

# Digital Discourse Analysis on the Issue of Education Development in Indonesia: The Perspective of the Free Nutritional Meal Program as a Solution for Student Nutritional Needs

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes the digital discourse surrounding the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) as part of Indonesia's educational development strategy. Employing a qualitative approach and Critical Discourse Analysis, the research explores how digital media frame MBG as a symbol of state commitment to securing children's rights to nutrition and education. Data were collected from digital documents, including press releases, news articles, and policy statements published between January and March 2025. Findings reveal that MBG is not merely perceived as a school nutrition initiative but also as a socio-political instrument, a driver of local economic empowerment, and a reformative tool for public policy governance. The discourse highlights institutional collaboration, MSME involvement, and community participation, while also reflecting public criticism regarding access inequality, food quality, and program sustainability. These dynamics indicate that public policy discourse in the digital era is highly contested, participatory, and politically nuanced. This study contributes theoretically to the application of Critical Discourse Analysis in educational and nutrition policy research. Practically, it offers insights for enhancing policy literacy and participatory planning. MBG emerges as a multidimensional policy requiring synergy among state actors, civil society, and digital media to realize a healthier and more empowered generation.

**Keywords:** Digital Discourse, Education Policy, Free Nutritious Meal Program, Critical Discourse Analysis, Student Nutrition, National Development.

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## A. INTRODUCTION

The development of education in Indonesia remains a central theme in public, academic, and policy discussions. In recent decades, digital media have played a dominant role in shaping discourses surrounding educational quality, teacher identity, and unequal access to learning opportunities. Media not only transmit information but also produce social meanings that influence public opinion and policymaking. As noted by Goldstein (2010), media discourse shapes perceptions of teachers and educational reform, often framing these actors within narratives of failure or inadequacy. Cohen (2010) adds that public discourse is frequently dominated by crisis narratives that hold teachers accountable for systemic educational shortcomings. These representations place pressure on teachers and reinforce reactive, top-down policies. The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), while designed as a nutritional intervention, is also interpreted through such mediated frames. As highlighted by

Zhang (2023), media constructions of inequality can deeply influence how new education-related programs are perceived by the public.

Beyond teacher identity and educational crisis, digital discourse increasingly highlights the transformation of education through technology. Media narratives often celebrate data-driven and student-centered approaches while obscuring the underlying power relations and market interests, as argued by Macgilchrist (2019). Salajan (2019) reinforces this critique by showing how digital education initiatives, such as the European Digital Education Area, often fail to address implementation gaps on the ground. In Indonesia, however, the MBG program emerges not from digital innovation but from the urgent need to address basic student welfare namely nutrition and access. In this sense, MBG provides a counterpoint to elite-driven narratives by emphasizing structural equity. The involvement of multiple ministries and community stakeholders in MBG also reflects a governance shift from centralized control to more collaborative public policy practices. Lester et al. (2017) advocate using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how such policy discourses are produced and contested in media. This method enables scholars to trace the power relations embedded within media texts and understand how public acceptance of educational policy is constructed and negotiated.

Despite the promising outcomes of MBG on student nutrition and school engagement, there is limited research on how this program is framed in digital media and how such framing influences public understanding. While previous studies have focused on MBG's nutritional benefits and educational outcomes, few have explored its symbolic and discursive functions in shaping public perception and legitimizing state policies. Hence, this study addresses a critical research gap by examining the digital discourse surrounding MBG as a part of Indonesia's broader educational development agenda. The study adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis framework to uncover how media narratives construct MBG and position various stakeholders such as teachers, students, and policymakers. It also investigates how discourse influences program legitimacy and public accountability. Through this approach, the study seeks to contribute theoretically to discourse studies in education and practically to participatory policymaking. The central research question guiding this study is: How does digital media frame the Free Nutritious Meal Program as part of the discourse on educational development in Indonesia?

## **B. METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how digital media construct and convey meaning in relation to public policy, particularly the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) within Indonesia's educational development agenda. CDA was selected for its ability to explore the interplay between language, power, and ideology in media discourse (Lester et al., 2017). The research is exploratory-descriptive in nature, aiming to uncover how digital narratives are structured, what perspectives are emphasized, and how key stakeholders such as teachers, students, and policymakers are represented.

The primary instrument used in this study was a discourse analysis framework based on three dimensions of CDA: textual analysis (including language, style, and metaphors),

discursive practice (production and interpretation of texts), and social practice (the socio-political context influencing discourse). These dimensions enabled the identification of both explicit and implicit messages, as well as the broader ideological positioning of the MBG policy. The study did not only focus on content but also considered the political, cultural, and institutional contexts behind each media artifact.

Data collection involved a systematic selection of digital texts that specifically addressed the MBG program in relation to education. The texts were analyzed through open and thematic coding, assisted by qualitative data analysis software to identify recurring discourse patterns. To ensure the validity of the findings, source triangulation and peer review of analytical outcomes were conducted. Transparency was maintained throughout the analytical process to enable replication. Ultimately, this method allowed for a deeper understanding of how media representations of MBG shape public discourse and influence the legitimacy of education-related policy narratives.

## **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Results**

The findings of this study reveal that the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) functions not merely as a nutritional intervention but also as a multidimensional strategy that intersects with educational development, public health, and local economic empowerment in Indonesia. Through critical discourse analysis of digital media and policy documents, six key thematic categories emerged that reflect the sociopolitical construction of MBG within public discourse. First, MBG is framed as a symbol of state commitment toward the "Golden Indonesia 2045" vision. Its launch on 6 January 2025 is widely portrayed as a strategic investment in human capital, aiming to reduce poverty, address malnutrition, and cultivate a productive generation. This is evidenced by targeted outreach to 82.9 million beneficiaries and a government budget allocation of IDR 171 trillion, with digital narratives frequently emphasizing future-oriented terms such as "investment in the nation's future" and "nurturing a healthy student generation" (Kemensetneg, 2024; Paudpedia, 2025; Tempo, 2025).

Second, MBG is depicted as a well-structured and collaborative policy. The establishment of over 722 Gizi Fulfillment Service Units (SPPGs) by March 2025—along with active partnerships involving micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and local farmers—illustrates an inclusive implementation strategy. Media discourses highlight this multi-stakeholder model as an embodiment of "cross-sector solidarity." Third, food quality and safety are positioned as critical pillars of the program. Measures include strict ingredient selection, routine distribution audits, and food safety certifications by BPOM and OKKP. Technology is used to monitor and report food delivery, reinforcing the state's role in ensuring hygienic food distribution, often emphasized in public narratives using expressions like "safe meals for students" and "quarterly audits as quality assurance" (BAPANAS, 2016; Berita Nasional Update, 2025; BPOM, 2006).

Fourth, the program is framed as a product of community-based governance, involving local authorities, health and education departments, and grassroots organizations in both food production and delivery. Public training in food safety and nutrition further strengthens this representation (Lor, 2024; Pegadangan, 2023). Fifth, MBG is shown to yield tangible

improvements in educational engagement and local economic activity. Reports from schools highlight increased attendance and student focus, while MSME involvement stimulates local supply chains and reduces dependency on food imports (Paudpedia, 2025). Lastly, despite widespread support, public discourse also reflects concerns over regional disparities and long-term sustainability. Critiques often target the unequal distribution in remote areas and the need for legislative guarantees to secure continuity beyond 2029. These responses underscore MBG as a subject of democratic deliberation and public accountability, positioning it not only as a state-led initiative but also as a contested, participatory space in contemporary education policy discourse (Media Keuangan Kemenkeu, 2025).

## **2. Discussion**

The digital discourse surrounding the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) reveals the complex interplay between public policy construction and the broader dynamics of education, health, and governance in Indonesia. This study's findings suggest that MBG is not merely a technocratic intervention in school nutrition, but a symbolic representation of the state's vision for sustainable development, social legitimacy, and digitally mediated policy communication. Through discourse analysis, the study identified multiple layers of meaning embedded in public narratives of MBG, which illuminate how education-related policies are framed, legitimized, and contested in the digital public sphere. The discussion that follows focuses on five major thematic aspects emerging from this discourse: the representation of the state in nutrition and education policy, the legitimacy of digital narratives and public perception, cross-sectoral collaboration structures, the integration of nutrition with educational and socio-economic resilience, and critical reflections on sustainability and participatory evaluation.

One of the core findings of this study lies in how MBG is discursively framed as an expression of state commitment toward realizing the national vision of "Golden Indonesia 2045." This representation aligns closely with Goldstein's (2010) observation that media often construct symbolic images of the state through policy communication, particularly in education reform. MBG is constructed not only as a response to school malnutrition but as part of a grander narrative that depicts the state as a responsible and forward-looking guardian of its future generations. Phrases such as "superior generation," "demographic bonus," and "rights to nutrition and education" are consistently used in media discourse, reflecting a deliberate strategy to foster public consensus and institutional legitimacy. These rhetorical devices not only elevate MBG's policy status but also reinforce the image of a capable and benevolent government.

Echoing Cohen's (2010) analysis, the framing of educational crises often becomes a rhetorical tool for restructuring the role of the state and its institutions, including schools and teachers. In the case of MBG, the state positions itself as both a manager and a caretaker, responding decisively to intersecting crises of nutrition and education. Such positioning is crucial in shaping the symbolic capital of the government in the eyes of its citizens. This research, therefore, contributes to the growing body of work that interrogates how public policy—especially in the realm of social welfare—is deeply intertwined with discourse production, where meanings are not neutral but laden with power dynamics and ideological interests.

Digital legitimacy and public discourse constitute another significant dimension uncovered in this study. As Macgilchrist (2019) notes, the digital integration of education narratives often masks underlying power structures and commercial agendas. MBG's representation in digital media through social platforms, online news portals, and government webcasts demonstrates how the state crafts a proactive image, positioning itself as transparent and inclusive. However, this carefully curated image is met with public responses that reveal concerns, particularly regarding access inequalities and regional disparities in program delivery. In line with Şen's (2018) findings on the influence of political contexts on media representation, this study shows how MBG becomes a site of discursive negotiation where government narratives encounter public scrutiny and counter-narratives.

The presence of digital public criticism indicates a growing space for democratic discourse within policy processes. As suggested by Lester et al. (2017), CDA enables the examination of how media practices allow the public to reinterpret, challenge, or rearticulate state-led initiatives. In the case of MBG, citizens do not merely consume media content; they actively produce alternative narratives that reshape the broader understanding of the program. Online commentary, social media discussions, and local news coverage have exposed gaps in implementation and have called for policy improvements—especially from stakeholders in rural and remote areas. This participatory engagement suggests a shift toward more dialogic and accountable forms of governance.

Collaboration across multiple stakeholders is another key aspect highlighted in both the discourse and the actual implementation of MBG. The involvement of BAPANAS, BPOM, the Ministry of Health, and local government agencies along with micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) represents a move away from hierarchical models of public administration toward more networked governance. This transformation aligns with global trends in public sector reform, where governance is increasingly defined by cooperation, flexibility, and responsiveness. Drawing from Zhang's (2023) insights, this study affirms that government programs achieve greater legitimacy when they integrate local actors into both design and delivery. The establishment of Local Food Committees and regular training for food producers signal a policy model rooted in community empowerment, reinforcing the sustainability and social embeddedness of MBG.

The discursive framing of MBG also points to its multidimensional impact on education and socio-economic resilience. The program is consistently linked to improved school attendance, enhanced student focus, and positive classroom climates, supporting findings from Heim et al. (2022) and Cohen et al. (2021). Moreover, the active participation of local food suppliers and small businesses helps strengthen rural economies and reduce reliance on imported food, which aligns with Taylor et al.'s (2020) argument that school meal policies can serve as levers for regional development. In public narratives, MBG is depicted not merely as a nutrition program, but as an integrated policy tool that connects education, health, and economic development a model that resonates strongly with contemporary calls for systemic, cross-sectoral approaches to policy design.

Despite these promising developments, MBG is not without challenges. This study found that digital discourse also reveals critical perspectives, particularly regarding the uneven quality of food distribution and the uncertainty of the program's future beyond 2029.

Comments from public stakeholders frequently point to the lack of legal guarantees and the risk of politicization, echoing Bayate et al.'s (2023) concern that media constructions can influence public perceptions of policy stability and teacher credibility. These findings highlight the need for long-term policy planning supported by robust legal frameworks and sustained funding mechanisms. Without such safeguards, MBG risks becoming a transient political project rather than a transformative policy legacy.

The implications of this discourse analysis point to the importance of transparent and evaluative policy framing in the digital age. As social media and online platforms become central arenas for policy communication, governments must move beyond one-directional messaging toward meaningful engagement with stakeholders. MBG's early successes should be reinforced by building structured pathways for continuous feedback, community monitoring, and data-driven evaluation. Policy discourse, as this study demonstrates, is not merely rhetorical; it actively shapes the implementation, perception, and durability of public programs.

From an academic standpoint, this study advances the application of Critical Discourse Analysis within the fields of education and nutrition policy. By integrating CDA with digital policy analysis, the research offers a novel conceptual framework that can be applied to other public sector programs, especially in post-digital governance contexts. The study also makes an original contribution to Indonesian policy scholarship by showing how digital discourse functions both as a tool of hegemonic reproduction and a space for grassroots participation. The duality of media both as an instrument of state control and a platform for civic engagement emerges as a central theme in the evolving landscape of policy communication.

Practically, the study underscores the urgent need to enhance public digital literacy, particularly concerning policy information. Citizens require the skills to critically evaluate policy narratives, identify misinformation, and engage constructively in dialogue. For the government, this entails not only greater transparency but also the creation of inclusive digital infrastructures for participation. Community-based digital monitoring systems and localized audit mechanisms could strengthen public trust and ensure that policies remain responsive to diverse needs. These practices are essential for bridging the gap between policy design and lived experience, especially in a country as socio-geographically diverse as Indonesia.

Nonetheless, this research has several limitations. First, it relies solely on digital and textual data sources, without incorporating direct interviews with policymakers or beneficiaries. This limits the depth of insight into the program's operational realities. Second, the analysis focuses exclusively on discursive representations, without assessing quantitative indicators such as academic performance, nutrition levels, or regional disparities. Third, the time frame of the study restricted to the first quarter of 2025 does not allow for the evaluation of mid- or long-term impacts. Future research should therefore employ a mixed-methods approach that integrates discourse analysis with empirical policy evaluation, including fieldwork, surveys, and longitudinal tracking.

In conclusion, the discourse surrounding MBG reveals the multifaceted nature of education and welfare policy in the digital era. It reflects both the symbolic power of the state and the growing agency of the public in shaping policy narratives. As governments increasingly turn to digital platforms for public engagement, the role of discourse becomes

ever more central to the success and sustainability of public programs. MBG serves as a powerful example of how policy is not only designed and implemented, but also constructed, negotiated, and redefined in the public eye.

#### D. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study reveals that the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) operates not solely as a nutrition-focused initiative for improving children's health, but also as a discursive construction of educational development infused with socio-political meaning. Within the digital sphere, MBG is portrayed as a manifestation of the state's commitment to future generations, especially in alignment with the national vision of "Golden Indonesia 2045." The discourse surrounding MBG demonstrates how policy is simultaneously a tool of governmental legitimacy, a medium for public education, and a contested space between institutional authority and civic participation.

The findings indicate that the successful implementation of MBG is closely tied to inter-institutional collaboration, the involvement of micro and small enterprises, local community engagement, and rigorous quality control mechanisms. Moreover, the presence of digital criticism underscores the participatory and democratic nature of contemporary policy evaluation. MBG thus emerges as a multidimensional policy that intertwines nutrition, education, economic empowerment, and digital communication in ways that reshape the landscape of public service delivery in Indonesia.

This study contributes theoretically by applying Critical Discourse Analysis to explore how digital representations shape public perception of social policy. In the Indonesian context marked by a growing reliance on digital media for information and advocacy this approach is particularly relevant. Despite its insights, the study is limited by its exclusive focus on online discourse and the absence of firsthand perspectives from program stakeholders. Future research should incorporate mixed methods, including ethnographic inquiry and quantitative assessments, to examine the long-term effects of MBG on educational outcomes, national nutrition status, and local food security. Ultimately, this study enriches the discourse on public policy by highlighting the ways in which digital narratives influence governance, accountability, and participatory development.

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