Institutional Legitimacy of the Bumiputera in Transformational Leadership Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the institutional legitimacy of the Bumiputera is demonstrated through transformational leadership discourse at the university level. Five official speeches delivered by the Vice-Chancellor of University Technology MARA (UiTM) during the 101st Convocation Ceremony in 2024 were analyzed to identify the most dominant lexical patterns. The analysis revealed five recurring key lexical items that reinforce the semantic categories of authority and institutional legitimacy, namely ilmu (knowledge), bangsa (nation), maruah (dignity), amanah (trust), and graduan (graduate). These lexical items illustrate how leadership discourse is constructed through three main linguistic strategies, through the use of active affixed verbs to portray progressive action, the selection of ethically charged lexical choices to convey moral integrity, and the development of national semantic fields to strengthen Bumiputera identity. Findings indicate that the lexical item ilmu functions as the foundation of the epistemic field that positions UiTM as an institution of academic authority. The term bangsa is predominantly used to reinforce UiTM's national mission as a Bumiputera-owned university. The lexical item maruah emerges as a cultural value symbolizing the legitimacy of identity and national honor, whereas amanah emphasizes moral responsibility and trust within academic leadership. Finally, graduan functions as a symbolic representation of institutional success and proof of UiTM's effectiveness in producing quality human capital. Overall, these five lexical items serve as the core of UiTM's discourse of legitimacy as a Bumiputera institution, having been recognized across academic, moral, and social dimensions. This study contributes to the field of institutional discourse analysis by demonstrating how transformational leadership language functions as a tool for reinforcing identity and legitimacy within the context of higher education in Malaysia.

Keywords: dominant lexicon, institutional legitimacy, leadership discourse, speech text, convocation ceremony

INTRODUCTION

Within the context of higher education in Malaysia, university leadership discourse is no longer confined to a formal channel of communication; however, it has evolved into an important medium to express social and symbolic meanings. The Vice-Chancellor's speeches, particularly during Convocation Ceremonies, now serve as platforms to depict the image, vision, and values that reflect the identity and legitimacy of the institution as a Bumiputera university. Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) is established upon the foundation of the Bumiputera development agenda, employing leadership discourse as a strategic mechanism to sustain institutional legitimacy mainly the social, moral, and epistemic acceptance of the university's authority as a center of national intellectual development.

In this regard, institutional leadership discourse is articulated through language, through lexical selection, morphological formation, and rhetorical style and is not only measured through structural strength or physical achievements. For this reason, Fairclough's (1992) framework of Critical Discourse Analysis provides a crucial foundation for examining how power, ideology, and identity are represented through language.

Transformational leadership discourse, in particular, illustrates how language is employed by academic leaders not to merely deliver information, but to inspire, influence, and reinforce institutional legitimacy.

UiTM, through its official leadership speeches, portrays itself as a symbol of social mobility and national intellectual progress, promoting the narrative that knowledge (ilmu) serves as the foundation of Malay and Bumiputera advancement. Consequently, each leadership discourse should form its own ideological dimension as an effort to uphold epistemic and moral legitimacy rooted in national identity.

Within the context of this study, the Vice-Chancellor's speeches delivered during Convocation Ceremonies should not be viewed simply as official university documents, but as ideological texts that illustrate how UiTM defends its role as an institution of knowledge and humanity for Bumiputera. Through selective lexical choice and syntactic structure, these speeches do more than express gratitude or congratulations, instead they function to build confidence, strengthen the unity of the university community, and verify UiTM's position as a trusted institution within Malaysia's higher education ecosystem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language in university leadership discourse functions as a reflection of organizational culture that continuously adapts to changing times and social realities. To ensure the continuity of UiTM's role as an academic and national institution, leadership language serves as a strategic space for constructing the meaning of Bumiputera institutional legitimacy within the context of modern higher education, while simultaneously affirming values that build trust and identity. In this sense, by sustaining UiTM's symbolic strength through the lens of society and the nation, language therefore acts as a medium that connects authority, aspiration and shared values.

Géring's (2023) study highlights that lexical strategies in the leadership discourse of higher education institutions play a crucial role in creating legitimacy through future-oriented narratives. By using words such as innovation, excellence, and future generation, this helps to establish an institutional image that is dynamic and forward-looking. In the context of UiTM, this approach aligns with the use of lexical items such as ilmu (knowledge) and graduan (graduate), which symbolize the nation's future and the outcomes of academic success as evidence of the epistemic legitimacy of a Bumiputera institution.

Meanwhile, Liu and Martinez (2025), in their study, Cultural Narratives and Educational Goals: A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis of University Presidents' Opening Convocation Speeches found that convocation speeches function as ideological texts that construct social legitimacy through themes such as achievement, gratitude, and community. Their findings reveal that university leaders consciously shape the institutional image through lexical patterns emphasizing shared values, responsibility, and social unity. This corpus-based approach can be applied to UiTM's context to trace the role of lexical items such as bangsa (nation), amanah (trust), and maruah (dignity), which reflect moral legitimacy and national values.

The study Legitimizing Strategies in Transformative Spaces (2025) further emphasizes that values such as trust, integrity, and shared vision function as key mechanisms in strengthening legitimacy when institutions face structural transformation. The findings indicate that language emphasizing trust and integrity enhances the moral and social legitimacy of organizations. These insights provide a relevant foundation for understanding the role of amanah (trust) and maruah (dignity) in UiTM's leadership discourse, which underscores ethical responsibility and national honor as the core of transformational leadership legitimacy.

In a similar vein, Taylor and Gomez (2023) as well as Miller (2022) discovered that lexical analysis of academic speeches can identify the construction of legitimacy through academic, moral, and social values. Miller divides the central values of convocation speeches into three categories—academic, ethical, and national which correspond closely with the functions of the lexical items ilmu, amanah, and bangsa in UiTM's context.

In conclusion, previous studies clearly demonstrate that lexical choice plays a significant role in shaping the symbolic power and legitimacy of higher education institutions. However, limited research has specifically focused on the aspect of Bumiputera institutional legitimacy. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining how five key lexical items which are ilmu (knowledge), bangsa (nation), maruah (dignity), amanah

(trust), and graduan (graduate) serve as linguistic anchors that reinforce UiTM's academic, moral, and social legitimacy. The analysis of lexical patterns within transformational leadership discourse aims to shed light on how UiTM's identity and authority are translated through language within the landscape of Malaysian higher education.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the key lexical elements found in transformational leadership speech texts related to Bumiputera institutions?
2. What symbolic and ideological meanings are conveyed through these lexical patterns in representing the position and role of Bumiputera institutions within leadership discourse?

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on the analysis of dominant lexical items found in the Vice-Chancellor's speeches of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) delivered during the 101st Convocation Ceremony in 2024. This study takes five (5) official Vice-Chancellor speeches, each representing a convocation session from five selected states which are Melaka (TUMel), Kelantan (TUKel), Selangor (TUSel), Sarawak (TUSar), and Sabah (TUSab) generated from official convocation documents.

The selection of all speech texts was guided by three principal criteria:

1. Representativeness, ensuring that each text reflects a different regional campus to capture the linguistic diversity within UiTM's leadership discourse;
2. Relevance, ensuring that all speeches were delivered by the same Vice-Chancellor under a unified thematic orientation; and
3. Accessibility and completeness, as all five texts are official documents originally written to be presented to a public audience.

This three-criterion approach strengthens the overall reliability and representativeness of the research data.

The selection of these texts was conducted through purposive sampling method to ensure a representative portrayal of leadership discourse that mirrors the geographical and social diversity in UiTM's convocation practices. This purposive sampling allows for a more nuanced understanding of how linguistic features manifests across different regional contexts while maintaining the institutional ethos of UiTM's leadership communication.

To strengthen Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this study also employs van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square framework to examine how UiTM's leadership discourse reinforces positive representations of the Bumiputera community, while also assisting the analysis in identifying the underlying ideological structures that form the basis of institutional legitimacy.

In addition, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Halliday (1994) is used as a complement to the CDA framework, aiming to examine the functions of language across three dimensions of meaning: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Through this combination, the study demonstrates how lexical choices, sentence structures (transitivity), and modality elements in speeches play a role in shaping meanings related to power, identity, and UiTM's moral stance.

To ensure higher reliability of the analysis, intra-coder validation was conducted by reviewing the lexical coding after a two-week interval to verify coding stability and reduce interpretive bias.

Analytical Approach

This analysis combines Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework with van Dijk's Ideological Square and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to provide a more multidimensional perspective on power, ideology, and representation. While Fairclough's framework focuses on the relationship between discourse and social practice, van Dijk's framework reveals how ideology is reproduced through the use of first-person pronouns, such as "we" versus "they," which reinforces the positive image of UiTM and the Bumiputera community. Meanwhile, Halliday's SFL approach provides a linguistic perspective for examining how meaning is constructed through transitivity, mood, and thematic structure in the speeches of UiTM's Vice-Chancellor.

Therefore, the analysis aimed to identify two primary patterns of lexical frequency within the UiTM Vice-Chancellor's speech corpus: (i) the overall occurrence of the five selected lexical items, and (ii) the comparative frequency of these lexical items across speeches from different states. This methodological design ensured that the lexical analysis was conducted in a systematic, consistent, and analytically transparent manner, thereby enhancing the validity and clarity of interpretation of the findings.

Focus of Analysis

From the frequency analysis, five (5) lexical items were identified as the most dominant in articulating the narrative of Bumiputera institutional legitimacy namely ilmu (knowledge), graduan (graduate), amanah (trust), bangsa (nation), and maruah (dignity). The selection of these lexical items was based on their high frequency of occurrence and their significant role in underlining the strength of UiTM's aspiration to construct and sustain the legitimacy of an intellectual institution grounded in the advancement of Malay and Bumiputera interests.

Lexical dominance was determined through frequency analysis using Wmatrix software, supported by manual validation to ensure contextual appropriateness. Words that appeared with high frequency and carried symbolic or ideological meanings, such as knowledge, nation, trust, dignity, and graduates, were coded as dominant lexemes. This combination of quantitative analysis and qualitative interpretation strengthens the transparency of the methodology.

The identified lexical items were subsequently compared across the five state-based speeches to observe thematic consistency and ideological emphasis, thus linking quantitative evidence to qualitative interpretation. These lexical choices reflect not only linguistic patterns but also the ideological underpinnings of UiTM's leadership discourse, where language serves as a symbolic mechanism to reassert the university's identity, authority, and cultural mission within the broader framework of Malaysia's higher education landscape.

Interpretation

The process of interpretation was conducted through a triangulated approach, which involved evaluating the speech context, linguistic patterns, and cross-textual meaning reinforcement for the purposes of lexical tagging, thematic code development, and lexical pattern visualization. This methodological triangulation provided a comprehensive analytical framework to understand how lexical choices function as linguistic strategies in constructing UiTM's academic, moral, and social legitimacy as a Bumiputera higher education hub.

This interpretive phase moved beyond surface description to interrogate how language encodes institutional power relations and reproduces ideological hierarchies.Through this approach, the study captures the dynamic interplay between language and institutional identity, demonstrating how discourse operates as a medium for legitimizing UiTM's epistemic authority and preserving its symbolic power within the Malaysian higher education landscape.

The interpretive process in this study goes beyond mere lexical categorization by also examining ideological polarization and meaning construction based on the functions of language. Using van Dijk's Ideological Square, the study identifies how UiTM's discourse highlights positive characteristics of the Bumiputera

community, such as diligence, dignity, and integrity, while minimizing external narratives that are critical or negative.

From Halliday's metafunctional perspective, it is observed that linguistic processes, such as material and relational sentence sand ructures (for example, phrases like "UiTM continues to lead…" or "UiTM stands as…"), manifest actions identities that uphold institutional power. The consistent thematic structure across the "knowledge–trust–nation" sequence demonstrates how UiTM constructs a self-image as a moral and academic preserver of Bumiputera heritage.

The interpretive coding process follows three main layers: (1) lexical coding, classifying recurring words according to semantic domains; (2) thematic coding, identifying ideological themes such as knowledge, moral integrity, and national pride; and (3) critical coding, linking linguistic patterns to structures of power and institutional legitimacy. This layered approach ensures that frequency data are not merely descriptive but also grounded in critical interpretation, consistent with Fairclough's CDA and van Dijk's ideology framework.

This approach also reveals the implicit power asymmetry in UiTM's discourse, positioning the university as a moral custodian of Bumiputera identity. It further illustrates how ideological reinforcement occurs through the repetition of values such as knowledge and loyalty, sustaining UiTM's hegemonic authority within Malaysia's higher education narrative.

RESULTS

The corpus analysis revealed five (5) dominant lexical items underpinning the discourse of Bumiputera institutional legitimacy in the UiTM Vice-Chancellor's speeches; ilmu (knowledge), graduan (graduate), amanah (trust), bangsa (nation), and maruah (dignity). As illustrated in Figure 1 below, ilmu emerged as the most frequently occurring lexical item, followed by graduan and amanah. These three lexical items collectively represent the foundational pillars of UiTM's legitimacy as an institution rooted in intellectual authority, dedicated to producing competitive graduates, and upholding moral values and social responsibility within the Bumiputera community.

Meanwhile, bangsa and maruah embody deeper layers of identity and emotions. Both terms highlights how the university's discourse extends beyond academic achievement to emphasize the defense of Bumiputera dignity and standing within the national higher education system. Collectively, these five lexical items demonstrate that UiTM's legitimacy is formed through the merging of intellectual, moral, and national identity dimensions, positioning the university not merely as a center of learning but as a symbol of Bumiputera struggle, pride, and collective aspiration.

Figure 1: Frequency of Dominant Lexical Items in the UiTM Vice-Chancellor's 101st Convocation Speech by State (2024).
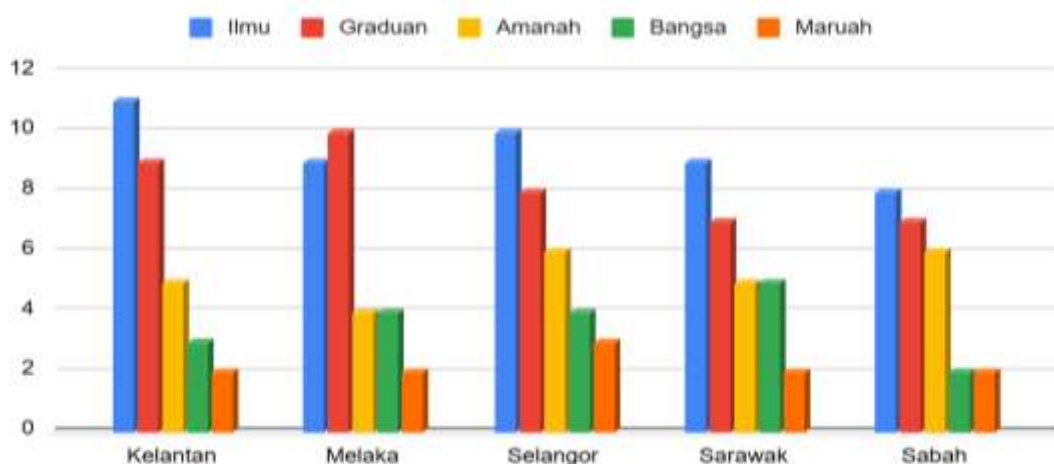
Figure 1 also shows the distribution of the five dominant lexical items identified in the UiTM Vice-Chancellor's speeches across the five states, which are Kelantan, Melaka, Selangor, Sarawak, and Sabah namely ilmu (knowledge), graduan (graduate), amanah (trust), bangsa (nation), and maruah (dignity). The findings indicate a relatively balanced pattern of lexical usage across all five states, suggesting thematic consistency within UiTM's transformational leadership discourse across its campuses.

However, the overall frequency count reveals that ilmu remains the most dominant lexical item, followed by graduan and amanah. This trend underscores UiTM's emphasis on intellectual values and the moral responsibility of graduates as custodians of the institution's trust. Meanwhile, bangsa and maruah appear with lower but still significant frequencies, reflecting a Bumiputera institutional legitimacy narrative deeply rooted in national consciousness and the cultivation of collective identity.

The consistency of lexical usage across all five speeches is examined through the following thematic analysis, which explores how the symbolic meanings and underlying ideologies conveyed serve to highlight the position and role of Bumiputera institutions within the discourse of transformational leadership. The lexical items ilmu (knowledge), graduan (graduates), amanah (trust), bangsa (nation), and maruah (dignity) form a cohesive discourse cluster that reflects UiTM's emphasis on legitimizing itself as a credible and authoritative Bumiputera institution. The frequency of these dominant lexical items, as shown in Figures 1 and 2, confirms that these words function not merely as ordinary linguistic units but as ideological signifiers that project the institution's legitimacy and identity.

Within this research framework, the analysis identifies two major semantic dimensions emerging from the speeches: (1) the meaning of leadership, which is tied to the university's vision, trust, and responsibility; and (2) the meaning of institutional identity, which refers to UiTM's role in relation to the nation and its people. However, close examination of the data reveals that these two dimensions are often expressed through overlapping lexical items, suggesting that UiTM's discourse integrates both aspects which includes leadership and institutional identity within a unified rhetorical structure.

Among these lexical items, ilmu (knowledge) emerges as the most dominant across all five Vice-Chancellor's speeches, signifying that knowledge constitutes the foundation of UiTM's institutional legitimacy as a Bumiputera university. Within the discourse of transformational leadership, ilmu functions dually: it reinforces the meaning of leadership while simultaneously strengthening the construction of institutional identity. Despite variations in contextual settings, the recurrence of ilmu underscores its role as a source of moral and rational authority that justifies UiTM's existence as a premier institution of higher learning. The repeated invocation of this lexical item consolidates the message that knowledge is both the cornerstone of national transformation and the proof of UiTM's effectiveness in advancing Bumiputera intellectual potential. Consequently, UiTM's legitimacy is established through academic credibility and institutional capacity, anchored in the strategic and purposeful use of the lexical item ilmu. The distinctions are as follows:

The contextual meaning of leadership :

"UiTM terus komited melahirkan graduan yang bukan sahaja cemerlang dalam ilmu, tetapi juga berakhlak dan berjiwa besar untuk memimpin masyarakat." (TUSel, P6, B29)

"UiTM remains steadfast in its commitment to producing graduates who are not only excellent in knowledge, but also possess noble character and a strong sense of purpose to lead their communities." (TUSel, P6, L29)

In this context, ilmu refers to academic knowledge that forms the foundation of the university's vision and institutional responsibility.

The contextual meaning of institutional identity

"Perjuangan ilmu ini adalah lambang maruah bangsa, tanda bahawa anak Bumiputera mampu berdiri

sama tinggi dengan bangsa lain." (TUMel, P3, B96)

"This pursuit of <u>knowledge</u> stands as a symbol of our nation's dignity — a testament that the Bumiputera children are capable of standing tall, equal alongside others." (TUMel, P3, L96)

The term ilmu is employed in a symbolic context, representing both the intellectual struggle of the Bumiputera community and the institutional legitimacy of UiTM.

The lexical item graduan (graduate) is the second most frequently used term and serves as an indicator of UiTM's success in fulfilling its educational mandate to the Bumiputera community. In speeches such as "UiTM remains steadfast in producing competent and competitive graduates," this lexical choice illustrates the tangible outcomes of the university's educational system. The term graduan signifies the legitimacy of institutional identity within social and economic dimensions, reflecting UiTM's recognized role in producing high-quality human capital. Within the context of leadership meaning, discourse containing the lexical item graduan functions to build public confidence in UiTM's capacity to nurture future leaders who embody knowledge, skills, and ethical values. Thus, graduan becomes a symbol of institutional effectiveness and serves as concrete evidence of UiTM's legitimacy as a national trust entrusted with advancing the Bumiputera community.

The contextual meaning of leadership :

"Sebagai institusi yang memacu perubahan, UiTM menekankan pembangunan graduan berfikiran strategik, berintegriti dan mampu menjadi pemimpin transformasi dalam pelbagai sektor." (TUKel, P8, B77)

"As an institution driving change, UiTM places great emphasis on nurturing graduates who think strategically, uphold integrity, and are capable of becoming transformational leaders across various sectors." (TUKel, P8, L77)

The lexical item graduate is used to represent the outcome of the university's transformational leadership, emphasizing the development of future leaders who are knowledgeable and ethical, in alignment with the university's overarching vision.

The contextual meaning of institutional identity :

"Kejayaan melahirkan ribuan graduan Bumiputera saban tahun menjadi bukti kukuh bahawa UiTM kekal sebagai institusi yang memperjuangkan hak dan mobiliti sosial bangsa." (TUKel, P7, B49)

"The success of producing thousands of Bumiputera graduates each year stands as strong evidence that UiTM remains steadfast as an institution that upholds the rights and advances the social mobility of the Bumiputera community." (TUKel, P7, L49)

The lexical item graduate functions as a symbol of institutional identity and legitimacy, reflecting UiTM's role in empowering the Bumiputera community through education and socioeconomic opportunities.

Meanwhile, the lexical item trust (amanah) highlights the moral and spiritual dimension of UiTM, which is deeply rooted in Islamic values and Malay cultural traditions. In expressions such as "You now bear a moral and intellectual trust to contribute back to your alma mater," the notion of trust is framed as a responsibility that is both weighty and noble. This indicates that UiTM's legitimacy is not solely grounded in academic excellence but also sustained through the integrity and moral uprightness of its community members.

In the context of leadership meaning, amanah operates as a discourse of sincerity and transparency in leadership, emphasizing that the true success of an institution is not measured by awards or status, but by loyalty to the entrusted responsibility. Furthermore, amanah reinforces UiTM's institutional and moral legitimacy as an Islamic-oriented university committed to nurturing knowledgeable and virtuous individuals.

The contextual meaning of leadership :

"Setiap warga universiti, sama ada pensyarah mahupun pelajar, harus menunaikan amanah yang diberikan dengan penuh keikhlasan dan tanggungjawab demi menjamin kelangsungan kecemerlangan UiTM." (TUSar, P5, B99)

"Every member of the university community, whether faculty or student, must fulfill the trust entrusted to them with utmost sincerity and responsibility, in order to safeguard the enduring excellence of UiTM." (TUSar, P5, L99)

The lexical item amanah is employed to emphasize the moral dimension of leadership, highlighting honesty, integrity, and transparency as the fundamental pillars of organizational success. It reflects a form of leadership responsibility that extends beyond administrative duties, grounded instead in spiritual and ethical values.

The contextual meaning of institutional identity :

"UiTM ditubuhkan atas dasar amanah bangsa untuk memastikan anak Bumiputera mendapat peluang pendidikan tinggi yang adil dan berdaya saing di peringkat global." (TUSab, P7, B85)

"UiTM was founded upon the sacred trust of the nation — a mandate to ensure that Bumiputera students are given fair and equitable access to higher education, empowering them to compete confidently on the global stage." (TUSab, P7, L85)

Amanah embodies the institutional identity of UiTM, representing its social and moral responsibility in shaping the future of the Bumiputera community. This lexical choice signifies the university's moral and cultural legitimacy as an Islamic institution entrusted with fulfilling the mandate of the people and the nation.

The lexical item bangsa underscores UiTM's position as a symbol of the collective struggle of the Bumiputera in higher education. Expressions such as "Insya-Allah, UiTM graduates will continue to contribute significantly to religion, nation, and homeland" illustrate how UiTM constructs national identity as the core of its institutional legitimacy. The concept of bangsa serves as a symbol of loyalty and perseverance, reinforcing the emotional bond between the university and the Malay community.

In this context, UiTM transcends its role as a mere academic institution to embody a broader social movement dedicated to upholding the dignity and advancement of the Bumiputera through knowledge. The repeated use of this lexical item highlights UiTM's founding mission—rooted in the defense and empowerment of the Bumiputera—positioning bangsa as a key discourse marker that connects historical legitimacy with contemporary aspirations for progress and collective identity.

The contextual meaning of leadership :

"Sebagai institusi yang melahirkan pemimpin masa hadapan, UiTM menyeru setiap graduan agar memimpin dengan nilai dan semangat yang mampu mengangkat martabat bangsa di persada dunia." (TUSab, P4, B39)

"As an institution entrusted with nurturing future leaders, UiTM calls upon every graduate to lead with values and a spirit that will elevate the dignity of our nation on the global stage." (TUSab, P4, L39)

Bangsa is employed as both the target and motivation of leadership, wherein the responsibility of leadership is perceived not merely as a personal or organizational duty, but as a collective commitment to national advancement. This reflects that UiTM's leadership vision is grounded in the struggle to nurture leaders with a strong sense of national identity and a focus on social development.

The contextual meaning of institutional identity :

"UiTM wujud sebagai hasil perjuangan bangsa yang ingin melihat anak Melayu dan Bumiputera memiliki

ruang dalam pendidikan tinggi negara." (TUSar, P10, B120)

"UiTM stands as the outcome of a national struggle — a vision born from the aspirations of the Malay and Bumiputera people who sought rightful access to higher education in this nation." (TUSar, P10, L120)

The lexical item bangsa functions as the core of UiTM's institutional identity, reaffirming the historical roots and founding mission of the university. It carries a symbolic meaning that positions UiTM not merely as an academic institution, but as a manifestation of the nation's aspiration to achieve educational equity and social advancement.

The lexical item maruah introduces an emotional and symbolic dimension within UiTM's leadership discourse. It is employed to represent personal dignity, academic integrity, and institutional pride. Expressions such as "Apply your knowledge and skills with integrity and dedication… uphold your character and dignity" illustrate that maruah is a value that every member of the university community must preserve as a mark of loyalty and respect toward the institution.

Although its frequency of occurrence is relatively low, each instance of maruah carries substantial rhetorical weight, reinforcing UiTM's symbolic legitimacy as the custodian of the nation's honor. Within the framework of transformational leadership, maruah serves as a moral and emotional anchor that sustains unity, identity, and national pride among UiTM's members. It elevates UiTM beyond its role as a center of learning, positioning it as a site of struggle dedicated to upholding the dignity and sovereignty of the Bumiputera nation.

The contextual meaning of leadership :

"Setiap pemimpin dalam UiTM mesti menjunjung maruah universiti dengan melaksanakan tanggungjawab secara berintegriti, telus dan beretika dalam setiap tindakan." (TUMel, P4, B29)

"Every leader within UiTM must uphold the dignity of the university by carrying out their responsibilities with integrity, transparency, and ethical conduct in every action." (TUMel, P4, L29)

The lexical item maruah (dignity) is employed to underscore the moral and ethical values inherent in transformational leadership, emphasizing the responsibility to uphold the institution's honor and credibility. Maruah functions as the foundation of integrity and honesty that must be preserved by all leaders to ensure UiTM remains respected as a credible and authoritative institution.

The contextual meaning of institutional identity :

"UiTM ialah benteng maruah bangsa yang membuktikan kemampuan anak Bumiputera berdiri setanding dengan bangsa lain melalui pencapaian akademik dan profesional." (TUKel, P8, B109)

"UiTM stands as the bastion of the nation's dignity, proving that Bumiputera sons and daughters are capable of standing on equal footing with others through their academic and professional achievements." (TUKel, P8, L109)

The lexical item maruah represents the symbolic identity of UiTM as an institution, serving as an emblem of collective dignity and pride among the Bumiputera community. It transcends the notion of personal virtue, embodying the broader manifestation of the nation's struggle as reflected through the achievements of this educational institution.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the analysis of five dominant lexical items—ilmu (knowledge), graduan (graduates), amanah (trust), bangsa (nation), and maruah (dignity)—illustrates how lexical choices serve as a central mechanism in constructing the institutional legitimacy of the Bumiputera. Through a thematic approach, the findings reveal that UiTM's leadership discourse functions not merely as ceremonial text, but as a strategic

vehicle for disseminating institutional ideology and reinforcing UiTM's status as a legitimate, authoritative, and nationally grounded entity.

The thematic analysis further indicates that these five dominant lexical items embody dual conceptual meanings operating within two major contexts: transformational leadership and institutional identity. In the context of leadership, these lexical items foreground transformational values such as vision, responsibility, integrity, and wisdom—legitimizing UiTM's role as a moral and intellectual leader in driving change. The lexical items ilmu and graduan signify the institution's capacity to produce highly competent human capital, whereas amanah underscores integrity-driven and value-oriented leadership.

This duality of meaning demonstrates that lexical selection in UiTM's leadership discourse is not merely denotative but ideologically layered, blending the discourse of professionalism with the narrative of identity and struggle. The deliberate use of these lexical items by the text's authors aims to construct UiTM's image as an institution that not only transmits knowledge but also upholds dignity and champions the collective well-being of the Bumiputera community. The analysis affirms that the language employed in the Vice-Chancellor's speeches carries consistent semantic force—integrating scholarly discourse, social responsibility, and national spirit into a coherent legitimizing narrative.

Beyond lexical analysis, the critical approach in this study demonstrates that UiTM's discourse operates within a hegemonic structure that sustains institutional power through moral and epistemic justification. Thus, discourse functions not only as a linguistic act but also as an ideological act that constructs legitimacy.

By extending Fairclough's CDA framework through the integration of van Dijk's ideological perspective and Halliday's functional linguistics, this study shows that UiTM's leadership discourse is not merely a manifestation of linguistic authority but also serves as an ideological mechanism that upholds Bumiputera identity through moral, epistemic, and symbolic dimensions. This theoretical combination provides a deeper interpretation of how language is used to construct and maintain institutional legitimacy within the context of higher education in Malaysia.

Overall, this integration of linguistic and ideological frameworks provides a replicable model for analyzing institutional discourse in higher education, offering both theoretical depth and methodological transparency that future CDA researchers can build upon.

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