

‘I Warmly Welcome You ...’: Institutional Identity Construction in Vice-Chancellors’ Welcome Messages in Ghanaian Universities

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## Abstract

Welcome messages from Vice-Chancellors play a significant role in universities’ official communications, yet they are often overlooked as important sites for constructing institutional identity. This study examines how institutional identity is constructed through the welcome messages of Vice-Chancellors at public universities in Ghana. Grounded in Organizational Identity Theory (Albert & Whetten, 1985), the study employs a qualitative multiple-case study. The data consist of publicly available welcome messages sourced from the official websites of eight (8) public universities in Ghana, collected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. The findings indicate that Vice-Chancellors’ welcome messages construct various identities, characterized by prestige, research, institutional mandates, and student-centredness. Notably, a faith-inflected identity also emerged. In addition to constructing institutional identity, the findings highlight how Vice-Chancellors construct their own leadership identities by positioning themselves as legitimate authorities within their institutions. They portray themselves as visionary, strategic leaders who articulate the future direction of their universities. These leadership identities personalize and validate institutional narratives, thereby enhancing credibility and strategic positioning. This study contributes to the fields of institutional discourse and higher education communication by recognizing Vice-Chancellors’ welcome messages as a distinct genre for constructing both institutional and leadership identities, while also broadening the empirical focus to include public universities in Ghana.

**Keywords:** Ghana, institutional identity, leadership discourse, Vice-Chancellors, welcome messages

## Cite as

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## **Introduction**

In contemporary higher education, universities do more than provide teaching and research. They also actively communicate who they are, what they value, and what distinguishes them from other institutions. Through official communication, universities project particular images of themselves and seek to shape how they are perceived by key stakeholders (Camilleri, 2019; Chapleo, 2011). As higher education institutions respond to growing demands for accountability, visibility, relevance, and international engagement, institutional communication has become an important means through which universities articulate their missions, priorities, achievements, and aspirations (Holm-Nielsen, 2018; Mogaji, 2016). Central to these communicative efforts is institutional identity, which encompasses the defining characteristics through which an organization understands and presents itself to the external world (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

Studies on institutional identity in higher education have examined a wide range of institutional artifacts, including university websites, mission statements, logos, slogans, anthems, and promotional materials (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2023; Ajiboye, 2023; Akoto, 2018; Laba, 2024; Shahnaz & Qadir, 2020; Yang, 2019). These studies have demonstrated that universities strategically deploy linguistic and semiotic resources to project particular values, achievements, and institutional characteristics. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to leadership-authored institutional discourse as a site of identity construction. This represents an important gap because Vice Chancellors occupy a distinctive communicative position within higher education institutions. They speak with institutional authority, and their public communication carries symbolic and ideological significance. Thus, unlike collectively produced institutional documents, Vice-Chancellors' welcome messages combine a personalized leadership voice with institutional representation, making them particularly valuable for understanding how institutional identity is constructed through discourse (Yu & Vergaro, 2025).

The need to examine this form of discourse is particularly evident in the Ghanaian higher education sector. Public universities in Ghana operate in an evolving environment characterized by institutional expansion, increased international engagement, and heightened expectations for educational quality, research productivity, and societal contribution (Edu-Buandoh, 2010). Within this context, Vice-Chancellors' welcome messages serve as strategic introductory texts through which universities communicate their identities, achievements, and aspirations. Despite their visibility and communicative significance, little empirical research has explored how institutional identity is constructed in these leadership-authored texts within Ghanaian universities. Consequently, there remains a limited understanding of the discursive strategies through which Vice-Chancellors project institutional identities, and of the extent to which these constructions vary across institutions.

This study addresses this gap by examining the welcome messages of Vice-Chancellors in selected public universities in Ghana. Drawing on Albert and Whetten's (1985) Organizational Identity Theory, the study investigates the discursive strategies through which institutional identity is constructed in leadership-authored university texts and explores variations in identity construction across universities. By foregrounding Vice-Chancellors' welcome messages as a distinctive form of institutional discourse, the study contributes to research on organizational identity, higher education communication, and leadership discourse in an African context. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What discursive strategies are employed by Vice-Chancellors to construct institutional identity in Ghanaian universities?
2. How do Ghanaian universities differ in their construction of institutional identity through Vice-Chancellors' welcome messages?

The subsequent section of this paper reviews the existing literature. This will be followed by a discussion of the research methods employed, a presentation of findings, and a concluding section.

## Literature Review

### *Organisational Identity in Higher Education*

The concept of organizational identity is a central theme in organizational studies. Traditionally, it has been defined as the set of core, distinctive, and enduring attributes that characterize “who an organization is” (Albert & Whetten, 1985). This foundational understanding reflects an essentialist perspective, in which organizations are assumed to possess relatively stable characteristics that remain consistent over time and across different contexts. From this viewpoint, organizational identity embodies an institution's fundamental essence, serving as a basis for continuity, coherence, and differentiation. However, recent studies have challenged the notion of organizational identity as fixed and stable, emphasizing its fluid, negotiated, and discursively constructed nature (Coupland & Brown, 2004). From a discursive perspective, organizational identity is not merely an inherent institutional attribute but an ongoing accomplishment shaped by language and communication practices.

In higher education, organizational identity becomes particularly complex because universities simultaneously serve academic, social, and economic functions. Universities serve not only as centers for knowledge production but also as strategic actors operating within increasingly market-oriented and internationalized educational environments (Ayaawan, 2023). Consequently, their identities are constantly negotiated across academic traditions, national development priorities, and pressures associated with internationalization and institutional competition.

Organizational identity in higher education is often articulated through institutional values, historical narratives, mission statements, strategic visions, and official communication practices (Seeber et al., 2019). These components enable universities to differentiate themselves from other institutions while maintaining legitimacy within the broader educational and societal systems. Notably, identity in this context is not merely descriptive but also strategically projected, reflecting how institutions seek to position themselves in relation to various stakeholders, including prospective students, faculty, policymakers, and international partners (Hemsley-Brown et al., 2016). This positioning becomes especially significant in contexts where universities compete for visibility, rankings, funding, and global recognition, resulting in more intentional efforts to construct and communicate their institutional distinctiveness (Flipse et al., 2023; Subbarayalu, 2022).

Studies like those of Buckner and Zhang (2024) and Godonoga and Sporn (2023) further underscore the dynamic and constructed nature of organizational identity. Rather than being static, institutional identity is continually shaped and reshaped by both internal developments and external pressures. In universities, such pressures may include policy reforms, global rankings, funding limitations, and calls for relevance and innovation (Marginson, 2022). These factors

often lead to hybrid identity configurations, in which institutions seek to balance traditional academic ideals with managerial, entrepreneurial, and market-driven approaches (Camilleri, 2019). As a result, organizational identity in higher education is best regarded as fluid, negotiated, and highly context-dependent (Bamberger & Yemini, 2022).

The articulation of organizational identity is intimately connected to concerns of institutional image and reputation (Fernandes et al., 2022). While identity encompasses internal self-understandings, it is often projected outwardly to shape how the institution is perceived. This outward projection is particularly important in the contemporary higher education landscape, where branding and strategic communication have become essential for institutional survival and success (Spry et al., 2020; Subbarayalu, 2022). Universities are increasingly engaged in intentional identity work to align their internal values with external expectations, often drawing on narratives that emphasize excellence, innovation, global engagement, and societal impact (Fernandes et al., 2022).

In African and Ghanaian higher education contexts, the construction of organizational identity is significantly influenced by postcolonial legacies, national development priorities, and the imperative to assert relevance in global academic spaces (Antwi et al., 2026). Universities in these settings frequently emphasize their roles in nation-building, capacity development, and regional leadership, all while engaging with global discourses of competitiveness and internationalization (Hazelkorn, 2009). This dual focus introduces an additional layer of complexity in the conceptualization and articulation of institutional identities.

Organizational identity can thus be understood not merely as a collection of institutional attributes but also as actively constructed and negotiated through language and representation in institutional discourse. While the concept of organizational identity has been widely explored in higher education, increasing scholarly attention is now being directed toward the discursive processes through which universities construct, project, and legitimize institutional identities in official communication.

### ***Studies on the Discursive Construction of Institutional Identity***

The discursive construction of institutional identity has emerged as a pivotal focus in contemporary higher education research, particularly in contexts marked by globalization, competition, and heightened marketization (Edu-Buandoh, 2010; Hazelkorn, 2009). Universities are increasingly perceived not as entities with fixed identities, but as dynamic, socially constructed phenomena that are continuously shaped and reshaped through discourse. Empirical studies (Akoto, 2018; Shahnaz & Qadir, 2020) have consequently examined how institutions utilize linguistic and semiotic resources across various communicative platforms to project their identity, values, and desired perceptions among both internal and external stakeholders (Huisman & Mampaey, 2016; Hyland, 2011).

Studies have examined symbolic and ceremonial artifacts as important sites for constructing institutional identity. Antwi et al. (2026) analyze the anthems of selected Ghanaian universities, demonstrating how these texts serve as strategic tools for identity projection and institutional branding. Their findings reveal that identity is constructed through recurring themes such as pedagogical leadership, national service, and moral purpose, positioning universities within the contexts of national development and professional training. Similarly, Akoto (2018) examines institutional mottos, highlighting how the choice of language, ranging from global languages

such as Latin to local Ghanaian languages and English as a glocal medium, acts as a discursive resource for articulating various identity orientations, including foreignness, local rootedness, and hybridity. In a related multimodal study, Shahnaz and Qadir (2020) investigate logos, mottos, and slogans in Pakistani universities, illustrating that institutional identity is constructed not only through language but also through visual semiotics, such as color, shape, and symbolic imagery. Their findings further reveal the ideological dimensions of identity construction, particularly in the ways public universities incorporate religious references into their discursive and visual representations. While these studies provide valuable insights into the encoding of identity within symbolic and condensed forms of discourse, they tend to focus on relatively static, collectively produced artifacts, offering limited engagement with more interactive and narrative forms of institutional communication.

Studies have also increasingly focused on digital and promotional discourses as pivotal arenas for constructing institutional identity. For instance, Ademilokun and Taiwo (2023) analyze the websites of Nigerian universities through a Critical Discourse Analysis lens, identifying various identity types, including professional, national, transnational, humanist, Afrocentric, ethnic, and religious identities. Their study highlights the strategic, often hybrid nature of identity formation, as universities strive to resonate with diverse audiences in a competitive, consumer-driven higher-education landscape. Similarly, Ajiboye (2023) investigates the vision and mission statements of Nigerian universities, demonstrating how institutional identities are constructed through specific linguistic strategies, including lexicalization, metaphorisation, and grammatical structuring. This study reveals both socially informed and educationally informed identities, positioning universities as both purveyors of knowledge and catalysts for societal development. Expanding on this perspective, Brown and Blake (2026) employ a longitudinal, computational approach to analyze university marketing magazines. Their findings indicate that universities actively construct and reconstruct their identities by navigating multiple institutional logics: market, professional, state, and religious, especially during periods of social change. Collectively, these studies emphasize the significant role of meticulously curated outward-facing texts in shaping institutional identity, illustrating that such identity work is often strategic, adaptive, and responsive to broader socio-economic pressures.

Across these empirical contributions, two dominant analytical approaches emerge: Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). While both view identity as socially constructed through communicative practices, they differ in analytical focus. Multimodal studies have highlighted how visual and symbolic resources contribute to institutional identity construction and branding. In contrast, CDA studies have demonstrated how linguistic choices construct institutional values, legitimacy, authority, and positioning. Despite these differences, both approaches converge in demonstrating that institutional identity is actively constructed through discourse. Additionally, they have focused predominantly on institutionally produced artifacts, paying relatively less attention to the role of identifiable institutional actors in identity construction.

Consequently, issues of leadership agency, institutional authority, and organizational voice remain underexplored in higher education identity research. This limitation is particularly evident in studies of Vice-Chancellors' welcome messages, despite their prominence on official university websites and their strategic communicative function. Unlike collectively produced institutional documents, welcome messages are personalized and narrative-driven texts authored

by institutionally authorized leaders. They, therefore, constitute a distinctive site where leadership voice intersects with institutional representation. Through such texts, Vice-Chancellors not only communicate institutional priorities and aspirations but also position themselves as legitimate representatives of institutional values and identities. Examining these texts, therefore, provides valuable insight into how agency, authority, and voice shape the discursive construction of institutional identity.

This study addresses this gap by examining how institutional identity is discursively constructed in Vice-Chancellors' welcome messages at selected Ghanaian universities.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study utilizes Albert and Whetten's (1985) Organizational Identity Framework. According to Albert and Whetten (1985), organizational identity comprises three defining attributes: central, distinctive, and enduring. Together, these attributes capture the essence of an organization, highlight what sets it apart, and emphasize aspects perceived to persist over time.

The central dimension focuses on textual elements that articulate the universities' core missions, values, and institutional priorities. The distinctive dimension enables the identification of discursive strategies employed to position the institution as unique. The enduring dimension examines how continuity is established through references to history, tradition, legacy, and long-standing achievements. These dimensions are operationalized as deductive coding categories that guide the analysis.

By employing this framework, the study contributes to the scholarship on organizational identity by demonstrating that the core attributes identified by Albert and Whetten (1985) are not only definitional but also discursively enacted in higher education contexts. Furthermore, it extends organizational identity scholarship by highlighting how institutional identity is constructed within formal leadership discourse in the Ghanaian university landscape.

## **Methods and Materials**

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data consisted of Vice-Chancellors' welcome messages retrieved from the official websites of eight purposively selected public universities in Ghana. The universities were selected based on the accessibility and availability of welcome messages on their websites at the time of data collection. Although the messages were publicly available, none included publication dates; consequently, their original publication dates could not be determined. All texts were retrieved in May 2025. The data comprised 2,836 words (approximately 355 words per text). Despite their shared communicative purpose, the texts varied across institutions in terms of length, structural organisation, and thematic emphasis.

The institutions selected for the study included the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), the University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS), the University of Energy and Natural Resources (UENR), the University of Environment and Sustainable Development (UESD), the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC), the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT), the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). The selection criteria ensured that all texts analysed were institutionally sanctioned, publicly accessible, and authored

or officially attributed to their respective Vice-Chancellors, thereby reflecting authoritative institutional discourse.

Public universities that did not feature welcome messages from their Vice-Chancellors on their official websites during the data collection period were excluded from the study. By focusing exclusively on publicly available institutional texts, the research minimised ethical concerns related to privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent. All excerpts utilised in the analysis were duly attributed to the respective Vice-Chancellors and institutions. Furthermore, no personal or sensitive information beyond what was publicly disclosed by the universities was included, ensuring compliance with established ethical research guidelines (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), guided by Albert and Whetten's (1985) Organisational Identity Framework and informed by discourse-oriented analysis.

The study employed an inductive, data-driven coding, allowing for a theory-informed interpretation. This facilitated the emergence of themes from the data, which were subsequently analysed through the lens of organisational identity. The analysis unfolded in six iterative stages. First, all welcome messages were read multiple times to ensure thorough immersion and familiarity with the dataset. Second, initial coding was conducted inductively, enabling the identification of salient features without the constraints of predefined categories. At this stage, codes reflected recurring ideas, patterns, and discursive elements present in the texts. Third, these initial codes were examined and organised into broader themes that captured the patterned meanings within the dataset. Fourth, the emergent themes were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and clear distinctions among them. Fifth, the refined themes were interpreted through Albert and Whetten's (1985) organisational identity framework.

This analysis specifically explored how the themes articulated dimensions of centrality (core institutional values and priorities), distinctiveness (assertions of uniqueness and competitive positioning), and endurance (representations of continuity, history, and legacy). In this capacity, the framework served as an interpretive tool rather than a predefined coding structure. Finally, cross-case comparisons were conducted to identify similarities and variations in the construction of institutional identity across the selected universities, with a particular focus on recurring discursive strategies and patterns of representation. Throughout the analytical process, reflexivity was upheld to enhance transparency and analytical rigour.

The researchers acknowledged that their academic backgrounds and familiarity with higher education contexts could potentially influence their interpretations. To mitigate this bias, the analysis concentrated closely on textual evidence, anchoring interpretations in explicit linguistic features and supporting them with illustrative excerpts from the data. Regularly revisiting the data and iteratively refining themes ensured that the findings remained data-driven. To enhance the study's trustworthiness, several strategies for qualitative rigour were implemented. Transparency was achieved through meticulous documentation of data selection and analytical procedures, while consistency was maintained by applying the same analytical framework across all cases. Furthermore, the inclusion of multiple cases enhanced the credibility of the findings.

## Results

### *What discursive strategies are employed by Vice-Chancellors to construct institutional identity in Ghanaian universities?*

This section presents how institutional identity is discursively constructed in the welcome messages of Vice-Chancellors in selected Ghanaian public universities. Drawing on Organizational Identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985) and informed by discourse-oriented analysis, the data revealed that Vice-Chancellors construct multiple, overlapping institutional identities, including prestige-oriented, mandate-driven, research-oriented, student-centered, and faith-inflected identities. These identities were revealed through discursive features such as pronoun usage, evaluative language, modality, metaphorical expressions, representational phrases, and lexical choices that positioned universities and their leaders. The data further demonstrated that institutional identity construction is closely intertwined with leadership identity construction, in which Vice-Chancellors position themselves as authorized institutional representatives, visionary leaders, and strategic agents of institutional development.

A prominent pattern across the dataset is the construction of a prestige-oriented institutional identity, positioning universities as distinguished, competitive, and symbolically superior within Ghanaian and African higher education landscapes. This identity is primarily constructed through evaluative language, superlative expressions, rankings, and symbolic branding strategies that foreground institutional excellence and distinction.

#### Excerpt 1

*Welcome to C. K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences (CKT-UTAS), the premier public university of the Upper East Region of Ghana, established at Navrongo in the Kassena-Nankana District*  
(CK Tedam)

#### Excerpt 2

*I warmly welcome you to the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, the Best University in Ghana and the 12th Best on the African Continent.*  
(KNUST)

#### Excerpt 3

*It is my great pleasure as Vice-Chancellor to warmly welcome you to the University of Energy and Natural Resources (UENR), the University of Technologists.*  
(UENR)

The excerpts demonstrate how institutional prestige is linguistically constructed through the strategic use of evaluative lexical items and superlative expressions such as “*premier*,” “*Best University*,” and “*12th Best on the African Continent*.” Such expressions function as positive self-representational strategies that position the universities within hierarchies of academic excellence and symbolic superiority. The use of superlatives discursively elevates institutional status by presenting excellence as an already achieved and recognizable reality. The construction of prestige is further reinforced through branding-oriented expressions such as “*the University of Technologists*,” which symbolically condense institutional identity into memorable and distinctive formulations. The explicit reference to continental rankings in Excerpt 2 also invokes globally recognized systems of academic validation, thereby legitimizing institutional status through external measures of credibility and visibility. The first-person singular pronoun “*I*,” used alongside institutional references, enables Vice-Chancellors to merge personal leadership

voice with institutional representation, thereby constructing prestige through both institutional authority and personalized engagement. Interpreted through the lens of Albert and Whetten (1985), these discursive constructions reflect both the central and distinctive dimensions of organizational identity. The emphasis on excellence and symbolic prestige foregrounds the values and aspirations that the institutions consider core. At the same time, the repeated use of superlatives, rankings, and branding formulations functions to differentiate the universities from competing institutions.

Another dominant identity constructed is a mandate-driven, specialization-oriented institutional identity, through which universities define themselves by their disciplinary focus, statutory responsibilities, and professional orientation. This identity is primarily constructed through lexical choices associated with expertise, professional training, and institutional mandate.

#### Excerpt 4

*... offer our students a high-quality range of academic and professional programmes in basic and applied sciences, mathematics, and computing technology for the socio-economic development of Ghana and beyond.*  
(CKT-UTAS)

#### Excerpt 5

*University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS), although young, is a leading health university in Ghana, which is focused on training quality health professionals.*  
(UHAS)

#### Excerpt 6

*Your informed choice to study at UENR provides you with the opportunity to be part of a full-fledged university with the core mandate to provide higher education, disseminate knowledge, and undertake research in energy and natural resources*  
(UENR)

#### Excerpt 7

*I'm absolutely thrilled to welcome you to one of Ghana's fastest-growing specialised public universities – the University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UniMAC).*  
(UniMAC)

#### Excerpt 8

*At the heart of our educational philosophy lies the unwavering commitment to training competent professional teachers across all levels of education.*  
(UEW)

#### Excerpt 9

*The University offers market-driven programmes of study and provides entrepreneurial training ranging from Art, Social Sciences, Science, Health Sciences, Engineering and Technology.*  
(KNUST)

#### Excerpt 10

*Our university offers a wide range of academic programs, extracurricular activities, and support services to help you succeed.*  
(UMAT)

The excerpts demonstrate that institutional identity is discursively constructed through specialized lexical fields associated with professional expertise, academic disciplines, and

institutional mandates. Expressions such as “*health university*,” “*professional teachers*,” “*energy and natural resources*,” and “*market-driven programs*” linguistically foreground specialized institutional functions and areas of competence. These lexical choices position the universities as purpose-driven institutions with clearly defined educational and professional mandates. Pronoun usage also contributes significantly to identity construction. The construction of institutional mandate is particularly evident in expressions such as “*core mandate*,” “*educational philosophy*,” and “*unwavering commitment*.” These formulations employ high-certainty and obligation-oriented language that frames institutional roles as stable, foundational, and enduring rather than temporary or negotiable. Thus, these discursive constructions reflect the dimensions of centrality, distinctiveness, and endurance (Albert & Whetten, 1985). The repeated emphasis on specialized mandates foregrounds what the universities consider central to their institutional purpose, while the articulation of discipline-specific expertise contributes to distinctiveness. References to institutional philosophy, mandates, and commitments also foster a sense of continuity and long-term institutional orientation, thereby reinforcing the enduring dimension of organizational identity.

The data further construct a research-oriented institutional identity, positioning the universities as centers of innovation and knowledge production, and as contributors to national and global development. This identity is discursively realized through lexical choices associated with research, as well as through future-oriented and high-certainty modal expressions that project institutional ambition and strategic direction.

#### **Excerpt 11**

*At CKT-UTAS, we offer a supportive environment to engage in cutting-edge research.*  
 (CKT-UTAS)

#### **Excerpt 12**

*Your informed choice to study at UENR provides you with the opportunity to be part of a full-fledged university with the core mandate to provide higher education, disseminate knowledge, and undertake research in energy and natural resources*  
 (UENR)

#### **Excerpt 13**

*We are committed to enhancing student life, expanding our state-of-the-art facilities, and pushing the frontiers of innovative research to help solve the numerous challenges facing the Media, Arts and Communication industry.*  
 (UniMAC)

#### **Excerpt 14**

*My vision... is for the University to be a leading university in the teaching, learning, and dissemination of knowledge... and create knowledge through research for national development.*  
 (UESD)

#### **Excerpt 15**

*Our mission, deeply rooted in the values of knowledge dissemination, research, and educational development, positions us as a formidable force in shaping the future of education in Ghana and the broader West African sub-region.*  
 (UEW)

#### **Excerpt 16**

*Together, we will continue to deploy our strengths and strategic initiatives to enable our cherished faculty and staff to continue to embark on relevant research and activities that would not only imbibe in our students the requisite skills for the transformation and socio-economic development of Ghana, but also enhance the international visibility of our noble institution*  
(KNUST)

In these excerpts, research identity is discursively constructed as a central institutional activity. Lexical choices such as “cutting-edge research,” “innovative research,” and “knowledge dissemination” frame research as a marker of institutional modernity and intellectual advancement. Modality also plays an important role in constructing research-oriented identity across the excerpts. High-certainty modal constructions such as “we are committed” and “to be a leading university” project confidence, determination, and institutional continuity. These modal expressions linguistically construct research not as a peripheral activity but as a sustained institutional priority and strategic obligation. In Excerpt 16, the future-oriented modal phrase “we will continue” further conveys endurance and long-term institutional commitment, thereby reinforcing perceptions of stability and continuity. The repeated foregrounding of research reflects the central dimension of organisational identity, presenting knowledge production and innovation as core institutional priorities. Distinctiveness is simultaneously constructed through references to specialized research domains, innovation capacities, and international visibility. The recurrent use of continuity-oriented and future-focused modal expressions also contributes to the enduring dimension of identity by framing research as a long-term, defining institutional commitment (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

The welcome messages further construct a student-centered institutional identity, through which universities position themselves as supportive, nurturing, and transformative environments committed to students’ academic, personal, and professional development. This identity is primarily constructed through interpersonal language, inclusive pronouns, evaluative expressions, motivational language, and metaphorical representations of growth and transformation.

#### **Excerpt 17**

*We are dedicated to the well-being and success of our students, providing them with extraordinary experiences and networks that allow them to grow and develop, explore new interests, and fully realise their potential for successful careers in their chosen fields of study.*

(CKT-UTAS)

#### **Excerpt 18**

*To our amazing students! You are the heart and soul of UniMAC. Your youthful energy, ideas, and passion make this place special, and that is why they call it a university, and we call it the home for growth. Get involved, take risks, and make the most of every opportunity. We are here to support, cheer you on, and celebrate your successes. So dare to enter to learn, exit to achieve.*

(UniMAC)

#### **Excerpt 19**

*At UESD, we exist to produce students endowed with Honesty, who take advantage of Opportunities, who Persevere and are Enterprising*

*(HOPE), and having the skillsets needed to confront the challenges of the current generation and beyond as transformational leaders... At UESD, we are guided by the principle of turning raw materials (our students) into very fine products (graduates) fit for the global job market and the world of work.* (UESD)

#### Excerpt 20

*Our committed and motivated team ensures our students and stakeholders achieve their needs in a timely manner. We provide an environment which allows freedom of expression and innovation. We embrace diversity and internationalisation among both students and faculty.* (UHAS)

Across these excerpts, student-centredness is constructed through strong interpersonal and relational language that positions students as the primary beneficiaries and symbolic focus of institutional activity. The repeated use of inclusive first-person plural pronouns, such as “we” and “our,” constructs a collective institutional identity centered on care, support, and shared responsibility for student success. Simultaneously, the use of second-person pronouns, such as “you,” in Excerpt 18 directly addresses students and establishes a sense of relational closeness between the institution and its audience. The excerpts further rely heavily on evaluative and affective language to construct positive institutional identities. Expressions such as “*amazing students*,” “*celebrate your successes*,” and “*committed and motivated team*” create emotionally affirmative representations of the universities as caring and enabling environments. Motivational language also plays an important role in identity construction. In Excerpt 18, expressions such as “*Get involved*,” “*take risks*,” and “*make the most of every opportunity*” position students as active participants in their own development while simultaneously constructing the university as a facilitator of growth and opportunity. Metaphorical language is also particularly significant in constructing student-centered identity. In Excerpt 18, the metaphor “*home for growth*” symbolically represents the university as a nurturing and developmental space. Similarly, Excerpt 19 employs a production-oriented metaphor that conceptualizes students as “*raw materials*” transformed into “*very fine products*.” This metaphor constructs education as a process of refinement, transformation, and value addition aimed at preparing graduates for the labor market. These discursive constructions strongly foreground the central dimension of organizational identity by positioning student development and support as core institutional priorities. Distinctiveness emerges through the different ways universities frame the student experience, whether through nurturing environments, entrepreneurial transformation, diversity, innovation, or moral development (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

An emerging, though less dominant, identity evident in the data is the construction of a faith-inflected institutional identity, in which institutional progress and success are linguistically linked to divine agency and spiritual guidance. This construction draws on religious language to frame institutional advancement and legitimacy.

#### Excerpt 21

*I am delighted to note that we are making good strides because UESD is tapping her energy from the living God.* (UESD)

In this excerpt, institutional success is explicitly attributed to divine influence. The metaphorical construction of the university as drawing energy from God symbolically frames

institutional progress as spiritually enabled rather than solely the result of managerial expertise, strategic planning, or administrative competence. Thus, rather than grounding institutional progress in measurable institutional achievements or academic performance indicators, the discourse attributes advancement to divine support. This attribution shifts the source of institutional legitimacy from secular to spiritual authority and faith-based orientation. Pronoun usage also contributes to identity construction within the excerpt. Viewed through Albert and Whetten's (1985) Organizational Identity, this construction reflects both centrality and distinctiveness. The invocation of divine agency suggests that spirituality and moral orientation form part of the institution's perceived core values. At the same time, the explicit religious framing distinguishes the university's identity from the more secular and managerial identities constructed elsewhere in the dataset.

Beyond constructing institutional identities, the welcome messages also discursively shape the identities of Vice-Chancellors. A dominant leadership identity emerging across the data is that of the Vice-Chancellor as an authorized institutional representative whose legitimacy derives from formal governance structures, institutional authority, and collective representation. This identity is primarily constructed through pronoun usage, institutional titles, representational expressions, and ceremonial language associated with official authority and institutional voice.

#### Excerpt 22

*It is my great pleasure as Vice-Chancellor to warmly welcome you to the University of Energy and Natural Resources (UENR), the University of Technologists.* (UENR)

#### Excerpt 23

*On behalf of the Chancellor, His Majesty Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, and the entire Management, I warmly welcome you to the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST).* (KNUST)

#### Excerpt 24

*It is with great pleasure and a profound sense of responsibility that I welcome you to the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), where academic excellence and innovation are woven into the fabric of our institution's identity.* (UEW)

#### Excerpt 25

*I extend a warm welcome to all our students, faculty, staff, and stakeholders to our rising specialised university* (UHAS)

#### Excerpt 26

*Welcome to C. K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences (CKT-UTAS), the premier public university of the Upper East Region of Ghana, established at Navrongo in the Kassena-Nankana District* (TEDAM)

#### Excerpt 27

*I'm absolutely thrilled to welcome you to one of Ghana's fastest-growing specialised public universities – the University of Media, Arts, and Communication* (UniMAC)

#### Excerpt 28

*On behalf of the Governing Council, Management, and the entire UESD community, I heartily welcome you to the UESD.* (UESD)

**Excerpt 29**

*On behalf of the entire faculty and staff at our university, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you. We are delighted that you have chosen to join us and are eager to support you on your academic journey.*

(UMAT)

Across these excerpts, leadership authority is linguistically constructed through the recurrent use of first-person singular pronouns, such as “I,” alongside institutional titles, including “Vice-Chancellor.” These linguistic choices position the speaker as the identifiable and authorized institutional voice. This representational function is particularly evident in the repeated use of phrases such as “on behalf of,” which appear in Excerpts 23, 28, and 29. These expressions construct leadership legitimacy through delegated institutional authority and collective representation. The Vice-Chancellor symbolically becomes the conduit through which the university and its governing bodies communicate with stakeholders. The discourse additionally employs ceremonial and affective language to humanize institutional authority. Expressions such as “warmly welcome,” “great pleasure,” and “heartily welcome” soften hierarchical distance and present the Vice-Chancellors as approachable, relational leaders rather than purely bureaucratic administrators. Importantly, the excerpts demonstrate that leadership identity and institutional identity are discursively co-constructed rather than analytically separable.

A second leadership identity constructed is that of the Vice-Chancellor as a visionary and strategic agent responsible for directing institutional transformation, competitiveness, and long-term development. This identity is discursively realized through future-oriented language, modality, and evaluative expressions that position the Vice-Chancellor as the architect of institutional progress and aspiration.

**Excerpt 30**

*My vision for the University in the next four years is to create a dynamic and responsive environment that promotes credible research, quality teaching and learning, vibrant internal processes, active stakeholder engagement grounded by the principles of Growth, Integrity, Fairness, Technology and Innovation, and Service.*

(UHAS)

**Excerpt 31**

*As the Vice-Chancellor, my vision is to transform your experience at UniMAC.*

(UniMAC)

**Excerpt 32**

*My vision, as Vice-Chancellor, is for the University to be a leading university in the teaching, learning, and dissemination of knowledge related to developments in the environment and agro-business, and to create knowledge through research for national development.*

(UESD)

**Excerpt 33**

*I envisage UHAS to be the university of choice within the sub-region for the training of quality health professionals*

(UHAS)

**Excerpt 34**

*As Vice Chancellor, it is my pleasure to oversee the education and well-being of our student body, and I am committed to providing you with the resources and support you need to succeed.* (UMAT)

In these excerpts, leadership identity is constructed through future-oriented language. Lexical items such as “vision,” “transform,” “leading university,” and “university of choice” position the Vice-Chancellor as a strategic actor responsible for institutional advancement and direction. Modality also plays a significant role in the construction of leadership identity. High-certainty and commitment-oriented modal constructions such as “*I am committed*” communicate determination, confidence, and institutional intentionality. The modal expressions portray institutional transformation as purposeful, achievable, and strategically guided rather than uncertain or accidental. The excerpts further rely on evaluative language to construct desirable institutional futures. Expressions such as “*dynamic and responsive environment*,” “*credible research*,” and “*leading university*” positively evaluate the envisioned institution and frame it as progressive, competitive, and development-oriented. Such evaluative constructions not only legitimise leadership authority but also symbolically align the institution with globally valued ideals of higher education.

### ***How do Ghanaian universities differ in their construction of institutional identity through Vice-Chancellors’ welcome messages?***

The data indicate that important variations emerge in how individual universities discursively position themselves. These variations are evident in the thematic priorities foregrounded and the ideological orientations embedded in the welcome messages. One major area of variation concerns how universities construct institutional prestige and competitiveness.

#### **Excerpt 35**

*I warmly welcome you to the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, the Best University in Ghana and the 12th Best on the African Continent.* (KNUST)

#### **Excerpt 36**

*Welcome to C. K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences (CKT-UTAS), the premier public university of the Upper East Region of Ghana, established at Navrongo in the Kassena-Nankana District.* (CK Tedam)

#### **Excerpt 37**

*I’m absolutely thrilled to welcome you to one of Ghana’s fastest-growing specialised public universities – the University of Media, Arts, and Communication* (UniMAC)

The excerpts demonstrate that universities construct prestige through different discursive pathways. KNUST foregrounds international and continental recognition through explicit ranking, thereby aligning institutional identity with globally recognized metrics of academic excellence and visibility. In contrast, CKT-UTAS constructs prestige through regional primacy, positioning itself as a dominant institution within a specific geographical context rather than within continental ranking systems. UniMAC, however, constructs prestige through developmental and expansion-oriented discourse, foregrounding growth and dynamism rather than historical prestige or ranking status.

Another significant variation concerns the degree and specificity of the institutional specialization emphasized by the universities.

**Excerpt 38**

*University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS), although young, is a leading health university in Ghana, which is focused on training quality health professionals.*  
(UHAS)

**Excerpt 39**

*Your informed choice to study at UENR provides you with the opportunity to be part of a full-fledged university with the core mandate to provide higher education, disseminate knowledge, and undertake research in energy and natural resources*  
(UENR)

**Excerpt 40**

*At the heart of our educational philosophy lies the unwavering commitment to training competent professional teachers across all levels of education.*  
(UEW)

**Excerpt 41**

*Our university offers a wide range of academic programs, extracurricular activities, and support services to help you succeed.*  
(UMAT)

The excerpts reveal notable differences in how explicitly universities articulate their institutional mandates and disciplinary identities. UHAS, UENR, and UEW construct highly specialized identities through direct references to health training, energy and natural resources, and teacher education, respectively. Their institutional identities are narrowly focused, professionally oriented, and clearly differentiated. These universities foreground specialized expertise as a key source of institutional distinctiveness. In contrast, UMaT adopts a broader, less specialized formulation, centered on the provision of a wide range of academic programs. Unlike the highly discipline-specific identities projected by the other universities, this broader construction produces a more generic institutional representation that may weaken symbolic differentiation.

The findings further reveal differences in how universities position students in the construction of institutional identity.

**Excerpt 42**

*You are the heart and soul of UniMAC... we call it the home for growth.*  
(UniMAC)

**Excerpt 43**

*We are dedicated to the well-being and success of our students, providing them with extraordinary experiences and networks that allow them to grow and develop.*  
(CKT-UTAS)

**Excerpt 44**

*At UESD, we are guided by the principle of turning raw materials (our students) into very fine products (graduates) fit for the global job market and the world of work.*  
(UESD)

Although the universities construct student-centered identities, the ideological orientations underlying these constructions differ considerably. UniMAC employs affective discourse, thereby constructing the university as a nurturing and emotionally supportive environment. CKT-UTAS similarly foregrounds holistic student development through the language of growth, opportunity, and personal fulfillment. UESD, however, adopts a more instrumental and market-oriented construction of students through the production metaphor of transforming raw materials into employable products, framing education primarily as labour-market preparation and positioning students as outputs of institutional production processes.

Another important variation concerns the ideology embedded within institutional identity construction.

#### **Excerpt 45**

*I am delighted to note that we are making good strides because UESD is tapping her energy from the living God.* (UESD)

#### **Excerpt 46**

*We embrace diversity and internationalisation among both students and faculty.* (UHAS)

#### **Excerpt 47**

*Together, we will continue to deploy our strengths and strategic initiatives... to enhance the international visibility of our noble institution.* (KNUST)

These excerpts demonstrate significant differences in the ideological foundations upon which institutional identities are constructed. UESD incorporates explicitly religious discourse by attributing institutional progress to divine agency, thereby constructing a faith-inflected institutional identity. This religious framing contrasts sharply with the more secular, managerial, and internationalization-oriented discourse employed by UHAS and KNUST. UHAS foregrounds inclusivity and internationalization, positioning itself within globally oriented higher education discourses associated with diversity, openness, and multiculturalism. KNUST, on the other hand, combines strategic managerial discourse with narratives of international visibility, thereby projecting a globally competitive, research-driven institutional identity.

### **Discussion**

The findings support discursive approaches to organizational identity, which argue that identity is not merely a fixed institutional essence but is actively constructed and negotiated through language and representation (Coupland & Brown, 2004). While Albert and Whetten's (1985) foundational conception of organizational identity emphasizes central, distinctive, and enduring institutional characteristics, the present study demonstrates that these characteristics are strategically articulated through discourse rather than simply existing as stable organizational attributes. The welcome messages do not merely describe institutional realities; they actively construct institutional meanings, aspirations, and legitimacy through carefully selected linguistic resources. This reinforces the argument that organizational identity in higher education is fluid, performative, and communicatively produced (Seeber et al., 2019).

A major finding of the study is the prominence of prestige-oriented identity construction across the universities. Vice-Chancellors consistently utilized evaluative language, superlative

expressions, rankings, and branding formulations to position their institutions as competitive and symbolically distinguished within national and international higher education spaces. This finding aligns with previous studies that argue that universities increasingly engage in strategic branding and image management in response to global competition, marketization, and ranking pressures (Sharma & Sharma, 2019; Spry et al., 2020). Similar patterns have been identified by Ademilokun and Taiwo (2023), who observed that universities strategically construct identities associated with excellence, professionalism, and global relevance through official institutional discourse. The emphasis on rankings, prestige, and visibility in the present study further reflects the neoliberal transformation of higher education, in which symbolic competitiveness and external recognition increasingly serve as markers of institutional legitimacy (Hazelkorn, 2009). The study also found that institutional identities were strongly shaped by disciplinary specialization and institutional mandate. Universities such as UHAS, UENR, UniMAC, and UEW foregrounded specialized domains, including health sciences, energy, media and communication, and teacher education, as defining institutional characteristics. This finding corroborates earlier studies showing that universities use institutional discourse to foreground areas of expertise and professional orientation, thereby differentiating themselves from competing institutions (Ajiboye, 2023; Antwi et al., 2026). The findings also support the argument that organizational identity in higher education is often shaped by institutional mandates, national development priorities, and labor-market expectations (Edu-Buandoh, 2010; Marginson, 2022).

Another important finding concerns the construction of research-oriented institutional identities. Across the dataset, research was consistently framed as central to institutional purpose, innovation, and societal contribution. Through their lexical choices on knowledge production, innovation, and development, the universities positioned themselves as active contributors to national transformation and global academic advancement. This finding supports previous research demonstrating that contemporary universities increasingly construct institutional legitimacy around research productivity, innovation, and knowledge generation (Fernandes et al., 2022; Flipse et al., 2023). Furthermore, the repeated association between research and national development reflects broader expectations placed on African universities to contribute directly to socio-economic transformation and policy development (Edu-Buandoh, 2010). The study further revealed the prominence of student-centered identity construction. Vice-Chancellors employed interpersonal language, motivational language, inclusive pronouns, and evaluative expressions to position their universities as supportive and transformative environments committed to student growth and success. This finding aligns with studies suggesting that higher education institutions increasingly foreground student experience, engagement, and employability within institutional communication (Antwi, 2026). However, the findings also revealed the coexistence of developmental and market-oriented constructions of students. While some universities framed students through nurturing, holistic developmental discourse, others adopted more instrumental, employability-oriented framings that conceptualized students as products prepared for labor market participation. This reflects broader neoliberal trends within higher education where universities increasingly emphasize skills acquisition, employability, and economic productivity (Khayatovich, 2024). An additional contribution of the study is the identification of faith-inflected institutional identity. Although less dominant across the dataset, invoking divine agency to explain institutional progress

suggests that institutional identity construction in Ghanaian higher education may extend beyond managerial and academic discourse to incorporate religious and moral orientations. This finding expands existing studies on institutional discourse in higher education, which have largely concentrated on secular constructions of excellence, branding, and competitiveness. The finding also resonates with Shahnaz and Qadir's (2020) observation that religious symbolism may constitute an important ideological resource in the construction of institutional identity.

Beyond institutional identity, the study found that Vice-Chancellors simultaneously constructed leadership identities through the performative act of welcoming. Leadership identity was primarily realized through two interrelated constructions: leadership as authorized institutional representation and leadership as visionary strategic agency. Through pronoun usage, representational phrases, and future-oriented vision discourse, Vice-Chancellors positioned themselves as legitimate institutional spokespersons and architects of institutional transformation. This finding significantly extends previous studies on institutional identity construction in higher education, which have largely focused on collectively authored institutional artifacts (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2023; Akoto, 2018; Shahnaz & Qadir, 2020). The present study demonstrates that leadership-authored discourse constitutes a distinct and analytically important site for understanding how institutional authority, agency, and organizational voice are constructed.

Importantly, the findings reveal that leadership identity and institutional identity are discursively co-constructed rather than analytically separable. The authority of the Vice-Chancellor derives from institutional legitimacy, while institutional identity simultaneously gains symbolic credibility through leadership voice and representation. This supports broader discourse-oriented arguments that institutional authority and identity are produced relationally through communicative practices rather than existing independently of discourse (Coupland & Brown, 2004). The welcome messages, therefore, function not merely as introductory texts but as strategic institutional performances through which legitimacy, authority, aspiration, and institutional distinctiveness are enacted.

## **Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of this study carry important pedagogical and professional implications. First, the study demonstrates that institutional identity is not constructed solely through formal policy documents or branding materials but also through everyday institutional communication practices such as Vice-Chancellors' welcome messages. This highlights the need for universities to pay greater attention to leadership communication as a strategic institutional resource. Consequently, university administrators and academic leaders may benefit from professional training in strategic communication and digital audience engagement to ensure that official institutional messages effectively project a coherent, distinctive institutional identity.

Second, the findings suggest that universities should adopt more intentional and audience-sensitive approaches to institutional communication. Since welcome messages serve as entry points for prospective students, international partners, policymakers, and other stakeholders, institutions may need to ensure these messages clearly articulate their institutional distinctiveness, values, and strategic priorities.

## Conclusion

This study examined how institutional identity is constructed in the welcome messages of Vice-Chancellors in selected Ghanaian public universities. Specifically, the study sought to identify the discursive strategies employed in constructing institutional identity and to examine how universities differ in their constructions of identity through Vice-Chancellors' welcome messages. The findings revealed that Vice-Chancellors' welcome messages serve as strategic institutional discourses through which universities construct multiple, interconnected identities. Across the dataset, universities were discursively positioned as prestigious, research-oriented, specialized, student-centered, development-focused, and, in some instances, faith-inflected institutions. These identities were constructed through diverse linguistic resources, including evaluative language, pronoun usage, modality, metaphor, branding discourse, and representational expressions. The study further demonstrated that institutional identity construction is closely intertwined with leadership identity construction, with Vice-Chancellors simultaneously positioning themselves as authoritative institutional representatives and visionary strategic leaders.

The study additionally revealed significant variation in how universities construct institutional identity. These variations suggest that institutional identity construction in Ghanaian higher education is neither uniform nor fixed but shaped by institutional mandates, communicative priorities, ideological orientations, and broader socio-economic pressures. Although the study provides important insights into institutional identity construction, it is limited by its exclusive focus on textual analysis of publicly available welcome messages. Future studies may therefore extend this research by incorporating audience perspectives, comparative cross-national approaches, or longitudinal investigations into changes in institutional identity construction over time.

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## Declaration of Using AI Generator Contents

This document has been enhanced through the use of Grammarly, which was employed to refine its linguistic style and correct grammar and spelling. While the incorporation of technology may introduce some AI-generated linguistic patterns, it is important to note that the core intellectual content, data interpretation, and conclusions presented are entirely the work of the authors.

### Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

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