A Critical Discourse Analysis of Nadiem Makarim's Speech on *Merdeka Belajar* at the 2024 National Education Day

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Abstract

This study critically analyzes Nadiem Makarim's 2024 National Education Day speech, focusing on how language reflects and reshapes power dynamics and ideology within Indonesia's *Merdeka Belajar* (Independent Learning) reform initiative. The research seeks to answer two key questions: how does the speech frame educational reform through discourse, and how does it distribute power and convey participatory ideology? Using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model and van Dijk's Power and Ideology framework, this qualitative study examines the textual, discursive, and social practices within the speech. The findings reveal that the speech strategically emphasizes decentralization, teacher and student empowerment, and cultural values of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) while reframing challenges, such as the pandemic, as opportunities for systemic change. These results suggest that the speech functions as a tool to foster collective responsibility and support for long-term educational reform. The study concludes with recommendations for policymakers to adopt inclusive, culturally resonant discourse to ensure effective communication of reform initiatives. Future research could explore the long-term impact of such discourse on policy implementation across diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; *Merdeka Belajar*; Educational Reform; Power Relations; Ideology in Discourse

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's education system has undergone significant transformations in recent years, driven by the *Merdeka Belajar* (Independent Learning) initiative led by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology 2019-2024. Spearheaded by Minister Nadiem Makarim, the reform seeks to decentralize educational governance, foster autonomy among educators and students, and realign educational practices with Indonesia's cultural values of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation). This initiative aims to address the limitations of rigid, centralized systems and create a more inclusive and adaptive framework for learning. One of the key platforms for promoting these reforms has been Nadiem Makarim's public speeches, including the 2024 National Education Day speech, which serves as the primary data source for this study.

Meanwhile, when we talk about Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this kind of study reveal a common thread regarding how language and discourse are utilized as tools

to shape public perception and maintain power structures. For instances, the study from (Kadim, 2022) demonstrates the use of ideological strategies in Trump's campaign speeches to create a clear dichotomy between "us" and "them," while (Schroeder et al., 2022) highlight how public health discourse inadvertently perpetuates stigma against gay and bisexual communities. Then, study from (Nigatu, 2023) exposes media bias in the coverage of the Ethiopian conflict, reinforcing unequal power relations through divergent representations of the central government and opposition forces and study by (Sundberg et al., 2023) emphasize that media discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic often focuses on narratives of social control and compliance. (Rahro et al., 2024) illustrate the use of rhetorical strategies in political debates in Iran to maximize positive self-representation and negative portrayal of opponents. Together, these studies demonstrate that critical analysis of discourse can uncover the subtle ways in which language is employed to reinforce ideologies and social dominance.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) encompasses a broad range of topics, analyzing language and its role in various social, cultural, and institutional contexts. By examining different types of texts and media, CDA aims to uncover how language shapes power dynamics, social norms, and ideologies. The five studies collectively reveal that discourse functions as a powerful mechanism in shaping social realities, embedding ideologies, and influencing cultural perceptions across various contexts. Media narratives, educational texts, policy frameworks, and cultural event representations all demonstrate how language subtly reinforces existing social hierarchies, power imbalances, and stereotypes. These analyses underscore the integral role of discourse in constructing societal norms, perpetuating biases, and shaping collective behaviors, while also presenting opportunities to challenge prevailing ideologies and promote social equity. (Eranfeno et al., 2024; Hendawy et al., 2024; Irimiás et al., 2024; Mcluckie & Kuipers, 2024; Suchana, 2024)

To analyze Nadiem Makarim's speech, this study employs the theories of (Fairclough, 2015) and (van Dijk, 2008). These theories help to explore how discourse serves to maintain or challenge power relations and communicate specific ideologies. Fairclough's CDA framework asserts that discourse is a form of social practice that does not merely reflect social realities but actively shapes them. According to Fairclough, language is a powerful tool used to construct social relations, sustain or contest existing power structures, and disseminate ideological positions. In the case of Makarim's speech, the language is strategically crafted to emphasize the empowerment of teachers and students, portraying them as active agents in the educational reform process. This strategic framing is particularly important because it positions the government as a facilitator of change rather than an authoritarian enforcer. This shift in rhetorical positioning suggests a move toward decentralization and shared responsibility, a significant departure from traditional top-down governance models in the education system.

In addition to Fairclough's approach, van Dijk's (2008) Theory of Power and Discourse is equally central to this analysis. Van Dijk's theory explores how power is enacted, reproduced, and resisted through language. He argues that discourse not only reflects social power structures but also plays a key role in either reinforcing or challenging them. In Makarim's speech, this dynamic is evident in how the discourse delineates the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders—teachers, students, policymakers, and the public. By framing these roles in a manner that encourages participation and shared ownership of the reform process, the speech potentially redistributes power away from centralized authorities and toward local educational actors. This redistribution of power is critical for understanding how language is employed to influence perceptions of governance and foster a collective sense of responsibility for educational outcomes.

This research on Nadiem Makarim's speech during National Education Day 2024 highlights several important gaps when compared to existing studies on critical discourse

analysis (CDA). One key distinction is the focus on educational reform, specifically how language in Makarim's speech communicates ideologies of empowerment and redistributes power between the government, educators, and students. Previous studies, such as (Mahendra Siregar, 2021) analysis of Joe Biden's speech, emphasized themes of unity and equality in political discourse but did not specifically address the educational sector. In contrast, the present research delves into how Makarim's speech fosters a participatory discourse, positioning teachers and students as central to the educational process under *Merdeka Belajar*.

Furthermore, this study fills a significant gap by targeting educational policy discourse, an area that has been underrepresented in CDA research, especially when compared to the extensive work done on political and legal discourses. For instance, (Nasser Aldosari, 2020) examined legal discourse through Nelson Mandela's speeches, focusing on issues of racial inequality and political struggle. While these studies shed light on power and ideology in political contexts, the current research extends CDA to the domain of educational policy, exploring how language in Makarim's speech promotes educational reform. This approach is particularly valuable, as educational discourse has not been widely explored in previous CDA studies, leaving a gap in understanding how reforms like *Merdeka Belajar* are communicated and implemented through language.

Additionally, this research employs Fairclough's 3D Model, aligning it with (Mekt et al., 2024) study of Christian Tadele's speech in Ethiopia, which focused on uncovering social inequalities. However, while Mekt et al. concentrated on issues of corruption and governance, this study emphasizes the ideological construct of empowerment and the redefinition of roles in education under the *Merdeka Belajar* policy. Another critical gap addressed by this study is the treatment of educational empowerment as an ideological construct. While studies like (Tian & Modality, 2021) explored how Trump's speeches created social solidarity or division, they did not examine how language can empower stakeholders in an educational reform context.

Moreover, (Sefrinta et al., 2020) research on discourse in the context of international conflict, specifically between the U.S. and Iran, highlights another important distinction. Their study focused on global political issues, whereas the current research centers on Indonesia's unique socio-cultural and educational challenges. The role of local values, such as "gotong royong" (mutual cooperation), is significant in shaping the discourse of educational reform in Indonesia, a concept that is absent in the international contexts studied by Ivana and Suprayogi. This cultural nuance adds depth to the analysis of Makarim's speech and underscores the importance of understanding educational reform within its local context.

In recent years, Indonesia's education system has undergone significant changes driven by the *Merdeka Belajar* (Independent Learning) initiative, led by Nadiem Makarim, the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. This reform aims to establish a more flexible, student-centered approach, shifting away from rigid, centralized structures to foster greater autonomy in learning. One of the key platforms used by Makarim to communicate his vision and progress of these reforms has been his public speeches, particularly during notable events such as the National Education Day 2024. These speeches not only convey updates on the initiative but also play a strategic role in shaping public perception and guiding the implementation of educational policy. Given the critical role of discourse in influencing power dynamics and ideological messaging, it becomes essential to analyze how language is employed in these speeches to construct narratives of reform.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the linguistic and ideological strategies employed in Nadiem Makarim's speech. It builds on existing CDA research while extending its scope to the domain of educational reform, a critical but

underrepresented area. Specifically, this study investigates how the speech constructs narratives of empowerment and collaboration, redistributes power among stakeholders, and aligns with broader societal values.

The research aims to answer two key questions: How does Nadiem Makarim's speech frame the discourse of educational reform, particularly through Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model? And How does the speech redistribute power and convey participatory ideology within the context of the Merdeka Belajar initiative, as analyzed through van Dijk's framework? By addressing these questions, this study not only contributes to the theoretical understanding of CDA in educational policy but also offers practical insights for policymakers and educators in communicating reform effectively.

METHODS
Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design, chosen for its ability to explore the nuanced ways language shapes and reflects power dynamics and ideology within educational discourse. The descriptive approach allows for an in-depth examination of Nadiem Makarim's 2024 National Education Day speech, focusing on how the discourse conveys reform strategies and redistributes power among stakeholders. Qualitative method is an approach to research that aims to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2018). This design aligns with the research objectives, which aim to analyze the speech's textual, discursive, and social dimensions using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model and van Dijk's Power and Ideology framework.

Data Samples

The primary sample for this study consists of Nadiem Makarim's National Education Day 2024 speech, which was delivered on May 2, 2024. This speech was selected as the main data source because it represents a significant moment for the Merdeka Belajar initiative, where the Minister addressed both achievements and ongoing challenges in educational reform. The speech is a strategic text, designed to communicate with a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, students, and the general public. Given its importance and public accessibility, this speech serves as a rich source of data for analyzing the construction of power relations and ideological messaging in the context of educational reform in Indonesia.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected using a documentary analysis approach, focusing on the transcript of Nadiem Makarim's speech delivered during the 2024 National Education Day celebration. The transcript was sourced from the official website of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, ensuring authenticity and reliability. The process began with gathering the speech transcript in its complete form, alongside supplementary materials such as official policy documents, press releases, and related public statements, which provided additional context for analysis. To verify the authenticity of the transcript, it was cross-checked against the official video recording of the speech to ensure accuracy. This step was essential for confirming that all textual elements, including tone and emphasis reflected in the spoken delivery, were accurately captured in the written version.

The supplementary policy documents and statements related to the Merdeka Belajar initiative were also reviewed to enhance the understanding of the speech's background and its broader significance in the context of educational reform. Given that the data are publicly accessible, there were no issues related to confidentiality or informed consent, as no direct involvement of human participants was required. Nevertheless,

ethical considerations were taken into account by ensuring proper attribution of sources to maintain academic integrity. The reliability of the data was ensured through a systematic review process, with the transcript being examined multiple times to minimize errors or omissions. Validity was further reinforced by triangulating the speech with related documents and statements, which helped to ensure consistency and contextual accuracy.

Data Analysis

This study employs qualitative data analysis techniques to interpret the discourse in Nadiem Makarim's 2024 National Education Day speech, with a primary focus on understanding how language constructs power relations and ideology within the context of the Merdeka Belajar educational reform. The analysis draws upon two key theoretical frameworks to guide the interpretation of the speech. The first framework is Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which provides a structured approach to analyzing the speech at three levels. At the micro-level, textual analysis examines linguistic features such as vocabulary, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies used in the speech. The meso-level focuses on discursive practice, investigating how the speech constructs meaning and shapes public understanding of the reform process. Finally, at the macro-level, social practice connects the discourse to broader social, cultural, and political contexts, highlighting its role in shaping power dynamics within Indonesia's education system. The second framework used is van Dijk's Power and Ideology in Discourse framework, which helps to analyze how the speech constructs, reinforces, or challenges power relations, particularly in terms of ideological messages of empowerment, collaboration, and decentralization in the context of educational reform.

The speech transcript was manually coded using thematic analysis, which involved identifying key themes related to power distribution, ideological framing, and the portrayal of stakeholders such as teachers, students, and government officials. Thematic categories were developed iteratively as the analysis progressed, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the discourse. This approach also involved identifying recurring linguistic patterns and rhetorical strategies that aligned with the research questions. To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, several steps were taken. For reliability, the coding process was conducted in stages, with multiple readings of the speech transcript, and themes and codes were checked against the original text to ensure accuracy. Additionally, peer debriefing with a colleague familiar with CDA was conducted to ensure that the interpretations remained faithful to the intended meaning of the speech. Validity was reinforced by triangulating the findings from the speech with supplementary policy documents and public statements related to the Merdeka Belajar initiative, ensuring that the analysis of power and ideology was grounded in the broader context of Indonesia's educational reform.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

In analyzing Nadiem Makarim's speech, Fairclough's 3D Model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how language operates on multiple levels to construct meaning, reinforce ideologies, and manage power relations. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of how specific phrases within the speech are structured to convey messages that align with the broader goals of the *Merdeka Belajar* initiative. By breaking down the speech into its textual, discursive, and social dimensions, we can better understand how the speech is crafted to address the audience, reflect the current educational climate, and promote a vision of reform. The following table presents

key excerpts from the speech, illustrating how Fairclough's model applies to the analysis of language and its social implications.

Table 1. Fairclough's 3D Model Analysis

No.	Indonesian Text	English Translation	Text (Micro-level)	Discursive Practice (Meso-level)	Social Practice (Macro-level)
1	*"Lima tahun terakhir ini adalah waktu yang sangat mengesankan dalam perjalanan kami di Kemendikbudristek."*	"The last five years have been a very impressive journey for us at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology."	Nadiem positions the Ministry as a reflective and evolving institution, adapting to challenges.	The speech positions the Ministry as proactive and responsive to changes in education.	Reflects broader social transformations in Indonesia's education system, addressing long-standing systemic issues through Merdeka Belajar.
2	*"Bukan hal yang mudah untuk mentransformasi sebuah sistem yang sangat besar."*	"It is not easy to transform such a large system."	Acknowledges the complexity and difficulty of changing a large education system.	The speech frames educational reform as necessary but challenging, preparing the audience for the long-term effort.	The broader message promotes patience and perseverance in educational reforms, reflecting ongoing systemic challenges.
3	*"Pandemi memberi kesempatan untuk mengakselerasi perubahan."*	"The pandemic gave us the opportunity to accelerate change."	Nadiem uses the pandemic as a discursive tool to frame it positively.	Positions the pandemic as an opportunity for systemic change, turning a crisis into a chance for progress.	Highlights the societal shift during the pandemic, where education systems adopted blended and online learning as the new normal.
4	*"Ombak kencang dan karang tinggi sudah kita lewati bersama."*	"We have passed through rough waves and high reefs together."	Metaphorical language used to emphasize overcoming challenges collectively.	Reinforces the idea of collective national effort in facing challenges, aligning with Indonesia's cultural values of cooperation.	Reflects national resilience and unity in times of crisis, symbolizing the importance of collective action in educational reform.
5	*"Kita sudah mulai merasakan perubahan terjadi di sekitar kita, digerakkan bersama-sama dengan langkah yang serempak dan serentak."*	"We have started to feel the changes happening around us, driven together with synchronized and simultaneous steps."	Emphasizes collective, synchronized action in achieving reform.	Language frames reform as a joint national effort where everyone plays a part.	Promotes a collaborative national approach to educational reform, involving all societal actors.
6	*"Kita sudah mendengar lagi anak-anak Indonesia berani*	"We have once again heard Indonesian	Highlights student empowerment	The reform is positioned as liberating	Promotes a shift in the role of education,

No.	Indonesian Text	English Translation	Text (Micro-level)	Discursive Practice (Meso-level)	Social Practice (Macro-level)
	bermimpi karena mereka merasa merdeka saat belajar di kelas."	children dare to dream because they feel free while learning in class."	as active agents in their learning.	students to be creative and innovative in their learning, aligned with Merdeka Belajar.	focusing on freedom and creativity in student learning, reflecting the broader goal of education reform.
7	*"Guru-guru yang berani mencoba hal-hal baru karena mereka mendapatkan kepercayaan untuk mengenal dan menilai murid-muridnya."*	"Teachers dare to try new things because they have the trust to know and assess their students."	Teachers are empowered as active agents of change, trusted to innovate in classrooms.	Shifts the perception of teachers from mere implementers of policy to leaders of educational innovation.	Reflects the global trend toward teacher autonomy and professional development, promoting decentralization in education.
8	*"Lima tahun bukan waktu yang sebentar untuk menjalankan tugas memimpin gerakan Merdeka Belajar."*	"Five years is not a short time to lead the Merdeka Belajar movement."	Acknowledges that reform is a long-term process, requiring sustained effort.	Frames the five-year period as significant but emphasizes the need for continued progress.	Promotes a long-term vision for educational reform, highlighting the importance of sustainability and continuous improvement.
9	*"Dengan penuh harapan, saya titipkan Merdeka Belajar kepada Anda semua, para penggerak perubahan."*	"With great hope, I entrust Merdeka Belajar to all of you, the drivers of change."	Nadiem shifts the responsibility for reform to the public, especially educators.	Collective ownership of the reform is emphasized, suggesting that the movement belongs to all citizens, not just the government.	Reflects a broader ideological shift toward shared responsibility in the development and sustainability of the educational system.

Table 1 breaks down Nadiem Makarim's speech using Fairclough's 3D Model, which analyzes the text at three levels: Text (Micro-level), Discursive Practice (Meso-level), and Social Practice (Macro-level). At the micro-level, the table identifies key phrases from the speech and explores their linguistic features, such as metaphors, framing, and rhetorical strategies. For instance, Nadiem begins by describing the last five years as "an impressive journey," positioning the Ministry as adaptive and reflective. This sets a tone of progress and responsiveness. The discursive practice (meso-level) examines how these textual elements are used to construct meaning within the specific context of educational reform. For example, Nadiem's reference to the pandemic as an "opportunity to accelerate change" shifts the narrative from crisis to opportunity, suggesting a proactive and resilient response by the Ministry. The social practice (macro-level) links these discursive strategies to broader societal changes, showing how the speech reflects the ongoing transformation in Indonesian education. Nadiem's emphasis on collective action (*gotong royong*) and the empowerment of students and teachers connects to a larger push toward decentralization and shared responsibility in the education system. By integrating all three dimensions, the table illustrates how the speech is used to frame reform as a necessary and collaborative effort, aligned with the values of modernization and empowerment in education

Building on the analysis of linguistic structure, van Dijk's theory of power and ideology in discourse offers a valuable perspective on how Nadiem Makarim's speech constructs and redistributes power among various stakeholders in Indonesia's education system. Van Dijk's approach helps uncover the underlying power dynamics and ideological positions that are embedded in the language, focusing on how discourse either reinforces or challenges existing social hierarchies. The speech positions teachers, students, and the general public as empowered agents of change, subtly shifting the role of the government from an authoritarian figure to a facilitator of progress. The following table outlines how key excerpts from the speech reflect these power relations and ideological messages, offering insights into how discourse is used to promote shared responsibility and collective empowerment in educational reform.

Table 2. van Dijk's Power and Ideology in Discourse Analysis

No.	Indonesian Text	English Translation	Power Relations (How Power is Constructed or Challenged)	Ideological Message (Underlying Beliefs and Values)
1	*"Lima tahun terakhir ini adalah waktu yang sangat mengesankan dalam perjalanan kami di Kemendikbudristek."*	"The last five years have been a very impressive journey for us at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology."	Nadiem positions the Ministry as a reflective, evolving institution that is responsive to challenges.	The ideology of reform and modernization, promoting the idea that education is always evolving and challenges are opportunities for improvement.
2	*"Bukan hal yang mudah untuk mentransformasi sebuah sistem yang sangat besar."*	"It is not easy to transform such a large system."	Acknowledges the difficulty of changing a large system, positioning the Ministry as a supportive guide rather than an authoritarian force.	Promotes the ideology of collective and gradual change, encouraging patience and collective effort rather than immediate, top-down directives.
3	*"Pandemi memberi kesempatan untuk mengakselerasi perubahan."*	"The pandemic gave us the opportunity to accelerate change."	Uses the pandemic to reframe a crisis as an opportunity for systemic change, showing the government's adaptability.	Reflects the ideology of turning challenges into opportunities, aligning with the broader societal narrative of resilience and innovation in education.
4	*"Guru-guru yang berani mencoba hal-hal baru karena mereka mendapatkan kepercayaan."*	"Teachers dare to try new things because they have the trust to know and assess their students."	Power is shifted to teachers, empowering them to take initiative and innovate in the classroom, challenging traditional top-down control.	Reflects the ideology of teacher empowerment and decentralization, supporting democratic values and participatory decision-making in education.
5	*"Kita sudah mendengar lagi anak-anak Indonesia berani bermimpi."*	"We have once again heard Indonesian	Students are positioned as active agents of	The ideology of freedom in learning and student

No.	Indonesian Text	English Translation	Power Relations (How Power is Constructed or Challenged)	Ideological Message (Underlying Beliefs and Values)
		children dare to dream."	change, empowered by the educational system to dream and innovate.	empowerment, focusing on creativity and innovation as core educational values.
6	*"Dengan penuh harapan, saya titipkan Merdeka Belajar kepada Anda semua, para penggerak perubahan."*	"With great hope, I entrust Merdeka Belajar to all of you, the drivers of change."	Responsibility for the Merdeka Belajar movement is shifted to the public, particularly educators, showing a redistribution of power.	Promotes the ideology of collective responsibility, emphasizing that education is a shared effort, not solely the government's duty.

Table 2 focuses on van Dijk's approach to discourse, which explores how power relations and ideological messages are constructed through language. This analysis highlights how the speech distributes power among different stakeholders—teachers, students, policymakers, and the public—while reinforcing the ideological message of educational reform. For example, in the excerpt where Nadiem says, "Teachers dare to try new things because they have the trust," the speech shifts power from the government to teachers, empowering them as agents of change. This reflects an ideology of decentralization, where decision-making is shared and teachers are trusted to innovate in classrooms. Similarly, the phrase "The pandemic gave us the opportunity to accelerate change" reframes the pandemic not as a hindrance but as a catalyst for reform, suggesting that challenges can be opportunities for progress. Van Dijk's model helps to reveal that this is not just about policy implementation but about changing the underlying power dynamics in education. The final segment of the speech, where Nadiem entrusts *Merdeka Belajar* to the "drivers of change," transfers ownership of the movement to the public and educators, reinforcing the idea that reform is a collective effort rather than a top-down directive. This shows how the speech embeds an ideology of shared responsibility and empowerment, positioning the educational community as central to Indonesia's progress.

Discussion

The analysis of Nadiem Makarim's speech using Fairclough's 3D Model and van Dijk's Power and Ideology in Discourse reveals significant insights into how language is employed to manage power relations and communicate ideological positions, especially in the context of educational reform in Indonesia through the *Merdeka Belajar* initiative. This research utilizes Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how language functions as a form of social practice, linking textual analysis, discourse practices, and socio-cultural contexts to uncover hidden power relations and ideological influences within the discourse (Xing, 2024) and Van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse Analysis, focusing on the integration of three core dimensions: text analysis, social cognition, and social context. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of how discourse is constructed, revealing underlying ideologies and the cognitive processes involved in shaping public perception, as well as the broader societal influences that impact the production and interpretation of the text (Ramdhani, 2024).

Fairclough's 3D Model helps illuminate the strategic use of language to frame both challenges and achievements. At the micro-level (textual analysis), Makarim's use of phrases like *"Lima tahun terakhir ini adalah waktu yang sangat mengesankan"* ("The last five

years have been a very impressive journey") positions the Ministry as an institution capable of reflection and growth. This acknowledgment of progress implies that while challenges remain, the Ministry is on a forward trajectory. Additionally, when Makarim states, *"Pandemi memberi kesempatan untuk mengakselerasi perubahan"* ("The pandemic gave us the opportunity to accelerate change"), he repositions the pandemic from a crisis to an opportunity, turning a negative event into a catalyst for positive transformation. This use of language serves to inspire resilience and adaptability in the face of difficulty, aligning the Ministry's goals with a broader narrative of progress and modernization.

At the meso-level (discursive practice), the collective use of "we" throughout the speech signals a participatory discourse. Makarim says, *"Kita sudah mendengar lagi anak-anak Indonesia berani bermimpi karena mereka merasa merdeka saat belajar di kelas"* ("We have once again heard Indonesian children dare to dream because they feel free while learning in class"), emphasizing the active role of students as dreamers and learners within the reformed system. This participatory framing extends to teachers as well, where he mentions, *"Guru-guru yang berani mencoba hal-hal baru karena mereka mendapatkan kepercayaan"* ("Teachers dare to try new things because they have the trust"). By framing teachers as empowered individuals who are trusted to innovate, the speech shifts the traditional top-down power dynamic in education and promotes a more decentralized approach, where teachers are seen as leaders of change. This redistribution of authority positions teachers as active contributors to the reform process, challenging the previously rigid structures of centralized control.

At the macro-level (social practice), the speech reflects broader social and cultural movements in Indonesia, where values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) are central. Makarim's call for collaboration is encapsulated in the phrase, *"Mari terus bergotong royong menyemarakkan dan melanjutkan gerakan Merdeka Belajar"* ("Let's continue to collaborate and enliven the Merdeka Belajar movement"). This culturally resonant term appeals to Indonesian values of community and collective action, suggesting that education reform is not solely the responsibility of the government but a collective societal effort. The speech thus bridges national cultural values with the reform agenda, making it more relatable and acceptable to the wider public.

Van Dijk's Power and Ideology in Discourse framework offers further insights into how the speech distributes power and conveys ideology. One of the central themes is the shift in power from the government to educators and students. For example, in the statement, *"Dengan penuh harapan, saya titipkan Merdeka Belajar kepada Anda semua, para penggerak perubahan"* ("With great hope, I entrust Merdeka Belajar to all of you, the drivers of change"), Makarim explicitly transfers the responsibility for the success of *Merdeka Belajar* to teachers, students, and the broader educational community. This shift illustrates a significant redistribution of power, where the Ministry is no longer positioned as the sole authority but rather as a facilitator of change. The speech suggests that teachers and students are now empowered to take the lead in the transformation of the educational system.

Additionally, van Dijk's analysis of power highlights how the speech challenges traditional power hierarchies. In stating, *"Bukan hal yang mudah untuk mentransformasi sebuah sistem yang sangat besar"* ("It is not easy to transform such a large system"), Makarim acknowledges the scale of the task without placing blame on any specific group. Instead, he frames the government as a supporter and guide, while positioning educators as the real agents of change. This reconfiguration of power encourages a more democratic and participatory approach to education, where decisions are not imposed from above but emerge from those directly involved in the teaching and learning process.

The ideological message of shared responsibility is further reinforced through the framing of the pandemic as an accelerant of change. By stating, *"Pandemi memberi*

kesempatan untuk mengakselerasi perubahan" ("The pandemic gave us the opportunity to accelerate change"), Makarim introduces an optimistic narrative that positions the challenges of the pandemic as opportunities for systemic reform. This ideological positioning reflects a forward-thinking approach, promoting resilience and adaptability within Indonesia's education system. The pandemic, in this sense, becomes a symbol of resilience, where challenges are not merely obstacles but integral steps in the reform process.

The findings from van Dijk's Power and Ideology in Discourse analysis further support this interpretation. By framing the government's role as a facilitator rather than an enforcer, the speech subtly redistributes power to teachers, students, and the wider educational community. This is evident in the statement, "I entrust Merdeka Belajar to all of you, the drivers of change," which signals a transfer of responsibility. Such a rhetorical move challenges traditional hierarchical structures, suggesting a more democratic and inclusive approach to policy implementation. The recontextualization of the pandemic as "an opportunity for change" instead of a crisis also highlights an optimistic ideological stance, promoting resilience and adaptability as core values within the educational reform narrative.

When comparing these results with previous studies, it is clear that the findings align with research on political and policy discourse, particularly in how language is used to foster solidarity and manage public perception during times of crisis. Studies such as those by Kadim (2022) and Rahro et al. (2024) highlight similar rhetorical strategies in political speeches aimed at unifying audiences. However, this study diverges from typical analyses of short-term political agendas, focusing instead on a long-term vision for systemic educational reform. Unlike previous research that often centers on issues of corruption or governance (e.g., Mekt et al., 2024), this study extends the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the educational sector, filling a gap in understanding how policy discourse shapes long-term reform initiatives.

These findings have significant implications for both policy communication and the broader educational landscape in Indonesia. The use of inclusive language and the framing of teachers and students as empowered stakeholders suggest a shift toward a more decentralized education system, where local actors play a central role. This aligns with international trends in education reform, emphasizing local agency and community participation as essential components of sustainable change. The strategic reframing of the pandemic as a catalyst for progress further underscores the importance of resilience and adaptability in navigating systemic challenges. For policymakers, this suggests that effective communication should not only inform but also inspire stakeholders, using culturally resonant values and inclusive messaging to build a sense of shared responsibility.

However, this study also has its limitations. Analyzing a single speech may not capture the full range of discourse strategies employed across different contexts and audiences. Future research should consider a broader dataset, including multiple speeches and public statements, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the language used in communicating Merdeka Belajar. Additionally, while Fairclough's and van Dijk's frameworks offer valuable insights into power dynamics and ideological messaging, incorporating multimodal analysis could enrich the findings by considering non-verbal elements like gestures and visual aids used during the speech.

The analysis of Nadiem Makarim's speech demonstrates how language can effectively construct narratives of empowerment, collaboration, and shared responsibility, crucial for the success of the Merdeka Belajar initiative. The findings highlight a deliberate shift in power relations, positioning teachers and students as active participants in educational reform, while the government assumes a supportive role. This reflects a broader move towards decentralization and aligns with global trends in participatory

education. Although this study provides valuable insights, further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of this discourse on the implementation and reception of educational reforms in diverse regional contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive critical discourse analysis of Nadiem Makarim's 2024 National Education Day speech, focusing on the Merdeka Belajar initiative. The findings reveal that the speech strategically uses language to redistribute power and reshape educational practices by empowering teachers, students, and other stakeholders, shifting from a traditional top-down governance model to a more decentralized, participatory approach. The discourse promotes collective responsibility, aligning with Indonesia's cultural values of mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and frames challenges, such as the pandemic, as opportunities for systemic change in education.

The study contributes to the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by applying Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model and van Dijk's Power and Ideology framework to the context of educational reform, an area underexplored in previous CDA research. By linking linguistic analysis with social practice, this study provides new insights into how language shapes and reflects power relations in educational policy, particularly in the context of long-term reform movements. Implications for practice include the importance of using inclusive, culturally resonant language in policy communication, ensuring that stakeholders feel empowered and engaged in the reform process. Policymakers should consider these findings when crafting speeches, documents, and public communications to ensure they foster collaboration and shared responsibility in educational reform.

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