Pros and Cons of Military-Based Character Education: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Fairclough's Framework

Lewi Kabanga'[1], Robinhot Sagala[2], Santy Layan[1], Dorce Bu'tu[1]

[1]Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Protestan Negeri Sentani, Papua, Indonesia

[2]Universitas Padjadjaran, Bandung, Indonesia

*Correspondence: Lewikaban@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the ideological contestations embedded in public discourse regarding the West Java Governor's policy on character education in military barracks. Adopting Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, data were collected from eleven public figures representing diverse institutional backgrounds, whose statements were disseminated through major Indonesian online media outlets (Kompas, Detik, Tempo, NU-Online, Gesuri.id, CNN Indonesia, Liputan6) and YouTube. The findings reveal that pro-policy discourse predominantly employed legitimizing diction, affirmative modalities, and metaphors that framed military barracks as spaces for discipline and nation-building. Conversely, counter-discourse highlighted risks of child rights violations, psychological harm, and incompatibility with inclusive and holistic educational principles. These opposing discourses demonstrate intertextual practices ranging from legal references to cultural values, while also reflecting broader ideological struggles between state-driven discipline-oriented education and civil society's advocacy for democratic, child-centered learning. The study contributes to CDA scholarship by extending its application to the underexplored domain of military-based character education in Indonesia and offers insights into how power and ideology shape the trajectory of educational policy debates.

1. Introduction

Education is universally acknowledged as a fundamental process for shaping individuals not only in terms of cognitive development but also in moral integrity, social responsibility, and civic consciousness. Beyond the transmission of knowledge and skills, education serves as a foundation for character formation, instilling values that enable learners to participate meaningfully in social and cultural life. In the Indonesian context, character education (pendidikan karakter) has become a national priority (Sadewa et al., 2024; Rahman & Weda, 2019; Rahman et al., 2019). Rooted in the philosophy of Pancasila, character education is designed to foster resilience, integrity, and ethical awareness among students in order to prepare them for the challenges of the twenty-first century. The government has sought to institutionalize this vision through programs such as the Pancasila Student Profile, which integrates six key dimensions, faith and devotion, global competence, independence, cooperation, creativity, and critical thinking, into learning practices both inside and outside the classroom. These initiatives reflect a broader recognition that knowledge, without a strong moral and ethical foundation, is insufficient for building a dignified and civilized nation.

Despite these national efforts, debates surrounding the most effective models of character education persist. In recent years, educational policies that intersect with institutions of authority, particularly the military, have drawn significant attention and controversy. A notable case emerged with the issuance of the West Java Governor's Circular Letter No. 43/PK.03.04/KESRA, which outlines character education programs to be conducted in military barracks (Arie Nugraha, Aura Antari, 2025) This initiative was presented as part of the "Gapura Panca Waluya" program, an educational framework emphasizing discipline, health, morality, honesty, intelligence, and creativity. The program targets students identified as engaging in delinquent behaviors, who are then sent to military facilities to undergo training intended to foster discipline and nationalistic values. According to local government reports, hundreds of students have already participated in this program through collaboration between schools, parents, and military personnel.

The introduction of this policy sparked polarized responses. Supporters argue that military barracks provide a structured environment conducive to instilling discipline, resilience, and national identity, viewing the policy as a pragmatic response to rising concerns about juvenile delinquency. They emphasize that the initiative is corrective rather than punitive, claiming that it does not violate children's rights as long as physical punishment is avoided. On the other hand, critics, including child rights advocates, psychologists, and educators, have raised serious concerns. They argue that the militaristic setting risks causing psychological trauma, contravenes inclusive and holistic educational principles, and undermines the modern educational paradigm that values empathy, collaboration, and creativity. Furthermore, opponents highlight potential legal conflicts with Indonesia's National Education System Law and international child protection standards. These opposing perspectives reveal not only a policy dispute but also an ideological struggle concerning how character should be cultivated in Indonesia's youth and what role the state and its institutions should play in this process.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a valuable framework for interrogating these debates because it situates language as both a product and a vehicle of power relations and ideology. Among the various approaches to CDA, Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework has been particularly influential. Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that discourse must be analyzed at three interrelated levels: (1) the textual dimension, which examines linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, modality, and metaphor; (2) the discursive practice dimension, which explores how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed; and (3) the social practice dimension, which connects discourse to broader sociocultural and ideological structures. Applying this model allows researchers to uncover how language choices construct competing representations of reality, legitimize or challenge authority, and reproduce or resist dominant ideologies (Kabanga et al., 2023). In the context of character education in military barracks, Fairclough's framework is particularly apt, as it enables an examination of how state and civil society actors deploy discourse to frame the policy either as a legitimate solution or as a problematic, authoritarian imposition.

A number of studies have applied CDA to educational and political contexts, both in Indonesia and internationally. Gusti & Setiawati (2025) analyzed the ideological content of student protest slogans concerning electoral law revisions, highlighting the moral and religious metaphors used to mobilize collective solidarity. Basid & Humaira (2025) examined the reporting of Yahya Sinwar's death in Arab media, revealing how language constructed competing narratives of heroism and domination in the Israel–Palestine conflict. Similarly, (Nurrohmah & Setiawati, 2025) investigated corruption discourses in Indonesian media, finding that textual choices reflected ideologies of anti-corruption and accountability. Samsuri et al., (2022) analyzed COVID-19 terminology in news discourse, uncovering how government narratives attempted to shape public understanding of the pandemic. These studies demonstrate the capacity of CDA to reveal hidden ideologies within texts and discourses across a wide range of contexts.

However, despite this growing body of research, relatively little attention has been directed toward the educational domain, especially policies that integrate militarization into pedagogical practices. While previous CDA studies have primarily focused on political slogans, media coverage of conflicts, corruption, and public health discourses, the ideological construction of discourses surrounding military-based character education has been largely neglected. This gap is significant, as education is a site where ideological struggles over power, discipline, rights, and national identity are acutely manifest. Moreover, the Indonesian case is particularly relevant given the historical entanglements between military institutions and civic life, raising questions about how education policies both reflect and reinforce broader sociopolitical dynamics.

Against this backdrop, the present study critically examines the pros and cons discourse surrounding the West Java Governor's policy on character education in military barracks. Using Fairclough's CDA framework, the study analyzes statements from eleven public figures representing diverse institutional backgrounds, whose opinions were disseminated through major Indonesian media outlets such as Kompas, Detik, Tempo, NU-Online, Gesuri.id, CNN Indonesia, Liputan6, and YouTube. The analysis focuses on how lexical choices, metaphors, argumentation structures, and modalities are mobilized to frame the policy either as legitimate and necessary or as harmful and regressive. It further investigates how discursive practices, through intertextuality and media framing, contribute to shaping public perceptions, and how these discourses are embedded in broader ideological struggles concerning child rights, national identity, and educational paradigms.

The primary goal of this research is to critically analyze how public discourses construct, legitimize, or resist the West Java Governor's policy on character education in military barracks through the lens of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. Theoretically, it extends CDA scholarship by applying it to an underexplored domain: military-based character education. It illustrates how ideological battles are enacted not only in political or economic discourses but also in educational policy debates. Practically, the study offers insights into the tensions between state-driven disciplinary

approaches and civil society's advocacy for inclusive, democratic, and child-centered education. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers, educators, and scholars concerned with the future trajectory of education in Indonesia.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology, to give descrption on situations (Sugiyono, 2013)sug . This study aimed at examining the ideological constructions embedded within the discourse surrounding the West Java Governor's policy on military-based character education. Data were drawn from reputable online media outlets -including Kompas, Detik, Tempo, NU-Online, Gesuri.id, CNN Indonesia, and Liputan6- as well as from audiovisual statements disseminated through YouTube. These platforms were deliberately selected due to their extensive reach and significant influence in shaping public opinion in Indonesia. From these sources, statements by eleven key figures were collected between May and July 2025, the period during which the debate reached its peak intensity. Of these, five figures expressed support for the policy, while six voiced opposition. The dataset comprised direct quotations, narrative accounts, and public commentaries, which were subsequently transcribed, reduced, and systematically classified into two principal categories: pro-policy and counter-policy discourse.

The analysis was conducted through Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, encompassing three interrelated dimensions: textual, discursive practice, and social practice (Fairclough, 1995). At the textual level, the inquiry focused on linguistic features such as lexical selection, metaphorical framing, negation, and modality, thereby revealing how arguments were constructed and legitimized by both camps. The dimension of discursive practice examined the processes through which media outlets produced and circulated these statements, foregrounding intertextual references to legal frameworks, child protection principles, and cultural norms. At the level of social practice, the findings were situated within broader ideological contestations in Indonesian education, exposing tensions between state-driven, discipline-oriented models and inclusive, child-centered paradigms advanced by civil society actors.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study employed data triangulation by consulting multiple sources and conducting peer debriefings with scholars in discourse studies. Although the materials were derived from publicly available sources, ethical considerations were carefully observed by treating all statements with respect and avoiding misrepresentation. This methodological framework enabled the research not only to capture the surface-level argumentative dynamics but also to uncover the deeper ideological struggles underpinning the polarized discourses on military-based character education

3. Result and Discussion

The analysis reveals that the policy of character education through military barracks represents an arena of ideological contestation structured within Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of critical discourse analysis. At the level of text, the pro-policy discourse employs optimistic lexical choices, the metaphor of the barracks as a symbol of discipline, and affirmative modalities to construct legitimacy, whereas the counter-discourse foregrounds rejection-oriented vocabulary, the metaphor of the barracks as a representation of repression, and epistemic modalities to highlight potential violations of children's rights. At the level of discursive practice, the production and distribution of the pro-discourse are dominated by state actors (government, military, and police) through mainstream media, while the counter-discourse is generated by independent institutions (Komnas HAM, KPAI, academics, and child psychologists) that utilize alternative media and intertextual strategies grounded in legal instruments and progressive educational values. At the level of social practice, this contestation reflects an ideological tension between authoritarian paradigms emphasizing discipline and nationalism and progressive paradigms prioritizing inclusivity, children's rights, and holistic pedagogy. Accordingly, the policy functions not merely as a technical instrument of character education but also as a discursive arena in which meanings, legitimacy, and the direction of national education are produced, contested, and negotiated. The data can be seen such table bellows

Table 1. Pros and Cons-Policy Discourse

Data	Pros-Policy
A.1	... *membentuk* karakter dan kedisiplinan siswa melalui pelatihan di barak militer, bukan sebagai bentuk hukuman,... . (Liputan6)
A.2	(1)...*Mendukung* kebijakan ini, ... untuk *membentuk* mental, karakter, dan kedisiplinan mereka... (Tempo)
	(2) ... *Mendukung* asal tidak ada kekerasan fisik...

	... *bukan merupakan* pelanggaran HAM. (Kompas)
A.3	...*kebijakan* ini sebagai upaya mencari solusi..." . (Detik)
A.4	...TNI Angkatan Darat siap untuk *membina* siswa bermasalah di barak militer, ..*penguatan karakter*, nasionalisme, dan kedisiplinan.. . (Kompas)
A.5	"... program pendidikan karakter ini *tidak melanggar hak-hak anak*. Justru, ... *membina* dan *mengarahkan*..." (Youtube)

No	Cons-Policy
B.1	"...Potensi *pelanggaran hak* anak dan *tidak sesuai* dengan prinsip inklusif dalam pendidikan..." (Kompas)
B.2	"...*Risiko trauma psikologis* akibat pendekatan militeristik yang keras..."(Liputan6)
B.3	1. "... *Kurangnya peran konselor* dan psikolog dalam proses pembinaan... . 2. ...Pendekatan yang *tidak holistik*, seharusnya melibatkan keluarga dan lingkungan sosial 3. ...*Kuranganya evaluasi* program.... 4. ...prinsip pendidikan modern yang menekankan empati dan pemahaman..." . (Detik jabar)
B.4	1. ... berpotensi *menghambat* perkembangan emosi, *merusak* kepercayaan diri, dan membatasi kreativitas.... 2. ... bukan semestinya dikirim ke barak militer, tapi ke psikolog..." 3) "... tidak bisa diselesaikan hanya dengan barak militer..." (NU Online, CNN Indoonesia)
B.5	1. ...*melangga*r hak anak dan *tidak sesuai dengan* Undang-Undang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional... 2. ... jadi opsi terakhir, *bukan yang pertama*...., karena gubernurnya gubernur konten.." 3. *tidak sesuai dengan sistem* pendidikan kita...," (1,2 Youtube, 3.Gesuri ide)
B.6	"...Mengirim anak ke barak itu *dangka*l,..." (Youtube)

3.1. Textual Analysis of Pro- and Counter-Discourses on the Policy of Character Education in Military

Sholikhati & Mardikantoro (2017) explained that the analysis of the textual dimension starts from the presentation of text descriptions, interpretations, and explanations.The textual analysis demonstrates that both pro- and counter-discourses concerning the policy of character education through military barracks training are constructed through divergent lexical choices, metaphors, argumentative structures, and modalities, each imbued with ideological undertones.

Within the pro-policy discourse, the language employed tends to emphasize optimism and confidence in the notion that the military barracks constitute an appropriate space for shaping students' character. Verbs such as membentuk (A.1, A.2), membina (A.4, A.5), mengarahkan (A.5), mendukung (A.2), and mendisiplinkan (A.1, A.2, A.4) suggest an active process of moral transformation (Dixon, 1997). The use of abstract terms such as karakter (A.1, A.2, A.4, A.5) and kebijakan (A.3) reinforces a normative impression, while phrases like tidak melanggar (A.2, A.5) are strategically deployed to assert that the policy does not contravene humanitarian values or legal principles. Collectively, these lexical choices underscore a narrative that highlights the benefits, legitimacy, and moral urgency of the policy.

Conversely, the counter-policy discourse privileges vocabulary that articulates explicit rejection, foregrounding the risks, incongruities, and weaknesses of the policy. Phrases such as tidak sesuai dengan prinsip inklusi pendidikan (B.1),

risiko trauma psikologis (B.2), kurangnya peran konselor (B.3.1), and tidak bisa diselesaikan hanya dengan barak militer (B.4.3) reflect a critical stance that repudiates militaristic approaches. The frequent use of negating expressions such as tidak (B.1, B.4.3, B.5.3), bukan (B.5.2), and kurangnya (B.3.1, B.3.3) signals explicit rejection, while evaluative terms like berpotensi menghambat (B.4.1) or menjadi opsi terakhir (B.5.2) indicate awareness of long-term negative consequences. Collectively, this discourse frames the policy as an approach misaligned with modern educational principles privileging empathy, inclusivity, and holistic pedagogical methods (B.3.4).

 Metaphor is a form of expression that transfers meaning from one thing to another on the basis of certain similarities or relationships (Putri & Putri, 2021). The metaphor of the barak militer emerges as the central site of ideological contestation across both discourses. For supporters, the military barracks symbolize discipline, nationalism, and character formation. For opponents, however, they signify repression, psychological trauma, and a superficial solution that fails to address the root causes of character education. Thus, a single metaphor generates diametrically opposed meanings depending on the ideological stance adopted.

The argumentative structures of the two camps also diverge sharply. The pro-policy discourse constructs claims that the barracks are not sites of punishment but rather effective arenas for fostering discipline and character, justified by the pressing need to address student delinquency. The tone is presented as solution-oriented and normative. By contrast, the counter-discourse stresses that the policy risks violating children's rights, inducing trauma, and contravening the principles of modern education. Its justification is rooted in principles of inclusivity, holistic approaches, and respect for children's rights. The tone here is more critical, vigilant, and insistent on the necessity of policy revision.

From the perspective of modality, the pro-policy discourse predominantly employs affirmative and deontic forms such as siap, tidak melanggar, or bukan hukuman to reinforce the legitimacy of the policy. These modalities convey certainty and normative claims that the policy is morally and legally defensible. In contrast, the counter-discourse combines deontic modalities (harus, tidak semestinya) with epistemic ones (berpotensi, mungkin), thereby employing a rhetorical strategy that not only rejects the policy normatively but also warns of potential risks. In this way, modality functions as a crucial instrument for constructing discursive authority and shaping public opinion.

Overall, these findings reveal that the pro-policy discourse seeks to sustain legitimacy through optimistic, normative, and solution-oriented language, whereas the counter-policy discourse emphasizes critique grounded in modern educational values, children's rights, and inclusive approaches. In both cases, language operates not merely as a vehicle of opinion but as an ideological instrument shaping how the public interprets and evaluates the policy of character education in military barracks.

3.2. Discursive Practice Analysis

Fairclough (1995) explains that discursive practice encompasses three crucial dimensions, namely the production, distribution, and consumption of discourse. These dimensions cannot be separated from the social and ideological contexts in which they are embedded. In line with this,   Sari et al., (2025) emphasize that discursive practice within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a key entry point for understanding how meaning is constructed, disseminated, and negotiated in the public sphere.

In the context of West Java Governor Regulation, discursive practice is evident in the dynamics of pro- and counter-discourses on character education in military barracks. The production of pro-discourse was largely undertaken by state actors such as local government, the military (TNI), the police (Polri), and political officials, who positioned the policy as a solution to juvenile delinquency. Narratives such as "tidak melanggar HAM, (A.2, A.5)" and "pembinaan karakter (A.1, A.4, A.5" were primarily disseminated through mainstream media outlets such as Kompas, Tempo, Detik, NU Online, CNN Indonesia, and Liputan6. In this regard, the media did not operate neutrally but actively participated in reproducing the state's ideology of social order and political stability.

Conversely, counter-discourses were produced by independent institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM), the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), academics, and child psychologists. These actors utilized both mainstream media and alternative digital platforms such as YouTube to circulate their oppositional narratives. Lexical choices such as "pelanggaran hak anak (B.1, B.5.1)" and "tidak sesuai dengan UU (B.5.1, B.5.3)" indicate intertextual strategies that draw upon national legal instruments as well as international conventions. In this way, the counter-discourse sought to build resistance by emphasizing inclusivity, children's rights, and modern educational principles.

At the level of consumption, discourse does not end as a text passively read (Banga et al., 2023) but instead triggers critical responses from the public. This was visible in online media comment sections, public discussion forums, and formal statements by educational institutions and civil society organizations. These processes demonstrate that texts become arenas of contested meaning within the public sphere, where the legitimacy of policy is continuously negotiated.

Discursive practice also reveals the complexity of intertextuality. As Kristeva reminds us, no text stands alone; every text constitutes a mosaic of quotations and transformations of other texts. This is clearly visible in both pro- and counter-discourses. Pro-discourse employed vertical intertextuality as direct citation by invoking laws and the constitution, as well as manifest intertextuality through direct quotations from officials or state institutions (Rasheed et al., 2025) . By contrast, counter-discourse revealed implicatural intertextuality, for instance through implicit references to modern educational philosophy or values of creativity that reject militaristic approaches. A notable example is the phrase "tidak melanggar HAM", which functions not merely as a legal argument but also as a hegemonic strategy to legitimize the policy and cultivate a positive public perception.

This mapping of intertextuality underscores that the media functions not merely as a channel of information but also as an ideological actor capable of reinforcing or challenging existing social structures. Accordingly, discursive practice in the debate over military-barracks-based character education policy reflects a struggle between the state's efforts to build legitimacy through legal language and institutional authority, and civil society's resistance grounded in the values of child rights, inclusivity, and contemporary pedagogy. This discursive contestation simultaneously opens a space for public deliberation in which the effectiveness and legitimacy of the policy can be questioned and critically evaluated.

3.3. Social Practice Analysis

The analysis of the social practice dimension, often referred to as the macro-dimension, involves an examination of situational, institutional, and societal levels that influence how a text is framed and subsequently communicated to the public (Cenderamata & Darmayanti, 2019). In the context of the character education policy in West Java, this dimension reveals that the pro- and counter-discourses are not merely exchanges of linguistic arguments, but also reflections of the socio-political conditions, prevailing ideologies, and educational dynamics in Indonesia. The situation that gave rise to these discourses was the issuance of West Java Governor's Circular No. 45/PK.03.03/KESRA, which outlined nine strategic steps for character education as part of realizing Gapura Panca Waluya—a Sundanese educational philosophy encompassing the dimensions of physical and spiritual well-being (cageur), moral virtue (bageur), honesty and ethics (bener), intellectual sharpness and criticality (pinter), and creative productivity (singer). This philosophy serves as the foundation for the province's educational development agenda. However, when these objectives were perceived as difficult to achieve due to persistent issues of student misbehavior, military barracks training emerged as one of the proposed intervention strategies.

At the institutional level, the policy positions the military as a partner in education, thereby generating discursive tensions. Pro-policy narratives are typically endorsed by actors with symbolic authority, such as the armed forces (TNI) and nationalist figures, who employ legalistic and normative diction—such as "pembinaan karakter" or "tidak melanggar hukum"—to assert the legitimacy of the policy. In contrast, counter-discourses are articulated by independent institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM), the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), as well as academics and child psychologists. These actors highlight potential violations of children's rights, risks of psychological trauma, and inconsistencies with inclusive education principles. Thus, social practice at the institutional level demonstrates a contestation of authority between the state (through government and military apparatuses) and civil society (through independent institutions and experts).

At the broader societal level, the debate reflects an ideological tension between conventional and progressive perspectives. The pro-policy ideology underscores the importance of discipline and character formation through top-down approaches grounded in control and order. Meanwhile, the counter-ideology emphasizes the values of modern education—democratic, inclusive, and child-centered—arguing that character development must be achieved through participation, empathy, and supportive learning environments that nurture creativity.

This ideological tension exposes a fundamental dilemma within the social practice of education in Indonesia. On one hand, there is a drive to cultivate disciplined, morally upright students through state-led authoritative approaches. On the other hand, there is a demand to create educational spaces that respect diversity, uphold children's rights, and embrace democratic principles. This ideological struggle not only manifests as a clash of discourses but also carries tangible implications for the future trajectory of educational policy and the way society understands the state's role in shaping

younger generations. Accordingly, the social practice dimension of this policy underscores that discourses on character education cannot be divorced from broader ideological, authoritative, and structural struggles.

4. Conclusion

The Governor of West Java's policy on character education through military-style camps has sparked an ideological contestation, reflected in competing pro and contra discourses that seek to influence public perception as well as the legitimacy of the policy. The pro discourse presents an optimistic narrative, emphasizing the policy's potential to instill discipline and nationalism, whereas the contra discourse highlights concern regarding possible violations of law and human rights, as well as the incompatibility of militaristic approaches with the principles of inclusive education. Within Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework, these discursive differences are constructed linguistically through contrasting lexical choices, framed intertextually via references to legal frameworks and educational values, and contextualized socially within broader ideological tensions between authoritarian and progressive paradigms of education. Accordingly, this study underscores that public policy is not merely an instrument of governance, but also a discursive arena in which meanings are produced, contested, and legitimized, while simultaneously reflecting deeper ideological struggles over the role of the state, the protection of children's rights, and the future direction of national education.

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