

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Argumentative essay writing is a crucial skill in developing critical thinking and persuasive communication skills. This activity, embedded within a social context, enables students to analyze multiple perspectives and construct logical arguments (Aull & Ross, 2020; Su, Y., Lin, Y., & Lai, C., 2023). Argumentative essays teach students to explore topics in depth, question existing assumptions, and evaluate evidence objectively (Ma, F., & Li, Y., 2022). Without argumentative writing in education, these skills cannot develop, which may lead to a decline in students' analytical and communication abilities (Graham & Perin, 2023). Therefore, argumentative essay writing is crucial for strengthening critical thinking skills that are essential in modern education (Al-Harthi & Al-Mansour, 2020; Landrieu et al., 2024).

Previous research on the development of argumentative essay writing skills has been conducted by several scholars with varying focuses. Sarr (2024) investigated best practices in academic writing and guided teaching argumentative essay writing at both secondary and university levels. The findings indicated that this approach helps improve students' writing skills as well as their readiness for exams and academic assignments. Fisher et al. (2023) also emphasized the importance of community-based support through programs such as weekly writing groups and weekend retreats to promote productivity and successful writing habits. Furthermore, Mallahi (2024) explored writing strategies used by Iranian EFL students, revealing that the limited use of essay writing strategies serves as a barrier to producing work that meets academic standards. These findings offer insights into the development of argumentative essays across various contexts.

Other studies have emphasized the link between argumentative essay writing and critical thinking skills. Wang and Mat Said (2024), in their scoping review, identified

key cognitive challenges, including a lack of mastery in argument structure and weak critical thinking abilities in writing. Sato (2022) discovered that students' critical thinking skills are closely connected to the relevance, logic, and development of ideas in their argumentative essays. Meanwhile, Green et al. (2024) investigated how culture influences perceptions of critical thinking and proposed a framework for developing critical thinking skills in multicultural classroom environments. These findings indicate that argumentative essay writing not only improves writing skills but also promotes students' critical thinking abilities across different cultural and educational backgrounds.

Furthermore, research has demonstrated how the lack of argumentative essay writing in education affects students' analytical and communication skills. Johnson and Walker (2024) revealed that without practice in writing argumentative essays, students struggle with critical thinking, analyzing perspectives, and developing logical arguments. Smith (2025) also emphasized the importance of such practice in improving effective communication skills in both academic and professional settings. Lee and Chan (2024) concluded that without argumentative writing, students encounter difficulties in constructing logical arguments, which negatively impacts their academic performance, especially in subjects that require in-depth analysis. These studies confirm the significance of argumentative essays in fostering students' intellectual and academic growth.

Although research on argumentative essay writing has been extensive, the exploration of how Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) can serve as a teaching tool to improve these skills remains limited. Previous studies, such as those by Wang and Mat Said (2024) and Green et al. (2024), have highlighted the importance of critical thinking and cultural perception in essay development. However, the use of MCDA to analyze non-traditional representations like female masculinity in Western films has not been widely examined. This gap is significant because modern media influence argumentative reasoning by presenting varied perspectives on gender

construction. Therefore, more research on applying MCDA in teaching argumentative essay writing could improve current methods and address existing educational limitations.

Building on previous studies such as Sarr (2024) and Fisher et al. (2023), this research aims to broaden perspectives on writing pedagogy by introducing a new intersection: multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) and gender studies. Existing research highlights the importance of structured guidance and community support in improving writing skills, but these approaches often overlook media analysis as a cognitive stimulus. By examining how Western films portray female masculinity, this study provides a unique viewpoint for understanding argumentative structure. Such analysis encourages students to critically engage with multimodal texts, strengthen cognitive links, and improve their ability to develop evidence-based and persuasive arguments.

Integrating MCDA into teaching argumentative essay writing offers multiple benefits. This method not only enhances students' critical thinking skills but also encourages them to question traditional gender norms depicted in media. Films serve as accessible and engaging sources that stimulate the analysis of social constructions, as noted by Mallahi (2024) and Lee and Chan (2024). Additionally, applying MCDA promotes a deeper understanding of multimodal texts, which enriches students' interpretive and analytical abilities. This approach supports innovative and culturally relevant pedagogy, fostering interdisciplinary learning. Therefore, this study addresses a significant gap by using media analysis to empower students to develop nuanced and persuasive essays.

This research examines the potential of multimodal critical discourse analysis as a tool to improve students' argumentative essay writing skills through analyzing female masculinity in Western films. It explores how portrayals of non-traditional gender roles can serve as a basis for teaching argumentative structure and critical thinking. By

analyzing the interaction of visual and textual elements in film, this study provides insights into how media analysis can cultivate analytical writing skills while offering a new pedagogical framework for integrating gender studies with essay writing instruction.

To identify the challenges faced by fourth-semester students of the English Education Department (Tadris Bahasa Inggris) at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, the researcher conducted preliminary research through observation and interviews on May 28, 2025. The observation showed that students generally could identify masculine female characters in Western films and compare gender roles between male and female characters. They also demonstrated an initial ability to construct arguments on gender issues, with a reasonably clear essay structure supported by evidence from the film. However, classroom participation was moderate, with some students still not actively asking questions or offering critical opinions. Furthermore, several students struggled to connect multimodal elements such as images, sound, and dialogue to their arguments (see Appendix 2 for the observation instrument and Appendix 10 for the observation results).

Meanwhile, the interview results reinforced the observations, with students expressing that the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) approach offered a new perspective in film analysis. Students acknowledged that gender representation in media significantly influences public perception. They also felt that MCDA encouraged more analytical thinking, especially in building arguments based on visual and narrative evidence. Although some students initially found the MCDA concept challenging to understand, most stated they were interested in and benefited from this approach in writing more in-depth and critical argumentative essays (see Appendix 1 for the interview instrument and Appendix 9 for the interview results).

This research is urgently needed because it addresses two important gaps: the teaching of argumentative essay writing and multimodal critical discourse analysis

(MCDA) in gender studies, predominantly female masculinity in Western films. While argumentative essay writing is recognized as a key way to develop critical thinking and persuasive skills, its teaching mainly focuses on verbal texts. This often ignores the power of visual media as a cognitive tool that can deepen analysis and foster more nuanced arguments. Incorporating MCDA into argumentative essay education is both pedagogically meaningful and contextually relevant, since modern media influences students' perceptions and thought processes. Western films featuring female masculinity serve as real resources for exploring non-traditional gender roles, encouraging students to question norms and develop arguments supported by multimodal evidence. Initial research with fourth-semester English Education students at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu shows that, although they can identify female characters with masculinity and craft basic arguments, their ability to relate visual, audio, and dialogue elements to their arguments still needs improvement. Therefore, this study is vital for creating an innovative, interdisciplinary, and culturally relevant learning model. The expected outcomes are not only to enhance students' argumentative writing skills but also to develop their critical analysis abilities of multimodal texts, an essential competence in today's media-literate world.

B. Identifications of the Problems

Based on the background and preliminary research results, the problems identified in this study are as follows:

1. The focus of argumentative essay writing instruction remains mainly on verbal texts, so the potential of visual media, especially films, as sources for argumentative analysis has not been fully utilized.
2. Students' skills in linking multimodal elements such as images, audio, and dialogue with their arguments are still limited, even though they can identify masculine and feminine characters in Western films.

3. There is no systematic integration of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) in argumentative essay writing to enhance critical thinking and writing skills based on visual evidence.
4. There is a lack of exploration into non-traditional gender representations, such as female masculinity in film media, as a cognitive stimulus for developing nuanced arguments.
5. The level of classroom discussion participation remains moderate, with some students being less active in asking questions or offering critical opinions related to gender issues in the West.

C. Limitations of the Problems

To focus the research and prevent overly broad discussion, this study is limited to:

1. The research subjects are fourth-semester students of the English Education Department (Tadris Bahasa Inggris) at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu.
2. The skill focus examined is argumentative essay writing using the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) approach.
3. The multimodal objects of study are limited to Western films featuring representations of female masculinity used as analysis material.
4. The multimodal elements analyzed include visuals (images, settings, gestures), audio (dialogue, music, sound effects), and narrative (plot, characterization).
5. The scope of the research centres on applying MCDA as a teaching tool to enhance students' critical thinking and argumentation skills, without delving into film production or gender theory beyond the context of writing instruction.

D. Research Questions

Based on the background outlined above, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How can multimodal critical discourse analysis enhance argumentative essay writing skills?
2. In what ways does the representation of female masculinity in Western films stimulate critical thinking in essay writing?
3. How can this approach contribute to students' understanding of gender construction and improve their argumentative abilities?

E. The Purposes of the Research

This study aims to contribute to developing innovative pedagogy for teaching argumentative essay writing through critical analysis. The objectives of this research are:

1. To identify how multimodal critical discourse analysis can be used to improve students' argumentative essay writing skills.
2. To analyze how portrayals of female masculinity in Western films can promote critical thinking skills during the essay writing process.
3. To explore how this approach can help students better understand gender construction and strengthen their academic argumentative abilities.

F. The Significances of the Research

This study holds significant value both theoretically and practically, especially in developing critical analysis-based pedagogy for teaching argumentative essay writing. Theoretically, it adds to the literature on multimodal critical discourse by providing a new perspective on how representations of female masculinity in Western films relate to the development of argumentative skills. It also broadens the theoretical framework around the role of media in shaping students' critical thinking, particularly in academic

writing settings. Therefore, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for creating innovative teaching models across various educational levels.

Practically, this study offers direct benefits for both teachers and students. Teachers can use its findings to design learning strategies tailored to students' needs, such as using films as a medium to foster critical discussion and essay writing practice. Students can improve their critical thinking and argumentative skills through more contextual and interactive learning approaches. Additionally, this multimodal method helps students understand social issues like gender construction, which are relevant to their daily lives.

Overall, this research aims to contribute to the field of education by providing fresh insights into teaching argumentative essay writing. The findings are expected to enrich both theoretical discussions and practical approaches, helping educators improve students' writing skills. Through the innovative method proposed, this study strives to bridge the gap between theory and practice in academic writing instruction and to prepare students for future academic and professional challenges.

G. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Several key terms need to be defined to ensure a more precise understanding within the context of this study. These terms are as follow:

1. Female masculinity refers to women adopting traits or roles traditionally seen as masculine, which challenges gender norms. This study explores how such representations encourage critical thinking in writing.
2. Western movies are a genre that tells stories of life and adventure in the American Old West, often featuring themes like conflicts among cowboys, Native Americans, and law enforcement in frontier areas.

3. Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) involves examining various modes, including text, visuals, and sound, to reveal ideologies and power dynamics. This study uses MCDA to understand how films foster critical thinking.
4. Writing is the process of creating coherent, organized, and meaningful texts to effectively communicate ideas. This study focuses on writing as a tool for improving students' academic skills and critical thinking.
5. An argumentative essay is a structured academic paper that presents evidence-based arguments to support or challenge claims. This study highlights its importance in developing students' critical and analytical thinking skills.

