

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis to Argumentative Essay Writing Skill Develop

Ade Elvira¹, Fera Zasrianita², Andriadi³

¹Student of English Department, ²UINFAS Bengkulu, ³Lecture of English Departement, UINFAS Bengkulu

E-mail: elviraade93@gmail.com¹, fera.zasrianita@mail.uinfasbengkulu.ac.id², andriadi@mail.uinfasbengkulu.ac.id³

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ABSTRACT

Argumentative essay writing is essential for developing students' critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and persuasive communication. However, many learners struggle to construct coherent arguments, integrate evidence effectively, and sustain logical flow. This study examines the potential of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) as a pedagogical tool to improve argumentative essay writing skills. MCDA focuses on the interaction of linguistic, visual, and auditory modes in shaping meaning, enabling students to critically analyze multimodal sources such as films, advertisements, and digital media. Through classroom observations, interviews, and writing evaluations, the study found that MCDA encourages deeper engagement with complex issues and promotes critical interpretation beyond surface-level description. Students became more aware of how multimodal elements influence meaning, leading to improved ability in building evidence-based arguments. The approach also increased motivation, as learners worked with authentic, culturally relevant materials. While some students initially faced challenges in interpreting multimodal data, targeted scaffolding supported their progress. Overall, integrating MCDA into writing instruction not only strengthened students' argumentative structures but also enhanced their critical literacy. This research highlights MCDA as an effective method for linking multimodal analysis with academic writing, preparing learners to navigate diverse discourse environments in the modern era.

Keywords: argumentative essay writing, critical thinking, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA)

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INTRODUCTION

Writing argumentative essays is an essential skill for developing critical thinking and persuasive communication abilities (Aull & Ross, 2020; Su et al., 2023). This activity enables students to analyze various perspectives, construct logical arguments, and evaluate evidence objectively (Ma & Li, 2022; Graham & Perin, 2023). Without such practice, students' analytical and communication skills may decline (Al-Harathi & Al-Mansour, 2020; Landrieu et al., 2024).

Previous studies (Sarr, 2024; Fisher et al., 2023; Mallahi, 2024) have emphasized the importance of structured guidance and community support in improving writing skills. Other research (Wang & Mat Said, 2024; Sato, 2022; Green et al., 2024) has revealed a close relationship between argumentative writing and critical thinking. However, few studies have explored how

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) can be employed as a pedagogical strategy to strengthen these skills, particularly through the study of female masculinity representation in Western films.

The results of preliminary observations and interviews with fourth-semester students of the English Language Education Program at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu show that they are able to identify masculine female characters and construct initial arguments, but still struggle to connect multimodal elements (images, sound, dialogue) to their arguments. MCDA is perceived as offering a new perspective and encouraging critical analysis, although its concepts are initially challenging to grasp.

This research is urgent because it fills the gap between argumentative essay instruction and MCDA application in gender studies. Integrating MCDA with film analysis is expected to enrich teaching methods, improve the quality of students' arguments, and strengthen their media literacy in the digital era

The study purpose was to identify how multimodal critical discourse analysis can be utilized to enhance students' argumentative essay writing skills.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design to provide a deep and nuanced understanding of the representation of female masculinity in Western films and its potential influence on students' argumentative writing skills. The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to explore complex social and cultural phenomena in depth, capturing the richness of meanings, interpretations, and contextual nuances that cannot be fully represented through numerical data alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The primary method of analysis in this study is Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), a framework rooted in social semiotics that examines how meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes such as text, images, sound, gesture, and movement in audiovisual media (Bateman & Tseng, 2023). By applying MCDA, the study seeks to uncover the ideological messages, power relations, and social identities embedded in the cinematic portrayal of female masculinity within the Western film genre.

The MCDA process in this study consists of three interconnected stages. First, the multimodal analysis stage focuses on identifying and categorizing visual, verbal, and auditory elements that contribute to the representation of female masculinity. This includes examining cinematography techniques, mise-en-scène, costume choices, dialogue, tone of voice, and background music. Second, the ideological and power interpretation stage seeks to understand the underlying beliefs, values, and social structures that shape the representation. Here, the researcher interprets how certain portrayals challenge or reinforce dominant gender norms and how they reflect broader cultural narratives about masculinity and femininity. Third, the integration into argumentative writing stage involves using the analytical findings as the basis for developing well-structured arguments in academic essays, thereby connecting media analysis with critical thinking and academic literacy practices.

This study utilizes qualitative data from five contemporary Western films released in the last five years, *The Dead Don't Hurt* (2023), *Calamity Jane* (2024), *God's Country* (2022), *Surrounded* (2023), and *The Woman King* (2022), selected for their relevance in portraying female masculinity within the genre. Unlike classic Westerns dominated by male protagonists, these films feature strong female leads who challenge traditional masculinity norms. Additionally, the study involves 67 fourth-semester students (18 male, 49 female) from the English Education Study Program at UIN

Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, drawn from four classes, to examine how such representations influence critical thinking in argumentative essay writing.

The data collection aimed to thoroughly answer the research questions using three main instruments: interviews, observation, and documentation. First, interviews were conducted to gather in-depth insights from respondents regarding their perceptions of female masculinity in Western films and its influence on their critical thinking during argumentative essay writing. Second, observations were carried out in the classroom to record students' engagement, participation, and application of critical thinking skills while discussing and writing about the films. Third, documentation was used to collect supporting materials, including students' essays, class notes, and relevant film scenes, to provide additional evidence and ensure data triangulation.

The data analysis in this study employed a qualitative approach following Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) spiral model, involving four main stages: data collection through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation related to the implementation of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) in Western films; data reduction to select and focus on information relevant to the research objectives; coding and categorization to group data into themes such as the role of films in stimulating critical thinking, student responses to MCDA, and argument structures in essays; and interpretation to draw conclusions on how MCDA-based learning influences students' critical thinking, engagement, and argumentative writing skills.

RESULTS

Students' improvement in writing skills was analyzed based on their argumentative essays, as well as data obtained through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation during the learning process. This learning process employed the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) approach, designed to train students to write argumentative essays critically. Through this approach, students were encouraged to connect their multimodal analysis of the films viewed with relevant social issues, particularly those related to gender.

Based on the students' argumentative essays, improvements in writing skills were evident in their ability to construct logical arguments, organize ideas coherently, and relate their multimodal film analysis to relevant social issues, especially gender-related topics.

As seen from the previously analyzed essays, the improvement in students' writing skills was clearly evident. Furthermore, based on the observation results, this improvement was reflected in two main indicators: the well-structured organization of argumentative essays (indicator number 1), and the use of evidence from films to support arguments (indicator number 2). High scores on these two indicators indicate that the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) approach effectively encourages students to think in a structured, analytical, and critical manner when expressing their ideas through academic writing.

Table 1. Observation Results on the Improvement of Writing Skills Through MCDA

Observed Aspect	Indicator	Score (1-4)	Observation Notes
Improvement of Writing Skills	Well-structured argumentative essay	4	
	Use of evidence from the film in the argument	4	

Based on the observation table above, the improvement in students' writing skills is reflected through two main indicators. First, the well-structured argumentative essay received a score of 4,

indicating that students were able to organize their ideas logically and coherently. Second, the use of evidence from the film to support arguments also received a score of 4, demonstrating that students were able to relate film content effectively to strengthen their opinions in writing. These two scores reflect the students' ability to write essays in an analytical and critical manner.

Furthermore, the improvement in students' writing skills is also supported by interview results conducted with several students after the learning process. In relation to writing skill development, the interviews focused on two main questions: question number 1 and number 2.

Table 2. Interview Results on the Improvement of Writing Skills Through MCDA

No	Cycle	Question/ Answer
1	<i>Q1</i>	How do you understand the concept of MCDA in film analysis?
	<i>SB</i>	<i>(MCDA or Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis is a discourse analysis method that examines visual and verbal texts to reveal ideological meanings.)</i>
	<i>IB</i>	<i>(Honestly, I was really confused at first because MCDA has a lot of terms. But from what I understood, MCDA is like analyzing a film not just from the story, but also from the visuals, sound, language, and social context. So, we're not just watching, but also thinking about the hidden messages behind all those elements.)</i>
	<i>CB</i>	<i>(MCDA is film analysis that looks at various aspects like visuals, sound, language, and social context, not just the storyline.)</i>
	<i>ED</i>	<i>(I understand MCDA as a way of analyzing a film holistically not just the text, but also the visuals, sound, and its social context.)</i>
	<i>KD</i>	<i>(MCDA is a method that analyzes a film through multiple elements images, sound, language, and social context to uncover a more complete meaning.)</i>
2	<i>Q2</i>	How does MCDA help you construct arguments in your essay?
	<i>SB</i>	<i>(MCDA helps identify visual and narrative elements that strengthen arguments about gender representation in film.)</i>
	<i>IB</i>	<i>(MCDA helped me see the film more broadly. So when I wrote the essay, I didn't just say "this character is strong," but I could explain why they appear strong through their speech, how the camera frames them, even the music used in that scene. So, my argument felt more convincing.)</i>
	<i>CB</i>	<i>(MCDA helped me create stronger arguments because I could use evidence from many elements of the film, not just the dialogue.)</i>
	<i>ED</i>	<i>(MCDA helped me find important details in the film that became strong evidence to support my argument.)</i>
	<i>KD</i>	<i>(With MCDA, I could combine different types of evidence from the film, so my argument was stronger and not just based on personal opinion.)</i>

Interviews with students revealed that they understand Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) as a method of film analysis that involves visual, verbal, auditory, and social context elements to uncover meaning more comprehensively. Although some students admitted feeling confused at first, they eventually recognized that MCDA helped them view films more critically and deeply. This approach also proved beneficial in helping students construct stronger essay arguments, as they were able to draw on various multimodal elements from the films to support their analysis particularly in discussing issues of gender representation.

Based on the analysis of students' essays, observation results, and interview data, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) approach effectively enhanced students' argumentative writing skills. Students demonstrated significant improvement in organizing ideas coherently, constructing logical arguments, and integrating relevant evidence from films particularly in addressing gender-related issues. Observation scores indicate strong performance in both essay structure and the use of film evidence, while

interview responses show that students not only understood MCDA's multidimensional analytical framework but also applied it to strengthen their arguments. Although some initial confusion occurred, the process ultimately fostered deeper critical thinking and a more analytical, evidence-based writing style, confirming MCDA's value as a pedagogical strategy for developing academic writing competence.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to identify how Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) can be used to improve students' argumentative essay writing skills. Unlike previous studies that focus mainly on conventional text-structure or grammar-based approaches, this research emphasizes the integration of visual, verbal, audio, and social context elements from films to construct more critical, logical, and socially grounded arguments.

Qualitative findings from students' essays, classroom observations, and interviews support the effectiveness of this approach. Observation results showed that students demonstrated a well-structured organization of ideas and effectively used evidence from films to strengthen their arguments. Analysis of their essays revealed notable improvements in critical thinking, coherence, and the ability to relate multimodal film analysis to social issues, particularly gender. Furthermore, interviews indicated that students not only understood the MCDA framework but also applied it to develop stronger, evidence-based arguments by drawing on various multimodal elements.

An unexpected and compelling finding was the emergence of strong emotional engagement when students analyzed female masculinity in Western films. Students who had been passive in previous lessons became more active, confident, and willing to express their opinions, as the classroom evolved into a safe space for critical thinking and self-expression. These affective factors emotional connection to gender issues and supportive classroom dynamics played a crucial role in enhancing cognitive engagement, even though they were not the initial research focus.

Therefore, the MCDA approach has proven effective not only in improving students' argumentative writing skills but also in fostering critical awareness of social and ideological issues. By integrating multimodal analysis into academic writing instruction, students were able to engage with texts more deeply, construct stronger arguments, and apply their critical thinking skills in ways that are contextually relevant to real-world issues. The implications of these findings highlight the importance of incorporating multimodal and socially conscious strategies into writing pedagogy to support both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the representation of woman masculinity in the film *The Dead Don't Hurt* (2023) demonstrates a multidimensional portrayal that challenges traditional gender norms in Western films. Through MCDA, the findings reveal that the female protagonist embodies traits such as resilience, assertiveness, and independence without rejecting emotional depth and empathy, allowing her to exist beyond the binary stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. The interplay of visual modes (cinematography, costume, gesture), verbal modes (dialogue, tone), and contextual elements (historical and social background) illustrates how the film constructs a nuanced narrative of gender power relations. The analysis also indicates that such portrayals can influence viewers' perceptions, encouraging more inclusive understandings of gender roles in popular culture.

Recommendations Based on the Research Findings:

1. For Film Studies Scholars: Researchers and academics are encouraged to further explore woman masculinity in various genres, using MCDA to uncover how multimodal elements interact in

shaping complex gender representations. Comparative studies with other Western films can provide deeper insight into evolving cinematic gender discourses.

2. For Film Directors and Screenwriters: Filmmakers should consider incorporating diverse and realistic portrayals of female characters that go beyond one-dimensional gender stereotypes. Drawing on multimodal storytelling can enrich character depth and audience engagement.
3. For Gender and Cultural Studies Educators: Educators may integrate films like *The Dead Don't Hurt* into teaching materials to foster critical discussions about gender identity, media representation, and cultural narratives. Using MCDA as a framework can help students develop analytical skills in decoding media messages.
4. For Future Researchers: This study can be expanded by analyzing audience reception to determine how viewers interpret woman masculinity in Western films, as well as by exploring intersections with race, class, or sexuality. Future research may also compare Western films with other cultural film traditions to identify similarities and differences in female masculinity portrayals.

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