

**IDEOLOGY AND POWER REPRESENTATION IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION  
POLICY DISCOURSE: A MULTIMODAL CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

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**Abstrak:** Studi ini muncul dari urgensi untuk memahami kebijakan pendidikan bahasa sebagai praktik sosial yang tidak hanya bersifat teknis tetapi juga sangat sarat dengan representasi ideologis dan relasi kekuasaan, khususnya dalam konteks pendidikan yang semakin multibahasa dan multimodal. Di tengah dinamika globalisasi dan digitalisasi pendidikan, wacana kebijakan bahasa memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk standar keberhasilan, identitas pembelajar, dan arah praktik pedagogis. Studi ini bertujuan untuk meneliti bagaimana ideologi dan kekuasaan direpresentasikan dalam wacana kebijakan pendidikan bahasa dan bagaimana wacana tersebut diinterpretasikan oleh para aktor pendidikan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus dan kerangka Analisis Wacana Kritis Multimodal, data dikumpulkan melalui analisis dokumen kebijakan pendidikan bahasa yang berisi elemen verbal dan visual, serta refleksi partisipan yang melibatkan pendidik dalam konteks pendidikan formal. Analisis data dilakukan secara tematik dengan meneliti pola makna yang muncul dari interaksi antara teks, visual, dan pengalaman sosial partisipan. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan tiga tema utama: normalisasi bahasa dominan sebagai tolok ukur keberhasilan, ketegangan antara tuntutan kebijakan dan realitas pedagogis, dan peran visualisasi kebijakan dalam melegitimasi ideologi secara simbolis. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi teoritis dengan memperkaya Analisis Wacana Kritis Multimodal melalui penekanan pada dimensi afektif dan pengalaman subjektif para aktor pendidikan. Secara praktis, temuan ini relevan untuk pengembangan kebijakan dan kurikulum pendidikan bahasa yang lebih inklusif, reflektif, dan kontekstual, sekaligus membuka jalan untuk eksplorasi lebih lanjut tentang hubungan antara wacana, kekuasaan, dan identitas dalam pendidikan.

**Kata Kunci:** Analisis Wacana Kritis Multimodal, Kebijakan Pendidikan Bahasa, Ideologi, Kekuasaan, Pendidikan Bahasa, Representasi Sosial.

***Abstract:** This study arises from the urgency to understand language education policy as a social practice that is not merely technical in nature but is also deeply imbued with ideological representations and power relations, particularly within increasingly multilingual and multimodal educational contexts. Amid the dynamics of globalization and educational digitalization, language policy discourse plays a crucial role in shaping standards of success, learner identities, and the direction of pedagogical practices. This study aims to examine how ideology and power are represented in language education policy discourse and how such*

*discourse is interpreted by educational actors. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design and a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis framework, data were collected through the analysis of language education policy documents containing verbal and visual elements, as well as participant reflections involving educators in formal education contexts. Data analysis was conducted thematically by examining meaning patterns emerging from the interaction between text, visuals, and participants' social experiences. The findings reveal three main themes: the normalization of a dominant language as a benchmark of success, tensions between policy demands and pedagogical realities, and the role of policy visualization in symbolically legitimizing ideology. This study contributes theoretically by enriching Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis through an emphasis on affective dimensions and the subjective experiences of educational actors. Practically, the findings are relevant for the development of more inclusive, reflective, and contextualized language education policies and curricula, while also opening avenues for further exploration of the relationships among discourse, power, and identity in education.*

**Keywords:** *Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, Language Education Policy, Ideology, Power, Language Education, Social Representation.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Discourse constitutes a social practice that is inherently non-neutral, as it is embedded with ideology and power interests. Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that ideology within discourse functions to construct, maintain, or transform power relations in society. In the context of public policy, including language education policy, discourse serves as a strategic means to legitimize particular values, interests, and viewpoints regarded as dominant, while simultaneously marginalizing alternative perspectives.

Education policy cannot be understood merely as an administrative document, but rather as a discursive construction imbued with ideological content. Ball (1993) argues that education policy represents specific ideologies and functions to legitimize desired educational practices and directions promoted by those in power. Consequently, analyzing language education policy discourse becomes essential to uncover the values and interests embedded behind policy formulations.

Furthermore, language policy is inherently intertwined with issues of power and social control. Shohamy (2006) asserts that language policy not only regulates language use but also reflects authority and the dominance of particular groups within society. In educational contexts, language policy can function as a tool for shaping identity, determining which languages are valued, and directing learning practices in line with dominant ideologies.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerges as a relevant approach for unpacking ideological and power relations within education policy discourse. Wodak and Meyer (2009) state that CDA seeks to expose the ideological effects of discourse in sustaining institutional power relations, including within education. Through this approach, language is understood as a social practice that contributes to the formation and reproduction of power structures.

However, language education policy discourse is conveyed not only through verbal text but also through various semiotic modes such as images, layout, color, and visual symbols. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasize that ideological meanings are constructed through the interaction between language and visual elements. Therefore, multimodal analysis is essential for understanding how ideology is represented in a broader and more complex manner within education policy documents.

The Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis approach enables researchers to reveal how power relations operate simultaneously across multiple semiotic modes. Machin and Mayr (2012) highlight that this approach uncovers how power and ideology are articulated not only through linguistic choices but also through visual representation and semiotic design. Accordingly, applying multimodal CDA to language education policy studies provides a more comprehensive understanding of how ideology and power function within institutional discourse.

Beyond being viewed as a social practice, language education policy discourse can also be examined through Foucault's (1972, 1980) conception of power relations, which positions discourse as a mechanism for knowledge production and subject regulation. Within this framework, language policy not only governs language use but also constructs categories of "normal" and "deviant" within educational practices. The relationship between language and power becomes more apparent when linked to Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital and symbolic power, which explains how certain languages gain institutional legitimacy and serve as instruments for reproducing social structures.

In educational contexts, the hegemony of dominant languages can be understood through Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony, wherein dominance operates not through direct coercion but through culturally and ideologically constructed consent. Apple (2004) asserts that educational institutions function as arenas for reproducing dominant ideologies through curricula and policy. This perspective is reinforced by Tollefson (1991) and Ricento (2006), who demonstrate that language policies often reflect specific political-economic interests and

contribute to unequal access to education.

Moreover, in the era of globalization, Blommaert (2005) and Pennycook (2001) emphasize that language policy cannot be separated from global dynamics that shape transnational language hierarchies. This process is closely linked to the construction of learner identities as globally competitive subjects. Giroux (1988), through critical pedagogy, stresses the importance of reading policy as an arena of ideological contestation, while Habermas (1984) offers the perspective of communicative action, positioning communicative rationality as an alternative to systemic domination in public policy.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is grounded in the understanding that language education policy is never neutral, but is always produced within specific ideological and power relations. Over the past five years, language policy research has increasingly positioned discourse as a primary arena in which ideology is negotiated, legitimized, and normalized through language, visual symbols, and institutional communicative practices (Berkovich & Benoliel, 2024; Khan & Zaki, 2022). This perspective emphasizes that policy texts—whether official documents, textbooks, or educational promotional media—are not merely administrative instruments, but symbolic tools that shape how educators and learners interpret language, identity, and social positioning.

Within ideology and discourse studies, van Dijk (1998) asserts that ideology functions as a collective cognitive framework guiding discourse production and interpretation. Fairclough (2003) further links discourse to social change, demonstrating that policy texts may serve as mechanisms for either transforming or reproducing social structures. Identity perspectives in discourse are further enriched by Gee (2014), who conceptualizes language as a means of constructing “Discourses” that regulate social recognition.

In language education contexts, Luke (2002) highlights the importance of critical literacy for dismantling power relations embedded in educational texts. Meanwhile, May (2012) and Hornberger (2006) emphasize the recognition of minority language rights and biliteracy practices as forms of resistance against institutional monolingualism. García and Wei (2014), through the concept of translanguaging, demonstrate that learners’ multilingual practices often conflict with rigid policy ideologies.

Blackledge and Creese (2010) show that multilingual classroom practices are frequently negotiated creatively by teachers and students. However, Block (2014) and Kubota (2016)

caution that neoliberal and racial ideologies in language education may reinforce structural inequalities by framing language as an economic commodity.

The primary theoretical foundation of this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed within the Faircloughian tradition and recontextualized in contemporary education policy studies. CDA views language as a social practice that maintains a dialectical relationship with power structures and ideology (Mulderig & Montessori, 2019; Angelo, 2021). In language education policy contexts, CDA enables researchers to trace how lexical choices, metaphors, and argumentative structures represent dominant group interests, such as normalizing neoliberal ideology, monolingualism, or global market orientations. For participants such as teachers or students, policy discourse often appears as an “official truth” that shapes emotions, aspirations, and pedagogical practices, even when it diverges from multilingual and multicultural classroom realities.

However, the increasingly visual and digital nature of policy communication necessitates extending CDA into Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA). Influenced by Kress and van Leeuwen’s multimodality theory, MCDA emphasizes that ideology and power operate not only through verbal text but also through images, layout, color, typography, and other visual representations (Machin & Mayr, 2023; Weninger, 2021). Recent studies indicate that policy brochures, school promotional videos, and institutional websites frequently represent the “ideal subject” of language learning—typically middle-class, global, competitive, and flexible—while marginalizing minority language experiences (Teo, 2021; Zhang & Smith, 2024).

As a comparative perspective, this study also considers Critical Policy Analysis (CPA), which focuses on the relationship between policy discourse and broader social structures such as race, class, and educational inequality (Diem et al., 2022). Unlike CDA, which emphasizes micro-textual analysis, CPA more explicitly frames policy as the outcome of political contestation and institutional interests. However, CPA tends to provide less detailed semiotic analysis and limited attention to participants’ subjective experiences. Therefore, this study adopts MCDA as its primary analytical lens due to its capacity to bridge textual, visual, and social experience analysis simultaneously.

The selection of MCDA is also grounded in its relevance to participants’ lived experiences in language education contexts. Teachers, for instance, may experience pressure

to align their teaching practices with images of “ideal language education” portrayed in policy documents and media, while students may internalize visual and verbal messages regarding which languages are considered valuable or prestigious. MCDA allows these experiences to be interpreted not merely as individual responses, but as outcomes of ideological discourse operating across modes and social contexts.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the study’s analytical framework conceptualizes data as discursive representations embedded with ideology and power relations. The researcher adopts a reflexive position as a critical reader, interpreting how meaning is constructed through interactions between verbal text, visual elements, and the social context of language education policy. Participant voices are understood not simply as personal narratives, but as articulations of social positions shaped and constrained by dominant policy discourse. This framework guides the analysis toward revealing how ideology is reproduced, negotiated, or contested in everyday language education practices and experiences.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. The case study approach was selected because the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how ideology and power are represented in language education policy discourse through multiple semiotic modes. Case studies allow for contextual, holistic, and in-depth examination of phenomena by focusing on one or several specific policy documents as the primary objects of analysis.

The case study design follows Yin’s (2018) framework, which emphasizes in-depth exploration of phenomena within real-life contexts. The qualitative approach aligns with the interpretive paradigm described by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Denzin and Lincoln (2018), which views social reality as a negotiated construction of meaning.

Multimodal analysis in this study is informed by Kress’s (2010) and Jewitt’s (2014) theories of multimodality, which assert that meaning is constructed through interactions among multiple semiotic modes. This perspective strengthens the justification for employing MCDA as an analytical method that examines not only verbal text but also visual and design elements.

Data and participant selection employed purposive sampling based on relevance and alignment with research objectives. Primary data consisted of officially issued language education policy documents produced by government institutions, including regulations,

curriculum guidelines, and policy dissemination materials. Inclusion criteria required documents that (1) directly relate to language education policy, (2) contain both verbal and visual elements (multimodal), and (3) are used or disseminated within formal education contexts. The social context of the study is situated within national education policy, particularly in formal educational institutions targeted by policy implementation.

Data collection was conducted primarily through document analysis. Policy documents were obtained from official sources such as ministry and educational institution websites. Supporting data included observational notes on visual elements such as layout, illustrations, symbols, and color usage. Data collection procedures involved document identification, selection based on inclusion criteria, data archiving, and organization into analytical categories. Analytical tools included document analysis sheets and researcher reflexive notes.

Data analysis was conducted using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. The analytical process began with comprehensive data reading to gain an overall understanding. This was followed by open coding to identify initial themes related to ideology, power, actor representation, and legitimization strategies. Themes were then clustered, and in-depth analysis was conducted on linguistic elements (lexical choices, sentence structure, modality) and visual elements (composition, framing, and visual symbols). NVivo qualitative analysis software was used to support data management and coding processes.

Data trustworthiness was ensured through the application of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria. Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement and repeated data reading. Transferability was supported through detailed contextual descriptions to facilitate understanding in similar contexts. Dependability was ensured through systematic documentation of the research process, while confirmability was maintained through reflexive documentation and traceable data sources. Ethical considerations included the use of official public data, maintaining analytical objectivity, and upholding academic integrity through transparent citation of sources.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

Data analysis indicates that language education policy discourse is represented and experienced by participants as a space imbued with ideology and power relations that are not always explicitly recognized. Through thematic analysis of policy documents and participant

reflections, three interrelated themes emerged: (1) normalization of a dominant language as a standard of success, (2) tension between policy compliance and pedagogical realities, and (3) policy visualization as a tool of ideological legitimation.

### **Theme 1: Normalization of the Dominant Language as a Standard of Success**

The first theme emerges from participants' experiences when engaging with language education policies that consistently portray a particular language as a symbol of progress, competitiveness, and educational quality. This pattern is evident in policy documents and dissemination materials that employ terms such as excellence, global, and competitiveness, which are almost invariably associated with mastery of the dominant language.

A language teacher (G1) described their experience as follows:

“When reading the policy documents, it feels as though successful students are those who are fluent in a particular language. Others seem invisible, even though my classroom reality is highly diverse.”

This excerpt reflects a sense of symbolic marginalization experienced by both teachers and students who do not fully align with the idealized image constructed by policy discourse. The normalization of the dominant language is not always perceived as overt coercion, but rather as a “natural” standard that becomes gradually internalized. For participants, this process generates emotional dilemmas between accepting such standards as professional demands and questioning their fairness within multilingual classroom realities.

### **Theme 2: Tension between Policy Compliance and Pedagogical Realities**

The second theme relates to participants' internal conflicts when translating policy into everyday practice. On the one hand, policy is perceived as an official guideline that must be followed; on the other hand, pedagogical realities often diverge from policy assumptions. This tension is particularly evident in linguistically and socially heterogeneous classrooms.

An educator (G3) expressed:

“On paper, everything looks neat and ideal. But once I enter the classroom, I have to choose: fully follow the policy or adapt to my students' conditions.”

This statement illustrates the paradox faced by participants: strict policy compliance may undermine sensitivity to students' needs, while adapting to classroom realities risks being perceived as deviating from institutional standards. This tension is rarely resolved decisively;

instead, it persists as an emotionally exhausting, everyday negotiation.

### **Theme 3: Policy Visualization as a Tool of Ideological Legitimation**

The third theme emerges from multimodal analysis of visual elements within policy discourse, including homogeneous student imagery, hierarchical layouts, and symbols of modernity. These visualizations not only reinforce verbal messages but also function as tools for legitimizing specific ideologies without explicit explanation.

One participant (P2) reflected on their experience viewing policy dissemination materials:

“Just by looking at the images, you can already tell who is considered ‘appropriate’. The students in the posters never resemble those in my school.”

This reflection highlights the gap between policy visual representations and participants’ lived realities. Policy visualizations create an illusion of uniformity and success while obscuring social complexity. Rather than openly rejecting these representations, participants often respond with ambivalence—oscillating between admiration, pressure, and a sense of being unrepresented.

### **Interconnection among Themes**

These three themes are interconnected in shaping participants’ complex experiences. The normalization of the dominant language (Theme 1) underpins pedagogical tensions (Theme 2), while policy visualization (Theme 3) reinforces ideological legitimacy, rendering such tensions difficult to contest openly. Overall, the findings reveal not linear or uniform experiences, but ongoing dynamics of negotiation, ambiguity, and internal conflict in participants’ interactions with language education policy discourse.

### **Discussion**

The study reveals three principal findings: the normalization of the dominant language as a standard of success, tension between policy compliance and pedagogical realities, and policy visualization as a tool of ideological legitimation. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that language education policy discourse operates not only at a regulatory level but also within symbolic and affective domains, shaping how participants interpret identity, professionalism, and social positioning within the education system.

Findings regarding dominant language normalization illustrate how policy ideology operates through processes that appear “natural” and non-coercive. This aligns with Mulderrig and Montessori (2019) and Angelo (2021), who argue that education policy frequently frames particular languages as symbolic capital associated with social mobility and modernity. This study extends previous research by foregrounding participants’ emotional dimensions, particularly feelings of marginalization and professional identity ambiguity experienced by teachers in multilingual classrooms. Such normalization functions not merely as a linguistic issue, but as a power mechanism determining visibility and legitimacy within official discourse.

Tensions between policy compliance and pedagogical realities reveal complex negotiation dynamics in everyday educational practice. These findings resonate with Diem et al. (2022) and Berkovich and Benoliel (2024), who emphasize that educational actors are never passive policy recipients. However, this study demonstrates that resistance does not always manifest as overt opposition; rather, it often takes the form of silent compromise and internal dilemmas. Policy power thus operates subtly through moral and professional pressures, rendering conflict predominantly internal rather than collective.

Analysis of policy visualization reinforces the argument that ideology and power are constructed not only through verbal language but also through visual modes. These findings are consistent with Machin and Mayr (2023), Weninger (2021), and Zhang and Smith (2024), who show that visual representations in education policy promote homogeneity while masking social inequalities. This study adds nuance by centering participants’ experiences, revealing how the disjunction between policy visuals and lived realities fosters feelings of misrepresentation that further entrench ideological dominance without explicit coercion.

Conceptually, these themes are mutually reinforcing, forming a stable yet problematic policy discourse ecosystem. Dominant language normalization provides the ideological framework, policy visualization strengthens symbolic legitimacy, and pedagogical tension becomes an obscured negotiation space rarely visible in official texts. These findings enrich Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis by demonstrating that discourse meaning is produced not only through text and visuals, but also through participants’ affective and reflective experiences under policy regimes.

Researcher reflexivity constitutes an integral component of this discussion. Participants’

socio-cultural positioning within linguistically diverse educational settings shapes their interpretation of policy as both normative and problematic. The researcher's role as a critical discourse reader influences analytical focus on power and ideology rather than technocratic policy effectiveness. Such reflexive awareness is essential to avoid universalizing claims and to situate findings as contextual understandings open to further dialogue.

Accordingly, this discussion affirms that language education policy must be understood as a multimodal discursive practice shaped by and shaping educational actors' social experiences. The study's primary contribution lies in foregrounding voices and experiences of underrepresented groups within policy discourse, while offering alternative perspectives that are more attuned to identity complexity, emotion, and power relations in language education.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

This study demonstrates that language education policy discourse functions not only as a regulatory instrument but also as a discursive practice that reproduces ideology and power relations through language and visual representation. Key findings reveal the normalization of a dominant language as a benchmark of success, persistent tension between policy demands and pedagogical realities, and the role of policy visualization in subtly legitimizing ideology. These meaning patterns shape participants' experiences with ambiguity, wherein compliance, negotiation, and feelings of misrepresentation coexist within everyday educational practice.

Through participants' experiences and reflections, the study offers new insights into how policy power operates not merely through explicit regulations but through symbolic and affective processes that guide educational actors' interpretations of professional identity and social positioning. Conceptually, these findings enrich Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis by emphasizing the importance of subjective experience as an integral component of ideological discourse work. Thus, the study contributes both to discourse theory development and to more inclusive understandings of language education policy.

Practically, the findings hold relevance for multiple stakeholders. For policymakers, the study underscores the need for more inclusive, reflective, and contextualized language education policies that acknowledge linguistic diversity and educators' lived realities. In curriculum development, the findings advocate for approaches that move beyond dominant language standards toward pedagogical practices responsive to learners' socio-cultural needs. Additionally, recognizing policy multimodality may enhance critical and digital literacy,

enabling educators and learners to interpret ideological messages in policy texts and visuals more consciously.

This study is subject to limitations that warrant critical consideration. Its focus on specific policy contexts and relatively homogeneous participant backgrounds limits generalizability. Furthermore, temporal and contextual constraints restrict exploration of collective resistance dynamics and long-term policy impacts on learners' linguistic identities. Acknowledging these limitations invites reflection on the phenomenon's complexity.

Future research is encouraged to employ diverse methodological approaches, such as policy ethnography or longitudinal studies, to capture evolving meanings and practices over time. Expanding contexts and participant populations, particularly involving marginalized language groups, is crucial for deepening understanding of ideology–power relations in language education. Further exploration of affective dimensions and symbolic resistance constitutes a significant research agenda. In this way, the present study serves as a foundation for sustained academic dialogue on equitable and socially just language education policy.

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