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Developing Critical Thinking in EFL Education Through Manipulative Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This article explores the development of critical thinking in English as a Foreign Language instruction through the analysis of manipulative discourse. In the context of digital transformation and the growing influence of persuasive media content, language education must prepare learners for critical engagement with ideologically and emotionally charged texts. The study addresses the question of how manipulative discourse analysis can be integrated into EFL instruction to strengthen learners' critical thinking and information resilience. Accordingly, the aim of the study is to provide a theoretical justification for incorporating manipulative discourse analysis into EFL education as a pedagogically grounded tool for fostering critical literacy and cognitive autonomy. The significance of the study lies in conceptualizing manipulative discourse analysis as a pedagogically grounded tool for strengthening learners' critical literacy, cognitive autonomy, and resistance to informational influence in contemporary digital environments. The study is theoretical in nature and is based on literature analysis, system analysis, comparative-analytical methods, elements of critical discourse analysis, and theoretical modeling. The findings show that manipulative influence operates through the interaction of lexical, syntactic, and narrative mechanisms that activate cognitive schemas and interpretative frames. Logical, psychological, and rhetorical forms of argumentation are identified as key dimensions of persuasive communication. The study proposes pedagogical practices such as discourse-analytical modules, comparative frame analysis, examination of AI-generated content, and argumentative-reflective tasks to foster analytical and metacognitive skills. It concludes that integrating manipulative discourse analysis into EFL instruction strengthens linguistic competence, promotes cognitive autonomy, and supports learners' ability to critically interpret contemporary media texts.

Keywords: Argumentation, critical thinking, discourse analysis, EFL education, manipulative discourse, media literacy.

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Introduction

Contemporary individuals operate within an intensive information environment characterized by an overabundance of heterogeneous texts and digital messages. The widespread accessibility of information, regardless of its reliability or quality, significantly shapes the interpretation of reality, the formation of attitudes, and individual cognitive processes. Under these conditions, the issue of informational influence and manipulation becomes particularly pressing, as the boundary between informing and persuading is increasingly ambiguous.

The rapid development of digital technologies, social media, and generative artificial intelligence has transformed the production and dissemination of textual information, amplifying its emotional and persuasive potential. During periods of social instability, crisis, and military conflict, the volume of persuasive and emotionally charged texts increases, thereby heightens the risk of uncritical acceptance of distorted or manipulative information.

In this context, the development of critical thinking emerges not only as an educational priority but also as a necessary component of individuals' informational and psychological resilience. Language education plays a central role in this process, as language functions as a tool for constructing meaning, representing positions, and implementing persuasive strategies. Within foreign language instruction, engagement with texts, argumentation, and discourse models creates opportunities to develop learners' ability to analyze, interpret, and critically reflect on linguistic means of influence.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in the development of critical thinking in education in general and in the EFL context in particular, most studies focus on general cognitive strategies or pedagogical approaches to fostering this skill. At the same time, the integration of linguistic and discursive mechanisms of manipulation as a direct object of instructional activity in foreign language education remains insufficiently explored.

The central problem addressed in this study is the insufficient integration of linguistic and discursive mechanisms of manipulation as objects of instructional reflection in EFL education. Accordingly, this article aims to provide a theoretical justification for incorporating manipulative discourse analysis into EFL instruction as a means of developing learners' critical thinking. The significance of this study lies in its conceptualisation of manipulative discourse analysis as a linguodidactically grounded tool for strengthening learners' critical literacy and cognitive autonomy, competencies of growing importance in an era of digital information overload and the escalating prevalence of information manipulation in contemporary media discourse. To achieve this aim, the study pursues three objectives: (1) to examine the linguistic mechanisms of manipulative influence in contemporary discourse; (2) to analyse argumentation structures as instruments of cognitive influence; (3) and to identify pedagogical practices for integrating manipulative discourse analysis into EFL curricula. These objectives are guided by the corresponding questions of how manipulation operates at the lexical, syntactic, and discursive levels; how argumentation types shape recipients' perception; and what instructional activities most effectively foster critical thinking in this context.

Literature Review

Critical Thinking as a Key Competence in Contemporary Education

Critical thinking is widely regarded as a key competence for sustainable societal development (Straková & Cimermanová, 2018). In UNESCO policy documents, it is defined as the ability to question established norms and beliefs, critically examine one's own assumptions, and defend positions through reasoned argumentation (UNESCO, 2017). From this perspective,

critical thinking extends beyond a cognitive skill and serves as a foundation for social responsibility and informed participation in public life.

Recent psychological research conceptualizes critical thinking as a complex and integrative cognitive process. Van Damme et al. (2023) emphasize that critical thinking combines cognitive skills, such as logical analysis, interpretation, and evaluation, with regulatory mechanisms, including planning, self-monitoring, and reflection. This integration enables individuals to function as active and self-aware agents of intellectual activity.

A similar position is advanced by Campo et al. (2023), who, drawing on empirical evidence, define critical thinking as a multidimensional competence encompassing the ability to systematize information, construct logical arguments, continuously question assumptions, objectively evaluate alternatives, and demonstrate readiness for decision-making and practical action. For higher education students, the authors conclude, critical thinking functions not only as an academic skill but also as a means of shaping a responsible civic stance.

Nevertheless, the conceptualisation of critical thinking as a measurable competence remains contested, as different frameworks emphasise different dimensions, complicating the design of consistent instructional approaches.

Critical Thinking in the Context of Foreign Language Education

In the context of EFL instruction, critical thinking is viewed as a competence with a dual function: it contributes to the development of both linguistic proficiency and broader cognitive capacities. Yuan et al. (2022) demonstrate that integrating critical thinking into the EFL process enhances students' conscious engagement with texts, promotes deeper contextual understanding, and fosters the ability to produce reasoned and well-structured arguments.

At the same time, the authors point to a recurring problem: although teachers recognize the importance of fostering critical thinking, their understanding of the concept is often fragmented, which makes it difficult to implement appropriate pedagogical strategies systematically (Yuan et al., 2022). This is partly due to the complex and multidimensional nature of critical thinking, which encompasses argument analysis, recognition of cognitive biases, and evaluation of information credibility – skills that become especially relevant when learners encounter information manipulation (Liu & Puteh, 2025).

In language pedagogy, critical thinking is regarded as an essential component of foreign language acquisition: linguistic competence and critical thinking develop interdependently, together shaping learners' communicative and cognitive abilities (Li, 2020; Yang et al., 2013; Mu et al., 2026). Empirical research confirms that incorporating critical thinking into EFL instruction improves learning outcomes and supports learner autonomy (Yin et al., 2023). At the same time, although generative AI tools can support the development of writing and analytical skills, excessive dependence on them may weaken students' capacity for independent reasoning (Zakaria et al., 2025).

A bibliometric analysis of publications from 2012 to 2022 indicates an exponential growth of scholarly interest in critical thinking within foreign language education. This trend reflects the recognition of critical thinking as a core twenty-first-century skill incorporated into national education policies in 152 countries worldwide (Arthi & Gandhimathi, 2025).

However, the relationship between linguistic proficiency and critical thinking is not straightforwardly linear: lower-proficiency learners may lack the linguistic resources to express critical positions even when they possess the underlying cognitive capacity. Furthermore, much

existing research relies on self-reported perceptions rather than empirical measurement, limiting the robustness of conclusions about instructional effectiveness.

Language, Cognition, and the Role of Text Analysis

Within linguistic and psychological research, language is considered a fundamental instrument of cognitive activity that actively shapes thinking processes. Within linguistic and psychological research, language is considered a fundamental instrument of cognitive activity that actively shapes thinking processes. Language is often viewed as more than a means of communication; it can facilitate the generation and organization of thought and contribute to the formation of ideas. Research also points to a close interaction between language and cognition, whereby linguistic processes support the development and refinement of mental representations (Halpern, 2014; Perlovsky, 2011). This perspective resonates with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, which suggests that linguistic structures can influence the ways individuals categorize and interpret reality, guiding thought patterns rather than rigidly determining them (O'Neill, 2015).

In this context, language education, and foreign language instruction in particular, creates favorable conditions for the development of critical thinking, as it requires continuous engagement with diverse text types, cultural contexts, and communicative situations. Text analysis as a complex semantic and communicative structure involves interpretation, comparison, identification of implicit meanings, authorial stance, and evaluative markers. Such processes directly contribute to the development of analytical and reflective thinking.

However, exposure to diverse text types does not automatically ensure analytical development unless engagement is explicitly structured. This implies that explicit instruction in recognising how language constructs meaning, rather than merely reflecting it, is a necessary condition for text analysis to function as a genuine instrument of critical thinking.

Manipulation, Persuasion, and Discourse Analysis

Contemporary research in psychology, philosophy, and linguistics demonstrates growing interest in manipulation as a tool of deliberate influence on human consciousness, beliefs, and behavior (Popa, 2024). Manipulative influence may be neutral or explicitly negative in nature; however, in the context of the modern information society, it is increasingly realized through language within media discourse, social networks, advertising, and online communication (Moyseyenko et al., 2026; Chetveryk & Veretiuk, 2025).

The study of manipulative strategies in language requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates tools from critical discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, and communication psychology. A substantial body of research shows how lexical choices, syntactic organization, narrative strategies, and rhetorical devices shape the interpretation of information and the construction of recipients' mental models. Understanding these mechanisms is considered a necessary condition for fostering critical thinking within language education (Vo & Moore, 2024).

However, the pedagogical implications of this research remain underexplored, as the majority of existing studies focus on identifying manipulative strategies rather than on developing learners' capacity to recognise and resist them. The growing prevalence of AI-generated content adds further urgency to this challenge, introducing forms of persuasive influence that conventional analytical frameworks may not adequately address.

Despite substantial research on critical thinking in EFL education, most studies focus on general cognitive strategies or instructional techniques, paying little attention to linguistic and discursive mechanisms of manipulation as objects of instructional reflection. Critical thinking is

frequently treated as a universal cognitive skill, divorced from the rhetorical and argumentative strategies through which manipulative influence operates in contemporary texts. How learners develop the ability to recognize implicit meanings and persuasive strategies in foreign-language discourse, particularly amid digitalization and the spread of generative AI, remains underexplored. This gap underpins the scientific novelty of the present study.

Methods

This article is theoretical in nature and aims to conceptualize the development of critical thinking in EFL instruction in the context of information manipulation. The study is based on the analysis and systematization of contemporary scholarly sources in psychology, language pedagogy, critical discourse analysis, and communication theory rather than on empirical data.

The literature review was based on four databases – Scopus, Web of Science, DOAJ, and Google Scholar – covering publications from 2012 to 2025, with emphasis on sources published after 2020. Inclusion criteria required peer-reviewed articles or monographs directly relevant to at least one of the study's core themes: critical thinking in EFL education, linguistic mechanisms of manipulation, and argumentation theory, available in English or Ukrainian.

The methodological framework includes four approaches: system analysis, used to examine critical thinking as an integrative cognitive competence; the comparative-analytical method, applied to contrast psychological and pedagogical perspectives on critical thinking in the EFL context; elements of critical discourse analysis, used to interpret mechanisms of linguistic manipulation in the contemporary information space; and theoretical modeling, employed to develop a conceptual framework for integrating critical thinking into language instruction. These approaches were structured around three analytical stages: thematic synthesis to identify recurring conceptual clusters; conceptual categorisation to organise themes into structural domains corresponding to the theoretical framework; and comparative analysis to examine convergences and tensions across disciplinary perspectives.

Source selection was guided by scholarly relevance, topicality, and interdisciplinary significance, with emphasis on recent publications and international policy documents defining critical thinking as a key twenty-first-century competence. This methodological strategy ensures the coherence of the theoretical analysis and provides a basis for further empirical research and practice-oriented methodologies.

Theoretical Framework

In this context, critical thinking acquires particular relevance as a means of counteracting manipulative influence. It is closely associated with the ability to analyze linguistic resources through which communicative strategies of influence are realized, as well as with an understanding of the mechanisms of argumentation underpinning persuasive discourse. Awareness of argumentative models enables recipients to assess the credibility of a message, identify implicit speaker intentions, and distinguish rational justification from manipulative techniques.

Linguistic Mechanisms of Manipulation

Contemporary research across linguistics, media studies, and cognitive psychology increasingly treats linguistic mechanisms of manipulation as a central interdisciplinary concern. Scholars argue that manipulation operates not so much through explicit message content as through linguistic organization, which activates cognitive schemas, emotional responses, and interpretative frames (Masia et al., 2022; Bassi et al., 2025; Golopych & Chernova, 2025). Within critical discourse analysis, manipulation is understood as covert influence achieved through the strategic

use of lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic resources that guide the recipient's interpretation. From this perspective, language is not a neutral medium but a means of constructing social reality.

At the lexical level, the manipulative potential of a text is largely associated with the use of evaluative vocabulary, connotatively marked nominations, and emotionally charged epithets. Research on disinformation discourse demonstrates that manipulative texts often display a high frequency of words related to fear, threat, crisis, or moral decline, which stimulates affective responses prior to rational processing of content (Sikosana et al., 2025). For instance, substituting *government* with *regime*, or *military operation* with *invasion*, illustrates how lexical choices construct an evaluative frame independently of the factual content of a message.

Syntactic structures also contribute to manipulative influence. Repetition, parallel constructions, rhetorical questions, and inversion heighten the emotional impact of a message and steer the recipient's attention toward selected elements. Such devices may bypass critical engagement by simulating dialogue while foreclosing alternative viewpoints (Bassi et al., 2025). Syntactic organization can thus function as a tool of cognitive overload or reduce complex phenomena to binary oppositions.

Narrative structure represents a further level of influence. By constructing causal relationships, personalizing social processes, and establishing clear polarizations – "us vs. them," "victim vs. aggressor" – texts produce simplified models of reality that discourage deeper analysis. Recurring narrative patterns, especially in contexts of informational conflict, tend to reinforce specific interpretative frames and reduce cognitive complexity in perception (Van Dijk, 2008; Gerlach et al., 2025). Manipulation thus operates through the coordinated interaction of lexical, syntactic, and discursive resources that together shape a coherent interpretative construct. A representative example is the narrative framing of a military conflict as a struggle between *freedom defenders* and *aggressors*, which personalises a complex geopolitical situation, assigns fixed moral roles, and forecloses more nuanced interpretations.

In EFL education, the analysis of these linguistic markers carries direct pedagogical relevance. Research on critical literacy shows that instruction in recognizing implicit meanings, presuppositions, and framing strategies improves students' ability to identify manipulative elements in foreign-language texts, while familiarity with typical indicators of influence develops metalinguistic awareness and reflective thinking. Studies in media education similarly confirm that incorporating critical discourse analysis into classroom practice strengthens cognitive autonomy and resistance to disinformation.

Critical discourse analysis thus functions as both a theoretical foundation and a practical pedagogical tool in EFL instruction, as its analytical categories, including evaluative lexis, framing, presupposition, and narrative structure, can be directly transposed into classroom tasks, enabling learners to engage critically with authentic English-language texts and develop the skills necessary to resist manipulative influence.

The key mechanisms discussed above are summarized in Table 1, which organizes them according to levels of textual organization – lexical, syntactic, and discursive. This structuring clarifies how these means interact in constructing interpretative frames and offers concrete reference points for developing critical linguistic awareness in EFL instruction.

Table 1. *Linguistic markers of manipulative Influence*

Level	Mechanism	Function	Examples
└ ◊ ∴	Evaluative vocabulary	Affective reaction	<i>threat, crisis, catastrophe</i>

	Connotative nominations	Implicit evaluation	<i>regime vs. government</i>
	Emotional epithets	Intensification	<i>devastating, shocking</i>
Syntactic	Rhetorical questions	Pseudo-dialogue	<i>Can we really trust...?</i>
	Repetition	Reinforcement	<i>We must act. We must resist.</i>
	Parallelism	Rhythmization	<i>Not for profit, but for people</i>
Discourse	Binary oppositions	Simplification	<i>us vs. them, good vs. evil</i>
	Causal links	Pseudo-logic	<i>Because X, Y is inevitable</i>
	Personification	Emotional identification	<i>innocent victims</i>

Table 1 demonstrates that manipulative influence operates simultaneously at lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels. Word choices such as *regime* rather than *government* shape perception implicitly; rhetorical questions and parallelism reinforce a message while limiting alternative interpretations; binary oppositions simplify reality and discourage critical engagement. The cumulative effect of these mechanisms makes their analysis a productive foundation for critical thinking development in EFL instruction.

Thus, the systematic integration of the analysis of linguistic markers of manipulation into contemporary English language teaching practices is not only linguodidactically justified but also methodologically grounded as a step toward fostering critical thinking. Awareness of lexical, syntactic, and narrative instruments of informational influence enables students not only to interpret a text but also to deconstruct its pragmatic intentions.

Familiarity with these mechanisms creates conditions for the conscious identification of manipulative strategies, which directly correlates with the development of critical analysis skills, argumentative evaluation, and cognitive autonomy in the contemporary information environment.

Argumentation and Cognitive Influence

Contemporary rhetoric and argumentation theory distinguish three principal types of argumentation: logical, psychological, and rhetorical (Tindale, 2004; Blair, 2012; Lumer & Sekundant, 2025; Hietanen, 2025). Logical argumentation draws on facts, evidence, and formal logic to persuade through the demonstration or refutation of specific claims (Novak, 2023; Hietanen, 2025). Psychological argumentation, by contrast, targets the recipient's emotional responses and relies on suggestion, emotional evaluation, and appeals to fears, expectations, and stereotypes, often bypassing critical reflection (Konat et al., 2024). Rhetorical argumentation combines elements of both logical and persuasive reasoning, seeking to generate conviction through the coordinated use of linguistic, stylistic, emotional, and pragmatic resources (Oswald, 2022; Konat, 2025; Hietanen, 2025).

Given the interconnection between linguistic resources and cognitive mechanisms of influence, it is appropriate to consider the typology of argumentation as a structural component of manipulative discourse. The classification of logical, psychological, and rhetorical argumentation allows one to trace how different persuasive strategies activate rational or affective channels of perception and shape the interpretation of information. The main characteristics of each type and the corresponding mechanisms of cognitive influence are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Typology of argumentation and mechanisms of cognitive influence*

Type of Argumentation	Basis and Tools	Mechanism of Influence	Goal
Logical	Objective facts, formal logic	Sequential proof or refutation	Rational conviction
Psychological	Emotions, fears, stereotypes	Suggestion and emotional evaluation	Affective reaction
Rhetorical	Synthesis of logic and pathos	Complex linguistic and pragmatic means	Sense of certainty

Table 2 shows that the three argumentation types target different cognitive channels: logical argumentation persuades through facts and formal proof, psychological argumentation bypasses critical reflection by activating emotions and stereotypes, and rhetorical argumentation combines both to produce a sense of certainty. Awareness of these distinctions enables EFL learners to identify which persuasive strategy is operative in a given text and respond to it analytically.

Thus, the analysis of types of argumentation in the linguistic dimension constitutes an important precondition for the development of critical thinking, particularly in the context of language education. It fosters the ability to process information consciously, recognize manipulative strategies, and construct one's own reasoned position within the communicative space.

An understanding of the typology of argumentation and its role in communicative influence provides a theoretical foundation for the further examination of manipulation as a linguistic phenomenon. However, effective resistance to manipulative influence requires not only awareness of general argumentative strategies but also analysis of the specific linguistic means through which these strategies are realized in discourse. It is at the levels of lexis, syntax, and discursive organization that argumentation is transformed into an instrument of cognitive influence, a process that underscores the need for their systematic analysis within the framework of fostering critical thinking in language education.

Pedagogical Integration in English as a Foreign Language Learning

In the context of EFL instruction, the development of critical thinking acquires particular significance, as EFL education involves continuous engagement with diverse authentic texts (Lytvynko et al., 2025) functioning within various discursive and sociocultural spaces. Within the EFL classroom, higher education students encounter information that not only conveys linguistic content but also reflects value orientations, ideological assumptions, cultural norms, and communicative strategies of influence (Popa, 2024). In this regard, foreign language instruction can and should be conceptualized as a platform for the purposeful development of students' ability to critically analyze information and consciously engage with persuasive discourse.

One of the key practices for fostering critical thinking in the EFL context is critical reading. This approach extends beyond surface level comprehension of lexical and grammatical structures and involves deliberate analytical processing of linguistic and discursive content. Critical reading encompasses the examination of authorial stance, the identification of evaluative markers, implicit meanings, argumentative strategies, and communicative intentions, particularly when working with media, journalistic, and online texts. Through such analysis, students learn to question texts, compare presented information with alternative sources, distinguish factual statements from interpretative judgments, and recognize potential mechanisms of manipulative linguistic influence.

Empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of targeted instruction in reading strategies for the development of critical thinking in the EFL classroom. For example, Mekuria et al. (2024) demonstrate that systematic training in critical reading strategies significantly enhances students' ability to analyze texts not only in terms of content but also with regard to their pragmatic and evaluative orientation. The authors argue that such strategies contribute to the development of skills necessary to identify authorial stance, detect implicit meanings, and critically assess the credibility and persuasiveness of information – competencies that are essential for resisting informational manipulation in the contemporary English-language discursive space.

An equally important component of EFL education is the development of media literacy, which is intrinsically linked to the formation of critical thinking. Engagement with digital texts, social media materials, news reports, and content generated through artificial intelligence requires students to evaluate source credibility, identify emotionally charged vocabulary, recognize manipulative headlines, framing strategies, and simplified narratives. Within EFL instruction, such objectives can be addressed through the analysis of media texts, comparison of different interpretations of the same event, identification of persuasive linguistic devices, and discussion of the text's impact on recipients' emotional responses.

The empirical and conceptual work of Navarro Pérez (2023) conceptualizes the integration of media literacy and critical thinking in the EFL classroom as a response to the challenges of the contemporary digital environment. The author emphasizes that digital exposure and the abundance of information do not automatically ensure students' ability to critically evaluate media messages. On the contrary, meaningful engagement with media texts requires explicit instruction in analytical, evaluative, and interpretative skills. Drawing on the framework approach of the Council of Europe, Navarro Pérez argues that Media and Information Literacy (MIL), understood as the integration of digital, information, and media literacy, contributes to the development of reflective, autonomous, and ethically aware learners who are capable of identifying authorial intentions, recognizing evaluative markers, and examining media content from a critical perspective.

Thus, systematic work with digital and media content in the EFL classroom fosters students' ability to assess credibility, detect emotional and manipulative elements, and critically interpret discursive framing. This approach is regarded as a powerful means of promoting media literacy that organically complements the development of critical thinking in foreign language education.

Argumentation-oriented communicative practices also occupy a central place in fostering critical thinking within EFL education. These include discussions, debates, argumentative writing tasks, and the analysis of diverse communicative positions. Through such activities, students not only improve their speaking and writing skills in English but also master the logic of argument construction, learn to structure evidence, identify logical fallacies, recognize manipulative emotional appeals, and analyze rhetorical techniques aimed at shaping specific beliefs. Research indicates that the level of critical thinking development is closely correlated with students' ability to produce argumentative writing, particularly with respect to constructing coherent positions, selecting relevant evidence, and ensuring argumentative coherence (Ekalia et al., 2025).

In contemporary educational practice, debates and argumentative tasks implemented in online or blended formats are of particular importance, as they create conditions for active cognitive interaction and reflection. Empirical findings suggest that participation in structured debates enhances such components of critical thinking as interpretation, evaluation of arguments, identification of assumptions, and anticipation of consequences, while simultaneously improving

oral and written argumentation skills in English (Aarar & Pérez Valverde, 2025). Consequently, argumentative activity within the EFL course functions not merely as language practice but as a cognitively oriented instrument for developing conscious and responsible communication, as well as the capacity for critical engagement with information – an ability of particular relevance in the context of the proliferation of manipulative discourse in the contemporary information environment.

Particular attention in the EFL context should be given to the analysis of persuasive and manipulative discourse widely found in advertising, political, and media texts. Systematic engagement with such materials helps students recognize that linguistic choices are not neutral and shape the perception of information. The analysis of evaluative lexemes, intensifying syntactic constructions, metaphors, repetition, and narrative patterns develops critical text interpretation skills and reduces learners' susceptibility to manipulative influence in the foreign-language information space.

The analysis of instructional practices indicates that the incorporation of authentic English-language media texts, particularly news materials, creates favorable conditions for fostering critical thinking among EFL students. Working with such texts facilitates the identification of mechanisms of linguistic influence, including ideological framing of events, selective presentation of facts, and the use of rhetorical strategies aimed at shaping preferred interpretations (Lytvyenko et al., 2025). These findings correlate with empirical research demonstrating the effectiveness of news materials as a tool for developing critical literacy in foreign language contexts (Park, 2011).

In particular, students demonstrate an increased ability to identify evaluative and manipulative elements within texts, participate in reasoned discussions of socially sensitive issues, and compare diverse cultural perspectives in the interpretation of information. The analysis of outcomes indicates that such pedagogical practices promote the integrated development of all language skills while simultaneously fostering argumentative competence and critical reflection. These results are consistent with research findings showing that persuasive strategies, including rhetorical questions, narrative models, and appeals to logic and evidence, positively influence the development of analytical and critical thinking in the EFL context (Alkhirbash, 2024).

Furthermore, the results confirm that systematic involvement in the critical analysis of media discourse enhances students' awareness of the risks associated with informational manipulation and disinformation. Learners demonstrate an enhanced capacity to evaluate source credibility, identify bias, and discern implicit communicative intentions. These findings align with contemporary research emphasizing the interrelationship between critical thinking, media literacy, and resistance to informational manipulation (Leba et al., 2025).

Research supports the systematic integration of persuasive discourse into EFL instruction as a means of developing critical thinking. Park (2011) argues that analyzing rhetorical strategies, evaluative lexis, and discursive models of persuasion builds students' awareness of the ideological dimensions of language and their capacity to critically interpret foreign-language texts. Recognizing linguistic markers of persuasion enhances linguistic competence while fostering cognitive autonomy and responsible engagement with information, qualities increasingly relevant in a media-saturated and politically charged information environment.

Based on these findings, developing critical thinking through argumentative practices in EFL instruction should follow several methodological principles. Argumentative tasks should address not only speech production but also argument structure, including the identification of theses, evidence types, logical connections, and implicit assumptions. Controversial or socially

significant topics encourage students to compare perspectives and detect manipulative techniques such as emotional pressure and rhetorical oversimplification. Combining oral and written argumentation supports assessment of planning and self-regulation, while digital tools for peer assessment expand opportunities for metacognitive reflection.

Based on the lexical, syntactic, and narrative mechanisms of manipulative influence analyzed in the article, as well as on the typology of argumentation (logical, psychological, and rhetorical), it is conceptually appropriate to delineate instructional activities that integrate the development of foreign language competence with the purposeful cultivation of critical thinking. Within EFL education, such activities should be grounded in the principles of critical literacy, discourse analysis, media education, and argumentative pedagogy, combining traditional analytical approaches with contemporary digital practices.

First, the implementation of discourse-analytical modules aimed at deconstructing the manipulative potential of texts appears particularly promising. This involves the systematic analysis of authentic English-language media, advertising, or political texts with a focus on identifying evaluative lexis, connotatively marked nominations, intensifying syntactic structures, rhetorical questions, framing devices, and narrative oppositions (e.g., “us–them,” “victim–aggressor”). Such activities foster students’ metalinguistic awareness by shifting attention from superficial content comprehension to the analysis of pragmatic intentions and cognitive schemas activated by the text. In this context, traditional textual analysis is transformed into a tool for cultivating reflective interpretation of foreign-language discourse.

Second, the application of comparative frame analysis is highly relevant. This approach involves juxtaposing multiple English-language sources that report on the same event from different ideological or cultural perspectives. Students examine lexical choices, syntactic emphases, modes of event representation, and argumentative models, thereby uncovering mechanisms of fact selection and the discursive construction of reality. This methodology integrates cognitive linguistics with media literacy and promotes the development of students’ ability to detect implicit communicative intentions within the foreign-language information space.

Third, in the context of the widespread use of generative artificial intelligence, the critical analysis of AI-generated content acquires particular relevance. Students may be tasked with comparing an authentic journalistic article with a text produced by a generative model in order to identify differences in argumentative structure, degree of factual verifiability, emotional marking, and stylistic patterns. Such activities not only enhance digital literacy but also cultivate the capacity for cognitive verification of information, which constitutes a central component of critical thinking in contemporary media discourse.

Fourth, argumentative-reflective practices constitute an effective pedagogical instrument, particularly structured debates, analytical writing tasks, and exercises focused on reconstructing the argumentative model of a text. Students may be guided to identify the type of argumentation employed (logical, psychological, or rhetorical), detect logical fallacies, analyze emotional appeals, and assess the strength and relevance of the evidentiary base. In producing their own argumentative texts in English, learners not only practice the linguistic structures characteristic of academic discourse but also cultivate the capacity for responsible and ethically informed communication.

Fifth, the integration of metacognitive reflective tasks is pedagogically advisable, as such activities promote awareness of students’ own interpretative strategies. Following text analysis, learners may engage in written or oral reflection on which linguistic markers influenced their initial

perception, whether their position shifted after critical examination, which arguments appeared most persuasive, and for what reasons. This component strengthens the regulatory dimension of critical thinking, which contemporary psychological research identifies as a necessary condition for cognitive autonomy.

In summary, the correlation between the proposed instructional activities, the linguistic levels at which manipulation is realized, and the components of critical thinking may be represented as follows (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Integration of learning activities*

Learning Activity	Level of Analysis	CT Component	Language Skills
Discourse-analytical text analysis	Lexical, syntactic	Analysis, interpretation	Reading, speaking
Comparative frame analysis	Discourse, narrative	Evaluation, comparison	Reading, writing
AI-content analysis	Argumentative, stylistic	Verification, reflection	Reading, discussion
Structured debates	Rhetorical, pragmatic	Argumentation, prediction	Speaking
Analytical writing	Logical, structural	Synthesis, position building	Writing

Table 3 shows that the proposed activities collectively address all levels of critical thinking development while targeting all four language skills. Moving from analytical reading tasks to argumentative writing and structured debates, the activities progress from recognition and interpretation toward evaluation, reflection, and independent position building.

A Conceptual Model of Critical Resistance to Manipulative Discourse in EFL

Building on the theoretical analysis of linguistic manipulation, argumentation typologies, and pedagogical practices, this study introduces the **Three-Level Model of Critical Resistance to Manipulative Discourse (TLCRMD)** for EFL education. Unlike approaches that treat critical thinking as a general cognitive skill or separate linguistic and pedagogical domains, the TLCRMD integrates these dimensions into a unified, operational framework tailored to the EFL context.

The model comprises three interdependent levels, each reflecting a level of learner engagement with manipulative discourse:

Level 1: Linguistic Decoding. The foundational level, where learners identify and interpret formal markers of manipulative language, including evaluative lexis, connotative nominations, intensifying syntax, rhetorical questions, and polarized narratives. This level targets the analytical aspect of critical thinking and is developed through discourse analysis and close reading of authentic texts. Without this foundation, higher-order critical engagement remains superficial, as learners lack the metalinguistic tools to discern how language constructs, rather than merely reflects, reality.

Level 2: Argumentative Evaluation. The interpretative level, in which learners assess a text's argumentative structure, distinguish logical, psychological, and rhetorical persuasion strategies, identify fallacies, evaluate evidence, and detect emotional manipulation. This level bridges linguistic competence and critical judgment, enabling learners to progress from recognition to reasoned judgment. It is activated via structured debates, argumentative writing, and comparative frame analysis.

Level 3: Metacognitive Reflection. The highest level, where learners examine their own interpretative processes, reflecting on which linguistic or argumentative features shaped their initial responses, how their judgments evolved, and which assumptions or cognitive schemas were engaged. This level develops the regulatory dimension of critical thinking through reflective writing, peer discussion, and critical analysis of AI-generated content.

The levels are mutually reinforcing rather than strictly sequential. Learners may engage at any level depending on task design, proficiency, or instructional goals; sustainable critical resilience, however, requires integration of all three. The TLCRMD offers EFL educators a theoretically grounded, practically applicable framework for cultivating linguistic competence, argumentative literacy, and metacognitive autonomy (Figure 1).

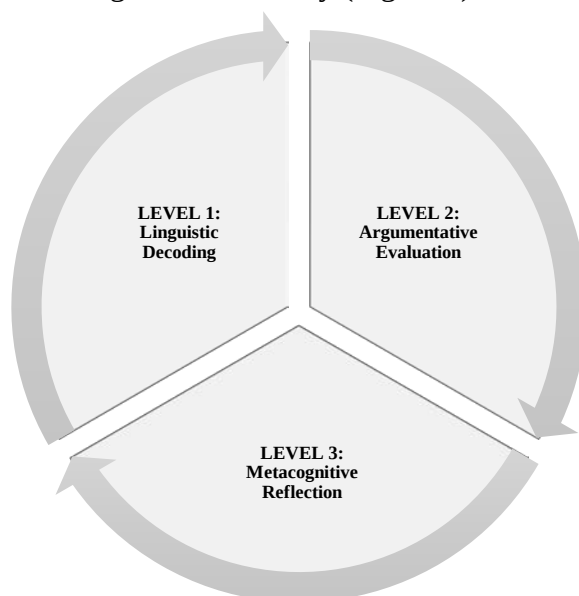


Figure 1. The Three-Level Model of critical resistance to manipulative discourse (TLCRMD) in EFL education

The TLCRMD advances existing scholarship by providing a domain-specific conceptualization of critical thinking, anchored in the linguistic realities of manipulative discourse and aligned with the communicative and cognitive demands of foreign language education – moving beyond generalized frameworks toward an integrated, EFL-oriented model of information resilience.

The integration of the aforementioned instructional activities into the EFL curriculum ensures a systematic alignment of language training with the development of analytical, evaluative, and reflective skills. These practices transform foreign language instruction into a space for the cognitive processing of contemporary media discourse, where language is conceptualized not merely as a means of communication but also as an instrument for constructing and critically reinterpreting social reality, a direction that corresponds to current trends in the digital transformation of education and the growing demand for information-resilient and autonomous individuals.

Taken together, the theoretical analysis, the proposed TLCRMD framework, and the delineated instructional activities constitute an integrated basis for reconceptualizing EFL instruction as a purposeful space for developing information-resilient learners. The implications of these

findings for existing scholarship and their broader pedagogical significance are addressed in the following section.

Discussion

The findings address the three research questions formulated in the introduction. First, manipulative influence in contemporary discourse operates through evaluative vocabulary, intensifying syntactic structures, and binary narrative oppositions at the lexical, syntactic, and discursive levels respectively. Second, the three argumentation types, namely logical, psychological, and rhetorical, target distinct cognitive channels, and awareness of these distinctions enables learners to recognise persuasive strategies and construct evidence-based positions. Third, five instructional practices, including discourse-analytical modules, comparative frame analysis, AI-content analysis, structured debates, and metacognitive reflection tasks, are identified as effective means of integrating manipulative discourse analysis into EFL curricula.

The findings corroborate research indicating that the development of critical thinking in language education requires the systematic analysis of linguistic and discursive mechanisms of meaning construction. Consistent with cognitively oriented approaches, the results show that analytical engagement with texts containing manipulative strategies fosters interpretative skills, argument evaluation, and the identification of implicit intentions. Unlike studies that conceptualize critical thinking primarily as a general metacognitive competence, this research emphasizes its linguistic grounding and its connection with lexical-grammatical, pragmatic, and rhetorical resources.

The findings also align with linguistic research on manipulation, which emphasizes the role of evaluative lexis, modality, presupposition, and implicit argumentation in producing persuasive effects. However, unlike primarily theoretical or discourse-analytical studies, the present research highlights the pedagogical potential of these linguistic phenomena in EFL instruction. The analysis of manipulative strategies in the learning process enhances students' linguistic awareness and their capacity for reflective interpretation of information, supporting EFL scholarship that integrates linguistic competence with critical-analytical training. This aligns with the position of Yuan et al. (2022) and Li (2020), who emphasise the interdependence of linguistic and cognitive development in EFL contexts.

It is also important to note that the findings expand current understandings of the role of language education in the context of digitalization and increasing information pressure. Whereas previous studies have primarily focused on fostering critical thinking through discussions, project-based learning, or general cognitive strategies, the present findings demonstrate the effectiveness of targeted engagement with the manipulative potential of texts as a means of developing information resilience. This is particularly relevant in contemporary media discourse and in the context of generative technologies, where the ability to recognize linguistic markers of influence has become a key component of both academic and media literacy. These findings extend the work of Navarro Pérez (2023) and Mekuria et al. (2024), who demonstrate the effectiveness of media text analysis and critical reading strategies in developing analytical competence in EFL learners.

Thus, the findings not only corroborate key propositions of prior research concerning the relationship between language education and critical thinking but also extend them by proposing a linguodidactic model in which the analysis of manipulative linguistic devices is conceptualized as a structural component of language instruction in higher education. This position resonates with Van Dijk (2008) and Vo & Moore (2024), who argue that linguistic awareness and critical thinking are fundamentally interconnected dimensions of communicative competence.

The study has several limitations. *First*, the analysis rests on a theoretical and conceptual framework without empirical data, which precludes quantitative evaluation of the proposed approach. *Second*, the focus on English-language contexts may limit applicability to other foreign languages with distinct discursive and cultural traditions. *Third*, the proposed activities require adaptation to students' proficiency levels and institutional conditions. *Fourth*, the study does not address diagnostic tools for assessing critical thinking development in relation to manipulative discourse. These limitations point to the need for empirical research to validate and adapt the proposed methodologies across diverse educational contexts.

Conclusion

This study aimed to provide a theoretical justification for integrating manipulative discourse analysis into EFL instruction as a means of developing learners' critical thinking. The study confirms that the development of critical thinking in English as a Foreign Language learning is a strategically and methodologically important direction of contemporary language education, particularly amid growing information manipulation and digital transformation of the communicative space. Critical thinking is not an isolated cognitive skill but an integrated competence closely linked to language use, text interpretation, and reflection on discursive strategies of influence.

The analysis demonstrates that manipulative influence operates through the interaction of lexical, syntactic, and narrative mechanisms that activate cognitive schemas and interpretative frames. Logical, psychological, and rhetorical argumentation are identified as key dimensions of persuasive communication, awareness of which enables learners to recognise manipulative strategies and construct evidence-based positions. The proposed instructional practices – discourse-analytical modules, comparative frame analysis, examination of AI-generated content, structured debates, and metacognitive reflection tasks – address linguistic, analytical, and reflective dimensions of learner development.

Thus, the study demonstrates that developing critical thinking through the analysis of manipulative discourse in EFL instruction is both linguodidactically justified and socially imperative. Prospects for further research include the empirical validation of the proposed methodologies, the development of diagnostic instruments for assessing critical thinking in the EFL context, and the adaptation of the approach to different proficiency levels and disciplinary contexts within higher education.

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