



Institutional Branding in Higher Education

A Linguistic Analysis of King Faisal University Identity

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Abstract. This paper presents a corpus-assisted discourse study (CADS) attempting to offer a linguistic analysis of the official King Faisal University Identity (KFUI) focusing on environmental sustainability and food security. To this end, it utilizes two tools of linguistic investigation, agency and interdisciplinarity, to offer an understanding of how this Saudi university is self-constructed in such a document and what implications such construction entails. The analysis reveals that KFUI brands itself as a research- and investment-inviting academic institution with an interdisciplinary take on environmental sustainability. Such take signifies its connections to discourses on economy and technology, along with its commitment to prospective measures to be taken in light of KFUI.

Keywords: Institutional branding · Higher education · King Faisal University · Corpus linguistics · Discourse analysis · Saudi Arabia · Sustainability

1 Introduction

King Faisal University (KFU) is a well-established Saudi governmental university founded in Al Ahsa in 1975. With tens of thousands of students nowadays, KFU takes a huge responsibility as a governmental and academic institution. However, following increasing transformational demands aligned with the Saudi 2030 vision [1], KFU has recently reformulated its institutional identity (published originally in Arabic and translated to English) [2]. Such reformulation has been based on environmental sustainability and food security as two cornerstones for its institutional branding. While several factors often affect why a given identity is formulated in such a way, KFU appears to have utilized its geographical location in Al Ahsa; one of the largest oases in the world with rich natural resources, such as produce, green lands and oil. Price et al. [3], for instance, suggests that natural settings like location could be a defining feature for academic branding.

With this in consideration, such reformulation merits further discursive investigation to underpin what implications could result from this transformation. To this end, this paper aims at answering the following questions: (a) what rhetorical moves are utilized in KFUI? (b) How is agency enacted in KFUI? And (c) how is interdisciplinarity utilized in KFUI? It starts with a brief introduction and contextualization within relevant literature, then highlights the rationale and scope of its methodology in data collection and analysis.

Results are stated comprising qualitative and quantitative analyses. These results are further elaborated on in the discussion section, followed by a brief conclusion. Below, Sect. 1.1 highlights some relevant literature on institutional branding in higher education, while Sect. 1.2 approaches this briefly from a discourse analysis perspective.

1.1 Institutional Branding in Higher Education

Branding is originally a management term [4] that indicates viewing an institution as a brand. A brand could be historically defined as a ‘familiar but conceptually elusive entity’ [5] p. 8. *Elusive* in such a conception can foresee the potential risks branding might run into when translated. Tierney and Lanford [6] p. 7, for instance, state that academic institutions these days undergo a period of ‘unprecedented turbulence’ as they attempt to work beyond norms to maintain their existence in the twenty-first century. However, despite such concerns, branding has been examined extensively in higher education literature in recent years, [7] and it continues to be a growing area of potential research in academia [8]. This interest has been motivated primarily by influences from the private sector of what counts as ‘good business practices’ [4] p.1. Such practices have been adopted, modified and appropriated in higher educational contexts to allow universities to highlight their competitive reputation [9] and their potential to attract business alliances [10] and promote academic research initiatives to serve such ends [6]. As a result, new vocabulary items such as identity and branding have started impacting higher education literature [4] since many institutions began to reformulate their identities following this. However, this transformation should not equate with reformulations carried out in commercial contexts. Despite some similarities, Black [9] distinguishes it from the commercial contexts; in academia, institutional branding is expanded to differentiate ‘who we are’ as an identity, which extends beyond what a given product might offer in the market within commercial contexts. Due to such a conception, it is possible to see that branding in higher education encompasses a broader sense than institutional branding in other domains.

1.2 Discourse Analysis for Linguistic Investigation

When the above discussion is considered, it is possible to envision the fundamental role of discourse in identity construction within institutional branding. Given that discourse analysis investigates language in use [11], institutional branding offers a significant area of research for discourse analysts who are often interested in the implications that could be deconstructed from such linguistic construction in search of ideological patterns. While many discourse studies have investigated relevant texts (see, for example, [12, 13] and [14]) from linguistic or semiotic perspectives, discursive research within the Saudi higher educational context remains scarce and requires far more attention. This paper attempts to bridge this gap by incorporating a linguistic analysis of institutional branding from a local perspective.

2 Methodology

Since this paper is a CADS, it utilises a mixed-methods approach simultaneously comprising elements from corpus linguistics and discourse analysis. In corpus linguistics,

texts are stored electronically in software packages that automatically analyse the texts in search of linguistic patterns [15]. It is often incorporated with other discourse analysis tools to allow further data utilisation within CADs [16]. It begins by approaching the text from a genre perspective, identifying the major moves established in the KFUI. Then the text is transformed into a plain text file to be compatible with corpus software packages for further analysis. Move analysis is rooted in genre studies, and it signifies the presence of several dividing moves acting like discursal segments and fulfilling certain communicative functions within a given discourse [17]. While many corpus software packages are available on the market, this paper uses #LancsBox v.6.x [18] and Wmatrix [19] to generate its dataset. As an interdisciplinary enterprise, discourse analysis has an extensive potential linguistic tool list to shape analyses. However, only two linguistic tools are investigated here. The first is agency, a component that often highlights which social actor dominates actions within a given discourse. It is a semantic category [20] that bears strong connections to action, the grammatical category in which social actors can be positioned on a continuum from active to passive. However, decoding such connections in discourse can be challenging due to the lack of a ‘neat fit’ between linguistic categorisation and semantic ones [21] p. 24. Keeping this in mind, after importing the corpus into #LancsBox v.6.x, the *Words* tool will be used to generate the most frequent words in KFUI, which will later motivate the identification of the major social actors controlling agency. In addition to Words, the keywords in context (*KWIC*) tool will be used to generate concordance lines, a fundamental application in CADs that examines individual words with their surrounding linguistic contexts [15]. Also, the *GrappColl* tool will be used to generate word collocations, signifying which words have a preference for co-existing alongside other words [15]. The second linguistic tool is interdisciplinarity, signifying that ‘discourses are linked to each other in various ways’ [22] p. 90. From such a perspective, discourses are characterised as being ‘hybrid’ and ‘open’, and such multiplicity in exploring potential themes within a given discourse is critical in exploring its underpinnings. Many studies within institutional discourse have analysed these two linguistic manifestations: agency and interdiscursivity (see, for instance, [23] and [24]), as they both bear strong connections to changing dynamics within any given discourse.

3 Data Analysis

3.1 Move Analysis

As explained in Sect. 2, this analysis starts with a brief move analysis of the text. It is of key significance to analyse the general moves utilised in the KFUI. This is primarily because identifying moves in the text establishes how to conduct the analysis. Below is a list of primary moves in KFUI.

- Introduction: this move serves to introduce the identity to the reader by establishing the identity’s significance on both national and international grounds. It does so in a top-down process by defining environmental sustainability as a general and overarching concept and gradually specifies such definition of food security on national and international grounds.

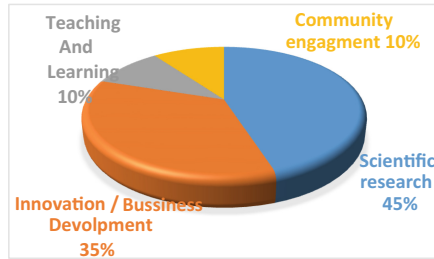


Fig. 1. Identity impact on university functions (source: KFUI)

- Action: This move begins with a concise identification of measures that have been/will be taken by KFUI to materialise its identity. Four cornerstones are identified at this move along with their assigned percentage in the KFUI realisation, as shown in Fig. 1:
- Motivation: this is the third move, and it establishes the internal and external motivation for forming the KFUI identity in such a way.
- Domain identification: This move highlights nine relevant domains incorporated within KFUI: water, agriculture, environment, management, technology, health, transportation and logistics, manufacturing and energy.
- Practical applications: this is the last move in KFUI, and it concludes the document with potential areas for investment and research trends such as genome editing and algae applications.

3.2 Agency

This section examines how agency is constructed in KFUI, particularly how the primary social actor, KFUI, is represented in context. Utilising the KWIC tool of #LancsBox v.6.x, several keywords denoting the primary social actor are used. *We*, the plural first-person subject pronoun, appeared 15 times in KFUI. Figure 2 demonstrate the concordance lines of *we*, which clearly collocates with the future modal auxiliary verb, *will*, in most of its cases. As evident in Fig. 3, such collocation dominates the visualisation over other function words. Created using the Graphcoll tool of #LancsBox v.6.x, the closer the link between a nod word (*we*, in this case) and any other word, the stronger the collocation between these two.

We, however, is not the only way to refer to KFUI. *KFUI* and *King Faisal University* are two alternative nominations of the same institution, although to a lesser degree. Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate their concordance lines. Again, the same agentive action-based pattern established with *we* appears here as most of these lines detect prospective measures to be taken under KFUI. This is apart from 1 in Fig. 4, signifying the title of this document, and 2 and 3 in Fig. 5, denoting respectively an adverb of place in a prepositional phrase (a noun phrase following a preposition) and the already taken measures.

Interestingly, though, a major function word relating to this particular social actor appears too often to be excluded from the analysis, that is *our*. With 33 occurrences,

Search we		Occurrences 15 (67.26)	▼ Corpus	kfu identity	▼ Context 7	▼ Display Text
Index	File	Left	Node	Right		
1	kfu English id	and environmental sustainability at the national level.	we	believe that King Faisal University can maximize		
2	kfu English id	focusing on food security and environmental sustainability.	we	will deep delve in our history and		
3	kfu English id	and environmental sustainability through our research capabilities.	we	will use our capabilities to turn the		
4	kfu English id	impact of each resource invested at KFU.	we	will extend our hand to work with		
5	kfu English id	that enable us to achieve our goals.	we	will also employ our investment capabilities, the		
6	kfu English id	food security and preserving its rich environment.	we	work to unleash the University's economic capabilities		
7	kfu English id	security and environmental sustainability a strategic choice.	we	aim to make our university campus an		
8	kfu English id	well as maintaining the quality of life	we	live in the long term through responsible		
9	kfu English id	that desert covers most of its land.	we	will study the techniques, legislations and administrative		
10	kfu English id	to get advantages from them. In addition,	we	will maximize our understanding of groundwater by		
11	kfu English id	and aquifers in the Kingdom. In addition,	we	will work on understanding and improving seawater		
12	kfu English id	techniques in partnership with the relevant authorities.	we	will direct our capabilities to study the		
13	kfu English id	as desertification, declining vegetation and environmental pollution.	we	are striving to figure out possible means		
14	kfu English id	Empty Quarter and its surroundings in particular.	we	will also study possible methods to take		
15	kfu English id	the continuity of efforts of environmental conservation.	we	will endeavor to achieve this by directing		

Fig. 2. Concordance lines of *we* using KWIC

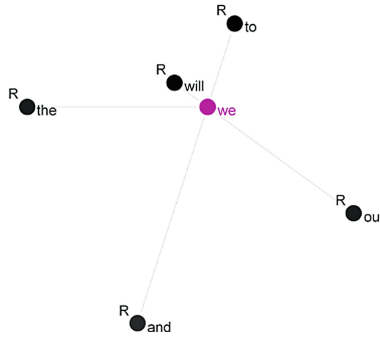


Fig. 3. Collocations of *we* using GraphColl

Search King Faisal Unive...		Occurrences 3 (13.45)	▼ Corpus	kfu identity	▼ Context 7	▼ Display Text
Index	File	Left	Node	Right		
1	kfu English id		King Faisal University	identity 2 4 5 6 7 King		
2	kfu English id	related to all vital sectors, especially education,	King Faisal University	(KFU) aims to be a leading university		
3	kfu English id	at the national level. We believe that	King Faisal University	can maximize its contribution by focusing on		

Fig. 4. Concordance lines of *King Faisal University* using KWIC

Search KFU		Occurrences 4 (17.94)	▼ Corpus	kfu identity	▼ Context 14	▼ Display Text
Index	File	Left	Node	Right		
1	kfu English id	s related to all vital sectors, especially education, King Faisal University	(KFU)	aims to be a leading university locally, regionally and internationally in i		
2	kfu English id	sitive role and enhance the positive impact of each resource invested at	KFU	We will extend our hand to work with those who share our ambition to		
3	kfu English id	we live in the long term through responsible use of natural resources.	KFU	in its entire academic and research sectors, has undertaken to contrib		
4	kfu English id	s and renewable energy sources. Despite the variety of energy sources,	KFU	will concentrate on renewable energies, especially bioenergy such as.		

Fig. 5. Concordance lines of *KFU* using KWIC

more than double the cases of *we*, this plural first-person possessive pronoun collocates with different keywords, as shown in Fig. 6. It collocates with keywords like food, environmental and security. The next section will further expand on the notion of keywords in KFUI.

Search our		Occurrences 33 (147.98)	Texts 2	▼ Corpus	kfu identity	▼ Context 14	▼ Display Text
Index	File	Left		Node	Right		
1		kfu English idin food security and environmental sustainability. We will deep delve in		our	history and build upon our predecessor's practices in food security and		
2		kfu English idmental sustainability. We will deep delve in our history and build upon		our	predecessor's practices in food security and environmental sustainabi		
3		kfu English idr's practices in food security and environmental sustainability through		our	research capabilities. We will use our capabilities to turn the challenge		
4		kfu English idronmental sustainability through our research capabilities. We will use		our	capabilities to turn the challenges of drought and desertification into of		
5		kfu English idication into opportunities for technological breakthroughs that address		our	challenges and put us on the map of the producing countries of these		
6		kfu English idid put us on the map of the producing countries of these technologies.		Our	specialized research centers in the fields of food security and environ		
7		kfu English idars in the fields of food security and environmental sustainability reflect		our	ability to give, create and innovate in these fields. Our strategic partner		
8		kfu English idstainability reflect our ability to give, create and innovate in these fields.		Our	strategic partnerships with food and environmental policy-makers and		
9		kfu English id: the positive impact of each resource invested at KFU. We will extend		our	hand to work with those who share our ambition to secure our food an		
10		kfu English idinvested at KFU. We will extend our hand to work with those who share		our	ambition to secure our food and preserve our environment, trusting All		

Fig. 6. Concordance lines of *our* using KWIC

Table 1. Most frequent tokens (words) and their occurrences (types) in KFUI

Type	Tokens	Type	Tokens	Type	Tokens	Type	Tokens
And	141	Will	15	Be	7	Addition	5
The	128	Its	13	It	7	At	5
Of	83	Development	13	Use	7	Plant	5
To	70	Water	13	Many	7	Achieve	5
Food	58	Through	12	Technologies	7	Farming	5
In	51	Is	11	Identity	7	National	5
Environmental	40	Agricultural	10	Contribute	7	Sectors	5
Security	40	This	10	Can	7	Capabilities	5
Our	33	Agriculture	10	Resources	7	Them	5
Sustainability	32	Sustainable	9	These	6	Animal	5
As	26	By	9	Manufacturing	6	One	5
That	21	Includes	9	Investment	6	Has	5
A	20	Challenges	9	Production	6	Natural	5
Environment	18	Energy	8	Management	6	Study	5
Research	17	Related	8	Products	6	Most	5
For	16	Well	8	Health	6	Important	5
With	16	Strategic	8	Goals	6	Techniques	5
University	16	Also	8	Such	6	–	–
On	16	Kingdom	8	Center	6	–	–
We	15	Areas	7	Optimal	5	–	–

3.3 Interdisciplinarity

Following the guidelines identified in Sect. 2 and relying on findings of the corpus analysis, it is possible to detect incorporated discourses based on the frequency analysis of the most frequent words (Table 1). Five occurrences within KFUI have been set as a cutting point to determine its keywords, meaning that a word should occur at least five times in this 2111 word corpus to signal keyness. Table 1 above summarises 77 types

(particular words) using the Words tool in #LancsBox v.6.x along with their tokens (frequency of occurrence). As evident in many CADS, it is not uncommon for function words like articles, prepositions and pronouns to dominate the frequency word list over content words like nouns, adjectives or adverbs [15]. However, analysis often discards these as they do not indicate the aboutness of a given text [25]. Figure 7 demonstrates a word cloud [26] generated from KFUI to visualise Table 1.

Based on this table, it is possible to detect the prominence of the environmental sustainability discourse in the most frequent words. Dominating most of the list with words like food, environmental sustainability, security, sustainable, water and agricultural, KFUI translates its identity quite strongly in text. This prominence, however, should not forecast other discourses. To illustrate, the first content word on this list that is not directly related to environmental sustainability is research (17 types), followed by university (16 types), both of which signify the presence of discourse on academia and higher education. In addition to this, there is a reference to discourse on technology as exhibited in the word technologies (7 types) and the list also includes other words that could be linked to business/economy discourse like investment and management (6 types each) for instance. However, it should be highlighted that corpus tools alone may not provide comprehensive findings, and that in some cases a combination of manual and corpus analyses are used instead. Considering this, KFUI has been analysed manually in search of more embedded discourses. Accordingly, the conventional analysis verified the four discourses detected by #LancsBox v.6.x but also revealed three more subordinate discourses. These were primarily identified in the domain identification move in Sect. 3.1 and related to discourses on public health, transportation and tourism but to a lesser degree.

All these discourses were further verified by the corpus software Wmatrix. Using the key semantic concept tool to identify electronically major semantic areas covered in a given text increases the reliability of the analysis and the verification of categorisation [27]. Figure 8 automatically highlights these discourses; the bigger the key semantic concept on this figure, the more prominence it possesses in KFUI. This explains why key semantic concepts like farming & horticulture and food are relatively larger than education in general, for instance. This visualisation also verifies the findings of Sect. 3.2, which relates the primary social actor in this corpus, KFUI, to a futuristic perspective signifying actions and measures to be taken. This is denoted by the key semantic concept of time: beginning in Fig. 8.

4 Discussion

The move analysis conducted earlier does go along with what has been highlighted in Sect. 1. Moves are structured to promote the competitive action-based identity of KFUI, which sets it apart within this domain. The relative prominence of scientific research and business development over other cornerstones echoes recent trends in institutional branding in higher education. The recurrent collocation between *we/KFU/King Faisal University* and the future modal *will* clearly exhibits this since it highlights prospective measures to be taken when considering such an identity. Connections to national contexts are also evident in the presence of the word *national* in Table 1, constructing KFUI in accordance with the wider context of The Saudi Vision 2030.

financial autonomy, this perception of student enrolment is likely to change. Again, such autonomy fulfils another premise called for by Saudi Vision 2030.

5 Conclusion

In brief, this paper examined KFUI as an instance of institutional branding in higher education. By incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, the analysis revealed the construction of KFUI as a research-based institution with aspiring initiatives for investment. The analysis also placed environmental sustainability within a multiplicity of relevant discourses, like those within economy and technology fields.

This serves to reinforce the reformative measures taken by the Saudi government to revolutionize higher education in the country. Such representation, as constructed through this linguistic analysis, documents the shift in the role expected from academic institutions; a role that transcends beyond traditional and rather constraining definitions. These winds of change, then, has not been motivated solely by internal factors within the same academic institution, but also by wider socio-political factors. KFUI's ambition to devise and start implementing such branding echoes the sustainable vision of 2030; an affiliation that stems from growth and not exploitation, invests for today while maintaining tomorrow and places quality of life at its heart.

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