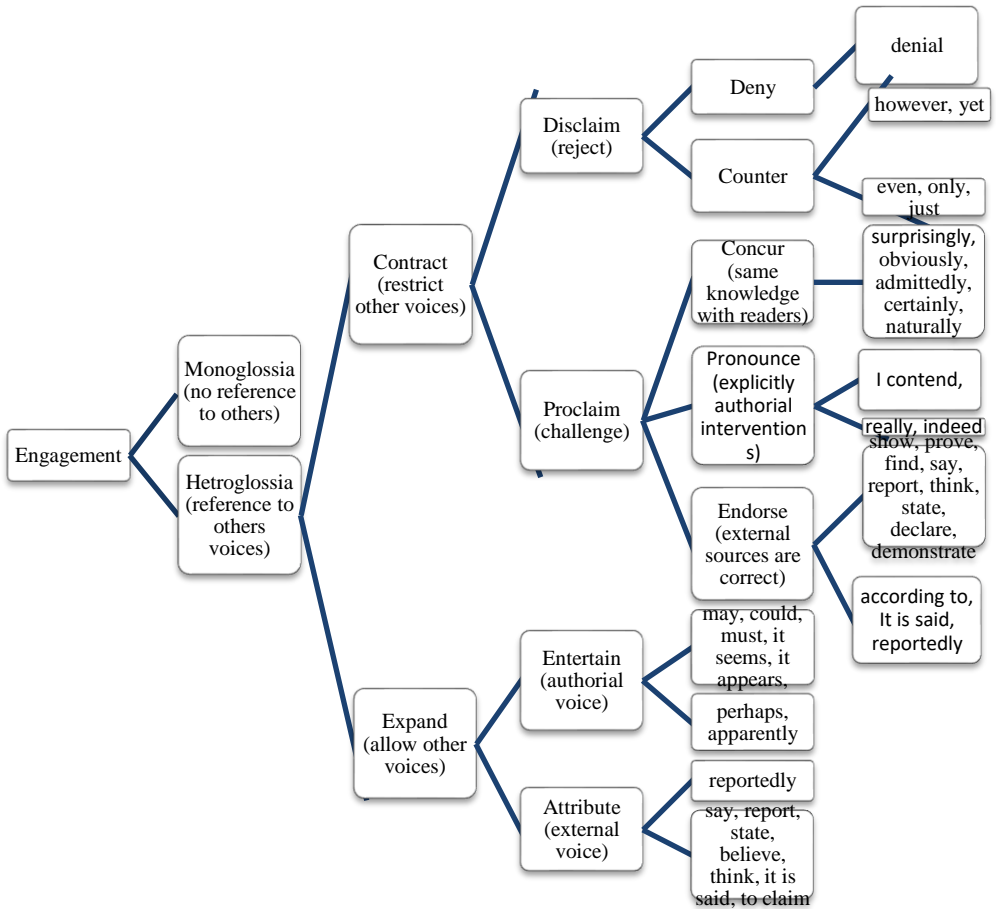
First writing	Technology is becoming increasingly prevalent in the world today. In the not too distant future, technology will completely replace the teacher in the classroom. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
Second writing	Some people support the development of agriculture, like factory farming and scientific creation of fruits and vegetables, while others oppose. Discuss both views and give your opinion.
Third writing	Some people say that the best way to improve public health is by increasing the number of sports facilities. Others, however, say that this would have little effect on public health and that other measures are required. Discuss both views and give your opinion.

## Appendix B:

Stance and Engagement Subsystem (Adapted from Hyland's (2008) Interactional Model)



Engagement Subsystem (Adapted from Martin and White's (2005) framework)



**Appendix C**

## Sentence and Paragraph Level Examples for Voice Adapted from IELTS Mentor Task 2

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### Neutral sentences

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- Nowadays, schools focus on academic subjects such as mathematics, science, and language. These subjects help young people to gain knowledge and to develop thinking skills.
- Lifestyle and diet the causes of poor health in developed countries.

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### Martin and White (2005)

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#### Sentence level examples

##### Contractive voice

- On the other hand, some of the students deny this fact as they may not consider the abilities of their children and force them to take subjects of their choice.
- Throughout human history, mothers mainly take care of the children and do most of the works for the children. On the contrary, men are mainly busy outside the home to earn the living for the whole family

##### Expansive voice

- Teachers have sheer knowledge because of their vast experience and observations. They can also provide real-time knowledge of the things to their students.
- Finally, a huge budget must be allocated to improve the alternative vehicles in the city and many countries will not be able to eventually do it successfully.

##### Paragraph level example

- There is always the opposite side of the coin. Certain women leadership proved that they are ready to encourage violence. To illustrate this, Pakistan started a war during women's leadership and it clearly proves that peace cannot be restored by changing leadership. In addition to this, Bangladesh also saw a great deal of internal violence during women's leadership only. It is clearly proved that violence can be evident under women's leadership also.

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### Hyland (2008)

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#### Sentence level examples

##### Hedges and Boosters

- Nobody can really predict which areas of knowledge will be most useful to society in the future, and it may be that employers begin to value creative thinking skills above practical or technical skills.
  - Address reader: We, us, you
-

- 
- We seem, in fact, to be faced with a dilemma.
  - I believe that we have an obligation to help those who live beyond our national borders.

Paragraph-level example

- I believe that we have an obligation to help those who live beyond our national borders. In some countries, the problems that people face are much more serious than those in our own communities, and it is often even easier to help. For example, when children are dying from curable diseases in African countries, governments, and individuals in richer countries can save lives simply by paying for vaccines that already exist.
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## **Appendix D**

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### **The way that learners employ voice in argumentative writing samples before treatment in the control group**

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However, replacing teachers by robots definitely will have negative effects especially in Asian countries, where your culture is remarkably different from western societies. You mainly value relationship. You prefer to establish rapport with your teacher. When you are in tough situations and need guidance, teachers are the only ones who should encourage you to overcome your difficulties and fulfill dreams.

Technological driven teachers will not replace teachers in the classroom. Robotic teachers cannot fulfill students' educational needs. For example, students definitely need to be monitored by their teacher in order to do their assignments. There are so many examples that support this idea. You can use so many mobile applications to learn better.

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### **The way that learners employ voice in argumentative writing samples after treatment in Martin experimental group**

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According to many, the first and foremost step for having pleasing and healthy circumstances, people should have physical activities at least two or three times a week. They claim that for people who have a sedentary job, sportive actions are dispensable and it would not be abandoned at all. For instance, an employee, who is in early thirteen, should have a regular plan due to avoid problems such as obesity and heart disease. Obviously, in today's world, with unhealthy and fatty food and polluted weather sport should not be forgotten. It makes it clear that sports facilities should be increased to help people to have a healthier lifestyle.

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### **The way that learners employ voice in argumentative writing samples after**

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**treatment in Hyland experimental group**

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These days, because of changing the lifestyle of people all around the world, individuals may have less time and eager to have physical activities. Sedentary jobs are increasing dramatically. This ultimately leads to having some problems in public health. I completely agree that sports facilities could be a helpful situation. There is no doubt that developing infrastructure and having more sports clubs could be significant elements that authorities should have noticed mainly. Adequate equipment and up-to-date devices are likely to allow people to enhance the quality of their health.

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