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A Linguistics-Based Digital Literacy Model for Critical Engagement with Political Narratives on Social Media

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Abstract Political narratives on Indonesian social media use emotive, polarizing language, yet digital literacy instruction rarely teaches students to analyze or rewrite it. This mixed-methods study developed a teaching model combining Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), critical discourse analysis, and genre-based pedagogy, drawing on a survey of 140 undergraduates, focus groups with 63 of them, and SFL analysis of 30 purposively selected posts from Indonesia's 2024 election. Exploratory factor analysis of the new questionnaire yielded three provisional factors of self-reported literacy; students rated their evaluative practices moderately high but rarely produced political content. Focus-group notes showed students aware that campaign content may mislead but unsure how to verify it. Two illustrative posts showed sweeping generalization about an unspecified group and selective paraphrase of a candidate's statement. The five-stage model (Exposure, Linguistic Deconstruction, Critical Framing Analysis, Reconstruction, and Reflection) was trialed with two classes. The trial indicated preliminary feasibility and acceptability, not effectiveness. Students' rewrites showed that reconstruction must be tied to source verification.

Keywords: *Digital literacy, Political narratives, Systemic functional linguistics, Critical discourse analysis, Social media discourse*

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1. Introduction

Social media has become a major venue for political information and the formation of public opinion. In Indonesia, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and X are spaces where political narratives are quickly produced, circulated, and contested (Ali Adeeb & Mirhoseini, 2023; Annur, 2024; Tahir & Ramadhan, 2024). The same platforms also spread superficial, emotionally charged, and weakly evidenced political content (Dame Adjin-Tettey, 2022; Khan & Idris, 2019). Because visibility depends on attracting attention more than on communicating policy, political communication can turn polarized and hostile (Hameleers & van der Meer, 2020; Maschler & Schiffrin, 2015; Orhan, 2023; Ridha & Riwanda, 2020). Understanding it

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therefore requires attention to how political meanings are constructed through language, as well as to the information itself. This challenge matters most for young people, who are heavy social-media users and, increasingly, voters. Many consume political narratives passively, and scholars debate when social media use fosters political literacy and when it undermines it (Neubaum et al., 2024). Students need to read political narratives critically and also to produce alternatives that are ethical, constructive, and solution-oriented (Kozyreva et al., 2023; Krzyzanowski & Tucker, 2018; Ronald Alfred & Wong, 2022; Saraswati, 2018), so that they can scrutinize policies and hold leaders accountable (Park et al., 2023; Rachimoellah et al., 2024).

Existing responses to political misinformation come from three traditions, each with a limitation. Misinformation education reduces susceptibility to false claims (Huang et al., 2026) and teaches strategies such as lateral reading, the practice of professional fact-checkers who check what other sources say about a site rather than reading it closely (Wineburg & McGrew, 2019). Yet it treats a post mainly as a claim to be verified and offers few tools for describing how its wording builds a stance. Critical literacy and critical discourse approaches ask whose interests a text serves, yet in classrooms they often stop at critique (Andersson, 2021; Kozyreva et al., 2023). Genre-based pedagogy moves learners from deconstructing model texts to constructing their own but has mostly been applied to academic and school genres. Our earlier corpus study used Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to describe linguistic markers of political disinformation in Indonesian social media (Ayomi et al., 2025) but did not carry the findings into the classroom. The present study brings the three traditions (i.e., misinformation education, critical discourse approaches, and genre-based pedagogy) together in one instructional sequence. Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions:

1. How do university students report engaging with, and critically assessing, political narratives on social media, and what challenges do they describe?
2. What lexico-grammatical resources, analyzed through SFL, characterize problematic political posts in Indonesian digital discourse?
3. How can a linguistics-based pedagogical model be designed from these findings, and how feasible and acceptable is it in a classroom trial?

The contribution lies in how these traditions are connected, not in a new theory. The model gives misinformation education a linguistic layer, using the SFL metafunctions as an explicit checklist for describing how a post builds its stance (Ayomi et al., 2025; Rossette-Crake, 2025). It extends the deconstruction-to-construction cycle of genre-based pedagogy from academic genres to short, multimodal political posts, so that critique ends in a rewritten text rather than a verdict. It also fixes an order among these steps: description first, verification before any judgment of manipulation, and rewriting checked against the source. This order guards against two failures that each tradition leaves open when used alone: judging a post manipulative from its wording alone, and replacing a hostile post with a polite one that is no more accurate. The model is offered as a preliminary, context-specific proposal that addresses the gap between students' conceptual awareness of digital literacy and the skills needed to act on it.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Digital Political Literacy and Youth Civic Participation

Digital political literacy refers to the competencies that enable citizens to access, comprehend, evaluate, and ethically respond to political information in digital environments (Kozyreva et al., 2023; Livingstone, 2004; Park et al., 2023). Kozyreva et al. argue that "critical ignoring" of low-credibility content is as important as critical evaluation, and Polizzi (2025) distinguishes functional digital literacy (operating platforms) from critical digital literacy (interrogating the power behind them). In Indonesia, Rachimoellah et al. (2024) and Saraswati (2018) document campaigning that relies on virality rather than policy communication. Ethical response also has a cultural dimension: Indonesian politicians use politeness strategically on social media to build credibility (Juita et al., 2024), which suggests that the civility expected of political talk is a learned, culturally shaped practice and can therefore be taught.

Empirical studies show that young people's evaluation of online information often falls short of these competencies. In an assessment of 3,446 US high school students, most struggled to judge the credibility of online sources and claims; more than half, for example, believed that an anonymously posted video provided strong evidence of voter fraud (Breakstone et al., 2021). Instruction can help. In a nationally representative sample of youth, exposure to media literacy education improved judgments of the accuracy of online political claims, whereas political knowledge did not. Even so, these judgments still depended on whether a claim matched the respondent's prior position (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). In Indonesia, hoaxes circulated during the 2017 Jakarta election reshaped existing material into messages that fitted prevailing beliefs and served partisan ends (Utami, 2018), and the media and political literacy of first-time voters have been examined in relation to their civic participation (Ridha & Riwanda, 2020). Together, these studies indicate that students need concrete procedures for examining political content, yet most interventions target the credibility of sources and claims and say little about the wording through which a post builds its stance.

2.2. Systemic Functional Linguistics and the Analysis of Political Discourse

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) treats language as making three simultaneous kinds of meaning: ideational (Participants, Processes, Circumstances), interpersonal (Mood, Modality, Appraisal), and textual (Theme-Rheme structure and cohesion). Because every clause makes all three, political wording is never neutral: an agentless passive ("services were cut") rather than an agentive clause ("the ministry cut services") is an ideological choice with traceable linguistic evidence (Gebhard et al., 2014). Rossette-Crake (2025) shows that SFL can expose the rhetoric of "social media oratory"; Ayomi (2021) and Ayomi et al. (2025) identify biased participant roles, exaggerated modality, and incoherent textual structure as markers of disinformation in Indonesian political social media; and Appraisal analysis of Indonesian news on the relocation of the capital shows how evaluative choices realize each outlet's ideology (Risdianto et al., 2024).

SFL has also been applied directly to political communication on social media and to literacy teaching. Ross and Caldwell (2020) used appraisal analysis to show how Donald Trump's tweets deployed evaluative resources to attack and undermine the character of political opponents, a strategy of "going negative" that is realized in identifiable choices of evaluative language. In education, Gebhard et al. (2014) found that English language learners could take up SFL metalanguage to discuss how texts work, although it was difficult to operationalize in class, and Emilia and Hamied (2015) found that SFL genre pedagogy helped Indonesian student teachers improve the organization and language of their argumentative writing. These studies show that SFL can serve both as a tool for analyzing political texts and as a shared classroom vocabulary. They have, however, rarely been brought together in instruction that asks students to analyze and respond to political posts on Indonesian social media.

2.3. Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Literacy Pedagogy

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2006) connects linguistic patterns to power and ideology. Van Dijk's (2006) account of manipulation is relevant to political social media, where asymmetric labeling can shape perception without any single false statement. Noori et al. (2024) show elite actors obscuring responsibility through agentless, euphemistic choices, and Kopf (2026) argues that critical analysis of social media must attend to platform affordances such as virality and algorithmic amplification. On Facebook, for example, binary framing combined with pseudonymity and engagement-driven visibility intensifies group conflict (Banikalef, 2025).

Critical literacy pedagogy turns this analytic stance into an educational goal: learners question and reframe dominant narratives rather than only decoding them. Genre-based pedagogy (Ayomi et al., 2023) adds an instructional logic of modeling, joint construction, and independent construction that moves learners from analyzing texts to producing them. Empirical work suggests that the two can be combined. In a university literacy course, Guerra-Lyons and Rosado Mendinueta (2020) joined explicit instruction in the argumentative genre with reflection on the linguistic correlates of ideology, and students' independent writing showed both critical stances and adequate command of the genre. Such work, however, has not yet addressed the short, multimodal political posts that students encounter in their social media feeds.

2.4. The Integrative Framework and Research Gap

The studies reviewed above point to a gap. Misinformation education improves students' evaluation of sources and claims but offers little analysis of wording. SFL and CDA explain how wording builds a stance and whose interests it serves but are mainly used by researchers rather than taught to students as procedures. And genre-based and critical literacy pedagogies move students from analysis to production but have rarely addressed political posts on social media. Indonesian students, meanwhile, meet political content mainly in their feeds, where hostile framing and misleading content circulate during election periods (Tahir & Ramadhan, 2024; Utami, 2018), and young people may be aware that such content can mislead without having the skills to examine and respond to it (Andersson, 2021). Little is known about how these students engage with political narratives or about the linguistic resources that make particular posts problematic.

This study therefore integrates three perspectives, each with a distinct role. SFL provides the unit of analysis: the metafunctions give students an explicit vocabulary for describing what a post represents, how it positions readers, and how it organizes information. CDA provides the critical orientation, turning that description into questions about whose interests the wording serves and what must be verified before a post is believed. Genre-based pedagogy provides the progression from deconstruction to reconstruction, so that students end by writing a more accurate and constructive alternative rather than only a critique. Combined in this order, the three perspectives address the problem identified above: the gap between awareness that political content may mislead and the ability to examine and answer it. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to describe how university students engage with political narratives on social media and what challenges they face, to identify the linguistic resources that characterize problematic political posts, and to use these findings to design a learning model and examine its feasibility and acceptability in a classroom trial.

3. Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods research and development (R&D) design. A survey, focus group discussions (FGDs), and SFL analysis of a social-media corpus informed the design of a learning model, which was then trialed with two class groups to examine its feasibility and acceptability, not its effectiveness.

3.1. Participants

The survey was completed by 144 undergraduates from the first- and third-semester cohorts of the English Literature and Law programs at Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, recruited through convenience sampling as young adults likely to encounter political content during the 2024 election, some as first-time voters. Four incomplete responses were excluded, leaving 140. All reported active social-media use; gender was not recorded. From this pool, 63 students volunteered for the FGDs and the trial, conducted in two intact class groups (n = 32 and n = 31). A panel of university specialists in linguistics, digital literacy, and education reviewed the instruments and draft model. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

3.2. Materials

The corpus comprised 30 political social-media items, 15 from X and 15 from Instagram, collected from December 2023 to late February 2024, around the 2024 presidential election. Items were selected purposively if they (a) concerned the presidential or vice-presidential candidates, (b) appeared on either platform within the period, (c) contained a potentially misleading claim or problematic framing, and (d) had enough verbal text (post, caption, overlay, or comment) for analysis across the three metafunctions. It is a purposive analytical sample, not a representative one. Each item was classed either as problematic framing, which attacks, labels, or ridicules without a checkable factual claim, or as potentially misleading representation, which makes a checkable claim about what a person said or did. As not every item was independently fact-checked, the corpus is described as problematic or potentially misleading content, not verified disinformation. With the corpus defined and classified, the analysis moved on to identifying recurrent patterns across the 30 items. Two patterns were identified across the corpus by coding all 30 items with the same scheme and comparing, item by item, which features each contained;

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a pattern was treated as recurrent when the coders noted it in more than one item. Frequencies were not tabulated. One item was then selected to illustrate each pattern (see the corpus findings).

Teaching materials comprised corpus posts with their captions and multimodal elements, an introduction to the three metafunctions, and guiding questions (Appendix A). The typology of constructive and provocative features from our earlier corpus work (Ayomi, 2021; Ayomi et al., 2025) served both as a heuristic for coding and as content for the Linguistic Deconstruction stage (Appendix B).

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. The Digital Political Literacy Questionnaire

A 16-item questionnaire developed for this study measured self-reported digital political literacy. Drawing on Livingstone's (2004) view of media literacy as accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating messages, Polizzi's (2025) distinction between functional and critical digital literacy, and the disinformation categories of our earlier corpus work (Ayomi, 2021; Ayomi et al., 2025), items were written for four content domains: exposure and access; comprehension; critical evaluation of sources, evidence, bias, motives, and provocative language; and ethical response and production. Items were rated on a five-point frequency scale with the response options 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, and 5 = *very often*, and the questionnaire was administered in Indonesian through Google Forms after expert review and a small student tryout for clarity.

3.3.2. Focus Group Discussion

Each FGD opened with one question: as first-time voters who obtained much of their political information online, did students feel that this information was sufficient, neutral, and accurate? The closing reflection asked how their understanding had changed, what was difficult, and how clear, relevant, and useful the activity had been. Sessions were not audio-recorded; the principal researcher noted each response by hand, in summarized form, during the session, together with field notes.

3.4. Procedure

The study proceeded in five phases. First, the digital political literacy questionnaire was administered, and the 140 complete responses were analyzed. The KMO measure and Bartlett's test checked suitability for factoring. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) used minimum-residual extraction and direct oblimin rotation; the number of factors was decided from eigenvalues above one, the eigenvalue plot, and parallel analysis in its common-factor and component-based forms (Horn, 1965), and an item was assigned to a factor when its primary loading was at least .40 and exceeded every cross-loading by at least .20 (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Internal consistency was estimated with Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega, or the Spearman-Brown coefficient for a two-item factor (Eisinga et al., 2013), and factor means were compared with a repeated-measures analysis of variance. With 140 cases, adequate for exploratory analysis when communalities are moderate (MacCallum et al., 1999) but not for cross-validation, confirmatory factor analysis was not attempted.

Second, a 30-minute FGD led by the principal researcher opened each trial session. The researchers coded each noted response by its main concern (e.g., doubts about credibility, difficulty verifying claims), grouped codes into subthemes and themes, and resolved differences in their groupings through discussion. Because the sessions were not recorded, the accuracy of the notes and the credibility of the themes were supported in three ways: responses were noted during the session rather than reconstructed afterwards; themes were checked by more than one researcher and retained only when supported by at least two separate responses; and the themes were compared with the survey and corpus findings (Creswell, 2009). Student responses are therefore reported below as translated summaries of field notes, without quotation marks.

Third, the research team coded the 30 corpus items clause by clause following Halliday and Matthiessen (2014): ideationally for Participants (including whether an agent is explicit or unspecified), process types, and Circumstances; interpersonally for mood, modal assessment, and evaluative lexis; and

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textually for Theme, conjunction, and reference to sources. Overlaid text, emoji, and music were recorded as multimodal context, and Indonesian clause structure, such as object-focus clauses in which a pronoun agent precedes a bare verb, was analyzed with reference to Sneddon et al. (2010). A feature was recorded as present on grammatical grounds, and its possible function was recorded separately as an interpretation requiring contextual support.

Fourth, the findings were translated into design decisions, and the draft model was reviewed in an FGD with the expert panel, whose input included adding an explicit Reconstruction stage. Fifth, the model was trialed in one session of about two hours with each class group. After the FGD, a 60-minute training session introduced the metafunctions and the contrast between constructive and provocative framing; students then analyzed corpus posts with the guiding questions in Appendix A, evaluated the framing of the two samples, and rewrote them as evidence-based critique. A 30-minute reflective discussion closed the session. Students' rewrites were read against the four success criteria stated in the training (Appendix A) to illustrate what the Reconstruction stage achieved and where it fell short. This examination was illustrative, not a systematic assessment: no rubric or scores were applied, and one rewrite per sample is reported. Reflections were analyzed like the FGD notes. No pre-test, post-test, or comparison group was used.

4. Results

The results are presented in the order of the three research questions. Section 4.1 reports how students engage with political narratives on social media, drawing on the survey and the focus group discussions. Section 4.2 describes the linguistic resources identified in the corpus of political posts, and Section 4.3 shows how these findings informed the design of the learning model and what the classroom trial indicated about its feasibility and acceptability.

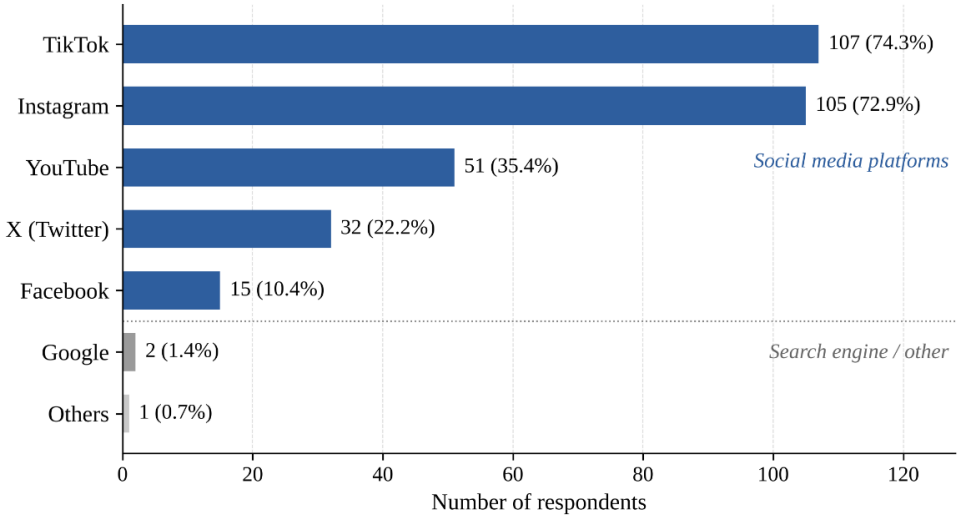
4.1. Students' Engagement with Political Narratives on Social Media

4.1.1. Platforms Used to Access Political Content

Figure 1 shows the platforms through which students reported accessing political content, distinguishing social media platforms from search engines.

Figure 1

Social Media Platforms and Search Engines Used to Access Political Content



Among social media platforms, TikTok and Instagram were used most often, at nearly equal levels. Google, the only search engine reported, was rarely used for political information, which suggests that most respondents encounter political content passively in their social media feeds rather than searching for it.

4.1.2. Factor Structure of the Digital Political Literacy Questionnaire and Self-Reported Practices

EFA was used to examine the structure of the questionnaire. The item correlations were suitable for factoring (KMO = .88; Bartlett's $\chi^2(120) = 1165.2$, $p < .001$; all individual KMO values > .60). Three eigenvalues of the full correlation matrix exceeded 1.0 (6.94, 1.55, 1.48), the first clearly dominant. Parallel analysis was run in two forms. In the component-based form, these eigenvalues were compared with random-data eigenvalues: the second fell just below its random counterpart (1.55 vs. 1.58) and the third just above (1.48 vs. 1.46), so this form was inconclusive beyond the first factor. In the common-factor form, which uses the reduced correlation matrix (communalities on the diagonal) and matches the minimum-residual extraction, the first three observed eigenvalues exceeded their random counterparts. Three factors were therefore retained on the basis of the common-factor parallel analysis, the eigenvalue-greater-than-one criterion, and the eigenvalue plot, with the second and third treated as provisional because the component-based test was borderline. The solution explained 50.5% of the variance. Table 1 reports each item's loading with its mean and the percentage of students answering often or very often.

Table 1

Factor Loadings and Descriptive Statistics for the 16 Questionnaire Items (N = 140)

Item	Loading	h^2	M	SD	Often/very often (%)
Factor 1: Critical Comprehension and Evaluation (M = 3.56, SD = 0.72)					
Evaluating the completeness of data and evidence	.90	.82	3.66	0.94	59.3
Distinguishing between informative and provocative language	.85	.72	3.73	0.96	60.7
Comparing narratives across multiple sources	.79	.63	3.62	0.97	57.1
Identifying bias or partisanship	.72	.53	3.36	0.86	32.9
Distinguishing between facts and opinions	.71	.51	3.63	0.88	53.6
Considering the motives of content creators	.71	.51	3.49	0.94	47.9
Paying attention to sources of information	.69	.51	3.64	0.96	55.7
Restating the content of political narratives	.55	.35	3.39	0.86	39.3
Understanding the purpose of political narratives	.53	.38	3.47	0.82	43.6
Factor 2: Exposure and Engagement (M = 3.20, SD = 0.89)					
Following political accounts/channels	.82	.68	2.69	1.24	26.4
Reading or watching political content to completion	.59	.38	3.29	1.07	38.6
Viewing political content on social media	.52	.32	3.63	0.93	51.4
Factor 3: Ethical Expression (M = 3.49, SD = 1.02)					
Commenting politely despite differing opinions	.80	.64	3.51	1.17	52.9
Presenting arguments supported by data or sources	.80	.64	3.46	1.10	45.7
Items not assigned to a factor					
Avoiding the dissemination of uncertain narratives	.42 (F1)	.28	4.16	1.01	77.9
Producing political content or comments with constructive intent	.36 (F2)	.19	2.56	1.28	20.7

Note. Minimum-residual extraction, direct oblimin rotation. Only the primary loading is shown; no cross-loading of an assigned item exceeded .30. For unassigned items, the highest loading and its factor are shown. Factor labels are descriptive names for item clusters, not validated constructs.

Here and below, *content domain* refers to the four domains used to write the items and *factor* to the three groupings derived from the EFA. As Table 1 shows, the first factor combined all comprehension and critical evaluation items (loadings .53 to .90), and the second corresponded to the exposure and access domain (.52 to .82). The four ethical response and production items split: commenting politely and arguing from data formed the third factor (both .80), and the other two met no assignment criterion: avoiding the dissemination of uncertain narratives (.42 on the first factor, cross-loading .30 on the third) and producing political content (no loading of .40 or above). The factors correlated positively (r = .38, .49, and .20).

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These results support only a provisional structure. Reliability was high for the first factor (α = .92, 95% CI [.90, .94]; ω = .92) and acceptable for the second (α = .75, 95% CI [.67, .82]; ω = .76), but the third rests on two items correlating at r = .63 (Spearman-Brown = .77). A two-item factor cannot be adequately identified or tested, and its items concern different things, civility and evidential accountability. The split of the ethical response and production domain shows, further, that this domain was not recovered as a single factor. The instrument's construct validity is therefore not established: the factor labels are used below only as descriptive names, the unassigned items are reported as single indicators, and confirmatory analysis in a new sample, with more items for the ethical domain, is needed before the factors can serve as scales.

With these cautions, the factor means differed, $F(1.64, 227.8) = 9.48$, $p < .001$, generalized $\eta^2 = .03$ (Greenhouse-Geisser corrected), a small effect: Critical Comprehension and Evaluation (M = 3.56) and Ethical Expression (M = 3.49) were both higher than Exposure and Engagement (M = 3.20; Bonferroni-adjusted $p < .001$ and $p = .018$). At the item level, students most often reported avoiding the dissemination of uncertain narratives (M = 4.16) and distinguishing informative from provocative language (M = 3.73), and least often producing political content (M = 2.56; 44.3% never or rarely) and following political accounts (M = 2.69). They thus described themselves as fairly frequent evaluators but infrequent producers of political content.

4.1.3. Focus Group Findings

Thematic analysis of the FGD notes identified five themes, summarized in Table 2, with one translated summary of the field notes for each.

Table 2
Themes and Subthemes from the FGDs

Theme	Subthemes	Translated summary of field notes
1. Doubtful credibility of campaign content	Content produced by interested parties; sensational personal accusations; selective clipping and framing	Students felt that during the campaign, every interested party produced content and that much of it seemed fake or a hoax.
2. Algorithmic narrowing	Feeds reinforce early preferences; repeated exposure shapes candidate preference	After watching content on one candidate's programme, a student's FYP showed only that candidate, which made a balanced view difficult.
3. Personalized and entertainment-driven content	Personality and appearance instead of programmes; ridicule and humour; politics consumed as entertainment or with apathy	Students noted that little content discussed programmes and track records properly; most focused on style and dancing.
4. Awareness without verification skills	Suspecting falsehood but unable to confirm it; lack of time; not knowing how to fact-check; reliance on news accounts	A student did not know how to fact-check or where to go to do so.
5. Language norms and expressed needs	Impolite language on social media; wish for guidance on neutral language; literacy for informed voting	Students suggested that a guideline on the features of good, neutral language would help, as language on social media felt impolite.

Note. Entries in the last column are the researcher's summarized field notes, translated from Indonesian; they are not verbatim quotations. FYP = TikTok "For You" page.

Students doubted campaign content, described narrowing feeds, and noted a focus on personality and ridicule rather than programs. Crucially, they recognized that content might be false but did not know how to check it or lacked time to do so; the one strategy mentioned, relying on news accounts, was seen

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as unsatisfying. They also asked for guidance on neutral, polite language. The notes thus record awareness without verification skills.

4.2. Linguistic Resources in Political Posts

Coding of the 30 posts identified two recurring patterns: sweeping generalization, which extends a claim about a person or group beyond any evidence offered, and selective paraphrase, which rewords an identifiable person's statement so that part of its original framing is lost. Both were examined through the three SFL metafunctions. As frequencies were not tabulated, this shows that the patterns recurred, not how common they are. One representative post was selected for each: Sample 1 illustrates sweeping generalization, and Sample 2 selective paraphrase.

Sample 1 was selected because, in two short clauses, it builds a broad claim about an unnamed opposing camp (supporters are *always* labelled as buzzers) through a high-value usuality adjunct and an agent without a referent, and offers no example or source. Sample 2 was selected because its overlaid headline rewords a recorded interview whose audio, in the same video, allows direct comparison with the source; the comparison shows how selective paraphrase shifts the emphasis from the priorities of one emergency phase to a general claim about the speaker's thinking. Sample 1, a post on X, reads:

> Sample 1. *"Pendukung pak @prabowo dan mas @gibran_rakabuming selalu mereka labeli sebagai buzzer, bahkan penjilat. Padahal yang sering terjadi, buzzer teriak buzzer. 🤭"* ("Supporters of Mr. @prabowo and Mr. @gibran_rakabuming are always labeled by them as buzzers, even sycophants. Whereas what often happens is a buzzer calling [another] a buzzer.")

Sample 2 is a short video of a media interview with Anies Baswedan about flooding. The post frames the footage with a headline overlaid in red highlighting, repeated in the caption with the hashtag *#rekamjejak* ("track record"), and set to a comic song titled *Dunia Tipu-Tipu* ("A World of Lies"):

> Sample 2. *"Anies tidak pernah berfikir bagaimana supaya tidak banjir tapi biarkan ada banjir tinggal evakuasi."* ("Anies never thinks about how to prevent flooding but lets the floods happen and just evacuates.")

In the audio of the same video, a reporter asks where the problem or its main cause lies, and Anies answers:

> *"Begini, pada fase ini semuanya fokus pada evakuasi penyelamatan warga. Curah hujan tidak dalam kendali kita, tetapi penanggulangan atas curah hujan ada pada kendali kita, sekarang kita fokus di situ. Karena banyak tempat-tempat yang tidak pernah mengalami banjir, juga sekarang mengalami."* ("Look, in this phase everyone is focusing on evacuating and rescuing residents. Rainfall is not within our control, but the response to rainfall is within our control, and that is what we are focusing on now. Because many places that have never flooded are now flooding too.")

For each metafunction below, observable features are reported first and their possible interpretation second.

4.2.1. Ideational Meaning

In Sample 1, *Pendukung ... selalu mereka labeli sebagai buzzer, bahkan penjilat* is an object-focus clause. Although *labeli* ("label") could be read as a verbal process, the clause has no Verbiage; it construes the result of labeling, membership of the class *buzzer*, and was coded as relational attributive, with the supporters as Carrier and *mereka* ("they") as Attributor. The Attributor has no identifiable referent. One plausible interpretation, which the text alone cannot confirm, is that this lets the writer accuse an opposing camp without naming anyone who could answer. In Sample 2, the overlay, a paraphrase rather than a fabricated quotation, attributes a negated mental process to Anies (*tidak pernah berfikir*, "never thinks") and material processes (*biarkan ada banjir*, "lets floods happen"; *evakuasi*). Compared with the interview, it omits the Circumstance *pada fase ini* ("in this phase") and the clause stating that the response to rainfall is within the government's control. Since Anies described evacuation

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as the focus of the current phase and said nothing about how he thinks about prevention, the overlay presents an unsupported inference as fact.

4.2.2. Interpersonal Meaning

Both items use high-value usuality: *selalu* ("always") in Sample 1, with median *sering* ("often") in its second clause, and *tidak pernah* ("never") in Sample 2. These are mood adjuncts of usuality (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), not markers of certainty or obligation. Both items carry negative evaluation, explicitly in *penjilat* ("sycophant"), intensified by *bahkan* ("even"), and implicitly in the dismissive *tinggal evakuasi* ("just evacuate"), and both add non-verbal cues of ridicule: a laughing emoji and comic music with red highlighting. Interpretively, in both samples the usuality adjuncts turn particular occasions into a general pattern, and the non-verbal cues mark the posts as mocking; whether they influence readers cannot be determined, since no reception data were collected.

4.2.3. Textual Meaning

In Sample 1, the supporters are the Theme of the first clause, so the labeled group rather than the labelers is the point of departure, and *padahal* ("whereas") introduces a counter-claim that the labelers are themselves buzzers. As no example or source is offered, the contrast works as a reversal of the accusation, a *tu quoque* move, not as evidence. In Sample 2, *tapi* ("but") sets prevention against evacuation, whereas the interview links them differently: evacuation is the priority "in this phase," because (*karena*) places that had never flooded are now flooding. The overlay keeps the topic but drops the temporal and causal links that framed it.

Taken together, the three metafunctions reveal different layers of the two posts. The ideational analysis shows what each post represents and omits: an accusing agent without a referent in Sample 1, and a missing Circumstance of time and clause about the government's control in Sample 2. The interpersonal analysis shows how the wording positions readers: high-value usuality turns particular occasions into general patterns, and evaluative lexis and non-verbal cues invite ridicule. The textual analysis shows how information is organized to direct interpretation: the labeled group is the point of departure in Sample 1, and *tapi* recasts evacuation and prevention as alternatives in Sample 2. The perspectives complement one another, locating what is omitted, how a claim is made to seem general, and how the reader is led toward one reading. Only Sample 2, however, can be shown to misrepresent a source, and these observations describe two posts, not the corpus as a whole.

4.3. Design and Trial of the Learning Model

4.3.1. The Learning Model and Its Grounding in the Findings

The findings were used to design a model integrating critical literacy pedagogy, CDA, and genre-based pedagogy (Ayomi et al., 2023; Bin Zulkifli & Bakar, 2024) within an SFL framework (Figure 2).

1. *Exposure: Guided Instruction from Teacher.* Students observe authentic political narratives on social media, including texts and multimodal content, without immediate evaluation, activating prior knowledge.

2. *Linguistic Deconstruction: Understanding Political Narratives on Social Media.* Using SFL as the analytical tool, students uncover how language functions at three levels of meaning: (a) Ideational meaning (Participants, Processes, Circumstances); (b) Interpersonal meaning (Mood, Modality, Appraisal); (c) Textual meaning (Theme–Rheme, cohesion, structure).

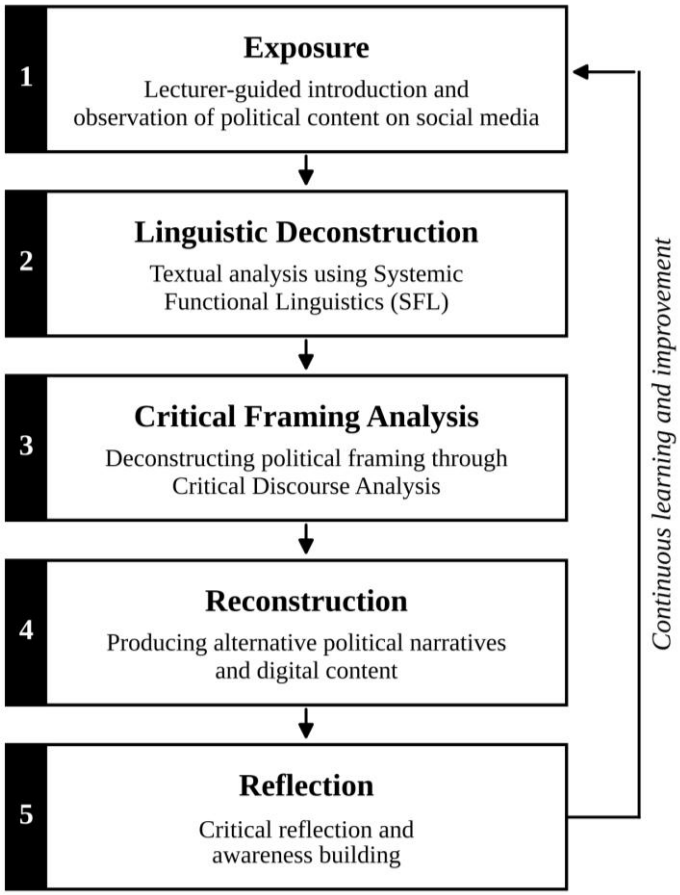
3. *Critical Framing Analysis with Critical Discourse Analysis.* Students examine the relationship between language and power, for example, why one political actor is labeled as the agent in a corruption case while another is described as "allegedly involved," and identify which claims must be verified before any judgment about manipulation is made.

4. *Reconstruction: Producing Political Content/Narratives.* Students rewrite a provocative post into a more accurate, balanced, and constructive critique, or produce solution-oriented, transparent comments, and check the rewrite against the source and the claims it makes.

5. *Reflection.* Students reflect on how their understanding of political narratives has changed through linguistic analysis, critical framing, and reconstruction, reinforcing critical digital awareness.

Figure 2

The Flow of a Linguistics-Based Digital Literacy Learning Model for Enhancing Critical Awareness of Political Narratives on Social Media



Each stage responds to a specific finding. The rarity of content production in the survey, with the expert panel's view that critique alone is insufficient (in the panel's view, students need creative space to reproduce narratives), led to Reconstruction as a separate writing stage. Passive, feed-based access (Figure 1) led to an Exposure stage using authentic posts. Students' inability to verify suspected falsehoods led to verification questions in Critical Framing Analysis, and their request for guidance on neutral language led to explicit SFL metalanguage for stance in Linguistic Deconstruction. The corpus supplied the teaching materials and the focus on usuality, unspecified agents, and missing Circumstances.

4.3.2. Trial of the Model

Both class groups completed the full sequence within the planned session. Table 3 presents one student reconstruction of each sample with its metafunctional changes. Read against the success criteria, both reconstructions were partially successful. In Sample 1, the student removed the unspecified "they," the usuality adjunct, and the emoji, and replaced the accusation with a recommendation (*perlu berfokus*, "needs to focus"). The rewrite is less hostile but no longer addresses the reciprocal "buzzer" accusations; as the original contained no checkable claim, the gain is in tone and dialogic stance, not evidential quality. In Sample 2, the student restored the attribution to the interview and reported evacuation as the emergency priority, matching the source, but added that Anies pursues long-term flood mitigation (*penanggulangan banjir jangka panjang*), which the interview does not state. Rewriting for balance can thus change the topic or add claims that need checking.

Table 3
Student Reconstructions of the Two Samples and Their Metafunctional Changes

Original	Student reconstruction	Metafunctional changes
Sample 1 (post on X)	*Diskusi mengenai rekam jejak digital pendukung paslon perlu berfokus pada validitas data wacana yang diunggah, bukan simplifikasi pelabelan, agar ruang publik digital tetap edukatif bagi pemilih muda.* ("Discussions regarding the digital track records of candidate supporters need to focus on the validity of the discourse data uploaded, rather than simplistic labeling, so that the digital public sphere remains educational for young voters.")	Ideational: unspecified Attributor (*mereka*) and labeling process → nominalized topic (*diskusi mengenai...*). Interpersonal: usuality *selalu* and laughing emoji → modulation of obligation, *perlu* ("need to"). Textual: contrast with *padahal* → purposive clause (*agar...*, "so that...").
Sample 2 (video overlay)	*Dalam wawancara media, Anies Baswedan menyatakan bahwa prioritas tanggap darurat saat curah hujan ekstrem adalah keselamatan warga melalui evakuasi, sembari tetap mengupayakan penanggulangan banjir jangka panjang.* ("In media interviews, Anies Baswedan stated that the emergency-response priority during extreme rainfall is citizen safety through evacuation, while continuously pursuing long-term flood mitigation.")	Ideational: attribution to a source restored (*dalam wawancara media*) with a projecting clause (*menyatakan bahwa*, "stated that"). Interpersonal: negative usuality *tidak pernah* → declarative report attributed to the speaker. Textual: contrast with *tapi* → *sembari tetap* ("while still"), which adds a proposition about long-term mitigation.

Reflection notes grouped into four themes. The first was appreciation of the materials as clear and relevant. One student noted that the workshop helped students respond more wisely to political issues in digital media. The second was reported awareness of framing, hoaxes, and bias. Another student noted that the framing workshop was very informative because it helped them understand how media shapes public perception. The third comprised requests for further content. Students asked for material on hoaxes, more practice in content analysis, and social media ethics. The fourth was a positive impression of the activity. One student noted that the session was fun and encouraged them to think critically and analyze issues. These responses, summarized from field notes and translated from Indonesian, indicate acceptability, not improved skill. Gains in awareness are self-reported, and responses given in a group to the facilitating researcher may lean toward positive evaluation.

5. Discussion

This study designed and trialed a linguistics-based model for engaging students critically and ethically with political narratives on social media. The trial suggested feasibility and acceptability, while the reconstructions exposed a limitation the model must address.

The first research question asked how students engage with political narratives on social media and what challenges they face. Their engagement was largely passive and feed-based. Most encountered political content on TikTok and Instagram rather than by searching for it, rarely followed political accounts, and rarely produced political content, even though they rated their evaluative practices moderately high. This pattern bears on the debate over whether social media fosters political literacy or mainly passive exposure (Neubaum et al., 2024) and supports the distinction between functional use of platforms and the critical literacy needed for participation (Polizzi, 2025). The FGDs suggest that this passivity is shaped by the platforms themselves: students described feeds that narrowed after they had watched one candidate's content and campaign material that dwelt on personality and ridicule, which echoes accounts of algorithmic amplification and of campaigning that relies on virality (Kopf, 2026; Saraswati, 2018). The challenge students named most clearly was not recognizing that content might mislead but knowing how to check it, a difficulty that large-scale assessments of young people's online reasoning have also documented (Breakstone et al., 2021).

Students' relatively high self-ratings for distinguishing informative from provocative language sit uneasily with the FGD notes, in which students said that misleading content was hard to recognize, that they did not know how to fact-check, and that they lacked time to verify claims. Students may overestimate their discrimination when asked in general terms, as among postgraduates whose awareness of disinformation did not translate into verification (Rodriguez-Diaz & Rodriguez-Ferrandiz, 2026), or may read the item as recognizing that language can be provocative rather than judging whether a claim is accurate. The high mean for avoiding uncertain narratives may likewise reflect social desirability. Performance-based tasks are needed to resolve these questions (Pan et al., 2025).

The four ethical response and production items did not form a single factor, which suggests that these practices are distinct rather than parts of one competence. Commenting politely and arguing from data grouped together, which suggests a shared concern with how students conduct themselves when expressing a political view in public. Avoiding the dissemination of uncertain narratives, the practice students reported most often, resembles what Kozyreva et al. (2023) call critical ignoring. Producing political content stood apart from the other practices. Because these readings rest on a provisional factor structure and on self-reported frequencies, they are tentative.

Regarding the second research question, the corpus findings are consistent with our earlier description of Indonesian political disinformation (Ayomi et al., 2025) and with the account of manipulation by Van Dijk (2006) as discourse that keeps the appearance of argument while withholding its substance. They extend that work in two ways. Separating problematic framing from potentially misleading representation shows that the samples are different kinds of problems. And in both samples the same resource, high-value usuality, does the generalizing work, suggesting that usuality deserves attention in teaching; whether it plays this role across the corpus was not quantified. Nor do features alone establish manipulation: Sample 2 could be shown to misrepresent its source only by comparing headline and audio. Linguistic analysis can show students where to look; it cannot replace verification. The negative evaluation and ridicule in both samples also resemble the "going negative" strategy that Ross and Caldwell (2020) identified in political tweets, in which evaluative language is used to undermine the character of opponents.

As for the third research question, the model adapts established principles: the deconstruction-to-construction cycle of genre-based pedagogy (Ayomi et al., 2023), the critical orientation of critical literacy and CDA, and SFL metalanguage as a shared classroom vocabulary, which Gebhard et al.'s (2014) study of English language learners shows can be taken up by students but is difficult to operationalize. What it adds is the order and the links between these elements for political posts. Unlike fact-checking instruction, it asks students to describe how a post builds its stance before checking its claims; unlike critique-oriented critical literacy, it requires a rewritten text; and unlike genre pedagogy for academic writing, it applies the deconstruction-construction cycle to short, multimodal posts, with verification placed between the two. This responds to calls to move critical thinking from disposition to practice (Andersson, 2021) and to bridge fact-checking-oriented and production-oriented approaches (Kozyreva et al., 2023). Without a pre-test, post-test, comparison group, or systematic assessment, the study cannot show that the model improves competence.

The reconstructions are nonetheless instructive. Both removed the confrontational resources typical of social media oratory (Rossette-Crake, 2025), but neither was clearly more accurate than its source. The first changed the topic, and the second added an unverified claim. The model reported in the Results is the version that was trialed: students were asked to identify claims that needed verification and to check their rewrites against the source, but these steps were not assessed. The trial therefore suggests one refinement, which has not yet been tested: making source fidelity, factual accuracy, and argumentative justification explicit assessment criteria at the Reconstruction stage.

Several limitations qualify these findings. The survey used a convenience sample from two programs at one university. The questionnaire is preliminary: its structure was derived by exploratory analysis without cross-validation; comprehension and evaluation merged into one factor; one factor rests on two items; two items were unassigned; and all items are self-reported frequencies, so its construct validity remains to be established. The FGD and reflection data are summarized notes, not transcripts. The

corpus is a small purposive sample, and the two samples illustrate mechanisms without establishing their prevalence. The trial had no comparison group or pre- and post-assessment.

In sum, the study offers a preliminary, context-specific pedagogical proposal grounded in three kinds of evidence. It suggests that SFL can give students a vocabulary for describing how political posts build their stance, and that this description is most useful when it leads to verification before judgment and to rewriting checked against the source. Future work should test the model with performance-based measures and a comparison group, quantify the identified mechanisms in larger corpora, test the questionnaire's structure with confirmatory factor analysis in a new sample, and examine whether the model transfers to other contexts.

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Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics Declaration

Participation in this study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. No personally identifying information about participants is reported.

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Appendix A

Table A

Guiding Questions Used in the Trial

Analysis focus	Guiding questions
Ideational	Which actors are presented in the post? What actions or attributes are assigned to them? Are the claims supported by data, evidence, or sources that can be checked?
Interpersonal	Which words show judgement, emotion, or partisanship? Does the language open space for dialogue or close down disagreement? Is there labeling, generalization, or sharp opposition between groups?
Textual	What is foregrounded at the start of the post? How are claim, reason, evidence, and conclusion related? Is the source stated clearly?
Framing evaluation and rewriting	What needs to be verified before the post is believed? How can it be rewritten to stay critical but be more accurate, balanced, and constructive?

Note. Success criteria stated in the training: students can (a) identify language choices and their function in building meaning; (b) recognize framing, emotional evaluation, or claims that need verification; (c) explain the need to check sources and factual support; and (d) write a critique that is more evidence-based, transparent, and constructive.

Appendix B

Table B

Typology of Lexico-Grammatical Features Used as an Analytical Heuristic

Metafunction	More constructive framing	More provocative framing
Ideational	Factual data and official sources; clear actors and accountability; few dramatic metaphors	Emotional evaluation without data; obscured actors (e.g., agentless passives); hyperbole and provocative metaphors
Interpersonal	Moderate modality that opens space for dialogue; evaluation directed at issues and policies; empathy and inclusivity	High-value assessment that closes discussion; negative evaluation of individuals; us-versus-them polarization; sarcasm and mockery
Textual	Clear Theme-Rheme progression; explicit connectors (because, therefore, however); references to sources; problem–data–solution argument	Fragmented structure and weak cohesion; unsupported claims ("everyone knows," "they say"); accusations without explanation

Note. Adapted from Ayomi (2021) and Ayomi et al. (2025).

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