



Critical Discourse Analysis: Papuan Rejection of the Free Nutritious Food Policy

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the media discourse construction regarding the rejection of the free nutritious meal program (MBG) policy by Papuan students through the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach using Teun A. Van Dijk's social cognition model. The focus of the research is directed toward a news article from Tempo.co titled "Thousands of Students in Papua Pegunungan Protest against Free Nutritious Meals" published on February 17, 2025. It aims to analyze the text structure, social cognition, and social context in the Tempo.co news coverage regarding the rejection of the free nutritious meal policy by Papuan students. This research uses a qualitative method with a critical discourse analysis approach developed by Teun A. Van Dijk, often known as the social cognition model. The research results show that Tempo.co's reporting not only describes the demonstrations but also reproduces the power relations between the central government and the Papuan people. At the textual level, the news places the legitimacy of the MBG policy as the main framework before presenting the reasons for rejection, while security-themed lexical choices, such as "preventing riots," "dispersing crowds," and "tear gas," frame the students' actions as a threat to public order. At the level of social cognition, it is evident that journalists prioritize official sources and policy explanations, resulting in limited space for students' structural reasons regarding educational and health disparities. At the level of social context, the construction of news discourse is closely related to the political dynamics of Papua and the tendency of national media to adopt a central perspective. The integration of the three levels of analysis reveals that media representation tends to affirm state hegemony, marginalize local voices, and normalize the actions of the authorities as part of restoring order.

Keywords: demonstration, free nutritious meals, critical discourse, social cognition model

INTRODUCTION

The fact that the MBG recipients are widespread and the budget allocation is large makes this program a battleground in the discourse between the state and society. The issue of malnutrition among children and low educational achievement in several developing countries has prompted the government to create a social policy as an instrument to address these problems. In several developing countries, the government has launched social programs to address the issues of malnutrition among children and low academic performance. The National Strategy Committee, led by President Prabowo Subianto, has decided to implement a free nutritious lunch program. This program began implementation on January 6, 2025, at 190 locations across 26 provinces, targeting school students, pregnant women, and nutritionally vulnerable children, with a target recipient count of 82.9 million people (Emir Yanwardhana, 2025). Since its implementation began, this program has received high public support since the campaign period, with 80.1% of respondents expressing approval of the policy (Nanda et al., 2024). This policy is understood as not only a nutritional intervention but also a state effort to strengthen social protection and reduce welfare disparities.

Several studies have examined the free meal program from various perspectives, including its effectiveness in meeting nutritional needs (Eliza et al., 2024), its role in strengthening household and community food security (Fatimah et al., 2024), and its long-term implications for social mobility and economic well-being. Long-term studies in Sweden show that providing free lunches in elementary schools during the period 1959–1969 resulted in a lifetime income increase of about 3% for those who received free meals, especially students from low-income households. This indicates that nutritional interventions in childhood can reduce economic inequality in adulthood (Lundborg et al., 2022).

The MBG program does not only focus on health and education aspects. Behind its implementation, this program also encompasses other interrelated dimensions, particularly the political dimensions. That dimension is related to the process of forming and simultaneously strengthening the legitimacy of power in public policy practices. Findings from various international studies indicate that school meal provision policies often operate in a space influenced by political interests, power relations, and government image strategies. Studies on the Brazilian School Feeding Program (PNAE) show that in addition to improving diet quality and household food security, the program is also used as a political instrument to strengthen state legitimacy through the practice of purchasing food from small farmers, which symbolically affirms the government's support for economically disadvantaged groups (Oliveira et al., 2023). Research on India's Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) shows that the free meal program not only serves

as a social policy but also becomes an arena for ideological negotiation. In practice, this program involves the interests of the state, local governments, and various community groups. This condition arises because this policy directly affects the way the public perceives the government's bias toward the poor (Pal et al., 2024).

Although there is a considerable amount of research on the MBG program in Indonesia, the available studies are still dominated by technical analyses of nutritional aspects, program achievements, and policy evaluations. They tend to pay less attention to the symbolic and political dimensions inherent in its implementation. The media occupies an important position in shaping policy images, managing public perception, and constructing the meaning of government actions through the selection of narratives and discourse strategies. Media representation has the potential to determine whether the free nutritious meal program is understood as a pro-people policy, a populist strategy, or a political instrument to maintain electoral support. This condition underscores a research gap because, to date, there are still very few studies specifically examining how Indonesian media frame the free nutritious food policy and how this narrative construction influences public acceptance and national political discourse.

Several studies show that the media in Indonesia often represent the Papuan community through constructions that overlook the social and cultural complexities of Papuan society. Such representations ultimately contribute to the marginalization of Papuan identity and social experiences in the news. Dalimunthe revealed that the media often positions the Papuan ethnic identity as the other, resulting in the perspectives and voices of the Papuan community receiving inadequate space. In news reporting practices, this position encourages the media to highlight issues of conflict, separatism, or backwardness, while the aspirations and social experiences of the Papuan people are often overlooked (Dalimunthe, 2022). Wirawan's findings also show that the national media has a much narrower, stereotypical social perspective, which ultimately neglects the issues faced by the Papuan people (Wirawan et al., 2022).

The media plays a strategic role in shaping public perception of government decisions. Not only does the media reflect reality, but it also actively constructs it through the selection of diction, perspectives, framing strategies, and various other discourse elements that contribute to meaning-making (Permana et al., 2024). Several studies also show that issues can be elevated to the national agenda as symbols of success and as political instruments that strengthen public support (Nabiri et al., 2020). In the context of the MBG policy, media coverage plays a role in determining whether the program is perceived as a solution to nutritional issues, as a form of political populism, or as a state intervention for affected community groups.

Critical discourse analysis becomes a relevant approach to examine how the narrative is formed and distributed. CDA views language as a social practice

related to power relations and ideology (Susilo, 2021). In this study, Teun A. Van Dijk's model is used because it offers a framework that connects text structure, journalists' cognitive processes, and the broader socio-political context (Eriyanto, 2005). This model departs from the view that media texts are never value-free, as meaning is formed through the interconnection between language, knowledge, and social structure. The Van Dijk analysis framework used in this research is based on three main components as the conceptual foundation. First, the text or discourse structure, which examines the form of discourse in both written texts and speech. This analysis includes themes, titles, vocabulary selection, coherence, and argumentation patterns present in the news coverage. Second, social cognition, which examines the framework of thought and ideological orientation of journalists, including how their experiences and knowledge influence the writing process and the interpretation of an event in the news. Third, social context, which examines the social-political conditions and dynamics as well as the power relations underlying the production and presentation of news in the media.

The importance of CDA in this program is based on its ideology and political agenda, the narrative in strengthening the legitimacy of government institutions and public trust through media influence. In the context of Papua, the history of distrust toward the state, as well as the rejection of this program by Papuan students, indicates that the central policy was never collectively agreed upon. Therefore, discourse analysis can be used to examine how media construction influences the relationship between the state and society, the level of acceptance of policies, and local political dynamics.

The research problems are: how this discourse of rejection is constructed and reproduced in media texts; how journalists' social cognition, which includes schemas, knowledge, experience, and ideological orientation, influences the process of news interpretation and composition; and how the discourse presented to the public is shaped by the surrounding social, political, and economic conditions. This research analyzes the text structure, social cognition, and social context or environment. This study also intends to illustrate, on a broader level, the relationship between media discourse and political configuration in constructing national media discourse, along with the dynamics of Papuan students' rejection of the free nutritious meal policy.

The novelty of this research lies in its effort to link the construction of national media discourse with the dynamics of Papuan student resistance. By integrating three points of analysis text, cognition, and context this study is expected to make an original contribution to the development of social policy discourse studies as well as to the understanding of power relations in media reporting practices in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a critical discourse analysis approach based on Teun A. van Dijk's sociocognitive model. This model approach divides critical discourse into three main areas: text structure, social cognition, and social context. The unit of analysis in this study is a news text published by Tempo.co on February 17, 2025, titled "Thousands of Students in the Papua Mountains Demonstrate against Free Nutritious Food." The research data were selected using purposive sampling techniques because this study focuses on discourse deemed most capable of representing the ideological struggle and power relations in the rejection of the MBG policy in Papua. By using purposive sampling techniques, the researchers identified texts that are substantively relevant and discursively significant. Data collection was carried out by writing down facts, reading carefully and slowly, grouping related words, and analyzing the language and persuasive strategies used in the text. The stages of analysis refer to van Dijk's CDA framework, applied sequentially: (1) macrostructure analysis to uncover the main themes and patterns of news presentation; (2) microstructure analysis, including lexical selection, discourse coherence, inter-sentential relations, source determination, rhetorical strategies, and the representation of actors; (3) social cognition analysis, aimed at tracing the journalist's mindset, journalistic values, news production mechanisms, and the editorial ideological orientation; and (4) social context analysis, used to examine power relations, the political situation in Papua, and the media's role in shaping discourse on government social policy.

The three points of analysis were then combined to trace how the discourse in the news text was constructed, circulated, and functions in shaping public understanding regarding the rejection of the MBG program. This integration allows for an analysis that not only stops the deconstruction of linguistic structures but also traces how representation, diction selection, and narrative structures are shaped by the knowledge, beliefs, and cognitive schemas of journalists. With this framework, this research can trace the connection between media linguistic practices and the thought processes and interpretation methods of journalists in framing the issues studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A large number of students from several schools in Wamena, Jayawijaya Regency, Papua Pegunungan, participated in a demonstration to support the decision to implement a free nutritious meal program, as reported by Tempo.co on February 17, 2025. With loud voices, they called out that the policy was far from the desires of the Papuan people, who expect the availability of decent and quality education and health services.



Source: Tempo.co, February 17, 2025

Figure 1. Thousands of students in Wamena demonstrate in front of the office of the Regent of Jawaijaya

Text Analysis (Media Discourse Structure)

To understand how news texts organise information and combine various elements into a narrative hierarchy, an analysis of the macrostructure (superstructure) was conducted. To evaluate how Tempo.co supported the MBG program and the Papuan students' rejection of it, the analysis considered the headline and lead, the content of the news related to the source of the demonstration, and the content of the news regarding the actions of the police. The purpose of the text analysis is to determine how government legitimacy is highlighted, how interpretive conflicts are reduced, and how the security narrative supports the actions of the authorities. The results of the macrostructure analysis are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Macrostructure Analysis (Superstructure)

Section	Analysis Indicator	Discourse function (CDA analysis)	Evidence/example (paragraph)
Headline & Lead	Focus on the scale of the demonstration (thousands of students) Directly linking protest actions to national MBG policies Affirming the policy context as a central	Setting the agenda: national policy as the starting point for news coverage Positioning protests as a reaction to policies that are assumed to be positive Constructing an interpretative framework that the	Headline: 'Thousands of Students in the Papua Mountains Protest Against Free Nutritious Meals' The lead emphasises that the action occurred in response to the implementation of the MBG programme in schools.

	<p>government program - Setting the agenda: national policy as the starting point for news interpretation Positioning protests as reactions to policies assumed to be positive Highlighting the demonstrators' diction through direct speech Contrast between the demonstrators' priorities (education & health) and the state's priorities (nutrition) Placing the demonstrators' voices after the legitimisation of the policy</p> <p>Use of security language: preventing stone throwing, dispersing the crowd, firing tear gas</p> <p>Use of causal structures: police actions as a logical response to mass action</p> <p>Repetition that MBG is a central government priority program</p> <p>Mention of program objectives: health,</p>	<p>MBG programme is a normative reference that is contested by local groups</p> <p>Presenting an interpretative conflict but still framing it as a local preference issue, not a structural problem</p> <p>Showing the hierarchy of discourse: the students' voices only reinforce the position of the policy as the 'norm.'</p> <p>Presenting the students' arguments as reactive and emotional</p> <p>Building the legitimacy of the authorities through order framing</p> <p>Shifting focus from the substance of demands to security issues</p> <p>Normalizing repressive actions by positioning the authorities as rational actors and protectors of social stability</p> <p>Strengthening the legitimacy of the policy through narratives of benefits and noble goals</p> <p>Providing a backstory that strengthens the</p> <p>'Give us free education, not nutritious food.' (student statement)</p> <p>The paragraph explains that the demands are positioned as criticism, not as a structural evaluation.</p> <p>The report states that the authorities fired tear gas "after the crowd started moving towards the regent's office"</p> <p>Paragraph emphasizes the officers' actions as a precautionary measure.</p> <p>The policy paragraph explains that MBG is aimed at improving student nutrition and has been appreciated in many regions.</p>
Body, reasons for the demonstration		
Body, description of police actions		
Body, National Policy Context		

	nutrition, food security	discourse that student resistance is not in line with the national development agenda Constructing the policy as something inherently good; Closing the news with a frame of stability, strengthening the state's role as a guardian of order	
Body Closing	Emphasis on the final conditions of the demonstration: disbandment, situation under control, authorities on standby	Obscuring the structural roots of demands through emphasizing post-action security conditions	The conclusion stated & quoted; the situation gradually became conducive after the authorities carried out additional security

Source: compiled from various sources

A macro or superstructure analysis shows that the reporting on the Papuan student demonstrations was framed within the context of the national policy on the MBG program. In the headline and opening paragraphs, emphasis was placed on the scale of the action and its connection to the policy formulated by the central government. This emphasis serves as an agenda-setting strategy that places MBG as the main reference in interpreting the event.

In the body of the news, the reasons behind the demonstrations are conveyed through direct quotes from students, but their position remains unequal in the discourse. The demands of Papuan students are presented as local preferences that conflict with government priorities, rather than as criticism of structural problems. This structure reveals a discourse hierarchy that treats policy as the norm, while the students' voices are considered more of an emotional reaction. The explanation of the authorities' actions uses language related to security and cause and effect, so that repressive actions appear rational and aimed at preventing problems. This framing shifts the focus from the content of the demands to the issue of order, while legitimising the role of the authorities as guardians of social stability. The national policy narrative emphasising health and nutrition objectives serves to reinforce the legitimacy of the MBG policy as a morally correct program.

In the closing section, the emphasis on the demonstrations ending peacefully and under control reinforces the frame of stability. This kind of conclusion affirms the role of the state as the guardian of order while obscuring the structural roots of the students' demands. Overall, the macro structure or

superstructure of the news reproduces power relations by centring legitimacy on the state and ignoring local community resistance. The results of this micro-structural analysis are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Microstructure Analysis (Linguistics & Rhetoric)

Micro Aspect	Linguistics/Rhetoric Features	CDA Implication	Example/quote
Syntax	The use of direct speech to the voice of protesters Syntactic order that places the voice of the government/official at the beginning of the paragraph Exclamative sentences on the part of local aspirations Security lexicon: "prevent riots", "dispel", "tight security"	Explains a narrative Hierarchy: The Voice of the state takes precedence over the voice of students Exclamative sentences give an emotional impression so that students' arguments seem subjective and less rational	"We need free schools and health, not nutritious food!" (shown after explanation of government policy).
Lexical / Stylistic	Material verbs that accentuate the action of the apparatus	Normalizing repressive measures by framing them as "security" measures Shifting the focus from substantive criticism to public order narratives	Police report: "officers were forced to disperse the crowd to prevent stone throwing."
Rhetoric (pathos/ethos)	Pathos: ekspresi emosional dari mahasiswa Ethos: legitimasi melalui pejabat, aparatur, dan data pemerintah	Pathos cenderung diposisikan sebagai suara "kelompok yang tersinggung" sehingga kurang otoritatif Ethos meningkatkan kredibilitas narasi negara, memperkuat hegemoni wacana	Kontras: kutipan emosional mahasiswa diikuti penegasan pejabat: "Program ini penting untuk kesehatan generasi muda."
Semantik (konotasi & ambiguitas)	Konotasi negatif terkait "ketertiban" dan "massa" ketika merujuk demonstran Presuposisi bahwa kebijakan MBG adalah solusi yang tepat	Media membangun citra mahasiswa sebagai potensi gangguan, bukan sebagai aktor politik sah Presuposisi menutup ruang pembacaan alternatif terhadap kebutuhan lokal	Teks menyatakan bahwa "massa mulai bergerak dan situasi memanas," menyiratkan ancaman ketertiban.

Source: compiled from various sources

An analysis of the microstructure of the text based on linguistic and rhetorical aspects was conducted to understand how motivation influences student behaviour and the decision-making process regarding free nutritious meals (MBG) at the micro level. There are three main dimensions in this analysis: syntax, style/form, rhetoric (pathos/ethos), and semantics (connotation & ambiguity). On the one hand, the use of straightforward language (direct speech) and explanatory language refutes claims of emotional demonstrations. This method is usually used after decisions have been legitimised, which can actually damage the government's prestige. In terms of aesthetics and behaviour, the use of words with clear meanings, such as 'preventing riots' or 'dispersing crowds,' increases the perception of the authorities as something normal and necessary, thereby normalising the response to punishment. Pathos in rhetoric is the demonstrators' speech to change moral support, while ethos is the official source of information that has the legitimacy of authority. The disagreement between the two sides demonstrates the government's dominant position. The lack of clarity regarding the suitability of the programme to local needs is caused by negative connotations in decision-making and the ambiguity of the objectives of the free nutritious meals (MBG).

Social Cognition

As an oppressed group, Papuan students are regarded as marginalized actors at the level of social cognition. Analysis shows that in news texts, Papuan students are positioned as a marginalized group. In reality, they are merely "local inspiration" for the dominating national agenda of free nutritious food (MBG). Although news articles provide space for student criticism, such as the slogan "Give us a free education, not a nutritious meal," this slogan is not used as an argumentative or legitimate foundation, but merely as a reaction to a national decision-making process that has long been seen as a public service. In this kind of construction, Papuan students are not only seen as actors with epistemic authority, but also as parties who challenge, question, or investigate decisions taken by the state. Such a representation pattern indicates the existence of a wave metric between the central angle of view and the peripheral angle of view.

National decision-making processes are seen as normatively important and necessary, while local communities are positioned as sources of influence, validity, or threat to the national agenda. Indirectly generate power relations involving the center as the main product and local communities as subordinate actors. The Media instead present local criticism as a reactive current, not as an alternative source of knowledge. Thus, the hierarchical understanding of who is authorized to speak on behalf of the public and who is behind the scenes as the judging or awarding party becomes eroded.

This is in line with the literature on media representation of marginalized

and minority groups. A global bibliometric study of the relationship between the media and marginalized groups shows that news practices often utilize discourse strategies that reproduce stereotypes and solidify the positions of powerful actors, while the viewpoints of vulnerable groups tend to be marginalized (Li et al., 2024). The negative or marginalized forms of representation that arise through text structure, framing, and polls are the main focus of research on the oppression of marginalized communities in the local context (Aliam & Sandoro, 2025).

Thus, the main role of the media in these cases is not only to report facts, but also to reproduce the myths of discourse. Where groups such as Papuan students continue to legitimize public discourse, while behind-the-scenes actors maintain their ideological and national dominance.

Social context

To understand Papuan students' rejection of the free nutritious meals (MBG) program, one must look at the dynamic relationship between the state, the media, and local communities. In addition to disseminating information, the media can also act as a container in shaping public perception of social and political events. From the point of view of Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK), Textual Criticism is seen as a discourse practice that is not only critical but also actively builds on the power structures, ideologies, and meanings contained in them.

First, the government is the hegemonic power in this text. The designation highlights the role of the government as the dominant hegemonic actor in the text. The government's decision to require free nutritious meals is a national strategy program aimed at improving the nutritional status of the nation's children, as described in the decree. The necessary grounds for legitimizing the decision were presented in the first paragraph. The storyline clearly explains the main issue of the news, being at the center of the reader's attention. Meanwhile, criticism and resistance from local actors are only seen as responses that need to be explained or measured within the framework of national decision-making. In this way, organizational structures work to foster the belief that national perspectives are more authentic, rational, and trustworthy.

Hierarchical relationships between national and local levels that reveal hegemonic practices that, according to the critical theory of hegemony, serve to build social consensus that influences the central government. By portraying the decision to provide free nutritious meals (MBG) as a universal and non-discriminatory program, the media subtly but effectively assigns a social role to the actors in the text. Where the government acts as a legitimate and impartial mediator, and local critics appear with a more hidden role, even antagonistic to the national agenda. This process shows that the media not only transmits information but also contributes to the production and reproduction of reality through the choice of text structure, framing, and representation of actors.

This approach is in line with the tradition of critical analysis of the media as put forward by Teun A. van Dijk and the concept of media hegemony. This perspective views the mass media not as a neutral entity, but as part of a power structure that plays a role in representing and maintaining the ideological dominance of ruling actors (Suhardi & Salamah, 2025). Government views are considered normative, and local views are positioned as resistance or exclusion, but this news does not convey information that national policies are more prominent than local criticism. Therefore, the media myth serves as a symbolic instrument of hegemony that shapes public perception in order to elevate the legitimacy of the state to the level of a myth.

Second, the media as an amplifier of inequality between the center and the regions. With the choice of point of view, lead structure, and selection of sources that put Central officials and security forces in the initial position of the news, the analysis shows that the media play a role in reinforcing the inequality center-region in discourse construction. The predominance of state actors in the initial part of the text creates an interpretive framework that prioritizes the central perspective as the main cornerstone of the reader's understanding. Thus, from the very beginning, there has been an attempt to shape national policy as a legitimate and unshakable goal.

In this context, the aspirations of the region, namely the Papuan students, emerged from a very turbulent background, as a result of the perspective of the authorities being hindered by this kind of narrative structure. They describe themselves as "local reactions" or "order issues" rather than as part of a broader political discourse. When local narratives are placed simply as responses to central policies, critical readings of power structures do not develop, and Papuan students do not come across as political subjects with argumentative authority.

This representational practice is consistent with findings in discourse analysis literature on regional conflict reporting, which suggests that mainstream media often produce representational biases towards events in peripheral regions. According to many studies, the perspective of the local population is positioned as a secondary element that is difficult to recognize, while the media continues to focus on the government and the authorities as the main source. For example, research on conflict in Papua reveals that the social reality of Papuans is often presented through biased viewpoints, highlighting the complexity and cruelty of local pandemics (Adiprasetio & Taqiyya, 2023).

Thus, the practice of news not only acts as a medium for delivering factual information, but also as a space where power relations are reproduced. The Media contribute to strengthening the hegemonic position of the state, normalizing the inequality of representation between the central and regional regions, and affirming the dominance of the national narrative over local experiences and

voices, through a strategy of storytelling that places central actors as authorities in the production of meaning.

Third, the repressive response of the police is often constructed as a form of "restoration of order". Analysis of the news texts revealed the use of language focused on security aspects, such as the phrases "prevent stone-throwing" and "use of tear gas," which reinforced the argument that the apparatus is a legitimate means of achieving stability. This lexical choice that emphasizes the elements of threat and control results in the understanding that the intervention of the authorities is perceived as a natural step necessary to maintain public order. By placing the apparatus as a party that reacts to dangerous situations, the news shifts the center of the problem from substantive criticism of students to issues of order by managing the apparatus as a party that reacts to dangerous situations.

The aforementioned framing patterns serve as tools of legitimacy that render national repressive practices ineffective and reversible. Within the framework of critical discourse analysis, the use of the security lexicon is not simply a choice of language, but a discursive practice that shifts the focus from the structural demands of demonstrators, such as education and welfare, to issues of social discipline. This shift in focus reduces the space for public empathy towards marginalized groups and strengthens the position of the apparatus as actors who safeguard common interests (Ranji & Selvik, 2025).

Thus, the language of security operates as a symbolic tool to maintain the hierarchy of power. All this is in line with other studies on the coverage of demonstrations that reveal the role of similar representations in the mainstream media. Rayyan Rahman and Claretta's research shows that the media have normalized the practice of state violence through language strategies that dismantle partisanship, the dissemination of information that portrays the authorities as the most authoritative source, as well as the dominance of real sources over the voices of demonstrators (Rahman and Claretta, 2025). This pattern of representation results in an image of the apparatus as a guardian of stability, while community groups that voice protests are constructed as parties that have the potential to disrupt social order.

In this framework, the security discourse in the news not only serves to report on police activities but also acts as a mechanism for reproducing power. Through narratives that emphasize stability and order, the media implicitly reinforces the dominance of central authorities while undermining the legitimacy of local demands for basic rights, such as education, health, and welfare. In the Papuan context, such protests would not only be a welcome change from the status quo but would also provide a platform for local communities to voice their disapproval of government policies.

Based on the results of structural analysis of the text, journalist cognition, and sociopolitical context, the findings of this study reveal how the mainstream

media represent Papuan students' rejection of the MBG program. News not only presents the facts of events but also builds social meaning that reflects the power relations between the central government and local communities. To further examine the impact of these representations on policy legitimacy, marginalization of local voices, and reproduction of inequality relations between the center and the regions, the next analysis is developed through a critical discussion that links the findings of this study with Van Dijk's theoretical framework and the findings in previous studies. The results of the analysis showed:

First, the hegemony of language and the legitimacy of decisions. According to A Te. Van Dijk, the role of the media is to produce social representation through effective strategies such as fact selection, narrative development, and emotional appeal. The entire research shows that the initiative behind the free nutritious meal (MBG) program legitimizes the decision-making process as a national priority, so government decisions are seen as the dominant norm. In contrast, criticism or local responses are only positioned as marginal responses that need to be explained, controlled, or ignored. Such a structure also indicates the operation of the hegemony of discourse, in which the media not only fail to reveal the facts but also establish a solid structure that normalizes dominance at the public level.

The hegemony of language and the process of legitimacy of decisions become central issues in this analysis. The Media function as producers of social representations through the application of various discourse strategies, such as the sorting of facts, the development of narrative lines, and the use of emotional appeals, as proposed by Teun A. van Dijk (Mouden, 2021). The findings of the study indicate that the legitimacy of the program as a national policy places it as the dominant reference in the decision-making process, thus it is treated as an established discourse norm by government institutions. On the contrary, responses of a marginal nature, including criticism and objections at the local level, tend to be positioned as something that requires explanation or even control. This kind of discourse construction reflects the work of imperial hegemony, where the media not only represent reality but also build symbolic structures that normalize the dominance of privileged groups in social space.

In the context of the MBG program, the mass media play a role in distributing information about the benefits of the program, the urgency of state intervention, and the formation of public perception through persuasive discourse strategies. This practice shows that policy decisions are not solely constructed as something normatively correct, but it closes the space for broader considerations of Justice. Meanwhile, Papuan students are represented as those outside the mainstream of the national agenda, so their objections tend not to have equal legitimacy. This condition shows how hegemony works through language by

The second is the marginalization of local collective identity. This analysis shows that the mainstream media continues to portray Papuan students as part of non-domestic groups in discourse construction. This analysis reveals that the main purpose of the media is to present Papuan students as outsiders in the news discourse. Not as a political subject demanding the redistribution of fundamental rights, but rather as a complainant voicing local aspirations. Therefore, Papuan students are not only seen as legitimate parties in demanding structural justice but also as Guardians of national policy norms.

This representation examines how local identities are constructed, eroded, and placed on the margins of public space. The representation of minority groups as 'other' or 'different' has been widely discussed in media studies and academic literature. According to Harsono's research, the mainstream media tends to produce narratives that place minority groups in subordinate positions through simplification of identity, blurring of historical context, and limiting their access to credible discourse (Harsono, 2021). In the Indonesian context, this process usually occurs when local groups express criticism of decision-making at the central level, where they are seen as obstacles to national development plans.

In the context of Papua, previous research has revealed that representations of Papuan identity in the national media are often structured within national normative frameworks or through stereotypes that reduce the socio-political complexity of Papuan society. The aspirations of the Papuan people are often positioned as marginal claims that are not equivalent to state authority, so their narratives are rarely raised as a source of legitimacy for discourse (Nababan, 2022). This shows how the structure of media discourse operates to maintain the dominance of the center over the region through the control of identity representation.

Thus, the news about Papuan students' rejection of the MBG policy cannot be understood solely as a difference of opinion between the government and students. This is part of a media representation mechanism that strengthens local identities, diversifies the role of students as an aspirational minority group, and promotes white supremacy as a more respectable and legitimate norm in society. This discourse configuration examines how media practices contribute to the reproduction of symbolic boundaries between cities and regions, as well as how they shape the nation's hegemonic position in defining what is considered important, true, and worthy of being told.

The third is the existence of inequality. Analysis of the context of inequality takes place in the long term and is documented in various studies of inequality in access to education and health services in Papua. Numerous studies have revealed that the limited infrastructure of schools and health services, the low availability of educators and medical personnel, and the lack of access to public services in

many regions have reached a critical point. Studies on the state of education in Papua also show a sharp disparity between districts and cities, with most areas still lagging significantly behind the national average. This situation confirms that structural inequality remains a fundamental issue in the fulfillment of the right to education and health for the Papuan people (Hanipah, 2024). Papuan students' rejection of the decision to implement the MBG program cannot be understood as a form of social pressure.

The rejection should be understood as an expression of criticism of the pattern of resource distribution that has been considered not to touch the root of the problem of underdevelopment. The students assessed that national development priorities are often unsustainable and poorly aligned with the concrete needs of underdeveloped regions. MBG is perceived as a short-term solution that does not target the structural dimension of inequality.

Mainstream media coverage highlights protesters' responses or actions without linking them to the broad social context. The public is hardly aware of the root causes behind the protests, such as the disparity in education, inequality in health services, and development gaps between regions. This framing indirectly reinforces the dominant narrative of the central government as the only legitimate reference for discourse and positions the voice of Papuan students as a responsive phenomenon, not as structural criticism based on factual conditions.

The distribution of budgets and public services in Papua shows a consistent pattern of inequality. Various reports indicate that government spending on education, health, and infrastructure is not proportional to the level of demand or the geographical conditions of the country. This indicates that service failures are not only caused by poor implementation of technology but are also part of a wider regional inequality structure. Papuan students' rejection of the MBG policy should be placed in an analytical framework that considers the dynamics of these structural injustices, not reduced to reactive issues as often reproduced in the media.

Fourth, the legitimacy of policing and security language. The analysis showed that the government used veiled language, such as the phrases "prevent stoning" and "tear gas is used," to disguise repressive measures as legitimate and rational actions for the sake of restoring public order. This lexical choice is not neutral, systematically focusing attention on threats to order and obscuring repressive measures as attempts to restore normalcy. In this way, the media not only convey information but also construct a framework of interpretation that benefits the apparatus. Security discourse serves as a discursive mechanism that shifts the focus from the structural demands of protesters, such as access to education, health care disparities, or development inequalities, to issues of order. When news stories highlight the potential for security disruption more than the

substance of the demands, the likelihood of public empathy for protesters diminishes. As a result, protest action is reduced to a matter of public discipline, rather than as an articulation of structural problems that require a policy response. The critical discourse analysis approach explains that the media, through word choice, narrative structure, and the prominence of certain actors, can reproduce power relations in public space. The language of security works as an ideological device that puts the apparatus in a superior position as protectors of society, while demonstrators are positioned as those who need to be controlled.

Thus, media discourse does not simply represent social reality but also serves as a mechanism that shapes the way in which the public assesses the legitimacy of government actions. A study of media coverage of demonstrations in Indonesia shows that action participants are often positioned as potential disturbances to security and order, rather than as political or social actors voicing their interests and demands (Nurjanah & Sutrisno, 2024). This representative pattern further reinforces the idea of government dominance as a strong authority in determining the boundaries of order. And on the contrary, it further weakens the legitimacy of the demonstration movement by students. Therefore, the practice of media reporting helps to reproduce and maintain the dominant security perspective when covering demonstrations.

CONCLUSION

Based on Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis framework, the discourse that developed in the Papuan student demonstrations can be understood as a form of collective resistance to the MBG program policy. The program is perceived as not really touching the basic needs of the Wamena community in mountainous Papua. The choice of words that are straightforward, even tend to be loud, as well as the use of direct quotes with full of emotions make the voice and position of local people feel stronger in the public space. Viewed from the side of social cognition, this discourse depicts the way students view government policies that they value as not on target and less sensitive to local realities. The repressive actions of the police contributed to the increased social tensions experienced by Papuan students during the demonstrations. Strong demands for free education and improved quality of health care indicate the dissatisfaction of Papuan students with the MBG policy. This condition reflects the sustainability of the problem of structural injustice faced by the Papuan people today. Therefore, the demonstration of Papuan students is not only to reject the MBG policy but also as a way for them to demand social justice and the fulfillment of basic rights as the responsibility of the government.

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