

19-02-2026

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To cite this article: Semartini, A. (2026). A critical discourse analysis of the toxic free nutritious meal in *The Jakarta Post*: Teun A. van Dijk's framework. *Priviet Social Sciences Journal*, 6(1), 413-425.
<https://doi.org/10.55942/pssj.v6i2.1513>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.55942/pssj.v6i2.1513>



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A critical discourse analysis of the toxic free nutritious meal in *The Jakarta Post*: Teun A. van Dijk's framework

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Received 30 December 2025

Revised 09 February 2026

Accepted 19 February 2026

ABSTRACT

Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) is a flagship program promoted by President Prabowo Subianto and Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka during the 2024 General Election campaign. In its implementation, the program has faced numerous challenges, one of which is the high number of food poisoning cases among students after consuming the MBG menu. The media reported on the poisoning case, including *The Jakarta Post*. News stories do not reflect reality but construct it. This study investigates the discourse of toxic Free Nutritious Meals constructed by *The Jakarta Post* using Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis approach. The data consisted of four online news articles obtained from *thejakartapost.com*, published at four different times. The news texts were analyzed through textual, social, and social cognition analyses, as proposed by Van Dijk. The findings reveal that *The Jakarta Post* constructs food poisoning cases as incidents that require serious attention from both the public and the government. However, at the same time, the newspaper also builds a discourse portraying the government as having responded to the cases promptly and the MBG program as generally well implemented.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; free nutritious meals; *The Jakarta Post*; toxic

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, food security and child nutrition have become central public concerns in Indonesia, particularly following the government's introduction of the Free Nutritious Meal Program. Free Nutritious Meals, commonly referred to as *Makan Bergizi Gratis* (MBG), is one of the flagship programs promoted by the Prabowo Subianto–Gibran administration during the 2024 General Election campaign (Kiftiyah et al., 2025; Mebra & Mauleny, 2025; Pancani & Ningsih, 2025). This program emerged from Prabowo Subianto's concern regarding the condition of Indonesian children who often skip breakfast, which negatively affects their learning activities at school (Andin et al., 2024). The MBG program aims to improve public welfare, particularly among children and adolescents (Kiftiyah et al., 2025). By ensuring adequate nutritional intake, children and adolescents are expected to participate more effectively in teaching and learning activities (Mebra & Mauleny, 2025). Furthermore, the program seeks to eradicate child hunger in Indonesia, regardless of ethnicity, religion, race, or socioeconomic status. One of the state's responsibilities is to realize the fifth principle of Pancasila, namely, Social Justice for All Indonesian People, and the provision of healthy food represents a concrete implementation of this principle (Andin et al., 2024; Kiftiyah et al., 2025).

The free nutritious meal program has been widely implemented in various countries and has demonstrated positive outcomes. India, South Korea, the United States, and Japan are among the countries that have adopted similar initiatives. This program aims to promote both academic and nutritional equity (Pasha et al., 2025). In China, research conducted by Fang and Zhu indicates that the provision of free nutritious meals not only improves children's physical health but also positively impacts their cognitive development. The most significant effects are observed among children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In other words, such programs can help reduce educational disparities caused by economic inequality (Andin et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, several studies have demonstrated that the free nutritious meal program offers numerous benefits to students. The implementation of the MBG has led to significant improvements in physical health, including reductions in malnutrition, stunting, and underweight prevalence, particularly among children (Pancani & Ningsih, 2025; Qomarrullah et al., 2025; Welasari; et al., 2025). The program has also been shown to increase student attendance and improve academic achievements (Qomarrullah et al., 2025). Additionally, MBG contributes to reducing anxiety, alleviating stress related to food insecurity, and enhancing children's self-esteem (Pancani & Ningsih, 2025).

Despite its benefits, the MBG program has faced various challenges and public controversies. One major issue concerns the substantial budget allocation required for the program (Kiftiyah et al., 2025), which reaches hundreds of trillions of rupiah and has sparked public debate, as the program is perceived as overly consumptive (Welasari; et al., 2025). After being inaugurated as president, Prabowo Subianto allocated approximately 171 trillion rupiah to provide free nutritious meals for 82.9 million Indonesian children (Mebra & Mauleny, 2025). This large-scale budget has raised public concerns regarding the potential for corruption. Large-scale aid distribution programs in Indonesia are often vulnerable to corrupt practices, leading to fears that the MBG program may face similar risks. These concerns are further intensified by the fact that many government officials involved in food management are affiliated with political parties, raising suspicions that the program could be exploited and deviate from its original public health objectives. Without strict oversight, the risks of price inflation, fund misappropriation, and corruption become easier to execute (Askar et al., 2025).

In addition to budgetary issues, quality control of the free nutritious meals poses a significant challenge to the program's effectiveness (Pancani & Ningsih, 2025). One increasingly reported problem is the high incidence of food poisoning among students after consuming MBG menu. Cases of food poisoning related to the program have occurred in various regions across Indonesia.

Food poisoning incidents undoubtedly cause health disturbances among students, including nausea, dizziness, vomiting, and diarrhea, which lead to decreased stamina, psychological effects such as anxiety, and reduced attendance and concentration. These conditions ultimately result in suboptimal learning outcomes. Such incidents also undermine parents' trust in the MBG program (Maulia et al., 2025).

The high frequency of these cases has attracted public and media attention, prompting extensive coverage by both online and print media outlets.

News does not merely reflect reality; rather, it constructs reality (Sari & Hamdani, 2024). The way news is structured, through specific word choices and language use, means that news does not fully reflect actual events (Mukhlis et al., 2020). When consuming mass media news, readers are often unconsciously exposed to discourses constructed by the media (Soeharto et al., 2021). News is the result of discursive struggles among various social forces and involves the perspectives and ideologies of journalists and media institutions (Susanti et al., 2023). Information produced by mass media can shape opinions and perceptions, thereby generating discourse and influencing cultural formation as conveyed through news narratives (Febriyanti & Sundari, 2022).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach to discourse research that examines how the abuse of social power and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimized, and resisted through text and talk within social and political contexts (Dijk, 2015). CDA is rooted in critical language theory, which views language use as a form of social practice. All social practices are embedded in specific historical contexts and function as sites where existing social relations are either reproduced or contested, and where particular interests are served. It is precisely these questions of interest that connect discourse to relations of power (Janks, 2006). Because CDA is deeply concerned with the critical study of power abuse and forms of resistance, it is not surprising that political discourse has become a central focus of CDA. Accordingly, CDA prioritizes social problems and political issues rather than merely examining the structural properties of discourse, particularly within social and political contexts (Dijk, 2015).

Critical Discourse Analysis provides theoretical and methodological tools for empirical studies of the relationship between discourse and social as well as cultural developments across various social domains (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Naidu et al., 2023). The primary objective of CDA is to uncover obscured meanings within discourse by analyzing linguistic features and relating them to their broader contexts (Masitoh, 2020). Within this framework, discourse is not limited to written and spoken language but also includes visual imagery. Therefore, the analysis of texts that incorporate visual elements must take into account the specific characteristics of visual semiotics and the relationship between language and images. For critical discourse analysts, discourse is understood as a form of social practice that both constitutes the social world and is simultaneously shaped by other social practices. As a social practice, discourse is engaged in a dialectical relationship with other social dimensions. It not only contributes to the formation and transformation of social structures but also reflects them (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). By examining linguistic and sociolinguistic features of texts, CDA provides insights into how language both shapes and reflects social reality, as well as how discourse interacts with societal structures that are often opaque to the public (Rahro et al., 2024).

One of the approaches within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the framework proposed by Teun A. van Dijk. Teun A. van Dijk argues that the use of specific words, sentence structures, and stylistic choices should not merely be viewed as means of communication, but as forms of political communication intended to influence public opinion, generate support, or marginalize opponents (Susanti et al., 2023). Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis is particularly concerned with the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power and its abuse. More specifically, his approach focuses on the intersection between local and global dimensions, namely the relationship between discourse structures and social structures (Surya et al., 2023).

Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis is employed to examine the structure of discourse texts, the mental awareness of language users, and the relationship between discourse and social structures through three dimensions: text, social cognition, and social context. Through these dimensions, news texts can be interpreted. The social cognition dimension analyzes journalists' schematic frameworks or tendency models that shape how discourse is constructed based on their cognitive structures (Surya et al., 2023). Mogashoa emphasizes that, in Van Dijk's perspective, CDA is not limited to textual structures alone, as discourse structures inherently express ideologies, meanings, and opinions. Therefore, to uncover hidden meanings within texts, an analysis of social cognition and social context is essential (Fayruza et al., 2021).

This study is motivated by the observable tension between the official narrative of MBG as a solution to nutritional inequality and media reports highlighting its risks and unintended consequences. While previous studies on MBG have largely focused on policy evaluation, program effectiveness, or stakeholder perceptions, limited attention has been paid to how the program is discursively constructed in the media, particularly during moments of crisis and controversy. This gap is significant because discourse does not merely reflect reality; it actively shapes public understanding, legitimizes certain power relations, and marginalizes alternative interpretations.

The Jakarta Post is one of Indonesia's most prominent English-language newspapers and is widely read by international audiences seeking information about Indonesia's social and political conditions. Therefore, it is important to examine how toxic Free Nutritious Meals is constructed by an English-language media. The aim of this study is to analyze the Critical Discourse Analysis on toxic Free Nutritious Meals published in The Jakarta Post using Teun A. van Dijk's CDA framework. By situating media texts within their broader socio-political and institutional contexts, the study seeks to reveal how language is used to negotiate accountability and authority in the governance of public nutrition programs. In doing so, this research responds directly to ongoing public debates surrounding MBG and contributes empirically grounded insights into the discursive politics of welfare policy in contemporary Indonesia.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design to examine how discourse surrounding toxic *Free Nutritious Meals* is constructed in Indonesian media. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study aims to explore meanings and power relations embedded in news texts rather than to measure variables numerically. The analysis focuses on in-depth interpretation of language use and discursive strategies employed in media reporting.

2.2. Research Setting and Unit of Analysis

The research is situated within the context of Indonesian mass media, specifically online news reporting published by *The Jakarta Post*. The unit of analysis in this study is news articles reporting incidents of food poisoning related to the *Free Nutritious Meals* program. Each article is treated as a discursive event that reflects broader socio-political and institutional contexts.

2.3. Population, Sampling Technique, and Sample Size Justification

The population of this study consists of all online news articles published by *The Jakarta Post* that report on issues related to the *Free Nutritious Meals* program. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select news articles that were directly relevant to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) the article explicitly reports incidents of food poisoning linked to the *Free Nutritious Meals* program; (2) the article was published between May and September 2025, a period marked by heightened public attention to the program due to repeated poisoning cases; and (3) the article is accessible in full text on *The Jakarta Post* official website.

Based on these criteria, four news articles published at different times were selected to capture variation in reporting across incidents and temporal contexts. The sample size is considered sufficient for qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis, which prioritizes depth of analysis over breadth of data and allows for detailed examination of discursive patterns across texts.

The selected articles are: (1) "Hundreds of Students in Bandung Get Food Poisoning After Govt's Free Meals" (May 2, 2025); (2) "Indonesia Free Meal Plan Stunted by Delays, Protests, Poisonings" (July 3, 2025); (3) "More Than 360 Hit by Food Poisoning After Eating Free School Meal in Central Java" (August 15, 2025); (4) "Over 800 Students Suffer Mass Food Poisoning from Free Meals Program" (September 20, 2025)

2.4. Data Types and Data Collection Procedures

This study utilizes both primary and secondary data. The primary data consist of online news texts retrieved directly from *The Jakarta Post* website (thejakartapost.com). The articles were collected manually by searching relevant keywords such as *free nutritious meals*, *food poisoning*, and *school meals* during the specified time frame. The data collection process was conducted between October and November 2025.

The secondary data include scholarly journal articles and relevant news sources that provide contextual information on the *Free Nutritious Meals* program and support the theoretical framework of the study. Secondary data were used to contextualize the analysis rather than as primary analytical material.

2.5. Analytical Framework and Procedures

Data analysis applies Teun A. van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis framework, which conceptualizes discourse analysis across three interrelated dimensions: textual analysis, social cognition, and social context. Textual analysis is further divided into macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure (Fayruza et al., 2021).

Macrostructure refers to the overall theme or dominant topic of the news text. Superstructure concerns the schematic organization of the news, particularly how headlines, leads, and story sequences are arranged. Microstructure includes semantic, syntactic, stylistic, and rhetorical dimensions. Semantic analysis focuses on meanings emphasized or suppressed in the text; syntactic analysis examines sentence construction and agency; stylistic analysis explores lexical choices; and rhetorical analysis investigates how emphasis and persuasion are embedded within the news discourse (Yulika, 2021).

To ensure systematic analysis, each analytical component was organized into tabular forms adapted from (Irmayani & Rahmi Usman, 2022) and modified by the researcher. This procedure facilitated consistent comparison across texts. See Table 1

Table 1. Text Analysis

STRUCTURE	STRATEGY	INDICATORS	DATA
Macrostructure	Theme	Topic	
Superstructure	Schema	Headline	
		Lead	
Microstructure	Semantics	Preconceptions	
	Syntax	Coherence	
	Stylistic	Lexicon	
	Rhetoric	Number	

Social context analysis examines how the news texts relate to broader social structures, institutional practices, and public debates surrounding the *Free Nutritious Meals* program. Social cognition analysis focuses on identifying both explicit and implicit knowledge, shared beliefs, and cultural assumptions that influence the construction of discourse in the media (Fayruza et al., 2021).

To minimize researcher bias, the analysis followed a clearly defined analytical framework and consistent coding procedures across all texts. The use of established CDA categories enhanced analytical rigor and transparency. In addition, interpretations were grounded in textual evidence and supported by relevant theoretical literature. Reflexive awareness was maintained throughout the research process to ensure that analytical conclusions were derived from the data rather than preconceived assumptions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Text Analysis

Several news texts analyzed in this research present abundant data to demonstrate a specific dimension; nevertheless, only a few are included in the table below as examples. Some data are written in short version to avoid high score of similarity. The complete sentences (data) can be read in the news. See Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5

Table 2. Analysis of Text 1

TEXT 1			
STRUCTURE	STRATEGY	INDICATORS	DATA
Macrostructure	Theme	Topic	This text addresses the issue of hundreds of students experiencing food poisoning after consuming free nutritious meals provided by the government through the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program.
Superstructure	Schema	Headline	<i>"Hundreds of Students in Bandung Get Food Poisoning After Govt's Free Meals"</i>
		Lead	<i>"Hundreds of students and teachers in a state junior high school in Bandung, West Java, have fallen sick and showed symptoms of food poisoning..."</i>
Microstructure	Semantics	Preconceptions	Hundreds of students in Bandung experienced food poisoning after consuming the Free Nutritious Meals program initiated by President Prabowo Subianto; however, the government has taken measures to address the reported poisoning cases.
	Syntax	Coherence	This text employs several lexical choices that serve to reinforce or intensify the idea being conveyed <i>"He added that students at SMA 19 Bandung state senior high school..."</i>
	Stylistic	Lexicon	This text employs adjectives with an intensifying or exaggerative function that convey negative connotations. <i>"...the long list of incidents surrounding..."</i>
	Rhetoric	Number	The news text uses numerical expressions to create emphasis, particularly highlighting the number of victims affected by food poisoning related to the Free Nutritious Meals program. <i>"342 students"</i> <i>"over 1,000 kitchens"</i>

Table 3. Analysis of Text 2

TEXT 2			
STRUCTURE	STRATEGY	INDICATORS	DATA
Macrostructure	Theme	Topic	This text depicts the Free Nutritious Meals program as a problematic public policy, characterized by multiple issues, including payment delays, corruption risks, food poisoning incidents, and other implementation problems.
Superstructure	Schema	Headline	<i>"Indonesia Free Meal Plan Stunted By Delays, Protests, Poisonings"</i>
		Lead	<i>"When an Indonesian mother dropped off her daughter at school in May, she did not expect her to become violently sick ..."</i>
Microstructure	Semantics	Preconceptions	Although the Free Nutritious Meals program aims to address stunting, it has faced numerous obstacles and public protests, particularly concerning toxic food cases and the substantial budget allocated to the program.
	Syntax	Coherence	The news text frequently employs contrastive conjunctions, such as <i>"but"</i> and <i>"however,"</i>
	Stylistic	Lexicon	The news text uses exaggerative lexical items with negative connotations. a. <i>"But its rollout since January has stumbled from crisis to crisis..."</i> <i>"...she did not expect her to become violently sick..."</i>
	Rhetoric	Number	The text extensively use numerical figures as a form of emphasis, referring primarily to the large budget allocated to or spent on the MBG program. a. <i>"It was slated to reach as many as 17.5 million children this year to the tune of US\$4.3 billion"</i> b. <i>"Prabowo's administration has allocated \$0.62 per meal and initially set a budget of 71 trillion rupiah (\$4.3 billion) for this year."</i> c. <i>"99.99 percent success rate in any field is a good thing"</i>

Table 4. Analysis of Text 3

TEXT 3			
STRUCTURE	STRATEGY	INDICATORS	DATA
Macrostructure	Theme	Topic	The text concerns hundreds of students who experienced food poisoning after consuming meals provided by the government through the Free Nutritious Meals program.
Superstructure	Schema	Headline	<i>“More Than 360 Hit By Food Poisoning After Eating Free School Meal In Central Java</i>
		Lead	<i>More than 360 people fell ill in Sragen, Central Java after consuming school lunches, an official said”</i>
Microstructure	Semantics	Preconceptions	Hundreds of students in Central Java experienced food poisoning after consuming the Free Nutritious Meals program initiated by President Prabowo Subianto to address stunting.
	Syntax	Coherence	This news text uses many words that connect it to previous events. “Since January...”
	Stylistic	Lexicon	The news text uses exaggerative lexical items with negative connotations. <i>“...has stumbled from crisis to crisis,”</i> <i>“...in the largest food poisoning case”</i> The news text uses metaphor: <i>“...marred by mass food poisoning cases.”</i>
	Rhetoric	Number	The text uses numerical data as a rhetorical device to emphasize several points, particularly the number of students affected by food poisoning and the amount of budget allocated to the program. <i>“More than 360 people...”</i> <i>“...affecting over 1,000 people...”</i> <i>“...cost of Rp 171 trillion (\$10.62 billion) ...”</i>

Table 5. Analysis of Text 4

TEXT 4			
STRUCTURE	STRATEGY	INDICATORS	DATA
Macrostructure	Theme	Topic	The text concerns hundreds of students experiencing food poisoning incidents after consuming Free Nutritious Meals provided by the government through the MBG program.
Superstructure	Schema	Headline	<i>“Over 800 Students Suffer Mass Food Poisoning From Free Meals Program”</i>
		Lead	<i>Over 800 students fell sick in two cases of mass food poisoning this week</i>
Microstructure	Semantics	Preconceptions	Since its launch in January, thousands of students from various regions in Indonesia have reportedly experienced food poisoning after consuming the Free Nutritious Meals, a government program that requires a very large budget allocation.
	Syntax	Coherence	The news text employs additive conjunctions that reinforce or strengthen the conveyed ideas, such as “added” and “adding.”
	Stylistic	Lexicon	The news text uses exaggerative lexical items with negative connotations. <i>“ambitious goal”</i>
	Rhetoric	Number	The text uses numerical figures to emphasize several aspects, including the number of children affected by food poisoning and the scale of the budget allocated to the Free Nutritious Meals program. <i>“over 4,000 children”</i> <i>“about 30 students had to be hospitalised”</i>

3.2. Social Analysis

Social analysis focuses on how society consumes, interprets, and understands existing texts (Irmayani & Rahmi Usman, 2022). In other words, social analysis is conducted by examining intertextuality, namely by relating one text to other relevant texts.

The Free Nutritious Meals program is one of the flagship initiatives promoted by President Prabowo Subianto and Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka during the 2024 general election campaign. The program is intended to realize one of Indonesia's major national visions, *Indonesia Emas 2045*. In addition, it aims to demonstrate the presence of the state across all segments of society by providing free nutritious meals to the population.

To demonstrate this commitment, President Prabowo Subianto and Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka coordinate with various stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the program. One key institution involved is the National Nutrition Agency (Badan Gizi Nasional). Collaboration with this agency signifies the government's commitment not only to distributing food but also to ensuring that the meals provided meet balanced nutritional standards (Maharani et al., 2024).

However, in its implementation, numerous obstacles and challenges have emerged, leading to growing public skepticism and calls for the government to re-evaluate the program. Among the most prominent issues are cases of food poisoning affecting students in various regions across Indonesia and the program's substantial budget allocation. The combination of high expenditure and incidents of food poisoning has generated public outrage and inevitably raised suspicions of corrupt practices.

Historically, social assistance programs implemented by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic were proven to be involved in corruption scandals (Purnamasari, 2025; Sahara, 2021). This history has contributed to public distrust toward government aid and subsidy programs. This skepticism is reflected in public statements cited in the second news text.

"A big budget means the possibility of corruption is wide open, and with lax monitoring, corruption can happen," stated Egi Primayogha, a researcher at Indonesia Corruption Watch. *"Since the beginning, the program was rushed, without any good planning. There is no transparency."*

The nutritional quality of meals provided by the MBG program has also drawn significant attention. According to reports from *Kompas.com*, the menus offered in the program often consist of snack-type foods that fail to meet balanced nutritional standards for school children (Rafni; & Larissa Huda, 2025). Several news reports indicate that, in some schools, the food provided was of poor quality, leading to parental rejection of the program and temporary suspension of its implementation. In response to these incidents, some have expressed worries over food quality. Issues related to quality control, logistic challenges, and weak regulatory frameworks have been identified as major problems in the implementation of the MBG program (Achmad et al., 2025).

The absence of a legal foundation further opens opportunities for irregularities, including corruption in procurement processes and limited public participation in program planning. Therefore, legal foundation governing procurement transparency, public oversight, and student health and safety must be strengthened (Felix et al., 2025).

The high incidence of food poisoning cases linked to the MBG program has heightened public anxiety regarding the food safety standards applied by the government. This situation indicates systemic negligence spanning the procurement of food ingredients, distribution processes, and final monitoring at the point of consumption (Felix et al., 2025).

Herdiana (2025) identifies multiple factors hindering the implementation of the MBG program in Indonesia, which can be categorized into three aspects: government-related factors, implementation processes, and societal factors. Among these, implementation plays a crucial role in the overall success of the program. Actors involved, production processes, and food distribution systems significantly determine the effectiveness of the MBG program. Furthermore, Santoso et al. (2025) demonstrate that several aspects of the program's implementation require substantial improvement, including existing governance related

to evaluation, effectiveness, and efficiency, as well as digital and institutional transformation and broader reforms in the governance of the MBG program.

3.3. Social Cognition

Social cognition refers to how news is constructed by journalists, as each journalist possesses individual perspectives and viewpoints. Nevertheless, shared or dominant ideologies also strongly influence how news is framed so that it is considered acceptable or permissible for publication (Irmayani & Rahmi Usman, 2022). In other words, through social cognition, it is possible to examine how The Jakarta Post constructs discourse related to toxic free nutritious meals.

The slogan of The Jakarta Post, displayed on its official website, is “*Still Bold, Fiercely Independent.*” Through this slogan, the newspaper positions itself as impartial and courageous in reporting events. This stance is reflected in its use of numerical data. In the published news headlines, The Jakarta Post explicitly highlights the high number of food poisoning cases. This can be observed in the headlines of texts 1, 3, and 4. The use of numbers in newspaper headlines directs public attention toward the magnitude of the cases, thereby emphasizing their seriousness. In this way, The Jakarta Post frames the issue as a matter of significant concern that demands attention from both the public and the government.

In addition to numerical emphasis, The Jakarta Post employs lexical choices that intensify the perceived impact of the food poisoning incidents. The newspaper choose the word “ambitious” to depict the MBG program. Felix et al. (2025) criticize this ambition as being disproportionate to the risks involved, particularly those related to food quality and safety.

Beyond highlighting poisoning cases, The Jakarta Post repeatedly underscores the substantial financial costs associated with the MBG program. Across the analyzed news texts, the newspaper consistently presents the large budget absorbed by the program and the opposition expressed by various parties toward this flagship program of President Prabowo Subianto.

However, The Jakarta Post also provides space for government counter-narratives. Text 2 quotes President Prabowo that by May, out of three million students who consumed free nutritious meals, only 200 experienced food poisoning and only five required hospitalization. He characterized these figures as evidence of success, claiming a 99.99% success rate. This statement contrasts sharply with the high numbers emphasized in the headlines, suggesting that the poisoning incidents are relatively insignificant.

Similarly, in text 1, The Jakarta Post offers space for local government responses. Muhammad Farhan, the Mayor of Bandung, stated that the Bandung government had coordinated with all relevant parties and expressed relief that the affected students had recovered.

The use of images in the news articles also contrasts with the idea conveyed in the headlines. The images predominantly depict students consuming MBG menu and the process of producing or distributing the MBG menu. The prominent size of these images represents the ideas being foregrounded. In other words, The Jakarta Post visually aligns with the government’s narrative that the program continues to function effectively and that students are still able to benefit from it. See Figure 1 and Figure 2



Figure 1. A student ate MBG menu (<https://s.id/N6anO>)



Figure 2. Students ate MBG menu (<https://s.id/cI53Y>)

Finally, the analyzed texts reveal that The Jakarta Post frequently avoids explicitly naming actors or agents in sentences discussing food poisoning incidents. Instead, passive constructions are commonly used, which obscures responsibility and prevents readers from clearly identifying who is accountable. The following clause is the example.

“...over 4,000 children have been hit by food poisoning after consuming the meals...”

In contrast, when reporting government actions, the newspaper tends to employ active voice constructions that position the government as the subject or agent, particularly in statements made by government or involved parties. The following sentence is the example.

“It’s our responsibility to protect the students..”

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine how the discourse surrounding the *toxic Free Nutritious Meals* program is constructed by The Jakarta Post. The Free Nutritious Meals program is a flagship initiative of President Prabowo Subianto intended to address stunting in Indonesia. However, the program has encountered numerous challenges in its implementation, including a substantial budget allocation, a lack of transparency in execution, and food quality issues that have resulted in thousands of students experiencing food poisoning.

Based on the data analysis, the findings indicate that The Jakarta Post attempts to position itself as an independent media outlet without explicitly aligning with any particular party. The newspaper constructs a discourse in which the high number of food poisoning cases is framed as a serious issue requiring public attention. At the same time, The Jakarta Post also builds a counter-discourse portraying the Free Nutritious Meals program as largely successful, emphasizing the government’s presence and its efforts to implement the program effectively.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Confidentiality Statement

Not applicable.

Authors' Contributions

Not applicable.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this research.

Data Availability Statement

All data supporting the findings of this study are derived from publicly available legal materials, including legislation, academic publications, and official regulations of international and national sports organizations. No additional datasets were generated or analyzed.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Notes on Contributors

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