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The Discursive Contradiction between Government Legitimacy and Labor Resistance: An Analysis of Fairclough's Critical Discourse on Two Perspectives of National Apprenticeship News in Kompas.com

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Abstract

This study aims to uncover the ideological dynamics and power relations in Kompas.com news about the National Apprenticeship Program using the Norman Fairclough model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The focus of the study is directed at two news texts that display the contradiction of representation between the legitimacy of the government and the resistance of labor unions, namely "Deputy Minister of Labor Calls Internship Program a Golden Bridge to the World of Work" (November 4, 2025) and "Trade Union Regarding the Ministry of Labor's Internship Program: Insulting Undergraduate Graduates" (October 14, 2025). The research method of this study is qualitative, with three stages of Fairclough's analysis: textual dimensions, discourse practices, and social practices. The results show that the government uses the language of development and modernization to legitimize apprenticeship policies through euphemistic strategies and progressive metaphors. At the same time, trade unions display resistant discourses that emphasize structural inequality and the degradation of workers' dignity. This contradiction of meaning confirms that the media has become an arena of hegemony that articulates and negotiates power. Through this study, critical discourse analysis can be seen as an important context in identifying the hidden ideologies behind news construction and fostering people's critical literacy of the media's language.

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INTRODUCTION

The Government of Indonesia, through the Ministry of Manpower (Kemnaker), is encouraging the implementation of the National Apprenticeship Program as a strategy to increase workforce competitiveness and reduce the educated unemployment rate. The government's narrative tends to emphasize that the program is a golden bridge to the world of work. This metaphor ideologically affirms the state's central role as a facilitator of social mobility. In a Kompas.com article (November 4, 2025), the Deputy Minister of Manpower stated in an optimistic tone, as if to clearly illustrate that the apprenticeship program can be an instrument for modernizing human resources relevant to industry and socio-economic development. However, behind the government's optimistic perception, there is a contradictory news discourse. Kompas.com also published a contrasting discourse, including a statement by the President of the Confederation of Indonesian Trade Unions (KSPI), Said Iqbal, who said the program could actually insult undergraduate graduates. The apprenticeship program is seen as a system that degrades academic dignity and disguises labor exploitation, because it opens the door to using interns as a substitute for formal workers, with minimum wages and without the legal protections afforded to workers.

The two contradictory reports reveal a complex contest over meaning between the government's legitimacy and the resistance's legitimacy. The government seeks to construct a *discourse of legitimacy* and to emphasize economic benefits, innovation, and the strengthening of national competitiveness. Instead, labor unions construct a *counter-discourse* that highlights aspects of structural inequality, exploitation, and degradation of the professional status of higher education graduates. The contradiction in these discourses not only reveals different views but also power relations among the state, the media, and the working class.

In the context of public communication, mass media is a crucial arena for negotiating ideologies, interests, and power through language. Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that every discursive practice contains linguistic (text), institutional (discourse practice), and social (social practice) dimensions that are simultaneously shaped by and shape power structures in the social order. Therefore, an analysis of two contradictory news stories can open up space to understand how language is influential as a medium of policy legitimacy and social resistance, especially in the realm of employment.

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach initiated by Fairclough includes text

analysis, discourse practice, and social practice. These three concepts allow analysts to elaborate on how lexical choices, sentence structure, and citation source placement form each other's relationship of meaning and power. In the context of the news on Kompas.com, the selection of state officials as the voice of authority and the use of the golden bridge diction represent a hegemonic effort to normalize the internship policy as an ideal solution. Then, articles related to workers' views that use insulting, degrading, and impartial diction, and that ideologically emphasize a position of resistance to state power. Thus, the two discourses not only function as public information media but also as symbolic instruments that frame social reality and shape collective perceptions of the relationships among education, work, and social justice.

One of the studies that strengthens the intensity of this study is Wodak & Meyer (2016). Both stated that public policy discourse is often a space for the reproduction of dominant ideologies that legitimize neoliberal economic interests through technocratic language that appears neutral. In relation to this statement, Van Dijk (2021) also emphasized that public discourse carries symbolic power, determining who is allowed to speak and how their views are articulated. Furthermore, in the Indonesian context, Hidayat (2023) & Anshori (2024) show that labor policy news often displays structural bias against the government, while the voices of workers and contract workers are placed in subordinate positions. This shows that the media is not only a channel of information but also a social actor that shapes the ideological order through narrative selection.

The contradictory dynamics between government legitimacy and labor resistance reflect ideological tensions in contemporary political economy: between the rationality of labor-market efficiency and that of social justice. The government seeks to strengthen its image as an enabler of human resource development, while trade unions reject the discourse of efficiency that sacrifices the dignity of work. In this situation, critical discourse analysis is important for unraveling how news texts employ legitimacy strategies, such as naturalization, rationalization, and moral evaluation (Leeuwen, 2008), as well as resistance strategies, such as delegitimization and resemantization. Through a critical reading of two news texts from the same media, this study not only maps the differences in viewpoints but also reveals how discourse operates as a tool for ideological formation in industrial relations in Indonesia.

Coupled with the complexity of the contradictions between the two discourses, this

study was prepared on the assumption that public policy discourse is not merely a neutral representation of social reality, but an ideological vehicle for the government and civil society to negotiate the meanings of justice and development. Through this study, analysts hope to examine the relationship between the media, language selection, and news structure as a context that can play a role in maintaining or opposing the hegemony of labor policy. More specifically, analysts hope that the study of this approach's results will not only offer a textual understanding of linguistics but also open a reflective space for the public to see language as an instrument of power in shaping social consciousness and public policy in Indonesia.

METHOD

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach developed by Norman Fairclough was chosen as the theoretical scalpel in this study. This approach is applied because it reveals the relationships between language, power, and ideology that are hidden behind the empirical practice of language in media texts. Fairclough (2010) views language as a form of social practice related to the processes of domination and hegemony; in this case, the study of discourse not only questions linguistic structure but also involves the social, institutional, and ideological issues that underlie it.

The object of this study is the online news discourse published by Kompas.com. The discourse is: 1) a news discourse entitled "Deputy Minister of Agriculture Calls the Internship Program a Golden Bridge to the World of Work" (November 4, 2025) and 2) a news discourse entitled "Trade Union Regarding the Ministry of Agriculture's Internship Program: Insulting Undergraduate Graduates" (October 14, 2025). The two narratives were chosen because they presented discursive positions that contradicted each other in interpreting the policies of the National Apprenticeship Program: one representing the government's legitimacy, the other depicting workers' resistance. This contradiction is an ideal field of study to examine how the media mediates ideological battles in the public sphere.

Data is collected through online documentation techniques, namely by tracing and archiving news discourse from Kompas.com's official website. The discourse obtained was then examined using three dimensions of dialectical studies in the concept of critical discourse analysis, as outlined by Fairclough (2023): text analysis, discourse-practice analysis, and social-practice analysis. Here is a visualization of Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis.

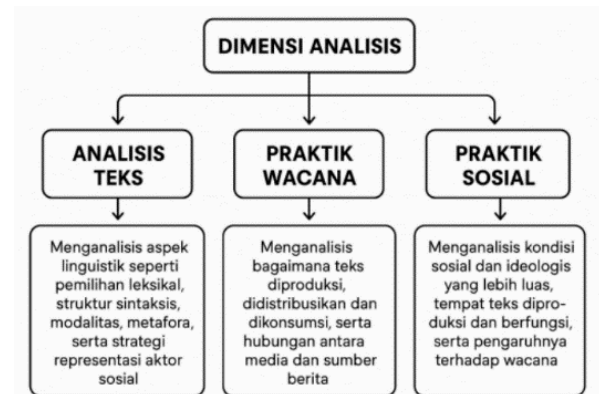


Figure 1. Fairclough Dimension of Analysis

The validity of the analysis is determined through theoretical triangulation, drawing on the ideas of other discourse analysts, such as van Dijk (2021), who emphasizes the relationship between discourse and power, and van Leeuwen (2008), who highlights the strategy of legitimacy in language. By combining these perspectives, the analyst maps how the two discourses build their respective legitimacy: the government through rationalization and development, while labor through moral evaluation and social solidarity.

The study is carried out qualitatively and interpretively, following hermeneutic principles that understand narratives in terms of the social context that gave rise to them (Fairclough, 2010). The interpretation process is carried out simultaneously between micro readings of language structures and macro readings of social structures. Dependent on this, this study not only describes what is said in the text, but also explains why and how it is said in the context of the ideology surrounding it.

Holistically, this research method is directed at revealing the discursive mechanisms that shape public perception of national apprenticeship policies and at explaining how the media plays a role in affirming or challenging state power. Drawing on CDA, this study seeks to uncover the reality that language in news discourse is not a neutral reflection of social reality, but rather part of social practices that shape how society understands the relationship between the state, labor, and education in the context of contemporary political economy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) places language as a social practice that produces and reproduces ideology and power (Fairclough, 2010). Using a three-dimensional framework: text, discourse practice, and social practice, this study examines two news texts from the Kompas.com online website that present

contradictory views on the National Apprenticeship Program initiated by the Ministry of Manpower (Kemnaker).

The first news discourse, entitled "Deputy Minister of Manpower Calls Internship Program a Golden Bridge to the World of Work" (Kompas.com, November 4, 2025), affirms the government's legitimacy through positive, progressive insinuations. On the contrary, the second article, "Trade Unions Regarding the Ministry of Agriculture's Internship Program: Insulting Undergraduate Graduates" (Kompas.com, October 14, 2025), highlights nuances in the resistance of labor unions, which consider the program a form of exploitation and degradation of higher education. Through an in-depth analysis, analysts find a contradiction in the two texts that is not just a difference of opinion, but a representation of the ideological battle between neoliberal discourse (government legitimacy) and labor populism (resistance to structural injustice)

Text Dimensions: Language Strategies, Lexicons, and Representations of Lexical Chosen Actors

Lexical and Positive Image of the Government

Discourse that shows the existence of the government predominantly uses a positive lexicon, indicating optimism and progress. Quotes in the news:

"The internship program is a golden bridge to the world of work and strengthens the competitiveness of Indonesia's human resources." (Kompas.com, November 4, 2025)

Shows the existence of a construction of meaning that normalizes internships as a strategic means of the state in economic development. The metaphor of the "golden bridge" symbolizes modernity, progress, and success. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), this kind of metaphor is not an object with a neutral role but rather serves to form an ideological perception of social reality.

Syntactically speaking, the discourse places the government as an active actor and the main agent of change through an active-transitive structure:

"The government continues to strengthen the link and match between the world of education and the world of work."

While subjects such as students or job seekers tend to be passive objects that are assisted, facilitated, or encouraged. This pattern shows a hierarchical relationship between the state, as

protector and regulator, and the people, as beneficiaries. In Fairclough's (2023) view, this kind of structure confirms the existence of *institutionalized power asymmetry* through grammatical choices.

Resistive Lexicon and Negative Image of the State

In contrast, trade union discourse displays confrontational and emotional lexical patterns, such as:

"This internship program insults undergraduate graduates."

"The government degrades the dignity of higher education by making undergraduates cheap apprentices." (Kompas.com, October 14, 2025)

The choice of insulting, condescending, and cheap words represents an experience of symbolic and economic injustice. The discourse attacks not only policies but also value structures that are deemed to prioritize economic efficiency over human dignity. The structure of passive sentences, such as 'bachelor's graduates are used as interns,' confirms that workers or scholars are victims of a larger system. The use of passive sentences and the nominalization of "insult to education" obscure the agent of the perpetrator but highlight the dimension of suffering. According to Halliday (2004), this strategy emphasizes the victim's position while strengthening the message's emotional impact.

Intertextuality and Implicit Ideology

In this case, intertextuality plays an important role in shaping the text's ideological position. The government's discourse, which inserts policy jargon such as superior human resources, link and match, and adaptive employment ecosystems, directly reproduces the *neoliberal policy discourse* that emphasizes the competitiveness of individuals in the global labor market (Rose, 2019). On the contrary, the trade union text links the issue of apprenticeships with the context of structural injustice:

"Workers are not prosperous, now graduates are even used as apprentices. This is tantamount to abolishing living wages."

The quotation presents an intertextual relationship with the discourse of class struggle and workers' rights. Through semantic opposition: prosperous, used as an apprenticeship, the related narrative builds a moral antithesis to the logic of

government efficiency. In Fairclough's (2010) perspective, this is a form of *recontextualization*, the process of reinterpreting social experiences across different discourse areas to counter dominant hegemony.

Dimensions of Discourse Practice: Production, Distribution, and Consumption of Meaning

The practice dimension of discourse highlights how texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted in media systems. Although both texts come from the same news portal, Kompas.com, both show different production strategies. The government's discourse follows an institutional news pattern that relies heavily on official sources. There was only one speaker, the Deputy Minister, without any cross-verification efforts or the inclusion of alternative votes. Thus, the media serves as a channel for state legitimacy. This tendency aligns with the findings of Herman and Chomsky (2020) in the media propaganda model, which argues that the media, as the information mainstream, often reproduces elite discourse due to its dependence on dominant sources. On the other hand, discourse on labor perceptions uses an issue-based reporting approach, with trade unions serving as the main resource persons to build the image of public resistance. The discourse on workers' perceptions lacks clear government clarification. As a result, the two texts do not interact with each other dialogically, but rather form two parallel discursive fields that reinforce polarization.

In the consumption dimension, government discourse tends to be aimed at public and academic spaces, or at those who believe in meritocracy and *self-improvement* narratives. Meanwhile, the discourse on labor perception is directed at the community of workers and students who are critical of social inequality. According to Wodak (2015), this kind of audience division reinforces discursive segregation, a form of public fragmentation based on different ideological interests.

The two contradictory discourses show a distinctive pattern of recontextualization. The government's discourse moves the language of economics into the social realm, "improving the quality of human resources". In contrast, the labor discourse moves the moral language into the political realm, "insulting the dignity of education". The battle between technocratic rationality and social morality reveals the dynamics of competing orders of discourse vying to shape the public's understanding of internships as a symbol of policy.

The Dimensions of Social Practice: Ideology, Power, and Hegemony

At the level of social practice, the contradictions in related discourses reveal an ideological struggle within the structure of Indonesian neoliberal capitalism. The government uses the language of development to normalize workforce flexibility. Internships are built as a golden bridge that brings young workers to the industrial world. In fact, behind this metaphor is the logic of the labor market that suppresses wage rights and permanent work status. This statement aligns with Fairclough's (2010) view that the language of development is a hegemonic instrument that constructs consent for a system that is, in fact, unbalanced. The government's discourse creates *technocratic common sense*: the view that inequality is a natural consequence of increased competitiveness.

On the contrary, trade union discourse is a counter-hegemonic discourse that seeks to deconstruct that logic by affirming the values of dignity, justice, and solidarity. Statement:

"How is it possible for a scholar who studies for four years to be equated with an internship without pay?"

It is a symbol of rejection of *the commodification of education*, a process that treats education as a purely economic instrument (Giroux, 2021). In this context, workers and students became political subjects demanding a new assessment of work and education. Further, the media, in this position, serves a dual function, namely: 1) expanding the reach of resistive discourse and 2) a market economic framework that relies on institutional sources. This shows that the media is not a neutral arena, but part of the *ideological apparatus* that mediates conflicts between the state and society (van Dijk, 2021).

Synthesis and Implications

The results of this study show that there are lexical, syntactic, and intertextual differences in the two texts that are not only linguistic constructions but also a reflection of the power relations inherent in social structures. The government's discourse represents the ideology of development and neoliberal meritocracy, while labor discourse reflects the ideology of social justice and resistance to exploitation.

Through Fairclough's framework, it can be concluded that the discourse of national apprenticeship on Kompas.com is a form of discursive struggle, a situation in which language is used to negotiate meaning between two powers:

the state that seeks to maintain hegemony through technocratic rationality, and the workers who resist through social morality. In the context of public policy, this study also emphasizes the importance of reading the media critically. Internship programs, if they continue to be represented singularly as a golden bridge, risk obscuring the dimensions of structural inequality in the job market. Therefore, the media needs to develop the practice of *deliberative journalism*, a news model that opens a space for debate among social actors, thereby avoiding the reproduction of hegemonic discourse (Habermas, 1989).

CONCLUSION

A critical discourse analysis of two news articles published by Kompas.com on the National Apprenticeship Program shows differences in representation between the government and trade unions. Inevitably, these differences are not just variations in views but a form of ideological battle rooted in power relations in labor policy. Through the three dimensions of Fairclough's analysis: text, discourse practice, and social practice, the analyst finds that the government constructs the apprenticeship discourse through the language of development, modernity, and technocratic rationality, while workers construct a counter-discourse based on morality, justice, and resistance to exploitation.

The government's discourse employs legitimacy strategies through euphemisms and positive metaphors, such as the 'golden bridge.' In contrast, labor discourse uses resistance strategies through evaluative diction, such as insults or degrading language. Both strategies show how language becomes a means of constructing meaning that shapes public opinion. In a broader context, this study's results show that the mass media function as a hegemonic arena that is not neutral. The media can strengthen or challenge the dominant power structure.

Linked to the results of the study described, this study confirms that CDA plays a role in uncovering the hidden ideology behind the language of policy and the media. The practical implication is that media institutions need to develop *deliberative journalism* that can present a diversity of social perspectives equally. At the same time, readers are expected to have critical discourse literacy so that they do not just receive public discourse, but can interpret and assess it reflectively.

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