

RESEARCH ARTICLE



HOW NEWS COVERAGE OF NADIEM MAKARIM'S PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE MERDEKA BELAJAR POLICY IN TEMPO CONSTRUCTED: FAIRCLOUGH'S THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF CDA

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ABSTRACT

This study uses Fairclough's Three-Dimensional model to examine how media discourse legitimizes education policy through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Focusing on a Tempo.co news article reporting on Nadiem Makarim's public statement about the Merdeka Belajar policy, the research explores how language, media practice, and sociopolitical context interact to construct policy authority and public acceptance. The analysis reveals how lexical strategies, nominalization, passivization, and transitivity position the policy as rational and transformative. Through intertextual analysis, the article's reliance on governmental sources and indirect reporting marginalizes dissenting perspectives while enhancing perceived objectivity. Social analysis situates this linguistic framing within Indonesia's post-reformasi educational landscape, highlighting the ideological struggle between centralized control and stakeholder democratization. The findings demonstrate that language use in the article reproduces institutional authority by legitimizing reform discourse, omitting contesting voices, and reinforcing modernization narratives. The paper contributes to educational discourse studies and CDA research in Southeast Asia by integrating textual, intertextual, and sociopolitical dimensions. It also highlights the importance of diversified source inclusion and media literacy in policy reporting. The study recommends that future research adopt multimodal discourse analysis to examine visual and audiovisual policy representations or conduct comparative analyses across media platforms to uncover how different outlets shape education reform perception. For policymakers and educators, the research offers critical insights into how public communication can entrench or challenge power asymmetries in education governance.

Introduction

The Merdeka Belajar policy, launched by Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture in 2019 under Minister Nadiem Makarim, represents one of the most ambitious educational reforms in recent history. Designed to grant schools and universities greater autonomy, the program seeks to enable institutions to develop curricula and learning methods tailored to both local contexts and global demands. At its core, the Merdeka Curriculum promotes experiential learning by integrating internships, research projects, and interdisciplinary collaborations. These initiatives aim to foster creativity, enhance critical thinking, and produce graduates capable of navigating the complexities of a rapidly changing world (Maghfirah, 2024; Tobondo, 2024).

Despite its progressive vision, the implementation of Merdeka Belajar has faced uneven adoption across educational levels. Structural disparities such as unequal distribution of resources, inadequate infrastructure, and limited teacher training have significantly constrained its transformative potential (Maghfirah, 2024; Hasriani et al., 2024). In many rural and underfunded schools, the lack of technological facilities and pedagogical support has hindered the application of project-based and interdisciplinary approaches

envisioned by the reform. As a result, a gap emerges between the aspirational rhetoric of the policy and the lived realities of classrooms.

This disjuncture highlights the importance of critically examining how Merdeka Belajar is represented, interpreted, and legitimized in public discourse. While previous research has explored its operational challenges—ranging from infrastructural deficits to uneven professional development (Prayitno & Mahmudi, 2025)—less attention has been paid to the communicative processes through which the policy is framed for public consumption. Given the media's role in shaping public opinion and policy reception, news coverage becomes a critical site for studying how narratives surrounding Merdeka Belajar are constructed. Media discourse does not merely relay information; it selectively frames issues, emphasizes certain perspectives, and downplays others, thereby shaping the ideological and power dynamics within education reform debates. Analyzing these discursive strategies offers valuable insights into how policy legitimacy is negotiated, contested, and sustained within the broader socio-political landscape.

In recent years, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has expanded beyond Fairclough's (1995) foundational framework, integrating perspectives from framing theory, modality studies, and discourse-historical approaches (Rogers et al., 2016; Wodak, 2024). Rogers et al. (2016) underscore the importance of interrogating how educational discourses position various stakeholders, particularly in the context of reform policies that directly impact power relations among government, educators, and the public. Wodak (2024) further challenges the assumption that media outlets function merely as passive conveyors of information, arguing instead that they actively reproduce and reshape ideological narratives. This recognition shifts CDA toward examining the media's role as an agent of political and cultural influence, especially in contentious or transformative policy debates.

Metaphor and evaluative lexis also significantly shape public reception of education reforms, as demonstrated in Koller's (2017) study. The choice of figurative language, descriptive terms, and evaluative frames can subtly steer readers toward accepting, questioning, or rejecting policy agendas. In the Indonesian context, *Tempo*—a leading online daily with a reformist editorial identity offers a compelling site for such investigation. Given its extensive readership and authoritative standing, every lexical choice, headline framing, and reporting mode deployed by *Tempo* carries significant ideological implications. Studying its coverage of Merdeka Belajar, therefore, not only reveals the mechanics of policy legitimation but also illustrates how a mainstream news outlet may simultaneously reflect and reinforce existing power dynamics. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of CDA remains a particularly effective analytical tool for this purpose, as it connects the micro-level analysis of textual features to the meso-level examination of discursive practices and the macro-level consideration of broader socio-cultural contexts. Through this model, it becomes possible to trace how language choices in *Tempo*'s coverage are intertwined with institutional routines and socio-political conditions, thereby shaping public discourse on education reform.

Previous CDA research on Nadiem Makarim's public communication, such as Febriansyah et al. (2024), which analyzed his National Education Day speech, highlights how rhetorical strategies can simultaneously foster stakeholder engagement and consolidate governmental authority. However, scholarship has yet to address the intersection between media framing and policy discourse in this domain. Specifically, little is known about how news sources, narrative structures, and contextual cues influence the representation of Merdeka Belajar's objectives, challenges, and ideological underpinnings. This gap underscores the value of a media-based CDA approach, which allows for the systematic examination of how journalistic practices and editorial stances mediate public understanding of reform policies. Focusing on *Tempo* as a case study, the research deepens the understanding of the media's discursive role in shaping education reform debates. It contributes to broader conversations about the interplay between language, ideology, and power in Indonesian public life.

To address this gap, the present study adopts Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis to examine a *Tempo.co* news article reporting Nadiem Makarim's public statement on Merdeka Belajar. This model enables discourse analysis at three interconnected levels: textual analysis, discursive practice, and socio-cultural practice, thereby offering a comprehensive lens to uncover the ideological work performed by media texts. The textual dimension focuses on micro-level linguistic features such as lexical

choices, syntactic transformations, and transitivity patterns, which shape the representation of actors, actions, and events within the policy discourse.

At the level of discursive practice, the study pays particular attention to intertextuality, tracing how Tempo.co draws upon, integrates, or recontextualizes other sources such as ministerial press releases, prior news coverage, and expert commentaries to frame Merdeka Belajar. This dimension is crucial in understanding the media's role as an information conduit and a meaning-making agent, selectively amplifying certain voices while marginalizing others. By mapping these intertextual connections, the analysis reveals how the policy is discursively positioned within broader narratives of educational reform, national development, and global competitiveness.

The socio-cultural practice dimension situates the news text within Indonesia's contemporary political and educational landscape, marked by ongoing debates about decentralization, quality improvement, and equity in access to learning opportunities. It examines how structural factors such as ministerial authority, public trust in government, and the media's institutional identity mediate the production and reception of the news report. This dimension also considers the ideological underpinnings that inform Tempo.co's editorial stance, including its historical positioning as a reformist outlet.

By integrating these three dimensions, the research aims to reveal the discursive strategies through which Merdeka Belajar is legitimized, contested, or reframed in the public sphere. Such an approach contributes to the growing body of CDA scholarship on education policy and advances the understanding of language's central role in mediating reform discourse in Indonesia. In doing so, it underscores the broader implications of media framing for public perception, stakeholder alignment, and the long-term sustainability of policy initiatives.

Materials and Methods

The present study employs a qualitative, interpretive design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically applying Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model (1995) as the guiding analytical framework. This approach is particularly suited to exploring how language in media texts constructs, legitimizes, or challenges policy discourse, as it integrates micro-level textual analysis with meso-level discursive practices and macro-level socio-political contexts. The primary data consists of a single online news article from Tempo.co in which Minister Nadiem Makarim articulates the Merdeka Belajar policy. This article was selected through purposive sampling due to its prominence in public discourse, comprehensive coverage of the Minister's statements, and representative features of Tempo.co's political reporting style. By focusing on one highly salient text, the research allows for an in-depth, layered analysis across all three CDA dimensions.

Data collection began with verbatim transcription of the news article to preserve the original linguistic features and structural organization. Repeated close readings followed this to familiarize the researcher with the text's nuances. An iterative coding scheme was then developed to capture three primary textual elements: (1) lexical choices, including evaluative lexis and modality; (2) transformation processes such as nominalization and passivization (Fairclough, 1992); and (3) transitivity patterns following Halliday's systemic functional grammar (Halliday et al., 2004). In addition, the coding also addressed intertextual features—specifically, the types of sources cited, modes of reporting (direct, indirect, or mixed), and patterns of attribution. Socio-political references were also documented to connect the text with Indonesia's broader educational reform landscape.

The analysis proceeded systematically through Fairclough's three stages. Micro-level textual features were identified and cataloged in the description stage according to the coding scheme. This was enriched with triangulation from contemporary discourse theories, including Rogers et al. (2016) on modality and positioning, and Koller (2017) on metaphor and evaluative lexis in policy discourse. In the interpretation stage, intertextual analysis examined how Tempo.co integrated or excluded external voices, paying attention to whose perspectives were amplified and marginalized. The explanation stage then situated these discursive patterns within Indonesia's socio-political context, drawing on secondary literature, policy documents, and historical accounts of education reform to unpack how the Merdeka Belajar narrative reflects and shapes broader power relations.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed peer debriefing with another CDA specialist, providing an external check on interpretations and coding reliability. An audit trail of analytical decisions was maintained to ensure methodological transparency and replicability. This rigorous process ensures that conclusions about the construction of legitimacy and power in *Merdeka Belajar* discourse are well-founded, analytically transparent, and sensitive to both linguistic detail and contextual complexity.

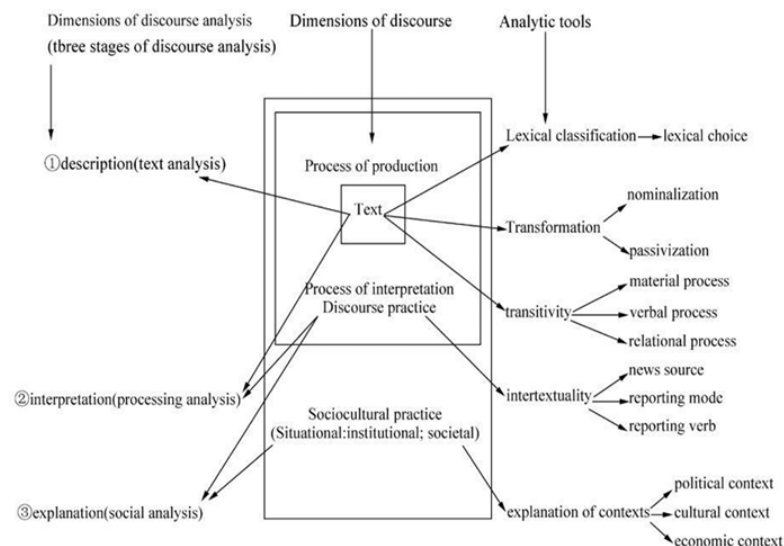


Figure 1. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are structured following the analytical scheme presented in Figure 1, which maps Fairclough's Three-Dimensional model onto the specific discursive strategies found in the Tempo.co article reporting Nadiem Makarim's *Merdeka Belajar* statement.

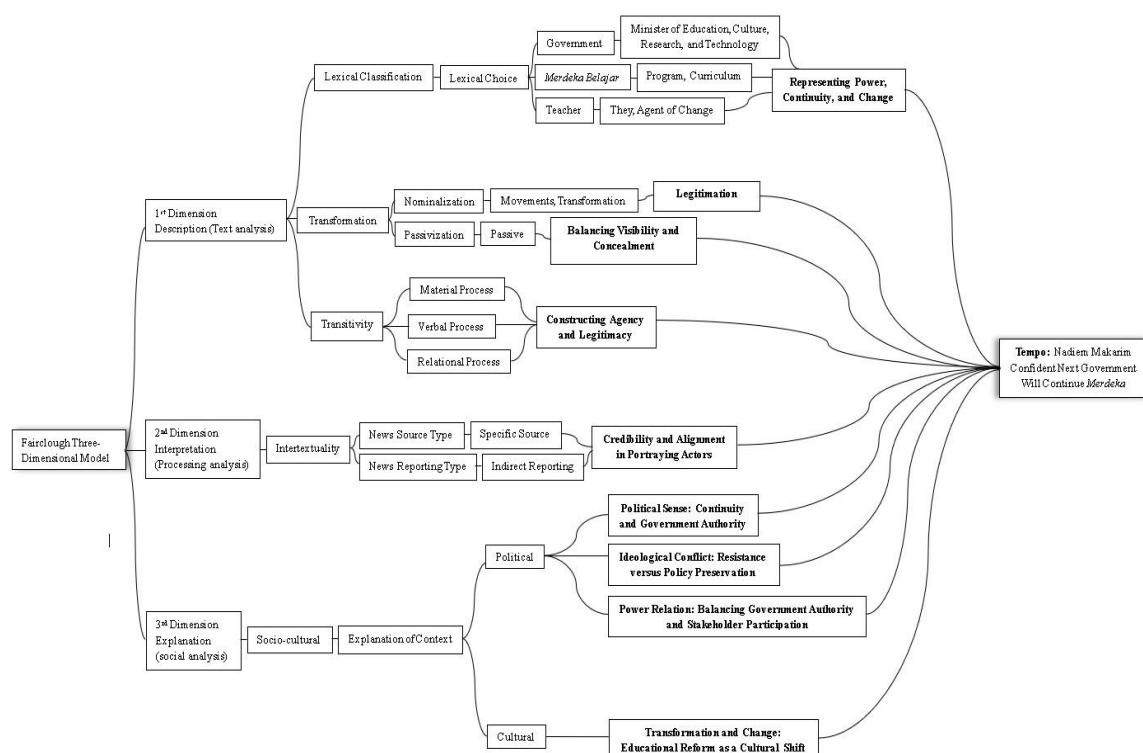


Figure 2. Findings Schema of the Fairclough Three-Dimensional Model in Nadiem Makarim's public statements on Tempo

The results are presented following Fairclough’s three-dimensional analytical model, which encompasses the description stage (text analysis), processing analysis (intertextuality), and social analysis (socio-political context). Each dimension reveals how language is mobilized to construct, legitimize, and reinforce the Merdeka Belajar policy discourse.

In the description stage, the analysis identifies three clusters of textual strategies that dominate the Tempo.co coverage. The first cluster is the strategic use of lexical choice, which frames Merdeka Belajar as both authoritative and transformative. Key terms such as “Merdeka Belajar”, “program”, and “curriculum” are consistently paired with actor labels like “teacher”, “student”, and “agent of change”, positioning the Ministry of Education and educators as central drivers of systemic progress. This lexical framing implicitly reinforces the government’s ownership over the reform narrative while assigning moral and professional responsibility to educational stakeholders. Such diction also works to naturalize the policy’s objectives as self-evidently necessary and beneficial, thus reducing space for counter-discourse. A detailed table (presented in the following section) exemplifies how these terms occur within the news article, illustrating the frequency, context, and collocational patterns in which they appear. For instance, “Merdeka Belajar” is often embedded in clauses emphasizing empowerment and innovation, while “teacher” is linked to verbs of agency and transformation, such as “implement,” “guide,” and “innovate.” These patterns foreground the actors as active agents and embed an ideological stance that aligns with reformist and developmentalist discourses in education.

| News Agencies | Sentences |
|---------------|--|
| Tempo.co | <p>Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Nadiem Makarim believes that the next government will not eliminate the <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> program. (example 1)</p> <p>This is because the program initiated in his era is considered to have provided benefits for teachers, students, and schools. (example 2)</p> <p>Nadiem explained that the <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> curriculum as part of the <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> program has also contributed to increasing student literacy and numeracy over the past 3 years. (example 3)</p> <p>"It's different from schools that don't implement the <i>Merdeka</i> curriculum. They experience learning loss " he said. (example 4)</p> <p>"They are agents of change in the transformation of education," said Nadiem. (example 5)</p> |

Table 1. The Example of Word Choices on Government, Merdeka Belajar, and Teacher

Based on the news article above, through lexical choices, Tempo uses several alternative terms to refer to the Government, Merdeka Belajar, and Teachers. In example one, the use of the formal designation "Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology" reinforces Nadiem's legitimacy and authority in shaping education policy. This helps construct a narrative in which the government plays a central role as the policy maker in the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar*. The phrase also directly connects Nadiem's official role with his belief that the next administration will continue the Merdeka Belajar program, portraying the government as a guarantor of policy continuity.

In the example two, the term "program" is used to show that *Merdeka Belajar* consists of a series of systematic initiatives with clear goals and measurable outcomes. It frames the policy as a movement that involves various stakeholders such as teachers, students, and schools.

Then, in the example three and four, the term "curriculum" is used to highlight that *Merdeka Belajar*, initially an abstract policy, has been translated into tangible practices at the operational level in schools. This usage focuses on enhancing literacy and numeracy and preventing learning loss, associating the policy with significant educational reform.

In the example five, the term "Agent of Change" acknowledges teachers as key figures in educational transformation. This labels positions teachers as the primary actors in implementing the policy and leading

change. It reflects a positive perception that the policy empowers teachers to actively address educational challenges.

From the explanation above regarding the alternative terms used for the government, *Merdeka Belajar*, and teachers, it can be interpreted that such terms are strategically employed to reinforce the narrative of their respective roles in the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. Therefore, it can be concluded that the government is described as the guarantor of continuity, *Merdeka Belajar* as a structured reform initiative, and teachers as both implementers and agents of change.

Second, transformation process, notably nominalization “movements,” “transformation” and passivization generalize agency and foreground institutional legitimacy, as reflected in the legitimization node.

| News Agencies | Sentences |
|---------------|---|
| Tempo.co | <p>“I am sure the program will continue. Because <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> has become a movement,” said Nadiem... (example 1)</p> <p>This number is a major achievement because teacher leaders help carry out the transformation of the <i>Merdeka</i> curriculum. (example 3)</p> |

Table 2. The Example of Nominalization Data

In Example 1, Tempo.co used movement as a nominalization, which is the noun form of the verb move. The word movement here also stems from the nominalization of collective actions such as moving. The sentence does not specify who made *Merdeka Belajar* a movement, nor is it explained who was involved in creating this movement. This omission makes the program appear as something already accepted and beyond debate, thus functioning as a legitimization of the policy. In this context, the *Merdeka Belajar* movement portrays not merely as an administrative policy but as a social phenomenon involving the active participation of many parties.

In Example 3, Tempo.co used transformation as a nominalization, which is the noun form of the verb transform. The term transformation also results from nominalizing an active process such as transformation. The sentence does not identify who initiated this transformation. While Teacher Leaders are mentioned, their role does not clarify who the main decision-making actors are. This absence of attribution diminishes the impression of direct government control and instead suggests that the change was participatory. Here, transformation refers to significant shifts in the education system toward implementing the more flexible, student-centered *Merdeka* curriculum.

From these examples, it can be concluded that the use of nominalizations such as movement and transformation helps frame *Merdeka Belajar* as a collective endeavor that drives substantial change in the education sector, thereby legitimizing the policy.

Third, transitivity patterns favor material and relational processes with the minister as an actor, thereby “constructing agency and legitimacy” by portraying him as the initiator and guarantor of educational reform. The processing analysis focuses on intertextuality. The article predominantly cites Nadiem’s own statements and unnamed future stakeholders, employing indirect reporting to lend an air of objective distance while subtly aligning with the policy narrative “Credibility and Alignment in Portraying Actors.” The text generates a “Political Sense” of seamless policy continuity and unchallenged governmental authority by privileging the Minister's voice and omitting counter-voices. The limited source diversity also contributes to an “Ideological Conflict” framing in which resistance is marginalized and policy preservation is normalized.

To represent the actors, this stage primarily addresses the intertextual aspects of the text. Analyzing the processes within news discourse is carried out by examining how speech is reported, particularly through identifying news sources and modes of reporting. In the articles news, journalists focused on education policies concerning the *Merdeka Belajar* program. They often supported their perspective by selectively quoting certain individuals. In specific instances, they used quotation marks and reporting verbs to indicate the voice of the person being cited or referenced from other texts. For example, journalists from Tempo.co quoted social actors such as former Minister of Education Nadiem Makarim. The way these texts are constructed is not arbitrary, it serves a political purpose. This study will uncover the dominant types of news sources and reporting modes found in the articles through the following tables and detailed explanations.

| Reporting Types | Frequency |
|--------------------|-----------|
| | Tempo.co |
| Direct Reporting | 4 |
| Indirect Reporting | 7 |

Table 3. News Reporting Type

Table 2 indicates that the total instances of reported speech amounted to 11, comprising 4 cases of direct reporting and 7 cases of indirect reporting. This distribution suggests that Tempo.co demonstrates a stronger preference for indirect reporting, allowing the news outlet greater flexibility in paraphrasing, summarizing, and framing the speaker’s message within its own narrative voice. Such a tendency reflects a discursive strategy that subtly mediates the original statement through editorial interpretation, potentially shaping how readers perceive the intent and tone of the source speech.

| News Source Types | Frequency |
|----------------------|-----------|
| | Tempo.co |
| Specific Source | 6 |
| Semi-Specific Source | 1 |
| Unspecific Source | 1 |

Table 4. News Source Type

The analysis identified a total of eight news sources referenced in the article, comprising six specific sources, one semi-specific source, and one unspecific source. The predominance of specific sources indicates *Tempo.co*’s inclination toward citing identifiable and authoritative voices—such as named government officials or institutional representatives—to enhance the credibility and perceived legitimacy of the *Merdeka Belajar* discourse. The presence of a single semi-specific source (e.g., “an education observer”) and one unspecific source (e.g., “according to experts”) suggests a limited but strategic use of generalized attributions, which may serve to frame certain points as part of a broader consensus or to introduce perspectives without anchoring them to a verifiable speaker. This distribution of source types reflects editorial choices that balance authority with narrative control, enabling the news outlet to reinforce key arguments while maintaining flexibility in framing contentious or interpretive claims.

| News Agencies | Type | Sentences |
|---------------|---------------|--|
| Tempo.co | Specific | Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Nadiem Makarim believes that the next government will not eliminate the <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> program. (example 1) |
| | Semi-specific | In addition, alumni from the Merdeka Campus as part of the <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> program will also definitely protest. (example 2) |
| | Unspecific | In addition, over the past 3 years, there have been 94,685 teachers who have participated in the teacher Leader training with a total of 61,256 teachers graduating. (example 3) |

Table 5. The Example of News Sources Type Sentences

Table 4 shows that Tempo.co predominantly relied on specific news sources. In example one, the source is Nadiem Makarim, the former Minister of Education, who expressed his confidence that the *Merdeka Belajar* program would continue even after his tenure ended. This is classified as a specific source because it includes both its full name and official title. In example two, the source is an alumnus of the *Merdeka* Campus program who stated they would protest if the program were discontinued. This is categorized as a

semi-specific source, as it refers to a group without identifying a particular individual. In example three, the source is unclear-it presents data on *Merdeka Belajar's* achievements over the past three years but does not mention where the data originates. This is considered an unspecific source since the statistical information is provided without citing any identifiable origin.

Therefore, the inclusion of Nadiem Makarim as a specific source suggests that Tempo.co aimed to enhance the objectivity and credibility of the article. Given that all specific sources come from government figures, it can also be inferred that the article intends to highlight and promote Nadiem's accomplishments, particularly those related to the *Merdeka Belajar* program.

| News Agencies | Sentences |
|---------------|---|
| Tempo.co | <p>"I am sure the program will continue. Because <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> has become a movement," said Nadiem. (example 1)</p> <p>"They might not allow it," Nadiem said. (example 2)</p> |

Table 6. The Example of Direct Reporting

In example one, Tempo.co presents Nadiem Makarim's belief that the continuity of the program is guaranteed because it has already developed into a broader movement. In example two, Tempo.co highlights Nadiem's implication that certain groups may oppose any changes to the policy. Indirectly, the news article underscores that the implementation of this policy has had a positive impact on enhancing the quality of education.

As shown in the reporting types table above (see Table 2), Tempo.co most frequently employed indirect speech in its news reporting. According to Fairclough (1992), indirect speech is considered less reliable, as it may fail to represent the original ideas and language of the source faithfully. This form of reporting allows for the possibility of distortion and manipulation. Based on this observation, it can be concluded that the journalists at Tempo.co demonstrated bias in their portrayal of government figures by favoring indirect speech over direct quotations. The use of indirect reporting is particularly evident in how the speech of certain social actors, listed in the table below, is presented.

| Social Actors | Frequency |
|-----------------|-----------|
| | Tempo.co |
| Nadiem Makarim | 3 |
| Teachers | 3 |
| Students | 1 |
| Schools | 1 |
| Alumni | 1 |
| Teacher Leaders | 1 |

Table 7. Indirect Reporting of Social Actors

Table six demonstrates that although the sources used are specific, Tempo.co's reliance on indirect reporting reflects the subjectivity of certain social actors, particularly Nadiem Makarim, the former Minister of Education, who holds the authority to shape education policy. This subjectivity is evident in the way the information is paraphrased rather than directly quoted. Such a reporting strategy may serve to strengthen the overall narrative by emphasizing the credibility of government sources, with Nadiem representing the government. It also highlights the involvement of key social actors such as teachers, alumni, and Teacher Leaders in supporting the policy. Additionally, it helps to construct the impression that the policy enjoys broad public support, through the use of statistical data and indirect statements that associate various groups with the success of the program.

| News Agencies | Sentences |
|---------------|---|
| Tempo.co | Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Nadiem Makarim believes that the next government will not eliminate the <i>Merdeka Belajar</i> program. (example 1) This is because the program initiated in his era is considered to have provided benefits for teachers, students, and schools. (example 2) |

Table 8. The Example of Data Indirect Reporting

Based on Table seven, all of the reported content emphasizes the reasoning behind the continuation of the *Merdeka Belajar* program namely, that it has brought significant benefits and that replacing it could lead to controversy. In examples one and two, Tempo.co journalists used reporting verbs such as believes and considered, indicating that the statements may not fully reflect the original wording. This suggests an element of subjectivity in how the information was conveyed.

From the data presented above, it can be concluded that Tempo.co effectively directed readers' attention toward the government by consistently highlighting it as a key social actor by including credible sources from government representatives. However, the reporting also shows signs of subjectivity, particularly using indirect quotations, which indicates a strong editorial influence in shaping how the government's role is presented.

After knowing the representation from the description and interpretation stages, the news article will be analyzed through social practices or explanations involving the relationship between discourse practices and socio-cultural practices.

In the social analysis, discourse features are situated within socio-political and cultural contexts. Politically, the narrative constructs a dual tension between progressive reform and the threat of regression, thereby reinforcing elite-driven legitimacy and power relation that balance government authority with token stakeholder inclusion. Culturally, the text appeals to national values of Indonesia's modernization. These dimensions reveal a multi-layered ideological process in which textual choices, intertextual practices, and contextual framing coalesce to naturalize the policy as urgent, rational, and inevitable. Below are the findings from the third layer, namely Explanation (social analysis).

Political Sense: Continuity and Government Authority

The sustainability of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy remains a pivotal issue within the evolving landscape of Indonesia's education sector. As the reform architect, former Minister of Education Nadiem Makarim conveyed both confidence and optimism regarding the policy's endurance beyond his tenure. His assertion underscores a belief that the program's foundational principles such as curricular flexibility, learner-centered pedagogy, and institutional autonomy have gained sufficient institutional traction to withstand political transitions. In discourse terms, this statement functions as a reassurance to stakeholders and a strategic act of policy legitimation, framing *Merdeka Belajar* as an enduring national agenda rather than a ministerial project tied to a single political figure. This rhetorical positioning seeks to align the policy with broader, long-term educational aspirations, thereby reinforcing its perceived inevitability and resilience against potential shifts in administrative priorities.

Ideological Conflict: Resistance versus Policy Preservation

The *Merdeka Belajar* policy, initiated by former Indonesian Minister of Education Nadiem Makarim, has generated support and provoked considerable controversy and resistance from various societal groups. Critics from education practitioners to policy analysts argue that the reform's implementation has been uneven, with its benefits disproportionately accessible to institutions with greater resources and infrastructural capacity. These opposing voices often stem from deeper ideological disagreements, questioning the policy's alignment with national educational values, its perceived neoliberal orientation, and its reliance on decentralized autonomy as a primary driver of quality improvement. In public discourse, such critiques frame *Merdeka Belajar* as an aspirational yet flawed project, highlighting gaps between the

policy's rhetoric and classroom realities. This ideological contestation reveals underlying tensions over the direction of Indonesia's educational development, particularly concerning equity, cultural relevance, and the balance between global competitiveness and local needs.

Transformation and Change: Educational Reform as a Cultural Shift

The Merdeka Belajar policy is framed as a transformative reform, promising substantial shifts in both the administrative architecture and the cultural fabric of Indonesia's education system. Within this narrative, educators occupy a central position as the primary agents through whom change is enacted. Media reports frequently highlight the stories of teachers who have successfully embraced new pedagogical approaches, positioning them as "agents of change" tasked with translating policy aspirations into classroom realities. This discursive positioning legitimizes the reform and personalizes its success, suggesting that systemic change is contingent on individual commitment and adaptability. One tangible manifestation of this support is the proliferation of intensive workshop programs, which serve as structured spaces for reorienting teaching paradigms toward creativity, critical thinking, and student-centered learning. Such representations reinforce the perception that Merdeka Belajar is not merely an administrative directive but a cultural shift that redefines teachers' identity and professional agency within Indonesia's evolving educational landscape.

Power Relations: Balancing Government Authority and Stakeholder Participation

The concept of power relations within education reform-particularly in the context of Indonesia's *Merdeka Belajar* policy-reflects the intricate dynamics between governmental authority and the active engagement of educational stakeholders. These power relations are established through formal policies and regulations also shaped by the participation of educators and institutions in the reform process. The effectiveness of such reform relies heavily on the alignment between the central government's strategic direction and the involvement of teachers, who function as agents of change within the educational landscape.

Micro Analysis Tringulation

The text also features metaphorical expressions such as "movement" and "agents of change," framing the policy as a socially driven transformation. Modality appears frequently, with expressions like "will continue," "will not eliminate," and "might not allow," indicating epistemic certainty and constructing inevitability. Negation and evaluative lexis reinforce binary logic between progress and decline, while presuppositions normalize the perceived benefits of the policy without presenting alternatives.

Discussion

The present study's findings demonstrate how Tempos report on Nadiem Makarim's *Merdeka Belajar* statement strategically employs linguistic strategies to construct policy legitimacy. At the description (textual analysis) the frequent use of terms such as "program," "curriculum," and "agent of change," together with nominalization "movements," and "transformation" and the dominance of material in transitivity process, foreground the policy as an inevitable and authoritative project. This mirrors Fitriyana and Hidayani (2024) observation that media texts package *Merdeka Belajar* with language that naturalizes reform as socially unproblematic. In processing analysis (intertextuality) the privileging of the Minister's voiced authority and the exclusion of dissenting perspective create a veneer of journalistic balance while effectively silencing counter-narratives. Febriansyah et al. (2024) similarly note that political speeches on National Education Day leverage selective quoting to align audiences with governmental agendas. This study extends this insight by showing how even indirect reporting, when restricted to a single source type, function as "credibility and alignment" tools rather than neutral reportage.

While the Tempo.co article foregrounds Nadiem Makarim's voice as the sole authoritative source, this selective intertextuality effectively silences other stakeholder perspectives-teachers, students, and parents, thereby constructing a monologic policy narrative. As shown in Table 3, 4, 5 and 7, all citations derive from either the Minister himself or anonymous future actors (e.g., "teachers who feel the benefits..."), with zero instances of direct quotes from grassroots participants.

This omission has three ideological effects. First, Source Monopoly by privileging a single institutional voice, the text enacts what Van Leeuwen (2021) in Yu & Zheng (2023) calls "authorization", granting the Ministry exclusive epistemic authority over policy interpretation. Second, Voicelessness, the absence of teacher or student quotations embodies Fairclough's notion of "silence" as a discursive strategy-marginalizing potential dissent and foreclosing critical debate (Fairclough, 1995). Third, Manufactured Consensus, indirect references to "protests" and "benefits" without firsthand testimony create a simulacrum of public consensus, aligning with Wodak's (2024) insights on how media discourse can manufacture social cohesion around elite-driven agendas.

Incorporating explicit voices from teachers or alumni-through interviews, social media posts, or follow-up articles would diversify source types also challenge the manufactured consensus. For example, adding a brief quotation such as "As a teacher-leader participant, I have experienced both benefits and challenges of implementing *Merdeka Belajar*" would introduce a counter-narrative that problems the policy's universal acceptance. The study exposes how journalistic practices on Tempo by critically interrogating this intertextual imbalance.co function as ideological machinery-choosing whom to hear and whom to render silent.

Political Sense: Continuity and Government Authority

Based on the findings presented in the Description and Interpretation sections, there is a direct statement from Nadiem Makarim that reinforces his confidence in the continuity of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. For example, the sentence "Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Nadiem Makarim believes that the next government will not eliminate the *Merdeka Belajar* program" reflects this conviction. The use of direct reporting and the emphasis on a specific source Nadiem himself serve to construct a strong image of government authority.

Nadiem's public statements are strategically framed to convey robust governmental authority and policy continuity. This is achieved through assertive lexical choices and sentence structures that foreground official figures (Fairclough, 1995). Moreover, the use of a formal and confident tone communicates to the public a sense of sustained governmental commitment to educational modernization. Consequently, this narrative affirms the government's authority also promotes the perception that *Merdeka Belajar* is a vital and strategic policy for advancing national education. Ultimately, it reinforces an ideology of reformism and modernization within the discourse.

Ideological Conflict: Resistance versus Policy Preservation

In the earlier findings, indirect reporting revealed implied resistance or the possibility of protest. For example, the sentence "According to Nadiem, if this program is removed, it will be protested by teachers who feel the benefits of the *Merdeka Belajar* movement" suggests an underlying ideological conflict between reformist groups that support the policy and those who oppose it.

The opposition expressed by various parties, particularly through constructive criticism and public debate highlighted concerns about the readiness of infrastructure and the unequal implementation of the program. This resistance was manifested in critical statements made during educational forums, emphasizing that the removal of the policy could trigger collective opposition. However, in January 2020, according to Antara News (2020), former Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim welcomed such constructive resistance. He asserted that the absence of any resistance would indicate that the changes introduced were insignificant. This statement implies that resistance itself serves as a measure of the policy's impact and significance.

According to Fairclough (1992), the use of indirect reporting that anticipates protest reflects an ideological tension embedded in the discourse. It suggests that, despite the government's optimistic narrative, there remains potential resistance from educational stakeholders such as teachers and alumni. This framing further reveals that the *Merdeka Belajar* policy has not been universally accepted. Rather, it has generated diverse perspectives, particularly around the clash between traditional values and the vision of modernization promoted by the reform.

Transformation and Change: Educational Reform as a Cultural Shift

The findings highlight several key representations within the *Merdeka Belajar* discourse: the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, the concept of a movement, and the identification of teachers as agents of change. These elements collectively frame the policy as a transformative process. For example, the statement "The *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum has continued to increase student literacy and numeracy over the past three years," classified as a material process in transitivity. It provides tangible evidence of the policy's outcomes. Additionally, the direct quote "They are agents of change in the transformation of education" emphasizes the central role of teachers as reform drivers. The use of lexical choices such as movement and agents of change in Nadiem Makarim's statement serves to portray the policy as a wide-reaching reform initiative. The term movement positions *Merdeka Belajar* as a collective effort involving various educational stakeholders in pursuit of systemic change. Meanwhile, agents of change refer specifically to teachers, who are depicted as the key actors responsible for enacting and sustaining the policy's objectives (Fairclough, 1995).

In relation to cultural transformation within the education system, these terms suggest a deliberate shift away from rigid, traditional practices toward more dynamic and learner-centered approaches. Traditional values in this context include outdated methods such as rote memorization and uniform instruction, which often overlook students' individual learning needs. *Merdeka Belajar*, in contrast, seeks to promote innovation and creativity by granting schools and teachers the autonomy to design learning experiences tailored to their students. In conclusion, these findings demonstrate that the educational reform driven by the *Merdeka Belajar* policy has contributed to a shift in both the culture and practice of teaching in Indonesia. This aligns closely with the transformational ideology reflected in Nadiem Makarim's public discourse.

Power Relations: Balancing Government Authority and Stakeholder Participation

The findings reveal a dual representation of power within Tempo.co's reporting of Nadiem Makarim's public statements. On one hand, Nadiem is positioned as the central authority figure with direct reporting, reinforcing the government's role in directing educational reform. On the other hand, statistical data and indirect reporting highlight educational actors' collective involvement, including teachers, alumni, and Teacher Leaders. Additionally, the use of passivization in several statements shifts the focus away from specific individuals, instead emphasizing the collective impact of the policy. For example, the sentence "The program is considered to have provided benefits" removes agency from the actors, foregrounding the outcome rather than those responsible for it.

This multifaceted representation of power reflects both centralized authority and distributed participation. The statistical references and the mention of educators' roles through indirect speech underscore that the success of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy depends not solely on government initiative, but also on the engagement of the wider educational community.

Traditionally, power within the education sector has been concentrated in state institutions, with policymaking dominated by elite decision-makers and limited influence granted to educators. However, the *Merdeka Belajar* initiative attempts to decentralize some of this authority by empowering teachers and schools to design curriculum and instructional practices. At the same time, the Ministry of Education maintains strong control over policy direction, resulting in a dual structure of power. This duality creates both opportunities for collaborative reform and challenges in achieving equitable stakeholder participation. Moreover, the shift in power dynamics toward shared authority reflects a broader societal trend favouring decentralization and collective action in policy development.

The analysis thus reveals two interconnected layers of power within Nadiem Makarim's discourse: the firm, centralized authority of the state and the active participation of grassroots educational actors. While government leadership remains dominant in setting the reform agenda, its success is depicted as contingent upon the involvement and response of teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders. This power balance suggests that education policy implementation is not unilaterally controlled but the product of collaborative effort.

In conclusion, the findings show that in Tempo.co's coverage of Nadiem Makarim's public statements, the *Merdeka Belajar* policy is framed as a reform initiative driven by strong governmental authority, yet inseparable from the support and participation of the educational community. This framing is not only affirming the legitimacy of state power but also constructs a narrative of reform as a collective endeavor thereby reinforcing the legitimacy and sustainability of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy.

Micro Discourse Analysis

Building on the three-dimensional analysis, a closer look at micro discursive features reveals how metaphor, modality, negation, presupposition, and evaluative lexis coalesce to reinforce the *Merdeka Belajar* narrative. Metaphorical expressions such as "movement" and "agents of change" do more than decorate the text—they position the policy as a collective, almost organic force and its implementers as heroic protagonists. This aligns with Koller's (2021) argument that metaphors in educational reform discourse serve to naturalize abstract policy goals and mobilize stakeholder buy-in.

Modality in the article—through thrusts of certainty ("will continue," "will not eliminate," "will also definitely protest") alongside a single marker of possibility ("might not allow")—constructs a rhetorical landscape in which policy continuity is not merely probable but inevitable. Van Leeuwen's (2021) taxonomy of legitimacy moves shows that such epistemic modalities function to shore up institutional authority, presenting reform as an uncontested social fact rather than a debatable initiative.

Negation strategically delineates the boundary between progressive (those who "implement" *Merdeka Belajar*) and regressive actors ("schools that don't implement" suffer "learning loss"). The text tacitly forecloses critical voices and marginalizes alternative pedagogical approaches by framing non-compliance as loss inflicting. This binary framing echoes the "us versus them" dynamics described by Wodak (2023), where negation becomes a tool of exclusion and ideological consolidation. Presuppositions embedded in statements like "program... is considered to have provided benefits" and "has also contributed to increasing literacy and numeracy" operate under the assumption that benefits are both realized and uncontested. Such backgrounding of evidence-free claims suppresses space for dissent or empirical evaluation, exemplifying Rogers' (2017) call to interrogate the taken-for-granted premises that underpin policy legitimacy.

Finally, the evaluative lexis—"major achievement," "learning loss," "agents of change" imbues the narrative with positive valence for policy adherents and negative connotations for non-adherents. This pattern of praise and blame guides reader alignment and also fashions a moral economy around *Merdeka Belajar*, where support equates to progress and progress equates to decline.

Together, these micro discursive mechanisms demonstrate that the Tempo.co article does more than report; it actively constructs an ideological terrain in which *Merdeka Belajar* is naturalized, dissent is delegitimized, and the Minister's authority is consolidated. Integrating these findings with van Leeuwen's legitimacy framework and Koller's metaphor theory enriches our understanding of how educational policy discourses operate at the granular level to shape public perception and entrepreneurial power asymmetries.

Situating these discursive moves within Indonesia's socio-political context, it finds that the report's framing reinforces a continuity of elite authority and marginalizes grassroots voices. Prawoto (2022) analysis of *Merdeka Belajar* coverage in Kompas.com highlighted comparable patterns of top-down narrative construction, yet did not unpack the specific transformation and transitivity operations that this study foregrounds. Similarly, Ramadhani et al. (2025) discuss ideological power in higher-education curricula, but this research is novel applying Fairclough's full Three-Dimensional Model to a news article, thereby illuminating how textual features, discursive practice, and social context interlock to normalize reform.

This study makes three contributions. First, it systematically integrates lexical, transformational, and transitivity analysis which dimensions often treated separately in prior CDA studies of Indonesian education policy into a cohesive framework. Second, by reconceptualizing processing analysis (intertextuality) it demonstrates how selective source deployment in news media operates as a distinct discursive mechanism of ideological reproduction. Third, mapping these strategies onto the socio-political milieu refines Fairclough's model for digital journalism contexts, suggesting that future CDA research should attend more closely to how nominalization and actor exclusion co-produce policy hegemony.

For media practitioners, these findings underscore the importance of diversifying source types and foregrounding actor agency to strengthen genuinely balanced reporting on reform initiatives. Journalistic guidelines might be revised to mandate explicit attribution and the inclusion of stakeholder voices affected by policy changes. For policymakers, the study highlights the power of discourse framing, crafting public statements with awareness of linguistic elements can reinforce or challenge existing power asymmetries. Finally, media literacy programs should incorporate CDA tools to empower citizens to interrogate how language shapes their perceptions of educational change critically.

Conclusions

This study has shown how Tempo's news article reporting Nadiem Makarim's public statement on the Merdeka Belajar policy constructs policy legitimacy through strategic language use, intertextual framing, and ideological alignment. Applying Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, the analysis revealed that, at the description stage, lexical choices, nominalization, passivization, and transitivity patterns collectively frame Merdeka Belajar as a transformative, institutionalized movement. At the intertextuality stage, the dominance of government voices and the absence of counter-perspectives reinforce official credibility while subtly legitimizing authority. At the explanation stage (social analysis), the discourse reproduces narratives of continuity, centralized control, and modernization, positioning educational reform as both inevitable and desirable.

The findings further indicate that the news foregrounds institutional authority, privileging the Minister's voice while silencing alternative perspectives, thereby manufacturing consensus. The portrayal of reform as inevitable reflects a top-down legitimacy process that distances public agency. These insights build upon and extend previous research by illustrating how media texts report and actively shape public understanding of education policy through ideological framing.

While offering valuable contributions, this study is limited by its reliance on a single news article, which constrains the generalizability of findings and excludes cross-media or multimodal variations. Future research could address these limitations by conducting comparative analyses across diverse media platforms, applying multimodal CDA to incorporate visual and audiovisual elements, and triangulating findings through interviews or focus groups with teachers and students. Such approaches would provide richer, more comprehensive insights into how Merdeka Belajar is represented, contested, and negotiated in Indonesia's evolving educational discourse.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this paper.

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