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**A Socio-cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis of Terrorist Ideologies in their
Education System**

Eğitim Sistemlerinde Terörist İdeolojilerin Sosyo-Bilişsel Eleştirel Söylem Analizi

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, terörist grupların ideolojik indoktrinasyonu teşvik etmek ve takipçi kazanmak amacıyla medyada gösterilen eğitim söylemini stratejik olarak nasıl kullandıklarını incelemektedir. Çalışmada, terörizmin hedeflerine hizmet eden aşırı ideolojileri meşrulaştırmak ve algıları manipüle etmek için kullanılan dili incelemek üzere van Dijk'in Sosyo-Bilişsel Modeli uygulanmıştır. Araştırma, bu örgütlerin okullarda, camilerde ve daha geniş toplumsal bağlamlarda kullandıkları eğitimsel retoriği temsil eden YouTube videolarına odaklanmış ve bu söylemlerin izleyicileri nasıl manipüle etmek, grup içi bağlılık oluşturmak, karşıt tarafı insanlıktan çıkarmak ve eğitim kisvesi altında terör örgütlerinin otoritesini meşrulaştırmak üzere tasarlandığını araştırmıştır.

Bu çalışma, dokuz YouTube videosundan alınan 53 metni analiz etmiş ve verilerde sıkça tekrarlanan 18 mikro düzeyde ideolojik strateji ile birlikte pozitif öz-temsili ve negatif öteki-temsili gibi makro stratejileri belirlemiştir. En yaygın stratejiler aktör tanımlaması, kutuplaştırma, otoriteye başvurma, tekrar ve genelleştirme olmuştur. Bu stratejiler, şiddeti yüceltmek ve karşı tarafı insanlıktan çıkarmak için kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, terörist söylemin şehitliği ve nefreti normalleştirdiğini, öğretim uygulamalarının ise korku, ilahi meşrulaştırma ve sadakat yoluyla itaatkâr takipçiler yetiştirmeye dayandığını göstermektedir. Genel olarak, bu bağlamda eğitim, eleştirel düşünmeden ziyade bir beyin yıkama ve indoktrinasyon aracı haline gelmektedir.

Terörist eğitimin incelenmesi, gençlerin farkındalığını ve eleştirel düşünme becerilerini artırabilir. Etkin vatandaşların, bu terör örgütleri tarafından kullanılan eğitim stratejilerinin farkında olmaları gerekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyo-bilişsel CDA Yaklaşımı, Manipülasyon Stratejileri, Eğitimsel Propaganda, Radikalleşme, Beyin Yıkama.

ABSTRACT

This study explores how terrorist groups strategically employ educational discourse showed in the media to promote ideological indoctrination and recruit followers. It utilized a Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model to examine how language used to manipulate perceptions and legitimize extremist ideologies that serve the goals of terrorism. It focuses on YouTube videos that represent these organizations' educational rhetoric in schools, mosques, and broader social contexts to investigate how these discourses are designed to manipulate viewers, construct in-group loyalty, dehumanize opponents, and legitimize the authority of terrorist groups under the guise of education. This study analyzed 53 texts from nine YouTube videos and identified 18 micro-level ideological strategies, frequently repeated across the data, alongside macro strategies of positive self-representation and negative other representation. The most common strategies were actor description, polarization, authority, repetition, and generalization. They were used to glorify violence and dehumanize opponents. These findings answered the research questions by showing that terrorist discourse normalizes martyrdom and hate while teaching practices rely on fear, divine justification, and loyalty to produce obedient followers. Overall, education in this context becomes a tool of indoctrination rather than critical thinking. studying the terrorist education can increase young people's awareness and critical thinking. Active citizens need to be aware of the educational strategies that are employed by these terrorist organizations.

Keywords: Socio-cognitive CDA Approach, Manipulation Strategies, Educational Propaganda, radicalization, Brainwashing.

1. Introduction

The impact of terrorist organizations on education policy is profound and multifaceted. In regions affected by conflict or extremism, educational institutions often become targets for violence or ideological indoctrination ¹. Consequently, education policies must address security concerns while promoting resilience through peacebuilding initiatives and critical thinking skills ². This paper aims to explore the role of education that plays in radicalization processes, examining how terrorist organizations exploit educational systems. In contemporary digital media, especially platforms like YouTube, these groups have increasingly turned to sophisticated forms of communication that combine language, imagery, and symbolism to project authority, justify violence, and promote extremist educational ideologies. These discourses are often framed within religious or political narratives, presenting their messages as righteous, instructional, or divinely sanctioned. However, despite the centrality of discourse in the propagation of terrorism, linguistic analysis remains an under-explored dimension within counterterrorism studies, though different studies have been conducted including, ³ study, "King Abdullah II Anti-Terrorism Ideology: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective," analyzes three of King Abdullah II's 2015 speeches using Van Dijk's socio-cognitive CDA framework. The research reveals how the Jordanian monarch employs lexical choices, repetition, and presuppositions to construct a dual narrative: demonizing terrorists while upholding Islam's peaceful image. Though limited to three speeches, the study demonstrates how political discourse shapes anti-terrorism ideology and public perception, emphasizing that extremism contradicts Islamic values. ⁴ study, "Language and Ideology: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Barack Obama's Speeches on the Representation of Iraq's War Against Daesh," analyzes how Obama framed the U.S. military campaign against ISIS in Iraq through five speeches (2014-2015). Using Fairclough's CDA and Halliday's SFL, the research reveals Obama's linguistic strategies (e.g., nominalization, transitivity,

¹ Teun A. van Dijk, "Discourse, Cognition and Society," içinde *Discourse as Social Interaction*, ed. Teun A. van Dijk (London: SAGE Publications, 1995), 1–37.

² Anna Uhl Chamot ve Greta Davidson, *Alternative Assessment for Language Minority Students* (Washington D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1998).

³ K. Khawaldeh Sami, *A Critical Discourse Analysis of English Language Teaching Materials in Jordanian Schools* (Doktora Tezi, Yarmouk University, 2018).

⁴ Saba Nawras, *Critical Discourse Analysis of Iraqi EFL Textbooks: Representation of National Identity and Ideology* (Yüksek Lisans Tezi, University of Baghdad, 2019).

repetition) to portray ISIS as brutal, justify U.S. intervention, and assert American leadership. While insightful, the limited sample of five speeches narrows generalizability. The study underscores how political discourse shapes ideological narratives.⁵ Master's paper, "The Representation of Popular Mobilisation Forces in Online British and Iranian News Reports," compares how British (BBC, The Guardian) and Iranian (Tehran Times, Financial Tribune) media portray the PMF using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The study analyzes 12 news reports with a mixed-methods approach, combining micro-level tools (Reisigl & Wodak's strategies, van Leeuwen's categories, Halliday's transitivity) and macro-level analysis (van Dijk's ideological strategies). Findings show both outlets use similar discursive tactics but with opposing ideological slants, confirming hypotheses about biased representations. The eclectic model proves effective in revealing nuanced power and ideology in media discourse.

While military, political, and sociological aspects of terrorism have received substantial academic and governmental attention, the linguistic mechanisms through which terrorist ideologies are constructed and spread have been relatively neglected. As⁶ argues, one of the significant gaps in countering extremist narratives lies in the insufficient focus on the linguistic strategies used by terrorist organizations to persuade, manipulate, and mobilize audiences. In response to this scholarly void, the current study aims to examine the manipulative and ideological discursive strategies used by terrorist groups, particularly through video materials produced by the Islamic State in high Muslim population regions such as Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey, where their educational propaganda has been especially forceful yet insufficiently studied. Additionally, mass media connects people worldwide and spreads information through TV, radio, newspapers, and digital platforms like social media. Researches show media often carries hidden biases that support powerful groups to make certain ideas seem common even when they are unfair⁷. Media is not for reporting news only, but it shapes

⁵ Zaineb Ali Hussein Safi al-Yassiry, *A Critical Discourse Analysis of Cultural Representations in Iraqi English Textbooks* (Yüksek Lisans Tezi, University of Babylon, 2023).

⁶ Alex P. Schmid, "Al-Qaeda's 'Single Narrative' and Attempts to Develop Counter-Narratives: The State of Knowledge," *ICCT Research Paper* (2014).

⁷ Edward S. Herman ve Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, 2. bs. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008).

how we see politics, culture, and even social issues ⁸. Unfortunately, media's power can also be misused. Terrorist groups, for example, exploit the internet to spread fear, recruit members, and raise money ⁹. Because media plays a crucial role in influencing opinions, this study relies on media sources, like YouTube videos, to analyze the discourse and address the research questions.

1.1 Research Questions

The is an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the discourse used in terrorist education contexts (e.g., in their speeches, videos, school programs) reflect their ideological and political objectives?
2. What are the most frequent ideologies used by terrorist instructors in teaching and learning practices?

1.2 Research Aims

The study has the following objectives:

1. To investigate how terrorist groups use discourse to advance their ideological and political goals.
2. To find out the most frequent ideologies used by terrorist instructors and their impact on education.

2. Ideology in CDA

Ideology refers to systems of beliefs or discourses that shape how people perceive and organize the world, often to legitimize social hierarchies or dominance. In Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), ideology is understood not just as abstract belief, but as embedded in language and social practices. It plays a crucial role in sustaining power structures and is reflected in discourse that benefits certain groups at the expense of others ¹⁰. Historically, ideology was viewed through a Marxist lens as "false consciousness" a distorted understanding of reality used to maintain control. Marx believed that ideologies hide contradictions in society and help preserve dominance. From this view, ideologies

⁸ Ruth Wodak ve Brigitta Busch, "Approaches to Media Texts," içinde *The SAGE Handbook of Media Studies*, ed. John Downing, Denis McQuail, Philip Schlesinger ve Ellen Wartella (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), 105–123.

⁹ Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology and Discourse: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (Barcelona: Pompeu Fabra University Press, 2000).; Marianne W. Jørgensen ve Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002).

aren't corrected by facts alone but by political action ¹¹. Modern CDA scholars argue that ideologies are both social and cognitive. According to¹², ideologies are shared mental frameworks that define a group's identity, goals, norms, values, and relationships with other groups. They influence what members of a group believe, how they behave, and how they speak. Ideologies may be simple or complex and can change based on social contexts. They are not necessarily true or false, but function to support the interests of a group. Ideologies also promote polarization "Us vs. Them", thinking where ingroups are viewed positively and outgroups negatively. This division is central in discourses like racism, nationalism, or extremism, and is used to justify actions and attitudes. For example, dominant ideologies often hide inequality through mystification, euphemisms, or manipulation ¹³. Most importantly, ideologies are not always negative. They can also drive resistance, reform, or solidarity ¹⁴. Feminism, anti-racism, and environmentalism are ideological too, but may serve different social purposes.

3. Methodology

This article adopted a qualitative method in which (9) videos have been utilized as the samples of the study. To analyze the selected data, the researchers thoroughly examined the texts based on the classifications developed by¹⁵. The researchers selected the videos using purposive sampling, focusing specifically on those related to the training of terrorist groups under the guise of education. The statements were announced in English, Arabic, Kurdish and Pashto while they have been translated and subtitled into English. The statements, which totaled (53) sentences from nine selected videos, were all retrieved from different YouTube channels to verify identity of contents. The rationale behind choosing these specific statements is governed by three criteria, the first is the time span, the second is nationality-related and the third is linguistic and theme related: The selected

¹¹ Scott Menard, *Research Methods: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2017).

¹² Teun A. van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," içinde *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen ve Heidi Hamilton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 352–371.; Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology and Discourse: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (Barcelona: Pompeu Fabra University Press, 2000).; Teun A. van Dijk, "Discourse, Cognition and Society," içinde *Discourse as Social Interaction*, ed. Teun A. van Dijk (London: SAGE Publications, 1995), 1–37.

¹³ Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003).; Teun A. van Dijk, "Discourse and Manipulation," *Discourse & Society* 17/3 (2006), 359–383.

¹⁴ Teun A. van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," içinde *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. Deborah Tannen, Deborah Schiffrin ve Heidi Hamilton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 352–371.

¹⁵ Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Knowledge: A Sociocognitive Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

video statements cover a time span from 2014, the year marking the declaration of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, until 2017. They have been organized systematically from the oldest to the newest one. They cover incidents where victims came from different parts of the world, as far east and west, apparently to achieve a global effect, which will help to explore whether terrorists used different discursive tools with its victims from different nationalities? And what are the tools they used and which ones have been used most frequently? Dealing with this topic of analysis, videos, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, documentaries, and news reports have been taken from the nine selected YouTube channels to serve as the study's dataset. The last section explains the types of data analysis and the number of texts and pictures selected from the videos and how and where the data for analysis were obtained.

In this study, Van Dijk's socio-cognitive discourse analysis model offers a detailed framework for spotting ideological bias in political speeches. At its Macro level is the strategy of "positive self-representation and negative other-representation," where speakers highlight their own group's good actions and downplay their faults, while doing the opposite for opposing groups.

Beside from Macro level, van Dijk also explains that ideology shapes discourse in details at Micro level, including word choice, sentence structure, and rhetorical strategies. He identifies 20 discursive devices, such as actor description, comparison, disclaimers, euphemism, repetition, metaphor, etc., that help reveal hidden ideological meanings. Therefore, this approach combines analysis of meaning, language form, and context to uncover how discourse subtly spreads and defends ideological positions. The following table presents the models of analysis prepared by the researchers through adopting all the analytical categories that are used to illustrate the ideological based properties of discourse structures introduced by Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach.

Micro- level Analysis	Brief Description	Example	Macro-level Analysis	
			Positive Self-rep.	Negative Self-rep.
1. Actor Description	Portraying people positively or negatively to create bias.	Calling refugees "fleeing war" vs. "burden on resources."		
2. Authority	Citing experts to make claims seem credible	"According to the UN..."		
3. Comparison	Highlighting differences to influence support or fear.	"Unlike us, they break the rules"		
4. Counterfactuals	Imagining "what if" scenarios to shape opinions.	"If we don't act, chaos will follow."		
5. Disclaimers	Acknowledging positives but emphasizing negatives to mask bias.	"Immigrants work hard, but they strain resources."		
6. Distancing	Using vague language to dehumanize outgroups.	Saying "they" instead of "we."		
7. Dramatization & Hyperbole	Exaggerating threats to scare the audience.	Describing immigration as "an invasion."		
8. Euphemism	Softening negative ideas with gentler words.	"Economic migrants" instead of "illegal immigrants."		
9. Evidentiality	Using facts/ statistics to support a point.	Studies show that, etc.		
10. Example/Illustration	Using stories or examples to clarify points.	Telling a refugee's journey story.		
11. Ultimate Attribution Error	Blaming outgroup flaws on inherent traits.	Blaming crime on "their nature."		
12. Generalization	Applying specific cases to broader stereotypes.	"All immigrants take jobs."		

13. History as Lesson	Comparing current issues to historical events.	"Like in WWII, we must act before it's too late!"		
14. Irony & Lexicalization	Using irony or specific words for indirect criticism.	Calling refugees "economic migrants" with disdain.		
15. Metaphor	Framing issues with images like "flood" or "invasion."	"An invasion of borders."		
16. Number Game	Using stats to emphasize scale.	"Millions threaten resources."		
17. Polarization	Dividing society into "us" vs. "them."	Portraying outgroups as threats.		
18. Presupposition & Pseudo-Ignorance	Implied beliefs through questions.	"Should we allow so many?"		
19. Repetition	Repeating stereotypes to reinforce them.	Calling refugees "illegal" repeatedly.		
20. Lexicalization	Word choices reveal biases.	"Bogus asylum seekers" vs. "fleeing oppression."		

Table (1). The Socio-cognitive Ideological Strategies by Van Dijk, 2012

3.1 The Selected Data for Analysis

Texts from the 1st Video:

- A teacher tells a child "What do you want to be, a jihadist or to execute a martyrdom (suicide) operation?"
- Teacher: "What have the infidels done?"
- Child: They kill Muslims"
- Teacher: All the infidels?
- Teacher: Like the infidels of Europe?
- Teacher: "The Islamic state was established with the **blood of the truthful.**"
- A child says "The Islamic state, they haven't done anything wrong and God willing they will not."
- A teacher says: "Those under fifteen go to Sharia Camp to learn about their creed and religion."
- "Those over sixteen, they can attend the military camp."

· *“Those whom they were previously enrolled in the camps can participate in military operations because Usama Ibn Zaid (adoptive son of Mohammed) led an army when he was 17 or 18 years old. He led an army against Roman.”*

- *Children are saying “O Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, you terrify the enemies”*
- *Children are saying “They don’t know that **we are the best people on the planet.**”*
- *Children are shouting “Abu Bakr al- Baghdadi, **the prince of the Faithful.**”*

Texts from the 2nd Video:

- *The fighters said that all children are educated by the Islamic State from the age of three.*
- *Girls, you come and sit at the back. Sit behind the boys, quickly.*
- *Turn your face this way, look at me.*
- *You know that this is the school of the Islamic State.*
- *What is this word? Jihad.*
- *What is Jihad? We must implement God’s religion over all people.*
- *God Says do Jihad until intrigue, idolatry and infidelity are gone from the world.*
- *Stand up, what’s this called?*
- *Klashinkov.*
- *What do we call it in Pashto?*
- *Machine.*
- *Why do we use this?*
- *To defend faith.*
- *And whose heads will we hit with this?*
- *Infidels.*
- *This is a hand grenade, meaning hand bomb.*
- *When the students struggle to answer, the teacher whispers.*
- *What’s it called?*
- *TT. Gun.*
- *Where is it made?*
- *China.*
- *How many shots can it fire?*
- *Six bullets.*
- *How do you hold to shoot?*

- *Like this.*
- *Fire it from a standing position, like this.*

Texts from the 3rd Video:

- *A child is convincing young children to sacrifice their lives without question.*
- *Teacher says: “we tell them all of us will die martyrs and reach Heaven. All of us”.*
- *Teacher says: “It is written in the Quran, so you have to fight, Jihad, for the sake of God and Islamic State.”*
- *Teacher says: “The most important thing to make them understand are that (President) Bashar’s state is infidel.”*
- *Teacher says: “Everyone should fight them, that’s God’s word.”*
- *Teacher says: “If they call me a terrorist, I’ll consider it an honor.”*
- *A child says: “They come when we enter the mosque and ask, “Do you pray?”. We say “yes”.*
- *A child says: They ask “Do you love al-Baghdadi (ISIS Leader)?”, “We say “Yes”*
- *A child says: They ask “Come with us and fight jihad in the name of God, and you will enter Heaven”*
- *A child says: “They say they will give us lots of things.”*
- *A child says: “They show us how they kill Bashar’s soldiers.”*

Texts from the 4th Video:

In a video, Omar Mansoor, the commander of a Pakistani Taliban faction, vows to target educational institutions across Pakistan. He states that, “These universities, colleges, schools, this is a system that has come from Britain and America. We want to disrupt this system, destroy its foundation. We want to establish Allah’s system, Allah’s rule.”

Texts from the 5th Video:

المثابرة دليل على النجاح “Perseverance is the key to success”

Texts from the 6th Video:

Report from the news state that, “The textbooks are titled English for the Islamic State. Iraqi troops found them at an orphanage when they liberated eastern Mosul in February.

*But these are unlike the school books you and I grow up with. In the alphabet the **letter B is for Bomb, G is for Gun. The letter S is for Sniper, presumably an ISIS fighter aiming his weapon. The letter W or Woman, shows indiscernible black figure, most likely a Burka clad woman.** And then there are the pictures of AK-47s and bombs used for Math exercises.*”

*“The orphanage where the ISIS textbooks were found was used to groom children to become ISIS soldiers or informants. According to Iraqi Military officials, Ruth Feldman is a child psychologist at Barlon University, who’s counseled children traumatized by war and terrorism. She says the toxic education of these so-called **cubs of the caliphate** only stokes the anxiety of living in harsh environment making these children easy prey.”*

“Those messages in the textbook help them divide the world into two. We are the just one, the right one. They are the enemy. They are wrong. They are hateful. They need to be killed. This is how children grow on violence and hatred.”

“The NGO said that, the children estimates that more than one million children living under ISIS rule in Iraq have either been forced out of school or forced to follow the terror group’s perverse curriculum that in the more advanced courses train students on how to make suicide bombs and beheading techniques.”

Text from the 7th Video:

- *A child says: “Thanks to God we are His army and we fight His enemies.”*
- *A child says: “In this religious camp you learn something called listening and obeying.”*
- *A child says: “You declare, I must listen and obey, even if I have to die.”*
- *A child says: “You must always repeat, I’m listening and obeying.”*
- *A child says: “Children are being systematically recruited across ISIS controlled territory into the three different ISIS fighting units.”*

Text from the 8th Video:

A child says: “They (The terrorists) were showing us everything on TV: how a suicide bomber explodes himself, how booby traps were detonated, how weapons were dismantled. How you can hit an armoured vehicle and destroy it. Where to shoot on the windshield of a hummer to hit and break it. Which angles to shoot, how you can sneak and attack them secretly. Next, they whip you and torture you. But I withstood all the torture and I quit.” He said he was terrified at what was happening and tried to leave.

Text from the 9th Video:

*The News's Report states that "English books by ISIS are brainwashing children with these books, e.g., I can shoot. Yes, you can and he can bomb. This is the book of the 1st grade, so from the age of five or six is what kids are exposed to. It is crazy here, you know... how to tell the time in English but rather just having a regular clock it's **a time bomb, it's like a timer on a bomb**. Also, making calculation with tanks and pistols. So, 5 equals 3 AK-47s and two other automatic weapons. It's the most subtle form of brainwashing it's repetition and it's normalizing. It's like a stolen childhood."*

3.2 Establishing Reliability and Validity

In qualitative video analysis, reliability is about showing that the data selection and coding process are consistent, systematic, and replicable ¹⁶. According to some other authors, reliability is about the clarity of the video quality, publication date, minimum length that can be lasted over three minutes, the source/ channel authenticity and its relevance to the topic ¹⁷. The videos that have been thoroughly selected based on these above-mentioned points. They all have been coded and they all are closely related to the topic of the study. The following table illustrates them in detail.

¹⁶ Matthew B. Miles ve A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2. bs. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1994).; Margrit Schreier, *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2012).

¹⁷ John W. Creswell ve Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, 4. bs. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2018).; Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, 6. bs. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2018).

Table (2) Establishing Reliability

	The Titles and their Relevance to the Topic	Channel's names	Publication's year	Length
1	Grooming Children for Jihad: The Islamic State	VICE News	8.Aug.2014	10:45
2	ISIS School Teaches Children Jihad in Afghanistan	FRONTLINE	1.Nov.2015	3:30
3	Children of ISIS (full documentary)	FRONTLINE	23.Nov.2015	10:40
4	Taliban Faction Vows More Attacks on Pakistani Students	The Wall Street Journal	22.Jan.2016	3:11
5	ISIS training children to be terrorists	Scripps News	16.May.2016	3:30
6	ISIS using education as terrorist propaganda	Fox News	8.Mar.2017	3:05
7	Children of the Caliphate (Child Soldiers)	Human Rights Network	13. Mar. 2017	7: 24
8	Brainwashed children kill prisoners in Islamic State training	Sky News	28.Mar.2017	3:32
9	When ISIS recruits children as killers, how hard is it to reverse the brainwashing?	CBS news	1.Aug. 2017	11:59

The videos with high quality content, without appropriate metadata, could be dismissed as poor-quality material. Similarly, videos with poor educational or misleading content, but contain appropriate metadata (such as adequate length, duration, captivating tags, titles, technical quality, and description), may be misinterpreted as good quality videos. Therefore, its crucial to consider both content and quality to establish reliability. After that, validity means the analysis truthfully reflects the ideological content and context of the videos¹⁸. To enhance validity, using triangulation by comparing findings from multiple videos. This method reduces researcher bias and increases trustworthiness¹⁹.

¹⁸Yvonna S. Lincoln ve Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, 1985).; Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*.

¹⁹ Creswell- Poth, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*.

Triangulation is the process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation.”²⁰.

1.Data Analyses

Strategy	Example from Data	Ideological Effect
1. Actor Description	1. “What do you want to be, a jihadist or execute a martyrdom operation?” → presents “jihadist” as noble option (V1) 2. “They kill Muslims” → “They” as infidels, dehumanized (V1) 3. “Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, you terrify the enemies” → heroic leader (V1) 4. “Infidels” → repeated across multiple videos, always negative (V1, V2, V3) 5. “His army” (children referring to themselves) → positive self (V7) 6. “Martyrs” → glorified identity (V3) 7. “Bashar’s state is infidel” (V3) 8. “Britain and America” → negative foreign actors (V4) 9. “Cubs of the caliphate” → positive, loyal fighters (V6)	Dehumanizes outgroups (infidels) portraying Muslims as Victims.
2. Authority	1. God says do Jihad until idolatry is gone (V 2) 2. “It is written in the Quran, so you have to fight” (V3) 3. “Usama Ibn Zaid led an army at 17” (historical example) (V1)	Using divine authority to legitimize violence.
3. Comparison	1. “They kill Muslims” vs. “We are the best people on the planet” (V1) 2. Unlike us, they break the rules (V3) 3. "Britain and America" vs. "Allah’s rule" (V4)	Polarizes “Us” (righteous) vs. “Them” (Sinful).
4. Counterfactuals	1. If they call me a terrorist, I’ll consider it an honor” (V3): implies “even if that happens, we still win.” 2. If we don’t act, chaos will follow (V4)	Creates fear to warn, persuade or justify preemptive violence.

²⁰ Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1995).

5. Disclaimers	1. "The Islamic state, they haven't done anything wrong and God willing they will not" (V1)	Defensive statement.
6. Distancing	1. "They kill Muslims". Vs "We are the best people" (V1) 2. "They" used repeatedly for enemies/ infidels (V1, V2, V3) 3. "Those over sixteen..." (V1)	Separates ingroup "We" from outgroup "they"
7. Dramatization	1. "B" is for "Bomb" exaggerates threat. (V6) 2. "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, you terrify the enemies" (V1) 3. "All of us will die martyrs and reach Heaven" (V3) 4. "Destroy its foundation" (V4)	Amplifies perceived danger of outgroups to create fear.
8. Euphemism	1. "Martyrdom operation" for suicide bombing (V1) 2. "Cubs of the Caliphate" for child soldiers (V6)	Glorifies violence as sacred duty.
9. Evidentiality	1. "God says do Jihad..." (V2) 2. "Quran says you must fight" (V3).	Using religious text to validate extremism.
10. Example	1. Story of Usama Ibn Zaid leading an army at 17 (V1). 2. Stories from children: "They show us how they kill Bashar's soldiers" (V3) 3. They (The terrorists) were showing us everything on TV: how a suicide bomber explodes himself, ...etc. (V 8)	Normalizes child soldiers through historical precedent.
11. Ultimate Attribution Error	1. "Infidels kill Muslims" (V1) 2. "Britain and America brought corrupt system" (V4)	Essentializes enemy evil
12. Generalization	1. All infidels kill Muslims (V1) 2. Everyone should fight them (V3) 3. All of us will die martyrs and reach Heaven. All of us (V3)	Stereotypes entire groups as enemies.
13. Metaphor	1. "Blood of the truthful" (V1) 2. the prince of the Faithful (V1) 3. "Cubs of the Caliphate" (V7) 4. "A time bomb" (V 9)	Frames children as future warriors.
14. Number Game	1. Ages of camps: under 15 → Sharia camp; over 16 → military (V1) 2. "Six bullets" (V2) 3. "Millions threaten resources" (V6)	Precision makes discourse credible.
15. Polarization	"We are the best people on the planet", vs "Infidels are wrong". (V1)	Sharpens ingroup superiority and outgroup hatred.
16. Presupposition	1. "What do you want to be, a jihadist or martyr?" presumes these are only options (V1) 2. "All the infidels?" (V1) 3. Should we allow so many (infidels)? (V1)	Assumes outgroups are inherently dangerous.

17. Repetition	1. Repeating “jihad” and “Islamic State” (V1,2,3)	Reinforce ideological slogans.	
18. Lexicalization	1. <i>Infidels</i> 2. <i>Martyrdom</i> 3. <i>Army</i> 4. <i>Destroy (in all videos)</i>	Language normalizes ideology	

This section presents the data analysis of (53) selected texts from 9 selected YouTube videos by using the analytical model outlined earlier. In addition, it applies discursive devices drawn from the socio-cognitive approach. After that, two sections follow: the first interprets the use and effect of micro-level devices, while the second examines the macro-level strategies.

4.1 Micro-Level Analysis

The analysis begins by identifying micro-level discursive strategies, such as actor description, authority, burden, categorization, comparison, consensus, counterfactuals, disclaimers, euphemism, evidentiality, examples, generalization, hyperbole, implication, irony, lexical choices, metaphor, national self-glorification, norm expression, number game, polarization (us–them), populism, presupposition, vagueness, and victimization. At the macro-level, the analysis focuses on the broader ideological strategies of Positive Self-representation and Negative representation.

Table (3) Micro-Level Analysis

4.2 Macro-Level and thematic Analysis

First of all, **Actor description** has been used to describe actors positively, or negatively to create bias. There are nine examples from the selected videos. The Positive self-representations are including, "jihadists," "martyrs," "His army" framed as brave, faithful. Whereas, the Negative other representations are "infidels," "Bashar's state," "Britain and America" as enemies. This constructs the idea that, the in-group is pious, heroic, and justified, but the out-group is demonized, guilty, and threatening.

Secondly, using religious or historical **Authority** to legitimize discourse. As stated by the Islamic teacher “God says do Jihad... It’s written in the Holy Quran.” It declares a Positive self-representation of the group’s violence presented as divinely approved and historically rooted. This establishes the theme of legitimacy by appealing to divine command and Islamic history that frames violence as religious duty.

Third, using **Comparison** to highlight differences between in-group and out-group. As stated by the *commander of a Pakistani Taliban* “*Britain and America, vs. Allah’s rule. Or, “They kill Muslims, vs. We are the best people on planet.”* It seeks to draw a Positive self as just and faithful but negative other as violent and corrupt. The theme constructs moral superiority and cultural purity.

Fourth, **Counterfactuals** have been used to imagine about hypothetical scenarios to warn or persuade the listeners. As stated by the teacher in the third video “*If they call me a terrorist, I’ll consider it an honor.*” This shows the positive self of a teacher that she acts to be faithful under any circumstance. Thus, it shows unshakable commitment by the group to their duty.

Fifth, using **Disclaimers** to acknowledge positivity before emphasizing negativity, as stated by the child in the first video, “*The Islamic state, they haven’t done anything wrong and God willing they will not.*” It emphasizes a positive self-defense to deflect criticism.

Sixth, when it comes to **Distancing**, vague terms are used to separate in-group from out-group. As in the most videos the pronoun “*they*” have been used repeatedly to refer to enemies, or infidels. This shows a negative self of others; those that are not part of the Islamic State, or terrorist groups are framed as distant and faceless. It can be delivered as dehumanizing opponents.

Seventh, **Dramatization**, or **Hyperbole** is about exaggerating to create fear and pride, as exaggerated by the terrorist curriculum designers in their orphanage school textbooks, *letter B is for Bomb, G is for Gun. The letter S is for Sniper, presumably an ISIS fighter aiming his weapon. The letter W or Woman shows indiscernible black figure, most likely a Burka clad woman.* They create a positive self-image for themselves-the terrorist groups- to express mighty and heroic, while drawing a negative self-image for the infidels as extremely evil and bad people. The message here is to magnify fear and pride.

Eighth, **Euphemism** is also another powerful tool that has been used to softening negative thoughts and acts with gentle words to encourage the victims (the children) to take brutal actions, for example “*cubs of the caliphate*” has been used in their toxic education, this term used by the terrorist group ISIS (Islamic State) to refer to children and teenagers they recruit and train to become fighters, spies, or suicide bombers so that making these children easy prey. It creates a positive self for violence and normalizes brutality.

Most importantly, **Evidentiality** took place in which facts, data, verses from holy books have been used as “*God says.*”, or “*Quran references*”, in which depicts a positive self and divinely justified of Islamic States to prove their claims and to give their discourse a religious authority.

Then, another tool is using **Examples**, or **Illustrations** through sharing old and historical stories, or other stories from Tv and any other recorded data, for example a child said that they were showing us a story of Usama Ibn Zaid leading an army at the age of 17. This to illustrate and indirectly teach the children that they are not the only children that they fight for the sake of Islam, but many other great leaders have gone through the same path. Therefore, it shows a positive self of heroic tradition that makes their ideology memorable.

After that, **Ultimate Attribution Error** has also been used by terrorist groups for blaming the out-group people’s flaws on inherent characters, such as “*America brought corrupt system*”. This declares negative-self of the infidels, they consider them as naturally evil as they say “*Infidels kill Muslims*”. These expressions attribute inherently bad deeds to the infidels.

Later, when the terrorist groups are applying one case to the whole group, it is called **Generalizations**. For example, when the teacher says “*we tell them all of us will die martyrs and reach Heaven. All of us.*”, she means that, they as teachers tell all the students that they will be martyrs. She used the pronoun “All of us” to generalize the entire group of Islamic States to die as martyrs after dying to rest in peace forever. This creates a positive self for all the Islamic groups; there is no room for nuance. Whether doing bad or good, they claim themselves as pure people that they all deserve to be in Heaven.

In addition, **Metaphor** is another important tool that has been used by the terrorist groups to frame words through imagery. For instance, as can be seen from the first video that, children are shouting “*Abu Bakr al- Baghdadi, the prince of the Faithful*”. The children are comparing Abu Bakr al- Baghdadi to the faithful king to depicts a positive-self-image of the Islamic group.

Moreover, another ideology is a **Number Game**- statistics, figures and numbers. Terrorists use this tool to make their discourse accurate and precise, for example a teacher says “*The children under ages of 15 must go to Sharia Camp and those that are over 16*

must go to Military Camp.” This indicates that, they follow rules and everything has been well-organized in their education system. This creates a positive-self-image for them as justifying policy.

Furthermore, **Polarization** (Us vs. Them) is another important tool that have been used in Terrorist speeches, for example when the brainwashed children are saying “*they don’t know we are the best people on the planet*” they draw a sharp boundary between they and themselves as they consider themselves positive and the others negative.

Sixteenth, Presupposition & Pseudo-ignorance (Implicit assumptions) is another tool that has been used in a form of question, for instance in the first video, a teacher asks a child “*What do you want to be, a jihadist or martyr?*” this presumes that these are only options. This creates a positive self-image for being jihadist and bomb suicide because it presumes the idea that in all cases they will be martyr and they go to Heaven where they can find eternal peace.

Seventeenth, another strategy that Islamic States are using it is **Repetition**. As it can be seen from the seventh video, the child says “*we must listen and obey*”. It means that, the children are going to be forced to repeat the actions that they have been shown. They are going to repeat it many times until it normalizes the idea. They use a positive self-representation a lot in their speeches, like using the word “Jihad” to Reinforce ideological slogans.

Finally, **Lexicalization**, or the choice of certain words, including: infidels, martyrdom, Jihad...etc. that have been selected, used and repeated throughout almost all the videos because it represents a positive-self through honorifics and negative others through slurs because language normalizes ideology.

5. Findings

Based on the analysis of 53 selected texts drawn from nine YouTube videos, the study examined how terrorist organizations strategically construct ideological discourse in educational contexts. Using Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model, the analysis identified eighteen micro-level ideological strategies, such as actor description, authority, repetition, metaphor, polarization, euphemism, presupposition, and others. At the macro level, the data showed a consistent use of positive self-representation and negative other

representation. In total, the analysis revealed 18 distinct types of ideological strategies, many of which were repeated across multiple videos and texts.

By answering the first research question “*How does the discourse used in terrorist education contexts reflect their ideological and political objectives?*” The study found that terrorist groups construct a discourse aimed at normalizing violence, glorifying martyrdom, and dehumanizing opponents. This is done through repeated references to divine authority, religious duty, and historical examples, combined with linguistic tools that emphasize loyalty, obedience, and the framing of violence as sacred.

In response to the second research question “*What are the most frequent ideologies used by terrorist instructors in teaching and learning practices?*” The most frequent strategies observed were: **Actor description** used in almost all videos to create polarized identities. **Polarization** (us vs. them) frequently repeated to intensify the contrast between in-group loyalty and out-group hostility. **Authority** and evidentiality were widely used to legitimize violence by appealing to divine sources or religious texts. **Repetition** and **lexicalization** were systematically reinforcing ideological slogans like “Jihad,” “martyrdom,” and “infidels.” **Generalization** and **dramatization** were exaggerating threats and glorifying in-group sacrifice.

Less frequent, but still significant, were strategies like **number games** (using statistics and ages to appear organized), **counterfactuals** (to warn or justify), **disclaimers**, and **irony**. The data showed that **actor description** and **polarization** were the most dominant, while **irony** and **disclaimers** were among the least frequent.

The findings suggest that these ideologies shape a distorted educational environment. They encourage children to internalize hate, unquestioning obedience, and to view violence as legitimate and heroic. Teaching practices, as shown in the data, are built around indoctrination rather than critical thinking, using repetition, fear, and moral dichotomies to produce loyal followers willing to fight and die.

6. Conclusion

This study explored how terrorist organizations use educational discourse to spread extremist ideology and manipulate perceptions. By analyzing 53 texts from nine videos through Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive CDA framework, it became evident that these groups skillfully combine religious authority, historical references, repetition, and us-versus-

them language to legitimize violence and shape young minds. The findings reveal that education under terrorist ideologies is not about learning but about indoctrination and constructing loyalty, justifying hatred, and glorifying martyrdom as the ultimate purpose.

7. Suggestions for Further Studies

Based on these findings, several suggestions were made:

- 1. For researchers:** Further studies could compare such extremist discourses across different regions, platforms, and languages to identify common patterns and context-specific variations.
- 2. For educators and curriculum developers:** Emphasize critical thinking, media literacy, and intercultural understanding to help students recognize and resist manipulative discourse.
- 3. For policymakers and media platforms:** Strengthen monitoring and removal of extremist content online, and support programs that promote peace education and counter-narratives highlighting shared human values.

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Etik Beyan / Ethical Statement

Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.

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