

Evaluating BOS Fund Policy in Merdeka Belajar Discourse: A Systemic Functional Linguistics Analysis

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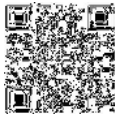
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ABSTRACT

Kebijakan pendidikan bukan hanya instrumen administratif, tetapi juga wacana untuk melegitimasi reformasi, membujuk pemangku kepentingan, dan membangun akuntabilitas. Di Indonesia, inisiatif Merdeka Belajar menjadi perubahan besar dalam tata kelola pendidikan, dengan Episode 3 berfokus pada distribusi dana BOS. Jika penelitian sebelumnya menyoroti aspek keuangan dan tata kelola, sedikit yang membahas dimensi wacananya. Studi ini mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan menerapkan Linguistik Fungsional Sistemik (SFL) pada pidato menteri saat meluncurkan Merdeka Belajar Episode 3. Analisis berbasis kerangka metafungsi Halliday difokuskan pada penggunaan konjungsi sebagai perangkat kohesi. Temuan menunjukkan tiga orientasi retorika utama: (1) perluasan melalui konjungsi aditif (dan, atau) yang menampilkan reformasi sebagai komprehensif; (2) pembenaran melalui konjungsi kausal (karena, sehingga, agar) yang merasionalisasi kebijakan sebagai keharusan; dan (3) legitimasi melalui proyeksi (bahwa) yang menghadirkan suara otoritatif untuk memperkuat kredibilitas kelembagaan. Pola ini menegaskan bahwa pilihan bahasa berfungsi ideologis dengan menggambarkan reformasi BOS sebagai inklusif, rasional, dan akuntabel. Dengan membandingkan kasus Indonesia dengan studi wacana kebijakan di Australia, Eropa, Tiongkok, dan AS, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada perdebatan global tentang bahasa dan legitimasi reformasi.

Education policy is not only an administrative instrument, but also a discourse to legitimize reform, persuade stakeholders, and build accountability. In Indonesia, the Merdeka Belajar initiative marked a major shift in education governance, with Episode 3 focusing on the distribution of BOS funds. While previous research has highlighted the financial and governance aspects, few have addressed the discourse dimension. This study fills this gap by applying Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to the minister's speech launching Merdeka Belajar Episode 3. Analysis based on Halliday's metafunctional framework focused on the use of conjunctions as cohesive devices. The findings reveal three main rhetorical orientations: (1) expansion through additive conjunctions (and, or) that present the reform as comprehensive; (2) justification through causal conjunctions (because, so, in order that) that rationalize the policy as imperative; and (3) legitimation through projection (that) that presents an authoritative voice to strengthen institutional credibility. This pattern confirms that language choices serve an ideological function by portraying BOS reform as inclusive, rational, and accountable. By comparing the Indonesian case with studies of policy discourse in Australia, Europe, China, and the US, this research contributes to the global debate on the language and legitimacy of reform.



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INTRODUCTION

Educational policy has become a central arena where governments, international organizations, and stakeholders negotiate the future of education through discursive and institutional practices. Rather than being neutral instruments, policies are discourses that construct realities, legitimize reforms, and mobilize collective action (Ball, 2017; Hogan, 2021; Skerritt, 2023). This recognition aligns with what critical policy researchers describe as the “discursive turn” in education policy studies, where language, texts, and narratives are seen as integral to how reforms are imagined, communicated, and enacted (Rogers & Schaenen, 2021; Lingard, Thompson, & Sellar, 2021). Across contexts, policy discourse reflects ideological struggles, balances between accountability and equity, and tensions between global influences and local needs (Verger, Fontdevila, & Zancajo, 2019; Tan, 2020; Yoon, 2021).

In Indonesia, the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) initiative represents one of the most significant education reforms of the past decade. Launched in 2019, it seeks to decentralize decision-making, enhance school autonomy, and improve teacher professionalism. Among its episodes, Merdeka Belajar Episode 3 focuses on the distribution and utilization of School Operational Assistance (BOS) funds, which play a pivotal role in sustaining schools, supporting teachers, and improving equity (Rosser & Fahmi, 2020). Traditionally, BOS funds were managed through regional governments, creating bureaucratic bottlenecks and delays (Rosser & Fahmi, 2020). By transferring funds directly to schools, the new policy aims to increase efficiency, flexibility, and accountability. Yet, as Grek and Ozga (2020) argue in the European context, governance reforms are never merely technical but discursive, requiring rhetorical strategies to build trust and legitimacy. The Indonesian case is no exception: BOS reform is not just a financial policy but also a discourse that communicates transparency, rationality, and moral commitment (Clarke & Phelan, 2019; Ozga, 2021).

Traditional evaluations of education policy have emphasized governance structures, financial management, and student outcomes (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2019; Darling-Hammond & Flook, 2021). While crucial, these indicators risk overlooking the symbolic and discursive dimension of reform. Policies are texts that persuade, justify, and normalize; they shape perceptions and identities (Luke, 2019; Clarke, 2019). Scholars argue that policy effectiveness also depends on the rhetorical and communicative strategies that frame problems, propose solutions, and construct legitimacy (Brown & Greany, 2018; Bradbury, 2021). Discourse is therefore a critical site of evaluation: it is where governments narrate reforms as inevitable, desirable, and aligned with global standards (Lingard & Sellar, 2020; Dale & Robertson, 2017).

Global comparative research illustrates this dynamic. In England, Brown and Greany (2018) demonstrate how evidence-informed discourse is strategically mobilized to persuade school leaders. In Australia, Lingard and Sellar (2020) show how competitiveness and accountability narratives dominate policy texts. In Europe, Ozga and Grek (2020) document the rise of “governing by numbers,” where data discourses reshape governance. In China, Zhang (2021) highlights the use of cohesive devices to align reforms with national priorities, while Auld and Morris (2022) examine how language frames education reform as modernization. Similarly, in the United States, Darling-Hammond and Flook (2021) show how discourse on professional learning legitimizes accountability reforms, and Luke (2019) highlights the role of critical literacy in reframing policy debates. These studies confirm that language and discourse are indispensable to understanding both the substance and legitimacy of reform.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers a robust framework for examining policy discourse. Developed by Halliday and expanded by later scholars, SFL conceptualizes language as a social semiotic system enacting three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). SFL connects micro-level linguistic choices such as conjunctions, modality, and appraisal with macro-level social functions like legitimation, persuasion, and evaluation (Martin & White, 2005; Liu, 2022; Shi & Gebhard, 2023). Recent applications of SFL in education include classroom discourse (Derewianka, 2019; Sun, 2024), textbook analysis (Chen & Derewianka, 2022), teacher education (Trojan, 2022), and policy texts (Zhang, 2021; Thompson, 2019). As Gebhard and Accurso (2020) note, SFL provides tools for uncovering how texts simultaneously represent reality, enact social relations, and organize meaning. Applying SFL to Merdeka Belajar Episode 3 allows us to examine how conjunctions, modality, and cohesion construct BOS reforms as rational, inclusive, and legitimate.

A striking feature of the Episode 3 speech is the heavy reliance on conjunctions and cohesive devices to build logical coherence and rhetorical force. Additive conjunctions (dan/and) dominate,

signaling accumulation and expansion, while causal markers (*karena/because, agar/so that, sehingga/therefore*) justify reforms by linking problems to solutions. Projection markers (*bahwa/that*) embed external voices such as the Ministry of Finance, enhancing legitimacy through inter-institutional alignment. These linguistic choices reflect broader strategies identified in policy discourse research: expansion, justification, and legitimization (Hogan & Thompson, 2021; Lingard et al., 2021). They align with findings from Australia (Lingard, 2021), Europe (Ozga, 2019; Grek, 2020), East Asia (Park & Sung, 2022), and the United States (Savage, 2020), where similar rhetorical devices are employed to naturalize reforms and mitigate contestation.

Beyond micro-linguistic analysis, situating BOS reforms within Indonesia's governance landscape is crucial. The policy responds to long-standing critiques of centralization and inefficiency (Rosser & Fahmi, 2020). By promising direct transfers and flexibility, the discourse positions the government as responsive and trustworthy. Yet, as Novelli and Verger (2022) note, policy borrowing and adaptation are mediated through local discourses that balance empowerment with accountability. In Indonesia, inclusive pronouns (*kita/we*) enact solidarity, but they also distribute responsibility and normalize surveillance (Clarke, 2019). This duality illustrates what Ball and Junemann (2017) describe as the contradictory discourses of reform: simultaneously empowering and controlling.

Internationally, research underscores that discursive strategies are not incidental but systematic. Bradbury (2021) documents how data discourses shape English policy texts. Savage (2020) shows how test-based accountability discourses legitimize U.S. reforms. Johnson and Kayi-Aydar (2019) analyze how language-in-education policies discursively shape inclusion. In Scandinavian contexts, Skedsmo and Mausethagen (2020) show how data use discourses redefine teacher accountability. In Asian contexts, Park and Sung (2022) reveal how accountability and equity discourses coexist in policy reforms. These insights contextualize the Indonesian case within global patterns, affirming Verger and Novelli's (2023) argument that global policy ideas are recontextualized through national discourse.

By drawing on this scholarship, the present study positions discourse analysis as a vital component of policy evaluation. It advances two contributions. First, it provides a linguistically grounded evaluation of Merdeka Belajar Episode 3, showing how conjunctions and cohesion perform ideological work in constructing BOS reforms as comprehensive, rational, and legitimate. Second, it situates the Indonesian case within international debates on education policy discourse, demonstrating similarities and differences across contexts. In doing so, it underscores the argument that evaluation should not only focus on financial accountability or learning outcomes but also on the communicative strategies through which reforms are legitimized and contested (Sellar & Lingard, 2018; Stevenson & Gilmore, 2021).

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical framework of SFL and its relevance to education policy discourse. The methodology section details the data and procedures for analyzing the ministerial speech. The results section presents findings on the distribution and functions of conjunctions. The discussion interprets these findings in light of global scholarship on policy discourse and evaluation. Finally, the conclusion summarizes key insights and highlights implications for both policymaking and research.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative discourse analysis approach, grounded in the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Unlike traditional evaluation research that emphasizes quantitative indicators of efficiency, equity, or financial accountability, the present study focuses on the linguistic construction of meaning in policy discourse. By examining the language choices in the ministerial speech of Merdeka Belajar Episode 3, the study seeks to uncover how the government represents policy reforms, builds interpersonal relationships, and organizes its message to persuade stakeholders. Following Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the analysis explores the three metafunctions of language—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—and their realization through conjunctions, modality, and cohesive devices.

Data Source

The primary data for this study is the transcript of the ministerial speech delivered during Merdeka Belajar Episode 3, focusing on the distribution and utilization of BOS funds. This transcript contains approximately 6,500 words and includes narrative, evaluative, and justificatory segments addressing

multiple stakeholders such as teachers, principals, parents, and policymakers. The text is particularly suitable for analysis because it reflects not only the technical dimensions of educational financing but also the discursive strategies employed to legitimize reforms. The transcript was obtained from the official Merdeka Belajar documentation, ensuring authenticity and reliability.

Analytical Framework

The analysis employs Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), specifically focusing on three metafunctions Ideational metafunction: examining how the speech constructs logical and experiential meanings. This includes the identification and categorization of conjunctions (additive, comparative, consequential) as markers of logical relations.

Interpersonal metafunction: analyzing how the speaker positions himself in relation to the audience, focusing on modality, appraisal, and pronoun choice. For example, the frequent use of inclusive pronouns (kita/we) signals solidarity, while modality markers such as harapan kami (our hope) reveal attitudinal positioning.

Textual metafunction: exploring the cohesive devices that organize the speech into a coherent message. Attention is given to explicit conjunctions (dan/and, karena/because, bahwa/that) and implicit conjunctions that structure clauses and create logical-semantic relationships.

This tripartite framework allows for a holistic evaluation of how policy discourse simultaneously constructs representations, enacts relationships, and ensures textual coherence (Eggins, 2004; Zhang, 2021).

Data Coding and Categorization

The analysis followed a systematic coding process:

Identification of Conjunctions and Cohesive Devices

All instances of conjunctions in the transcript were manually identified and categorized into additive, comparative, and consequential relations (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Emilia, 2020). Frequency counts were compiled to establish distribution patterns.

Categorization of Metafunctions

Each occurrence was analyzed in its context to determine whether it primarily contributed to ideational, interpersonal, or textual meaning. For example, the conjunction *dan* was often used ideationally to expand policy initiatives, while *agar* served consequential functions linked to policy goals.

Analysis of Interpersonal Resources

Pronouns (*saya, kita, bapak ibu*), modality markers (*harapannya, harus, akan*), and evaluative expressions (*terima kasih, kabar gembira*) were examined to reveal the relational stance between government and stakeholders (Martin & White, 2005; Rogers & Schaenen, 2021).

Textual Organization

Cohesive patterns across paragraphs were mapped to illustrate how explicit (*dan, karena, bahwa*) and implicit markers structured the argument. Attention was paid to the sequencing of issues (problem → solution → justification → future orientation) as a rhetorical strategy.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure analytical rigor, the study employed triangulation of perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The coding of conjunctions and metafunctions was independently reviewed by two applied linguistics researchers with expertise in discourse analysis. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. Furthermore, findings were cross-checked against existing studies of policy discourse in Indonesia (Widodo, 2021; Pratiwi & Suryana, 2022) and international research on language and policy (Lingard & Sellar, 2020; Zhang, 2021). This procedure enhanced the validity of interpretations and minimized subjectivity.

Ethical Considerations

The study relied exclusively on publicly available government documents, thus involving no human participants. Ethical clearance was therefore not required. Nevertheless, care was taken to accurately represent the data without distortion, ensuring that interpretations remained faithful to the original speech context.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis was carried out in three stages:

Descriptive Stage

Identification and frequency analysis of conjunctions and cohesive markers. Mapping of modality and pronoun usage.

Interpretive Stage

Examination of how linguistic choices enact the three metafunctions of SFL. Contextual interpretation of how these choices align with the policy objectives of Merdeka Belajar.

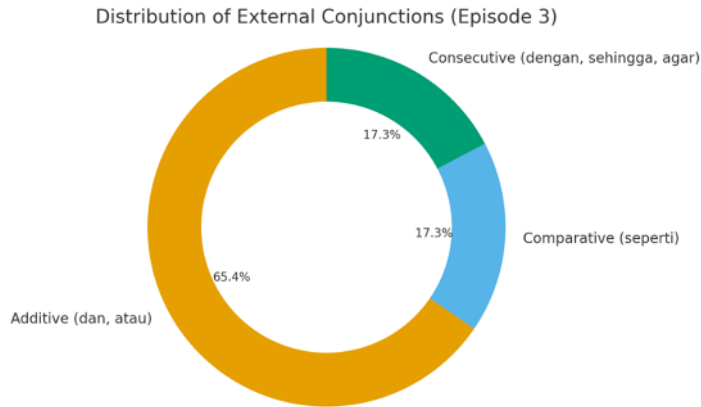
Evaluative Stage

Assessment of the implications of linguistic patterns for policy legitimacy, transparency, and stakeholder engagement.

Reflection on how discourse serves as both a tool of communication and evaluation in educational policy. Through this procedure, the methodology ensures that the analysis not only identifies linguistic features but also situates them within the broader goals of educational evaluation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analisis Konjungsi Eksternal



The analysis results show that external conjunctions in the Merdeka Belajar Episode 3 speech are used to structure logical relationships between ideas. Out of a total of 81 external conjunctions, the majority are additive (and, or), accounting for 65.4%. The dominance of and illustrates the government’s rhetorical strategy to build a narrative of policy abundance and program continuity.

Comparative conjunctions (such as) (17.3%) are employed to link new policies with old ones, thereby constructing an evaluative argument that change is necessary. Meanwhile, consequential conjunctions (with, so that, thus) (17.3%) emphasize causality and purpose, reinforcing the logic that the new policies are a rational solution to longstanding problems.

Table 1. Distribution of External Conjunctions

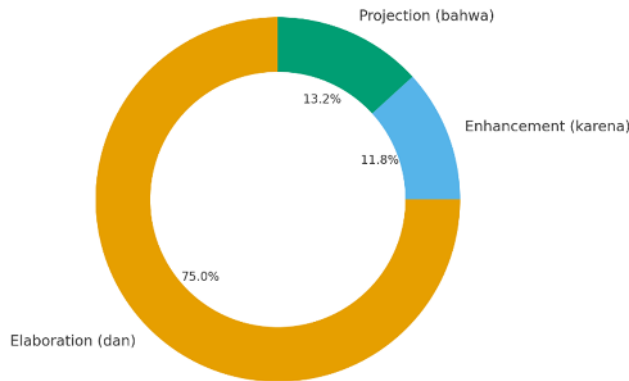
Type of Conjunction	Form	Frequency	Percentage	Semantic Function	Example Sentence	Role in Discourse
Addition	dan, atau	53	65.4%	Adding / expanding ideas	“Guru honorer itu dibiayai, pengembangan perpustakaan, sarana, prasarana, tenaga pendidik dan lain-lain.”	Demonstrates policy abundance and program diversity.
Comparison	seperti	14	17.3%	Similarity / comparison	“...Sekolah di Papua, sekolah di Jakarta, sekolah di	Highlights contrasts

Consequence	dengan, sehingga, agar	14	17.3%	Cause-effect / purpose	Maluku semuanya berbeda... seperti pembayaran honor.” “...Transfer langsung dari Kemenkeu ke rekening sekolah... sehingga lebih sederhana.”	between old and new conditions. Justifies the policy as a logical solution.
Total	—	81	100%	—	—	—

Analysis of Explicit Conjunctions

Explicit conjunctions indicate the logical coherence of arguments. Out of a total of 68

Distribution of Explicit Conjunctions (Episode 3)



Occurrences, the majority are elaboration (dan), accounting for 75%. This pattern is consistent with the rhetorical strategy of expanding the narrative. Furthermore, enhancement conjunctions (karena), which comprise 11.8%, function to explain causal relationships, while projection (bahwa), amounting to 13.2%, demonstrates how the speech cites external authorities to reinforce legitimacy.

Table 2. Distribution of Explicit Conjunctions

Type of Conjunction	Form	Frequency	Percentage	Semantic Function	Example Sentence	Role in Discourse
Elaboration	dan	51	75.0%	Expansion / addition	“Episode 1... zonasi dan RPP itu episode 1...”	Connecting policy sequences linearly
Enhancement	karena	8	11.8%	Justification	“...banyak guru honorer tidak bisa mendapat penghasilan layak karena kebijakan lama membatasi honorarium”	Providing reasons for reform
Projection (locution)	bahwa	9	13.2%	Reporting	“...Ibu Menkeu bilang bahwa penawaran BOS itu langsung ke rekening sekolah”	Giving authority to claims
Total	—	68	100%	—	—	—

Analysis of Implicit Conjunctions

In addition to explicit ones, implicit conjunctions were also found to connect clauses without being marked by direct linking words. The implicit use of detail markers (+) and ideational projection (“^b bahwa) functions to smooth the transition between clauses while simultaneously reinforcing propositions.

Table 3. Distribution of Implicit Conjunctions

Type of Conjunction	Form	Frequency	Clause Relation	Semantic Function	Example Sentence	Role in Discourse	Discourse Strategy
Logical Projection	+ (rincian)	—	Additive	Expressing additional detail	“...penyaluran BOS dilakukan tiga kali setahun (+) bukan empat kali”	Providing policy detail	Expansion / clarification
Ideational Projection	” [Ⓟ] (bahwa)	—	Projection	Expressing proposition	“...data yang akan digunakan Kemdikbud sebagai data final (” [Ⓟ])”	Reinforcing authoritative claims	Legitimisasi / authority

Distribution Visualization

The analysis of conjunctions in the *Merdeka Belajar* Episode 3 speech reveals clear distributional patterns between external and explicit types.

External Conjunctions

The majority (65.4%) belong to the *additive* type (*dan, atau*), reflecting a rhetorical tendency to expand the policy narrative by presenting multiple initiatives simultaneously. Comparative conjunctions (*seperti*) constitute 17.3%, used to highlight differences or similarities between past and current policies. Consecutive conjunctions (*dengan, sehingga, agar*), also 17.3%, function to establish causal or purposive relations, reinforcing the logical necessity of reforms.

Explicit Conjunctions

Elaboration (*dan*) dominates at 75%, enhancing narrative expansion and continuity. Enhancement (*karena*) appears in 11.8% of cases, functioning as justification by linking policies to their causes or effects. Projection (*bahwa*) accounts for 13.2%, where external authorities are cited to strengthen legitimacy and institutional credibility.

These distributions, already illustrated in donut charts and bar graphs (Figures 1–2), confirm the rhetorical strategies underlying the government’s policy communication.

Table 4. Comparative Distribution of Conjunctions

Category	Sub-type	Form	Frequency	Percentage	Semantic Function	Example Sentence	Role in Discourse	Discourse Strategy
External Conjunctions	Additive	dan, atau	53	65.4%	Addition / expansion	“guru honorer... sarana, prasarana, tenaga pendidik dan lain-lain”	Depicting policy abundance & diversity	Expansion / accumulation
	Comparative	seperti	14	17.3%	Comparison / similarity	“...sekolah di Papua... di Jakarta... berbeda... seperti pembayaran honor”	Evaluating old vs new conditions	Evaluation / contrast
	Consecutive	dengan, sehingga, agar	14	17.3%	Cause-effect / purpose	“...transfer langsung... sehingga”	Justifying reforms	Logical justification

Explicit Conjunctions	Elaboration	dan	51	75.0%	Expansion / addition	lebih sederhana” “Episode 1... zonasi dan RPP itu episode 1...” “...tidak mendapat penghasilan layak karena kebijakan lama...” “...Ibu Menkeu bilang bahwa BOS langsung ke rekening sekolah”	Linking sequential policies	Narrative continuity
	Enhancement	karena	8	11.8%	Justification / cause		Providing reasons for reform	Causal reasoning
	Projection (locution)	bahwa	9	13.2%	Reporting / authority citation		Borrowing authority for legitimacy	Legitimization

The quantitative distribution of conjunctions in the *Merdeka Belajar* Episode 3 speech confirms three rhetorical orientations that underpin the government’s policy communication. The first orientation is expansion and abundance, realized through the frequent use of the conjunction *dan* (and). With 75% of explicit conjunctions and 65.4% of external conjunctions functioning additively, the speech creates a cumulative narrative that emphasizes comprehensiveness and inclusivity. By linking multiple initiatives—teacher welfare, school operations, libraries, and infrastructure—through additive relations, the discourse presents BOS reforms as wide-ranging and multi-dimensional. This strategy gives the impression that the policy is not fragmented but systematically addresses various educational needs, thereby reinforcing the government’s commitment to holistic reform.

The second orientation is justification via causal links, expressed through conjunctions such as *karena* (because), *sehingga* (so that), and *agar* (in order to). These markers establish clear cause-and-effect relations between policy problems and their solutions. For example, references to the limited honorarium for honorary teachers *because* of previous restrictions are followed by the explanation that greater flexibility in BOS allocation will resolve this issue. This discursive pattern situates reforms within a logical framework that naturalizes change as both necessary and inevitable. By embedding causal reasoning into the policy narrative, the speech constructs an argument that is not merely aspirational but also rational, pragmatic, and evidence-based. In doing so, the government reduces potential skepticism by showing that each reform responds directly to identifiable challenges.

The third orientation is legitimization through authority citation, primarily realized through the conjunction *bahwa* (that), which projects external voices into the speech. By quoting other institutions, particularly the Ministry of Finance, the discourse draws on inter-institutional credibility to enhance its persuasive force. Such citation practices expand the speech beyond a singular ministerial voice, embedding it within a wider network of governmental authority. This rhetorical strategy functions not only to validate the reforms but also to signal cross-ministerial alignment and fiscal reliability. Through this legitimization, the reforms are framed as not merely educational but also financially sound and institutionally sanctioned, reducing resistance and building public trust.

Taken together, these orientations—expansion, justification, and legitimization—demonstrate how conjunctions function as more than syntactic connectors. They operate as rhetorical devices that structure the policy narrative, reinforce its logic, and strengthen its authority. From a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective, these findings reflect the interplay of the three metafunctions of language: the ideational function through causal and additive relations, the interpersonal function

through authority and alignment, and the textual function through cohesive structuring of arguments. The analysis therefore underscores that conjunctions, while often overlooked, play a central role in transforming a policy speech into an evaluative, persuasive, and legitimizing discourse.

Discussion

The analysis of the Merdeka Belajar Episode 3 speech reveals how conjunctions, as seemingly small linguistic devices, operate as powerful rhetorical resources in framing education reform. Through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the study identified three primary orientations—expansion, justification, and legitimization—that collectively demonstrate how policy discourse is strategically organized to construct reform as comprehensive, rational, and institutionally endorsed. This finding underscores the proposition that language is not peripheral but central to the governance of education (Ball, 2017; Hogan & Thompson, 2021). By linking Indonesian policy discourse to global scholarship, the discussion highlights both universal rhetorical strategies and locally situated features of BOS reform.

Expansion and the Rhetoric of Abundance

The first orientation, expansion through additive conjunctions, demonstrates how the government accumulates policy initiatives in a way that conveys inclusivity and comprehensiveness. The dominance of *dan* (and), functioning as elaboration, mirrors rhetorical strategies observed in other contexts where enumerative structures present reforms as wide-ranging and inevitable (Fairclough, 2018; Lingard & Sellar, 2020). In the Indonesian case, the repetitive accumulation of initiatives—school finance, teacher honoraria, curriculum support—signals a deliberate effort to portray BOS reform as addressing multiple systemic challenges simultaneously.

This strategy resonates with international findings. In Australia, Lingard and colleagues (2021) showed how the discourse of national testing employs cumulative logic to position PISA benchmarking as unavoidable. Similarly, in China, Zhang (2021) demonstrated that cohesive devices function to align reforms with national priorities, ensuring ideological consistency. Auld and Morris (2022) further argue that language in reform discourse often constructs modernization narratives through expansion. The Indonesian speech follows this global tendency by constructing a sense of “abundance” that frames reforms as integrated rather than piecemeal.

Yet, the Indonesian case adds a unique dimension. The frequent use of inclusive pronouns such as *kita* (we) alongside additive conjunctions expands not only initiatives but also responsibility. This reflects what Clarke (2019) describes as the “dual discourse” of empowerment and surveillance, where inclusivity also serves to distribute accountability. In this way, expansion in BOS discourse not only multiplies reforms but also multiplies obligations, embedding schools and teachers within a collective frame of reform enactment.

Justification and Discursive Rationality

The second orientation, justification via causal conjunctions, highlights how the speech naturalizes reform as both logical and necessary. Conjunctions such as *karena* (because), *agar* (so that), and *sehingga* (therefore) establish explicit causal relations between existing problems and proposed solutions. This discursive rationality reflects Rogers and Schaenen’s (2021) argument that causal markers are essential in framing reforms as evidence-based and unavoidable. In U.S. policy debates, Darling-Hammond and Flook (2021) note that accountability reforms are often justified through narratives of cause-and-effect necessity. Similarly, Luke (2019) showed how literacy reforms were discursively legitimized by linking them to social and economic competitiveness.

In Indonesia, causal justification serves to explain why direct BOS transfers are required. The speech frames previous inefficiencies—delays, bureaucratic bottlenecks, limitations on honoraria—as problems that logically necessitate reform. This resonates with Novelli and Verger’s (2022) observation that global reform discourses often portray change as inevitable responses to systemic crises. The Indonesian case aligns with this pattern, presenting reform not as political choice but as technical necessity.

Comparatively, this justification strategy echoes findings from Europe, where Ozga and Grek (2020) identified how accountability discourses rely on causal rationality to naturalize reforms. In East Asia, Park and Sung (2022) show that causal markers are used to balance accountability and equity narratives. The Indonesian speech reflects these tendencies but with a distinctive focus on teacher

welfare—an emphasis less common in Western policy texts. This highlights how causal justifications can be globally recognizable while still shaped by local priorities.

Legitimization through Authority Citation

The third orientation, legitimization through projection, is realized through the frequent use of *bahwa* (that) to embed external voices. By citing institutions such as the Ministry of Finance, the speech aligns BOS reforms with broader governmental authority. This reflects Martin and White's (2005) notion of engagement resources, where attribution to external sources enhances legitimacy. Clarke and Phelan (2019) similarly highlight how authority citation shapes teacher identity by positioning reforms as sanctioned by higher bodies.

Comparative research supports the importance of legitimization strategies. In Europe, Ozga (2019) shows how policy texts invoke data authorities to strengthen credibility. In Australia, Lingard (2021) documents how references to OECD benchmarks legitimize reforms. In Latin America, Verger et al. (2019) highlight how privatization reforms draw legitimacy from global discourses of modernization. The Indonesian case fits within this global pattern but with local specificity: citing financial authorities such as the Ministry of Finance situates BOS reform within fiscal reliability, reassuring stakeholders that reforms are not only educationally sound but also economically sustainable.

Legitimization thus functions on multiple levels. It reassures stakeholders of institutional alignment, reduces contestation, and embeds reform within a network of authorities. As Skedsmo and Mausethagen (2020) argue, such strategies are critical in contexts of decentralization where legitimacy must be continuously negotiated. In Indonesia, legitimization underscores not only the government's authority but also its fiscal responsibility, aligning BOS reform with broader discourses of good governance.

The Interplay of SFL Metafunctions

Taken together, these orientations illustrate the interplay of the three metafunctions of language in SFL (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The ideational metafunction is realized through causal and additive conjunctions that represent reform as logical and expansive. The interpersonal metafunction emerges in legitimization strategies where external voices and inclusive pronouns build solidarity and credibility. The textual metafunction is evident in the cohesive organization of arguments, ensuring smooth transitions from problem identification to solution and future direction.

This tripartite interplay confirms what Gebhard and Accurso (2020) emphasize: SFL provides a framework for linking micro-level textual features with macro-level ideological functions. In this study, the micro-analysis of conjunctions reveals how the speech performs ideological work—expanding reform narratives, naturalizing change, and legitimizing authority. This supports Thompson's (2019) argument that policy texts function as genres with intertextual relations that both constrain and enable reform discourses.

Comparative and Theoretical Contributions

The findings contribute to broader debates on education policy discourse. First, they confirm that Indonesian reform discourse shares global rhetorical strategies of expansion, justification, and legitimization (Lingard & Sellar, 2020; Rogers & Schaenen, 2021). Second, they highlight specific local features, such as the emphasis on teacher welfare and the use of inclusive pronouns, which differentiate the Indonesian case from Western discourses (Rosser & Fahmi, 2020; Clarke, 2019). Third, they demonstrate the value of applying SFL to ministerial speeches—a genre less studied than policy documents or international assessments (Lingard et al., 2021; Zhang, 2021).

This novelty lies in bridging linguistics and policy evaluation. While previous studies of BOS focused on governance and financial management (Rosser & Fahmi, 2020), this study foregrounds the linguistic and rhetorical dimension. It aligns with Sellar and Lingard's (2018) argument that global policy is mediated through discourse, and extends it by providing empirical evidence from Indonesia. By doing so, it fills a gap in both education policy studies and applied linguistics.

Practical and Policy Implications

Practically, the analysis suggests that reform communication is as critical as reform design. As Brown and Greany (2018) argue, evidence alone does not guarantee policy success; how evidence is communicated matters. For Indonesian policymakers, the strategic use of expansion, justification, and

legitimization demonstrates an awareness of the need to persuade multiple stakeholders. This suggests that linguistic strategies should be considered part of policy design, not merely afterthoughts.

For practitioners such as teachers and school leaders, the analysis highlights how discourse positions them within reforms. Inclusive pronouns create solidarity but also distribute responsibility. Understanding these rhetorical moves can empower practitioners to critically engage with policy discourse rather than passively accept it (Luke, 2019; Clarke & Phelan, 2019). For international agencies, the Indonesian case underscores the importance of attending to local discursive practices when evaluating reforms (Verger & Novelli, 2023).

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers important insights, it has limitations. The focus on a single speech limits the generalizability of findings. Future research could expand the dataset to include multiple episodes of Merdeka Belajar or comparative analysis across Southeast Asia. Additionally, while conjunctions provide a valuable entry point, other linguistic features such as modality, appraisal, and metaphor deserve further investigation (Martin & White, 2005; Shi & Gebhard, 2023). Finally, future research could triangulate discourse analysis with stakeholder interviews to examine how policy discourse is received and enacted in practice (Mitchell, 2020; Stevenson & Gilmore, 2021).

CONCLUSION

In sum, the Merdeka Belajar Episode 3 speech illustrates how conjunctions function as rhetorical devices that expand reform narratives, justify policy choices, and legitimize authority. Through SFL, these micro-level features are shown to perform macro-level ideological work, situating Indonesian reform within global discursive patterns while reflecting local specificities. The study advances the field by integrating linguistic analysis with policy evaluation, highlighting the communicative dimension of reform. By doing so, it contributes to international debates on education governance and demonstrates the value of discourse-oriented approaches to policy evaluation.

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