

Language and Ideologies in Mission Statements of State and Private Universities in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how state and private universities in Ghana construct institutional identities and ideological orientations through their mission statements. Drawing on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, the study analyses 63 mission statements to uncover the ideological categories encoded in these texts and the linguistic resources through which they are realized. The findings reveal thirty-two ideological orientations, with educational, developmental, professional, leadership, and national ideologies most frequently foregrounded. Linguistically, ideologies are naturalized through declarative sentence structures, non-finite clauses, nominalization, evaluative adjectives, and strategic representations of social actors. A comparative analysis shows that state universities predominantly align with national development, scientific advancement, and public service discourses, whereas private universities, especially faith-based ones, mobilize religious, entrepreneurial, global, and moral ideologies to differentiate their institutional identities. These patterns demonstrate that mission statements operate as ideological technologies that mediate institutional legitimacy, respond to socio-political pressures, and position universities within both local and global educational markets. The study contributes to Critical Discourse Studies by illuminating how higher education institutions in the Global South recontextualize globally circulating discourses within culturally and politically specific contexts. It also offers insights into how language functions as a strategic tool in institutional branding, policy alignment, and identity construction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Universities today express their institutional identities, priorities, and ideological leanings through institutional discourse, and among the most prominent genres in this discourse is the university mission statement. As higher education systems across the world undergo rapid change due to globalization, marketization, accountability, and increasing levels of competition, the university's mission statement has evolved from a simple declarative statement about organizational purpose to a much more complex and multifunctional tool for institutional discourse (Darbi, 2012; Zhuang & Kong, 2023; Mas-Machuca et al., 2024). Rather than serving as a simple statement of organizational purpose, university mission statements provide narratives of institutional identity, legitimacy, and

aspiration, and, within this context, language assumes a critical role as a medium for university discourse on institutional mandate, legitimacy, and ideology.

Mission statements have therefore emerged as a key genre of communication in modern higher education institutions (Cieciora et al., 2021). In earlier scholarship on management, mission statements have been conceptualized as formal statements of organizational fundamental intent and underlying values (Pearce & David, 1987; David, 1989; Falsey, 1989; Lugoboni & Goto, 2018). In this sense, a mission statement serves as a mechanism for strategic planning and decision-making in organizations, underscoring its importance in defining organizational intent and direction. Although mission statements have been viewed as a key managerial tool in literature, more contemporary research highlights their symbolic and rhetorical importance. Rather than merely articulating organizational intent, mission statements have been viewed as rhetorical devices to facilitate organizational identity, values, and legitimacy (Mas-Machuca et al., 2024; Hove, 2022; Darbi, 2012).

In higher education institutions, mission statements have emerged as key communication tools to project institutional distinctiveness and strategic intent. Morphew and Hartley (2006) note that universities use mission statements as “strategic expressions” of organizational identity to project specific values, priorities, and visions of education, thereby creating distinctiveness in the highly competitive higher education market. In this sense, mission statements are not only internal managerial tools but also communicative devices to project institutional intent to external audiences such as prospective students, accreditation bodies, governments, and the public (Ezekwe & Egwu, 2016; Hove, 2022). Swales and Rogers (1995) note that mission statements constitute a specific genre of organizational discourse that projects institutional culture and values while simultaneously articulating organizational legitimacy.

From a discourse analytical point of view, mission statements can thus be seen as institutional texts that encode ideological positions through linguistic and rhetorical means (Vargas-Halabi & Yagüe-Perales, 2024; Abawa & Obse, 2024). As socially embedded discourses, they index the wider political, economic, and cultural contexts in which institutions are situated. Research on institutional discourses, including Banda and Mafofo (2016), has also shown that mission statements often resort to widely circulating discourses of excellence, innovation, global competitiveness, professionalism, and social responsibility, thus aligning universities with the dominant narratives of the role of higher education in contemporary societies (Amoa-Gyarteng & Dhliwayo, 2024). For example, Banda and Mafofo (2016) show how South African universities use mission statements as resources for institutional branding and identity construction, mobilizing discourses of transformation, modernization, and global relevance in response to changing socio-political contexts.

Additionally, mission statements often encode national and developmental aspirations. A corpus-based analysis of Turkish university mission and vision statements by Efe and Ozer (2015) showed that themes of national progress, technological development, and global competitiveness recur. These findings underscore the ideological nature of mission statements and illustrate how institutional discourse indexes wider socio-

political agendas. In many cases, universities situate themselves as producers of knowledge, agents of national development, and actors in global knowledge economies. In this sense, mission statements are condensed ideological texts that articulate institutional values while responding to shifting expectations about higher education (Hove, 2022; Seo & Itoh, 2019; Orphan, 2018).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a significant theoretical framework for analyzing the ideological dimensions of institutional discourse. In CDA, ideology is viewed not merely as a set of beliefs but also as a discursive practice that serves as a mechanism for constructing and reconstructing social relations, identities, and power (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough, 2003). Ideologies are embedded in linguistic practice, including lexical choices, grammatical structures, metaphors, and evaluative statements that are perceived as natural or common sense but are used to construct institutional discourses about themselves and their roles in society. As Fairclough (2003, p. 9) argues, discourse is a key mechanism in the “reproduction or transformation of relations of power, where social meanings are naturalized through repeated linguistic structures in institutional texts”.

To further this understanding, Van Dijk (2006) defines ideology as a socially shared belief system that shapes the identities and practices of specific social groups. From this stance, institutional ideologies embedded in university mission statements shape how universities conceive their roles in society, their constituencies, and the type of knowledge or citizenship they seek to promote. These ideologies are not often stated explicitly but are instead encoded in discursive practices that privilege specific values such as excellence, innovation, development, morality, or global engagement. As Voloshinov (1986) suggests, linguistic signs are inextricably linked to the social contexts of their use, such that discourse is always reflective of the ideological contexts in which it is produced.

In higher education, ideological discourses have become increasingly influenced by globalization and marketization (Hasnain, 2020; Stich & Reeves, 2016). For instance, in many countries, higher education institutions are now operating in competitive knowledge economies characterized by globalization, rankings, and economic relevance. Similarly, in Ghana, it has been argued that ideological discourses in higher education institutions have become increasingly influenced by neoliberal discourses. For instance, in her study, Edu-Buandoh (2010) demonstrates how higher education institutions in Ghana have increasingly used market-oriented language in their strategic communication.

In the context of higher education in Africa, it has been argued that ideological discourses in higher education institutions have become increasingly influenced by the socio-political and cultural context in which they operate. For instance, in many African countries, higher education institutions have played a critical role in the socio-economic and technological advancement of the country (Darbi, 2012; Amoa-Gyarteng & Dhliwayo, 2024). As a result, mission statements have become increasingly influenced by local discourses of nation-building and community service. Similarly, in the case of faith-based institutions, ideological discourses are increasingly shaped by local religious and moral discourses.

While there is increasing international literature on mission statements and institutional discourses, there is still limited literature on the ideological construction of mission statements in African higher education. The current literature has examined mission statements in various contexts, including those of South African universities (Banda & Mafofo, 2016) and faith-based tertiary institutions in Ghana (Gunu, 2013). However, little literature has been found on comparative analyses of how various types of universities in similar contexts construct their institutional ideologies. In Ghana, for instance, there has been a proliferation of universities in recent years, with private universities accounting for a significant share of the tertiary education landscape. Most of these private universities are faith-based or entrepreneurial in their conceptualization of higher education.

This diversification in the higher education sector highlights important questions about how universities create their identities through institutional discourses and how these identities vary across institutional types. While national policy frameworks generally govern state universities and focus on their contributions to national development agendas, private universities adopt their own ideological orientations grounded in religious, competitive-market, or globalized-market discourses (Ramirez, 2020; Zhuang & Kong, 2023). However, the linguistic means by which such ideological orientations are articulated in their mission statements is not fully explored.

This study tends to fill this gap by employing Fairclough's (1995, 2003) framework on Critical Discourse Analysis. Therefore, seeks to explore how ideologies are constructed in the mission statements of state and private universities in Ghana and how these ideologies are linguistically expressed. Given that mission statements serve as socially situated discursive practices that mediate between institutional identity and socio-political structures, the research explores the mission statements of 63 universities in Ghana. The paper seeks to identify the ideological categories embedded in such mission statements and explore the linguistic means by which such ideologies are constructed. More specifically, the study addresses three research questions:

1. What ideologies are constructed in the mission statements of state and private universities in Ghana?
2. How are these ideologies linguistically realized within mission statement discourse?
3. What similarities and differences exist between the ideological constructions of state and private universities?

In this regard, this research addresses important questions that add to the emerging body of literature on institutional discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis by shedding more light on how higher education organizations in the Global South use language to create their organizational identity and ideological legitimacy. It also offers insights into how globalized discourses on development, excellence, innovation, and global competitiveness are taken up within Ghana's unique cultural, political, and religious context.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative methodological approach that is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Critical Discourse Analysis is appropriate for this study because of its emphasis on the interrelationships among language, ideology, and social structures. According to Fairclough (1995; 2003), Critical Discourse Analysis is concerned with the interrelationship between language, ideology, and social structures. Furthermore, discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis can create and shape social realities; thus, this study employed this aspect to investigate how language contributes to the creation and representation of ideologies in higher education in Ghana. Universities' mission statements are considered strategic discourse because they create and represent the institutions' ideologies in linguistic form. As a result, they are considered appropriate for this study because they have been strategically designed to convey the institutions' ideologies and values (Seo & Itoh, 2019).

2.2. Data Collection and Corpus Construction

The dataset used in this study consists of mission statements retrieved from the official websites of accredited universities in Ghana. At the time of data collection, there were 69 accredited universities in Ghana's higher education system, including both public and private institutions. Mission statements of 63 universities were available and thus included in the data set. Six universities were excluded from the data set because their official websites indicated that their mission statements were still under development. The universities were grouped into two categories based on institutional ownership and governance: state universities ($n = 19$), which include traditional public universities, technical universities, and specialized public institutions, and private universities ($n = 44$), which include faith-based institutions and private universities that are affiliated with public universities for the validation of programs offered.

Mission statements were retrieved from the "About Us" or institutional profile pages of the official university websites, where these institutions of higher education provide information on their mission, vision, and core values. Only the mission statement texts were retrieved for analysis to ensure consistency in genre. Other documents, such as institutional profiles, strategic plans, and value statements, were excluded from the data set to ensure focus on mission statement discourse.

Although mission statements are short texts, they are carefully crafted institutional texts that distill organizational identity and priorities into highly strategic language. Their brevity makes them analytically dense and particularly amenable to critical discourse analysis. The dataset thus constitutes a small yet complete corpus for the study of mission statement discourse in the Ghanaian higher education sector.

2.3. Analytical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis

The analysis follows Fairclough's (1995, 2003) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice operating at three interconnected levels:

1. Textual analysis (description): examination of the linguistic features of the text, including vocabulary, grammar, clause structure, and lexical choices.

2. Discursive practice (interpretation): analysis of how texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted within institutional contexts.
3. Social practice (explanation): interpretation of how discourse relates to broader social, political, and institutional structures.

This framework enables the study to move beyond simple content analysis by examining both the ideological themes present in mission statements and the linguistic mechanisms through which these themes are expressed. This approach also allows institutional discourse to be interpreted in relation to wider transformations in higher education, including globalization, marketization, and national development priorities.

2.4. Analytical Procedures

The analysis was conducted in three stages to identify ideological patterns and their linguistic realization systematically.

Stage 1: Identification of Ideological Themes

At this stage, each mission statement was analyzed to identify explicit and implicit ideological orientations embedded in the text. According to Van Dijk (2006), ideology is a socially shared system of beliefs. In this analysis, representations related to themes in the text, including education, professionalism, leadership, national development, global engagement, religion, innovation, entrepreneurship, and social responsibility, were considered. As the mission statements were read and analyzed inductively, thirty-two ideological themes were identified. These themes facilitated comparisons between state and private universities and served as the basis for identifying dominant and institution-specific ideological themes.

Stage 2: Linguistic Analysis of Ideological Realization

In the second stage, the study examined the linguistic features through which the identified ideologies were constructed. Attention was given to the following linguistic resources:

- a. Sentence structures, especially declarative and imperative forms, are used to assert institutional commitments.
- b. Clause structures, including non-finite clauses such as *to-infinitive* and *-ing* constructions, often foreground institutional purpose.
- c. Nominalization, through which processes such as development, innovation, or leadership are represented as institutional achievements or goals.
- d. Evaluative lexical items, including adjectives and noun phrases that frame institutional activities positively (e.g., *quality education*, *world-class training*, *responsible leadership*).
- e. Representation of social actors, including students, communities, industries, and the nation, to determine how universities position themselves in relation to these stakeholders.

This stage reveals how ideology is embedded not only in thematic content but also in the grammatical and lexical structures that shape institutional discourse.

Stage 3: Comparative Analysis

The final stage involved comparing ideological patterns between state and private universities. This comparative analysis examined how differences in institutional

mandates, governance structures, and socio-economic positioning influence the ideological orientations expressed in mission statements. Private universities, particularly faith-based institutions, were observed to emphasize religious, entrepreneurial, and global ideologies more strongly, whereas state universities tended to foreground national development, scientific advancement, and public service commitments. By examining these differences, the study provides insight into how institutional type shapes discursive representations of university identity and purpose.

2.5. Methodological Significance and Limitations

Mission statements are considered strategic texts in university settings and offer significant insight into how such organizations portray their identity and values (Seo & Itoh, 2019). The concise nature of such texts and their carefully crafted content make it highly appropriate for a discourse analysis, where it is likely that linguistic features are highly significant and representative of the university's overall positioning. The fact that this study can access and analyze multiple mission statements from different university settings enables it to draw significant inferences about ideological trends in Ghana's higher education discourse.

However, this study has several limitations. Firstly, it should be recognized that mission statements are official university discourses and, as such, may not necessarily reflect how such institutions operate in practice. Additionally, it should be noted that such texts are concise and may not necessarily provide detailed information about university policies and strategies. Nonetheless, this study provides significant and insightful insights into how language operates in university settings and can be used as a strategic tool in higher education. The fact that the research can access and analyze multiple mission statements from different university settings enables it to draw significant inferences about ideological trends in Ghana's higher education discourse.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Ideological Constructions

This section addresses Research Question 1 by identifying the ideologies constructed in the mission statements of Ghanaian state and private universities. The findings reveal a wide range of ideological orientations that reflect institutional mandates, socio-political contexts, and the evolving landscape of higher education. Ideology is encoded in representational choices that appear naturalized yet work to legitimize particular social relations (Fairclough, 2003; Van Dijk, 2006). The analysis demonstrates that mission statements constitute ideologically saturated texts that articulate visions of education, citizenship, development, and identity. Across the 63 mission statements examined, 387 instances of ideological expression were identified, distributed across 32 thematic categories. These ideological formations can be grouped into dominant, recurrent, and institution-specific orientations.

3.1.1. Dominant ideologies: education, professionalism, leadership, and development

The most frequent ideological category, educational ideology, appeared in 53 mission statements, underscoring the foundational role universities attribute to teaching, learning,

and research. This emphasis aligns with institutional efforts to legitimate academic authority and signal alignment with global quality assurance norms. Phrases such as ‘quality teaching and learning,’ ‘advancing knowledge,’ and ‘promoting academic excellence’ construct education as both a public good and a competitive endeavor, naturalizing the university’s role as a producer of knowledge and human capital.

Closely linked is the ideology of professionalism (31 occurrences), which situates universities as training grounds for skilled labor. Many institutions highlight commitments to producing ‘competent,’ ‘responsible,’ or ‘industry-ready’ graduates. It reflects a neoliberal logic whereby higher education is framed in instrumental terms, shaping individuals for economic productivity. Professionalism functions here as a discursive bridge between academic identity and national imperatives of employability.

Leadership ideology (30 occurrences) also features prominently, particularly in mission statements that aim to cultivate ‘future leaders,’ ‘ethical leaders,’ or ‘value-driven leaders.’ Leadership discourse positions universities as moral and intellectual stewards responsible for shaping societal direction. It also individualizes development by placing responsibility on graduates to embody and enact leadership virtues. It aligns with contemporary global higher education trends that market leadership as a hallmark of elite educational experiences.

Finally, development ideology (22 occurrences) reflects Ghana’s national goals of technological, economic, and social advancement. Mission statements frequently foreground institutional contributions to “national development,” “industrial growth,” and “capacity building.” Through such discourse, universities position themselves as agents of state-building and socio-economic transformation. Development ideology is particularly salient in public universities, where alignment with national priorities reinforces state legitimacy and accountability.

3.1.2. Recurrent ideologies: globalization, entrepreneurialism, nationalism, policy, and innovation

A second cluster of ideologies appears recurrently across institutions and reflects broader global transformations in higher education. Globalization (17 occurrences) is articulated through references to ‘global competence,’ ‘international partnerships,’ and ‘world-class standards.’ These representations align universities with transnational mobility, competition, and global knowledge economies. The discourse constructs institutions as participants in global academic circuits, normalizing the pursuit of global visibility and competitiveness (Ezekwe & Egwu, 2016; Ramirez, 2020; Lomotey, 2025).

Entrepreneurial ideology (21 instances) positions universities as hubs of innovation, enterprise creation, and economic productivity. Terms such as ‘entrepreneurship training,’ ‘innovation,’ and ‘value creation’ redefine universities as actors within market economies. This ideological focus reinforces the shift towards marketization previously observed in Ghanaian institutional discourse (Edu-Buandoh, 2010) and mirrors global neoliberal restructuring of higher education. Nationalism (18 occurrences) appears in mission statements emphasizing patriotism, heritage, and national contribution. Phrases such as ‘serving the nation,’ ‘advancing national goals,’ or ‘building Ghana’s future’ situate universities within broader nation-building projects. Nationalism is discursively

intertwined with education and development ideologies, forming a coherent narrative of universities as custodians of national progress.

Policy ideology (6 occurrences) emerges through statements that foreground regulatory compliance, governance frameworks, or alignment with national educational directives. These references reinforce institutional credibility and signal accountability to state and accreditation bodies. Innovation (9 occurrences) cuts across entrepreneurial and educational discourse, constructing universities as forward-looking institutions that embrace technological advances and creative problem-solving.

3.1.3. Institution-specific ideologies: religion, locality, health, linguistic identity, and standardization

A third set of ideologies reflects sharper distinctions between state and private institutions. Religious ideology (18 occurrences) is overwhelmingly concentrated in private, often faith-based, universities. Mission statements emphasize ‘spiritual development,’ ‘moral education,’ ‘Christian values,’ and ‘church planting.’ These representations position education as both an academic and spiritual endeavor, shaping university identity within moral, theological, and pastoral frameworks. Religion functions as a differentiating ideology that constructs distinct forms of institutional legitimacy grounded in faith.

Locality ideology (5 occurrences) appears exclusively in state universities, reflecting commitments to serving local communities or regions. This discourse roots universities in specific socio-cultural landscapes and contrasts with private institutions’ tendency to foreground transnational orientation. Health ideology (7 instances), often linked to medical or health sciences institutions, emphasizes societal wellbeing and professional health training.

Linguistic ideology (1 instance), a rare but notable expression, reflects institutional commitment to language preservation or multilingualism, though this remains marginal across universities. Standardization (3 occurrences) appears only in private universities, aligning their institutional ambitions with global benchmarks or quality frameworks. It suggests a desire to gain legitimacy relative to older, more established state universities.

These ideological constructions in Ghanaian mission statements reveal a hybridized discursive landscape in which global competitiveness, national development, spiritual identity, and market rationality coexist. The mission statement emerges as a powerful ideological instrument through which universities articulate institutional purpose, align themselves with socio-political expectations, and differentiate themselves within an increasingly stratified higher education system.

3.2. Linguistic Realization of Ideologies

This section answers Research Question 2 by analyzing how these ideologies are linguistically realized in mission statement discourse. Ideologies are not only encoded in the thematic content of mission statements but are also materially realized through linguistic structures that frame, elevate, or naturalize specific institutional identities and values. Following Fairclough’s (1995, 2003) emphasis on the ideological significance of linguistic form, this section analyses how Ghanaian state and private universities employ sentence types, clause structures, nominalizations, evaluative lexis, and representational

choices to construct and legitimize their ideological orientations. The analysis shows that linguistic strategies work synergistically to produce authoritative, future-oriented, and socially consequential institutional identities.

3.2.1. Sentence types: declaratives and imperatives as ideological tools

Across the corpus, the declarative sentence is overwhelmingly dominant, appearing in 98% of the analyzed mission statements. Declaratives function to assert institutional commitments as factual and uncontested, thereby constructing universities as authoritative agents capable of delivering specific outcomes. Examples such as ‘We provide quality teaching, learning and research...’ or ‘KNUST exists to advance knowledge...’ exemplify how declaratives serve to normalize institutional purpose as common-sense and non-negotiable. Through this grammatical form, ideology becomes embedded in statements of institutional identity that appear self-evident rather than constructed.

Although rare, imperative constructions, notably in some private universities, play a distinct ideological role. Instances such as ‘to develop professionals of excellent caliber...’ explicitly direct the interpretation of institutional purpose, positioning the university as a commanding actor shaping national and global futures. The imperative mood foregrounds institutional agency and competence, intensifying the persuasive force of ideologies related to professionalism, nationalism, and global competitiveness. Thus, even though imperative forms constitute only 2% of the corpus, their pragmatic force signals a shift toward more assertive institutional self-fashioning.

3.2.2. Non-finite clauses and mission as purpose-oriented action

A key linguistic feature across the dataset is the pervasive use of non-finite to-infinitive and -ing clauses, particularly in sentence-initial positions. Examples include the following: ‘To promote the development of human resources...’ ‘Providing quality teaching, learning and research...’ ‘To function as a cutting-edge Christian university...’ These constructions foreground purpose and expected action rather than agents, effectively erasing institutional subjects while emphasizing institutional goals. It aligns with Fairclough’s (2003) observation that non-finite forms contribute to abstraction and impersonality, enabling institutions to present mission as an inevitable trajectory rather than a negotiated choice.

The use of non-finite clauses also creates ideological effects:

- i. Teleological framing– Universities appear driven by clear and inevitable goals (e.g., development, innovation, leadership formation).
- ii. Depersonalization– Responsibility is shifted away from identifiable actors, presenting ideology as embedded in institutional logic rather than in human decision-making.
- iii. Strategic ambiguity–non-finite constructions allow institutions to project ambitious visions without specifying mechanisms, reflecting what Morphew and Hartley (2006) describe as mission statements’ tendency toward aspirational vagueness.

3.2.3. Nominalization: condensing social processes into ideological objects

Nominalization, the transformation of processes into noun forms, is a key resource for embedding ideology. Terms such as development, innovation, leadership, entrepreneurship, excellence, and service appear frequently across mission statements. These lexical items condense complex socio-political processes into stable entities,

allowing universities to represent abstract goals as tangible institutional commitments, as shown in the following examples:

- i. 'promote industrial development'
- ii. 'advance knowledge in science and technology'
- iii. 'support national development'

Through nominalization, ideologies are packaged as discrete outcomes over which universities claim authority. This discursive strategy obscures the contested nature of these concepts, particularly development and excellence, and naturalizes them as universally desirable. Nominalization also supports the neoliberal orientation of higher education by transforming historically collective or public goods into institutional products. Ideologies thus become operationalized as deliverables, aligning with the logic of marketization (Hasnain, 2020; Edu-Buandoh, 2010).

3.2.4. Evaluative lexis: constructing institutional identity and aspirational ideals

Mission statements are saturated with evaluative adjectives that elevate institutional identity and encode ideological stances. Frequent descriptors include quality, innovation, comprehensiveness, liberalism, responsibility, professionalism, world-classness, and cutting-edge. These evaluations not only characterize institutional activities but also frame universities as actors aligned with global benchmarks, moral values, or national priorities. Adjectives thus serve as ideological signposts, signaling alignment with discourses of excellence, morality, transformation, or technological advancement.

For example:

- i. 'quality teaching, learning and research' encodes educational ideology.
- ii. 'creative, innovative and responsible citizens' constructs students as ideological agents of societal change.
- iii. 'cutting-edge Christian university' merges technological modernity with religious identity, producing a hybrid institutional ideology.

These evaluative forms project aspirational identities that differentiate universities within competitive educational markets.

3.2.5. Representation of social actors

Mission statements strategically represent social actors, students, communities, the nation, and industry to reflect institutional priorities and power relations. Universities frequently position themselves as active agents ('we provide,' 'we promote,' 'we develop') while communities and students are represented as beneficiaries. This relational configuration reinforces institutional authority and constructs universities as drivers of national and social progress. Notably, private universities introduce religious actors such as 'servants of God,' 'pastors,' or 'disciples,' foregrounding spiritual identity as a central dimension of institutional mission. It introduces an additional ideological layer absent in state universities and reflects distinct moral and theological framings of education.

Ultimately, the linguistic structures employed in mission statements, including declarative forms, non-finite clauses, nominalization, evaluative lexis, and selective representation of social actors, work together to naturalize the ideological orientations. Through these features, universities construct authoritative, aspirational, and ideologically

coherent institutional identities that reflect broader socio-political currents in Ghanaian higher education.

3.3. Differences Between State and Private Universities

This section addresses Research Question 3 by comparing ideological constructions across state and private universities. Although state and private universities in Ghana share several ideological orientations, including particularly those related to education, professionalism, development, and leadership, their mission statements differ significantly in how they construct institutional identity, legitimate their mandates, and position themselves within the higher education landscape. These differences reflect the distinct historical trajectories, governance frameworks, and socio-economic imperatives that shape each institutional type. A comparative CDA reveals systematic contrasts in ideological emphasis, linguistic strategies, and representational practices.

3.3.1. Divergent institutional mandates and ideological priorities

State universities overwhelmingly foreground ideologies tied to national development, industrialization, public service, and scientific advancement. Their mission statements frequently articulate commitments to ‘promoting industrial development,’ ‘supporting national policy,’ and ‘advancing knowledge in science and technology,’ reflecting alignment with state priorities and public accountability mechanisms. These themes are consistent with the state universities’ broader role in national capacity-building and their responsibility to contribute to socio-economic transformation. Private universities, by contrast, display a more diversified ideological landscape. Their mission statements place strong emphasis on religious ideology (18 occurrences), entrepreneurialism, global orientation, and moral formation. Faith-based institutions, in particular, foreground spiritual development, pastoral preparation, and moral responsibility, with mission statements referencing ‘raising pastors,’ ‘moral education,’ and ‘church planting’. This ideological framing is absent in state universities, whose discourse is anchored in secular and national developmental narratives. Private institutions also articulate entrepreneurial and global aspirations more assertively, using language such as ‘develop globally competent leaders’ or ‘create innovative entrepreneurs.’

3.3.2. Globalization versus locality

A striking contrast emerges in the deployment of globalization and locality discourses. Private universities frequently construct themselves as globally oriented institutions, seeking transnational legitimacy through references to ‘global citizenship,’ ‘international collaboration,’ and ‘world-class education’. This aligns with their competitive positioning in a saturated tertiary sector, where a global orientation serves as a marketing strategy to attract prospective students and secure prestige (Stich & Reeves, 2016). State universities, however, balance global aspirations with explicit commitments to locality, a discourse absent in private institutions. Locality ideology (5 occurrences) appears exclusively in state mission statements, where universities emphasize serving specific regions, communities, or national constituencies. It reflects historical mandates tied to regional development and public service obligations (Orphan, 2018; Lugboni & Goto, 2018). In contrast, private universities project outward-facing cosmopolitan identities,

positioning themselves within global knowledge economies rather than local social ecologies.

3.3.3. Moral and theological authority vs. secular public mandates

Private universities, particularly faith-based ones, construct institutional identity through discourses of morality, spirituality, and divine mission. Mission statements invoking ‘servants of God,’ ‘Biblical knowledge,’ or ‘Christian values’ discursively situate education within theological frameworks. These ideological markers position private universities as moral communities and frame their institutional purpose as extending beyond academic training to spiritual formation. State universities do not employ religious discourse; instead, they rely on secular ideological constructs such as national policy alignment, industrialization, scientific innovation, and public accountability (Orphan, 2018). Their mission statements project institutional authority through associations with state goals and the public good, indicating sources of legitimacy distinct from those of private institutions, which draw authority from religious or moral narratives.

3.3.4. Standardization and quality assurance as competitive positioning

Private universities exhibit greater emphasis on standardization (3 occurrences), referencing global benchmarks or quality frameworks to enhance their institutional credibility. This discursive strategy responds to the competitive pressures private institutions face in establishing legitimacy relative to long-established state universities. Phrases such as “meeting international standards” or “achieving global excellence” function as identity-building tools that counter perceptions of institutional inferiority. State universities, by contrast, rely less on standardization discourse and instead assert legitimacy through historical prestige, national mission, and academic capacity. Their credibility derives from state mandates and long-standing reputations rather than from appeals to external validation frameworks.

3.3.5. Linguistic strategies in institutional positioning

Linguistic patterns reinforce these ideological differences. Private universities frequently use:

- i. Evaluative adjectives to mark moral or spiritual superiority (e.g., ‘humane,’ ‘Biblical,’ ‘value-driven’),
- ii. Imperative constructions signaling institutional authority in shaping future leaders,
- iii. Infinitival clauses that project aspirational global or spiritual missions (‘to build God-fearing leaders,’ ‘to equip globally minded graduates’).

State universities exhibit:

- i. Declarative structures asserting institutional identity in authoritative, factual terms,
- ii. Nominalizations emphasizing development and scientific responsibilities (‘promotion of industrial development,’ ‘advancement of knowledge’),
- iii. Representations of the nation as the primary beneficiary, reflecting alignment with public service mandates.

These linguistic divergences demonstrate how grammatical and lexical choices function ideologically, producing distinct institutional narratives.

3.3.6. Ideological density and identity differentiation

Although both institutional types share core academic ideologies, private universities display greater ideological density, incorporating religious, entrepreneurial, global, and moral discourses. This layered ideological configuration reflects their hybrid institutional identities as educational, spiritual, and commercial entities. State universities, on the other hand, construct a narrower but more institutionally entrenched ideological profile centered on national responsibility, scientific advancement, and public service. Their discourse reflects stability and alignment with state structures, whereas private universities use mission statements as instruments of differentiation and competitive positioning.

Indicatively, mission statement discourse constructs distinct ideological identities for state and private universities. State institutions position themselves as engines of national development and scientific progress, grounded in secular and public mandates. Private institutions leverage religious, entrepreneurial, and global discourses to project unique identities and compete within an expanding tertiary education market. These differences underscore the role of mission statements as ideological artifacts that mediate institutional legitimacy, articulate strategic orientations, and reflect broader socio-political structures in Ghanaian higher education.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Ideological Orientations in Mission Statement Discourse

The research findings show that the discourse of university mission statements in Ghana revolves around dominant ideological orientations such as education, professionalism, leadership, and national development. These ideologies are similar to globally recognized narratives about universities as creators of knowledge, professional expertise, and national human capital (Stich & Reeves, 2016; Bittencourt & Willetts, 2018). As observed in other research, university mission statements convey the value and importance of the university to society (Uwizeyimana, 2025; Morphey & Hartley, 2006). The dominant ideologies of education and professionalism align with the current focus on teaching, research, and graduate employability skills in modern higher education discourse.

The dominant use of national development as an ideological orientation in Ghanaian universities' mission statements resonates with universities' broader role as actors in societal development. In Africa, universities are seen as major contributors to societal development through socio-economic transformation, technology, and human capacity development. This finding resonates with other research works that show that higher education institutions in developing countries use development discourses as part of their university narratives (Uwizeyimana, 2025; Heinke, 2022). The use of national development discourses in Ghanaian university mission statements resonates with the broader role of public universities as contributors to national development and human capacity development.

The study's findings also highlight the presence of globalization and entrepreneurial ideologies in most of the university's mission statements. The presence of global competence, international partnerships, innovation, and entrepreneurialism in Ghanaian

universities' mission statements suggests that Ghanaian universities are increasingly aligned with global trends in higher education governance. It is in line with the restructuring of higher education systems in different parts of the world, where there is a move towards a neoliberal model of higher education governance in which higher education systems compete in a global knowledge economy and contribute to innovation-based economic growth (Heinke, 2022; Bittencourt & Willetts, 2018; Cunha & Harten, 2016). Other studies have found similar ideological patterns in university mission statements in different parts of the world. For example, Gunawan and Hamida (2023) found that university mission statements in Indonesia often combine developmental and neoliberal discourses, highlighting universities' roles in societal development and global competitiveness. Similarly, Chan, Yang, and Lo (2023) found that higher education systems worldwide often incorporate neoliberal values such as efficiency, innovation, and global competitiveness in their institutional communication.

The study's findings show that Ghanaian universities operate in a hybrid ideological space where traditional developmental and public service values and discourses are intertwined with market-oriented ones, such as innovation, entrepreneurialism, and global engagement. It aligns with global transformations in higher education governance, in which higher education systems must address both national developmental challenges and global competitiveness in terms of prestige, funding, and student recruitment (Bittencourt & Willetts, 2018; Hajdas & Kłeczek, 2021; Dębski et al., 2020).

4.2. Linguistic Realization of Institutional Ideologies

While the study reveals the presence of specific ideologies, it also shows that these ideologies are expressed through particular linguistic features, which ultimately influence the construction of institutional identities. Consistent with Fairclough's (2003) argument that ideology is expressed through linguistic form, it is evident that grammatical features such as declarative sentence structure, non-finite clauses, nominalization, and evaluative language play an important role in the naturalization of institutional ideologies. While declarative sentence structure is predominant in all university mission statements, it is consistent with the idea that such grammatical features play an important role in the naturalization of ideologies. Declarative sentence structure gives the university an aura of authority and certainty by presenting institutional ideologies as facts. It is consistent with Swales and Rogers' (1995) study, which revealed that university mission statements frequently employed declarative sentence structure to convey institutional legitimacy and institutional confidence. Through such grammatical features, university ideologies are portrayed as self-evident truths universally desirable, rather than institutional strategies that are contestable.

While the frequent use of non-finite clause constructions in university mission statements might be expected to provide a sense of dynamism and change, it is consistent with Fairclough's (2003) argument that such features play an important role in the abstraction and reification of ideologies. The frequent use of words such as development, innovation, leadership, and excellence to describe institutional ideologies suggests that university ideologies are expressed as institutional deliverables; as such, these words abstract socio-political ideologies into institutional features. Through such linguistic

features, the university claims ownership of universally desirable ideologies while, at the same time, masking the complex socio-political features underlying them.

Evaluative words also have an important impact on the construction of institutional identity. Words like ‘world-class,’ ‘innovative,’ ‘responsible,’ and ‘cutting-edge’ position the university as progressive and competitive. In this respect, evaluative words are used as rhetorical devices to position the institution in line with the dominant discourse of ‘excellence’ and ‘innovation’. It has also been noted in other studies of university mission statements that similar linguistic strategies are used to construct institutional identity (Lima et al., 2023).

The use of non-finite clauses also affects the ideological construction of institutional mission statements. By placing the institution’s goals before the agents, it inevitably positions the institution. This linguistic strategy allows institutions to position themselves as progressive while avoiding strategic ambiguity regarding goal achievement. As noted by Morphew and Hartley (2006), mission statements are aspirational statements that position the institution in terms of its goals and values.

4.3. Institutional Differences and Ideological Positioning

The comparison between state and private universities reveals significant differences in ideological positioning. Although both types of institutions share common academic ideologies regarding education, professionalism, and leadership, their mission statements are characterized by distinct sources of institutional legitimacy. Ideologies of national development, scientific progress, and public service dominate the mission statements of state universities. These results are consistent with the historical role of public universities as institutions mandated to support national development agendas and to provide public goods through education and research. The positioning of national development discourse aligns with broader trends in higher education policy, positioning universities to contribute directly to economic development and technological innovation.

The mission statements of private universities are more ideologically diverse. Some private universities include religious, entrepreneurial, and globalization discourses in their mission statements. Religious universities, in particular, position their mission statements around moral development, spiritual formation, and Christian values. These results are consistent with other studies that have shown that religious universities integrate theological discourses with academic goals (Kim, 2025; Van der Walt & Oosthuizen, 2022; Irigaray, Cunha & Harten, 2016). These ideological positions enable private universities to differentiate themselves in a competitive higher education market by providing distinctive institutional identities. Private universities also tend to place greater emphasis on globalism and competitiveness. The use of the terms “global citizenship,” “international collaboration,” and “world-class quality” indicates a deliberate attempt to locate these institutions within a global framework of education. It is consistent with research that finds universities increasingly use globalized discourses to promote the legitimacy of their institutions and attract international students (Mizrahi-Shtelman & Drori, 2021; Lomotey, 2025).

The differences found between the state and private universities also reflect the ideological conflicts between neoliberalism and collectivism in higher education. Whereas

neoliberal ideology emphasizes market competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and individualism, collectivism emphasizes social responsibility, community, and national development. Research on the discourses of higher education has found that mission statements are often a location where these ideological conflicts are worked out (Madikizela-Madiya, 2022; Van der Walt & Oosthuizen, 2022).

4.4. Global Trends and Local Adaptations in Higher Education Discourse

The findings of this research also highlight the complex relationship between global higher education trends and local socio-political contexts. Universities across the globe have been found to use similar discursive frameworks that promote excellence, innovation, entrepreneurship, and global competitiveness. This phenomenon has been referred to as institutional isomorphism, in which institutions across contexts use similar structures and discourses in response to shared pressures and expectations (Madikizela-Madiya, 2022).

However, the research findings have also highlighted that while universities in Ghana have used global discourses of innovation and internationalization, they have also employed similar discourses to promote national development, community engagement, and religious identity. This phenomenon of combining global and local discourses can also be seen in the higher education system in other countries in the Global South. For example, Mizrahi-Shtelman and Drori (2021) have highlighted how universities in Israel negotiate an “identity paradox” in their mission statements by simultaneously promoting global excellence and local relevance. In another study, Uwizeyimana (2025) highlighted how universities in Rwanda have tried to balance the pressure of neoliberalism with national development and social responsibility.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the construction of ideologies and their linguistic realization in the mission statements of state and private universities in Ghana, using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The study offered a comprehensive account of the realization of ideologies in the mission statements of universities in Ghana based on the analysis of 63 mission statements. The study established that the mission statement of a university in Ghana is an ideologically rich institutional discourse through which the university constructs and communicates its institutional purpose. The study found that Ghanaian universities incorporate a wide range of ideologies, including education, professionalism, leadership, development, globalization, nationalism, religion, and innovation, in their mission statements. These ideologies are realized in accordance with the university’s historical mandate and the socio-political environment in which it is situated. The study found that the mission statements of universities in Ghana reflect their historical mandates, with state universities emphasizing ideologies of development, scientific advancement, and service to the nation. In contrast, private universities, particularly those affiliated with religion, emphasize religious ideologies, globalization, and innovation.

The research contributes to an understanding of how ideology is realized in language. The research found that ideological commitments are realized through various linguistic

features, including declarative sentence types, non-finite clauses, nominalizations, and representations of social actors. These linguistic features enable universities to portray their institutional priorities as objective and universally desirable goals. Through this process, mission statements transform ideological commitments into neutral institutional commitments. This research thus supports the central argument of Critical Discourse Analysis that discourse plays an important role in the construction and naturalization of institutional power and social meaning. The paper also contributes to an understanding of how different types of universities use mission statements to construct their institutional identities. State and private universities share many core ideological commitments, including academic ideologies surrounding teaching, research, and leadership development. However, there are also many differences in how each type of institution discursively represents its institutional identities and sources of legitimacy. Public universities rely on discourses surrounding national service, scientific advancement, and public accountability, while private universities rely on religious values, innovation, and global competitiveness. This research thus demonstrates how mission statements serve as strategic instruments through which universities negotiate their position in both national and global educational contexts.

Despite all these contributions, the study also has a few limitations. The study is limited to a specific genre of institutional discourse, i.e., mission statements, which may limit the overall understanding of the subject. Although mission statements provide a good understanding of how universities ideologically position their institutional priorities, they may not capture the full range of discursive practices in higher education institutions. It is also important to note that mission statements are carefully crafted forms of discourse that may reflect how a university wants to be perceived rather than how it actually is. The overall understanding of the ideological orientations presented in the current study should be taken as a form of representation of institutional aspirations rather than actual behaviors. Another limitation concerns the study's domain of context. Although this study has incorporated a large number of universities in Ghana's higher education sector, it is important to note that it is a national study. In this respect, higher education systems differ significantly in different nations. In this respect, it is important to conduct further studies in other African nations to better understand regional discourse in higher education better. In this regard, although this study has employed a qualitative approach to discourse analysis, it is important to conduct further studies that combine CDA with other approaches, such as corpus linguistics and quantitative methods, to better understand discourse in higher education.

The findings of this study have several implications. In relation to discourse studies, this study has demonstrated the significance of examining university discourse in the context of broader transformations in higher education ideology. In this respect, mission statements are important for gaining a better understanding of how universities manage demands in relation to global competitiveness, national development, and university identity. Further studies could examine how mission statements change over time to better understand how universities shift their ideological positions in response to broader transformations in higher education (Hajdas & Kłeczek, 2021). From a policy perspective,

the study highlights the importance of mission statements in shaping how universities communicate their institutional priorities and societal contributions. Policy-makers and accreditation bodies likely recognize the importance of mission statements in shaping how universities align with national educational policy and international higher education trends. In addition, the study highlights the importance of language in how universities construct their institutional brands and identities, which will be significant to university administrators and higher education leaders. In effect, the study highlights the importance of mission statements in shaping how universities construct their identities and societal contributions. By examining the ideological and linguistic structures embedded in mission statements, the study contributes new knowledge to the field on how universities construct their identities and societal contributions in rapidly changing higher education environments. The study highlights the importance of language as a strategic tool through which universities construct their identities and negotiate legitimacy in higher education environments.

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