



International Media Discourse Constructing the Controversy in Indonesia VS Bahrain Football Match: Critical Discourse Analysis

Nabilah Izza Nurrerynta¹✉; A. Dzo'ul Milal²
Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya^{1,2}
✉ nabilahizza0900@gmail.com

Abstract:

This research aims to investigate the information from international media reports about Indonesia vs Bahrain football match on 2026 World Cup Qualifiers. The second goal by Mohamed Marhoon, the player of Bahrain's national team, caused a problem that was investigated by both Indonesian netizens and PSSI. This controversial goal has spread even discussed in European countries' football communities. The researcher applied descriptive qualitative method to explain the words that media used to reports the news. The data were collected by reading the news and find some data with the tool called LancsBox. After that, the data were classified into word and word cluster, then combined them to identify the textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice based on critical discourse analysis theory by Norman Fairclough (1996). In the end of the study, we can conclude that the researcher found the word such as controversial (42 tokens), stoppage time (14 instances), injury time (19 instances), etc. The researcher also explained the word cluster "stoppage time" and "injury time" refers to the referees who conducted this match and the word "controversial" refers to the referee who has suspected of performing the act of unfairness on his duties, which indicates that he was on the side of Bahrain team. From this research, the researcher hopes that the readers are able to discover and understand the meaning behind the word choice used and reported by the international media.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; International Media Reports; Corpus Based Analysis; 2026 World Cup Qualifiers

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis informasi dari laporan media internasional mengenai pertandingan sepak bola antara Indonesia dan Bahrain dalam kualifikasi Piala Dunia 2026. Gol kedua yang dicetak oleh Mohamed Marhoon, pemain tim nasional Bahrain, menimbulkan masalah yang diselidiki oleh netizen Indonesia dan PSSI. Gol kontroversial ini bahkan telah menyebar dan dibahas di komunitas sepak bola negara-negara Eropa. Peneliti menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif untuk menjelaskan kata-kata yang digunakan media dalam melaporkan berita. Data dikumpulkan dengan membaca berita dan menemukan beberapa data menggunakan alat bernama LancsBox. Setelah itu, data diklasifikasikan menjadi kata dan kelompok kata, lalu digabungkan untuk mengidentifikasi analisis teks, praktik diskursif, dan praktik sosial berdasarkan teori analisis diskursus kritis oleh Norman Fairclough (1996). Pada akhir studi, dapat disimpulkan bahwa peneliti menemukan kata-kata seperti "kontroversial" (42 token), "waktu tambahan" (14 contoh), "waktu cedera" (19 contoh), dan sebagainya. Peneliti juga menjelaskan bahwa kelompok kata "waktu tambahan" dan "waktu cedera" merujuk pada wasit yang memimpin pertandingan tersebut, sedangkan kata "kontroversial" merujuk pada wasit yang diduga melakukan tindakan ketidakadilan dalam tugasnya, yang menunjukkan bahwa ia berpihak pada tim Bahrain. Dari penelitian ini, peneliti berharap pembaca dapat memahami makna di balik pilihan kata yang digunakan dan dilaporkan oleh media internasional.

Kata kunci: Analisis Wacana Kritis; Laporan Media Internasional; Analisis Berbasis Korpus; Kualifikasi Piala Dunia 2026



INTRODUCTION

The world of football frequently occurs a wide variety of incidents, whether accidental or not, because of pure mistakes or there is an intentional element, whether it is an incident between players, coaches, referees, or the audiences. The events that occur in football matches are also often out of control, so as football enthusiasts we must know every detail of the match that is currently happening. Recently, there are several cases that are being explored by netizens in Indonesia. The case of Bahrain vs Indonesia in the World Cup 2026 Qualifiers match which caused some confusion and concern among the fans. This match away from Indonesia at the Bahrain National Stadium ended with a score of 2-2 by Mohamed Marhoon at 15' and 90' + 9', Ragnar Oratmangoen at 45' + 3', and also Rafael Struick at 74'. Unfortunately, Mohamed Marhoon's second goal caused a problem that will be investigated by both Indonesian netizens and PSSI (Football Association of Indonesia). Because this case was really discussed among the Indonesian people and also it will be reported to FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association) officials, this information has spread in another country and some European countries are even talking about it. This can be further explored using corpus analysis methods and covers some of the international media that reported on the Indonesia vs Bahrain incident.

International media is a media type focused on collecting data related to specific themes to create a news report. A lot of international media exist on social media, especially media related to sports news around the world. Among the media platforms covering sports in the English language are FIFA, BBC Sports, ESPN Official, The Straits Times, ANTARA News, and many more. Some of the media platforms above have their own particular style of writing the news. This research focused on how international media reports the match between Indonesia VS Bahrain.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher uses a book from Norman Fairclough within the title "Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language". "Critical Discourse Analysis is a research approach that examines how language is used in texts and social practices to reveal and challenge power relations and ideologies" (Fairclough, 1996). CDA aims to demystify how power operates through discourse and to promote social change by revealing hidden meanings and assumptions in language. According to Mukhroji (2016), there are three kinds of dimensions to analyze according to Fairclough such as sentence



structure, lexicon, and meaning. In his article titled “Critical Discourse Analysis on TV Program of Indonesian Lawyer Club in Perspective of Norman Fairclough”, found that there were implicatures giving pragmatic force which were found in each recording which enabled watchers to understand the speaker meaning easily.

Moreover, there is also an article written by Yankai Liu which about Chinese and American media coverage in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games with critical discourse analysis based on the corpus tools. Liu states that he wondered if this was an opportunity for politics to compete for the attention of those in power or if it is just an entertainment event for Olympic Games enthusiasts (Liu, 2024). This analysis can be using the corpus tools to find the meaning behind based on the people interaction in social media. The results of his analysis are narrative description or based on his thought with credible proof that occur in the software like Antcon.

Similar with two articles above, the last article written by Shuyi Amelia Sun which about language of sports including texts, media, and modalities using corpus approaches (Sun, 2020). The researcher hopes that readers can understand the broad scope of linguistic research on sports beyond football, being more able to highlight and study about sports language as it relates to both audio and visual communication. After reading and analyzing some research from those who use corpus analysis approach, most of them only use Antcon and their research is only based on word list and collocation. Therefore, this research will use other types such as word list, list of verbs, noun, and adjective, and also N-gram. The objective that the researcher hopes for by the end of this study is that readers can understand the issues that were discussed by the internet a few months ago after the qualifying match between Indonesia vs Bahrain and try to examine them in detail with a corpus approach and are able to express their opinions for the right thing.

RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher used qualitative method. According to (Neergaard et al., 2009), qualitative methods is a method used in research which contains the questions such as what, where, and who regarding an event or phenomenon that is lacking in understanding and is explained in the form of a description directly. The researcher used this method because the data in the form of media which is text from international media reports, so there is no calculation data and just explaining based on the data that we took. The researcher used the data, then read the news and used Lancsbox to find the word and word cluster, analyzed, and explained with the social phenomenon from this match. The main



research data for this research were some news from international media that reporting 2026 World Cup Qualifiers match between Indonesia vs Bahrain. The researcher analyzed with critical discourse analysis by Norman Fairclough's theory. The researcher chose this news because it caused some controversy atmosphere in the field due to the match and after the match. So, it was useful for the readers to know the language style commonly used by media.

The corpus that the researcher used consists of the way international media reports the controversies of Indonesia vs Bahrain match in World Cup Qualifiers 2026, since their match on October 10th, 2024 until now is followed by the other controversies whether it is from the match itself, the players, the referee, or from the supporters. This article covered a wide range of topics about the irregularities found by the people that involving the Omani referee in the match named Ahmed Al Kaf followed by the VAR referee named Abdullah Al Kandari dan Ali Iraq from Kuwait. For this article, the researcher used the platform google chrome to search the news. Specifically, the data for this research is sourced international news such as official news from FIFA, BBC Sport, and also ESPN official website, and also from the other website such as hello Indonesia, Vietnam news, news of Bahrain, and football tribe which are publicly available on the google with each specific website. These news texts were converted into plain text format (.txt) to ensure compatibility for corpus analysis and delete the spaces between the sentences (don't forget to save the file). Before analyzed these texts, the data should be clear and remove the irrelevant content, so that the data isn't mixed by the wasting stuff in the text. All of the data should put at one folder, so it won't mix with the other files.

After cleaning the data, it was processed and analyzed using an application named LancsBox. This application is a corpus linguistics software designed for linguistic analysis, enabling detailed examination of word frequencies within the data. The researcher used this application to find the credible data and it is easier way to do research especially when the data is on social media and don't have the hard file or physically one. This application is also used for the people who want to do research with the data out of our range. This application offers some types of the data, we can use word list to find the most word that the news used, then it has collocation to find the collocation of a word. There is N-Gram also to find before or after of a word that they usually use. Last is KWIC to find the noun word, verb word, also adjective word in some news. In this research use critical discourse

analysis by Fairclough (1996) which discussed about the lexical word that occur in a text can identify about the meaning behind if we research and examine them one by one.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Word List Frequency

WORD	FREQ	WORD	FREQ	WORD	FREQ	WORD	FREQ
Bahrain	220	Referee	99	National	61	Afc	50
Indonesia	216	Football	91	Goal	58	Pssi	46
Match	162	Team	88	Fifa	51	Fans	45
Indonesian	127	Time	87	Minute	51	Said	45
		World	85			Controversial	42
		Cup	75			Players	42
						Minutes	42
						Al	42

The researcher presented this discussion based on Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis theory with a model of three-dimensional analysis. This analysis focused on three key words as identified through data found in LancsBox, which are “referee,” “controversial,” and “stoppage time.” These words frequently appeared in international media reports covering the Indonesia vs. Bahrain World Cup Qualifier match and represented how language shapes certain ideologies surrounding justice, authority, and power in global sports discourse.

Textual Analysis

In this textual analysis, the researcher focused on the use of words and meanings that are possibly used by most international media. First, the word “referee” was mostly paired with the words “free kick” and “did not blow” as shown in the KWIC in Lancsbox. Such as in the sentences “Unfortunately, until 90'+6’, the referee did not blow the long whistle“ and ”When Rafael Struick was fouled in front of the Bahrain penalty box, but the referee did not award a free kick and only decided on a drop ball" explicitly show that the international media reported on the active role of the referee, portrayed him as a source of injustice rather than a neutral enforcer of the rules, as evidenced by the referee's fair treatment of Indonesia when a foul happened.

Similar to the previous words, the word “controversial” was often paired with the words “2-2 draw” and “decision.” In the sentences “The match ended in a 2-2 draw after a controversial decision by Al -Kaf to extend injury time allowing Bahrain to equalize outside the set “and” Bahrain had requested to move the match, scheduled for March



2025, citing safety concerns following a controversial 2-2 draw with Indonesia in a previous match" showed that the international media also used the same language towards Bahrain, who were considered to be scared of having an away match in Indonesia due to the previous match led by the referee from Oman, Ahmed Al-Kaf.

Third, in the word cluster "stoppage time," which was often paired with the words "allowed" and "continued." As in the sentence "Indonesia was leading 2-1, but Al-Kaf's decision to extend the match beyond the allotted six minutes of stoppage time allowed Bahrain's Muhamed Marhoon to score in the 90'+9' minute" and in the sentence "Referee Al-Kaf gave six minutes of stoppage time, but continued the match until the 90'+9' minute." These sentences both convey the same message, that the referee wasn't accurate in his duties, which allowed the other team to score a goal that was considered invalid by the public because the injury time had been extended too much. These patterns of linguistic interpretation reinforce the narrative of inequality and emotional bias in most international media reports.

Discursive Practice

According to discursive practice, the selection of attractive words and sentences is a duty, allowing the media to reflect their way of reporting something. A news report highlighted by journalists and editors must hold dramatic elements to maintain the audience's engagement. In this case, the referee was the main focus, and stoppage time was the evidence of a controversial incident that occurred on the field. Other media sources repeated similar expressions, making what Fairclough (1996) terms of intertextuality, which means the repetition and transformation of existing discourse in various texts. Those readers who read from several media sources also noticed some similarities in the coverage, which cornered both Bahrain and the referee.

This contributed to the discourse on injustice, putting Indonesia as the victim of a biased referee and Bahrain as the intended recipient of institutional power. The presence of this discourse, which can be widely disseminated through digital media, online news portals, and social media platforms, can strengthen the emotional response and moral outrage among viewers. The word "referee" becomes a discursive symbol of distrust, while "extra time" serves as evidence in the public debate about fairness in soccer.

Social Practice

According to Fairclough (1996), these CDA analysis show a correlation between the language used by the media and the concept of ideology or social strata. The third model



analysis showed that terms such as referee, controversial, and stoppage time weren't just terms with specific meanings. These terms implied and were connected to ideological tensions in global sports discourse. The choice of these words wasn't neutral, which signaled the struggle for justice, legitimacy, and institutional power in international soccer. As in the case of the Bahrain Football Association, which had more power than the Indonesian Football Association. As stated in Fairclough's theory (1996), discourse can function as a reflection of social status, especially when compared to the current president of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), according to the official AFC website, namely Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, who has been president of the AFC since 2013 and represents the nationality of Bahrain. Within this context, discourse related to the match reinforces public skepticism toward authority while simultaneously legitimate institutional dominance. A paradox that maintains the power of global sports organizations.

In the end, regulations and laws related to international soccer operations are managed by the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and the AFC itself. Besides these officials, fairness would be difficult to enforce and it would be hard for smaller federations to develop on the international level due to resistance from these officials. It revealed how the media functions as an arena for ideological negotiation. Controversies surrounded by referees' decisions became a medium for audiences to challenge the global hierarchy, express opposition, and redefine justice according to their own perceptions. These linguistic and discursive patterns found in the data reflected within the context of micro-politics of language use, as well as larger struggles for recognition, legitimacy, and equality in the global sports arena.

CONCLUSION(S)

In this study, it was found that many international media outlets contained biased language when reporting on a topic. In the case of Indonesia vs. Bahrain, many media outlets were found to be biased, as they focused on one side that had the power and were able to influence the outcome of the match. In football, it isn't just in Asia, but throughout the world it is applied. With power, it is possible to control what happens in the field. A suggestion for the next study can choose a topic related to football by analyzing about power representation. Issues that lead to power over everything in football world can be determined by performing actions that constitute foul play, especially in the case of



referees, where the issue is explained more detailed and concrete evidences can be taken in the upcoming media reports in case a lot of similar irregularities are found.

REFERENCES

- Fairclough, N. (1996). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (pp. 1–224). Longman Group.
- Liu, Y. (2024). *Sport or politics? A corpus-based critical discourse analysis of chinese and american media coverage of the paris 2024 olympic games*. 168–184. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2024.1210014>
- Mukhroji, M. (2016). *Critical discourse analysis on tv program of indonesian lawyer club in perspective of norman fairclough*. 8(1), 45–54.
- Neergaard, M. A., Olesen, F., Andersen, R. S., & Sondergaard, J. (2009). Qualitative description-the poor cousin of health research? *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 9(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-9-52>
- Sun, S. A. (2020). *Book review: Corpus approaches to the language of sports (texts, media, modalities)*. 2(1), 23–27.