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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN ENHANCING THE ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING SKILLS

Albetia Freina Sinu¹

Yulian Juita Ekalia¹

Ely Helydiana Selamat¹

¹Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, Indonesia

*Email: albetiasinu@gmail.com

Abstract: This study aimed to test the effectiveness of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach in enhancing the argumentative writing skills. It focused on addressing the challenges vocational students face in constructing critical and logical arguments within English language learning. The researcher employed two groups of 40 students and saw how they participated in argumentative writing lessons delivered through Fairclough's three-dimensional model. To measure the impact of the teaching method, the researcher used a pretest-posttest design. Before the instruction began, the researcher assessed the students' writing knowledge and then the writers evaluated their progress after the lesson. The collected data were analysis using t-test to determine the statistical significance of the intervention. The findings indicated that the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach is effective in enhancing students' argumentative writing skills. This is supported by the t-test results, which yielded a significance value of 0.000, falling below the 0.05 significance threshold. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted, and the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. The findings demonstrate that the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework significantly enhances the coherence and critical depth of students' argumentative writing.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Fairclough's Model, Argumentative Writing Skills

INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of symbols that people use to share ideas, feelings, and hopes with one another. It is not something we are born knowing how to do naturally, however, it is a human ability that lets us express our thoughts through signs we create on purpose. Language does more than help people communicate. It also helps people think, understand the world around them, and pass on cultural values from one generation to the next. Language can appear in spoken form, written form, or sign form. In writing specifically, language is not just about putting words on paper. It is a mental process that needs planning, critical thinking, and attention to detail. Yulian Juita et al. (2025) explains that good writing needs the right word choice, clear sentences, and well-organized ideas. Because of these demands, writing is often seen as the hardest of the four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing especially for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Since writing is such a demanding skill, it plays an important role in school. Writing is not only a way to communicate, it also shows how well a student can think critically. Lee (2017) states that good writing means being able to understand information, organize complex ideas, and present arguments clearly and logically. There are several types of writing, such as narrative, descriptive, and expository writing. However, schools often focus on argumentative writing because it helps students build strong opinions, use evidence, and respond to different points of view. This type of writing, though, is usually the one students find most difficult.

Argumentative writing is especially hard for Senior High School students, particularly those in vocational schools. Ozfidan and Mitchell (2020) explain that this type of writing is important in English learning because it teaches students to persuade, not just describe. To write a strong argument, students need to state their opinion clearly and support it with facts or expert evidence. This requires both good English skills and strong reasoning skills. Wang (2024) adds that even students who understand grammar well often still struggle to organize their ideas or build strong arguments in English. In Indonesia, this problem becomes even bigger. Ananda et al. (2024) found that vocational students often have trouble finding ideas, organizing their arguments, and keeping their writing clear. This shows that there is an urgent need for better and more structured teaching methods. Similarly, Ulfa and Wahyudi (2023) found that Indonesian students face language problems, such as limited vocabulary and grammar mistakes, as well as personal problems, such as low confidence and anxiety about writing.

Due to ongoing problems, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has become a teaching approach that may help solve them. Hamdi (2022) explains that CDA helps students see that language is not neutral it reflects social values, power, and beliefs. Several studies support this idea. Bekkouch (2024) found that students who learned writing through CDA became much better at noticing bias and organizing their ideas. Ayomi et al. (2023) also used CDA in a university class and found that it made writing more meaningful by connecting it to real-life topics, such as sustainable tourism. In addition, Shapiro (2022) argues that the critical thinking developed through CDA helps students write essays that are more persuasive and well-reasoned.

At SMK Widya Bhakti Ruteng, Grade 10 students are at an important stage of building the communication skills they need for their future careers. However, many of these students still struggle with argumentative writing because they have not had enough practice in critical thinking or structured writing. Since argumentative writing is also tested in national exams that matter for further education, finding better ways to teach it becomes very important. For this reason, the CDA approach is proposed as a way to close this skill gap and give students a stronger foundation in persuasive writing.

Several previous studies provided useful background. First, Bekkouch (2024), in a study titled "The Use of Critical Discourse Analysis to Improve Critical Thinking Skills in EFL Writing," examined how CDA-based teaching can improve students' critical writing skills. Second, Hamdi (2022), in a study titled "Critical Discourse Analysis in EFL Teaching," looked at the role of CDA in EFL teaching from a sociocognitive point of view. Third, Ayomi et al. (2023), in a study titled "Integrating Critical Discourse Analysis in Sustainable Tourism in English Language Learning in University," used CDA to improve students' critical writing skills related to global issues.

Even though these studies show that CDA can be effective, there is still an important research gap. The studies by Bekkouch (2024), Hamdi (2022), and Ayomi et al. (2023) mostly focus on university students or general academic settings. They do not explore how CDA works in Vocational High Schools (SMK), especially at the Grade 10 level. This study aims to fill the gap by examining whether CDA can be used effectively to improve argumentative writing among Grade 10 students at SMK Widya Bhakti Ruteng. In this way, the study hopes to add new understanding about inclusive and context-appropriate EFL teaching for non-academic students in Indonesia. Based on this background, the study aims to answer the following research question: How effective is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in improving students' argumentative writing skills?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental design to examine the effectiveness of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach in enhancing students' argumentative writing skills. A quasi-experimental design was chosen because the research was conducted in a natural classroom setting where students could not be randomly assigned to groups; instead, two pre-existing, intact classes were used as the experimental and control groups. As Creswell (2014) explains, a quasi-experimental design is appropriate when researchers wish to determine the effect of a treatment on an outcome but cannot randomly assign participants to conditions due to practical or institutional constraints. Specifically, this study used a nonequivalent control group design, in which both groups were given a pretest before treatment and a posttest after treatment, allowing the researcher to compare gains within and between the two groups. This design enabled the researcher to isolate the effect of the CDA-based instruction from other variables by comparing it directly against a conventional teaching method.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of Grade 10 students at SMK Widya Bhakti Ruteng. From this population, two intact classes were purposively selected as the sample: Class 10 AK 1, which served as the experimental group, and Class 10 AK 2, which served as the control group. Each class consisted of 20 students, bringing the total sample size to 40 students. The experimental group received argumentative writing instruction integrated with CDA principles based on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model, which consists of description, interpretation, and explanation. The control group, in contrast, received conventional instruction using a standard Genre-Based Approach. Since both groups were pre-existing classes rather than randomly formed groups, homogeneity between them was statistically verified prior to hypothesis testing, ensuring that any differences in posttest outcomes could be more confidently attributed to the instructional treatment rather than pre-existing group differences.

Technique of Data Collection

Data were collected through argumentative writing tests administered in a pretest-posttest format to both groups. Before treatment began, students in both classes completed a pretest in the form of an argumentative essay to establish their baseline writing ability. Following the instructional period during which the experimental group received CDA-based teaching and the

control group received conventional instruction both groups completed a posttest under the same testing conditions. The posttest consisted of two writing prompts requiring critical analysis of contemporary digital issues, namely "Does the use of mobile phones in the classroom have a negative or positive impact?" and "The Impact of Social Media Use for Adolescents." These topics were selected because they required students to take a clear stance, support it with reasoning, and respond to counterarguments, which are core features of argumentative writing. By using identical testing procedures and topics for both groups, the researcher ensured that any differences observed between the pretest and posttest scores could be reasonably linked to the type of instruction received rather than to differences in testing conditions.

Instrument of Data Collection

The primary instrument used to collect data was an analytical scoring rubric designed to assess students' argumentative essays across several dimensions. The rubric included general writing criteria such as Thesis Clarity and Language Use, as well as CDA-specific criteria aligned with Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model: Critical Stance and Evidence-Based Reasoning (reflecting students' ability to construct persuasive arguments), Textual Analysis or Description (surface-level understanding of the text), Discourse Practice or Interpretation (understanding of how texts are produced and consumed), and Social Practice or Explanation (understanding of the broader social and ideological context of the text). Using a rubric grounded in Fairclough's model ensured that scoring was not limited to surface grammatical accuracy but also captured students' developing critical awareness, which is central to the CDA approach. As Hamdi (2022) notes, CDA-based instruments are designed specifically to "help students understand that language is not neutral" but instead reflects social values, power, and belief systems an understanding that a conventional writing rubric alone would not adequately measure. Each essay was scored independently based on this rubric to ensure consistency across the pretest and posttest for both groups.

Technique of Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS 27 for Windows through several statistical stages. First, a normality test was conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk technique to determine whether the pretest and posttest data in both the experimental and control classes were normally distributed. Second, a homogeneity of variance test was performed using Levene's Test to confirm that the two groups originated from populations with equal variance prior to treatment. These preliminary tests were necessary to

determine whether the data satisfied the assumptions required for parametric statistical analysis. Once normality and homogeneity were confirmed, an independent samples t-test was employed to compare the posttest scores between the experimental and control groups, while a paired t-test logic was applied to examine the gain scores within each group from pretest to posttest. A significance value (p) of ≤ 0.05 was set as the threshold for determining statistical significance; if the resulting p-value fell below this threshold, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, indicating that the CDA approach had a statistically significant effect on students' argumentative writing performance compared to conventional instruction.

RESULTS

The Data of Experimental Group

The tenth-grade students of Class 10 AK 1, consisting of 20 students, received treatment using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach based on Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional model. Table 1 presents their pretest and posttest scores.

Table 1 Students’ Pretest-Posttest Scores in the Experimental Class

No.	Student	Pretest	Posttest	Gain Score
1.	GSB	37	91	54
2.	FO	60	88	28
3.	MCJ	43	82	39
4.	MAASA	60	88	28
5.	MP	70	82	12
6.	YRH	35	91	56
7.	YJW	70	82	12
8.	AF	60	91	31
9.	YAN	72	91	19
10.	AEK	27	80	53
11.	HD	67	88	21
12.	YNM	73	88	13
13.	KO	65	82	17
14.	AA	54	80	26
15.	AI	37	82	45
16.	LD	50	91	41
17.	GLM	60	82	22
18.	YFR	75	88	13

19.	MEJ	45	88	43
20.	FG	50	82	32
Σ		1,11	1,717	605
Mean		55.50	85.85	30.25

As shown in Table 1, the average score of the experimental class increased from 55.50 in the pretest to 85.85 in the posttest, representing a 30.25-point increase in the mean gain score. Individual gains varied considerably, ranging from as low as 12 points (Students MP and YJW) to as high as 56 points (Student YRH), suggesting that while the CDA approach benefited the class overall, its impact was not uniform across all students.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental Class

Test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	20	27	75	55.50	14.380
Posttest	20	80	91	85.85	4.184

Table 2 further shows that the standard deviation dropped sharply from 14.380 in the pretest to 4.184 in the posttest, indicating that students' posttest scores became considerably more homogeneous after the intervention. This narrowing spread suggests that CDA instruction not only raised the average score but also helped reduce the performance gap between initially stronger and weaker writers a pattern consistent with Li et al. (2021), who found that structured, discourse-focused interventions tend to produce more consistent writing gains across EFL learners of varying initial proficiency compared to conventional instruction alone.

Descriptive Data of the Control Group

The control class, Class 10 AK 2, also consisting of 20 students, received conventional instruction using a standard Genre-Based Approach. Table 3 presents their pretest and posttest scores.

Table 3 Students' Pretest-Posttest Scores in the Control Class

No.	Student	Pretest	Posttest	Gain Score
1.	SRJ	35	74	39
2.	ET	56	88	32
3.	MOM	60	77	17
4.	GNS	42	88	46
5.	HT	30	50	20

6.	YCJ	20	60	30
7.	SMF	50	69	19
8.	PHS	29	65	36
9.	AGMW	50	70	20
10.	MAJ	70	80	10
11.	MSB	30	60	30
12.	SDJ	50	80	30
13.	FJA	60	82	22
14.	DTB	40	74	34
15.	TN	44	78	34
16.	FKP	45	70	25
17.	CVFS	60	80	20
18.	MPJ	42	75	33
19.	AS	34	60	26
20.	RMT	44	70	26
Σ		891	1,45	523
Mean		44.55	72.50	26.15

As shown in Table 3, the pretest scores ranged from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 70, with a mean of 44.55. Following instruction, posttest scores increased to a minimum of 50 and a maximum of 88, with a mean of 72.50 a gain of 26.15 points. This indicates that conventional instruction still contributed positively to students' argumentative writing, even though the improvement was less pronounced than that achieved by the experimental group.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of the Control Class

Test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	20	20	70	44.55	12.751
Posttest	20	50	88	72.50	9.902

Table 4 shows that the posttest standard deviation for the control class (9.902) remained considerably higher than that of the experimental class (4.184), indicating that students receiving conventional instruction continued to show more variable outcomes even after treatment. Comparing Tables 1 through 4, the experimental group's average posttest score (85.85) clearly exceeded that of the control group (72.50), demonstrating that the CDA approach produced both a larger and a more consistent improvement in argumentative writing performance. This pattern echoes Idris et al. (2025), who similarly found that Indonesian vocational EFL students receiving a more structured, critically oriented instructional approach

outperformed peers receiving standard classroom instruction, even though both groups showed some improvement over time.

Normality Test

Table 5 Normality Test Results for Pretest and Posttest Scores in the Experimental and Control Classes

Class	K-S Statistic	df	K-S Sig.	S-W Statistic	df	S-W Sig.
Pretest, control class	.087	20	.200	.979	20	.918
Posttest, control class	.180	20	.090	.910	20	.064
Pretest, experimental class	.173	20	.120	.939	20	.233
Posttest, experimental class	.155	20	.200	.920	20	.099

Table 5 presents the results of the normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk technique. The significance value (p) for the experimental class was .233 (pretest) and .099 (posttest), while for the control class it was .918 (pretest) and .064 (posttest). Since all four values exceeded the alpha threshold of .05, the data in both classes can be considered normally distributed at both testing points.

Because the normality assumption was satisfied, the researcher proceeded with parametric statistical analysis, specifically the Independent-Samples T-Test, to compare the mean scores between groups. This step aligns with standard quantitative research procedure, in which normality and homogeneity checks are treated as prerequisites before applying t-tests or ANOVA to experimental data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Homogeneity Test

Table 6 Homogeneity Test on the Pretest Results of the Experimental and Control Groups

Result	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Based on Mean	.847	1	38	.363
Based on Median	.429	1	38	.516
Based on Median and adjusted df	.429	1	36.839	.516
Based on trimmed	.800	1	38	.377

Table 6 shows the results of the homogeneity test using Levene’s Test. Based on the mean, the significance value (Sig.) was .363, which exceeds the alpha threshold of .05, indicating that the pretest scores of both groups are homogeneous that is, both groups had equal variance prior to treatment.

This finding satisfies the fundamental requirement for proceeding with further parametric analysis, including the Independent-Samples T-Test. Confirming both normality and homogeneity before comparing groups is considered essential methodological practice in quasi-experimental writing research, as inconsistent baseline variance between groups can otherwise confound the interpretation of posttest differences (Rahimi & Fathi, 2022).

Hypothesis T-Test

Table 7 Results of the Independent Samples T-Test

Condition	Levene’s Sig.	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Equal variances assumed	.005	38	.000	15.300	2.071	19.493	11.107

Table 7 presents the results of the Independent Samples T-Test comparing the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups. The analysis shows a 2-tailed significance value of .000, which is well below the alpha threshold of .05. This indicates a statistically significant difference between the mean posttest scores of the experimental group (M = 85.85) and the control group (M = 72.50), with a mean difference of 15.300 points in favor of the experimental group.

Based on this result, the null hypothesis (H₀) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted, confirming that the CDA approach had a statistically significant positive effect on students’ argumentative writing performance compared to conventional instruction. This outcome is consistent with prior CDA-based intervention studies conducted in EFL contexts (Hidayati et al., 2021; Hazaea, 2020), both of which similarly found statistically significant gains in students’ critical and argumentative language use following CDA-based instruction, reinforcing the broader pattern that explicitly teaching students to deconstruct language critically yields measurable writing improvements beyond what conventional instruction alone typically produces.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of Critical

Discourse Analysis (CDA) in enhancing the argumentative writing skills of Grade 10 students at SMK Widya Bhakti Ruteng. The results showed a significant disparity in performance between students taught using Fairclough's three-dimensional model and those receiving conventional instruction. These findings indicate that integrating critical deconstruction of language into the writing process significantly improves students' ability to formulate logical and reflective arguments. The experimental group achieved a substantially higher average posttest score of 85.85 compared to the control group's 72.50, demonstrating that the CDA approach is more effective than traditional lecture-based methods for this population of vocational learners.

The success of the CDA intervention was characterized by students' ability to navigate the three analytical stages central to Fairclough's model: description, interpretation, and explanation. In the experimental class, students moved beyond surface-level text comprehension to identify persuasive diction, hidden intents, and the connection between texts and social reality. This intellectually engaging process encouraged students to defend their positions with more profound reasoning, as reflected in individual score increases of over 50 points for some participants. In contrast, while the control class showed some improvement through structured grammar lessons, students appeared less enthusiastic and struggled to analyze deeper social implications, resulting in a comparatively lower mean gain score of 26.15 points. This pattern suggests that gains in argumentative writing are not simply a matter of grammatical accuracy but are closely tied to whether students are given tools to think critically about the texts and topics they are writing about.

These findings are consistent with previous research on CDA in EFL contexts. Bekkouch (2024) similarly found that CDA-based instruction significantly improves students' capacity to recognize bias and organize arguments coherently, reinforcing the idea that CDA functions as an effective pedagogical tool even outside traditional academic settings. This is further supported by Hashemi and Ghanizadeh (2012), who conducted an experimental study involving EFL learners in reading journalistic texts and found that CDA had a significant positive effect on learners' critical thinking, particularly in their ability to interpret meaning and recognize unstated assumptions. Their findings closely parallel the present study's results, in which students in the experimental group demonstrated a stronger ability to identify implicit meaning and construct evidence-based reasoning after CDA instruction. Taken together, these two studies suggest that the cognitive benefits of CDA namely, improved interpretation and critical reasoning transfer across different learner populations and text types, whether journalistic articles or student-generated argumentative essays.

At the same time, it is important to situate these findings within the

broader landscape of argumentative writing interventions that do not rely on CDA. For instance, Peltzer et al. (2025) conducted a large-scale experimental study (N = 202) examining the effects of different types of formative feedback including rubric-and-exemplar feedback and in-text comments on secondary EFL students' argumentative writing. Their findings showed that while structured feedback improved students' overall essay structure and coherence, gains in higher-order elements such as counterargument and rebuttal were far more limited, and only the group receiving the most transparent, criterion-based feedback showed meaningful improvement in these deeper argumentative skills. This contrast is instructive: whereas Peltzer et al.'s (2025) feedback-only approach struggled to move students beyond surface-level revisions, the present study's CDA-based intervention appears to have more directly targeted the critical, evaluative dimension of argumentation namely, students' ability to interrogate assumptions, recognize bias, and connect textual choices to social meaning. This suggests that CDA may offer an advantage over generic feedback-based approaches specifically because it explicitly trains students to engage with the ideological and social dimensions of language, rather than only its structural or surface-level features.

However, not all evidence points unambiguously in favor of CDA-based instruction. Wang (2024) noted that even students with strong grammatical competence often continue to struggle with organizing ideas or building coherent arguments, suggesting that grammatical or structural knowledge alone does not guarantee strong argumentative performance. This raises an important caveat for interpreting the present findings: while the experimental group's gains were substantial, the intervention specifically targeted critical and discourse-level skills, and it remains unclear how much of the improvement can be attributed to increased engagement and motivation from a novel teaching approach as opposed to CDA's theoretical mechanisms per se. Similarly, Ananda et al. (2024) found that Indonesian vocational students' difficulties in argumentative writing often stem from a combination of limited ideation, poor organization, and low confidence factors that a single-semester intervention, however effective, may only partially resolve in the long term.

Furthermore, this study's findings align with Ayomi et al.'s (2023) observation that CDA becomes especially meaningful when it is anchored in real-life, socially relevant topics. In the present study, the posttest prompts on mobile phone use and social media's impact on adolescents gave students familiar, personally relevant ground on which to practice critical stance-taking, which likely contributed to the depth of engagement observed in the experimental group. This reinforces Shapiro's (2022) argument that critical language awareness developed through CDA translates into more

persuasive and well-reasoned writing, particularly when students are asked to write about issues they can relate to directly.

Nonetheless, the deep analytical nature of the CDA approach requires strong and consistent teacher guidance to ensure that students can effectively link linguistic features with broader social values, rather than treating the three-dimensional framework as a mechanical checklist. This observation is consistent with Hamdi's (2022) point that CDA's core value lies in helping students recognize that language is never neutral an insight that requires sustained scaffolding to internalize, especially for younger or less linguistically confident learners such as those in a vocational high school setting. Without this scaffolding, there is a risk that students may replicate the vocabulary of critical analysis (e.g., identifying "bias" or "persuasive diction") without genuinely internalizing the underlying critical thinking process.

Overall, when considered alongside both supporting and contrasting studies, the CDA approach proved to be a powerful method for encouraging students to think critically and develop well-structured, persuasive written expression, particularly compared to conventional instruction and generic feedback-based approaches. However, its effectiveness appears contingent on strong teacher facilitation, socially relevant writing topics, and realistic expectations about how much foundational writing difficulties can be resolved within a single instructional intervention.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach is exceptionally effective in enhancing the argumentative writing skills of Grade 10 students at SMK Widya Bhakti Ruteng. Based on the empirical analysis of 40 students, the experimental group taught using Fairclough's three-dimensional model demonstrated a substantial progress where the mean values jumping of 55.50 reaching 85.85 a surge of 30.25 points. In contrast, the comparison cohort taught via traditional technique achieved a lower increase of 26.15 points. Statistical results from the Independent Samples T-test evaluation yielded a p-value of 0.000, scientifically proving that CDA successfully bridges the gap between basic writing and deep critical analysis.

Students in the experimental class showed a superior ability to identify persuasive diction and deconstruct hidden motives behind discourse compared to those in the control class. The integration of description, interpretation, and explanation provided a clear structure for students to link linguistic features with real social practices, transforming them from passive writers into critical analysts. While the study is limited by its sample size and the need for intensive teacher guidance, the findings

suggest that CDA represents a transformative shift in vocational writing instruction. Ultimately, this method not only improves academic performance but also empowers students with the critical tools necessary to navigate and influence complex social communication.

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