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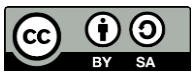

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Enhancing Critical Media Ethics in EFL Classrooms through Fake News Deconstruction, Narrative Reframing, and Editorial Simulation

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Abstract
This study explored how integrating fake news deconstruction, narrative reframing, and editorial simulation can enhance critical media ethics in EFL classrooms. The research involved 30 English education students in North Sumatra who participated in an eight-week task-based curriculum. The lessons positioned English learning not only as a language skill but also as a platform for ideological awareness and ethical responsibility. Drawing on systemic functional linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and appraisal theory, students engaged in rewriting distorted headlines, clarifying vague attributions, and realigning mismatched visuals and captions. Data were collected through student portfolios, classroom observations, and reflective writing. The findings showed that students developed greater rhetorical precision, ethical awareness, and stylistic maturity. They transformed from passive media consumers into active, critical agents. By merging English instruction with civic literacy, this study offers a replicable model for ethical pedagogy in the digital era, highlighting truth-validation, genre critique, and linguistic agency as key goals in 21st-century EFL education.

Keywords: *Critical Language Awareness; Editorial Simulation; EFL Pedagogy; Fake News Deconstruction; Media Ethics; Narrative Reframing.*

Introduction

Introducing media ethics into English language education has become increasingly essential as misinformation proliferates alongside the rapid expansion of digital media content. Stamps (2024) highlights the urgent need for *"information disorder*" literacy in educational environments, yet English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula rarely offer structured engagement with the ethical dimensions of media discourse. Consequently, learners are often left unprepared to interpret the manipulative modalities, misleading visuals, and ideological cues embedded in contemporary news narratives. Although task-based pedagogical models such as proposed by Santikul (2024) shows that integrating media analysis can enhance critical thinking, they frequently fall short in addressing the layered multimodality of headlines, captions, and data visualizations. In Indonesia alone, over 1,500 hoaxes were recorded in 2023, with significant implications for youth literacy and civic engagement.

This study responds to that gap by introducing a pedagogical model combining fake news deconstruction, narrative reframing, and editorial simulation to cultivate learners' discursive awareness and rhetorical responsibility. For instance, Stevani (2024) exposes how speculative modal verbs like "*could spark outrage*" create lexical illusions that demand linguistic decoding. Similarly, recent misinformation regarding climate change and satire misinterpretation (Husain et al., 2024) underscores the need for ethically anchored instruction in ELT. To meet this need, the proposed pedagogical model offers a theoretically grounded and adaptable framework to see the classroom as a site for cultivating civic and media literacies through structured and theory-informed tasks in tackling the ethical-linguistic challenges of the post-truth era.

This intervention is built on a theoretically grounded framework that integrates critical and linguistic perspectives to inform pedagogical design. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis highlights how passive constructions in media obscure agency and deflect institutional accountability (Jenkins & Yao, 2025). Supporting this, Alisoy (2025) argues that syntactic vagueness systematically protects dominant groups from critique. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics emphasizes how modality signals speaker judgment, a crucial skill in identifying bias (Jesudas, 2025).

In visual communication, Kress and van Leeuwen show how images and captions jointly frame meaning and emotion (Thamae & Lihotetso, 2024). Martin and White's Appraisal Theory reveals how evaluative language, especially emotive adjectives in headlines, ideologically positions readers (Nanavaratorn, 2025). Similarly, Van Leeuwen's legitimation strategies explain how unsourced numbers lend false authority (Thamae & Lihotetso, 2024). Hyland's stance model stresses the importance of attribution clarity, warning against vague labels like *"experts say"* (Smirnova & Perez-Guerra, 2025). Collectively, these frameworks form the

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foundation for tasks that promote multimodal critique and ethical language use.

A concrete and verifiable example of the dangers of fake news in Indonesia occurred during the 2024 General Election, when a viral video falsely claimed that ballot boxes stored in a warehouse in Central Jakarta had been tampered with by election officials. The video, circulated widely on WhatsApp and TikTok in February 2024, showed unopened boxes being moved and was captioned *"Kecurangan Pemilu Terbukti!"* (Election Fraud Proven!). The Election Supervisory Board (Bawaslu) and General Elections Commission (KPU) quickly responded, confirming the video was misleading, showing only routine logistics preparation at GOR Kuningan, not evidence of vote-rigging.

The hoax prompted unnecessary public outrage and even sparked a small protest at the site, demonstrating how visual misinformation can escalate civic tension and erode trust in democratic processes (Hidayat, 2024). Kominfo's official fact-check report, published on February 15, 2024, states: *"Video tersebut telah disunting secara menyesatkan dan tidak menggambarkan kejadian kecurangan. Proses pemindahan logistik telah sesuai prosedur dan dikawal petugas resmi."* This case illustrates the urgent need for EFL learners to critically analyze captions, visual framing, and modal claims within public texts. It highlights how narrative manipulation, especially when presented through seemingly authentic footage can influence public perception, and why ethical media engagement must be embedded in language instruction.

Lu et al. (2024) argue that civic and ethical literacies should be central to language education. This is supported by Stevani et al. (2024) who highlight the absence of visual-textual analysis in ELT. While Tamboer et al. (2024) show that task-based instruction enhances fluency and complexity, it often overlooks ethical reasoning. Similarly, Chan (2024) emphasizes the importance of decoding satire in journalism education, though this has yet to influence ELT. Wu (2024) finds that rewriting tasks improve critical numeracy but do not address ideological reconstruction. In response, this study introduces a triadic model: fake news deconstruction, narrative synthesis, and editorial simulation to design ethically grounded and theory-informed tasks for intermediate EFL learners. This model addresses a clear gap by integrating multimodal analysis with ethical engagement in language learning.

Recent examples from Indonesian and global media reveal how learners can benefit from this model. Headlines such as *"Zelensky says the battle for Donbas has begun"* by BBC in 2022 presents speech as fact although it omits modal cues. Learners trained in modality revise it to reflect journalistic neutrality. The caption *"Refugees Storm Border Fence"* by BBC in 2023 exaggerates agency, especially when it appears with static images which shows the importance of maintaining coherence between visual and textual elements. Statements like *"Thousands protest government decision"* often lack attribution by using inflated figures to imply

legitimacy without evidence. Satirical headlines such as *"President Awards Himself Medal"* by Jakarta Globe require contextual literacy to avoid misinterpreting irony as fact. Through editorial simulations, students learn to rewrite such headlines ethically, for example, *"Officials estimate 1,200 people demonstrated peacefully."* These tasks go beyond linguistic correction as they foster narrative responsibility while promoting ethical awareness in learners.

Although ELT and media literacy increasingly intersect, most programs still lack a cohesive curriculum that integrates multimodal analysis, narrative synthesis, and ethical critique. While Nash et al. (2024) advocate for multimodal literacy, they offer no structured rewriting model grounded in critical linguistics. Similarly, Islentyeva's et al. (2024) work on advertising critique promotes civic discourse but lacks ethical depth and editorial realism. Responding to these gaps, this study proposes an eight-week curriculum combining discourse analysis, caption decoding, stance evaluation, and statistical reframing through scaffolded editorial tasks. Building on the concerns, the framework emphasizes both rhetorical precision and ethical reasoning in 21st-century ELT.

Empirical evidence further supports this model. Fact-checkers like PolitiFact and FactCheck.org identify vague attribution, modal distortion, and numerical exaggeration as frequent misinformation tactics. Coverage of Brexit and Jakarta's 2022 floods reveals common issues such as source omission and emotional framing (Muhhit, 2025). Schmidt & Meir (2024) found that student engagement increases when learners gain editorial agency through rewriting. This study builds on her work by linking rewriting practices with critical discourse analysis and ethical reflection. The curriculum also aligns with UNESCO's call for digitally literate and discerning media users. Together, these findings support reimagining ELT classrooms as participatory spaces that foster editorial responsibility and ethical media engagement.

While existing studies have explored the integration of media texts into English language teaching, particularly for promoting critical thinking, digital literacy, or genre analysis, few, if any, have systematically embedded *ethical media critique* into *task-based language instruction*. Most ELT interventions treat media content as a source of vocabulary, grammar input, or discussion prompts, without engaging students in *editorial-level rewriting tasks* that directly confront issues of misinformation, manipulation, or ideological framing. Moreover, frameworks like Critical Discourse Analysis, Appraisal Theory, and Legitimation Strategies are often used for analysis, but rarely adapted into classroom-based and student-generated editorial simulations.

This leaves a pedagogical gap: no prior model explicitly combines fake news deconstruction, narrative reframing, and editorial rewriting into a cohesive curriculum that equips learners with both linguistic precision and ethical judgment. This study addresses that underexplored intersection by transforming

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abstract discourse theories into actionable classroom activities designed for intermediate EFL learners in contexts vulnerable to misinformation.

This study explores how ethically grounded editorial simulation tasks can enhance both linguistic competence and media awareness among intermediate EFL learners. It investigates two core questions: (1) How do learners engage with real-world media distortions through deconstruction and narrative reconstruction? (2) What rhetorical and linguistic strategies do they use to reframe distorted content into ethical alternatives? Data were triangulated from rewritten texts, reflective journals, and classroom observations to trace learning progression. Unlike studies that separate language, ethics, and media; this study integrates them into a cohesive, practice-based framework. It moves beyond traditional pedagogy by embedding ethical critique directly into language instruction.

This study contributes to applied linguistics, critical pedagogy, and media ethics by positioning appraisal theory, legitimation, and transitivity not just as analytical tools but as instruments for classroom intervention. It answers Chang & Kabilan's (2024) call for participatory digital literacies by using student-produced editorial portfolios as tools for both assessment and reflection. Consistent with Nguyen & Hekman (2024), it reframes the ELT classroom as an editorial lab where learners examine truth, critique bias, and develop expressive precision. For curriculum designers, this approach offers a scalable, theory-based model for integrating ethical reasoning into language learning. It is adaptable across proficiency levels while maintaining conceptual depth.

Ultimately, the study shows that ethically oriented editorial simulations support learners' growth from functional literacy to epistemic agility and civic fluency. Its innovation lies in merging critical discourse analysis, applied rewriting, and narrative synthesis into structured and assessable practices. In today's media-saturated and algorithm-driven world, the ability to ethically interpret and reconstruct public texts is a vital democratic skill. ELT must evolve beyond communicative fluency to include interpretive justice and ideological awareness. Integrating media ethics into English education equips learners not only with language skills but with the critical capacity to act as informed and responsible participants in a complex information society.

Method

This study employed a qualitative, classroom-based design situated within a critical-interpretive framework to explore how editorial simulation tasks can enhance ethical media engagement among EFL learners. Grounded in critical pedagogy, the approach views English language learning not as isolated grammar practice but as a vehicle for ideological critique and civic literacy (Methila et al., 2024). The approach focused on authentic media texts that contain epistemic ethical and rhetorical complexities. It encouraged students to deconstruct critique

and reconstruct distorted representations found in real-world news. The study was both analytical and interventionist as it examined students' developing ethical-linguistic awareness while reshaping their interpretive practices through scaffolded editorial simulations. It was grounded in the belief that ethical language use is inseparable from democratic literacy, and that English learning must address how truth, bias, and responsibility circulate in discourse.

The participants were 30 third-year university students (aged 20–23; 11 males and 19 females) enrolled in undergraduate programs at two private institutions in North Sumatra, Indonesia: *Universitas Sari Mutiara Indonesia* (Communication Science) and *Universitas Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia* (English Education). All participants were pre-service teachers with CEFR B1–B2 proficiency, most at pre-intermediate level, and had prior exposure to basic concepts of media and critical literacy. They were purposively selected for their familiarity with key concepts and their readiness to engage with multimodal news texts. Their dual role as learners and future educators made them well-suited for exploring the ethical dimensions of language and pedagogy.

The materials included 30 real news articles published between 2022 and 2025, sourced from both global and national outlets such as *BBC News, CNN Indonesia, Jakarta Globe, The Jakarta Post, Reuters,* and *VOA News.* These texts were selected based on common ethically problematic features in journalism, such as agent deletion via passive voice, vague attribution, unverified numerical claims, emotionally charged or exaggerated headlines, misaligned photo captions, and satirical headlines that blurred the line between humor and misinformation.

Each dimension was analyzed using established frameworks: Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics is used to analyze modality and transitivity (Jesudas, 2025), Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on uncovering ideology (Yousaf & Ahmed, 2025), van Leeuwen's legitimation theory examines authority and the use of statistics (Thamae & Lihotetso, 2024), Martin and White's Appraisal Theory explores tone and evaluation (Nanavaratorn, 2025), while Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal grammar (Qadees et al., 2025) is applied to analyze the coherence between captions and images.

The intervention lasted eight weeks, involving two 90-minute sessions per week. Each class included 15 students, and the researchers as the instructors received prior training in critical discourse analysis, multimodal literacy, and ethical reasoning through a four-week workshop facilitated by the researchers, as outlined below.

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Table 1. Instructional Procedures

Week	Focus Area	Task Type	News Example
1	Headline modality	Headline rewriting	*"Battle for Donbas has begun: Zelensky says" (BBC News, April 19, 2022)*
2	Agentive vagueness	Passive-to-active reconstruction	*"Flooded Street Injures Pedestrian" (Jakarta Post, December 17, 2022)*
3	Numerical distortion	Statistical reframing	*"Thousands of Online Drivers and Couriers Plan Protest in Jakarta" (Jakarta Globe, August 29, 2024)*
4	Caption misalignment	Visual-textual analysis	*"Panic After Stadium Stampede" (Jakarta Globe, October 1, 2022)*
5	Biased editorial voice	Appraisal-neutral rewriting	*"Angry Mob Clashes with Police" (Jakarta Post, May 15, 2024)*
6	Source ambiguity	Attribution clarification	*"Pressure mounts on South Korea's milk producers to cut prices" (Jakarta Post, July 18, 2023)*
7	Intertextual contradiction	Narrative synthesis	*"Thousands of people rallied in Indonesia's biggest cities" (Reuters, September 6, 2022) vs. "Hundreds of conservative Muslims marched in Indonesia's capital" (VOA News, September 12, 2022)*
8	Political satire	Satire decoding and factual restatement	*"President Awards Self Medal" (Jakarta Globe, February 2025)*

A pilot pre-test was administered to assess baseline awareness of media ethics and discourse features. Participants rewrote two unmodified headlines and were interviewed briefly to establish starting points. This helped shape the sequencing of tasks. Then, each session began with a discourse analysis mini-lecture led by the instructor, followed by small-group tasks that required rewriting or reframing the texts. Afterward, students individually wrote commentaries explaining their choices, drawing on class discussions and relevant theoretical frameworks. Weekly outputs were compiled into cumulative portfolios containing the original text, the ethically revised version, and a reflective justification. These iterative tasks helped students move beyond surface-level edits to deeper epistemic engagement with meaning, bias, and credibility.

Data collection drew on three main sources: (1) approximately 180 rewriting outputs, (2) student commentaries on linguistic strategies and ethical motivations (240+ entries), and (3) field observations, including audio recordings and instructor-researcher field notes. Observations focused on group interactions,

emerging ethical dilemmas, and how students navigated linguistic and ideological challenges. All data were anonymized using student-generated IDs, and confidentiality and research ethics were strictly upheld.

A thematic analysis was applied to student-generated data using structured, theory-informed coding (Saad, 2025). The researcher, a lecturer with an academic background in English education, initially identified ethical-linguistic issues in the original media texts such as vague attribution, numerical exaggeration, and satirical distortion. Student responses were then categorized by their corrective strategies, including restoring agency, clarifying evidence, and adjusting modality. These shifts reflected growing ethical awareness and progressed from basic revisions to more principled theory-based reformulations. Triangulation across texts, commentaries, and observations enhanced reliability by confirming consistency between intentions and linguistic outcomes.

To ensure trustworthiness, credibility was supported by member checking where students reviewed interpretations of their work. Dependability was established through detailed documentation of instructional steps, coding processes, and analytic decisions. Transferability was enhanced through rich contextual descriptions of participants, instructional routines, and task types. Confirmability was ensured via an audit trail of researcher reflections and methodological records. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and all students gave informed consent with the right to withdraw at any time. All instructional texts were publicly available and framed within critical literacy and ethical reasoning objectives.

Results

1. Disinformation and Headline Semiotics: Lexical Illusions in News Titles

Table 2. Modal Verbs and Misinterpretation in News Headlines

Headline Source & Date	Modal Lexis Used	Student Observation	Students' Rewrite (Post-Test)
"Battle for Donbas has begun: Zelensky says" (BBC News, April 19, 2022)	"says"	Interpreted as statement of fact, not speaker's claim	"Zelensky says fight has started."
"Counter-offensive actions have begun, Zelensky says" (BBC News, June 10, 2023)	"have begun" (reported speech)	Reader may accept claim as verified fact	"Zelensky says the attack started."
"Battle for Donbas region has begun, says Zelensky" (BBC News, April 15, 2022)	"has begun" + "says"	Confuses reader: speaker claim seen as confirmed	"Zelensky says Donbas battle has started."

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"Expert eases worries over Jakarta's fuel tax increase" Jakarta Globe, March 4, 2025	"eases worries" (expert says)	Suggests reassurance as fact, not opinion	"Expert says fuel tax hike will not hurt much."
"Heavy rain has triggered mass evacuations, officials warn" (BBC News, April 16, 2022)	"warn"	Warning framed as inevitable fact	"Officials warn heavy rain may cause floods."

The semantic ambiguity in modal constructions such as *"says," "warn,"* and *"has begun"* demonstrates how headlines subtly blur the boundary between subjective claim and objective truth. This aligns with the notion of synthetic personalization as proposed by Fairclough in 1995, where public discourse mimics factual immediacy while remaining ideologically framed. In the examples above, students misread modality-laden headlines as definitive statements rather than reported assertions, especially when verbs like *"says"* and *"warns"* are strategically positioned to simulate epistemic certainty. One student reflected, *"I always thought that when a news headline said something like 'Zelensky says the battle has started,' it meant the battle really started, not that it was just his opinion. After the lesson, I realized the difference is really important because it affects how we judge the truth."* This response illustrates a shift from passive consumption to active interpretation, reinforcing the importance of attribution positioning.

This misinterpretation aligns with Halliday's interpersonal metafunction, where modal verbs encode the speaker's stance but are often recontextualized by news media to convey institutional authority. For example, the headline *"Battle for Donbas has begun: Zelensky says"* prioritizes the event while relegating the attribution which leads readers to treat a political claim as confirmed fact. Saidova & Tursunova (2024) argue that such lexical choices manipulate mental models by inflating epistemic weight without explicit falsehood.

Students' rewrites such as *"Zelensky says the attack started"* reflect a move toward epistemic transparency, where attribution is foregrounded and speculation is linguistically marked. This reflects the principles outlined in Martin and White's Appraisal Theory of 2005, particularly in its engagement framework that signals the degree of commitment to a proposition (Nanavaratorn, 2025). Similarly, the headline *"Officials warn heavy rain has triggered evacuations"* was revised to *"Officials warn heavy rain may cause floods"*, repositioning speculation as possibility rather than certainty. Another student noted, *"When I changed the headline to say 'may cause floods,' I felt more responsible because I didn't make people panic. It's not honest to say something already happened if it's just a warning."* This comment reflects growing linguistic ethics: the awareness that word choice carries consequence, especially in contexts of public communication.

Through this deconstruction-reconstruction process, students internalized how modal lexis functions ideologically in media discourse. By neutralizing predictive tones and clarifying evidential status, they not only improved syntactic competence but also developed ethical awareness. This enabled them to engage with media texts as critical readers and responsible communicators.

2. Referential Incoherence and Implicit Actor Bias

Table 3. Passive Constructions and Hidden Agents in News Headlines

Headline Source & Date	Phrase	Passive Form	Agent Elided	Students' Rewrite (Post-Test)
"Flooded Street Injures Pedestrian" (Jakarta Post, December 17, 2022)	"Pedestrian injured in flooded street"	Passive	No agent	"Car hit a pedestrian on the flooded street."
"Inflasi Bikin Pusing Bank Sentral" (CNN Indonesia, July 17, 2022)	"Inflation hits central banks hard"	Active with agent vague ("inflation")	No human agent	"Inflation makes central banks worried."
"Houses Collapses in Jakarta Suburb" (Jakarta Post, April 10, 2022)	"Building collapses after heavy rain"	Active	No actor	"Heavy rain causes the houses to collapse."
"*Stagnasi Ekonomi Dicatat"* (CNN Indonesia, February 2025)	"Economy stagnated"	Passive	No agent	"The government reported that the economy stagnated."
"Commodity downturn to eat into state revenue" (Jakarta Post, June 26, 2023)	"Downturn eats into state revenue"	Active	No agent	"Lower prices make state revenue drop."
"*Indonesia alami deflasi selama 4 bulan"* (CNN Indonesia, September 3, 2024)	"Deflation experienced for four months"	Passive	No agent	"BPS says Indonesia has deflation for four months."

The analysis of referential incoherence in passive and agent-elided constructions reveals how language subtly obscures responsibility and weakens epistemic clarity in news discourse. Headlines such as "*Pedestrian injured in flooded street*" or "*Deflation experienced for four months"* suppress the agent and shift the focus away from human or institutional accountability so that the

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narrative becomes abstract and event-driven. According to Firdous et al. (2025), passivization and nominalization are discursive strategies that eliminate personal agency and thereby reduce reader engagement with the causes or responsible actors. One student noted, "*I was confused by who actually made the mistake or caused the problem. After rewriting, I saw clearly that sometimes headlines hide important actors like the government or companies."* This response shows emerging awareness of how grammatical choices can shift attention away from real sources of action.

Student rewrites restored clarity by reintroducing specific agents such as, *"A car hit a pedestrian"* or *"BPS says…"*, realigning the sentences with ethical transparency and making causal links clearer. It can be stated that critical literacy involves identifying not only what is said but also what is systematically omitted. In *"Inflation hits central banks hard"*, for instance, inflation is anthropomorphized while obscuring policy responsibility; students revised this to *"Inflation makes central banks worried"*, simplifying the agency while preserving meaning at their level. Another student reflected, *"When the sentence said 'economy stagnated', I didn't know who was responsible. But when I wrote 'The government reported…', I realized it's not just about what happened, but also who chooses to report and how."* This reflection indicates a growing understanding of discourse as a space where power and agency are framed linguistically.

The transformation of *"Economy stagnated"* into *"The government reported that the economy stagnated"* shows how passive forms can mislead, especially when reporting structural issues. Here, Critical Discourse Analysis (Riduansyah et al., 2024) explains how syntactic choices serve ideological purposes, and student revisions act as counter-strategies to rhetorical omission.

Across six examples, students began to recognize agent deletion as a form of ideological bias and practiced restoring agency to ensure textual accountability. This task not only improved their sentence construction but also encouraged critical awareness of how language conveys power and ideology. It also helped them recognize the ethical stance embedded in texts which are essential components of media literacy in EFL contexts.

3. Data Fabrication and Numerical Framing in Quantified Claims

Table 4. Ethical Reframing of Quantified Headlines in News Reports

Headline Source & Date	Quantitative Claim	Problem	Student Rewrite (Post-Test)	Ethical Impact
"Thousands of Online Drivers and Couriers Plan Protest in Jakarta"	"Thousands of online drivers and couriers plan protest"	Approximation / no exact number	"Police say about 1,200 drivers plan to protest."	Inflated magnitude

(Jakarta Globe, August 29, 2024)				
"Hundreds of Indonesians Join Global Rally Demanding End to Gaza Genocide" (Jakarta Globe, January 13, 202)	"Hundreds of Indonesians join global rally"	Low precision / "hundreds" unclear	"Around 300 people joined the rally."	Inflated social proof
"*5.000 Buruh SPSI Ramaikan Unjuk Rasa Hari Buruh*" (CNN Indonesia, July 17, 2023)	"5,000 workers rally on Labor Day"	Lack of context or total number	"About 5,000 workers came to the rally, police say."	Missing context
"Israel Strikes Kill 326 in Gaza" (Jakarta Globe, March 3, 2023)	"326 killed in Gaza"	Precise figure but source unclear	"UN reports 326 people were killed in Gaza."	Factual clarity

The manipulation of numerical data in journalistic discourse serves not only as rhetorical intensification, but also as a legitimizing strategy that often bypasses critical scrutiny. Headlines such as "*Thousands of Online Drivers and Couriers Plan Protest*" and "*Hundreds Join Global Rally"* show that vague approximations without clear source attribution can increase the perceived scale of an event. This reflects what van Leeuwen calls *symbolic authority*, where numbers imply legitimacy regardless of accuracy (Thamae & Lihotetso, 2024).

One student noted, *"When I first read 'thousands of drivers', I imagined a massive chaos in the city. But when I changed it to a specific number, it felt more realistic and easier to analyze."* This response illustrates how numerical framing can alter public emotion and perception of threat. By revising the quantity with clear source attribution ("Police say about 1,200…"), the student not only corrected exaggeration but restored ethical proportionality.

In another response, a student explained, *"Writing 'UN reports 326 people were killed' felt more responsible because now the reader can trace where the data came from. Just saying 326 without a source makes it look like opinion, not fact."* This reflects growing awareness of how verifiability and source transparency serve as ethical pillars in media discourse.

In revising these headlines, students applied interpretive judgment by adding explicit sources such as, *"Police say about 1,200 drivers…"* and refining vague quantities into grounded estimates. These rewrites improve statistical framing and reinforce ethical transparency. As Arwanto et al. (2024) argue, quantification in

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media often operates ideologically to present partial truths under a guise of objectivity. Replacing "*hundreds"* with "*around 300"* provides a verifiable reference point that encourages critical inquiry instead of general assumptions. However the statement "*326 killed in Gaza*" although numerically specific does not include any source which weakens its verifiability. Students addressed this by revising it as *"UN reports 326 people were killed…"* to restore both clarity and institutional traceability. This reflects on warning against the ethical risks of decontextualized figures in public narratives (Husnussalam & Yana, 2024).

Through these revisions, students combined statistical literacy and ethical responsibility and demonstrated that quantified claims are not neutral but are discursively constructed to influence perception. This practice not only enhances linguistic accuracy but also builds critical awareness of how language, numbers, and sources interact to either clarify or obscure truth in media discourse.

4. Editorial Voice and Framing Language in Opinion Columns

Table 5. Reframing Biased Language in Editorial Headlines

Headline Source & Date	Biased Term	Student Rewrite (Post-Test)	Ideological Shift
"For Humanitarian Reasons Only" (Jakarta Post, April 15, 2025)	"Only"	"We must act for help"	Removes exclusive moral imperative
"Not-a-Party Official" (Jakarta Post, May 29, 2023)	Implication of denial	"He is not just a party official"	Removes cynicism
"Borrowed Standards, Buried Sovereignty" (Jakarta Post, May 19, 2025)	Metaphor "buried"	"Our standards may hide our rights"	Softens dramatic tone
"Priceless Waters" (Jakarta Post, January 23, 2025)	"Priceless"	"Sea and coast are very important"	Replaces hyperbole with value
"Climate Change: Why We Need the Financial Sector to Act" (Jakarta Post, August 23, 2023)	"Need"	"We ask banks to help with climate change"	Shifts demand to request

Editorial discourse often uses evaluative intensifiers, metaphors, and modal imperatives to express ideological stance and guide readers' interpretation through subtle linguistic framing rather than through explicit argumentation. In the headlines from The Jakarta Post that were analyzed biased terms such as "*only," "need*" and "*priceless"* function as inscribed attitudes and they present value-laden claims as if they were absolute truths. Students' simplified rewrites at the pre-intermediate level demonstrate a key ideological shift from assertive persuasion to

ethically responsible suggestion.

For example the phrase *"For Humanitarian Reasons Only"* presents a single moral justification which eliminates other possible perspectives. Rewriting it as *"We must act for help"* removes exclusivity and invites dialogic openness. One student reflected, *"I felt the word 'only' makes it sound like no other view matters, so I changed it to something that includes more reasons to help."* This suggests that learners begin to see how even small lexical choices can shape moral framing.

Similarly, the metaphor *"buried sovereignty"* in *"Borrowed Standards, Buried Sovereignty"* dramatizes national loss through figurative language. The student version *"Our standards may hide our rights"* still expresses concern although it reduces the emotional intensity which reflects on the concept of de-ideologized critique (Qowim & Degaf, 2024). Another student noted, *"I didn't want it to sound like everything is lost. 'May hide' gives more space for thinking, not just blaming."* This change shows growing awareness of tone, implication, and fairness in editorial framing.

In another case, replacing *"need"* with *"ask"* in a climate-related headline shifts the tone from institutional urgency to cooperative appeal. This transformation aligns with Hyland's 2005 stance framework as it demonstrates how hedging and boosting regulate the speaker's degree of commitment and maintain politeness within discourse (Smirnova & Perez-Guerra, 2025). Through such revisions, students learned how language implies obligation or blame without direct coercion.

Overall, the task reveals how editorial headlines function as compact ideological texts, shaping thought through seemingly neutral language. By reconstructing them, students developed both linguistic agency and critical reading skills: learning that ethical communication is not about silencing opinion but expressing it with clarity and fairness.

5. Visual Rhetoric and Photo Caption Distortion in News Layouts

Table 6. Caption Bias and Student-Led Revisions in News Image

Caption Source & Date	Visual Detail	Misalignment Type	Student Rewrite (Post-Test)
"Refugees Storm Border Fence" (BBC News, February 28, 2023)	Refugees shown standing quietly	Exaggerated action	"Refugees wait near the border fence"
"Panic After Stadium Stampede" (Jakarta Globe, October 1, 2022	Image shows people exiting calmly	Sensationalism	"People leave the stadium after the game"
"Angry Mob Clashes with Police" (Jakarta Post, May	Protesters holding placards, no	Stereotyping	"People protest with signs in

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

15, 2024)	violence		front of police"
"Violent Encounter During Labor Protest" (CNN Indonesia, August 5, 2023)	Police pointing batons at seated workers	Provocation masking	"Police talk to workers at protest site"
"Chaos in Downtown Jakarta as March Escalates" (Jakarta Globe, November 22, 2023)	Empty street with a few scattered people	Misleading spatial cue	"Street quiet after morning protest ends"

Though brief, news captions carry significant semiotic weight, especially when paired with emotionally charged images. The examples show how mismatches between caption and image can distort narratives and exaggerate events. As Kress and van Leeuwen in 2006 explain captions like *"Refugees Storm Border Fence"* intensify action even when images show passivity which creates what Alejandro & Zhao (2024) call anchorage distortion where text directs biased interpretation. For example in "*Panic After Stadium Stampede"* calm spectators contradict the sensational caption and this illustrates what Alejandro & Zhao (2024) terms strategic dramatization used to increase emotional impact. One student reflected, *"The caption made me think there was a riot, but after seeing the image, I realized it was just a peaceful crowd walking out. I changed the sentence to avoid exaggeration and focus on what's visible."* Likewise, calling peaceful demonstrators an *"Angry Mob"* reflects discursive stereotyping and it reinforces negative frames without visual evidence. Students' pre-intermediate revisions such as *"People protest with signs in front of police"* aim to neutralize ideological wording and restore descriptive balance so they align with ethical semiotic practices.

The caption *"Violent Encounter"*accompanied by an image of seated workers facing police illustrates provocation masking as institutional aggression is concealed in order to preserve the appearance of authority. Another student commented, *"It looked like the police were the ones being aggressive, but the caption blamed the workers. I wanted the new sentence to reflect who was actually doing what."* Likewise, *"Chaos in Downtown Jakarta"* demonstrates spatial inflation since minor gatherings are textually expanded so they seem like major unrest. Students' rewrites show an increasing awareness of visual-verbal coherence. This aspect is essential in developing critical multimodal literacy. As they identified and corrected biased framings, they demonstrated an understanding of how visual and verbal texts construct ideology. This supports the argument by Putland et al. (2025) that captions act as silent yet powerful narrators of truth, conflict, and authority.

6. Citation Manipulation and Unverified Attributions in News Sources

Table 7. Vague Attributions and Citation Issues in News Headlines

Headline Source & Date	Claim	Citation Phrase	Problematic Feature	Student Rewrite (Post-Test)
Commodity downturn to eat into state revenue (Jakarta Post, June 26, 2023)	"The moderation of commodity prices is inevitable."	"is inevitable" (by ministry)	General "ministry" no name	"The Finance Ministry says prices will likely be smaller."
Pressure mounts on South Korea's milk producers to cut prices (Jakarta Post, July 18, 2023)	"Price hikes … are inevitable if raw milk rises, say local dairy company officials."	"say local dairy company officials"	Vague "officials"	"Dairy company people say milk prices will go up."
How AI could upend the world … (Jakarta Post, March 20, 2023)	"OpenAI says it plans to build AGI gradually … but … safety flaws."	"OpenAI says"	Relies only on company statement	"OpenAI says they will make AI safe step by step."
Stormy season for Asian tech behemoths (Jakarta Post, December 21, 2022)	"Experts believe poor year for start-ups due to external factors."	"Experts believe"	No expert names or affiliations	"Some experts say start-ups had a hard year."
Bahaya Deflasi… "Ahli ekonomi mengatakan deflasi bisa turunkan pekerja" (Economic expert says deflation may lower jobs) (CNN Indonesia, April 2022)	"*Ahli ekonomi mengatakan deflasi bisa turunkan pekerja."*	"*Ahli ekonomi mengatakan*" (economic expert says)	"*Ahli"* unspecified	"A local economic expert says fewer people might lose jobs."
RI factories struggle… (Jakarta	"Inflation remained	Passive construction,	Who said "manageable"?	"The report says inflation

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

Post, September 12, 2022)	manageable … were produced with inputs brought in earlier."	no clear source	was not too high last months."

The use of vague or unverifiable sources in journalism shows a pattern of citation manipulation that builds credibility and authority subtly. Expressions such as *"experts believe" "say local officials"* and *"the ministry says*" function as attributional hedges (Smirnova & Perez-Guerra, 2025) because they create an illusion of evidence while avoiding direct responsibility. This reduces epistemic transparency especially when the identity or context of the source is missing which reflects Bakry's (2025) concern about anonymous authority. For example a headline in the Jakarta Post in 2023 states that something "*is inevitable*" and vaguely attributes the statement to "*the ministry"* which falsely strengthens certainty. The student's revision identifies the source as "*Finance Ministry*" and changes the statement to *"likely be smaller"* which shifts the tone from certainty to caution. This reflects critical media pedagogy where students learn to identify boosters that conceal unverified claims. One student reflected, *"When the article just said 'the ministry,' I didn't know if it was Finance or Trade. It felt too strong. So I changed it to 'Finance Ministry says it may go lower,' because now we know who said it and that it's not 100%."* This response shows growing awareness of attribution precision and the importance of hedging to reflect uncertainty.

Likewise, the phrase "*local dairy company officials*" is not specific which allows ideological bias to appear under professional authority. The student's revision "*Dairy company people say…"* deliberately reduces institutional power which illustrates van Leeuwen's idea of rhetorical de-legitimation (Thamae & Lihotetso, 2024). In the OpenAI example corporate self-citation creates a risk of biased narrative. The original text shows institutional confidence while the student rewrite adds a sense of caution and avoids uncritical repetition which is an issue often discussed in critiques of techno-optimism. Another student noted, *"I didn't trust the AI article because it just said OpenAI said something. I rewrote it so the sentence looks more like a step, not a promise, and I didn't want readers to think OpenAI was perfect."* This shows ethical reasoning in evaluating institutional claims and balancing tone.

By clarifying vague expressions like "*experts believe"* or "*ahli ekonomi mengatakan"* through specific context or hedging, students can reduce rhetorical exaggeration and promote interpretive responsibility. This supports critical citation literacy (Makhloufi, 2025) which emphasizes the need to evaluate not only what is cited but also who says it, how it is said, and why. The exercise

demonstrates the ethical importance of attribution since student revisions show a shift toward evidence-based reporting that values clarity accountability and integrity.

7. Intertextual Contradiction and Policy Language Distortion

Table 8. Contrasting Media Narratives and Student Revisions

Event Line	Source A	Source B	Student Rewrite (Post-Test)
Protest scale	"Thousands of people rallied in Indonesia's biggest cities" Reuters, September 6, 2022)	"Hundreds of conservative Muslims marched in Indonesia's capital"	"Some protests had thousands of people, but one group had only hundreds."
Protester behavior	"tyres burned and some roads were blocked" (Reuters, September 6, 2022)	"Protesters waved flags and chanted slogans"	"Some protestors burned tyres, while others waved flags and shouted."
Government response	"Thousands of police were deployed across Jakarta" (AP News, September 12, 2022)	"Authorities blocked streets leading to the Presidential Palace"	"Police guarded streets and blocked roads near palace."
Image/visual detail	AP photo shows activists burning a tyre (AP News, September 12, 2022)	AP photo shows protesters in robes holding flags	"Picture shows people burning tyres. Another shows people with flags."
Protest scale	"Thousands of people rallied in big cities" (Reuters, September 6, 2022)	"Hundreds of conservative Muslims marched in capital" (VOA, September 12, 2022)	"Some protests had thousands of people, but later only hundreds marched."
Protest behavior	"Tyres burned and roads were blocked" (Reuters, September 6, 2022)	"Many waved flags and chanted slogans" (VOA, September 12, 2022)	"Some protestors burned tyres, while others waved flags and sang."
Security response	"Thousands of police were deployed" (Reuters, September 6, 2022)	"Authorities blocked streets leading to Presidential	"Police guarded streets and blocked areas near the palace."

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

		Palace" (VOA, May 22, 2022)	
Casualties	no mention	"One man died and 600 injured" (VOA, May 22, 2022)	"One person died and many people were hurt."

The analysis of intertextual contradiction between *Reuters*, *AP News*, and *VOA News* shows how lexical, visual, and numerical differences construct conflicting narratives about the same event, prompting learners to engage in discursive reconciliation. For instance, the contrast in protest scale "*thousands rallied"* versus "*hundreds marched"* illustrates magnitude framing, which according to Messaoudene (2025), can legitimize or diminish social action through selective quantification. Similarly, behavioral contrasts like "*tyres burned*" versus *"flag waving"* reveal behavioral polarity, aligning with Martin and White's *Appraisal Theory* in which lexical choices shape ideological stance (Nanavaratorn, 2025). One student noted in her reflection, *"When I first read the articles, I thought one protest was big and dangerous, and the other was peaceful and small. But when we compared both, I saw that they talked about the same event but focused on different parts. I tried to mix them fairly in my rewrite so it didn't make one side look worse than the other."* Her reflection shows early development in reconciling ideological asymmetry by recognizing lexical salience and contextual emphasis.

Institutional portrayal also differs, with *Reuters* reporting massive police deployment while *VOA* highlights selective road blockages. This reflects power obfuscation via selective reporting, where students rewrote both as *"police guarded streets and blocked roads*" to balance perspectives. Image inconsistencies such as *photos of tyre burning versus peaceful flag waving* exemplify visual anchoring (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Qadees et al., 2025), as visuals emotionally steer interpretation. Students rewrote captions to reflect both visuals accurately. Another student explained, *"It was confusing because the picture showed violence, but the text said they were peaceful. So, I changed the sentence to show both, like 'some burned tyres and others waved flags' so it doesn't give a wrong message."* This reflects growing semiotic awareness, where learners begin to detect and correct visual-textual mismatches.

Their revisions demonstrate growing competence in ethical intertextuality (Juliana et al., 2025), synthesizing conflicting accounts into balanced summaries. This critical skill is key in civic-minded language education. Students also identified discrepancies in casualty reporting: *Reuters* omitted it, while *VOA* noted one fatality and 600 injuries. This reflects selective visibility, which, as Stamboliev & Christiaens (2025) argue, manipulates public empathy by omitting harm. Students addressed this gap by integrating both: "*One person died and many people were hurt."*

In sum, this intertextual synthesis task trained students to identify ideological

bias, lexical salience (Rasheed et al., 2025), and institutional framing (Taghizadeh & Gholami, 2025). Their rewrites combined emotional and factual content, showing both epistemic vigilance and critical empathy. Through this process, learners practiced ethical English use and strengthened media literacy grounded in fair, inclusive, and responsible reporting.

8. Linguistic Satire and Ethical Boundaries in Political Humor

Table 10. Ethical Revisions of Political Satire Headlines

Satirical Headline Source & Date	Target	Satirical Strategy	Ethical Risk	Student Rewrite (Post-Test)
"Finance Minister Laughs Off Inflation" (Jakarta Globe, July 2024)	Economic administration	Irony + downplay	Trivializing inflation consequences	"Finance Minister says inflation is not a big problem."
"President Awards Self Medal" (Jakarta Globe, February 2025)	Presidential ego	Hyperbole	Vanity masking public duty	"President gives himself a medal."
"Govt Declares War on Nature" (Jakarta Post, May 2023)	Environmental policy	Personification	Simplification of ecological harm	"Government says it fights climate change."
"Virus Takes a Holiday in Bali" (CNN Indonesia, Nov 2023)	Pandemic response	Euphemism	Undermines ongoing threat	"COVID-19 cases go down during holiday."
"School Problem Solved in One Night" (Jakarta Post, August 2024)	Educational reform	Overstatement	Sets unrealistic expectations	"New school system starts quickly tomorrow."

Satirical headlines, though humorous, often carry implicit ideological critiques through exaggeration, irony, and metaphor, which can mislead readers into mistaking opinion for fact. In the five examples above, students identified and rewrote exaggerated or ironic expressions that concealed the truth behind humor. This task aligns with Jaballah's (2025) view that satire operates through "*layered*

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
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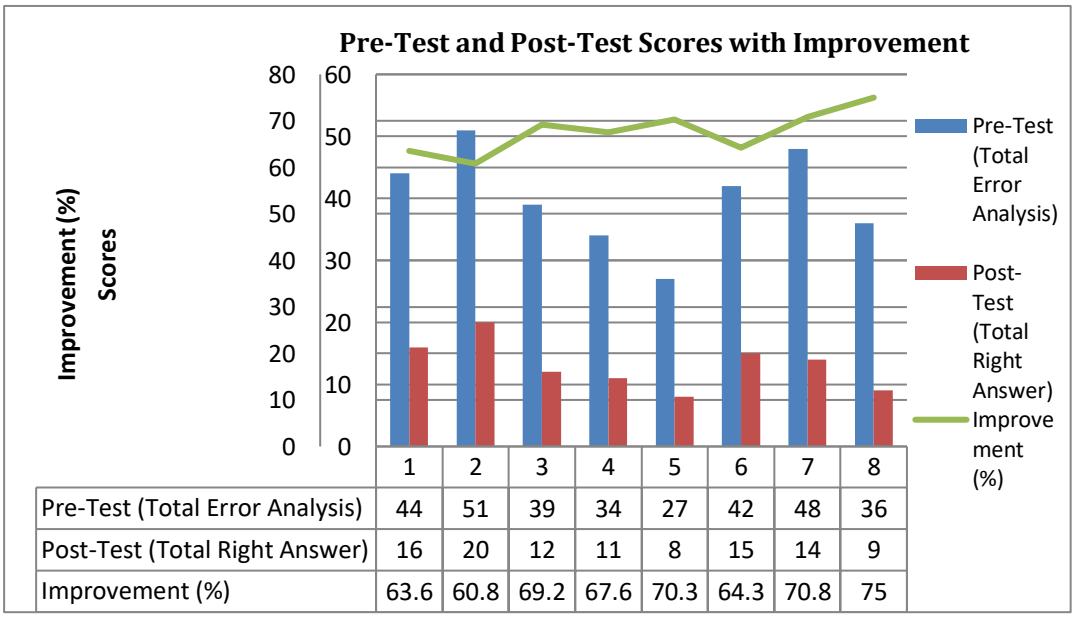
incongruity," requiring socio-pragmatic awareness that early learners may not yet possess.

For example, the headline *"Finance Minister Laughs Off Inflation"* uses irony to highlight official detachment from public hardship, but students often interpreted it literally or as dismissive of real suffering. One student commented, *"I thought the minister was really laughing on TV. But now I understand it was a way to criticize how the government didn't take it seriously."* This supports Sadaf & Iftikhar's (2025) view that satire, without proper context, may reinforce elitism. Similarly, the headline *"President Awards Self Medal"* uses hyperbole to critique vanity in leadership. A student explained, *"At first, I believed it happened because the headline looked like a real achievement. But now I know it's sarcasm to show how some leaders care too much about image."* Such expressions may foster cynicism if the rhetorical intent is not understood. This aligns with Jaballah's (2025) concern that news discourse often blurs the boundary between entertainment and information.

Students' rewrites like *"President gives himself a medal"* or *"Government says it fights climate change"* demonstrate their growing ability to neutralize affective bias and restore informational clarity. Through these revisions, they engaged with Martin and White's Appraisal Theory by differentiating between explicitly stated emotions and implied evaluations (Nanavaratorn, 2025). Ultimately, transforming satire into factual language deepens students' understanding of how humor can shape ideology. It builds ethical awareness by helping learners recognize when satire obscures truth or distorts public narratives. This is an essential skill in an era where satirical headlines often appear together with real news.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Pre-Test (Total Error Analysis)	44	51	39	34	27	42	48	36
Post-Test (Total Right Answer)	16	20	12	11	8	15	14	9
Improvement (%)	63.6	60.8	69.2	67.6	70.3	64.3	70.8	75

Figure 1. Students' Pre-test and Post-test

The data shows consistent improvement across all eight critical media literacy themes, indicating increased student ability to identify and analyze ethical-linguistic issues in news reporting. The highest gain occurred in Theme 8: Linguistic Satire and Ethical Boundaries in Political Humor, with a 75% improvement, followed by Theme 7: Intertextual Contradiction and Policy Language Distortion (70.8%) and Theme 5: Visual Rhetoric and Photo Caption Distortion (70.3%), suggesting strong progress in recognizing satire, conflicting narratives, and visual manipulation. Significant gains were also evident in Theme 3: Data Fabrication and Numerical Framing (69.2%) and Theme 4: Editorial Voice and Framing Language (67.6%), reflecting improved understanding of bias in statistical language and opinion writing. Moderate improvements in Theme 6: Citation Manipulation (64.3%), Theme 1: Disinformation and Headline Semiotics (63.6%), and Theme 2: Referential Incoherence and Implicit Actor Bias (60.8%) indicate that while students made meaningful progress, certain areas of subtle language bias and reference ambiguity remain more challenging. Overall, the results demonstrate the effectiveness of the training in enhancing ethical awareness and critical analysis of media texts.

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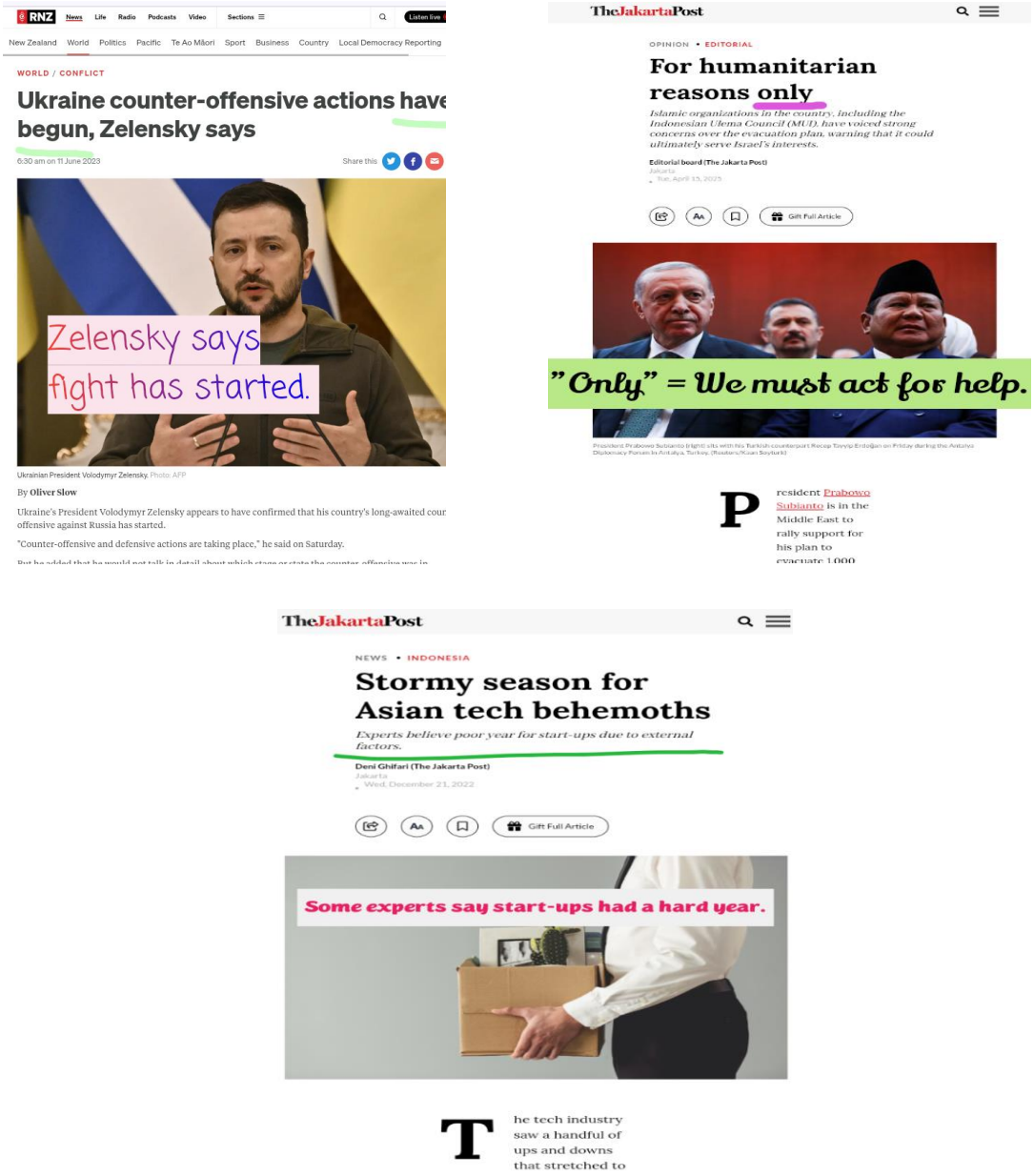

Figure 2. Samples of Students' Works

This framework synthesizes the multidimensional learning outcomes gained from integrating ethical reasoning into English media writing pedagogy. Students engaged critically with real-world news discourse through various simulation-based tasks, so they moved beyond surface comprehension and developed reflective and linguistically informed reconstruction. Activities such as headline rewriting, syntactic reformulation, numerical reframing, evaluative rewording, visual-semantic alignment, and citation refinement enabled students to ethically mediate the language of news.

Each pedagogical focus addressed a specific type of ethical-linguistic distortion to transform students from passive recipients into active and responsible editorial agents. They gained control over modality to distinguish assertion from speculation, recovered agency in passive constructions, and refined how statistical data was framed to avoid exaggeration. Students also practiced evaluative neutrality in opinion writing, corrected caption mismatches in visual rhetoric, and improved citation clarity by accurately tracing sources. By comparing intertextual contradictions and identifying distortions in policy language, they navigated the ideological variability of news genres. Analysis of satirical headlines further sharpened their ability to differentiate irony from factual reporting. The following table outlines the pedagogical framework that structured these critical transformations:

Table 11. Dimensions of Ethical Language Use and Pedagogical Strategies

Dimension	Ethical Problem	Pedagogical Task	Linguistic Strategy	Theoretical Tool
Modality	Misleading tone	Rewrite headlines	De-modalization	Systemic Functional Linguistics by Halliday (Jesudas, 2025)
Agency	Hidden actors	Rewrite passives	Transitivity analysis	Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough
Statistics	Inflated impact	Quantitative reframing	Ratio recalibration	Legitimation by van Leeuwen (Thamae & Lihotetso, 2024)
Evaluation	Biased adjectives	Neutral editorial rewriting	Appraisal balancing	Appraisal theory by Martin & White (Nanavaratorn, 2025)
Caption	Visual distortion	Caption rewriting	Image-text coherence	Visual grammar by Kress & van Leeuwen (Qadees et al., 2025)
Source	Vague citation	Attribution reform	Evidential precision	Stance framework by Hyland (Smirnova & Perez-Guerra, 2025)
Intertext	Contradictory	Synthesis	Genre	Dialogism by

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	framing	writing	triangulation	Bakhtin (Varkey et al., 2025)
Satire	Sarcasm and irony misuse	Literal rewriting of satire	Irony recognition	Stylistics of satire by Simpson (Jaballah, 2025)

Through multi-modal and multi-genre tasks, students transitioned from passive consumers of news to active ethical writers. The table above demonstrated how linguistic knowledge, ethical reasoning, and critical media analysis can be meaningfully integrated into English language pedagogy through narrative, visual, and editorial transformation tasks.

Discussion

This study shows how integrating media ethics into English learning through deconstructive reading, comparative narrative writing, and editorial simulations can enhance both linguistic competence and critical awareness. Rather than isolating language acquisition from civic discourse, the project positioned English learning as an epistemological practice. Students critically examined and rewrote distorted news texts to promote accuracy, clarity, and ethical responsibility. The findings strongly suggest that ethically informed simulation tasks empower learners to become reflective language users capable of recognizing bias and discerning truth in multimodal media. This aligns with recent study in the Indonesian context such as Hidayat (2024), which shows that critical language engagement fosters students' socio-political awareness, especially when embedded in real-time news analysis.

Throughout the tasks, students engaged with real-world news from sources like *The Jakarta Post*, *CNN Indonesia*, *BBC News*, and *Jakarta Globe*. They identified language strategies that obscure, exaggerate, distort, or trivialize meaning through grammatical suppression, vague attribution, visual overstatement, or unverifiable quantification. While rhetorical, these techniques carried ideological weight to shape how readers interpret events. Students' responses consistently reflected increased sensitivity to how linguistic form and ethical meaning interact which supports Tamboer et al. (2024), who argue that ethical media literacy involves not just evaluating sources but reworking discursive framing. Unexpectedly, several students struggled initially to distinguish between journalistic fact and commentary, particularly when analyzing opinion editorials, which required guided scaffolding and model texts.

A significant shift emerged in students' understanding of agency. When rewriting passive headlines like *"Protester Shot"* or *"Inflation Hits Families"*, they restored grammatical subjects like *"Police shot protester"* or *"Government policy led to inflation"*. This demonstrates an application of Critical Discourse Analysis

(Riduansyah et al., 2024), where syntactic choices reveal ideological positions. Using Halliday's transitivity framework (Jesudas, 2025), students observed how responsibility is distributed across clauses. This aligns with Alisoy (2025), who highlight how mainstream media often suppress syntactic responsibility which leads to depoliticized interpretations. By restoring agency, students challenged narratives that normalize or depersonalize harm. Comparable findings were observed by Arwanto et al. (2024) in their EAP journalism course in Surabaya, where students exposed to similar critical rewriting tasks developed heightened syntactic agency awareness.

The use of quantitative claims in news, often lacking numerical transparency such as in phrases like *"Thousands Protest,* or *"Over 50% Agree* which reveals another layer of discursive distortion. Students applied van Leeuwen's legitimization strategies to reframe these claims with clearer statistics and proportional context (Thamae & Lihotetso, 2024). This not only demonstrated numeracy but also rhetorical ethics by highlighting how numbers can legitimize agendas or exaggerate significance. Rewritten versions like "*Police recorded 1,200 protestors"* reflect their growing skill in critical statistical framing. This supports Husnussalam & Yana (2024) concern that numerical ambiguity in journalism weakens public trust while also hampering data literacy. In future implementations, more scaffolding may be needed for learners with lower statistical literacy, as several students defaulted to vague rewordings without proper numerical sourcing.

Students also analyzed the use of modal verbs and epistemic stance in headlines such as *"Zelensky Says War Has Begun"* or *"Officials Warn of Rain Disaster."* Their rephrasings shifted tone from certainty to probability which reflects a deeper grasp of Halliday's interpersonal metafunction. By unpacking modal illusions, students distinguished between speaker voice and factual reporting, so they improved comprehension as well as ethical writing. This mirrors Wang & Jins (2024) findings that managing modality and voice is key to metacognitive awareness in multimodal literacy. These skills proved especially useful for intermediate-level students, but less so for beginners, indicating that adaptation of modality tasks should align with proficiency level.

Visual rhetoric further contributed to this ethical awareness. Discrepancies between images and captions such as a calm crowd labeled *"Mob Breaks Fence"* led students to question the politics of photojournalism. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, they revised captions to match visual evidence to replace sensationalism with clarity (Qadees et al., 2025). These changes emphasis on visual literacy in decoding ideologically charged image-text relations, especially in digital media. Scalability of this task was evident: while upper-intermediate students made varied revisions, beginners could still identify mismatches between captions and images, showing potential for tiered application.

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In analyzing editorial and opinion discourse, students encountered emotionally charged adjectives, moral absolutism, and ideologically loaded metaphors (e.g., *"Inept response," "Shamefully slow," "Unforgivable mistake"*). Applying Martin and White's Appraisal Framework, they practiced evaluative neutrality by removing ad hominem tones and replacing judgment with evidence. This shift from exaggeration to descriptive clarity marked their growing competence in ethical stylistics and argumentative precision. It reflects that stance and engagement are central to academic and media voice, and that modeling stance-shifting fosters rhetorical maturity (Smirnova & Perez-Guerra, 2025). Unexpectedly, some students initially resisted removing strong adjectives, believing they conveyed passion; this required reframing objectivity as a rhetorical strength.

A more complex task involved identifying intertextual contradictions. For example, Reuters reported *"Thousands rallied"*, while AP News stated *"Hundreds marched."* Students learned to triangulate conflicting data, revealing biases in numerical framing. This process of reconstructing a coherent narrative demonstrated dialogic synthesis through the ability to engage competing perspectives. Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia applies here, as students read news not as neutral texts but as ideologically varied discourses (Varkey et al., 2025). These practices reflect Firdous's et al. (2025) emphasis on critical literacy, where decoding intertextual tensions becomes a core ethical skill. Future research could explore how multilingual learners resolve intertextual contradictions across English and Indonesian-language media to deepen this dialogic literacy.

Students also explored satirical headlines, analyzing irony, euphemism, and exaggeration in examples like *"President Awards Self Medal"* and *"Virus Takes Holiday."* While humorous, these texts raised ethical concerns. Learners distinguished when satire revealed injustice versus when it risked trivializing harm. By rewriting satire into factual reports, they demonstrated genre awareness and a commitment to factual-ethical clarity which supports Sadaf & Iftikhar's (2025) argument that satire should be critically taught as political discourse. Through these simulations, students evolved from reactive readers to constructive writers. Their editorial revisions showed lexical precision, syntactic control, and growing epistemic accountability. No longer accepting media as naturalized truth, they began treating it as constructed discourse that was open to critique and correction. This aligns with Husnussalam & Yana's (2024) call for integrating media and civic literacy into education through hands-on textual transformation.

Ultimately, embedding media ethics into English learning reshaped students' cognitive, discursive, and civic engagement with language. Rooted in critical pedagogy (Methila et al., 2024), this approach treats language as a tool for ideological negotiation and social action. Through comparative analysis as well as ethical editing tasks, students practiced democratic participation through writing

which is an essential skill in a post-truth era where fact claim or fiction increasingly converge. To further this research, future studies could investigate how sustained integration of ethical media analysis affects long-term writing proficiency, or how AI-generated content can be ethically critiqued and edited by students in similar frameworks. Additionally, scalable curriculum models can be developed for adaptation across beginner, intermediate, and advanced EFL levels to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness across learning populations.

Conclusion

This study concludes that integrating media ethics into English language learning through activities such as fake news deconstruction, comparative narrative writing or editorial simulation improves grammatical accuracy and discourse competence while also fostering epistemic vigilance, ideological awareness and ethical agency in news engagement. Students developed the ability to identify and correct misleading modality, vague attribution, distorted statistics, biased evaluation, and visual misalignment. As a result, they shifted from passive readers to critical and responsible media participants. These outcomes highlight the pedagogical value of critical language awareness, rooted in systemic-functional linguistics, appraisal theory, critical discourse analysis, and visual grammar to empower learners beyond linguistic accuracy toward civic and ethical participation. However, the study has three main limitations: (1) it focused solely on print and online written media, excluding audiovisual and social media genres that present different ethical concerns; (2) the intervention occurred in a controlled classroom setting with a small participant group, limiting generalizability; and (3) assessments prioritized rewriting tasks over tracking long-term behavioral change. Future research should expand this framework to include multimodal social platforms such as TikTok captions, Instagram reels, and YouTube while also exploring translingual and cross-linguistic dimensions of media ethics. It should further investigate how ongoing editorial simulations shape learners' democratic literacy, intercultural sensitivity and real-world media engagement over time.

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