

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Seacoast International School's Advertisement for Student Registration, Tripoli, Libya through Faircloughian Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines how a promotional advertisement for Seacoast International School's Ain Zara branch constructs persuasive appeal and reproduces ideological assumptions about international schooling. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, using qualitative textual analysis, the transcript is examined at the textual, discursive, and social levels. Textually, superlative comparison, antithetical slogans, unmodalized predictive claims, and direct address through "we," "you," and "your child" construct the advertisement's persuasive force. Discursively, the advertisement borrows legitimacy from an internationally distributed curriculum and predominantly foreign teaching staff rather than local evidence of quality, positioning parents as decision-makers responsible for a child's future opportunity. At the social level, these choices reflect a neoliberal reframing of education as a competitive, internationally benchmarked investment rather than a public good, treating English proficiency and foreign instruction as prerequisites for success. The findings extend Fairclough's account of marketized discourse in public higher education to a private, multilingual K-6 context, showing how the advertisement naturalizes a hierarchy of educational value without stating it directly.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis; Fairclough; advertising discourse; education marketing; ideology; student recruitment; linguistic strategies.*

1. Introduction

Language has always been viewed as the focal point the educational system. Schools, specifically, private ones are using advertisements to present their services and to present a description of those services (Halliday, 2016). The word choices made in an advertisement, the images placed behind them, and the assumptions all contribute to Critical analysis as those features and asks how the text was put together, by whom, for what institutional purpose, and within what wider social and economic conditions (Scott, 1994; National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2023; *Writing for Eagles*, n.d.). This is relevant to private education sector in Tripoli, Libya. The growing number of schools has forced a competition between all schools who are offering an internationally oriented curriculum. Seacoast International School, which operates multiple campuses across Tripoli, is one such institution, and like its competitors it relies on advertising to recruit students each academic year. The advertisement is not incidental to the school's operation; it is the point of first contact between the institution and the family it hopes to enroll, and the language and imagery it uses are

chosen, whether deliberately or through inherited convention, to make that first contact persuasive (Accreditation Team, 2025; Mercadal, 2021; Netaji Subhas Open University, 2018).

Fairclough's account of the marketization of public discourse offers a useful lens for understanding why a school advertisement might read less like an announcement and more like a sales pitch. Fairclough (1993) observed that institutions once assumed to sit outside commercial logic, such as universities, had begun adopting the discourse conventions of advertising and public relations once financial competition for students intensified, a shift subsequent research has traced in university admissions prospectuses (Ma, 2024), charter school websites (Wilson & Carlsen, 2016), and elite school marketing more broadly (Drew, 2013). Private schools operating in a competitive local market, such as those in Tripoli, sit squarely within this dynamic: their promotional materials sell an education while continuing to describe themselves in the language of pedagogy, care, and community. Examining how this dual function is achieved in language is the task this study sets for itself.

1.0 Research Aim

This study aims to conduct a critical discourse analysis of Seacoast International School's student registration advertisement, examining how its linguistic and visual choices construct persuasive meaning and position the school, prospective parents, and students within broader ideological discourses of international education in Libya. Guided by Fairclough's (1989, 1992, 2003) three-dimensional model, the analysis proceeds from the textual and visual features of the advertisement to the discursive practices surrounding its production and reception, to the social and ideological structures it reflects and reinforces.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What linguistic and visual features does Seacoast International School's registration advertisement use to construct persuasive meaning and represent the school's institutional identity?
2. How does the advertisement function as a discursive practice, shaping parents' perceptions of the school and promoting its educational values? (Interpretation — discursive practice level)
3. How does the advertisement reflect and reinforce broader social and ideological discourses surrounding international education and educational quality in the Libyan context? (Explanation — social practice level)

2. Literature Review

Seacoast International School, a private institution operating across several campuses in Tripoli, Libya, promotes its academic programs through registration advertisements that combine written text with visual and layout choices designed to attract enrollment. Such advertisements are constructed texts that draw on particular linguistic strategies, visual arrangements, and cultural assumptions to persuade parents that a given institution deserves their trust and their tuition fees. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and specifically the three-dimensional model developed by Norman Fairclough, offers a method for tracing this persuasion to the social and economic conditions that produced it, supplemented here by Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design and by appraisal theory's account of evaluative, interpersonal meaning.

CDA emerged in the 1980s against approaches that treated texts as self-contained objects detached from the conditions of their production. Fairclough's early work established language as social practice shaped by institutions and power (Fairclough, 1989), while Van Dijk (1995, 2013) argued that ideology operates through shared mental frameworks, often in the polarizing pattern he termed the ideological square. Kress and Hodge (1993) made a related claim specific to language: ideological meaning is realized in linguistic choices themselves, a premise Kress and Leeuwen (1996, 2001) extended to other semiotic modes.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model treats discourse as simultaneously a text, an instance of discourse practice, and an instance of social practice (Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 2003), later reformulated as a movement from description through interpretation to explanation (Dahlborg et al., 2024); the three levels are interconnected rather than sequential. Fairclough (1993) applied the model directly to education, showing how British universities had absorbed the discourse conventions of advertising under pressure to compete for students, a marketization later traced in other national contexts.

Because advertisements combine language with images, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) grammar of visual design extends CDA into the visual register, and Machin and Mayr (2012) offer a compatible multimodal model for meaning that text-only analysis leaves concealed. Appraisal theory (Martin, 2000; Martin & White, 2005) divides evaluative resources into attitude, engagement, and graduation, with a visual counterpart in Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) categories of eye contact, social distance, and perspective; Larson's (2012) ethos, pathos, and logos offer a further lens on how these resources serve persuasion.

Research applying CDA to advertising finds a recognizable set of strategies for constructing closeness with the consumer, personal pronouns, superlatives, and short fragmented sentences, a pattern Fairclough termed synthetic personalization (Kaur, Arumugam, & Yunus, 2013; Jaworska, 2017). In education specifically, Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) identify the promotional activities schools use to pursue a distinctive market identity, and Ma (2024) finds Hong Kong prospectuses relying on pronouns, superlatives, and imperative "click here" constructions borrowed from commercial genres. Wilson and Carlsen (2016) show charter-school websites signaling "fit" with particular families through discourses of race, culture, and achievement, while Drew (2013), Ashehave (2007), and Zhang and O'Halloran (2013) trace comparable exclusivity, imperative address, and commercial branding across elite schools, prospectuses, and university homepages. Debs and Cheung (2021), argue that school choice is bound up with the reproduction of privilege.

Educational advertisements also construct identity: Darvin and Norton (2015) frame international schooling as a resource for global mobility, while Kress (2010) and Nami et al. (2023) show this construction achieved jointly through text and image. "International" itself carries particular weight, typically signaling global citizenship (Hughes, 2020), though recent scholarship warns the concept can function as a marketable individual advantage rather than a critical practice (Ferguson & Brett, 2023).

2.0 Gap in Literature

Within Libya, CDA has been applied chiefly to political rather than commercial discourse (Haider, 2016). No study located for this review applies CDA to the promotional discourse of a private school in Libya, despite the rapid growth of the private international school sector in Tripoli. A study of Seacoast International School's registration advertisement therefore extends this tradition, Fairclough's model read alongside visual grammar and appraisal theory, into context existing research has not yet addressed.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

This study adopts Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis as its primary theoretical framework, on the grounds that it offers what few other approaches to text analysis do: a single, coherent account of how a piece of language relates to the institution that produced it and to the society that institution operates within. Fairclough (1989, 1992, 2003) argues that any discursive event, whether a political speech, a job advertisement, or a school's registration notice, can be analyzed as three things at once. It is a text, a concrete linguistic and visual product open to close reading. It is an instance of discourse practice, a text that was produced through particular institutional processes and that

will be consumed and interpreted by a particular audience. And it is an instance of social practice, an event embedded within larger economic, political, and cultural structures that make some ways of speaking possible and others unlikely. Fairclough later restated these three dimensions as a movement from description, to interpretation, to explanation, and it is this restated form, corresponding respectively to the text, discourse practice, and social practice levels, that this study takes as its organizing structure (Dahlborg et al., 2024).

3. Methodology

3.0 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, on the grounds that its central concern, how a school's registration advertisement constructs meaning, identity, and ideology, is a question about interpretation rather than measurement. A qualitative approach treats the advertisement not as a set of variables to be counted but as a text whose wording, imagery, and layout carry socially constructed meaning that only close, situated reading can recover. Within this broader qualitative orientation, the study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its specific method, following Fairclough's three-dimensional model outlined in Chapter 3. CDA is suited to this task because it does not stop at describing what a text says; it asks how that text was produced, how it is likely to be consumed, and what social and ideological conditions make its particular choices of wording and image effective. A purely descriptive or content-analytic approach could catalogue the adjectives and images in Seacoast International School's advertisement, but only a qualitative, discourse-analytic design can connect those choices to the institutional identity, parental positioning, and ideology of international education that this study sets out to examine.

3.1 Data Collection

The primary data consist of a video advertisement posted by the Ain Zara branch of Seacoast International School on its Facebook page, featuring four speakers across a combination of on-camera presenters and voice-over narration (Seacoast International School – Ain Zara Branch, n.d.). This advertisement was selected through purposive sampling, on three grounds: it is an officially produced promotional text issued by the institution itself; it is representative of the marketing videos circulated by private international schools on Libyan social media more broadly; and it is rich enough in linguistic and multimodal detail to sustain a full CDA analysis.

The unit of analysis is the complete verbal transcript of the advertisement, treated as a single text, with individual clauses and utterances serving as the units of linguistic analysis. The spoken content was transcribed verbatim to produce a written corpus for analysis. In addition to this linguistic transcription, screenshots of the advertisement's visual elements, including setting, presenters' attire, camera framing, and color choices, were captured for multimodal analysis, following the social semiotic approach developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006).

3.2 Data Selection Criteria

Not every piece of communication a school produces is equally useful for this analysis, and the sample is therefore bounded by three criteria. The first is relevance: only material that is explicitly oriented toward student registration or enrollment is included, rather than the school's general communications about events, achievements, or campus life. The second is language richness, meaning that a selected text must contain persuasive content substantial enough to support discourse analysis; a bare announcement of registration dates and fees, with no evaluative or persuasive language, would offer little for a study concerned with how meaning and ideology are constructed. The third is representativeness: where more than one registration advertisement is available, preference is given to material that reflects the broader promotional register used by private and international schools operating in the same market,

so that the analysis speaks to a pattern rather than to an idiosyncratic outlier. Together, these criteria narrow a potentially large body of promotional material down to the advertisement, or small set of advertisements, best suited to answering the study's three research questions.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in three stages, each corresponding to one of the study's research questions. The first stage, description, addressed the first research question through a line-by-line coding of the transcript using the categories set out in Section 3.5, applying a manual coding scheme that recorded each linguistic feature, its example in the text, and its apparent function or effect; this stage produced a catalogue of the persuasive linguistic devices used to construct the school's institutional identity. The second stage, interpretation, addressed the second research question by grouping and reading these codes in light of genre and discourse-practice analysis, identifying the discourses the advertisement draws on, such as corporate marketing discourse or testimonial and vlog conventions, and considering how the medium, Facebook, and the target audience, Libyan parents, shape both the text's production and its likely reception. The third stage, explanation, addressed the third research question by linking these discourse features to the broader social, ideological, and historical conditions specific to Libya, including the growth of private schooling, the prestige attached to the English language, and the neoliberal logic of educational marketing, in order to explain the social function this discourse serves and the ideologies it reproduces.

Consistent with Fairclough's own account of the dialectical relationship between text, practice, and society, these three stages were not applied as a strict linear sequence. Findings reached at the explanation stage were used, where relevant, to revisit and refine the textual coding completed earlier, so that the analysis moved iteratively between levels rather than simply forward through them.

3.4 Trustworthiness and Rigor

Because CDA is an interpretive rather than a statistical methodology, trustworthiness in this study rests on three practices. Transparency is maintained by grounding every analytical claim in verbatim textual evidence drawn from the transcript. Reflexivity is maintained through explicit awareness of the researcher's own position and its potential influence on how the data are read and interpreted. Triangulation is maintained by anchoring the study's claims in established CDA and sociolinguistic theory, so that an interpretation is supported by more than the researcher's individual reading of a single text.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The data analyzed in this study consist entirely of publicly available, institutionally produced promotional material rather than data gathered from human participants, and no formal consent procedure is therefore required. The analysis nonetheless takes care to direct its critique at the discourse itself, the linguistic and multimodal choices made in constructing the advertisement, rather than at the individuals appearing in it, and it makes no claims regarding the personal intentions, character, or motivations of the presenters or voice-over speakers featured in the video.

4. Analysis and Findings

The advertisement for Seacoast International School's Ain Zara branch was examined using Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, which treats a text as simultaneously a linguistic object, a product of discursive practice, and an instance of wider social practice. Following qualitative textual analysis, the transcript was read and re-read to identify recurring lexical patterns, then organized into the three analytical levels below, with segments of the advertisement quoted directly to ground each observation in the data.

4.0 Textual Analysis

The lexical choices in the advertisement work to position the school within a global, rather than local, frame of reference. Ms. Donna and Mr. Mohamed repeatedly invoke internationalism as the school's defining feature: the teaching staff is described as "*mostly foreigners*," and English is cast not merely as a subject but as "*the key to the world*." The Macmillan curriculum is introduced with a comparative superlative, "*one of the best educational curriculums in the world, not just in Libya*," a phrasing that explicitly ranks the school against a global standard rather than a national or local one. This move from local to global comparison is a small but telling lexical choice: it asks the parent-viewer to measure the school's worth against an international benchmark rather than against neighboring institutions.

The four unnamed speakers who follow Mr. Mohamed shift register from informational to aphoristic. Their lines read as scripted slogans rather than spontaneous speech: "*we don't just teach lessons, we inspire futures*," "*every student is a story of success in the making*," "*this is not just education, this is the start of a lifelong journey*," and "*together we are shaping global systems ready for tomorrow*." Each follows a near-identical antithetical template, negating a modest claim ("*not just teach*," "*not just education*") to assert a grander one (inspiring futures, shaping global systems). This repeated structure functions as a rhetorical signature for the advertisement, rather than an isolated flourish.

Modality in the transcript is largely declarative and predictive rather than obligatory: there is no instance of deontic modals such as "*must*" or "*should*" pressuring the viewer toward action. Instead, the advertisement relies on unmodalized assertions of fact ("*this is the third branch*," "*the curriculum...is the Macmillan curriculum*") and future-oriented predictions stated with certainty ("*your child will learn it when he is young*," "*together we are shaping global systems ready for tomorrow*"). The effect of this categorical phrasing is to present contestable claims about educational quality and outcomes as settled fact, without the hedging that would normally accompany a claim about a child's future development.

Pronoun use marks a clear division of roles between the institution and the family. "*We*" is used by every speaker to speak on behalf of the school as a unified institutional voice, even though four different individuals deliver the lines, producing a collective identity that outweighs any single speaker's authority. "*You*" and "*your child*" address the viewer directly and personalize the appeal, shifting the advertisement from a general description of the school to a direct address aimed at the parent as the responsible decision-maker for the child's education.

The advertisement also relies on imperative and exclamatory constructions to sustain viewer engagement, most notably Mr. Mohamed's "*let's go!*" and the rhetorical question "*why Seacoast school in particular?*" which he immediately answers himself. This question-answer structure is a common persuasive device: it anticipates and pre-empts the viewer's skepticism by voicing the objection before the institution resolves it.

4.1 Discursive Practice

At the level of production, the advertisement is structured as a branch-launch promotion rather than a general institutional profile. Ms. Donna's opening lines situate the video within a specific expansion narrative, "*this is our third branch*," which frames the advertisement as part of a broader growth strategy in which each new location is marketed as evidence of institutional success and demand. Mr. Mohamed's contribution then functions as a bridge between the local announcement and a set of transferable claims about the brand ("*the teaching team here is mostly foreigners*") that presumably apply across all three branches, suggesting a centralized branding strategy applied uniformly regardless of location.

The advertisement draws on intertextual references to globally recognized education markers to lend it credibility. The Macmillan curriculum is named explicitly, borrowing legitimacy from an internationally known publisher rather than describing the school's own pedagogy in

original terms. Similarly, the claim that "*80% of the teachers are foreigners*" borrows credibility from an implicit hierarchy in which foreign, and by extension English-speaking, instruction is treated as inherently superior to local instruction. Neither curriculum design nor teacher qualification is described independently; both are validated by reference to external, globally circulating discourses of educational prestige.

Audience positioning throughout the advertisement casts parents as the primary decision-makers and the child as the object of that decision. The address moves from the general ("we") to the specific parental concern ("*your child will learn it when he is young*"), reinforcing the idea that timing and choice of school are within the parent's control and consequential for the child's future. The four slogan-speakers who close the advertisement broaden this address further, from the individual parent to an implied community of aspirational families ("*every student is a story of success in the making*"), suggesting that enrollment is not simply a service transaction but membership in a shared, forward-looking project.

4.2 Social Practice

Read at the level of social practice, the advertisement participates in a broader neoliberal reframing of education as a competitive good rather than a shared public entitlement. The repeated comparison of the school to global, rather than local, standards, "one of the best...in the world, not just in Libya," positions education as a market in which institutions compete for prestige on an international scale, and in which parents are expected to shop accordingly. The near-total absence of any reference to public schooling or to shared community benefit, combined with the exclusive focus on Seacoast's private branches and their expansion, reflects a treatment of education as a private investment made on behalf of an individual child rather than as a collective social provision.

This investment framing is reinforced by the advertisement's emphasis on English proficiency and foreign staffing as forms of capital that convert into future advantage, "*the key to the world*." Fluency in English is not presented as one skill among several but as a gateway good, implying that a family's choice of school in early childhood carries outsized consequences for the child's later access to global opportunity. This positions the decision to enroll as consequential well beyond the classroom, tying private educational choice to long-term social mobility.

Finally, the advertisement's closing slogans, "*shaping global systems ready for tomorrow*" and "*welcome to the place where dreams come true*," draw on a globalized discourse of schooling in which local institutions borrow the vocabulary of international development and self-actualization to construct prestige. This vocabulary is not unique to Seacoast; it echoes a wider pattern found across internationally branded schools, in which local institutions signal parity with global education markets through shared rhetorical conventions rather than through concrete, locally specific claims about pedagogy or outcomes.

5. Discussion

The findings address the study's three-tiered aim: how textual features construct persuasive appeal, how discursive practices position the school and its audience, and how the text reproduces broader educational ideologies. The three levels are cumulative: the lexical and grammatical choices persuade only because the discursive practice makes certain international referents recognizable, and that recognition depends on the neoliberal discourse of education, which already equates foreignness and English with quality. This supports Fairclough's (1992, 1995) claim that a text's persuasive force depends on discourse conventions circulating beyond the text itself, and extends a pattern he documented in UK university prospectuses (Fairclough, 1993), where public institutions adopted a promotional register under competitive pressure. The present case applies this same marketized register to a private K-6

school built around global rather than national identity from the outset, suggesting the strategy travels well beyond the sector and region Fairclough originally studied.

The implications extend beyond this single advertisement. If English proficiency and foreign instruction are consistently marketed as prerequisites for a child's future, as "the key to the world" implies, the discourse helps construct the criteria by which parents judge educational adequacy, normalizing the assumption that local, non-English-medium schooling is insufficient regardless of its actual merit. This is ideology in Fairclough's sense: the text naturalizes a hierarchy of educational value without stating that hierarchy directly.

6. Conclusion

This study applied Fairclough's three-dimensional model to an advertisement for Seacoast International School's Ain Zara branch, finding that superlative comparison, confident unhedged predictions, and slogan-based address at the textual level draw legitimacy from internationally recognized curricula and foreign staffing at the discursive level, reproducing a neoliberal construction of education as private investment at the social level; the analysis confirms that school advertising constructs, rather than merely describes, the criteria by which audiences judge educational worth, contributing to CDA scholarship by extending Fairclough's (1993) account of marketized public higher-education discourse to a private, multilingual K-6 context, though the study is limited by its reliance on a single advertisement, its focus on verbal content alone, and the absence of inter-rater coding comparison, pointing to future research comparing multiple schools, incorporating visual and multimodal analysis, and examining parent reception directly.

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