



ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: [www.ijirss.com](http://www.ijirss.com)



## Framing Malaysia's digital future: A critical discourse analysis of EdTech in national education policies

 Nor Fatin Abdul Jabar<sup>1\*</sup>, Nurshafawati Ahmad Sani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Faculty of Education, Social Sciences & Humanities, Universiti Poly-Tech Malaysia.*

<sup>2</sup>*Faculty of Languages & Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia.*

Corresponding author: Nor Fatin Abdul Jabar (Email: [norfatin@uptm.edu.my](mailto:norfatin@uptm.edu.my))

### Abstract

Artificial intelligence and digital technologies have become central to educational transformation agendas worldwide, positioning Education Technology (EdTech) as a strategic instrument for national development and global competitiveness. In Malaysia, recent education policies increasingly frame digital transformation as essential for producing future-ready learners and strengthening the nation's digital economy. Despite the growing prominence of EdTech within policy discourse, limited research has critically examined how these policies linguistically construct digital futures and legitimise particular ideological orientations. This study investigates the discursive representation of EdTech in Malaysian national education policies through Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The analysis focuses on the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) 2021, and the Digital Education Policy 2023. The findings reveal that policy discourse consistently constructs digital transformation as inevitable, necessary, and economically driven through the recurrent use of high-modality expressions, neoliberal developmental rhetoric, and intertextual alignment with global frameworks such as UNESCO and the OECD. Teachers are predominantly positioned as implementers of institutional digital agendas, while students are represented as future contributors to the digital economy. The analysis further demonstrates that policy narratives foreground innovation, efficiency, and competitiveness while marginalising concerns related to digital inequality, pedagogical autonomy, and infrastructural disparities. This study contributes to critical language and policy scholarship by illustrating how educational policies function as ideological instruments that shape perceptions of technological progress, governance, and national modernity. The findings offer important implications for policymakers, educators, and researchers concerned with equitable and context-sensitive digital education reform.

**Keywords:** Critical discourse analysis, Digital transformation, EdTech discourse, Malaysian education policy, Policy framing.

**DOI:** 10.53894/ijirss.v9i5.11647

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**History: Received:** 26 February 2026 / **Revised:** 24 April 2026 / **Accepted:** 24 April 2026 / **Published:** 14 May 2026

**Copyright:** © 2026 by the authors. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Transparency:** The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

**Acknowledgement:** The authors would like to thank the Ministry of Education Malaysia from the bottom of their hearts for letting them use the policy documents for academic testing. Thanks also go to coworkers and peers who gave helpful feedback during the research process. Thanks to the academic reviewers whose helpful comments made this research clearer and better. The authors ultimately acknowledge the continuous support from the academic community that fosters critical scholarship in language and education studies.

**Publisher:** Innovative Research Publishing

## 1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has significantly transformed contemporary education systems, positioning Education Technology (EdTech) as a central component of educational policy and governance worldwide. Governments increasingly regard digital transformation as essential for improving learning accessibility, strengthening economic competitiveness, and preparing citizens for participation in technologically driven societies. International organisations such as UNESCO, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank consistently advocate digital readiness as a strategic educational priority, emphasising the integration of digital competencies, technological innovation, and data-driven governance within national education systems. Contemporary policy narratives increasingly present digitalisation not merely as a pedagogical enhancement but as a national imperative closely associated with economic resilience, global competitiveness, and sustainable development. Within this context, EdTech has evolved beyond its original function as an instructional support mechanism and now occupies a broader ideological and institutional role in shaping educational futures.

Across Southeast Asia, governments have intensified efforts to institutionalise digital education policies in response to global technological shifts and the increasing demands of knowledge-based economies. Malaysia has emerged as one of the regional states actively promoting digital transformation through large-scale educational reforms and national policy frameworks. Significant policy initiatives such as the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) 2021, and the Digital Education Policy (DEP) 2023 collectively articulate the nation's ambition to develop digitally competent learners and establish an innovation-oriented educational ecosystem. These policies repeatedly emphasise notions such as “future-ready learners,” “digital transformation,” “innovation-driven education,” and “global competitiveness,” reflecting broader international discourses surrounding technological modernisation and human capital development. While these policy directions position Malaysia as a progressive participant within global digital agendas, they also raise important questions regarding the ideological assumptions embedded within official policy language.

Recent scholarship on EdTech policy discourse demonstrates that educational technologies are frequently framed through persuasive narratives that normalise digital transformation as inevitable, beneficial, and necessary for national progress [1, 2]. These narratives often portray technology as a neutral and objective solution to educational challenges while simultaneously obscuring structural inequalities, infrastructural limitations, and socio-political complexities associated with digital reform. Critical scholars argue that contemporary EdTech discourse frequently reflects neoliberal rationalities that connect education to economic productivity, workforce competitiveness, and market-oriented governance [3]. Within such frameworks, students are commonly represented as future economic assets requiring digital competencies, while teachers are positioned as implementers responsible for adapting to institutional technological agendas. Consequently, policy discourse does not merely describe educational transformation but actively shapes social understandings of progress, citizenship, and institutional authority.

The expansion of digital education discourse in Malaysia became particularly significant following the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed substantial disparities in digital access, infrastructural readiness, and technological literacy across educational settings. School closures and emergency remote teaching accelerated reliance on digital platforms and intensified governmental efforts to strengthen technological integration within schools and universities. The Digital Education Policy 2023 represents one of the most comprehensive national initiatives aimed at consolidating Malaysia's educational digitalisation agenda. The policy emphasises digital infrastructure development, integrated learning environments, digital competency enhancement, and data-informed educational management. Furthermore, the policy demonstrates strong intertextual alignment with international frameworks such as UNESCO's ICT Competency Standards for Teachers and the OECD Learning Compass, illustrating Malaysia's intention to align national educational development with global standards and benchmarks.

However, despite the increasing prominence of EdTech within Malaysian educational governance, limited research has critically examined how these policy documents linguistically construct digital transformation and legitimise particular ideological perspectives. Existing Malaysian scholarship concerning education and language policy has predominantly focused on areas such as multilingualism, English language education, classroom practices, and technology acceptance among educators and students. While such studies provide valuable insights into educational implementation and pedagogical adaptation, they often rely on descriptive, evaluative, or quantitative approaches rather than critical language analysis [4, 5]. As a result, there remains insufficient understanding of how policy discourse shapes perceptions of technological progress, distributes institutional responsibilities, and constructs identities within digital education reform.

This gap is significant because policy documents function not only as administrative instruments but also as ideological texts that influence educational priorities, institutional practices, and public understandings of technological modernity. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) scholars emphasise that policy discourse plays a powerful role in legitimising dominant ideologies and maintaining institutional power relations through linguistic choices, representational strategies, and discursive positioning [6]. Through recurring lexical patterns, modality structures, metaphors, and intertextual references, policy documents can naturalise particular assumptions regarding education, governance, and national development. In the context of EdTech, such discourses may reinforce technocratic governance models that prioritise efficiency, innovation, and global competitiveness while marginalising concerns related to digital inequality, teacher autonomy, cultural diversity, and pedagogical complexity.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis offers an appropriate framework for examining these dynamics because it enables the investigation of language at textual, discursive, and sociocultural levels simultaneously. The framework facilitates analysis of how specific linguistic features contribute to broader ideological constructions and institutional agendas. Previous studies employing CDA within educational contexts have shown that digital policy discourse frequently portrays technological adoption as unavoidable while limiting opportunities for critical engagement with alternative educational perspectives [3, 7]. These studies further reveal that institutional narratives often privilege economic rationality and managerial efficiency over socially responsive and pedagogically grounded educational approaches. Nevertheless, such critical investigations remain limited within the Malaysian context, particularly regarding national education policies that explicitly promote digital transformation.

The present study addresses this gap by critically examining the discursive construction of EdTech within Malaysian national education policies. Specifically, the research investigates how policy language constructs digital transformation, positions teachers and students, and legitimises broader socio-political and economic agendas associated with technological reform. The study focuses on three major policy documents: the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) 2021, and the Digital Education Policy 2023. Through Fairclough's CDA framework, the analysis explores textual features such as lexical choices, modality, metaphorical constructions, and intertextuality, while also examining the broader ideological implications embedded within policy discourse.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Malaysian national education policies linguistically construct EdTech and digital transformation?
2. What ideological discourses underpin the representation of EdTech within Malaysian education policies?
3. How are teachers and students discursively positioned within Malaysia's digital education agenda?

This research contributes to the growing body of scholarship on policy discourse, digital governance, and educational linguistics by extending critical examination of EdTech narratives within the Southeast Asian context. It highlights how language functions as an ideological mechanism that shapes perceptions of educational modernity, institutional authority, and national progress. The study also provides important insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers concerned with digital equity, teacher agency, and socially inclusive educational reform. By critically examining the linguistic framing of Malaysia's digital future, the research emphasises the necessity of approaching technological transformation not merely as a technical process but as a deeply political and discursive phenomenon.

## **2. Literature Review**

The growing integration of digital technologies into education systems has transformed Education Technology (EdTech) into a dominant component of contemporary educational governance and policy discourse. Across global, regional, and national contexts, governments increasingly frame digital transformation as a strategic response to economic competition, labour market demands, and educational modernisation. Consequently, policy discourse surrounding EdTech has attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly within critical studies examining the ideological implications of technological reform. Existing research demonstrates that educational policy documents do not merely describe technological initiatives but actively construct narratives of progress, innovation, and institutional authority through language. These narratives shape public understanding of educational futures, influence institutional priorities, and legitimise particular forms of governance. The present study draws upon scholarship in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), digital policy studies, and educational governance to examine how Malaysian national education policies linguistically construct digital transformation and position EdTech within broader socio-political agendas.

Internationally, educational digitalisation has become closely associated with broader narratives of economic advancement, innovation, and global competitiveness. Organisations such as UNESCO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the World Bank consistently promote technology integration as essential for educational development and future economic resilience. These institutions frequently frame digital competencies as necessary skills for participation in twenty-first century societies, while portraying educational technology as a mechanism capable of improving accessibility, efficiency, and learning outcomes [8, 9]. Such policy narratives have become particularly

influential following the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated global reliance on digital learning environments and intensified governmental investment in educational technologies.

Despite these optimistic representations, critical scholars argue that global EdTech discourse often reflects neoliberal assumptions concerning education, governance, and economic productivity. Rather than functioning as politically neutral instruments, digital technologies are frequently embedded within market-oriented ideologies that prioritise efficiency, competitiveness, and measurable performance [1, 3]. Within these discourses, education is increasingly conceptualised as an economic enterprise responsible for producing digitally skilled citizens capable of contributing to national and global economies. Consequently, policy language frequently emphasises notions such as “future-ready learners,” “innovation ecosystems,” “human capital development,” and “digital competitiveness.” These expressions naturalise the relationship between technological adoption and national progress, positioning digital transformation as both necessary and inevitable.

Williamson and Eynon [2] argue that contemporary EdTech narratives often promote what they describe as “solutionist” perspectives, whereby technology is represented as the primary solution to educational challenges regardless of broader social, political, or pedagogical complexities. Such framings frequently obscure structural inequalities relating to infrastructure, socio-economic disparities, data governance, and unequal access to digital resources. Selwyn [1] similarly contends that EdTech policy discourse commonly privileges technological optimism while marginalising critical concerns surrounding surveillance, commercialisation, teacher workload, and platform dependency. These critiques suggest that educational digitalisation should not be examined solely as a technical process but also as an ideological and discursive phenomenon shaped by institutional power and socio-economic interests.

Within critical policy scholarship, discourse is understood as a powerful mechanism through which institutions construct social realities, legitimise authority, and regulate public understanding. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has therefore become an influential methodological approach for examining how policy language reflects and reproduces ideological structures. CDA scholars argue that policy documents are not neutral administrative texts but institutional artefacts embedded within broader political, economic, and cultural contexts [6]. Through lexical selection, modality, metaphor, intertextuality, and representational strategies, policy discourse can normalise particular worldviews while excluding alternative perspectives.

Among CDA frameworks, Fairclough’s three-dimensional model remains one of the most widely applied approaches in educational policy analysis. The framework conceptualises discourse through three interconnected dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. Textual analysis examines linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, modality, and rhetorical structures. Discursive practice investigates how texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted within institutional settings. Sociocultural practice situates discourse within broader ideological and socio-political contexts [10]. This multidimensional approach enables researchers to analyse not only what policy documents say but also how language functions ideologically to sustain institutional authority and shape educational agendas.

Recent CDA studies examining EdTech policy reveal recurring ideological patterns across international educational contexts. One dominant trend involves the representation of digital transformation as inevitable and universally beneficial. Policy documents frequently employ high-modality expressions such as “must,” “need to,” and “essential,” thereby constructing technological adoption as obligatory rather than optional. Macgilchrist [3] argues that these discursive patterns create a sense of urgency and inevitability surrounding digital reform, reducing opportunities for critical engagement with alternative educational approaches. Similarly, Williamson [7] demonstrates how digital learning initiatives are frequently legitimised through references to scientific objectivity, data-driven governance, and innovation, despite underlying commercial and political interests.

Another significant trend within EdTech discourse concerns the representation of teachers and students. Research consistently demonstrates that teachers are often positioned as implementers responsible for adapting to institutional technological agendas rather than as active contributors to pedagogical decision-making. Perrotta and Gray [11] observe that policy discourse commonly frames educators through expressions such as “upskilling,” “adaptation,” and “capacity building,” implying professional deficiency and reinforcing top-down governance structures. Within such narratives, institutional authorities establish digital objectives while teachers are expected to comply with reform agendas. This representation may contribute to the erosion of teacher autonomy by prioritising technological compliance over pedagogical expertise.

Students, meanwhile, are frequently constructed as future economic assets whose educational value is closely linked to labour market participation and digital productivity. Williamson and Eynon [2] note that contemporary policy discourse increasingly portrays learners as data-informed subjects requiring technological competencies to remain competitive within global economies. Such representations align closely with neoliberal educational rationalities that frame education primarily in terms of economic outcomes rather than holistic intellectual, social, or cultural development. Consequently, critical scholars argue that EdTech discourse often narrows the broader purposes of education by prioritising employability, productivity, and market-oriented skills.

Intertextuality also plays a significant role within global digital education discourse. Policymakers frequently reference international frameworks, standards, and benchmarks to legitimise national educational reforms. References to UNESCO competency frameworks, OECD educational indicators, and international digital standards function as discursive strategies that establish institutional credibility and global alignment. Fairclough [10] argues that intertextuality within policy discourse serves as a mechanism of authorisation, enabling institutions to justify reforms through association with internationally recognised authorities. However, critics suggest that excessive reliance on global frameworks may marginalise local educational realities, cultural diversity, and context-specific pedagogical needs.

Within Southeast Asia, educational digitalisation has become increasingly prominent as governments seek to strengthen national competitiveness and regional economic integration. Countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand have introduced extensive digital education initiatives aimed at supporting Fourth Industrial Revolution agendas and knowledge-based economic development [12]. Although these regional policies frequently adopt global narratives concerning innovation and digital readiness, scholars argue that they often inadequately address infrastructural inequalities, socio-economic disparities, and pedagogical diversity across educational systems [13]. Consequently, critical examination of policy discourse within Southeast Asian contexts remains important for understanding how global technological narratives are localised, adapted, and legitimised within specific socio-political environments.

In Malaysia, national educational discourse has increasingly prioritised digital transformation over the past decade. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 established foundational commitments toward technological integration, digital learning environments, and twenty-first century educational competencies. Subsequent policies such as the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) 2021 and the Digital Education Policy (DEP) 2023 further institutionalised the nation's digital education agenda by emphasising infrastructure development, digital governance, teacher competencies, and integrated learning ecosystems. Collectively, these policies frame technological transformation as essential for national development, economic competitiveness, and educational modernisation.

Despite the growing significance of these initiatives, scholarly research examining Malaysian EdTech policy remains relatively limited. Existing studies have predominantly focused on technological readiness, online learning implementation, digital literacy, and educator perceptions of educational technologies [4, 5]. While such research contributes valuable empirical insights regarding technological adoption and pedagogical adaptation, it generally relies upon descriptive, evaluative, or quantitative methodologies. Consequently, insufficient attention has been given to the ideological and linguistic dimensions of policy discourse itself.

The limited application of CDA within Malaysian EdTech research creates an important scholarly gap. Current studies rarely investigate how policy language constructs digital transformation, distributes institutional responsibilities, or legitimises particular forms of governance. Moreover, little attention has been given to how Malaysian policy discourse positions teachers, students, and educational institutions within broader narratives of technological progress and national development. This gap is particularly significant because policy rhetoric influences not only implementation strategies but also the identities, expectations, and institutional relationships associated with digital reform.

Malaysia's socio-cultural and linguistic diversity further highlights the importance of context-sensitive analysis. Educational policies developed within multilingual and multicultural societies inevitably intersect with broader questions concerning equity, accessibility, cultural representation, and national identity. However, globalised digital narratives may sometimes privilege standardised technological models that insufficiently reflect local educational realities. As critical scholars argue, policy discourse that excessively prioritises efficiency, competitiveness, and innovation may marginalise socially responsive educational approaches and reinforce centralised governance structures [1].

Another recurring concern within critical EdTech scholarship involves the silencing of structural inequalities within policy narratives. Although digital transformation is frequently associated with inclusion and accessibility, policy documents often minimise or overlook persistent disparities relating to internet connectivity, device ownership, rural infrastructure, disability access, and socio-economic inequality. Selwyn [1] describes this phenomenon as “digital optimism,” whereby narratives of technological progress overshadow the complex realities associated with implementation. Such omissions are discursively significant because silence itself functions ideologically by directing attention toward selected priorities while backgrounding structural concerns.

Within Malaysian educational discourse, these issues are particularly relevant given existing rural-urban disparities and unequal technological access across educational settings. While national policies strongly promote digital transformation, less attention is frequently given to the uneven distribution of technological resources and institutional support. Consequently, examining how policy documents linguistically construct digital futures becomes essential for understanding whose interests are prioritised and how educational modernity is imagined within national development agendas.

The existing literature therefore demonstrates several important patterns relevant to the present study. First, global EdTech discourse frequently reflects neoliberal and technocratic ideologies that frame technology as economically necessary and institutionally desirable. Second, Critical Discourse Analysis provides an effective framework for examining how policy language legitimises these ideological constructions. Third, current scholarship consistently identifies recurring representations of teachers as implementers, students as future economic assets, and digital transformation as inevitable. Fourth, research concerning Malaysian EdTech policy remains largely descriptive and insufficiently attentive to discourse, ideology, and linguistic representation.

The present study addresses these gaps by critically examining the discursive construction of EdTech within Malaysian national education policies through Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework. By analysing the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) 2021, and the Digital Education Policy 2023, the study investigates how language constructs technological transformation, legitimises institutional authority, and shapes educational identities within Malaysia's broader digital development agenda. In doing so, the research contributes to critical scholarship on educational governance, digital policy discourse, and the sociolinguistics of technological reform in emerging digital economies.

### **3. Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how Malaysian national education policies discursively construct Education Technology (EdTech) and digital transformation.

The qualitative orientation is appropriate because the research seeks to examine ideological meanings, representational strategies, and institutional narratives embedded within policy language rather than to quantify linguistic frequencies alone. Policy documents are not treated as neutral administrative texts but as ideological artefacts that shape public understanding, institutional priorities, and educational governance. Consequently, the study focuses on how language functions to legitimise particular assumptions regarding technological progress, national development, and educational reform within Malaysia's digital education agenda.

The research adopts Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis as its primary analytical framework. Fairclough's model conceptualises discourse through three interconnected dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice [10]. This framework remains widely applied in educational policy research because it facilitates examination of both micro-level linguistic features and broader socio-political structures embedded within institutional discourse [6, 14]. The model is particularly suitable for the present study because EdTech policy operates at the intersection of language, governance, technology, and ideology. Through this framework, the study analyses not only the explicit content of policy documents but also the institutional assumptions and ideological implications underlying the representation of digital transformation.

The study focuses on three major Malaysian policy documents that collectively define the nation's educational digitalisation agenda: the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) 2021, and the Digital Education Policy (DEP) 2023. These documents were purposively selected because they represent the most influential institutional frameworks guiding Malaysia's national digital education strategy. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 established foundational educational reform objectives and introduced early commitments toward technological integration within schools. The Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) 2021 expanded these commitments by linking educational digitalisation with broader economic and labour market development goals. The Digital Education Policy 2023 was selected as the central focus of the study because it provides the most explicit articulation of Malaysia's current digital education vision, implementation strategies, competency frameworks, and institutional objectives.

The selection of these documents was also based on their institutional authority, national policy significance, and chronological continuity. Together, the documents provide insight into the evolution of Malaysian digital education discourse across a ten-year policy trajectory. Examining multiple policy texts enables identification of recurring discursive patterns, ideological consistency, and shifts in representational strategies over time. Since the documents originate from official governmental institutions, including the Ministry of Education Malaysia and national policy agencies, they constitute authoritative representations of state-led educational priorities and governance perspectives.

The data collection process involved retrieving official and publicly accessible versions of the selected policy documents from governmental websites and institutional repositories. Only finalised and officially published documents were included to ensure analytical reliability and institutional authenticity. Supplementary materials such as media reports, policy commentaries, speeches, and unofficial summaries were excluded because the study specifically focuses on formal institutional discourse rather than public interpretation or journalistic representation. The selected documents were converted into digital text format and organised within NVivo software for systematic coding and qualitative data management. Although CDA does not require specialised software, NVivo facilitated efficient organisation of textual segments, thematic coding, annotation, and retrieval of recurring lexical patterns throughout the analytical process.

The analytical procedure followed several iterative stages aligned with Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. The first stage involved textual analysis, focusing on linguistic and rhetorical features within the policy documents. Particular attention was given to lexical selection, modality, transitivity, nominalisation, metaphorical constructions, and the representation of social actors. Lexical analysis examined recurring expressions associated with technological transformation, including terms such as "future-ready learners," "digital economy," "innovation," "ecosystem," "competitiveness," and "transformation." These lexical patterns were analysed to determine how policy discourse constructs digitalisation as desirable, necessary, and economically significant.

Modality analysis focused on modal verbs and expressions such as "must," "should," "will," and "need to," which function discursively to establish institutional authority and obligation. High-modality expressions were examined to identify how policies construct digital transformation as inevitable and compulsory rather than optional or negotiable. The analysis also investigated transitivity patterns to determine how agency and responsibility are distributed within policy discourse. Particular attention was given to the representation of teachers, students, schools, and governmental institutions in order to examine how policy language positions educational actors within technological reform processes.

Metaphorical language constituted another important analytical component. Metaphors such as "catalyst," "driver," "ecosystem," and "transformation" were examined because metaphors often function ideologically by shaping public perceptions of policy objectives and institutional priorities. Additionally, nominalisation patterns were analysed to identify how policy discourse abstracts institutional processes and obscures agency through the transformation of actions into depersonalised concepts. These linguistic strategies collectively reveal how policy texts construct authority, urgency, and legitimacy surrounding digital education initiatives.

The second analytical stage focused on discursive practice, which examines how policy documents are produced, circulated, and interpreted within institutional contexts. This dimension involved analysing the communicative purposes of the policies, their intended audiences, and the institutional conditions surrounding their production. The study considered how the documents function as strategic governmental instruments aimed at guiding educational institutions, educators, policymakers, and international stakeholders toward specific technological objectives. The analysis also examined how policy language constrains or privileges particular interpretations of educational reform. For instance, statements

prescribing that teachers “must integrate digital tools” were interpreted as discursive mechanisms that position educators primarily as implementers of institutional technological agendas rather than autonomous pedagogical decision-makers.

Intertextuality constituted an important component of discursive practice analysis. References to international frameworks, including UNESCO’s ICT Competency Standards for Teachers and OECD educational models, were identified and examined to determine how Malaysian policy discourse constructs legitimacy through alignment with globally recognised standards. Intertextual references were analysed as ideological strategies that connect national digital ambitions with international narratives concerning innovation, competitiveness, and educational modernisation. This analysis also considered how global discourses are selectively appropriated and localised within the Malaysian educational context.

The third stage involved sociocultural analysis, which situates policy discourse within broader political, economic, and social contexts. This dimension examined how Malaysian digital education policies align with national development agendas, technological governance strategies, and economic modernisation initiatives. The analysis considered Malaysia’s broader aspirations to become a digitally advanced and high-income nation by 2030, particularly through policies related to the digital economy and Fourth Industrial Revolution development. Relevant socio-economic contexts, including post-pandemic educational digitalisation, infrastructural disparities, labour market transformation, and regional technological competition within Southeast Asia, were also considered in interpreting policy discourse.

Coding and interpretation were conducted iteratively throughout the analysis. Initial coding identified recurring concepts such as technological inevitability, digital inclusivity, innovation, global benchmarking, capacity building, competitiveness, and efficiency. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader discursive themes including neoliberal development discourse, technocratic governance, digital optimism, institutional authority, and global alignment. The analysis also paid close attention to silences and omissions within policy discourse, particularly concerning issues such as digital inequality, teacher workload, rural infrastructural limitations, pedagogical autonomy, and socio-economic disparities. Following Selwyn [1] critique of “digital optimism,” these absences were interpreted as ideologically significant components of policy representation.

To enhance analytical rigour, reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process. Since CDA is inherently interpretative, repeated close reading and cross-document comparison were employed to minimise overinterpretation and ensure consistency in thematic identification. Triangulation across multiple policy documents enabled verification of recurring discursive patterns and strengthened interpretative credibility. The use of systematic coding procedures and transparent analytical categories further contributed to methodological reliability.

Ethical considerations within the study were minimal because the research relied exclusively on publicly accessible governmental policy documents. No human participants were involved, and no personal or confidential information was collected. Nevertheless, ethical reflexivity remained important because policy critique involves interpretation of institutional discourse and ideological representation. The analysis therefore aimed to maintain scholarly objectivity while critically examining how policy language shapes educational governance and technological narratives.

Overall, the methodology integrates Critical Discourse Analysis with systematic document analysis and sociocultural contextualisation to examine the ideological construction of EdTech within Malaysian national education policies. By combining textual, discursive, and contextual analysis, the study provides a comprehensive examination of how policy discourse shapes understandings of digital transformation, institutional authority, educational modernity, and technological governance in Malaysia.

## **4. Findings**

The Critical Discourse Analysis of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) 2021, and the Digital Education Policy (DEP) 2023 reveals a highly consistent discursive construction of digital transformation across Malaysian national education policies. The analysis demonstrates that EdTech is represented not merely as an educational tool but as a strategic national imperative closely connected to economic competitiveness, technological modernisation, and institutional reform. Across the documents, several recurring linguistic and ideological patterns emerge, particularly in relation to technological inevitability, neoliberal developmental discourse, technocratic governance, the representation of educational actors, and the legitimisation of digital reform through global intertextuality.

The findings further reveal that policy discourse consistently foregrounds optimism, innovation, and efficiency while minimising structural concerns relating to inequality, infrastructural disparities, and pedagogical autonomy. Through modality, lexical repetition, metaphorical constructions, and representational strategies, the policies collectively construct a future-oriented narrative in which digital transformation appears natural, necessary, and institutionally uncontested.

### *4.1. Technological Inevitability and the Normalisation of Digital Transformation*

One of the most dominant findings concerns the representation of digital transformation as inevitable and compulsory. Across all policy documents, digitalisation is repeatedly framed through high-modality expressions that position technological integration as mandatory rather than optional. The frequent use of modal verbs such as “must,” “will,” “need to,” and “essential” contributes to the construction of technological inevitability and institutional urgency.

Table 1 Summarises the recurring modality patterns identified across the analysed documents.

**Table 1.**  
The Recurring Modality Patterns.

Discursive Feature	Lexical Examples	Discursive Function
High modality	“must integrate,” “must embrace,” “will transform”	Constructs digitalisation as obligatory
Necessity framing	“essential,” “critical,” “necessary”	Normalises technology adoption
Future orientation	“future-ready,” “next generation,” “digital future”	Projects inevitability and progress
Transformation metaphors	“catalyst,” “driver,” “ecosystem”	Represents technology as transformative force

The Digital Education Policy (DEP) 2023 states that:

*“Digital education is an essential enabler that must be integrated across all learning ecosystems.”*

The modal verb “must” functions as a strong institutional directive, eliminating alternative possibilities regarding educational reform. Rather than presenting technological integration as one possible pedagogical approach, the policy constructs it as a compulsory pathway toward national educational development. Similarly, the MyDIGITAL Blueprint repeatedly emphasises that Malaysia “must embrace digitalisation” in order to maintain regional competitiveness. Such linguistic constructions reinforce the perception that technological transformation is both unavoidable and universally beneficial.

The analysis also identified extensive repetition of future-oriented lexical patterns such as “future-ready learners,” “digital future,” “innovation-driven economy,” and “next-generation education.” These expressions construct an aspirational national narrative in which educational transformation becomes inseparable from technological advancement. The repeated invocation of “future-readiness” positions the future as a technologically predetermined space requiring institutional adaptation. Consequently, policy discourse narrows educational possibilities by presenting digitalisation as the singular route toward progress.

Metaphorical constructions further strengthen this discourse of inevitability. Technology is repeatedly described as a “catalyst,” “driver,” and “enabler” of transformation. Such metaphors portray technology as an active force capable of accelerating national progress and institutional efficiency. Importantly, these metaphors obscure the human, social, and pedagogical complexities involved in educational reform by attributing transformative agency primarily to technology itself.

The findings also reveal significant nominalisation patterns within policy language. Processes such as “digital transformation,” “innovation,” and “capacity building” are frequently represented as abstract institutional goals rather than socially contested processes involving human actors. This abstraction depersonalises educational reform and reinforces institutional authority by framing digitalisation as a neutral administrative necessity rather than a political or ideological project.

Overall, the discourse of inevitability contributes to the naturalisation of digital transformation by portraying technology adoption as rational, essential, and institutionally uncontested. Alternative pedagogical approaches, critical perspectives, and contextual limitations are largely absent from the policy narratives.

#### 4.2. Neoliberal Developmental Discourse and Economic Rationalisation

A second dominant finding concerns the strong neoliberal orientation underpinning Malaysian EdTech discourse. Across all documents, education is repeatedly linked to economic productivity, labour market competitiveness, and national economic development. Policy language consistently frames technological education as an investment in human capital and economic growth rather than primarily as a social or pedagogical endeavour.

Table 2 Illustrates the dominant neoliberal lexical patterns identified within the policy documents.

**Table 2.**  
The Dominant Neoliberal Lexical Patterns.

Lexical Pattern	Examples	Ideological Orientation
Economic competitiveness	“global competitiveness,” “high-income nation”	Neoliberal developmentalism
Workforce preparation	“future workforce,” “digital talent”	Human capital discourse
Productivity language	“efficiency,” “optimisation,” “performance”	Technocratic governance
Innovation rhetoric	“innovation ecosystem,” “digital economy”	Market-oriented education

The MyDIGITAL Blueprint states:

*“A digitally skilled workforce is essential to drive Malaysia’s transition towards a high-income, innovation-driven economy.”*

This statement explicitly positions education as an economic mechanism responsible for producing labour market competencies. Learners are represented primarily as future contributors to national productivity, while technological skills are constructed as forms of economic capital. Similarly, the DEP 2023 repeatedly emphasises “digital competencies,” “innovation-driven mindsets,” and “entrepreneurial skills” as educational priorities.

The analysis identified frequent collocations between education and economic terminology. Terms such as “economy,” “competitiveness,” “innovation,” “productivity,” “talent,” and “market readiness” repeatedly co-occur

alongside references to students, schools, and digital learning. These collocational patterns reinforce the ideological alignment between educational transformation and neoliberal economic agendas.

Importantly, policy discourse consistently prioritises measurable efficiency and institutional performance. The DEP 2023 describes digital education as a mechanism capable of:

*“enhancing efficiency, streamlining management, and improving resource optimisation.”*

Such expressions reflect technocratic governance rationalities that privilege managerial efficiency and administrative optimisation. Educational value is therefore increasingly measured through productivity-oriented frameworks rather than broader pedagogical or humanistic considerations.

The findings further reveal that economic discourse frequently overrides socio-cultural and pedagogical considerations. Although inclusivity and accessibility are occasionally mentioned, these concepts are generally subordinated to narratives concerning economic growth and national competitiveness. References to creativity, citizenship, critical literacy, or socio-emotional development remain comparatively limited throughout the analysed documents.

The repeated emphasis on *“global competitiveness”* also positions Malaysia within broader international economic hierarchies. Policy discourse constructs technological education as essential for maintaining relevance within global markets and international benchmarking systems. Consequently, educational success becomes closely associated with the nation’s ability to compete economically within digitally driven global economies.

#### 4.3. Representation of Teachers Within Technocratic Governance

Another major finding concerns the discursive positioning of teachers within Malaysia’s digital transformation agenda. Across all policy documents, teachers are consistently represented as implementers required to adapt to institutional technological reforms. The analysis reveals limited representation of teachers as autonomous pedagogical agents or active contributors to policy development.

Table 3 summarises the dominant representations of teachers identified within the corpus.

**Table 3.**  
The Dominant Representations of Teachers.

Representation Pattern	Examples	Discursive Effect
Adaptation discourse	“teachers must adapt,” “upskill educators”	Constructs professional deficiency
Compliance framing	“must integrate,” “required to implement”	Reinforces institutional control
Support discourse	“teachers will be supported”	Positions teachers as passive recipients
Competency orientation	“digital competencies,” “capacity building”	Prioritises technical compliance

The DEP 2023 states:

*“Teachers must acquire digital competencies to effectively deliver integrated digital pedagogies.”*

The modal verb *“must”* constructs compliance as obligatory and positions teachers as subjects required to fulfil institutional expectations. The phrase *“acquire digital competencies”* also implies professional inadequacy, suggesting that teachers lack the necessary skills required for modern education.

Similarly, the MyDIGITAL Blueprint emphasises the *“upskilling of educators”* as necessary for digital transformation. Such language repeatedly constructs teachers through discourses of adaptation, retraining, and compliance. The policies rarely acknowledge teachers as experienced professionals capable of shaping educational innovation according to contextual classroom realities.

Passive constructions further reinforce hierarchical institutional relationships. Expressions such as *“teachers will be supported”* and *“educators will be guided”* position teachers as recipients of institutional intervention rather than active agents of pedagogical change. Agency is frequently attributed to governmental institutions and technological systems, while educators occupy subordinate implementation roles.

The analysis also identified substantial emphasis on technical competency over pedagogical expertise. Teachers are primarily evaluated according to their ability to integrate digital tools, manage online learning systems, and support institutional technological objectives. Broader pedagogical concerns, including critical literacy, classroom relationships, and contextual teaching practices, receive comparatively limited attention.

This technocratic framing contributes to the reduction of teacher autonomy by privileging institutional technological mandates over professional pedagogical judgement. Educational transformation is therefore represented as a managerial process driven by policy implementation rather than collaborative pedagogical innovation.

#### 4.4. Representation of Students as Human Capital and Digital Assets

Students are similarly positioned within highly instrumental and economically oriented discourses. Across the analysed documents, learners are repeatedly represented as future contributors to Malaysia’s digital economy rather than as holistic individuals with diverse educational and social needs.

The DEP 2023 describes students as:

*“future-ready learners equipped with digital competencies to thrive within global ecosystems.”*

The expression *“future-ready learners”* reflects a recurring policy formulation that links educational value to labour market preparedness and technological adaptability. The metaphor *“global ecosystems”* further situates students within competitive economic environments rather than social or civic contexts.

Table 4 presents the dominant student representations identified in the analysis.

**Table 4.**  
The Dominant Student Representations.

<b>Representation Pattern</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Ideological Implication</b>
Human capital discourse	“digital talent,” “future workforce”	Economic instrumentalisation
Competency framing	“digital competencies,” “future-ready skills”	Labour market orientation
Innovation discourse	“entrepreneurial mindset,” “innovation-driven”	Neoliberal subjectivity
Passive beneficiary role	“students will be equipped”	Limited learner agency

Students are frequently associated with economic terminology such as “talent,” “workforce,” “innovation,” and “entrepreneurial skills.” Such lexical patterns reinforce the human capital orientation underpinning Malaysian educational policy. Learners are valued according to their future economic productivity and technological adaptability.

The findings also reveal limited representation of students as critical thinkers, cultural participants, or socially engaged citizens. Instead, policy language prioritises employability, innovation, and competitiveness. Educational outcomes are therefore increasingly framed according to economic utility rather than broader intellectual or social development.

Passive grammatical constructions further reduce learner agency. Statements such as “students will be equipped” and “learners will be provided with competencies” position students as passive recipients of institutional intervention. Educational transformation is represented as something delivered to learners rather than collaboratively constructed through educational engagement.

#### 4.5. Intertextuality and Global Legitimation

The analysis identified extensive intertextual references to international frameworks and global educational standards. References to UNESCO, OECD frameworks, global digital benchmarks, and international competency standards appear throughout the policy documents.

Table 5 summarises the major intertextual patterns identified.

**Table 5.**  
The Major Intertextual Patterns.

<b>Intertextual Reference</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Discursive Effect</b>
UNESCO standards	Global legitimacy	Institutional credibility
OECD frameworks	International benchmarking	Alignment with global norms
Fourth Industrial Revolution discourse	Technological urgency	Future-oriented governance
Global competitiveness rhetoric	Economic alignment	International positioning

The DEP 2023 explicitly states that the policy aligns with: “UNESCO ICT Competency Standards for Teachers.”

Similarly, the MyDIGITAL Blueprint emphasises the importance of aligning educational competencies with “international standards” to ensure “global relevance.”

These intertextual references function as mechanisms of legitimisation by associating Malaysian educational policies with internationally recognised authorities. Global frameworks are employed to justify national technological agendas and reinforce institutional credibility. Policy discourse therefore constructs Malaysia as a progressive and internationally aligned nation capable of participating within global digital economies.

However, the findings suggest that this emphasis on global alignment may simultaneously marginalise local educational realities. References to international standards significantly outweigh discussions concerning Malaysia’s linguistic diversity, socio-economic inequalities, rural infrastructural challenges, and contextual pedagogical needs. Consequently, global legitimacy is prioritised over local specificity.

#### 4.6. Silences, Omissions, and Marginalised Concerns

One of the most significant findings concerns the presence of discursive silences within the analysed policies. Although the documents strongly promote digital transformation, they provide comparatively limited engagement with structural inequalities and implementation challenges.

The following issues receive minimal attention across the policy corpus:

- Rural-urban digital disparities
- Unequal internet accessibility
- Teacher workload and burnout
- Socio-economic inequalities
- Data privacy and digital surveillance
- Disability access and inclusive technological design
- Pedagogical resistance or critical digital literacy

The omission of these concerns contributes to what critical scholars describe as “digital optimism,” whereby narratives of innovation and technological progress overshadow structural and social complexities. Policy discourse foregrounds success, competitiveness, and institutional advancement while backgrounding the limitations and inequalities associated with educational digitalisation.

Importantly, silence itself functions ideologically within discourse. By minimising structural concerns, the policies reinforce the perception that technological transformation is universally accessible, institutionally manageable, and socially beneficial. Consequently, educational inequalities become discursively marginalised within the broader national narrative of digital progress.

#### *4.7. Summary of Findings*

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Malaysian national education policies construct EdTech through several interconnected ideological and linguistic patterns. Digital transformation is represented as inevitable, future-oriented, and institutionally necessary through repeated use of high modality, transformation metaphors, and future-oriented lexical constructions. Educational discourse strongly reflects neoliberal developmental rationalities that connect technological reform with economic competitiveness, productivity, and labour market preparation.

Teachers are primarily positioned as implementers responsible for adapting to institutional technological agendas, while students are represented as future economic assets requiring digital competencies. Extensive intertextual references to global frameworks legitimise national educational reforms through international alignment and benchmarking. Simultaneously, structural inequalities and contextual educational challenges remain comparatively marginalised within policy discourse.

Collectively, these findings reveal that Malaysian EdTech policy functions not only as an administrative framework for technological integration but also as an ideological mechanism that shapes national understandings of progress, governance, education, and digital modernity.

### **5. Discussion**

The findings demonstrate that Malaysian national education policies construct Education Technology (EdTech) through highly institutionalised discourses that position digital transformation as inevitable, economically necessary, and strategically aligned with national development agendas. Through repeated modality patterns, future-oriented lexical choices, intertextual references, and technocratic representations of educational actors, the analysed policies collectively reinforce a dominant narrative of digital modernisation that privileges institutional efficiency, economic competitiveness, and global alignment. Viewed through Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), these discursive patterns reveal how policy language functions ideologically to shape public understandings of educational reform, institutional authority, and technological progress within Malaysia's evolving digital landscape.

One of the most significant findings concerns the normalisation of digital transformation through the discourse of inevitability. The frequent use of high-modality expressions such as "must integrate," "must embrace," and "will transform" positions digitalisation as compulsory and uncontested. From a CDA perspective, modality functions as an important mechanism of institutional power because it allows policymakers to present preferred ideological positions as objective necessities rather than negotiable policy choices [10]. In the present study, the linguistic construction of obligation contributes to a deterministic representation of technological reform in which alternative educational approaches become marginalised or discursively invisible.

This pattern closely reflects global EdTech discourse identified in previous scholarship. Selwyn [1] and Macgilchrist [3] similarly observe that digital education policies often frame technology as a universally beneficial solution capable of modernising educational systems and preparing societies for future economic demands. However, the Malaysian context demonstrates how these global narratives are strategically localised within national developmental agendas. References to "future-ready learners," "digital ecosystems," and "innovation-driven education" function not merely as educational aspirations but as ideological formulations linking technological transformation to national survival and economic competitiveness. Consequently, technological adoption is framed as a moral and institutional responsibility rather than a pedagogical choice open to critical evaluation.

The discourse of inevitability also contributes to the depoliticisation of educational reform. By representing digital transformation as a natural progression toward modernity, the policies minimise opportunities for debate regarding the pedagogical, social, and ethical implications of technological integration. This is particularly significant within Malaysia's diverse educational landscape, where socio-economic disparities, linguistic plurality, and uneven infrastructural development continue to influence educational accessibility and implementation capacity. Yet these contextual complexities are largely absent from the dominant policy narrative. The policies instead construct a linear developmental trajectory in which technological advancement automatically equates to educational improvement and national progress.

Such deterministic framings may have important implications for educational governance and policy implementation. When technological integration is represented as inevitable, institutional compliance becomes prioritised over pedagogical reflection. Schools, educators, and students are therefore positioned within a reform framework that privileges adaptation and implementation rather than critical participation or contextual negotiation. This reinforces what Williamson and Eynon [2] describe as the "solutionist" orientation of global EdTech discourse, whereby technology is presented as the primary solution to educational challenges irrespective of broader structural realities.

Another important discussion emerging from the findings concerns the strong neoliberal orientation underpinning Malaysian EdTech policy discourse. The repeated association between education, economic productivity, competitiveness, and labour market preparation demonstrates how educational value is increasingly conceptualised through economic rationality. Learners are represented as "digital talent," "future workforce," and contributors to the "digital economy," while schools are framed as institutional mechanisms responsible for producing technologically skilled citizens capable of sustaining national economic growth.

This finding aligns with Fairclough [10] argument that neoliberal discourse increasingly transforms education into a market-oriented enterprise governed by principles of efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness. Within the Malaysian policy context, educational success is strongly connected to technological proficiency and economic adaptability. The policies repeatedly foreground terms such as “innovation,” “global competitiveness,” “entrepreneurial mindset,” and “high-income nation,” reflecting broader neoliberal assumptions that position education primarily as a tool for economic advancement.

The dominance of economic discourse may be understood within Malaysia’s broader national development agenda, particularly the country’s ambition to strengthen participation within the global digital economy and achieve high-income nation status. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that such developmental priorities risk narrowing the broader social and humanistic purposes of education. Educational values associated with critical thinking, civic engagement, cultural diversity, multilingualism, and socio-emotional development receive comparatively limited attention within the policy corpus. Instead, policy discourse privileges technological efficiency and labour market relevance as primary indicators of educational success.

This economic rationalisation may also contribute to the commodification of learners and educational institutions. Students become discursively valued according to their future productivity, while schools are increasingly expected to function as training grounds for economic competitiveness. Such framings reinforce human capital ideology by positioning educational outcomes in terms of measurable economic utility rather than broader intellectual and social development. As Macgilchrist [3] argues, neoliberal EdTech discourse frequently transforms learners into economic subjects whose value is determined by their technological competencies and market readiness.

The findings additionally reveal the emergence of technocratic governance within Malaysian digital education policy. Teachers are consistently positioned as implementers required to adapt to institutional technological reforms through “upskilling,” “capacity building,” and “digital competency acquisition.” The repeated use of modal constructions such as “teachers must integrate digital tools” reinforces hierarchical relationships between policymakers and educators, where institutional authorities establish reform agendas while teachers occupy implementation roles.

This representation reflects broader global trends identified in critical EdTech scholarship. Perrotta and Gray [11] argue that digital policy discourse frequently constructs teachers as professionally deficient subjects requiring technological retraining and institutional guidance. In the present study, teachers are rarely represented as knowledgeable pedagogical agents capable of critically shaping digital transformation according to classroom realities and contextual educational needs. Instead, policy language privileges institutional directives and technological compliance over professional autonomy.

The implications of this discourse are significant. First, the technocratic framing of teachers may contribute to the erosion of pedagogical autonomy by positioning technological integration as an administrative obligation rather than a collaborative educational process. Teachers may become increasingly evaluated according to their technological compliance rather than their pedagogical expertise, critical judgement, or contextual responsiveness. Second, the emphasis on digital competencies and institutional implementation potentially increases teacher workload by constructing technological integration as an additional professional responsibility requiring continuous adaptation and retraining.

Importantly, the policies largely omit discussion concerning the practical challenges educators may face during implementation. Teacher burnout, technological fatigue, unequal digital literacy, and classroom-specific constraints remain marginal within the policy discourse. Such omissions reinforce what Selwyn [1] identifies as “digital optimism,” whereby policy narratives foreground technological progress while backgrounding the human complexities associated with educational reform.

Students are similarly positioned within instrumental and economically oriented discourses. The findings indicate that learners are repeatedly constructed as future contributors to national productivity rather than holistic individuals with diverse educational, cultural, and social identities. Expressions such as “future-ready learners,” “digital talent,” and “innovation-driven mindsets” position students within a developmental framework focused primarily on economic adaptability and technological competitiveness.

This representation reflects the broader influence of human capital theory within contemporary educational policy. Education is conceptualised as an investment designed to produce economically productive citizens capable of sustaining national development objectives. While such framings may align with governmental economic strategies, they risk reducing educational value to labour market preparation alone. Learners become future economic resources rather than active intellectual, cultural, and democratic participants within society.

The discourse also limits student agency. Passive grammatical constructions such as “students will be equipped” and “learners will be provided with competencies” position students as recipients of institutional intervention rather than co-constructors of educational meaning. Their role within policy discourse is largely passive and developmental, with limited recognition of their capacity to critically engage with technology, negotiate digital identities, or contribute to educational transformation beyond economic participation.

Another significant finding concerns the extensive use of intertextuality as a legitimisation strategy. References to UNESCO frameworks, OECD standards, and global educational benchmarks function as discursive mechanisms that establish policy credibility through international alignment. Fairclough [10] argues that intertextuality within policy discourse often serves ideological purposes by allowing institutions to justify reforms through association with globally recognised authorities. In the Malaysian context, references to international standards reinforce the nation’s image as a globally competitive and technologically progressive educational system.

However, the strong emphasis on global alignment may simultaneously reinforce Western-centric educational models and globalised policy frameworks that inadequately reflect local socio-cultural realities. The policies prioritise international benchmarking and digital competitiveness while providing comparatively limited engagement with Malaysia's linguistic diversity, rural educational contexts, and socio-economic disparities. Consequently, global legitimacy may inadvertently overshadow locally responsive educational approaches and context-sensitive pedagogical practices.

This tension between global alignment and local educational realities is particularly important within Southeast Asian contexts, where educational systems operate within complex multicultural, multilingual, and socio-economic environments. The findings suggest that Malaysian policy discourse strongly privileges international technological narratives, potentially at the expense of locally grounded educational priorities and culturally responsive pedagogies.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the findings concerns the discursive silences embedded within the policy corpus. While the documents strongly promote digital transformation, they provide minimal engagement with structural inequalities, infrastructural disparities, and ethical concerns associated with educational digitalisation. Issues such as unequal internet access, rural-urban digital divides, disability inclusion, teacher workload, platform surveillance, and data governance receive little sustained attention.

From a CDA perspective, silence itself functions ideologically because what policy discourse excludes can be as significant as what it explicitly includes. Van Leeuwen [15] describes such omissions as forms of discursive suppression that redirect institutional attention toward preferred narratives while marginalising structural concerns. In the present study, the omission of inequality and implementation challenges contributes to the maintenance of optimistic technological narratives centred upon innovation, efficiency, and competitiveness.

These silences may have practical consequences for educational implementation. By minimising structural barriers, policy discourse risks constructing an unrealistic representation of digital transformation that overlooks uneven infrastructural readiness and socio-economic inequality across Malaysian educational contexts. Rural schools, lower-income communities, and under-resourced educational institutions may experience digital transformation very differently from the idealised narratives presented within official policy documents.

Collectively, the findings illustrate that Malaysian EdTech policies function not merely as educational frameworks but as ideological instruments shaping national understandings of progress, governance, and modernity. The policies promote a technologically deterministic and economically oriented vision of education that privileges institutional efficiency, global competitiveness, and technocratic governance. Teachers and students are positioned within hierarchical reform structures that prioritise implementation, productivity, and adaptability, while structural inequalities and contextual complexities remain comparatively marginalised.

The discussion therefore highlights the importance of critically engaging with policy discourse beyond surface-level representations of innovation and digital progress. Technological transformation within education is not simply a technical process but a deeply political and ideological phenomenon shaped by institutional priorities, global economic pressures, and competing visions of educational purpose. In the Malaysian context, the findings suggest a need for more critically reflective and context-sensitive digital education policies that balance technological advancement with pedagogical autonomy, cultural diversity, and social equity.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has critically examined the discursive construction of Education Technology (EdTech) within Malaysian national education policies through Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. By analysing the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) 2021, and the Digital Education Policy 2023, the research demonstrates that policy discourse consistently constructs digital transformation as inevitable, economically necessary, and strategically aligned with national modernisation agendas. The findings reveal that these policies do not merely outline educational strategies but actively shape ideological understandings of technological progress, institutional authority, and educational governance within Malaysia's broader developmental framework.

A central conclusion emerging from the study is that Malaysian EdTech policy discourse strongly normalises technological inevitability. Through repeated use of high-modality expressions such as "must," "essential," and "necessary," digital transformation is represented as a compulsory and unquestionable pathway for educational advancement. This discourse constructs technology as a neutral and universally beneficial force capable of addressing educational challenges while simultaneously strengthening national competitiveness and economic growth. Such representations closely mirror broader global policy narratives surrounding digital modernisation and technological solutionism, where digitalisation is positioned as both unavoidable and inherently progressive.

The study further concludes that Malaysian digital education policies are deeply shaped by neoliberal developmental rationalities. Education is repeatedly framed as an economic instrument responsible for producing digitally skilled citizens capable of contributing to the national and global economy. Lexical patterns relating to "innovation," "competitiveness," "future workforce," and "digital talent" demonstrate how educational discourse increasingly prioritises economic productivity and labour market readiness. While these priorities align with Malaysia's broader aspirations for economic transformation and participation within the digital economy, they also risk narrowing the broader social, cultural, and humanistic functions of education. Educational success becomes closely associated with technological proficiency and economic adaptability, potentially marginalising alternative educational values such as critical literacy, cultural understanding, democratic participation, and socio-emotional development.

Another important conclusion concerns the technocratic representation of educators within policy discourse. Teachers are predominantly positioned as implementers of institutional technological agendas who must continuously "adapt,"

“upskill,” and “integrate” digital tools into teaching practices. The policies rarely represent educators as autonomous pedagogical professionals capable of critically shaping technological reform according to classroom realities and contextual educational needs. Instead, institutional authority and technological systems occupy dominant positions within the policy narrative. This finding suggests that digital transformation discourse may contribute to the erosion of teacher autonomy by prioritising compliance with institutional digital agendas over professional pedagogical judgement and collaborative educational innovation.

Similarly, students are represented primarily through human capital discourse that positions them as future contributors to Malaysia’s digital economy. Learners are repeatedly described as “future-ready,” “innovation-driven,” and technologically competent individuals prepared to participate in globally competitive environments. Such representations reinforce economically instrumental understandings of education in which students are valued according to future productivity and labour market contribution. The findings indicate that learners are rarely positioned as active democratic participants, critical digital citizens, or socially engaged individuals within policy discourse. Instead, educational transformation is predominantly framed through institutional and economic priorities.

The study also highlights the significant role of intertextuality within Malaysian digital education policies. References to UNESCO frameworks, OECD standards, and international digital competency models function as mechanisms of institutional legitimisation and global alignment. These intertextual strategies position Malaysia as a technologically progressive nation capable of participating within international educational and economic systems. However, the strong emphasis on global benchmarking may simultaneously marginalise local educational realities, socio-cultural diversity, and contextual pedagogical needs. The findings therefore suggest an important tension between international alignment and locally responsive educational governance within Malaysian digital policy discourse.

Perhaps most importantly, the study concludes that structural inequalities and implementation challenges remain significantly underrepresented within official policy narratives. Issues such as rural-urban digital disparities, unequal infrastructural access, teacher workload, disability inclusion, digital surveillance, and socio-economic inequality receive comparatively limited attention throughout the analysed documents. These discursive silences contribute to highly optimistic representations of digital transformation that foreground innovation, efficiency, and competitiveness while backgrounding structural limitations and contextual complexities. As a result, policy discourse risks constructing an idealised vision of educational digitalisation that inadequately reflects the realities experienced across diverse Malaysian educational contexts.

The study contributes to existing scholarship in several important ways. First, it extends Critical Discourse Analysis research within Southeast Asian educational policy contexts, an area that remains comparatively underexplored in contemporary EdTech scholarship. Second, the research contributes to critical digital policy studies by demonstrating how language functions ideologically within national educational transformation agendas. Third, the study provides a context-specific examination of how global technological narratives are localised and institutionalised within Malaysia’s socio-political environment. By focusing on linguistic representation, modality, intertextuality, and discursive positioning, the research highlights the importance of examining educational policies not only as administrative documents but also as ideological texts that shape institutional authority, educational priorities, and public perceptions of technological progress.

The findings also carry important implications for policymakers and educational stakeholders. Future digital education policies should move beyond technologically deterministic narratives and engage more critically with issues of equity, pedagogical diversity, and contextual implementation challenges. Greater attention should be given to teacher agency, collaborative educational decision-making, and the socio-cultural dimensions of digital learning. Policymakers should also acknowledge the uneven realities of digital access and infrastructural readiness across Malaysian educational contexts to ensure that digital transformation does not unintentionally reproduce existing inequalities.

Overall, this study demonstrates that Malaysian national education policies construct EdTech as a strategic instrument of economic modernisation, institutional governance, and national progress. However, the dominance of technological optimism, neoliberal rationality, and technocratic discourse may limit critical engagement with the broader educational, cultural, and social implications of digital transformation. A more balanced and context-sensitive approach to digital education policy is therefore necessary to ensure that technological reform supports not only economic development but also educational inclusivity, pedagogical autonomy, and socially responsive learning environments within Malaysia’s evolving educational landscape.

## References

- [1] N. Selwyn, *Should robots replace teachers? AI and the future of education*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2022.
- [2] B. Williamson and R. Eynon, "The datafied child: Education, data and digital capitalism," *Learning, Media and Technology*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 251–264, 2020.
- [3] F. Macgilchrist, *Education, digitalization and democracy: Global, national and local processes*. London, England: Routledge, 2021.
- [4] A. Kaur and B. E. Wong, "Digital learning in Malaysian schools: Challenges and policy implications," *Malaysian Journal of Learning and Instruction*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 209–233, 2021.
- [5] N. A. Rahim and H. Hashim, "Teachers’ readiness for digital learning: A Malaysian perspective," *Asian Journal of University Education*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 312–326, 2022.
- [6] R. Wodak and M. Meyer, *Methods of critical discourse studies*. London, England: Sage, 2020.
- [7] B. Williamson, *Datafication of education: Big data, technology & the future of learning*. London, England: Routledge, 2022.
- [8] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Education in the digital age: Healthy and safe learning environments*. Paris, France: OECD Publishing, 2020.

- [9] S. a. C. O. United Nations Educational, *Global education monitoring report 2023: Technology in education*. Paris, France: UNESCO Publishing, 2023.
- [10] N. Fairclough, *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London, England: Longman, 1995.
- [11] C. Perrotta and S. Gray, *The politics of education and technology: Conflicts, controversies, and connections*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- [12] ASEAN Secretariat, "ASEAN digital masterplan 2025," ASEAN, Retrieved: <https://asean.org>. 2021.
- [13] O. Zawacki-Richter, V. I. Marín, M. Bond, and F. Gouverneur, "Systematic review of research on artificial intelligence applications in higher education—where are the educators?," *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, vol. 16, no. 1, p. 39, 2019.
- [14] R. Breeze, *Critical discourse analysis and its critics*. In J. Flowerdew & J. Richardson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of critical discourse studies*. London, England: Routledge, 2019.
- [15] T. Van Leeuwen, *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008.