

## **A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Language on the Homepage of Selected Universities in Ghana**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the language of websites of universities in Ghana and how it is used to represent the institutions. It was based on Fairclough's (1993; 1995a, 2001) approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. The first six premier universities in Ghana were purposively selected for this study, namely, University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University of Education, Winneba, University for Development Studies and Valley View University. The findings revealed the following: the universities build their institutional identities on their Homepages through texts and visuals; the universities express their power to determine what to present to viewers of the website; the language on the websites are institutional centred; the universities use similar texts that serve as promotional discourse; the websites contained elements that present the universities with peculiar African (Ghanaian) characteristics. The findings have implication for pedagogy, theory and practice as it enables universities in Ghana to know how they are represented on their institutional websites in order to improve their marketing strategies especially toward their visibility on the global front, better positioning on the international ranking and the attraction of international students.

**Keywords:** CDA, Language of Websites, Universities in Ghana

### **1.0 Introduction**

Since the 1990s, there have been studies to analyse the use of World Wide Web (WWW) communication theories. Online advertising emerged in 1994 when HotWired sold the first banner ads to several advertisers. This boosted the revenue in the United States, estimated at of \$7.1 billion in 2001 which was about 3.1 percent of overall advertising spending. The dot-com bust declined or weakened many of the early online advertising industry players (Nosrati, Karimi, Mohammadi, & Malekian, 2013). Fu & Pirolli (2007) indicated that the WWW has become a domain that opens the "possibility for psychological, anthropological, and sociological study of complex everyday human cognition". With the introduction of WWW, there is a wide range of materials for research. The resources online can be utilized as the basis of research since they are now part of human experience.

Universities across the world use their institutional websites to attract potential customers who include students and donors. Thus, like other organizations, colleges and universities compete for customers (i.e., students) and resources. However, competition goes beyond customers and

resources. Organizations vie for institutional legitimacy and political power, which translates into economic and social fitness (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Consequently, to maintain institutional reputation, colleges and universities must rely on a variety of tactics in order to create a distinctive image, one that attempts to communicate to a number of audiences.

There is strong evidence that institutional websites serve as the tool to market institutions. Research suggests that 60% to 70% of college and university website access comes from external visitors, with prospective students among the primary visitors (McCollum, 1999; Middleton, McConnell, & Davidson, 1999; Pooch & Lefond, 2001; Schneider & Bruton, 2004). Also, eighty-four percent of prospective students were reported to have used institutional websites to do research and find information on colleges and universities. This indicates that websites play a vital role in the college-choice process (e.g., Anctil, 2008; Hossler, 1999; Pooch & Lefond, 2001). College and university websites often serve as the first, if not the only impression of the institution for prospective students; in fact, Anderson & Reid (1999) stated that, "visiting university websites

seems to have become a norm, with many people considering their visit to a university website as their first visit to the university itself” (p. 54). There is no doubt that today the effective management and planning of educational institutions require more than the traditional advertisement and identity development in newspapers, radio and television advertisement, as well as mounting of bill boards. The higher educational institutions must be crafty and present messages which will coagulate the experience of the target group in order to get competitive advantage on the academic market, as well as alumni and donors.

All the public universities in Ghana use online application for admission; this ensures regular visits of applicants to the websites of the universities. However, despite the online admission, which is not restricted to any geographical boundary, there is less international application. For instance, in 2017, out of the 15,506 admitted students to Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, only 268 were international students, which represented 1.73%. Also, out of the 27,239 students admitted to University of Ghana, only 745 students were international students representing 2.74%. University of Education, Winneba, University of Cape Coast, University for Development Studies, and Valley View University at their 2017 matriculations were silent on the number of international students. Although this could be attributed to other factors such as the economic and social standard of living in Ghana, it is expected that institutional policy makers should understand the implication and design marketing strategies to attract many foreign students.

As Dorkenoo et al (2015) stated, tertiary institutions in Ghana do not use informative advertisement which helps to improve the image of the higher education institutions in the creation of awareness and persuasion of audience. The higher education institutional websites consist of two main structures: content and development. The content deals with who and what is on the website. The content therefore must be purposely written to meet and inform the target group. Persuasive and informative rhetoric form the basis for such content. The development answers the

question, how? This includes functionality, innovation and visibility (Losonczi, 2012). There is no argument that how the development appears will be dependent on the target group and the information which forms the content; hence content and development are interrelated. There is the need to build academic reputation and college attributes which comprise the size of graduate orientation, technical orientation, fine arts orientation, and liberalness. This should be carefully crafted to arouse the interest of the prospective student to explore these avenues as many students utilize the social media and web for college search.

The analysis of the language of the higher educational institutional websites helps to bring to light the online appearance and reputation of the educational institution. Also the ideological presupposition that is hidden beneath the surface structure of the language use on the websites is unveiled. The choice of topic, purpose, relations and social distance is embedded in the language. This is determined by the choice of vocabulary, grammar and text structure. Words connect us to the world of experience. The vocabularies or words therefore are the tools for encoding one's ideology. The choice of grammar adds experiential value to the choice of vocabulary. The ideological meaning of a text is exposed through the analysis of the process type of the verbs as well as the predominate participants with key consideration of the type of sentence, relational values and logical connectors. It should however be mentioned that themes are not only achieved through the use of words but also the style, outline of text, colour, images, forms and layout, (Pietikämen & Mäntynen 2009). Therefore, the above and all the linguistic choices and the linguistic structures which project institutional identity and institutional online presence are the focus of this paper.

## **2.0 Statement of the Problem**

Although a lot of work has been done on websites of universities in Ghana, not much has been done on the language and its representation on websites of the premier universities in Ghana. A cursory search for scholarly works which related to this area shows the following: Chipper (2006), Saichaie (2011) and Hoang & Rojas-Lizana (2015)

use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to find out how universities in Ghana, through language use were represented on their institutional websites. Anttil (2008) works on Selling Higher Education; Saichaie (2011) examines representation on college and university websites using CDA and Chiper (2006) investigates how Romanian universities represent themselves on their institutional websites and then compares the discourse of Romanian universities with that of higher institutions in the UK, France, Germany and Italy. Schimel et al (2010) through a survey discover that ninety-four per cent of the student respondents examine the institutional websites before considering admission. Given the importance of institutional websites to both the prospective students and the universities, this paper investigates how universities represent themselves through the use of language on institutional websites.

### 3. Research Questions

This paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- How do universities in Ghana use textual and visual language to represent themselves on the institutional websites?
- How are the promotional discourses represented in the language used on the institutional websites?

### 4.0 Theoretical Framework

CDA evolved from the critical theory of language with the focus on language as a form of social practice. Social practices had historical contexts for their production and interpretation to serve a particular interest. This study relies on Fairclough's (1995a) framework approach to CDA which allows three-dimensional analysis: textual analysis, process analysis and societal analysis. As explained by Bloor and Bloor (2007), "critical discourse analysis is interested in the way in which language and discourse are used to achieve social goals and in the part this use play role in social maintenance and change" (p. 2). CDA studies are not simply the study of language structures and text but they extend to the study of "people, institutions and organisations" (Habib, Farahnaz, Akbar, & Ali, 2015). CDA perceives discourse as a form of social practice which uses language to express human experience and constructs social

structures. This makes CDA interdisciplinary and employs the eclectic approach to extract the inherent ideologies in intricate social phenomena. Fairclough & Wodak (1997) summarize the main canons of CDA as follows:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action.

### 5.0 Methodology

Content analysis method which includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches was adopted for this study (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Through the purposive sampling technique, 5 public universities and one private university (the first private university in Ghana) were selected for this study. The universities are University of Ghana (UG), The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), University of Cape Coast (UCC), University of Education, Winneba (UEW), University of Development Studies (UDS) and Valley View University (VUU). There was multiple data collection on the above pages of the websites of the universities from the month of November, 2019 to February, 2020. This time period was selected because the universities were in session as well as have opened admissions. When the admission was opened, the websites were updated regularly to attract and inform prospective applicants. The multiple data collection allowed the researchers to examine the changes in the representations in both language and image. Also the multiple data collection strengthens the validity of the data.

The online webpages were captured and saved for further analysis. Offline copies were created to maintain both the textual and visual components.

### 5.1 Data Management

To be able to establish the representation of the universities in Ghana on their institutional websites, there was both textual and visual analysis of the data collected from the various

websites. Both the textual and the visual analysis were choices that the universities made to build their online reputation. Following Fairclough's (1995a) framework for CDA, the data collected were analysed in accordance with the three inter-related processes; text analysis, process analysis and social analysis.

The analysis focuses on both the textual and visual data. The textual data was analysed using Jank's, (2005) Linguistic Analysis rubric which is a summation of Fairclough's (1993, 1995a, 2001) and Halliday's, (1985, 1994). This requires the analysis of descriptors such as word selection, sentence structure, use of verbs, modality, voice, subjects and sequence of

information. The visual data was analysed descriptively based on their general attributes, types of actors and page design.

The process analysis, which is the second dimension, involved the interpretation of the data in relation to the producer. This takes into consideration Fairclough's (2001) interpretative analysis framework (see Table 1) which focuses on the content of the language, subjects, the relations and connections between the language and the larger society.

Content	Subject	Relation	Connection
What's Going On?	Who's Involved?	In What Relations?	What's the Role of Language in What's Going On?
Activities, Topics & Purpose (e.g., verbs, modalities, voice)	Subjects (e.g., institutions, actors, buildings) & Types (e.g., white, nonwhite, female, male)	Composition (e.g., angle, distance) & Sequence (e.g., top, bottom, centre)	Themes & Genres that connect to larger social structures.

Table 1: Fairclough's Interpretive Analysis Framework Source: Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Longman.

The third dimension involving the societal analysis is the explanation of the data from the "larger cultural, historical, and social discourses surrounding interpretation of data" in relation to building of institutional identity (Saichaie, 2011).

## 6.0 Analysis and Finding

**6.1 Question1.** How do universities in Ghana use textual and visual language to represent themselves on the institutional websites?

In constructing their institutional identity, the universities use both textual and visual elements. Textually, the universities present themselves as subjects, use action verbs to establish themselves as producers and relational verbs to relate to the visitors of the websites (Fairclough, 1995a, 2001; Halliday, 1994; Janks, 2005; Sachaie 2011). They, like others are producers of academic products in the world, see students as customers (Fairclough 2001). As producers and therefore equipped with the power to enact/influence what is found on the website, they take the subject position and

construct their self-identity on their websites (Weeden, 2017). They use "we" and "you" to represent themselves and others respectively.

### (a) Textual:

#### 1. Homepages

The Home page is the 'Billboard' of the university which seeks to advertise the products of the institution. The institutional accomplishments through the staff and students are all presented to enhance the image of the institution. VVU, welcomes the visitor with "You are here: Home." And then there is a Happy New Year wish which is also seen on UDS Home page at the beginning of the year. This creates an interpersonal relationship with the visitor. This is followed by a video to tour the campus. This video goes with the quote of Harry Firestone "You get the best out of others when you give the best of yourself." It is also written on the video interface, "Take a Tour, Campus Life", to entice the visitor to watch the video as a tour in the university.

UG presents Admission advertisement



“2019/2020 Admissions, Graduate Entry Medical Programme & EMBA, Graduate Regular & Sandwich” with a call to action “Apply Now” to persuade the visitor to apply. Admission promotion is seen on all the samples offering similar invitation and with call to action. UCC does not use rotating images but the website welcomes visitors with the interrogative statement “Do You Want a University that Prepares You for the Future? You Need University of Cape Coast.” This is also followed by an invitation to join the University for personal development and growth.

UG makes the claim “UG RANKED 151-200, The World University Rankings Golden Age.” UG is not specific on their current ranking in the world but gives a range which may be deceptive. The range of 50 makes the visitor find it difficult on where to place UG. KNUST, however, makes a similar claim but with specific figures “KNUST has been ranked as the best University in Ghana and West Africa, 14<sup>th</sup> best on the African Continent and 706<sup>th</sup> best university globally by the US News & World Report.” Notwithstanding KNUST position on the various rankings, they consistently claim to be the best or among the best. Apart from UG and KNUST, all the other samples are silent on institutional rankings.

UDS allocates rotating images for accommodation information “Detail information on accommodation on all campuses for freshers.” Three other rotating images are for conference announcement. Conference announcements are seen on the Home page of all the other institutions inviting staff and students to conferences, seminars and training. UEW showcases its interaction with the society by dedicating a rotating image with the inscription “UEW Management Graces Okyenene’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Grand Durbar.” The News, Events and Announcements reinforce the institutional achievements and identity. The use of institutional subjects builds the university identity and provides positive reputation. However, the subjects are mostly the university, staff, departments and societies. The sample consists of only a few announcements and events which are directly related to students. Students as actors are seen in a large group with others as part of the achievement of the university. For instance,

“UCC Debate Society Presents GUDC Trophy to the Vice Chancellor.”, “KNUST Medical School Debate Team Wins 2019” and “KNUST Observes International Day of Persons with Disabilities.” In these instances, the students are not projected but rather are seen as participants in the university activities and achievements. It is worthy to note that four of the samples do not have any news, events or announcement relating to students. They all emphasize the activities and the achievements of the university. The universities’ names and key offices are therefore often used as subjects. VVU captions “Our Achievement” with the claim “The primus inter pares and pace setter in quality higher education amongst private universities.” This is reinforced by data on enrolment, programmes, campuses and students. This is also similar to UDS claims where the size of the University is established by the data on enrolment, programme offered, faculties/schools/institutes, and campuses. The News and Events also established the university’s reputation by announcing collaborations with educational and research institutions as well as projecting research publications and centres to emphasise the institutional mandate and contribution to knowledge.

The discourse on the Home page is also built relying on glories of alumni intellectual abilities and affiliations from other institutions. As seen in the claims: “UEW Alumnus Spearheads Curriculum Reforms in Ghana.”, and sections such as “Meet our Alumni” and “Spotlight” on UDS and UCC homepages respectively. These sections promote the high achieving alumni of the universities as they celebrate them. Of the six personalities on this section of UDS Home page, they are either professors or highly ranked politicians, thus a member of parliament. Their individual achievements are highlighted to uplift the image of the university as a ground for positive training. UCC Home page spotlight also feature staff. The samples indicate that UCC celebrates the Professors they have produced with the claim “We want the whole world to know about you today, smile you under the spotlight.” The Home page highlight of Alumni achievements serves as promotional discourse to entice the prospective applicant who desire to achieve greatly in future.

The language on the Home page are simple in a word e.g. Home, Admission, Academics, Research, Students, Staff, Events or two words e.g. About Us, Fee Schedule, International Applicant, Apply Now, Top Story, Quick Links, Latest News, Research News, two words with ampersand e.g. Research & Innovation, News & Media seen only on UCC Home page. Simple clauses are also used to introduce and caption news and events with images. Examples are “UCC, University of Alabama and Central University Hold 1<sup>st</sup> symposium”, “UDS Elects First Alumnus Pro-Vice Chancellor”, “UEW Research Team Visits Europe on a Collaborative Project” “UG launches 20 for 20 Campaign”. However, phrases are mostly used for announcements e.g. Development, Scientific Writing and Presentation Training. These phrases and clauses besides captioning the images also serve as hyperlinks to read more on the topic.

## 2. Academics Page

It is expected that the Academic page of the website sells the university programmes. However, in the samples studied, universities in Ghana pay less attention to the overview of the academic page. UCC, and UDS do not have overview of the Academic page, UG has a two-line overview while VVU, UEW and KNUST provide brief introduction. UG’s introduction is a statement to declare that UG “has four colleges, each with several schools and departments. All the colleges offer programmes for both undergraduate and graduate studies.” VVU focuses on the achievements of the academic departments, students and alumni, and the University itself. For example, for achievement of department, we have:

### 1. Home Page

The visual themes identified from the Home pages are summarised below

Table 2: Visual Themes from the Sample

VISUAL THEMES	EXAMPLES
Institutional Attributes	Logo, Ranking, Management Activities, Affiliations, Social Support
Academic Programmes	Research Publication, Conference Flyers, Academic Collaborations,
Achievements	Alumni Success, Clubs and Society’s Success, Departmental Success
Congregations	Graduation, Honourary Degree Conferment, Matriculation
Campus Aesthetics	Trees, Lawns, Buildings, Flowers, Entrance, Roads, Pavements
Student Life	Studying, Practical Works, Walking, Lab Works,

Below are some examples:

“Codeplex of VVU emerged as the only group to have successfully entered into the Microsoft Ghana Imagine Cup Competition and also was to represent Ghana in the global competition in 2013.”; achievement of students and alumni: “The First University in Ghana to develop and use its own School Management System developed by current/past students of Valley View” and the achievement of the University itself: “VVU is the first to develop and implement its own Biometric Authentication System.” This form of Academic overview gives assurance to the prospective student that the university is a high achieving university and one which motivates its students for innovative work as well as accepting the works of the products. UEW on the Academic page outlines ten ways the University shall achieve its purpose. UEW is seen as actor to ensure the success of the students. It determines the components of its academic programmes, ensures practical and appropriate methodology in lesson delivery and develops teaching and learning materials for teaching in the University and other educational institutions.

### (b) Visual

The visual component of the website makes it attractive, sums up and adds to information. Below is the initial descriptive analysis of the various pages and the subsequent process and societal analysis (for both textual and visual elements). This is in line with previous works on visual analysis such as Askehave, (2007); Hartley and Morphew, (2008), and Saichaie, (2011).



Figure 1. UG Ranking. Retrieved from ug.edu.gh on 29/11/ 2019

Most rotating images are focused on admission, campus beauty and conferences. The universities use the flyers as advertisement with the focus of selling the activities of the universities and building their reputation. VVU provides a video which features the campus buildings and environs. The video provides close view as well as distant view and aerial view. This helps to better capture the ecological nature of the VVU campus as seen in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: A view of VVU campus from the video. Retrieved from vvu.edu.gh on 08/01/2020

UCC uses a picture of students learning in lawns as the first image on the Home page. This picture (in figure 3) is attached to text for admission promotion. Students seen on the Home page are all related to admissions exhibiting what they have studied in labs and field works. There is no picture on interior of classrooms or buildings. The focus is on the outside beauty of the campus.



Figure 3: UCC Home Page Admission promotion. Retrieved on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2020. From [uuc.edu.gh](http://uuc.edu.gh)

## 2. About Us Page

Minimal images are used on the About Us page of the sampled websites. Institution such as UCC does not attach any image to the description about the University. UG and VVU use only an image while Knust, UEW and UDS use 13, 10, and 6 images respectively. The universities position images relating to campus scenery, architecture, administrators, old emblem and students and the repetition of institutional logo. For instance:



Figure 4: UG 'About Us Image' retrieved on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 from [ug.edu.gh/about/overview](http://ug.edu.gh/about/overview)





Figure 5: KNUST 'About Us Image' retrieved on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 from [knust.edu.gh/about/knust/campus](http://knust.edu.gh/about/knust/campus)

### 3. Admissions Page

The Admissions pages of the sampled websites use visuals and features hyperlinks to academic programmes, entry requirement, how to apply, admissions procedure, financial aid, students' life and admission portal. The identified themes on the Admissions pages are campus aesthetics, academic programmes, students' interaction and activities, university ranking, and international recognition. The admission pages are linked to international programmes which opens new tab to give detailed information on international programmes and students activities. The International Programmes or education pages are utilised purposely for institution world-wide recognition.

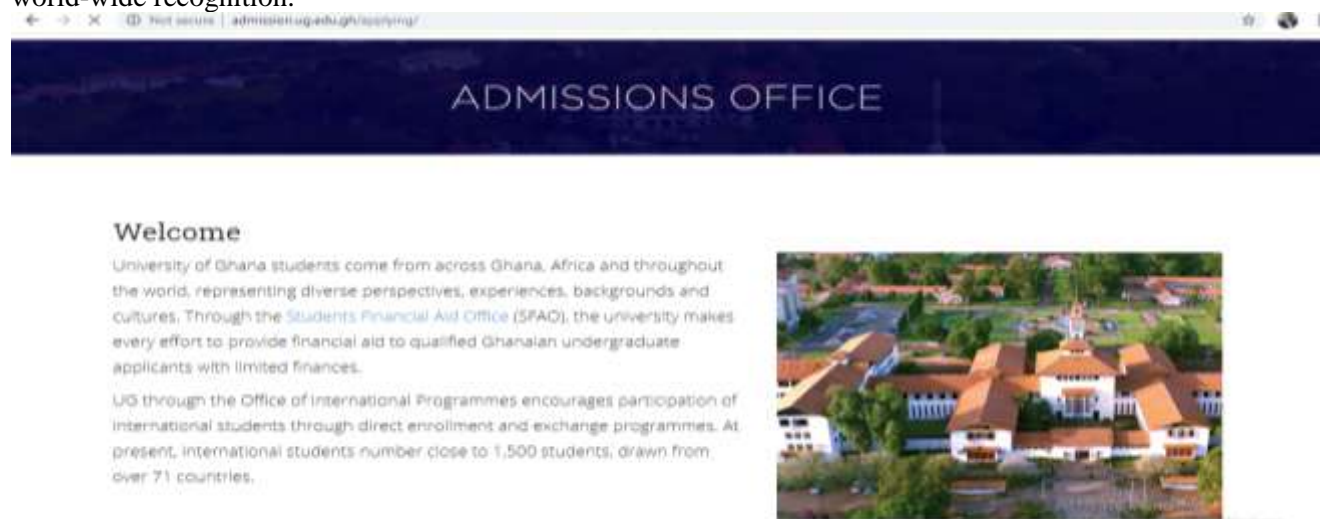


Figure 8: UG Admission Page. Retrieved from [admission.ug.edu.gh/applying/](http://admission.ug.edu.gh/applying/) on 08/01/2020



Figure 9: UG International Programmes Page. Retrieved from ipo.ug.edu.gh on 08/01/2020



Figure 10: UEW Admission Page. Retrieved from uew.edu.gh/admissions on 29/11/2019

#### 4. Academic Majors and Programmes Page

The Academic Majors and Programmes page use minimal images on the webpages. The images are used to display intellectual work of people in the various departments. Most of the images feature people engage in academic work – studying, laboratory works, and field works, students and members of the department and departmental building facilities. Many of them are dressed in their professional attire to engage in practical work and to show the future prospect of the students from the department. Example:

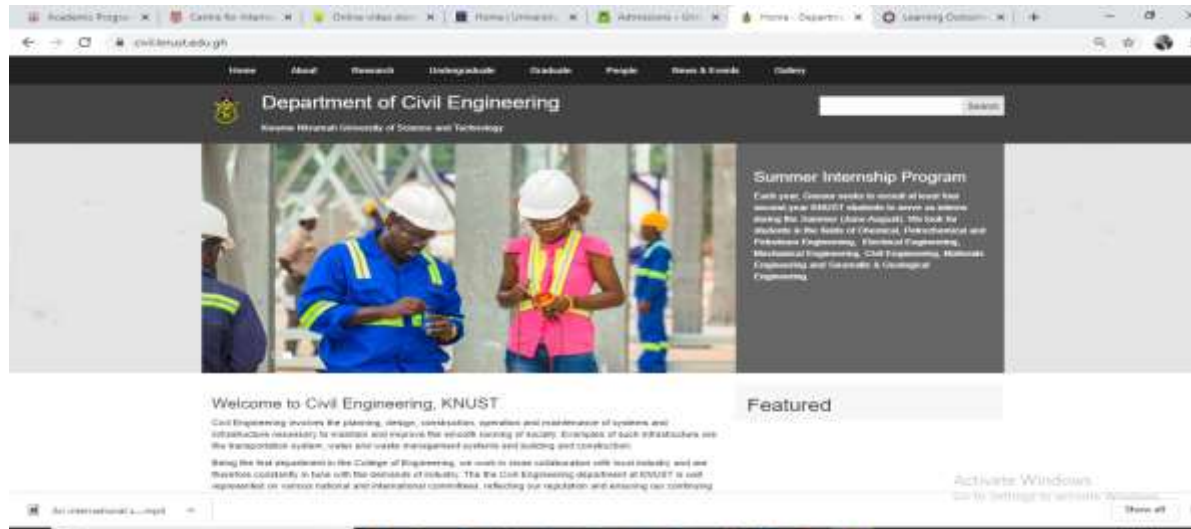


Figure 11: KNUST Department of Civil Engineering Page retrieved from civil.knust.edu.gh on 08/1/2020

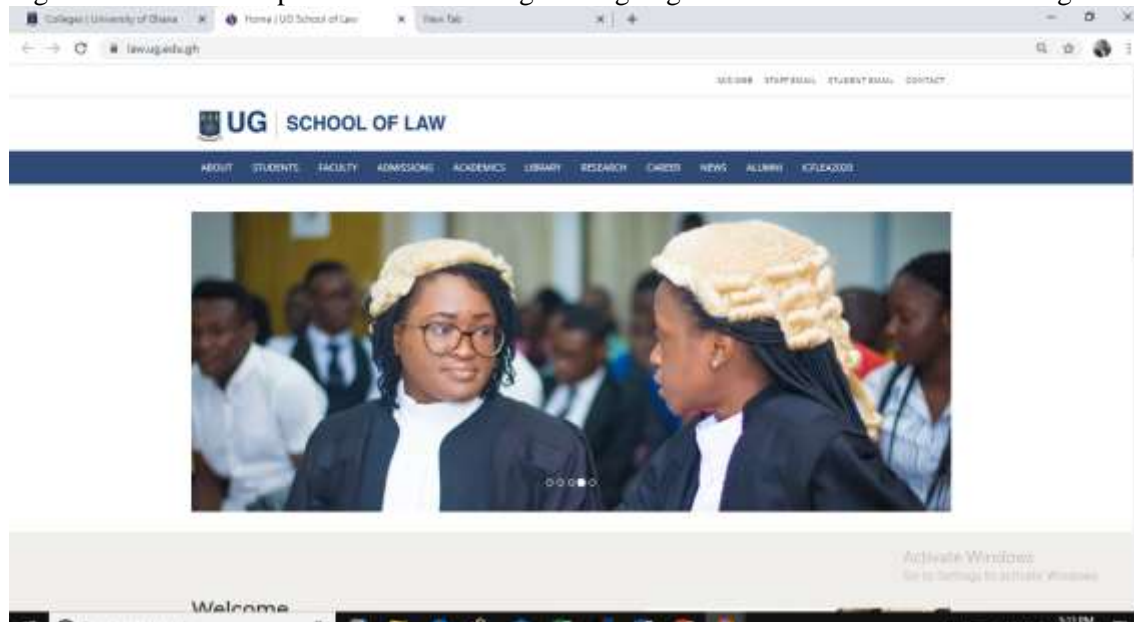


Figure 12: UG School of Law Page. Retrieved from law.ug.edu.gh on 08/01/2020

**6.2 Question 2:** How are the promotional discourses represented in the language used on the institutional websites?

The language on the universities' websites is for promotional purposes. All the webpages reveal the purpose of promotion both textually and visually.

**(a) Textual:**

### 1. About Us Page

This page presents a promotional discourse which elevates the historical background, the mandate, and the vision and mission of the university as well as the achievements and its traditions. The

discourse on the About Us page reinforces the claims on the Home page. The establishment of the university and its transitional period forms the historical background while the vision and the mission express claims they envisage in the future. The achievements of the university serve as bates to persuade prospective applicant to apply in that university. The tradition of the university also includes the global, continental, regional and national recognition, the size and beauty of the campus(es), life at campus, famous faculties and departments, institutional affiliations, sports,



publications, ability to train students for leadership, and diversity of programmes.

All the samples studied begin the history or profile of the university with the founding year and mostly with the Parliamentary Act or Ordinance for the establishment. For example, "The UEW was established in September, 1992 as a University College under PNDC Law 322.", "The University of Science and Technology succeeded the Kumasi College of Technology which was established by a Government Ordinance on 6th October, 1951. It stated operation officially on 22nd January, 1952 with 200 Teacher Training students transferred from Achimota, to form the nucleus of the new College". UG and UDS add the purpose for the establishment of the university with the claim:

"The UG, the premier university and the largest university in Ghana, was founded as the University College of the Gold Coast by Ordinance on August 11, 1948 for the purpose of providing and promoting university education, learning and research."

"UDS is Ghana's first public University in the North. It was established in May, 1992 by the Government of Ghana (PNDC Law 279) to "blend the academic work with that of the community in order to provide constructive interaction between the two for the total development of Northern Ghana, in particular, and the country as a whole."

However, VVU which is a private university began the history with the date of establishment and agency responsible for its establishment. Much effort is made to link the university to the Adventist Church which is the founder.

"VVU was established in 1979 by the West African Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists. In 1997 it was absorbed into the Adventist University system operated by the West Central Africa Division (WAD) now West Central African Division of Seventh-day Adventist with headquarters in Abidjan, Cote

d'Ivoire. The Ghana Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, (organized in 2000), serves as the local manager of the University."

The transitional period of the university is also key to establishment of the institutional reputation. Institutions like VVU, UG, UEW, and UCC show their affiliations, establish themselves from other renowned institutions which build the trust of prospective applicants. The choice of words is crafted to show the independence of the universities but through thorough stages and transitions which ensures quality standard of academic and administrative excellence. The choice of verbs like **attained**, **upgrade**, and **granted** to express the academic and administrative freedom gained shows the standard of quality education they offer. The current state of the university is as a result of the attainment of certain good pedigree, an upgrade of the existing structures and programmes, and independence granted based on merit. For example, "Then in 1997, the National Accreditation Board (NAB) of the Ministry of Education in Ghana granted Valley View College national accreditation thus permitting her to award her own degrees." Also UCC states: "On October 1, 1971, the College attained the status of a full and independent University, with the authority to confer its own degrees, diplomas and certificates by an Act of Parliament ..." and UEW adds: "On 14th May, 2004 the University of Education Act, Act 672, was enacted to upgrade the status of the University College of Education of Winneba to the status of a full University."

The About Us pages of the samples studied focus less on explicit presentation of achievement with the exception of VVU which provides a list of the achievements of the university. This may be because it is a private university and reputation is built on achievements. Some of the achievements attributed to VVU are listed. For example, VVU is

1. The First Chartered Private University in Ghana
2. The First University in Ghana to train the Ghana Police in Computer Security and Cyber Forensics



3. The Best Private University in the Year 2013 (Ranked by 4ICU)
4. The Private University with the Highest Number of Publications
5. The Only Eco-Friendly University in Africa

Other achievements attributed to specific departments also includes: “The Nursing Licensure Exam pass in 2015 was 97%.” VVU list of achievements are to help build institutional image and identity as among the high achievable universities among private universities. These claims are tangible and therefore have the higher possibility of influencing visitors to the website.

UG on the other hand boast of being “the leading university in Ghana” through the statements on the number of research institutes, students, international links and international students’ admission to the university. For instance, “The UG, has over the years built an image as one of the continent’s reputable universities which makes the UG the first choice for academics, researchers and students.” UG claims to have over 38,000 students and links with universities in Africa, Europe and North America with international students from over 70 countries across the world. The successes of UG are measured based on their international reputations and recognition. This is a motivator to prospective students since the outcome of their education will be accepted worldwide.

KNUST, UCC, UEW and UDS do not show explicit list or mention achievements, but rather, emphasises what they are poised to do. KNUST displays: “endeavour to maintain and strengthen our position as the premier Science and Technology University in the country leading in generating and exchanging new knowledge in innovation and technology, and offering service to government, industry and society.” To do this, they state that “We are dedicated to exhibiting the highest standards of professional ethics and integrity, efficient utilisation of resources and a culture of accountability and responsibility in all our operations” UCC also “seeks to pursue excellence through the creation of standards in teaching, intellectual inquiry, engagement and professional practice and offers opportunities to its

employees and products in a manner that empowers them to be agents of change.” These claims and others found on the About Us page of these four institutions are what they seek to do but real experience and achievements are not presented. However, one may be attracted to their core value without demand for evidence of their success and attributes of campus size and aesthetics.

The About Us pages are also utilised to make claims of the worldwide, continental, and national visibility of the universities. This is done through the use of words and phrases like **national, in Africa, other African countries, world-class, international, other parts of the world, and worldwide**. UEW makes a claim of its national and continental relevance by stating ways of achieving their aims by “[p]lacing emphasis on subjects which are of special relevance to the needs of the educational system of the country and for national development.” And also “provide opportunities for higher education especially teacher education for students from other countries in Africa.” Likewise, all the other institutions make a claim of continental and global relevance or achievements in addition to the national contributions. For example, UG has its vision “[t]o become a world class research-intensive University over the next decade” and UCC with similar vision “[t]o be a University with a worldwide acclaim that is strongly positioned for innovative teaching, research, outreach and professional development.”

UDS also has for its vision “... to be a Home of World Class Pro-Poor Scholarship.” In addition, KNUST has the vision “[t]o build on KNUST’s leadership as the premier science and technology university in Ghana and to be among the top ten universities in Africa. However, KNUST makes a strong claim that “It has within the short period of its existence become an important centre for the training of scientists and technologists not only for Ghana, but also for other African countries as well as from other parts of the world.” And so “[t]he KNUST is a world-class academic centre of excellence, spearheading West Africa’s pursuit of technological advancement.” The first claim is substantiated by the facilities in the campus that enhance the development of the

students and the university as a whole. The second claim also is buttressed by the size and the aesthetics of the campus which can compete with universities across the world.

Another textual promotional purpose in the websites is the linguistic display of a serene and conducive environment. Universities display their wealth and size in relation to their campuses. They display the beauty of their campus, their facilities and programmes. UEW made a list of their campuses: "... operates from four (4) campuses: the colleges of Technical Education located in Kumasi, the College of Agriculture, located at Mampong, the College of Languages Education, located at Ajumako and the Winneba Campus where the main administration is also located." VVU and KNUST also show not only the beauty of the campus but also the benefits to the students' success:

"VVU is located at Oyibi, 31 km from the city of Accra, and 13 km from Adenta, a suburb of Accra. The serene atmosphere and the hilly surroundings provide the necessary tranquil, conducive to serious academic work. The vastness of the University land (335 acres) constitutes an important guarantee for future physical development".

KNUST adds:

"Our campus is located at a very ideal place inside the city of Kumasi. With an estimated eight-mile square of aesthetic beauty, a rising and falling landscape, state of the art buildings, a wide range of trees, long stretches of well-cut lawns and very conspicuous flora prettification, our community provides the right atmosphere for the holistic development of students."

UCC has two sites for their campus and the description of the campus extends to the Cape Coast city. The Cape Coast is a historical city in the pre-independence history of Ghana and a home

of culture.

The Southern Campus or Old Site is uniquely situated in the heart of the hilly settlements of "Apewosika" and "Kokoado" in the Cape Coast metropolis close to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, providing a daily comfortable sea breeze. The site sits on high ground above sea level providing a beautiful bird's eye view of the ocean. The setting up of the University campus within these communities has opened them up to a lot of socio-economic activities.

Language use on the About Us page of the universities websites is to build promotional discourse which emphasizes the identity and reputation of the universities. The historical background, independent and established system of administration, campus aesthetics, and famous faculties builds the image of the university and attracts prospective students. The choice of sentence complexes gives the universities the room to add more attributes in one statement.

For example, UCC utilises the complex structures to establish the need for bill to establish them in order to review the mandate of the university.

"Besides the need to give legal backings to current practices in the University as well as ensuring consistency with Constitution of Ghana, the passage of the Bill would also position the University to meet new challenges and demands of the Ghanaian Society and beyond and to keep pace with the developments in the higher education environment."

The use of first person personal pronoun plural 'We' is also dominant to show the collective effort of the institutional actors for the establishment and achievement of the universities. 'We' often take the subject position to represent the university where the name of the university or its referent is not mentioned. This makes the discourse on the About Us pages institutional centred. However, less attention is given to students on the About Us pages. When students are mentioned, the

institutions are actors and just personalise the discourse for the purpose of promotion.

## **2. Admissions Page**

The textual elements on the Admission pages of the sampled websites centres on themes relating to promotional discourse on the choice of university through the claims of the university as a provider of service, programmes offered, financial aid, institutional size, diversity, international exchange and social networking, student development, and application guidelines. The sole purpose of the Admission pages is to give information to the prospective students to entice them to choose the university. The Admission pages add to the Home and About Us pages to establish the universities as reputable institutions with the purpose of persuading the prospective student.

These programmes are listed on the Admission page for prospective students to scroll through for their selection. Aside the programmes, some of the samples promote other services which are related to the development of the student.

For example, “At VVU, we motivate, build the potential and ability in each person for further study, by providing you with not only academic opportunities, but with challenging learning environment that will make you suitable for industry.” VVU claims to build the prospective student capabilities in other for them to achieve academic excellence and better job in future. VVU presents a claim from the About Us page that there is a high market for their graduates; this is to enforce and to explain the offer they provide. UCC admission promotion is a section on the Home page. UCC uses similar attributes as their promotional tool. For example, “Join us at the UCC where we focus on serving the needs of students, nurturing and challenging them to grow socially, physically, morally and intellectually.” Likewise, the other universities make similar claim. UG’s focus is on the financial aid that the university provides to support the students in addition to the programmes. KNUST focuses on the administrative service that they provide to prospective student to facilitate their application: “We are keen on facilitating your application and admission process to enable you study with us”. This administrative assistance entices students to

apply to the university simply because the admission process seems easy and they are likely to be admitted. UEW focuses on the programmes they offer through the various modes of delivery. It claims: “The University runs over 100 Graduate, Undergraduate and Certificate programmes through the Regular, Part-Time, Distance and Sandwich modes.” These services the universities provide have an impact on the decision-making of the prospective student. While one may opt for a university that the admission process is so simple, another may opt for a university that has co-curricular activities that ensure total development of the student and yet another may opt for the university that has links with industry.

Financial aid is one of the key factors that prospective students consider in the college choice process. The samples studied link the Financial Aid Services with the Admission page to give the prospective students what they can offer while they make their decision on the university. The samples with Financial Aid provision on the Admission page have links to scholarship provided within the university. The offers are made available to students and the universities are ready to assist them to secure the funds.

For example, UG shows willingness by saying “[t]hrough the Students Financial Aid Office (SFAO), the university makes every effort to provide financial aid to qualified Ghanaian undergraduate applicants with limited finances.” KNUST also has the Students' Financial Services Office which “among others, explore, solicit and offer financial assistance to students from Less Endowed Schools, as well as, Needy but brilliant Students studying in the University.” UG, KNUST and VVU have the Students' Financial Services Office section which uses invitational language to welcome students for support. UEW, UDS and UCC provide list of available scholarships for student to apply.

## **3. Academics Page**

The sampled universities project themselves itself as the number-one university in Ghana on the Academic page: For instance, KNUST boasts: “Proudly Ghana's No. 1 University and seeking to maintain academic excellence; – one of our hallmarks.” It goes on to mention that it offers undergraduate, postgraduate

and distance learning courses and that these programmes are ‘carefully’ categorised into six colleges with ultra-modern library and ICT centre and other research facilities which shows that “KNUST delivers a high standard of education which reflects the pedigree of a University poised on attaining a status of being No. 1 in Africa.” Other promotional language included “Academic related issues especially on studying and research has never been this convenient. This hallmark is evident in our ever-increasing affiliate institutions. We are the home of academic excellence.”

Here is what others say about their programmes:

Astute marketing practices are the bedrock of successful enterprises the world over and effective and efficient customer management is also an absolute sine qua non for the success of any business enterprise... This is a 4-year

undergraduate programme in Marketing. In the first two years of study, students are required to take courses such as Language Skills (UG)

The Civil Engineering department at KNUST is well represented on various national and international committees, reflecting our reputation and ensuring our continuing influence on the civil engineering profession. (KNUST)

In almost every organisation, whether private or public sector, the work of accountants is very useful to provide accountability over their stewardship. Additionally, as a nation, there is shortage of qualified accounting personnel. Graduates from this programme will feed in as accounting personnel and managers in both private sector and public sector organisations. (UCC)

## **(b) Visual**

### **1. Admissions Page**

Visually this page projects promotional discourse the most. It is linked to international programmes which opens new tab to give detailed information on international programmes and students activities. The visual display shows promotional tendencies and projects the university as a place to be. Again, non-black students are displayed to invite non-black students who may wish to school in Africa. Example:





Figure 13: UG International Programmes Page. Retrieved from ipo.ug.edu.gh on 08/01/2020

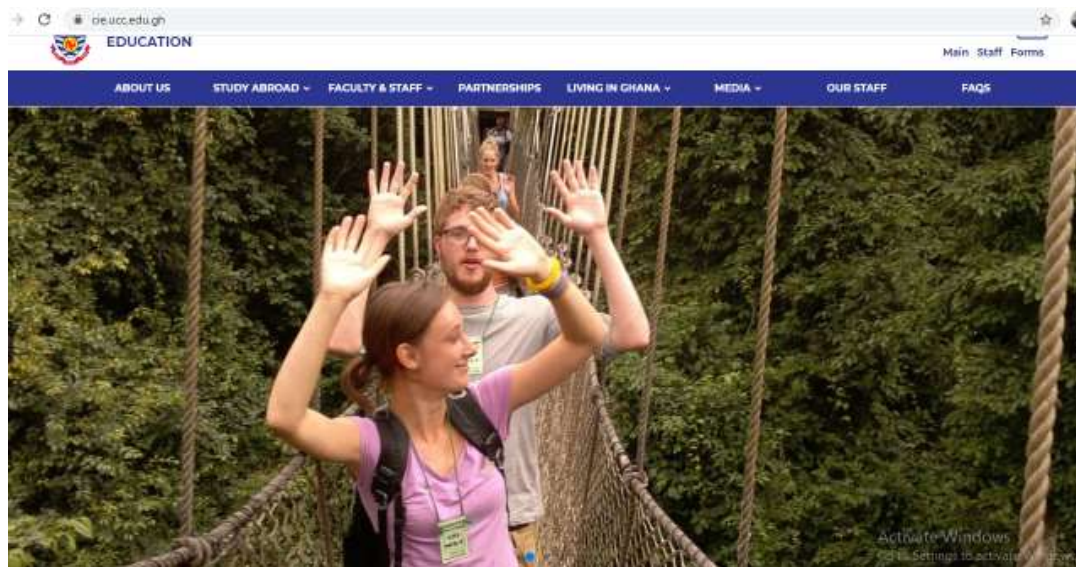


Figure 14: UCC International Education Page. Retrieved from ieo.ucc.edu.gh on 29/1/2019

Again, Admissions page display smiling faces, recreational activities, sports, and beautiful campus views to promote the institutions and to entice prospective students to choose them instead of others. Example:

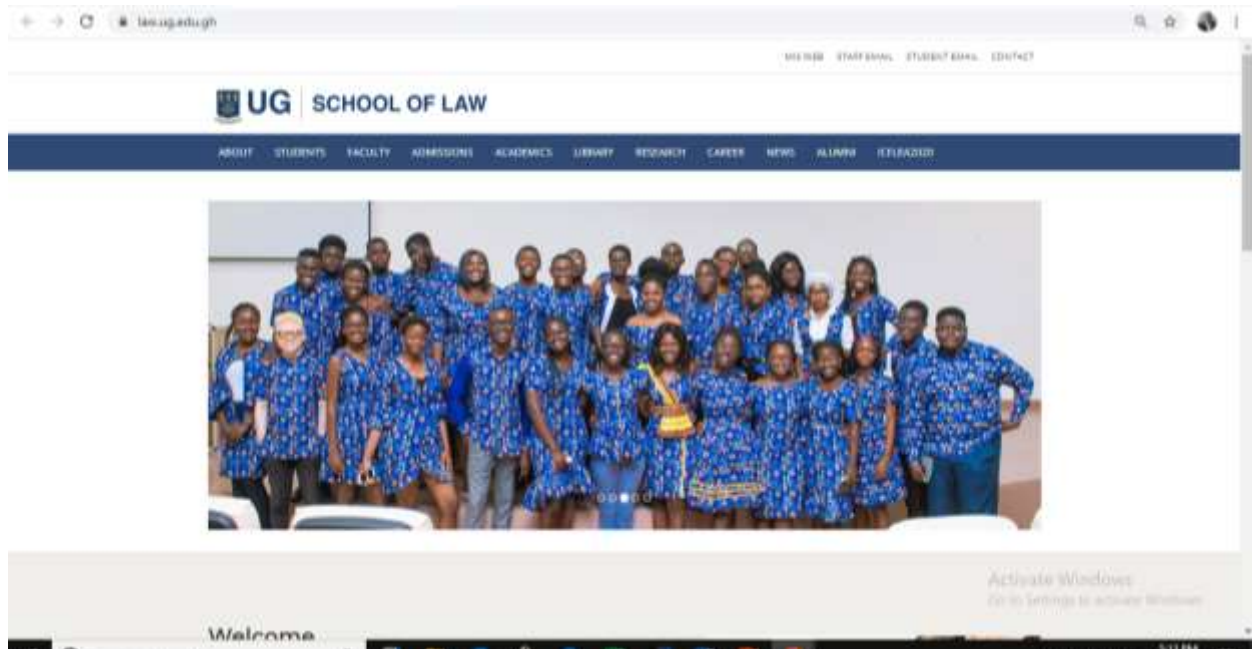


Figure 15: UG School of Law Page. Retrieved from law.ug.edu.gh on 08/01/2020

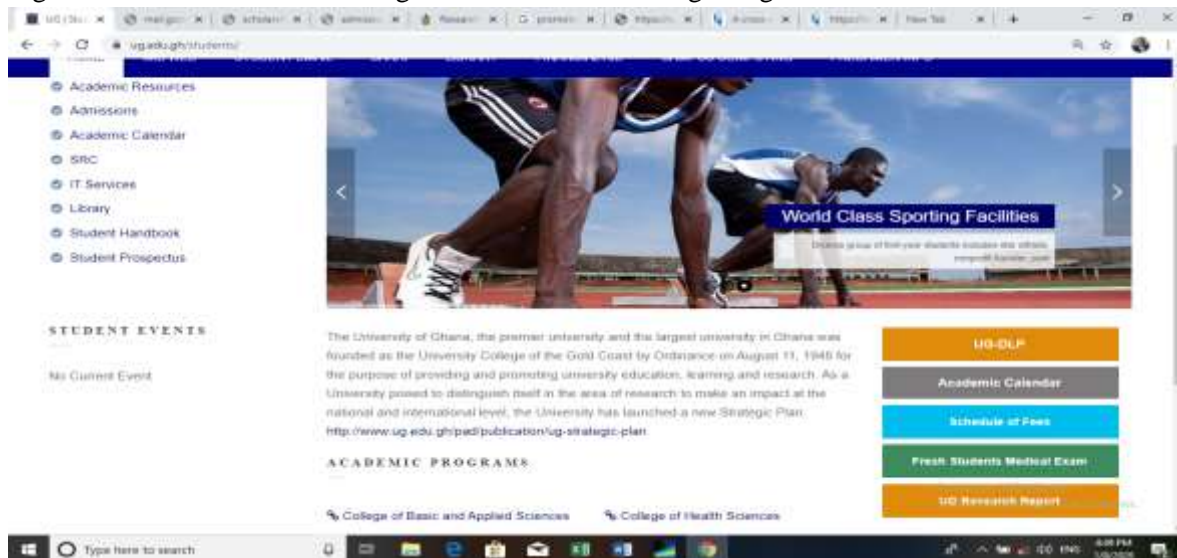


Figure 16: Retrieved from ug.edu.gh/students/ on 29/11/2019



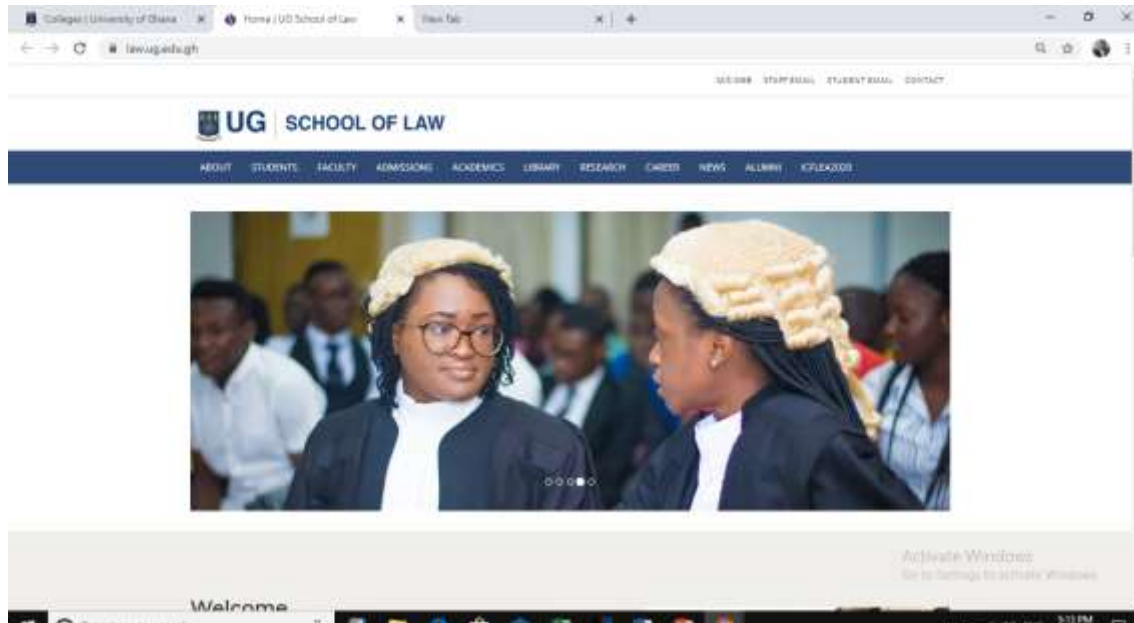


Figure 17: UG School of Law Page. Retrieved from law.ug.edu.gh on 08/01/2020



Figure 18: Retrieved from knust.edu.gh on 29/11/2019



Figure 19: Retrieved from vvu.edu.gh on 29/11/2019

## 7.0 Conclusion

The sampled universities represent themselves on their institutional websites through the use of textual and visual elements. The findings indicate that the universities' vision is mainly to gain international recognition and global presence. To achieve this, their websites (a) build institutional identity through the use of both textual and visual elements, (b) exhibit the power to determine what to present to viewers (c) use language which is institutional centred (d) serve as

billboard to inform and persuade visitors, (e) use texts that serve as promotional discourse, (f) present their institutions as actors who shape the actions of students and faculty members. In addition, the discourse on the websites reveals various promotional discourses, such as establishing institutional reputation through rankings, campus aesthetics, student population, building facilities and programmes offered.

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