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Digital Teaching Style on Instagram Reels: Jerome Polin and Teacher Appreciation in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the problem of low teacher appreciation in Indonesia. The data are drawn from one of Jerome Polin's Instagram Reels that compares teacher salaries with the price of an iPhone. Using a qualitative case study with sociolinguistic theories of style-shifting and multimodal discourse analysis, the study finds that Jerome combines humor, casual language, gestures, visual design, and captions to construct a teacher persona in digital space. These strategies make social critique both accessible and entertaining while reconstructing teacher identity performatively on social media. The study contributes theoretically to sociolinguistic discussions of style in multimodal digital contexts and provides practical recommendations for educators, content creators, and policymakers in developing effective communication strategies.

Keywords: Digital teaching style; Instagram Reels; Jerome Polin; Teacher appreciation in Indonesia; Multimodal discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the teaching profession occupies a paradoxical position highly praised in rhetoric yet undervalued in practice. Teachers are often hailed as “heroes without medals,” yet systemic challenges such as low salaries, insufficient institutional support, and inconsistent professional recognition persist. This lack of appreciation reflects not only economic disparities but also a cultural undervaluation of teachers’ intellectual and moral contributions to society. At the same time, the rise of social media platforms has created new opportunities for reshaping public narratives around education and teaching. Within this context, Jerome Polin, a popular content creator known for his mathematics tutorials and motivational videos, has emerged as a distinctive voice. His ability to blend humor, relatability, and critique allows him to speak to younger audiences in ways that traditional classroom settings cannot. In one of his widely circulated Instagram Reels, Jerome juxtaposes teacher salaries with the cost of an iPhone, a comparison that resonates powerfully with the everyday realities of digital-native viewers. By framing his critique through humor, gestures, and multimodal design, he not only entertains but also highlights the deep social issue of teacher undervaluation. Such a case presents fertile ground for sociolinguistic analysis, particularly in understanding how style-shifting, multimodal discourse, and digital identity construction intersect in the making of a “digital teaching persona.” Thus, this study situates Jerome’s Instagram Reel as a site where the boundaries between pedagogy, entertainment, and advocacy blur, raising important implications for how teachers and educational figures may engage with audiences in online spaces.

the emergence of digital teaching personas like Jerome Polin also reflects the complex interplay between education, media, and socio-cultural dynamics in Indonesia. His content operates not merely as entertainment or informal learning material, but as a cultural artifact that mirrors the aspirations, frustrations, and everyday realities of young Indonesians navigating a rapidly changing society. By situating educational critique within a framework of humor and relatable storytelling, Jerome transforms what could be a dry or confrontational issue into an accessible, emotionally resonant message. This strategy is particularly effective in a media landscape where attention spans are short and competition for engagement is intense. Beyond the surface level of entertainment, Jerome’s narrative subtly questions structural inequalities such as the wage gap, lack of teacher welfare, and limited state support while empowering viewers to rethink the value of education and those who provide it. His ability to blend informal speech with visual cues, gestures, and symbolic contrasts (like the iPhone versus teacher salaries) turns his content into a persuasive multimodal discourse that transcends classroom walls. This dynamic not only repositions teachers and educators as relevant figures in the digital sphere but also opens up new spaces for public discourse, collective reflection, and even social mobilization. In this sense, Jerome’s online presence becomes a powerful example of how digital media can function as a site of resistance, advocacy, and pedagogical innovation reshaping how society perceives and values the teaching profession in the 21st century.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study adopts a qualitative case study design that emphasizes depth of analysis over breadth, focusing on a single Instagram Reel by Jerome Polin that explicitly critiques the undervaluation of teachers in Indonesia. The chosen Reel serves as the primary data source because it embodies Jerome’s hybrid style

part educator, part entertainer, and part social critic. To ensure rigor, the analysis is supplemented with secondary data drawn from academic works on sociolinguistic style, multimodal discourse analysis, and digital pedagogy. Data collection began with the selection and downloading of the Reel, followed by a systematic process of transcription. The transcript included not only verbal utterances but also multimodal elements such as gaze, gestures, captions, intonation, and editing features. Observation notes were then used to annotate these multimodal cues, ensuring that meaning-making beyond the spoken word was fully captured.

The analysis proceeded in several stages. First, coding categories were developed based on theoretical frameworks: (1) linguistic features such as shifts in register, humor, and rhetorical devices; (2) multimodal features such as gesture, facial expression, and textual overlays; and (3) framing devices used to highlight teacher appreciation as a social issue. Style-shifting theory (Eckert & Rickford, 2001) guided the analysis of how Jerome alternated between casual and serious tones, while multimodal discourse analysis highlighted how meaning was orchestrated across language, visuals, and performance. Triangulation with secondary sources ensured validity, while interpretation linked the case to broader debates on teacher identity, social critique, and the role of digital platforms in shaping public discourse. This layered methodology allowed the study not only to describe the Reel but also to theorize how Jerome's style contributes to the ongoing redefinition of teaching and teacher identity in Indonesia.

Table 1. Data Sources of the Study

Data Type	Source	Description
Primary Data	One Instagram Reel by Jerome Polin (2025)	A short-form video where Jerome compares teacher salaries to the price of an iPhone, combining humor, gestures, and captions to critique the undervaluation of teachers in Indonesia.
Secondary Data 1	Sociolinguistic theories (Eckert & Rickford, 2001; others)	Frameworks on style and style-shifting, highlighting how linguistic variation constructs identity.
Secondary Data 2	Multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; O'Halloran, 2011)	Analytical tools for examining how language, visuals, gestures, and design interact in meaning-making.
Secondary Data 3	Indonesian education statistics (BPS 2023; CEIC 2023; Kemendikbudristek 2024)	Empirical context showing teacher shortages, low recognition, and structural undervaluation in Indonesia.
Secondary Data 4	Studies on digital pedagogy and social media (Hyder, 2024; Sjoraida et al., 2024)	Comparative literature situating Jerome's content within broader discussions on teaching and activism in digital spaces.

The study employed a qualitative case study design, which was considered appropriate because the focus is on the in-depth analysis of linguistic and multimodal strategies within a bounded unit of analysis one Instagram Reel by Jerome Polin. The primary data consisted of the Reel that explicitly highlights

teacher appreciation, selected because it captures both the humorous and critical aspects of Jerome's style. This video was transcribed verbatim, and multimodal annotations were added to capture gestures, gaze direction, intonation, captions, and editing cues. The use of a single Reel allowed the research to zoom into micro-level details of stylistic construction while still connecting them to macro-level sociolinguistic and educational issues. Meanwhile, secondary data in the form of sociolinguistic theory, multimodal discourse frameworks, and education statistics served to triangulate the findings, ensuring that the analysis was theoretically grounded and empirically contextualized.

The research procedure followed several steps. First, the Reel was identified and downloaded, after which a detailed multimodal transcript was produced. The transcript recorded not only words but also visual cues such as Jerome's facial expressions, hand movements, and the textual overlays that appeared on-screen. Next, the data were coded thematically using categories derived from the literature: (1) linguistic features such as humor, casual register, and style-shifting; (2) multimodal features such as gesture, gaze, captions, and editing pace; and (3) framing strategies that highlighted teacher appreciation as a socio-political issue. The coding process allowed for systematic segmentation of data, making it possible to trace how different communicative modes interacted to construct meaning. At this stage, connections between the Reel and national statistics were also explored for example, how the humor about iPhone prices mirrored empirical realities of low teacher salaries.

the analysis integrated these coded data with sociolinguistic and multimodal theories to produce an interpretive account of Jerome's digital teaching style. Style-shifting theory (Eckert & Rickford, 2001) was used to examine the alternation between humorous and serious registers, while multimodal discourse analysis revealed how gestures, captions, and editing reinforced linguistic messages. Data triangulation with educational statistics and prior research ensured that the interpretation went beyond impressionistic commentary, linking Jerome's style to broader structural realities and theoretical debates. By combining primary and secondary data in this layered way, the methodology ensured both analytic depth and contextual validity, allowing the study to show not only how Jerome communicates but also why his strategies resonate in Indonesian society.

methodological framework is grounded in the understanding that language and multimodality are not neutral tools of communication, but powerful semiotic resources that shape and reflect broader social structures. As noted by Jan Blommaert (2010), discourse is always situated within specific sociocultural, historical, and political contexts, meaning that the way Jerome communicates on social media cannot be separated from the larger narratives surrounding education, class, and media consumption in Indonesia. By applying a qualitative case study approach, the research does not aim for statistical generalization but rather *analytic generalization* (Robert K. Yin, 2014), where insights from one bounded case are used to build or extend theoretical understanding. This aligns with the interpretivist paradigm that views meaning as socially constructed and mediated through discourse practices. The choice of multimodal discourse analysis as a core component of the method follows the framework of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2001), who emphasize that contemporary communication involves complex interactions between modes such as language, image, gesture, and layout especially in digital environments. This approach allows the study to unpack not just *what* Jerome says, but *how* he says it and *why* it matters within a particular sociopolitical setting.

style-shifting theory as articulated by Penelope Eckert and John Rickford (2001) provides a lens to examine how Jerome alternates between informal and formal registers to achieve specific communicative goals. His deliberate shifts from playful humor to moments of serious critique exemplify how style functions as a resource for positioning oneself in relation to audiences, ideologies, and institutions. This aligns with Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall's (2005) perspective that identity is *performed* through language and interaction, rather than merely reflected. Thus, Jerome's digital teaching persona is not fixed but dynamically constructed through each linguistic and multimodal choice. At the same time, the integration of Indonesian educational statistics and policy reports provides a structural backdrop that anchors this micro-level analysis within macro-level realities—demonstrating how his seemingly light-hearted content engages deeply with issues of teacher pay, professional dignity, and systemic undervaluation. This step ensures that the study does not treat the Instagram Reel as an isolated artifact, but as a discursive act situated in a broader socio-institutional ecosystem.

methodological choice resonates with the principles of critical discourse analysis as outlined by Norman Fairclough (1992), who argues that texts and discourses contribute to the production, reproduction, and transformation of social structures. By examining how Jerome frames teacher appreciation through humor, gesture, and digital design, the study reveals how digital influencers can disrupt traditional power relations surrounding who gets to speak about education and how such conversations are framed in the public sphere. The layered use of coding categories, multimodal transcription, and theoretical triangulation allows the researcher to trace how meaning is co-constructed through the interplay of verbal and visual elements. This also acknowledges the role of platform-specific affordances of Instagram its short-form video format, algorithmic amplification, and visual editing tools which mediate how educational critique is packaged and circulated to mass audiences. In doing so, the methodology goes beyond merely describing Jerome's communication style; it interrogates how this style functions as a discursive strategy that resonates with digital-native viewers, mobilizes affect, and brings visibility to structural educational issues in Indonesian society.

the methodological design underscores the value of using a micro-to-macro analytical lens in sociolinguistic and multimodal research. As emphasized by Theo van Leeuwen (2016), meaning-making in digital media is not a linear process but a layered, dynamic interplay between modes, audiences, and contexts. The combination of a single, carefully analyzed Instagram Reel with robust theoretical frameworks and empirical educational data allows the study to produce a nuanced, richly contextualized account of how a digital figure like Jerome Polin participates in reshaping educational narratives. This approach not only strengthens the interpretive validity of the analysis but also contributes to broader discussions on the role of digital media in reconfiguring public discourse, teacher identity, and cultural perceptions of education in Indonesia today.

One of the most compelling examples of how digital media can function as a site of social critique can be found in one of the Instagram Reels uploaded by Jerome Polin on Instagram. In this short video, Jerome deliberately highlights a stark socioeconomic contrast: the high cost of iPhone 14 Pro compared to the low salaries of Indonesian teachers. While the message itself concerns a deeply structural and sensitive issue the undervaluation of educators in Indonesia Jerome delivers it through an engaging, humorous, and accessible performance style that allows the topic to reach a broad and often young audience. The video begins with his signature opening: a casual greeting delivered with an enthusiastic facial expression, a bright

background, and quick camera cuts that immediately capture the viewer's attention. He then displays the price of an iPhone on-screen shown with bold typography and a clear visual emphasis before juxtaposing it with the average salary of a public honorary teacher, which is significantly lower. Rather than narrating this comparison with a serious or formal tone, he performs an exaggerated reaction his eyes widen, his mouth drops, and he dramatically points toward the screen. This gestural performance has a double function: on one hand, it invites laughter and identification from viewers, and on the other, it signals to them that something is fundamentally unjust about this economic reality.

The visual design of the Reel is highly calculated. Jerome overlays short, punchy phrases like "Harga iPhone vs Gaji Guru" ("iPhone Price vs Teacher Salary") and "Pahlawan tanpa tanda jasa tapi gajinya segini?" ("Heroes without medals but their salaries are like this?") in large, bold fonts. The text appears in sync with his verbal utterances, reinforcing the message visually and creating what multimodal discourse theorists describe as "mode orchestration," where language, image, and gesture work together to produce meaning. Bright colors, dynamic zooming, and quick cuts give the video an energetic rhythm, characteristic of viral Reels aimed at retaining audience attention in the first few seconds. The background music is deliberately light, neither overly serious nor too playful, allowing it to support but not overpower the spoken message. This careful use of **multimodal resources** enables the Reel to communicate complex and critical content without sounding didactic or heavy-handed.

From a **sociolinguistic perspective**, Jerome's delivery exemplifies what Penelope Eckert and John R. Rickford describe as **style-shifting**, a deliberate shift between linguistic registers to accomplish specific communicative goals. At the beginning of the video, Jerome uses an informal, youth-oriented linguistic style characterized by fast intonation, exclamations, code-mixing between Indonesian and English (e.g., "Gila sih, ini crazy banget!"), and laughter particles that convey a sense of intimacy and camaraderie with the audience. Midway through the Reel, however, his intonation slows, his pitch drops, and his lexical choices become more evaluative and reflective. This tonal shift serves as a rhetorical pivot point, signaling to viewers that while the content might appear humorous at first glance, it carries a serious underlying critique. Style-shifting here functions not merely as a linguistic phenomenon but as an **interactional resource** that indexes shifts in stance, emotion, and footing, allowing Jerome to perform both the role of entertainer and social critic simultaneously.

This interaction between informal and reflective tones aligns with Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall's theory of **identity as performance**, in which speakers construct and negotiate their identities dynamically through linguistic and interactional choices. Jerome does not simply "state" his opinion about teachers' low salaries; he **performs** a particular kind of digital teaching persona one that is witty, approachable, and emotionally responsive. This persona increases his credibility among younger audiences, who often distrust or ignore more formal, top-down discussions about education policy. Through this performance, Jerome aligns himself with ordinary people, implicitly positioning himself as part of a shared community of concern rather than as a detached observer.

From the perspective of **multimodal discourse analysis**, as theorized by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, this Reel represents a rich site of meaning-making that relies on the orchestration of several semiotic modes. Jerome uses language (spoken Indonesian and code-mixed English), gestures (hand movements, expressive facial reactions), visuals (text overlays, layout, camera movements), and audio (background music, intonation, rhythm) to create a layered communicative event. Each mode contributes a

distinct affordance: language conveys propositional meaning, gestures intensify affective stance, visuals guide focus and interpretation, and audio sets emotional tone. Importantly, these modes do not merely coexist—they interact. For example, when Jerome says “Gaji guru segini doang?” (“Teacher salaries are only this much?”), his tone drops, the camera zooms in, and the text flashes in bright red—an alignment of linguistic, visual, and auditory cues that amplifies the critical force of the utterance.

The **discursive impact** of this multimodal construction can be analyzed through the lens of critical discourse analysis as articulated by Norman Fairclough. According to this framework, discourse is not merely a reflection of social reality but an active element in its construction and transformation. Jerome’s Reel does not simply report on the fact that teacher salaries are low; it **frames this fact as a social problem**, dramatizes it, and presents it in a way that mobilizes emotional and cognitive responses from viewers. By using a popular and accessible communication format, he disrupts the traditional boundaries of who gets to speak authoritatively about educational issues a space usually dominated by policymakers, academics, and journalists and shifts the conversation into the everyday digital sphere.

The audience’s responses to this Reel, as reflected in the comment section, further illustrate its discursive power. Many viewers express shock, empathy for teachers, or anger toward the systemic undervaluation of educators. Others share personal stories of being teachers or having family members who are teachers, thereby turning the comment space into a **participatory discursive arena**. This participatory nature is a hallmark of social media discourse, where audiences are not passive recipients but active co-constructors of meaning. In this sense, Jerome’s Reel not only functions as a piece of individual expression but also as a **trigger for collective sense-making** around teacher appreciation and education reform.

This phenomenon is particularly significant in the Indonesian context, where teachers are frequently described as “pahlawan tanpa tanda jasa” (“heroes without medals”), a phrase that reflects moral reverence but not necessarily material support. By choosing to highlight this disparity through humor and affect rather than through formal debate, Jerome taps into a shared cultural narrative while simultaneously challenging its contradictions. His use of humor is not neutral: it functions as a **soft form of resistance**, making the critique more palatable while maintaining its critical edge. This strategy mirrors broader trends in digital activism, where influencers use entertainment-based formats to raise awareness of structural issues without triggering defensiveness or backlash from audiences who might resist overtly political messaging.

From a methodological standpoint, this Reel demonstrates why **micro-level discourse analysis** is crucial for understanding **macro-level social dynamics**. Through careful analysis of style-shifting, multimodal orchestration, and interactional framing, researchers can trace how a short, seemingly lighthearted video actually participates in the construction of public discourse on educational inequality. The use of a single, well-chosen case study enables a close reading of how different semiotic resources are mobilized to achieve both affective resonance and political critique. This aligns with Robert K. Yin’s notion of **analytic generalization**, in which insights drawn from a bounded case can be used to build or refine theoretical understandings of broader phenomena in this case, how digital influencers shape public debates on education.

Finally, the platform-specific affordances of Instagram also play a crucial role. The Reel format short, visually rich, and algorithmically amplified—enables messages like Jerome’s to circulate widely and rapidly, often reaching audiences who might not engage with more formal or academic discussions of the

same issue. This viral potential transforms seemingly personal content into a **mass-mediated discursive event**, one that blurs the boundaries between entertainment, education, and activism. In this sense, Jerome's Reel is not simply an example of influencer content but a **sociopolitical act of communication**, contributing to the public conversation on teacher identity, labor valuation, and the meaning of education in contemporary Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that Jerome employs a deliberate combination of humor and critique to make the issue of teacher appreciation both relatable and entertaining. His linguistic style draws heavily on casual Indonesian expressions, peppered with interjections and rhetorical questions that mimic everyday conversation. For example, his comparison of teacher salaries to the price of an iPhone transforms an abstract structural problem into a vivid, tangible image easily grasped by young audiences. This humorous framing allows him to criticize systemic undervaluation without sounding confrontational, thereby maintaining accessibility and relatability. Style-shifting is evident as he alternates between moments of lighthearted exaggeration and serious reflection, balancing authority with approachability.

Multimodal features significantly reinforce this linguistic strategy. Jerome's use of gestures such as widening his eyes, tilting his head, and mimicking classroom actions embeds his critique in performative embodiment. The addition of captions and on-screen graphics visually punctuates his points, ensuring that the message remains clear even in a fast-scrolling digital environment. Editing techniques, such as quick cuts and background music, further enhance engagement and align with the expectations of Instagram Reels audiences who consume content rapidly. In this way, Jerome orchestrates multiple modes of communication to construct a teaching persona that is simultaneously credible and entertaining.

The results also highlight how Jerome redefines teacher identity in digital space. Traditionally, authority in teaching stems from hierarchical classroom structures, where the teacher commands attention through institutional position. In contrast, Jerome constructs authority by aligning himself with the audience he speaks as a peer rather than a superior, using casual registers, humor, and shared cultural references. Yet, this casualness does not diminish his credibility; instead, it amplifies his role as a digital teacher who understands both the struggles of educators and the perspectives of students. This reconfiguration of teacher identity illustrates the adaptability of pedagogical authority in online contexts, where relatability often enhances rather than undermines credibility.

Table 2. Coding Categories in Jerome Polin's Reel

Category	Example from Reel	Function in Meaning-Making
Linguistic – Humor	“Gajinya kalah sama harga iPhone!”	Uses exaggeration and irony to make critique more relatable and entertaining.
Linguistic – Style-shift	Moves between casual slang (“aduh...”) and reflective commentary (“kalau nggak ada guru...”)	Balances authority and approachability, appealing to both peers and younger audiences.
Multimodal – Gesture	Eye widening, hand gestures mimicking teaching actions	Embeds critique in performance, strengthening emphasis visually and emotionally.
Multimodal – Gaze	Direct gaze into the camera	Builds intimacy and solidarity, positioning Jerome as speaking “to” rather than “at” viewers.
Multimodal – Caption	On-screen text highlighting “guru vs iPhone”	Reinforces spoken message, ensuring clarity in fast-scrolling digital contexts.
Multimodal – Editing	Quick cuts, background music	Matches platform aesthetics, sustaining attention and amplifying humor.

The analysis reveals that Jerome Polin's Reel operates through a hybrid linguistic style that combines humor, casual registers, and moments of serious reflection. His comparison of teacher salaries with the price of an iPhone immediately captures attention because it translates a systemic issue into a vivid, everyday metaphor. Humor plays a crucial role here: rather than presenting statistics or formal arguments, Jerome relies on irony and exaggeration, which invite laughter but also provoke reflection. Importantly, style-shifting is evident when he transitions from playful comments to earnest statements such as “kalau nggak ada guru, ya kita nggak bisa jadi apa-apa.” This movement between registers constructs him simultaneously as a relatable peer and a credible educator, illustrating how digital teaching styles can sustain both entertainment and authority.

Beyond language, multimodal cues amplify the effectiveness of Jerome's critique. Gestures, such as widening eyes and mimicking classroom actions, dramatize his points, making abstract ideas more tangible. His direct gaze into the camera enhances the sense of intimacy, positioning him as conversing directly with viewers rather than addressing a faceless mass. Captions such as the bold text contrasting “guru” and “iPhone” act as visual anchors, ensuring the core message is not lost in the rapid flow of Instagram content. Editing techniques like quick cuts and upbeat background music further align his Reel with the platform's stylistic norms, sustaining viewer engagement and reinforcing his identity as both influencer and educator.

The findings also show how Jerome's style contributes to a redefinition of teacher identity in digital contexts. In traditional classrooms, authority is derived from hierarchical roles and institutional legitimacy. Jerome, however, reconstructs authority through relatability: he positions himself alongside the audience, acknowledging frustrations about teachers' conditions while maintaining respect for the profession. His use

of casual slang and humorous exaggeration does not undermine his credibility; rather, it makes him appear authentic and trustworthy to younger audiences. This suggests that in online environments, authority can emerge not from formality but from the ability to connect, empathize, and communicate across modes.

the Reel can be seen as a form of digital advocacy that bridges statistical realities with public awareness. National data confirm structural issues such as low teacher training rates and shortages across Indonesia but these facts often fail to resonate with lay audiences. Jerome's Reel translates these abstract statistics into a concrete, emotionally engaging story. The juxtaposition of teacher salaries with iPhone prices embodies the disconnect between societal dependence on teachers and the lack of material recognition they receive. By reframing statistics into a relatable critique, Jerome transforms a serious policy issue into a shareable, entertaining, and socially meaningful narrative. This highlights how influencers and educators can use multimodal discourse to shape public debates and advocate for systemic change in teacher appreciation.

Finally, Jerome's Reel can be understood as a form of digital advocacy that bridges statistical realities with public awareness. National data on teacher shortages, low training levels, and inconsistent recognition confirm that the problem is systemic. However, such statistics often fail to resonate with the public. Jerome's humorous comparison salary versus iPhone price translates these realities into a narrative that is emotionally engaging and socially shareable. In doing so, he transforms social critique into a performative act of teaching, using digital media not only to entertain but also to advocate for teachers' rights and recognition. This suggests that influencers and educators alike can play a critical role in shaping public discourse on education through digital platforms.

Digital Advocacy, Sociolinguistic Performance, and the Reconfiguration of Educational Discourse

The findings of this study underscore that Jerome Polin's Instagram Reel is not merely an act of personal expression, but a sophisticated form of *digital advocacy* that blends humor, critique, and multimodal performance to highlight a deeply rooted social issue—the undervaluation of teachers in Indonesia. His ability to translate structural inequalities into emotionally resonant, easily digestible narratives reveals the strategic role of language and multimodality in shaping public perception. According to Norman Fairclough (1992), discourse is a site where social power relations are produced and contested. In this context, Jerome's humorous but critical presentation can be read as a counter-discourse that challenges dominant narratives of teacher invisibility, making systemic inequities visible to a wide digital audience. By employing familiar cultural references like iPhone prices, he connects macro-level issues of wage disparity to the micro-level lived experiences of his viewers most of whom are students and young people. This creates a sense of collective identification, transforming what could be perceived as a distant policy problem into a shared social concern.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, Jerome's performance exemplifies what Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2005) call *identity as interactional accomplishment*. Through strategic style-shifting, he navigates between being a peer, an entertainer, and a critical observer of social structures. His casual use of Indonesian slang and humor allows him to lower the boundaries between teacher and student, fostering horizontal rather than vertical communication. Yet, moments of serious commentary anchor his role as a knowledgeable figure, reaffirming his position as an educator in the digital sphere. This dual positioning enhances his credibility without relying on institutional authority, illustrating how pedagogical identity is being redefined in the era of social media. Unlike traditional classrooms where authority is hierarchical,

digital spaces allow educators to build influence through relatability, shared values, and emotional engagement.

Jerome's use of multimodal features gesture, gaze, on-screen text, and editing represents what Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2001) describe as *orchestration of meaning across semiotic modes*. His widened eyes, playful gestures, and direct camera gaze function not just as aesthetic choices, but as rhetorical tools that intensify the impact of his linguistic message. The captions act as visual anchors, reinforcing key ideas and ensuring message retention in a fast-scrolling environment. Meanwhile, the quick editing style and upbeat background music align his Reel with the expectations of short-form video audiences, demonstrating a keen awareness of platform-specific communication norms. This multimodal synergy amplifies the persuasive force of his critique, enabling serious issues to circulate widely and resonate more deeply with digital-native viewers.

The broader implication of this finding lies in how digital influencers like Jerome can disrupt conventional boundaries between education, activism, and entertainment. Drawing on the framework of critical digital pedagogy (Jesse Stommel, 2014), the Reel demonstrates that teaching in the 21st century is no longer confined to classrooms or formal institutions. Instead, educators can leverage digital platforms to mobilize awareness, build communities of concern, and challenge structural inequalities. Jerome's content operates at the intersection of knowledge dissemination and social critique, illustrating how pedagogical authority can be collaboratively constructed rather than institutionally imposed. In this sense, he embodies a new kind of *digital teaching persona* one that speaks *with* the audience rather than *at* them, transforming passive viewership into active engagement.

Finally, this case reflects a significant cultural shift in how public discourse on education is produced and circulated. Where traditional advocacy often relies on formal reports, campaigns, or institutional actors, digital advocacy through humor, style, and performance can reach audiences at scale with immediacy and emotional impact. Jerome's Reel exemplifies how linguistic and multimodal strategies can turn complex structural problems into memorable, shareable narratives. By doing so, he contributes to a collective reimagining of teacher identity and value in Indonesia. This highlights the increasing relevance of sociolinguistic and multimodal approaches in understanding how contemporary digital spaces function as arenas for cultural negotiation, social critique, and public education.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Jerome Polin's Instagram Reel serves as more than just entertainment; it is a multimodal act of teaching and advocacy that redefines how teacher identity is constructed in digital spaces. By combining humor, casual linguistic style, gestures, captions, and editing techniques, Jerome successfully delivers a critique of teacher undervaluation in ways that are accessible, engaging, and socially resonant. His style illustrates how educators can adapt to digital platforms by balancing authority with relatability, turning serious issues into widely shareable narratives. The findings extend sociolinguistic theories of style into the realm of multimodal digital discourse and provide practical insights for teachers, content creators, and policymakers. For teachers, the study suggests new strategies for digital pedagogy that maintain credibility while fostering engagement. For policymakers, it highlights the growing influence of social media in shaping perceptions of the teaching profession. Ultimately, Jerome's Reel exemplifies

how digital communication can amplify voices for teacher appreciation, transforming online entertainment into a meaningful space for social critique and pedagogical innovation.

For policymakers, the urgent need to address structural inequalities that make such humorous critiques possible and resonant in the first place. The viral spread of Jerome's Reel underscores how deeply the issue of low teacher appreciation is felt by society especially among young digital audiences. This form of digital advocacy should not be dismissed as mere entertainment but recognized as a legitimate mode of civic discourse that can pressure institutions to act. By transforming abstract statistics into concrete and relatable narratives, Jerome bridges the gap between policy discourse and everyday public sentiment, making invisible problems visible and emotionally compelling. In this way, the study reveals that digital teaching personas can play a crucial role in shaping national conversations about education, teacher welfare, and social justice in Indonesia, demonstrating that language and multimodal communication are powerful tools not only for instruction but also for societal transformation.

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