

# Voicing youth empowerment: Critical discourse analysis on Joshua SEVENTEEN speech at UNESCO Youth Forum 2023

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**Article History:** Accepted: December 02, 2025; Revised: February 2, 2026; Approved: March 6, 2026

## Abstract

This study analyzes Joshua's speech, a member of the K-pop group SEVENTEEN, at the UNESCO Youth Forum 2023 using Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The research investigates how discourse structures in public speeches convey messages of education and youth empowerment. A qualitative descriptive method was applied to examine macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. The findings show that the macrostructure emphasizes education as a transformative force; the superstructure presents a well-organized format aligned with international speech conventions; and the microstructure employs semantic clarity, inclusive syntax, stylistic consistency, and rhetorical devices such as metaphors and hashtags to build emotional resonance with global youth. Audience reactions on YouTube were further analyzed through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory, demonstrating pride, awareness, and affective engagement. The study concludes that Joshua's speech successfully conveyed educational values and inspired global participation, affirming that popular culture figures can act as effective agents of social change through discourse.

**Keywords:** *Critical discourse analysis; speech; UNESCO; SEVENTEEN*

## Introduction

Discourse analysis is an approach that highlights the active role of discourse in shaping change in the social world, noting that the concrete use of language is based on prevailing conventions in society (Herman, 2022). Discourse can be realized in various forms that are not limited to written texts. The forms of discourse include texts, such as announcements, essays, papers, theses, or romances; speech, which includes conversations, questions and answers, or dialogues; plays, such as dramas, soap operas, poems, or attractions; and artifacts, in the form of buildings, stone tools, metals, or historical relics (Masitoh, 2020).

Fairclough (1995) states in (Aljoundi, 2024) "CDA is intended to critically evaluate the way language is used in order to expose the hidden power structures and to challenge the dominant narratives that cause social injustice." Framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), language is viewed as a social practice that is inherently tied to ideology and culture (Baharuddin, 2022). CDA

enables researchers to uncover how discourse both shapes and is shaped by social structures and relationships.

CDA has become an essential approach in studying communication within public and institutional contexts, including international forums such as UNESCO. UNESCO was established in 1945 to promote international cooperation in education, science, culture, and communication (Singh, 2023). It serves as a global platform for leaders and influencers to address contemporary issues. In this study, attention is given to Joshua, a member of the K-pop group SEVENTEEN, whose speech at the UNESCO Youth Forum 2023 emphasized education and youth empowerment. Social media comment sections often display both criticism and praise as forms of speech acts, reflecting how users express attitudes and construct meaning within digital interactions (Mukminin et al., 2024).

This research refers to several previous studies that have analyzed critical discourse. Several studies related to Critical Discourse Analysis have been reviewed by researcher. The first study was

conducted by (Putu and Widiastuti, 2020), this journal applied Teun A. van Dijk's CDA framework, covering macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure, to analyze Mohamad Nasir's speech on National Education Day. Their findings revealed that discourse in the speech reflected how symbolic elites utilized language to unite multiple educational stakeholders in reform efforts.

The second study was conducted by (Wahyuni and Syamsi, 2021), this journal examined the speeches of Nadiem Makarim and Muhadjir Effendy using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework. The results indicated that Makarim's speech employed more creative and engaging language, while Effendy's was more formal and less appealing. The study showed that linguistic strategies are central to shaping narratives that influence audience perception in educational discourse.

The third study was conducted by (Rubing and Sandaran, 2023), who used Fairclough's model to investigate ideological bias in *The Times* newspaper. Their findings showed that lexical choices such as *uncertainty* and *difficulty* were frequently used when reporting on Brexit, reflecting a preference for governmental perspectives. The study concluded that media discourse is often influenced by institutional ideology rather than being entirely neutral.

The fourth study was conducted by (Kadim, 2022), who analyzed Donald Trump's campaign speeches using Van Dijk's microstructure approach. The research identified discourse strategies such as hyperbole, contrast, and repetition that contributed to polarization and mobilized public support. Emphasized that political discourse should avoid racial and sectarian undertones that can harm social unity.

The fifth study was conducted by (Aprilia and Firdaus, 2024), who applied Van Dijk's CDA framework to analyze TikTok content from @Gerindra related to the 2024 election. The study revealed that informal and cheerful discourse—such as the *Gemoy* narrative—was strategically used to attract Gen Z audiences and construct a positive image of Prabowo Subianto as a friendly leader. Their findings indicated that digital platforms are

effective spaces for political discourse aimed at youth engagement.

With reference to previous studies, several similarities and differences can be identified in relation to this research. The similarities lie in the use of Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis theory, which encompasses the analysis of macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure elements, as well as in the focus on educational issues observed in the works of Putu and Widiastuti (2020) and Wahyuni and Syamsi (2021), who analyzed the speeches of national figures such as Mohamad Nasir and Nadiem Makarim. These studies emphasize how discourse is employed to shape public perception and promote social change. The main distinction lies in the context and audience. Joshua's speech was delivered in an international forum (UNESCO) addressing a global audience, whereas the other speeches were presented in national contexts to Indonesian audiences. At the microstructural level, Joshua's language demonstrates an emotional, inspirational, and creative tone, contrasting with the political and confrontational style evident in Trump's campaign speeches analyzed by Kadim (2022). This study also aligns with Aprilia and Ferdaus (2024), who examined TikTok discourse aimed at attracting Gen Z audiences. Both highlights how social media functions as a medium for communicating messages to younger generations, although Joshua emphasizes educational values while Gerindra focuses on political campaigning. Consequently, Joshua's speech contributes a new perspective to CDA by integrating pop culture and educational advocacy into a discourse field traditionally dominated by political and ideological themes.

The significance of Joshua's speech lies in its dual role as both an artistic and educational discourse. It not only stresses the importance of education for youth but also highlights concrete actions such as building schools in underprivileged areas. This makes it an important object of study within CDA, as it demonstrates how popular culture can intersect with educational advocacy in an international forum. Previous studies on CDA have mostly focused on political figures and formal leaders; this research contributes by examining a

cultural icon in a global educational context.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze Joshua SEVENTEEN's UNESCO 2023 speech using Teun A. van Dijk's CDA model, which includes macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. In addition, audience responses from YouTube comments are examined using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework to evaluate how viewers interpreted and reacted to the speech. This framework assumes that an external message (stimulus) can influence an individual's internal state (organism) and lead to observable reactions (response), aligning with previous studies that highlighted the effect of communication stimuli on motivational and emotional behavior (Al Danish & Patriantoro, 2025). The findings are expected to provide insights into how discourse strategies can inspire awareness, solidarity, and participation in global education movements.

## **Methods**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyze Joshua SEVENTEEN's speech delivered at the UNESCO Youth Forum 2023. The qualitative research was selected because it enables to emphasize understanding human behavior, perception, and motivation within a natural context, where data are analyzed inductively to highlight meaning rather than to generalize findings (Safarudin et al., 2023).

Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model was used to reveal how language in the speech constructs meaning and conveys messages of education and empowerment. The analysis focused on three discourse levels: macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure, each of which provides insight into thematic content, schema, and linguistic (Wardhana & Laksmi, 2025).

According to (Turale, 2020), qualitative descriptive research offers a pragmatic approach to exploring the 'who, what, and where' of social events, maintaining rigor while staying close to the data to produce rich yet accessible descriptions.

According to Hermansyah (2012:14) in (Siregar, 2021), data was a collection of facts that represented

events or occurrences within an organization or physical environment before being processed into a format that could be understood and utilized by humans. The primary data were drawn from the official video of Joshua's speech uploaded on KOREA NOW's YouTube channel, specifically the segment from minutes 22:59 to 27:55. The transcript was re-verified for accuracy and analyzed alongside viewers' comments, which served as secondary data. Data collection followed several steps: identifying and transcribing the speech, classifying textual structures according to Van Dijk's model, analyzing each element, and interpreting audience responses. Supporting materials such as academic articles and reports were also reviewed to strengthen contextual understanding.

Data analysis combined Van Dijk's CDA framework and Carl Hovland's Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory. Through this integration, the study not only explored the structure of Joshua's speech but also examined its communicative impact on the audience. The thesis of this research argues that Joshua's speech represents how popular culture figures employ discourse strategies to promote educational values and inspire global youth participation.

## **Findings and discussion**

This study examines Joshua SEVENTEEN's speech at the UNESCO 2023 forum using Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, covering macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. Data were taken from the official speech on KOREA NOW's YouTube channel, along with selected comments to explore audience responses and the speech's impact.

### **Macrostructure (Thematic)**

The macrostructure of Joshua SEVENTEEN's speech at the UNESCO Youth Forum 2023 emphasizes education as a transformative force. The main theme consistently highlights the importance of education for young people as future leaders. Joshua's statement clearly reflects this point:

*“Through the campaign, we seek to make young people, the ones who will be leading the future, be aware of the importance of education.”*

This quotation underscores the central message that education shapes the identity and potential of the younger generation. It invites youth to reflect on their responsibilities and demonstrates SEVENTEEN’s awareness of their role as cultural influencers in advancing education.

Another quote reflects the group’s concrete plan to improve educational infrastructure in less developed countries:

*“We plan to improve educational infrastructure in the least developed countries by building schools.”*

This statement reinforces the global scope of their commitment, aligning with UNESCO’s mission of providing equal access to education worldwide. Such emphasis on infrastructure reflects the notion of education as both a right and a tool for reducing inequality.

The macrostructure further develops the theme of social responsibility through the declaration:

*“We pledge to work as ambassadors to UNESCO, to further raise awareness of the critical challenges in our time.”*

This reveals Joshua’s attempt to construct a long-term narrative of solidarity and commitment. It shows how the speech strategically places SEVENTEEN not only as entertainers but also as agents of global change.

### Superstructure (Schematic)

Joshua SEVENTEEN’s speech at the UNESCO Youth Forum 2023 follows a clear and systematic structure, consisting of an opening, body, and closing, in accordance with Teun A. van Dijk’s theory of superstructure. In the **opening**, Joshua introduces himself and connects SEVENTEEN’s achievements with their social responsibility. He states:

*“Hello my name is Joshua and I’m also a member of Seventeen. After some years of sharing the fruits of our learnings, growth, and achievement with the wider world, Seventeen started a new Chapter of giving back in August 2022. We began working with the Korean National commission for UNESCO, the partnership that ultimately led us here today.”*

This opening establishes Joshua’s identity and credibility before the international audience. The transition from “*sharing the fruits of our learnings*” to “*giving back*” reflects ethical growth and legitimizes SEVENTEEN’s presence in the forum.

The body of the speech develops the campaign narrative systematically, highlighting both concrete actions and long-term commitments. Joshua explains:

*“Perhaps you’ve heard of the #GoingTogether campaign. SEVENTEEN launched educational Campaign last year with the KNCU. Through the campaign, we seek to make young people, the ones who will be leading the future, be aware of the importance of education. The campaign also supports growth through educational opportunities. We spent a lot of time thinking about how to raise awareness of the importance of education. To support the campaign, we posted on our social media account using the hashtag #EducationCanChange\_ and invited people to join in this conversation around education. We raised funds with a font inspired by an original character that Mingyu over here designed himself. We also ran a campaign booth at our Fan meeting event. We took all the donations added to it some of the profit from our world tour and used it to build a school in Malawi. None of this, would have been possible without our CARATs, our fans, who jumped into action to help the campaign. Thank you, CARATs. We love you. And there are even more reasons to be thankful. Our campaign caught the attention of UNESCO headquarters, who then offered to work in collaboration with SEVENTEEN and the KNCU. That gave us the opportunity to*

*expand the #GoingTogether campaign to the whole world. Going forward we plan to improve educational infrastructure in the least developed countries by building schools. We also strive to keep the conversation around education going. We pledge to work as ambassadors to UNESCO, to further raise awareness of the critical challenges in our time. Now we want to take on a greater share of the responsibility, reach even more reasons and do even more. That is why we are here with you all today. We are honored to take in this UNESCO Youth Forum to amplify youth voices and give the incredible young people before us, a say in shaping our future. We have already experienced what It's like to make your Dreams Come by coming together in solidarity for positive change."*

Through this long passage, Joshua details the #GoingTogether campaign, its goals, and the actions carried out, including spreading educational messages via social media, fundraising through a font design, and building a school in Malawi. He emphasizes the indispensable role of CARATs in the campaign's success and acknowledges the attention gained from UNESCO headquarters, which led to broader international collaboration. He also lays out SEVENTEEN's future plans such as improving educational infrastructure in underdeveloped countries and committing to serve as UNESCO ambassadors. The body of the speech thus presents the campaign's journey, highlights the impact of collective action, and situates the group's role in advancing global education.

In the **closing**, Joshua reinforces the message of inclusivity, hope, and solidarity. He concludes:

*"We hope that our actions through UNESCO will reach young people everywhere, from kids on islands, even smaller than Jeju, to those in every corner of the world. Who are fostering, reaffirming and acting on their Dreams even as we speak. Just as it did for SEVENTEEN, #EducationCanChange\_Me, #EducationCanChange\_MyDream, and #EducationCanChange\_theWorld. Let's make it, So We're all #GoingTogether by learning*

*together."*

This closing statement combines a global vision with personal experience, showing how education and dreams intersect to inspire change. The use of education-themed hashtags and the direct invitation "Let's make it..." functions as a collective call to action, leaving the audience with a strong and memorable impression.

Taken together, the superstructure of Joshua's speech demonstrates a coherent organization that begins by establishing ethos, develops arguments through evidence and actions, and closes with an inspirational appeal for collective participation in global educational change.

### Microstructure

Microstructure involves semantics, syntax, stylistics, and rhetoric. Joshua's speech contains rich examples of each.

*"After some years of sharing the fruits of our learnings, growth, and achievement with the wider world, Seventeen started a new Chapter of giving back in August 2022."*

The metaphor "fruits of our learnings" conveys a sense of growth that naturally leads to responsibility, highlighting the theme of maturation. The complex sentence structure contributes to logical sequencing, guiding the reader through the progression of ideas. Stylistically, the capitalization of "Chapter" emphasizes its importance, suggesting a significant moment or turning point. Rhetorically, these elements together position SEVENTEEN as mature and socially engaged, reflecting their development both artistically and personally.

*"Through the campaign, we seek to make young people, the ones who will be leading the future, be aware of the importance of education."*

The statement establishes an explicit link between education and future leadership, emphasizing the role of learning in shaping capable and responsible individuals. The use of balanced clauses ensures clarity and coherence, allowing the message to flow

smoothly. Stylistically, the formal diction aligns with an institutional context, reinforcing a sense of seriousness and purpose. Rhetorically, the passage appeals to both responsibility and aspiration, inspiring readers to view education as a foundation for meaningful leadership.

*“None of this would have been possible without our CARATs, our fans, who jumped into action to help the campaign.”*

The expression conveys gratitude directed toward fans, acknowledging their support and presence. The use of a relative clause adds elaboration, providing depth and a more personal touch to the message. Stylistically, the tone remains personal and warm, fostering a sense of closeness and sincerity. Rhetorically, this strengthens the bond of solidarity between the artist and the audience, reinforcing mutual appreciation and emotional connection.

*“Let’s make it, so we’re all #GoingTogether by learning together.”*

The statement emphasizes unity and collective learning, highlighting the importance of shared growth and collaboration. The imperative construction creates a sense of urgency, motivating immediate action and engagement. Stylistically, the repetition of “together” intensifies the message, reinforcing the theme of solidarity and mutual effort. Rhetorically, the use of a hashtag transforms the statement into a form of digital activism, extending its reach and encouraging communal participation in an online context.

In conclusion, the microstructure thus illustrates how Joshua balances formal institutional discourse with creative, accessible rhetoric. This hybrid approach expands the reach of his message to both policymakers and youth audiences.

### **Audience Response (S-O-R Analysis)**

To complement CDA, audience comments on YouTube were analyzed using the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Achjar et al., 2023). The speech served as stimulus, the viewers

as organisms, and their comments as responses.

*“Congratulations Seventeen, you made a great impact in the lives of others. Your existence created a positive difference and solidarity. Thank you for providing education for the less fortunate children and keep inspiring the youth... We are so proud of you.”* (@Starlah-w5q)

This response reveals cognitive awareness of SEVENTEEN’s contributions, affective pride, and conative encouragement.

*“I had no idea that they had built a school in Malawi. Wow I have never been more proud of them. Thank you Seventeen for giving back to the community and supporting education of all children everywhere. God bless you.”* (@shayceycarat3650)

The comment shows cognitive surprise, affective admiration, and a conative blessing, illustrating deep engagement.

*“Not only they’re great artists but also excellent public speakers... Each one of them is confident, relaxed, engaging... And most importantly, they deliver sincere, heartfelt and inspiring messages.”* (@nenasuprobo1026)

This evaluation highlights delivery style, balancing professional assessment with emotional admiration.

*“Bangga bangga bangga. Mereka bener bener jadi inspirasi buat orang di sekitar mereka... terima kasih Seventeen 🍀.”* (@caratslyfe)

Repetition of “*bangga*” reflects strong affective pride. The message illustrates how discourse fosters both admiration and identification among audiences.

The analysis of macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure confirms that Joshua’s speech at UNESCO 2023 was a well-structured discourse consistent with Teun A. Van Dijk’s framework. The macrostructure revealed education as a transformative theme, framed through collaboration, social action, and the #GoingTogether campaign.

The superstructure presented a coherent flow, beginning with the establishment of ethos, developing into narratives of local-to-global action, and concluding with an inclusive invitation to participate in change. This careful arrangement reflects what Van Dijk (2017) emphasized as the importance of schematic organization in strengthening the persuasiveness of discourse.

The speech also demonstrated contextual adaptation by aligning its structure with UNESCO's mission as a global forum for education and collaboration. Through formal and rhetorical language, expressions of solidarity, and collective appeals, Joshua successfully carried universal values rather than individual or entertainment-centered messages. This adaptation resonates with Fairclough's (2013) view that discourse is not neutral but socially situated, and with Baharuddin's (2022) idea that CDA exposes how language embodies ideology and power relations. By elevating the role of youth and stressing equal access to education, the speech transformed from a mere performance into an institutionalized form of advocacy.

Audience responses further illustrate the speech's effectiveness as measured through the Stimulus-Organism-Response model. Comments such as those from @Starlah-w5q and @shayceycarat3650 reflected affective pride, cognitive surprise, and conative support, showing alignment between Joshua's intended message and public interpretation. Compared with previous studies, Joshua's discourse differs from ideologically divided or confrontational rhetoric, as in Kadim's (2022) analysis of Trump, and is closer to the creative, youth-oriented strategies highlighted by Aprilia and Firdaus (2024). This suggests that popular culture figures can effectively function as discourse agents, bridging entertainment and advocacy, and reinforcing Van Dijk's claim that discourse both reflects and shapes social practice.

## Conclusion

This research concludes Joshua SEVENTEEN's speech at the UNESCO Youth Forum 2023 demonstrates a complete discourse structure in line

with Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, encompassing macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. The speech consistently highlights education as a transformative force for youth, presented in a formal, inclusive, and inspiring style appropriate to the UNESCO context. Audience responses on YouTube revealed pride, admiration, and awareness, confirming the speech's effectiveness both as discourse and as digital communication. These findings suggest that popular culture figures can act as agents of social change by integrating entertainment and advocacy. Future studies may further investigate how similar figures from global pop culture employ discourse strategies in different institutional contexts or compare their impact with political leaders and policymakers in shaping public awareness.

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