Enhancing Critical Thinking Skills of EFL Students for Use to Evaluate News Articles in terms of Bias and Objectivity

Belabbes Ali[*]
The University of Bouzareah, Algiers2 (Algeria)
belabbes.ali@live.fr

Hamitouche Fatiha
The University of Bouzareah, Algiers2 (Algeria)
f_hamitouche@yahoo.com

Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of explicit critical thinking training on English language learners' ability to detect bias in news reports. It sheds light on how skills in analyzing argumentation influence students' ability to identify and evaluate bias and balance in news presentations. Sixty students enrolled for the Master degree in either ESP or applied linguistics at the University of Mascara in Algeria participated in a quasi-experimental study during the academic year 2023-2024. The effectiveness of the training was assessed through use of a pre- and post-tests. The results revealed significant improvements in students' ability to analyze media texts and detect authorial bias based on argument identification and evaluation. However, improvement in identifying ideological bias, linked to specific evidence use, was limited. This result suggests that beyond critical thinking, understanding the social, cultural, and political context of the text is crucial, requiring broader knowledge and cultural awareness.

1. Introduction:

Incorporating media literacy skills in the L2 classroom with an eye to enhancing learners ability of interpreting the enormous amounts of media they daily experience has introduced challenging demands for teachers in taking on complex roles to advance higher-order or critical thinking and independent learning. Thus, an academic call for a thorough grounding in theoretical and pedagogical perspectives to push teaching towards learning that values social empowerment of students is necessary if educational objectives are expected to help students become active agents in consuming media contents. With this regard, the aim in this article is twofold. First, it seeks to contribute to a better understanding on the basis of theoretical foundations of how to effectively integrate the practice of textual analysis of media texts across EFL curriculum to strengthen students' empowerment. Second and more specifically, this paper extends the existing previous research by examining empirically the

[*] The corresponding author: Belabbes Ali

impact of direct instruction on argumentation on students' evaluative comprehension or critical reading, in which they engage in a process of detecting bias, then using bias markers for addressing ideological perspectives embedded into media texts.

Research has consistently shown that critical media skills cannot be adequately taught or practiced without the cultivation of critical thinking skills. There are plenty of thoughtful, insightful publications that delve deeply into the practice of transferability of critical thinking into analyzing and evaluating media texts (Kellner & Share, 2007). Implementing critical practice through media texts requires appraising message arguments and judging their strength and quality. Many educators and scholars recommend that argumentation is at the core of teaching critical thinking skills which should be context- and problem-based learning (Andrews, 1995; Rapanta, 2019). Central to teaching argumentation is engagement of students into tasks of identifying the key claims, evidence, and reasoning used in arguments, and evaluating their coherence, relevance, and sufficiency. The strength of argument is determined by the extent to which it follows a logical structure where each point connects logically to the next. Involved in evaluation of argumentation is assessing how persuasive the argument is in performing a support or challenge a given statement.

Framed within critical pedagogy, the authors of the present paper examine students' critical thinking through analyzing the critical thinking behaviors they exhibited in the context of being engaged with news texts addressing current controversial issues. As has already been mentioned, the purpose of this study was to gauge the efficacy and effectiveness in teaching argumentation to enhance the level of critical media literacy among EFL students studying discourse analysis at the master's degree level. From our perspectives, an author's strategic use of words can significantly influence the persuasive power of an argument. Through the deliberate selection of specific vocabulary, authors can elicit emotions, reinforce their authority, and shape the reader's understanding. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to assess the extent to which instruction on how word choices shape arguments and influence their persuasive power could enhance students' ability to detect biased attitudes in media texts and contribute to a better understanding of textual ideologies. The research questions posed for this study were:

RQ1. What are the effects of explicit instruction of argumentation on Master EFL students' ability to detect biased attitudes in newspaper texts and how does learning contribute to a better understanding of textual ideologies?

RQ2. What are students' perceived levels of learning satisfaction and significant challenges encountered during the explicit teaching of evaluation of argumentation in relation to analyzing newspaper texts?

The first research question is intended to probe the effects of explicit teaching of argumentation to EFL students in taking a deeper approach to reading media texts. The second one is designed to explore the students' perceived learning satisfaction and level of the exhibited significant difficulties with their learning. Two research hypotheses were put forward to answer these questions. By explicitly engaging in tasks of argument evaluation and, in particular, with the language in which arguments are expressed, students will be better able at critically interrogating texts and detect bias; but if the analyses are limited to examining argumentation they would still be unable to identify the ideology that the biased texts embed.

1-Theoretical Frameworks:

To understand the practices that would best enable critical media literacy, it is best to first delve into its meaning and how it has been operationally defined by scholars in educational pedagogy. Keller and share (2007) defined the term "critical media literacy" as an approach to teaching media that "focuses on ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of crucial dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality; incorporating alternative media production; and expanding textual analysis to include issues of social context, control, resistance, and pleasure", (p. 62). This definition clarifies that developing the ability of interpreting messages critically (text processing ability) and interrogating societal issues and norms are central to critical media literacy. The operational definition of critical media literacy by scholars is diverse and multifaceted, offering diverse perspectives and explanations of pedagogical practices. Rooted in contemporary media studies, critical media literacy is operationally defined as having a critic perspective on media coverage of news stories, issues, and challenges facing humanity and societies around the world. To leave a little room for unveiling biased perspectives, critical media literacy imposes engagement into meaningful phrases that invite higher- level thinking skills across efforts to access, analyze, and reflect on information, making effective use of practical methods and techniques where appropriate.

It follows from the above that the inclusion of critical media literacy in educational practices denotes a dynamic involvement of learners into deep reflections on a variety of important news and current events which require basic skills related to critical thinking for getting command of some fairly sophisticated and advanced skills leading to progress towards the more sophisticated reasoning skills required for interpretation of delivered information (Joanou, 2017). Embedded into the core of teaching critical media skills is inculcating into students the knowledge of how to decipher information conveyed through the media channels, driving the learner towards assessing the media messages at hand (Share & Gambino, 2022). Attaining high levels of critical media literacy achievements can be described in terms of a form of advanced comprehension involving critical evaluation of understanding information from media texts (Kukkonen & Stocchetti, 2011). This delineation is further advocated by Potter (2019) who stated that the fundamental of critical literacy revolves around applying a critical eye to understand media messages. Hence, knowing definitions of what scholars mean by the concept of critical media literacy will help us understand scope and sequence of our teaching and coaching practices to develop this essential literacy among students.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the role of the inclusion of critical media literacy in language teaching. Lombardo (2020) stressed that CML can equip learners with the skills and dispositions for effective critical evaluation of the credibility and bias of media messages, Higdon & Butler (2024). More to the point, critical media analysis not only provides an opportunity for students to retrieve, dissect and investigate media content in a critical manner, but also has an effect on developing their recognition of the roles of media in transmitting the ideological thinking; thereby, increasing their preparedness on how to resist media manipulation to grow into more empowered individuals.

There are plenty of research studies which demonstrate the vital connection between language learning and critical media literacy, and exploring why it is critical for research on language education to take into account the full spectrum of linguistic skills that associate with critical literacy to open the opportunity for empowering students with critical media

literacy (Masterman, 1985; Bazalgette, 1992; Schmidt, 2012). What these studies commonly entail is a call for empirical studies on the learning process and the teacher's role in facilitating critical media literacy through engaging students into linguistic analyses of how literary devices are used by the journalists to facilitate communication and achieve particular effects. By examining the language and rhetorical techniques used in media, learners can better understand how argumentation can be used to persuade, manipulate, or inform.

Analysis of argumentation, being a potent yardstick, presents an unmistakable benchmark and a means of criticism on which lies the process of interpretation of media texts. Rottenberg (2017) argues for the use of argumentation as a crucial aspect for developing critical reading skills where the reader guesses authorial intent, which raises the question of authorial intent in which bias is deeply embedded. In contrast to reading comprehension that focuses on acquiring information, critical reading is about positioning the reader as a thinker who actively engages with the reading text, rather than passively accepting it; in doing so, working with an agenda using his/her own knowledge and reasoning to form informed opinions and judgments about the representations of reality in the text being read. Becker (2012) advocates that students should be given the opportunity to practice reading critically media texts, and be guided to realize the effects of argumentation and language choices on news framing. For conducting objective analysis of media texts, Gagne (2021) warns against the effects of a type of bias which refers to the prejudicial attitudes that may affect reader's textual criticism in an unconscious manner.

Analysis of arguments is a key exercise which is traditionally included in philosophy courses. Within the contents of the study of logic, statements are typically used to assess and then evaluate students' critical thinking. Courses associated with argumentation explicitly asked students to judging arguments to be reasonable or unreasonable. While traditionally taught in philosophy, the skills associated with argumentation can be effectively incorporated into the curriculum of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013). Several studies have been conducted related to the study of argumentation effects in the process of analysis of discourse (Walton, 2007; Reisigl, 2014; Fairclough, 2016). These studies are generally, or to a large extent, being greatly limited for students and scholars of linguistics, as well as specialists in discourse studies. Applications of relevant theories and empirical findings in foreign language education are entirely neglected. This point indicates an imposing need to understand the relation between evaluating the quality of arguments, which is a part of the critical thinking process, and fostering a more informed, rational, and open-minded approach to textual evaluation in settings where English is a foreign language. Textual evaluation stands in need of unveiling bias and ideology embedded in texts that students read. Reading texts through particular lenses based on backgrounds on critical discourse analysis can help students sharpen their way of looking at media news reports and, as a result, it improves their critical media literacy.

2- Research Methods:

The following section describes the procedures used in the data collection phase of the study, provides information about the study participants, describes the intervention and context in which it occurred, and cites the procedures of data-analysis through which the researchers addressed the study.

2-1 Data Collection:

In order to understand how EFL learners seek out and recognize bias and ideological slant embedded in news texts; thereby, improve teaching and learning, the authors of this paper conducted a two-stage study focused on the role of aspects of critical thinking on students' in-depth textual analysis of media texts. The two stages involved in this research process were quasi-experiment and survey design. For both pre and post-tests, the authors provided

subjects with two newspaper texts dealing with the same issue, and asked them to read and critically evaluate each text. Without being provided with a formal evaluation method, respondents were instructed to select ratings on an appraisal scale provided for assessing "bias". For each text, subjects were then asked to specify the parts of the text that proved objectivity or bias, and then draw out the ideological slant inherent the text, which was followed by writing one short sentence about what they'd drawn. Each test ended by asking the respondents to describe why and how they made their textual evaluations. Pre- and post-surveys were distributed online via Jotform. The pre-survey was administered at course beginning and the post-survey was administered by the end of the semester. The surveys` links were made available to students through their mails. The surveys were designed with the objective to capture students' levels of self - efficacy in their own ability to find bias in media texts and their perception of knowledge of applying critical discourse analysis for uncovering texts' underlying ideological orientations. In this regard, a five-point Likert-type scoring system was used with a five points scale, with 1=never; 2=seldom; 3=sometimes; 4=often; and 5=usually.

In designing the course on discourse analysis tools for students ' use to understand media texts, the authors followed the procedure followed in Fairclough's relational approach to text analysis (Fairclough 2003, Titscher et al 2000,p. 153).This approach is part of Norman Fairclough's broader framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It focuses on understanding how language functions in social contexts and how it reflects and shapes power relations, ideologies, and social structures. The proponents of this approach holds that "language is not used in a context less vacuum; rather, it is used in a host of discourse contexts, contexts which are impregnated with the ideology of social systems and institutions", (Paul Simpson, 1993, p. 5). Most scholars in the fields of education and pedagogy who advocate teaching of critical discourse analysis focus on L1 classroom settings in their communities. We know very little of the support relevant to this area for L2 assistance (for exceptions, see Clark & Ivanic, 1999; Cots, 2006; Wallace, 2009). To integrate critical media literacy into L2 pedagogy, teachers must conduct in-depth research on critical discourse analysis frameworks. These frameworks offer valuable insights into how language shapes perceptions of bias and ideology. Further, critical discourse analysis for the study of media literacy has produced an increasingly popular set of teaching methods but there are few studies illustrating the contextualization of these methods within L2 settings for smoothly use as pedagogical tool.

Combining the study of how emotions functions in the form of discourse and the study of how arguments fit together to form discourse, together within the framework tasks of quasi-experimental designs; the current study aimed to yield modest generalizations about the role undertaken of 'critical' practices of discourse on improving EFL readers' skills of identifying bias, ideology, stance, and intent in media texts. Training prompted subjects into the process of "entextualizing" (bounding), "recontextualizing" (separating), and "decontextualizing" (integrating) media texts; then, giving evaluations based on objectivity/bias criteria followed by an attempt of drawing conclusions about the ideologies embedded in the texts. The process undertaken for data analysis started with an analysis of the particular stretches of discourse which subjects identified as markers of authorial bias or objectivity; then, during a second-stage, the analysis moved to the analysis of the particular stretches of discourse they generated in their response to the instruction of explaining how and why they made their choices. Passing out finally in a third stage, our analysis shed light on students' writings on their made efforts to uncover the ideologies coded in the texts.

2-2 Research Participants:

For this quasi-experiment, the participants were 60 masters' students studying in English department at the University of Mascara situated in the north-west of Algeria. The students were aged between 22 and 26 years (mean age; 21.1) at the beginning of the experimentation. There were 19 males and 41 females. They were enrolled for either their second semester of the LMD Master in the field of applied linguistics (N=28), or their second semester of the LMD Master in ESP (N=32). They were Arabic native speakers, with the exception of 3 who were bilingual in both Amazigh and Arabic Algerian varieties. Prior to the experiment, all the participants had no training in or even familiarity with both CDA methods and critical media literacy. Before undertaking the present course, the students had not been involved in learning tasks that would bring interaction with texts from media to identify bias and ideology. They participated in throughout the course of a module labeled "discourse analysis" that covers 2-credit of content.

2-3The Intervention:

The intervention was the infusion teaching of critical discourse analysis in the regular curriculum. It was delivered from February to May 2024 in two stages. Within the framework of the infusion method proposed by elder and Paul (2020) for teaching critical thinking, the first stage (lesson 1-3) introduced students to tools that can foster the improvement of thinking critically about media texts. With application on extracts from media texts, students were introduced to techniques widely used in the field of critical discourse analysis, and then moving to introducing Fairclough's (2008) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis. With the objective to prepare students for situating deeply these techniques within the field of media literacy, lessons 4-7 shed light on showing points of intersection between critical discourse analysis, argumentation, and persuasion theories. One of the core principles underlying this intersection is the recognition that CDA explores how language is used to exercise ideological power and influence people' minds, for which it is crucial to understanding the dynamics of both persuasion and argumentation made in message contents. Analyzing how arguments are framed and how persuasive techniques are employed can reveal underlying bias ideological stances in a text's form or content.

To minimize theory and expose students more to practice, the second stage was devoted to reinforcing skills of analysis and evaluation of argumentation, and giving regular practice of investigating the relationship between emotions, persuasion and meaning in texts' contents. Developing such skills required supporting materials. Used Materials to carry out the teaching were post handouts to the classroom web page to be downloaded by students to their laptops. They were developed from textbooks available in PDF format for courses in critical thinking and critical media literacy. Preferring textbooks over others was a long time decision made on the basis of their readability and appropriateness for curriculum objectives and students' needs. The textbooks used for the course contents included, but were not limited to, the following: (1) Cottrell (2011), (2) Fairclough (2003), (3) Fairclough & Fairclough (2012), (4) Napthine (2018), and (5) Napthine, et al (2008). The researchers believed that combining input from these cited five textbooks would lead to reasonably consistency in directing students towards the achievement of the course objectives. It is also worth noting that the choice was grounded in a view of the need of a course combing theory and practical applications.

For each of the pre and post-tests, the authors presented students with two different articles about the same topic with difference in terms of being two-sided or one-sided arguments regarding message structure; then have them evaluate what they had read. They had to perform various critical thinking operations with the texts. To show the degree of critical thinking effort which learners exert when evaluating a message, instructions asked them to evaluate each text on a continuum of an objectivity/bias scale. Following this, they were

asked to uncover the unexpressed ideologies that they thought lie behind each text. An answer for each text was to be expressed in one sentence. For each of the two attempts of evaluations, they were asked to describe why and how they made their decisions. The tests' questions were on four texts from newspapers issued on the same day (October 18-19, 2023) about the same topic. They were divided into pairs, and each pair was assigned an alphabetic code. For a pair of each test, one text was British and the other American one. The British articles were one from the *Guardian* by Bethan Mckernan[1] and one from *Daily Mail* by Vanessa Allen, Josh White and Jason Groves[2]. The American articles were one published in *Chicago Daily Tribune* by Najib Jobain, Samya Kullab and Matthew Lee [3], and one published in *Wall Street Journal* by Margherita Stancati, Yaroslav Trofimov, Nancy A. Youssef and Stephen Kalin[4]. For the sake of reliability of students' performance, half the students were given first the two texts labeled under the pseudo code (A) to work on their analysis, and half were given the two texts labeled under the pseudo code (B) first. No evidence suggested that the proposed form of order could affect the obtained responses.

Pseudo code (A)			
Newspaper	**Title**	**Author(s)**	**Date of Publication**
The Guardian	They believed it was safe': death toll rising after blast at Gaza hospital	Bethan Mckernan	18th of October, 2023
Chicago Daily Tribune	Blast kills hundreds at hospital in Gaza	Najib Jobain, Samya Kullab, & Matthew Lee	18th of October, 2023
Pseudo code (B)			
Newspaper	**Title**	**Author(s)**	**Date of Publication**
Daily Mail	Hospital horror: Who's to blame?	Vanessa Allen, Josh White, & Jason Groves	18th of October, 2023
The Wall Street Journal	U.S., experts say evidence suggests Palestinian rocket hit Gaza Hospital	Margherita Stancati, Yaroslav Trofimov, Nancy A. Youssef, & Stephen Kalin	19th of October, 2023

Table (1): Newspaper Articles Used for Carrying Out the Experiment

Each newspaper article was used as a pre-test for half of the students, and as a post-test for the other half.

2-4 Procedures:

To understand how the ability of EFL students to critically analyze media texts gets changes over time and throughout the process of an experimental course, the authors visualized undertaking the data in two ways. The first visualization focused on revealing the process by which readers looked at texts critically, emphasizing the differences in their level of ability of critical thinking. The second visualization focused on revealing the perceptions and experiences owned by students in applying critical discourse analysis to reveal bias in news articles and unveil ideology embedded on the language of news reporting. Combining data from both sources was expected to uncover hidden patterns and correlations and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand.

After each of the pre and post-test, the steps of the analytic process of students' responses involved: (1) collecting students' responses to the questions, then using a tally sheet with grouped tallies within which   responses were recorded, (2) tallying the existing lexical

items (i.e. content words) in text passages that were identified and marked frequently as evidence of authorial bias, (3) describing the patterns of these lexical items, with regard to their class membership and semantic-pragmatic features, (4) gathering commentary reports expressed by respondents within which they described the process by which they had drawn evaluative decisions, and (5) gathering commentary reports expressed by the respondents within which they judged each text in terms of ideological stance.

   To further investigate the link between practice of critical discourse analysis and the ability to detect bias and ideological tensions within media texts, respondents were requested after the last session of the quasi-experimental course to fill in an evaluation questionnaire measuring their perceptions. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first one was about eliciting the respondents' profiles, where three questions about age, education and gender were asked plus ideology measured by self-rating on a 4-point scale ranging from very liberal to very conservative. Following was a part composed of 18 items questionnaire asking responses about their satisfaction. They were grouped into three sections in terms of skills and abilities (see Table 6). Measurement was stated in a 4 point Likert scale, for categorizing the responses (1: completely satisfied; 2: very satisfied; 3: fairly satisfied, and 4: not very satisfied). Following was a section, consisting of four items, asked respondents to rate the course difficulty. It used a different 5-point semantic scale scale (1: very easy; 2: easy; 3: not easy nor difficult; 4: difficult, and 5: very difficult). The questionnaire ended by incorporating three open ended questions that focused on a need to know whether certain aspects of the course were perceived by students most effective /useful/interesting /enjoyable than other aspects.

3- Results:

3-1 Responses to Media Texts:

First newspaper article (A^1)

   The article presents the devastating consequences of the explosion at the al-Ahli al-Arabi hospital in Gaza, including the high death toll and international reactions. It details conflicting reports on the cause of the explosion, with the Gaza health ministry accusing Israel of an airstrike and the Israeli military attributing it to a failed Palestinian rocket launch. The article also highlights the impact of the incident on the broader conflict and international diplomacy.

Article A^1	N	Completely objective	Mostly objective	Mostly biased	Completely Biased
PRE-TEST	30	2 (7%)	6 (20%)	17 (57%)	5 (17%)
POST-TEST	30	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	21 (70%)	6 (20%)

Table (2): Perceived Objectivity and Bias Ratings for the Article Published in _The Guardian_

   On the pre-test of textual evaluation, reading of Mckernan' article that was published on the _Guardian_ newspaper received 8 (27%) of 30 evaluations of objectivity and 22 (74%) evaluations of bias. The same text on students' Post-test performance received 3 (10%) evaluations of objectivity compared to 27 (90%) evaluations of bias. It must be mentioned that most responses fell into the middle categories between the two extremes of the scale with perception of the article as being more biased than being objective.

   In their responses, test- takers had to cite specific evidence from the readings to justify their evaluations of text's objectivity and bias. In both tests, most of the items identified as evidence of bias were devices used to mark author's stance. The following noun phrases appeared most frequently in students' responses:

   ▪ "**war crime**" (21 readers)
   ▪ "**a horrific massacre**" (11 readers)

▪ "**shocking attack**" (2 readers)

The phrases "relentless Israeli attacks" and "genocide" were marked as evidence of bias but only in the post-test. Other stance patterns identified by multiple readers in the post-test were phrases such as "Enough is enough," "Disaster," and descriptions of the scene ("corpses in the streets") used to evoke emotional reactions and sympathy in readers.

Students were asked to indicate the ideological effect that the text intended to have on the readers. For this question in the pre-test, more than 75% of students provided poor performance lacking evidence-based answers. This led one to believe that the results lacked evidence of deep critical thinking, as the task demanded moving beyond the text, which proved to be more challenging than anticipated. Data also show that a frequency of less than 20% of the students gave generalized and vague answers. A few others gave some confused responses marked by ambiguity. On the same question in the post-test, answers of more than 50 % reflected progressive improvement at various levels of students' critical thinking. They could grasp the authors' intention and make that intention explicit through a linguistic form.

Second newspaper article (A^2)

The main idea of the article is about a devastating blast at a Gaza City hospital, resulting in hundreds of deaths. The incident has escalated tensions in the region, with conflicting claims about who is responsible—Hamas accuses Israel of an airstrike, while Israel blames a misfired rocket from the Palestinian group Islamic Jihad. The explosion has sparked outrage and protests across the region and complicated diplomatic efforts to prevent the war from spreading further, especially as President Joe Biden prepares for a visit to the Middle East.

Article A^2	N	Completely objective	Mostly objective	Mostly biased	Completely Biased
PRE-TEST	30	5 (17%)	22 (73%)	2(7%)	1 (3%)
POST-TEST	30	3 (10%)	18 (60%)	6 (20%)	3 (10%)

Table (3): Perceived Objectivity and Bias Ratings for the Article Published in *Chicago Daily Tribune*

On students' pre-test performance, reading of the newspaper article of Jobain, N., Kullab, S., & Lee, M., published on *Chicago Daily Tribune* received 27 (90%) of 30 evaluations of objectivity in its coverage of the issue the deadly blast at Gaza City's al-Ahli hospital compared to 3 (10%) evaluations of bias. The same text on the post-test performance of the participating students obtained 21 (70%) evaluations on the scales of objectivity compared to 9 (30%) evaluations on the scales of bias. Like in text A, most responses fell into the middle categories between the two extremes of the scale, but with perception of the article as being more objective than being biased.

Following their responses expressing bias or objectivity of the text, respondents had to cite specific textual examples to illustrate   such evaluations. Like responses to text A[1], most of the items identified as evidence of bias were the devices employed in the account for the purpose of indicating authorial stance. Most frequently occurring responses included phrases suggesting a deep empathy for the victims and a condemnation of the violence:

▪"**massive blast**" (4 readers)
▪ "**strewn with the baered and torn bodies of boys and men**" (7 readers)
▪"**horrific massacre**" (8 readers)
▪"**outrage**" (1 reader)

The phrases "horrific massacre" and "strewn with the baered" were the most cited evidence of bias. Both phrases were cited twice in the pre-post test; while, their citing was doubled in the pos-test and raised   at the quintuple point. The choice of the word

"outrage" as marker of bias appeared once in post-test students' responses. Readers could have cited more terms as expected,   but they did not, implying that the exercise was difficult for them.

In responding to text A^2, most of the marked passages indicated evidence of authorial objectivity or impersonality and the presentation of the incident in a detached, neutral fashion were as follow:

- **"Hamas blamed an Israeli airstrike, while the Israeli military said the hospital was hit by a rocket misfired by Palestinian terrorists"** (18 readers)
- **"The Israeli military blamed Islamic Jihad, a smaller, more radical Palestinian group that often cooperates with Hamas in their shared struggle against Israel".** (16 readers)
- **"Video that The Associated Press confirmed was from the hospital showed fire engulfing the building...".** (20 readers)
- **"Ambulances and private cars rushed some 350 casualties from the al-Ahli blast to Gaza City's main hospital, al-Shifa, which was already overwhelmed with wounded from other strikes, said its director, Mohammed Abu Selmia".** (21 readers)

The first passage cited as a marker of objectivity by most respondents (62%) presents both sides of the news event without favoring one, allowing the reader to understand the conflicting claims. The second marker identified as a clue reflecting objectivity by more than half of the respondents (53%) was a sentence in which the authors present the Israeli military's perspective, identifying Islamic Jihad as a potential culprit while providing context about the group's relationship with Hamas. The third passage cited as a marker of objectivity by more than two-thirds of the respondents (66 %) was a sentence highlighting the authors' dedication to presenting accurate information by citing a reliable source. The fourth passage cited as a marker of objectivity by two - thirds of the respondents (70 %) was the use of direct quotes from a named source (the hospital director) adds credibility to the report, ensuring that the information is attributed and verifiable.

For the second text A^2, students were also asked to indicate the ideological effect that they thought the text intended to have on its readers. Compared to Text A1, students' performance on this test did not significantly improve before formally studying critical reading of media passages. This involves a reading characterized by careful analysis of argumentation, critical evaluation of rhetorical processes, and understanding the media message's role in a social and interactive context designed to influence various publics. In their attempts to illuminate the text's own ideological underpinnings, all respondents on the study (100%) gave poorly-justified and insufficiently-detailed answers. It is worth noting that answers to this type of questions vary for which evaluation is determined by the extent to which the test-taker can give persuasive reasons that justify his/her answer. When the same question, using the same newspaper text, was asked again in the final test, an average improvement of 45 % in students' grasping of the basic skills of critical discourse analysis was observed. They demonstrated progress with limited ability to conduct the description of argument constructions and analysis of them in a critical manner within their process of unveiling ideological assumptions underlying the text they read.

Third newspaper article (B¹)

The main idea of the text is that a significant incident occurred at al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City, where an explosion led to a large number of casualties. There is a dispute over the cause

of the explosion: Gaza officials attribute it to an Israeli air strike, while Israel claims it was caused by a misfired rocket from Palestinian militants. This incident has heightened tensions and risks escalating the conflict further, complicating diplomatic efforts, particularly those involving U.S. President Joe Biden and other international leaders. The situation has also prompted strong international reactions and criticisms, and raised concerns about potential broader regional implications.

Article B[1]	N	Completely Objective	Mostly objective	Mostly biased	Completely Biased
PRE-TEST	30	0 (00%)	16 (53.33%)	9 (30%)	5 (16.67%)
POST-TEST	30	0 (00%)	0 (00%)	18 (60%)	12 (40%)

Table (4): Perceived Objectivity and Bias Ratings for the Article Published in *Daily Mail*

Article B[1], published in *Daily Mail*, received (100%) evaluations of bias. No rating (00%) for objectivity perception was registered. Readers' responses required to mark or quote specific linguistic or stylistic choices perceived as evidence to support the evaluations they had, or by describing contents on which their dependence was to draw conclusions.

Many of the items identified as evidence of bias were typical lexical units. The data showed that use of the term "terror group" attracted the attention of all readers in both pre and post-tests. The term "terrorism" traditionally refers to the unlawful use of violence or threats of violence against civilians to achieve political goals. The term "terror group" is closely associated with violence, extremism, and political instability. The authors' use of the term "terror group" to describe Hamas represents a strong stance, which led it to be perceived as biased.

On their pre-test performances, students' most frequent made comments were on the omission of certain detailed information for giving unbalanced coverage of the event, reflecting bias against Hamas. Pre-test comments of 11 % were unintelligible and a frequency of 25 % did not comment at all.

On their post-test performances, multiple readers who rated the article "completely biased" described textual contents on which observing uses of sympathetic language. One of the respondents made the observation that the text refers to Hamas as a "terror group" and emphasizes that the health ministry is "Hamas-run." Another respondent commented, though vaguely, on the use of assertive language and framing of claims. The observation made on this point was that the text uses a language of presenting the Israeli perspective in a more assertive manner, citing the examples, "Israel insists," "IDF spokesman insisted," and "My information, that I have just received from the highest authority." But for presenting the Palestinian perspective, the language is likely to be less assertive. The observation made on this point was on the authors' use of the verbs "claim" and "say" in phrases like "Gaza officials claim" and "Hamas-run health ministry said," perceived to have the effect of implicitly undermining the credibility of the sources by framing their statements as mere claims, rather than verified facts. It is noteworthy that both comments were expressed in students' post-test. Evidence of perceived bias within the text includes the following phrases:

- "**Terror group's leaders**" (27 readers)
- "**Savage war crime**" (21 readers)
- "**Fresh accusations of war crimes**" (17 readers)

Referring to Hamas as a "terror group" is a value-laden rather than factual description that signals a particular stance on the group's legitimacy and actions. The term "savage war crime" is a particularly strong and emotionally charged phrase; its use is to describe acts of extreme brutality and violence committed during armed conflict. The nature of this type of crimes is so

horrific that it causes widespread outrage and condemnation. The phrase "fresh accusations of war crimes" means that recent allegations have been made against Israel regarding actions that may violate international laws governing warfare. The term "fresh" has the value of emphasizing that these are new or additional claims, possibly building upon previous accusations. What the statement implies is that the conflict is under constant investigation by different groups and organizations due to suspected illegal actions. The passages on which appear these phrases share commonly the implicit purpose of expressing empathetic attitudes towards Israel' defensive actions in Gaza in response to the 7 October 2023 giving significant weight to criticisms and allegations against Hamas' acts.

Fourth newspaper article (B^2)

Preliminary evidence from Israel, the U.S. government, and independent security experts suggests that the deadly explosion at Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza was caused by a local militant group, casting doubt on Palestinian claims that an Israeli airstrike was responsible. Analysts pointed out that the blast site and damage were inconsistent with the types of bombs or missiles typically used by Israel. U.S. intelligence, which includes communications intercepts and missile activity analysis, supports the conclusion that the explosion was likely caused by an errant rocket launched by Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Despite Israel's presented evidence and the U.S.'s assessment, Palestinian officials and several Middle Eastern governments continue to hold Israel responsible, leading to widespread protests across the region.

Article B^2	N	Completely objective	Mostly objective	Mostly biased	Completely Biased
PRE-TEST	30	0 (00%)	2 (7%)	22 (73%)	6 (20%)
POST-TEST	30	0 (00%)	0 (00%)	30 (100%)	0 (00%)

Table (5): Perceived Objectivity and Bias Ratings for the Article Published in *Wall Street Journal*

In the pre - test, article B^2 *The Wall Street Journal*, was judged as biased by 28 readers and mostly objective by only 2 readers. The same text in the post-test was judged as being mostly biased by the whole members of the class of students. No rating of objectivity of the text warecorded by the readers. The convergence of results obtained here indicates that readers' responses to the target text were heavily influenced by being based on their own ideological bias, rather than on applying critical or evaluative reading strategies in the processing of the text. In both tests, most of the items identified as evidence of text's leaning towards subjectivity were devices used in conveying author stance. The following listed expressions appeared most frequently in students' responses:

- "**casting doubt**" (19 readers)
- "**experts said**" (29 readers)
- "**The U.S. has collected 'high confidence' signals intelligence**" (8 readers)
- "**Washington's assessment that Israel wasn't behind the blast**" (8 readers)
- "**appeared more accurate based on information he had**" (10 readers)
- "**buttressing Israel's contention that it wasn't responsible for the blast**" (1 reader)

In responding to the question asking them to describe why and how they reached their conclusions, critical judgments of some readers rested on their own bias and for some others raised from their thoughts in attempts of comprehensive analysis of the texts and understanding of the underlying authors' motives. In their characterizations of bias, students described the reading process as a mental mapping designed with a primarily focus into interpretation and argumentation to develop a position on the reading issue. But in their

characterizations of objectivity, students described the reading process as a mental mapping at a superficial level which is most often designed   without purpose and without thought.

3-2 Responses to the Self Description Questionnaire:

By the end of the study, students participated in a set of self - assessment measurement designed to find out their self-perceptions of their ability to transfer skills acquired from the course on critical discourse analysis to generate evaluations of news texts for objectivity and bias. A response questionnaire was distributed to students in the class on the last day of the semester. The following Three sections made up the survey: (1) "Students self-perceptions of developing skills for easily finding bias in media texts" (six questions), (2) "Students self-perceptions of themselves as biased and the importance of self bias awareness in how they conduct unbiased textual evaluations " (six questions), (3) "Students self-perceptions of their ability to think critically to reveal ideologies of news writers' bias" (six questions).

Sections	Items	Mean	SD	Trend Level
1	1- I believe I can now effectively apply critical thinking skills to analyze media content and identify potential biases.	4.80	0.48	Extremely High
	2- The syllabus provided for this course raised confident in my ability to identify bias in media texts.	4.73	0.58	Extremely High
	3- I believe I can now easily identify emotional appeals used in media texts to manipulate audience responses.	4.73	0.50	Extremely High
	4- The tasks involved in this course made me more aware of my bias.	4.63	0.61	Extremely High
	5- My understanding of media bias changed since taking lectures on media literacy and learning about media bias through other means.	4.60	0.62	Extremely High
	6- The coursework provided valuable opportunities to make me familiar with different types of bias.	4.50	0.73	Extremely High
2	7- The course helped me so much to identify and increase my awareness of bias in myself to effectively evaluate media texts.	4.80	0.48	Extremely High
	8- This experience equipped me with the skills to engage in self-reflection to assess my own biases and their potential impact on my evaluations.	4.77	0.52	Extremely High
	9- I think my personal biases might influence my ability to conduct unbiased textual evaluations.	4.57	0.63	Extremely High
	10- I believe I am personally biased in my evaluation of textual information.	4.47	0.78	Extremely High
	11- I believe it is important to be aware of my own biases when evaluating textual information.	3.03	0.35	High
	12- I am aware of effective strategies which might be helpful to overcome my biases and conduct more unbiased textual evaluations.	3.01	0.31	High

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Continued

Sections	Items	Mean	SD	Trend Level
3	**1-** The lectures on critical discourse analysis persuaded me that all media are used to carry ideologically constructed messages and images.	2.89	0.32	Average
	2- I think these tasks contributed to my overall development in distinguishing between factual reporting and editorializing in media.	2.33	0.89	Average
	3- Practice of deconstructive analysis of some arguments developed my confident in identifying the ideological dimensions of media messages.	2.13	0.81	Below Average
	4- I believe I can now recognize when media texts are promoting certain values or beliefs.	2.03	0.89	Below Average
	5- Due to the tasks I performed in this class, I feel skilled at uncovering the ideological perspectives presented in news articles or opinion pieces.	2.03	0.25	Below Average
	6- The tasks involved in this course made me more aware of how language and imagery in media can shape ideological perspectives.	2.03	0.25	Below Average
Total:		**3.67**	**0.20**	**High**

Table (6): Subscales and Descriptive Statistics for Post-Questionnaire on Students' Self-Perceptions N (60)

Mean scores ranging between 0.00 and 5.00
[0.01– 1.00 $^1/_5$=**Very Small Extent**; 1.01 – 2.00 $^1/_5$ =**Small Extent**; 2.01– 3.00 $^1/_5$= **Neutral**; 3.01–
4.00 $^1/_5$ =**Large Extent,** 4.01– 5.00 $^1/_5$= **Very Large Extent**]

Table 6 summarizes the students' perceptions of learning gains and their views on the course's effectiveness. The undertaken analysis focused on three dimensions: 1) bias identification (students' increased knowledge of identifying bias in news reports); 2) bias avoidance (students' improved skills in avoiding biases during news evaluation); 3) bias analysis (students' enhanced ability to use bias identification to understand the ideological underpinnings of a media text and evaluate the credibility of the information it contains). Respondents were asked to rate their agreement on a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with eighteen statements. The obtained mean score for each statement ranged from 4.80 to 2.03, indicating a sense of student satisfaction with the lecturer's teaching, as well as a learning effect of integrating critical thinking skills into EFL teaching within a discourse programming course applied to aspects of media.

The statements of the mean score above 4.60 from the highest to lowest are: item 1 (identifying authorial bias via critical discourse analysis), item 7 (identifying and increasing awareness of bias in oneself to effectively evaluate media texts.), item 8 (engaging in self-reflection to assess one's own biases and their potential impact on textual evaluations), item 2

(awareness of one's own bias), and 3 (identifying emotional appeals used in media texts to manipulate audience responses).The mean score below 2.60 from the lowest to highest are: item 18 (increase in awareness of how language and imagery in media can shape ideological perspectives), item 17 (developing a feeling of being skilled at uncovering the ideological perspectives presented in news articles), item 16 (recognizing when media texts are promoting certain values or beliefs), item 15 (developing confidence in identifying the ideological dimensions of media messages through practice of deconstructive analysis of some arguments), and item 14 (developing skills of distinguishing between factual reporting and editorializing in media). From examining each section individually, we can see that section three received lower mean scores than the first and the second ones. Items belonging to the first section received the highest mean scores. Nevertheless, most items formulating the questionnaire received varying high levels of satisfaction as represented in Table 6. The value of results obtained is discussed in detail in the section that follows.

4- Discussion:

The current study examined and revealed results in regards to bringing the teaching of argumentation to the centre of CDA curriculum; thereby explored its effects on the development of the ability to identify bias and ideology in media texts. It investigated the role of integrating a series of practices of analysis of the role of language in the structure of arguments with an application to English news texts. With such practice performance, it hoped developing critical media literacy skills for EFL students, attending a Master program for a degree in applied linguistics. Two hypotheses were formulated for this study. Firstly, the study hypothesized that the practice of evaluation and analysis of arguments would lead to significant increase in EFL student's ability to identify bias in media texts and critically derive judgments on authorial ideology. Secondly, the study hypothesized that the variable "self- perception" would play significant role in the enhancement of the aforementioned skills.

In regards to the first hypothesis raised in this research; a certain level of satisfaction was obtained in support of the claim correlating bias detection to the ability of analyzing text's arguments and recognizing the tone of word choices .Statistically significant differences revealed in students' skills due to the intervention. Additionally, students' obtained level of skills revealed to be also positively influenced by self-perception developed through the experience in the educational intervening program. The second hypothesis made in regards to the impact of self-perception, showed that self-perception plays a significant role in the enhancement of applying tools from critical thinking approaches to seek out and identify bias in media texts. It is revealed that practice based on insights from CDA eliminated the effects of one's own unconscious bias along the process of textual evaluations. The intervention effectively closed the gap between critical thinking and media literacy through efforts in building critical and analytical skills central to get considerations of ideology that affects language of news reporting. By doing so, it offered a vision of learning that values social empowerment. This is aligned with other studies highlighting the practical value of using a based-pedagogy on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to enhance students' critical thinking skills for applying them to the consumption of media, paying particular attention to teaching as an 'authentic practice', (Feuerstein, M., 1999; Fuller, L. B., 2000; Rodesiler, L., 2010; Potter,W.J., 2023).

For developing critical literacy among students, a crucial aspect of the process of educational growing up is not only teaching students on how to identify bias, but also teaching them about ideology and giving them opportunities to make up attempts to unveil the ideological agenda of the texts being read. Teaching students to think on higher levels is not an easy task, but it is necessary if the supreme end of educating them is for being

empowered with deeper instruction helpful to respond to the challenges of the global world and survive. Though recognizing the limitations of EFL students ' abilities, this research sought to engage students into critical-based text analysis for a better understanding of authorial ideology communicated through news reports. To meet the readiness level of the learners, the content of the experimental course was organized in a flexible a way that promoted raising reasoning at varying levels of student ability. Raising reasoning is still not easy, but it is far easier if adjusting teaching within a context that raises student learning efforts. Not only this research, but many other educational studies and other linguistic analyses have focused on use of CDA as a framework helpful to engage in a rational process to deconstruct ideological assumptions authors inscribe into their texts. The results of the present study are aligned with other studies suggesting that students involved in language learning are more likely to develop skills of analysis of media texts to form objective and evidence-based judgments if they are engaged in their studies and have developed higher order thinking skills, situated within the practice of critical discourse analysis (Cots, J. M., 2006; Martínez Guillem, S., & Toula, C. M., 2020; Statham, S., 2022).

The contribution of this study has been to confirm that practicing analysis of argumentation boosts students' critical discourse analysis by making them go beyond surface comprehension along the process of reading media messages, and go towards supporting their thinking with evidence. It is crucial to note that reflecting on important textual arguments makes critical reading easier based on viewing a text more than verbal structure but also an ideological entity. When a student deconstructs a text and analyses its arguments, his/her detection of bias and ideology would be higher. To put it shortly, introducing students to the major concepts and issues relevant to critical discourse analysis with opportunities of applications in analyzing media texts seemed to play a significant role in deepening and strengthening students' media literacy and critical thinking.

When students are working in finding flaws in evidence and arguments used in media texts, they are on the path of developing critical media literacy. In addition, by examining the emotive language used in argumentation, students' efforts lead them towards getting a higher level of skills on 'textual transparency'. Hence, the practice of arguments analysis through authentic texts from media seemed to play a significant role in making students feel motivated. The level of intervening of self-bias while analyzing media texts revealed to be decreased, showing that their self-control was boosted and they felt better about themselves as media evaluators. The aforementioned aspects are perceived important characteristics for future citizens in order to be able to survive and succeed in our society.

5- Conclusion:

In teaching students to think critically, we are trying not only to create opportunities to impart knowledge and improve pre-determined skills, but also ones' to foster state of mind necessary for effective transfer of learning to new and different contexts and make them functioning effectively to overcome challenges. The person possessing such mind should have the capacity to weight with adequate reason evidence to support authorial credibility rather than accepting claims blindly with pre-conceived prejudices (Ennis 1985; Siegel 1988; Lipman 1991). Scholarship in the area of critical discourse analysis asserts that possessing basic knowledge and skills is a prerequisite for critical thinking, but not the critical determinants of generating objective analytical judgments in performing the critical reading process (Fairclough, I. & Fairclough, N. 2012). In the context of discourse analysis, analysis of argumentation is only one part of the overall learning skills that must be taken into account when applying the critical approach. Other skills may be just as important, if not more so, and must be recognized in the evaluation of texts and talks. They include skills of analyzing interactional, social, political and cultural functions of texts, as well as skills of

examining the grammatical features, lexical choices, and rhetorical strategies used for persuasive intents. Combining these different forms of skills directs learning towards developing students' critical dispositions, enabling them to identify bias in discourse, analyze power relations and ideology, and ultimately understand the essence of sidedness. As such, it is widely recognized that the possibility of the design of courses for looking at texts critically requires getting a level of higher order thinking skills that goes well beyond that of most EFL students. However, spaces of the possible should be opened, so that students dig a path leading up towards independence in learning and result in empowerment, preventing from falling prey to an ideological manipulator.

5-Limitations and Future Directions:

As encouraging as the results of this study are, there are still limitations that must be considered. Though the resulting data show a marked improvement in the post-test, that improvement was limited. Most students have shown improved performance in analyzing and evaluating arguments; however, they generated more text dependent evaluations than text-independent evaluations. This implies that they couldn't reach the highest levels of critical thinking hierarchy. The process seemed too complicated for them and was expected to take too much time training. Furthermore, a full grasp of the ideological bias of a media text requires from consumers the employing of a range of skills beyond analysis of argumentation and authorial choice of language. Accordingly, future research on this issue should focus on exploring critical media literacy for EFL students as practice opportunities within which news texts in different media forms are placed within meaningful historical, political, social and cultural contexts, emphasizing practicing intertexual skills for developing students' disposition of decoding authorial stances and intentions, as a cue to rationally unveil ideological assumptions involved in news coverage.

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