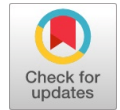


# The Relationship Between Institutional Pedagogy and the Brand Identity Formation of Higher Education Institutions

Ozioma Ikonne



**Abstract:** This study sought to facilitate insight into the potential role of pedagogy in the brand identity formation of higher education institutions (HEIs) through a study of selected HEIs in The Gambia. Specifically, the study sought to address the following research question: What role do pedagogical practices play in building the brand identity of selected universities in The Gambia? The intra-paradigm qualitative mixed method of data collection underpinned the research design. This research design facilitated a preliminary analysis of the contents of institutional documents and social media postings. This process was followed by telephonic and virtually mediated in-depth interviews through which this researcher explored the interactionist interpretations, recollections, experiences, and opinions of 54 participants (students and staff) on the themes of institutional brand management practices, institutional pedagogical practices, institutional brand identity, and the links between pedagogical practices and institutional brand identity. The study used the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix as a supporting analysis framework. The findings show a relationship between pedagogical practices and institutional brand identity formation. The evidence suggests that the selected HEIs use hardly differentiated production-style portfolios of academic courses to pursue largely unengaged students, prospective students, and other stakeholders. Further findings indicate that teaching and learning practice is dominated by academic staff's discretionary use of transmissive pedagogy. This insight emerged against the background of additional evidence, which shows a link between pedagogy policy and practices of HEIs and stakeholder impressions. A synthesis of these findings culminated in the emergence of the pedagogy-based higher education brand identity matrix (P-HEBIM), which this study proposes as a novel framework for the branding of HEIs. The study sets out a practitioner guide on how higher education managers can pursue the institutional brand management priorities of branding strategy development, competitor intelligence, and brand communication using the P-HEBIM as a framework.

**Keywords:** Branding, Higher Education, Institutional Identity, Marketing, Pedagogy

## I. INTRODUCTION

Despite having a history of tertiary education that dates to the 1950s, university education is relatively new in The Gambia.

Manuscript received on 29 September 2024 | Revised Manuscript received on 14 October 2024 | Manuscript Accepted on 15 October 2024 | Manuscript published on 30 October 2024.

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The University of The Gambia (UTG), the first University in The Gambia, was established only two and half decades ago. However, the available evidence (Fred & Daniel, 2014) suggests a trend of low graduate competitiveness and huge gaps between training and labour market requirements in The Gambia. This insight is emerging against the government's recent decision to liberalise the HE sector and commission new public university projects in the country. The anomaly that accompanies this national ambition, however, appears to be that existing evidence indicates that current higher education (HE) systems and structures tend not to be in alignment with commodified, deregulated, expansionist, liberalisation goals of government in the sector (OACPS,2022) [1] [34]. Given the newness of HE in the country and the global trend of neo-liberalism and a deregulated HE, there is a gap in our understanding of how HEIs in The Gambia adapt to this emerging global HE environment. Chapleo and Simms (2010) [6] contend that HE branding has emerged in the wake of the neoliberal realities in the sector. However, the extent to which HEIs adapt to emerging realities remains unknown. In the specific case of The Gambia, the newness of HE in the country brings added dimensions to the complexity of factors that facilitate our understanding of how HEIs might have articulated and used branding as a valid tool of competition.

This study is conceptualised based on the understanding that most studies in HE branding investigated Western universities. Research examining the HE branding phenomenon in the specific context of Africa is few (Mogaji, 2019) [28]. In addition, the structural and historical distinctions of HEIs in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and the low churn of research in HE branding leave a gap in the literature of HE branding in SSA. This situation further emerges as a tense paradox in which no evidence exists on the competitive behaviour of HEIs in this context. What adds dimension to this is that the collective output of HEIs influences the evolution of any nation's country-of-origin effect (Kamalakar & Kamala, 2022).

This situation tends to subsist against evidence that HE managers face challenges in managing the identity remits of their institutions (Melewar & Akrel, 2005 [25]; Balmer & Lao, 2007) Ermita & Florencondia, 2019) [2]. These authors argue that institutional identity fosters institutional distinctions as the aggregate of norms and shared meanings, which facilitate the identification and differentiation of HEIs. Within this context, institutional brand identity emerges as the outcome of institutional brand management.



In reinforcing the views expressed in prior studies, Lee (2023) [18] [22] maintains that institutional pedagogical identity is a critical element of HE branding. The emergence of the notion of institutional pedagogical identity, while adding to the complexity of managing HE brands, highlights the pedagogical philosophy of HEIs as a potential point of difference for HEIs (Himanka, 2024) [15]. Hence, this study sought evidence on how institutional pedagogical doctrines may be formulated, validated, and shared as institutional points of difference upon which institutional positioning and brand identity management can be anchored.

## II. RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following broad research question was proposed: What role do pedagogical practices play in the brand identity formation of selected universities in The Gambia? In order to develop an in-depth holistic understanding of the phenomena that are highlighted in the research question, the following research objectives were pursued:

- RO<sub>1</sub>: To understand the brand management practices of selected HEIs in The Gambia
- RO<sub>2</sub>: To understand the current pedagogical practices of these HEIs.
- RO<sub>3</sub>: To explore the institutional brand identity of these HEIs.
- RO<sub>4</sub>: To explore the link between institutional pedagogical practices and institutional brand identity at these HEIs.

## III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### A. Higher Education Pedagogy in Africa

Universities in Africa originate from the traditional university movement, drawing their epistemological framing from the behaviourist and objectivist templates of the colonial university system, including languages and methods of instruction (Varghese, 2016) [44]. With this colonial heritage, universities and the broader HE systems in SSA imported curricula from the colonising countries, distorting the host countries' national identities and development priorities. These institutions laid the foundation for the profoundly diverse educational systems, differing professional standards, diverse instructional strategies, and outcomes that currently exist on the continent. This diversity created a status quo that poses challenges not only to the ability of HE managers to harmonise educational standards across the region but also hinders the optimisation of the beneficial impacts of breakthrough instruments like the Africa Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) and Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA).

There is evidence of ongoing efforts by higher education stakeholders to harmonise the Recognition of Qualifications in HE in Africa (Woldegiyorgis, 2018) [14] [47]. A further evidence of this can be found in the Tuning Africa Project and the Association of African Universities (AAU) initiated Pedagogical Leadership in Africa (PedaL) project (Ikonne, 2022) [17]. However, these sources maintain that the challenge is incentivising the universities' rapid adoption of the central ideas of these projects in the pilot countries. This situation is against the backdrop of evidence (McCowan,

Omingo, Schendel, Adu-Yeboah, & Tabulawa, 2022) [23], which indicates that transmissive pedagogy still dominates teaching and learning practices in universities on the continent. The evidence of a direct relationship between institutional pedagogical practices and national development, as reported by Millie (2019) [27], brings an added dimension to the role of pedagogy in branding HEIs, especially those in Africa. This evidence, albeit implicitly, highlights enacted pedagogical practices as factors of influence on the quality of graduates and the competitiveness of HEIs. It highlights the necessity for an evolutionary nexus between neoliberal, political and economic trends and the repurposing of HE, especially in the post-pandemic world (Chen, 2019) [7]. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the limitations of the dominant traditional HE models in SSA. This period has highlighted the need for universities in Africa to enact pedagogic traditions that are resilient and active with demonstrable potential to feature as critical elements of institutional brand identity.

### B. Branding in Higher Education

Although HE branding is a relatively new discipline, it has begun to attract immense scholarly interest over the past few decades (Ikonne, 2022). This interest is emerging against the backdrop of the continuing evolution of knowledge and the changing role of HEIs (Melewar & Nguyen, 2015) [26]. Marketing and HE scholars (Mogaji, 2019; Mogaji, Maringe, & Hinson, 2020 Al-Mahdawi, 2022) have sought to broaden our understanding of applying traditional commercial branding principles to the HE sector. Hence, research on different dimensions of HE branding has emerged. There is evidence of scholarly interest in HE brand equity (Mourad, Ennew, & Kortam, 2011) [31]. These authors conducted inquiries into the dominant brand-building perspectives in the HE sector. Other scholars (Chen, 2019; Pinar, Trapp, Girard, & Boyt, 2011 [37], 2014 [38]; Clark, Chapleo, & Suomi, 2019 [8]; Wayne, Farinloye, & Mogaji, 2020) [10] [29] [46] focused on brand identity within the HE sector. Studies on internal branding and HE brand communities have been led by Sujchaphong, Nguyen, and Melewar (2014) [39], Chapleo and Clark (2016) [5] and Dean, Arroyo-Gamez, Punjaisri, and Pich (2016) [9]. Studies on the theme of brand capital and the mediating effects of brand identity on brand knowledge within the HE are led by Chen (2019). These studies recognise the changes in the global HE landscape and the implications of such changes on the evolution of students from passive recipients of knowledge to active participants and reflective practitioners in the co-creation of knowledge.

### C. The Pedagogy Paradox in Higher Education Branding

Existing evidence shows that pedagogic conceptions and practices within HEIs emerge concurrently with enacted or inherited disciplinary loyalties. Such conceptions become frozen practices while serving as the main channels of value exchange between HEIs and their stakeholders. The teaching and learning practices that emerge thus become emblazoned into a distinct pattern of shared institutional meanings while guiding the emergence of the reputational equity of the institution (Butcher & Moore, 2015) [4].

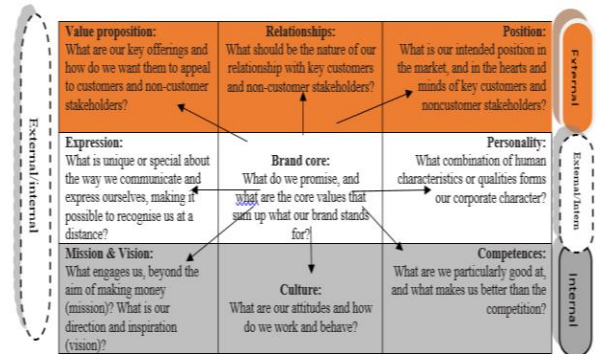
This insight puts the pedagogy and HEIs nexus into a metaphoric context that builds the conceptual holism of HE brands. Thus, this analogy highlights HEIs as embodying epistemic and pedagogic sub-identities. In contrast, the notion of epistemic and pedagogic stretch, on the other hand, emerges as normative symbols of HEIs.

The assumptions on the nexus between HEIs and institutional pedagogical doctrines create the context for the emergence of the pedagogy paradox in HE branding. This paradox mirrors the assumptions of the learning paradox in which learners are provoked to transcend their previous capacity by their efforts. The pedagogic metaphors of HEIs need to be at the core of their positioning strategies if such strategies were to convey the complete anatomy of such institutions. Except for a few notable university brands, the paradox that emerges from the evidence in extant research suggests that pedagogy, as a critical component of the HE, hardly features in the institutional brand identity architecture of HEIs.

However, Peruta, Hamula, & Gayeski (2015), Ng (2016) [32], and Grewal, Meyer & Mittal (2022) [13], in their findings, convey an implicit validation of the effectual role of pedagogy in university branding. While investigating the branding behaviours of Western universities, Peruta *et al.* (2015, P. 5) contend that the competitive strategies of universities can be anchored on the notion of 'pedagogical brands. These authors maintain that Schulman's concept of signature pedagogies can be used to enact shared pedagogical meanings in specific disciplines. This view is reinforced by Ng (2016), who, in investigating the pattern of competition among universities in Singapore, identifies the enactment of institutional pedagogical doctrine as a critical step in the institutional identity formation of HEIs.

**D. A Theoretical Framework**

This study sought to generate a preliminary understanding of the institutional pedagogical identity concept and its role in building the brand identity of HEIs in The Gambia. Hence, the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM) (Urde, 2013) [41], as depicted in Figure 1, was used as the primary analysis framework. The CBIM was used in Urde (2013) and Urde & Greyser (2015) [42]. These qualitative exploratory studies indicate that using CBIM as this study's primary analysis framework conveys a methodological and conceptual congruence with this study's objectives, thus validating this study's qualitative research design choices. Another justification for adopting the CBIM in this study can be traced to its application to managerial practice. The evidence indicates that the CBIM has been used as a framework for the branding activities of such companies and organisations as the Nobel Prize Organisation (which manages the Nobel Prize), Cargotec (a cargo-handling equipment manufacturer with operations in over 90 countries), Bona (a multinational wood floor decoration company), Intrium (a debt-equity company) and Trelleborg (a polymer technology manufacturer) (Urde,2022) [43].



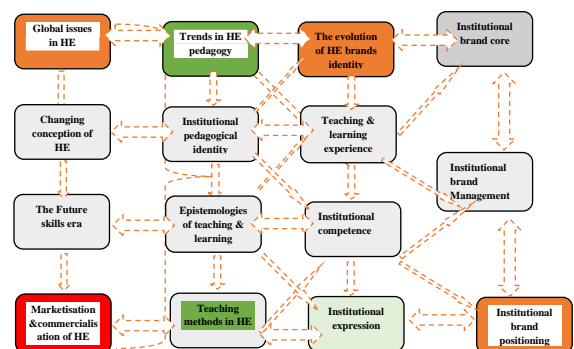
**Figure 1: Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM)**

Source: (Urde, 2013)

**E. A Conceptual Framework**

The insight emerging from the review of extant literature suggests that universities in Africa are yet to initiate the philosophical and structural responses that befit emerging trends in the global HE environment. Although no empirical or theoretical reasons have been ascribed to this strategic lethargy by HEIs in SSA, Nyangau (2014) [33] hints at the sequence of conceptual, structural, and historical challenges that hinder the exercise of environmental sensing capabilities and the capacity to respond to emerging trends quickly and sustainably.

Against this background, this study draws on the research question to facilitate preliminary insight into the pedagogical, marketing and branding practices of the selected HEIs. Hence, this study draws on the CBIM and existing learning theories (Toka & Gioti, 2021) [30] [40] to explore the notion of institutional pedagogical identity within the framework of institutional branding of HEIs. While note is taken of the significant epistemological variations in the basic assumptions of the theories above, it is pertinent to mention that they represent varying blends of interpretivism as a shared epistemology of learning. As illustrated in Figure 2 below, the collective assumptions of these theories underpinned the conceptual framing of this study.



**Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the Study**

Source: Based on Toka & Gioti (2021); Vokatis and Zhang 2016 [45]; Urde 2013.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Philosophy, Design and Approach

This study sought to answer the research question by adopting interpretivism as the research philosophy. This philosophical position is underpinned by the evidence that indicates that the research problem has not been investigated in depth to inform hypotheses and related deductions that characterise positivism and other related research philosophies. Hence, the inductive approach to data collection was used.

B. Target Population, Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The population of interest included current students, heads of institutional marketing, faculty heads, teaching staff and Deputy Vice Chancellors Academic (DVCA) or their equivalent at the four selected HEIs. The breakdown of the population across the selected institutions is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Overview of the Target Population

	UTG	AIUWA	GTTI	MDI	Total
Heads of Marketing	1	1	1	1	4
Faculty Heads	10	5	9	7	31
Teaching Staff	286	110	150	120	666
Academic Director/Registrar/DVCA	1	1	1	1	4
Current Students	6620	1300	2500	1500	11920
<b>Total</b>	<b>6918</b>	<b>1417</b>	<b>2661</b>	<b>1629</b>	<b>12625</b>

Source: David, David, Kevin, & Dara, (2014).

The maximum variation (heterogeneity) approach was used as the sampling approach. The selected HEIs, domiciled in the Gambia, exhibit significant variations in their statutes, structures and HE provisions. Hence, the adoption of the maximum variation sampling facilitated insight into the selected case institutions' shared and distinct patterns of pedagogical practices, their implicit institutional identity formation processes, and their emergent impact on institutional brand identity. Using this approach, this researcher recruited 60 volunteers to participate in this study. Zhang, Wang, Millar, Li and Yang (2017) [12] [48] demonstrate the efficacy of the maximum variation approach, especially in research designs which use small to medium sample sizes. Details of the sample size are shown in Table 2 below.

C. Data Collection Methods and Procedure

The dual approach to data collection was used in this study. These were content analysis (secondary/documentary qualitative data) and in-depth interviews (primary qualitative data). The intra-paradigm, qualitative mixed method underpins this approach, as stipulated in O'Reilly, Kiyimba and Drewett (2020) [35]. This approach, grounded in the qualitative research paradigm, provided the design rationale for the sequential use of content analysis and online and telephonic interviews as data collection methods in this study. However, the intra-paradigm and qualitative mixed methods vary epistemologically from the pragmatic and inter-paradigm mixing of quantitative and qualitative data sets in one study. Adopting the intra-paradigm mixed method ensured that two different data collection methods were used. Tables 3 and 4 highlight content analysis and in-depth interview data sources used in this study. This mixture further sought to unify the epistemological foundations of content analysis and in-depth interviews while enhancing the integrity of research outcomes. The further implication is that the exploited congruence of mixed data collection methods was not effected at the methodology level of this study (Kiyimba, Lester and O'Reilly, 2019) [20]. Instead, this occurred at the level of data collection methods while enabling separated analysis and triangulation of findings.

Table 2: Overview of the Sample

	UTG	AIUWA	GTTI	MDI
Head of Marketing	1	1	1	1
Faculty Heads	3	2	5	2
Teaching Staff	5	3	3	2
Academic Director	1	1	1	1
Current Students	10	5	8	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>

Table 3: Sources of Content Analysis Data

HEI	Document Type/Sources of Data	Types of Data
The University of The Gambia (UTG)	Website, social media channels (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Linked-In)	Textual, pictorial, video
American International University, West Africa (AIUWA)	Website, social media channels (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Linked-In)	Textual, pictorial, video
The Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI)	Website, social media channel (Facebook), student handbook, institutional report, posters	Textual, pictorial, video
Management Development Institute (MDI)	Website, social media channel (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), student handbook, photo archives, posters	Textual, pictorial, video



As shown in Table 4 below, a total of 54 participants took part in this study. The in-depth interview phase followed the conclusion of the documentary analysis stage. The study's research question and central constructs were explored using semi-structured questions. The interviews were conducted

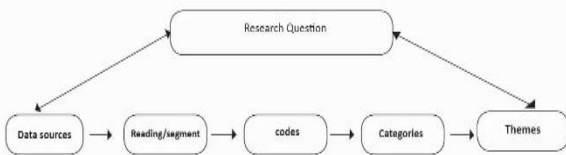
via telephone, Google Meet, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams live-streaming video platforms. The online and telephone interview methods were used within the provisions of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) directives on COVID-19 safety protocols.

**Table 4: In-Depth Interview Participants' Profile**

Participant Category	Number of Participants	Background/Profile of Participants	Range of HE Experience
Students	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diploma in Civil Engineering</li> <li>▪ Bachelor's degree in management</li> <li>▪ Graduate Diploma in Gender Studies</li> <li>▪ Professional qualifications in Accounting and Finance</li> <li>▪ Master's Degree in Humanities</li> </ul>	Two to five years
Academic staff	19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physical and Allied Sciences,</li> <li>▪ Management &amp; Business Administration</li> <li>▪ Teacher Education</li> <li>▪ Humanities</li> </ul>	Five to twenty years
Management staff	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Marketing Officer</li> <li>▪ Vice Chancellor</li> <li>▪ Deputy Vice-Chancellor</li> <li>▪ Registrar</li> <li>▪ Deans</li> <li>▪ HODs</li> </ul>	Six to twenty-two years

**D. Data Analysis**

The data derived from examining the sources shown in Table 3 were analysed using content analysis guided by the context-based analysis framework in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: A: Context-Based Framework for Contents of Documentary Data Sources. Source: Researcher's Construction**

The research question guided the search for cues and evidence of branded web and social media pages (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter). This researcher analysed the contents of the media platforms, the messaging patterns, the frequency and recency of posts, institutional mission and vision statements and core values, teaching and learning philosophy statements, and market positioning statements.

The intensive reading strategy was used to examine the contents of these documents and platforms. Then, codes and categories emanating from the study's central constructs were generated (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017) [11]. The recurrence of these across different digital platforms of the same institution was monitored in tandem with a cross-case comparison of their recurrence across the other selected case institutions' web and social media pages.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse interview data. The four-step approach recommended by Maguire and Delahunt (2017) guided the analysis process. The four-step approach began with the transcription of recorded data. This approach facilitated the researcher's immersion into the data. Then, codes and themes that supported the reporting of findings were generated and identified (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017 [24]; Kiger & Virpio, 2020) [18] [19]. Using this approach, this researcher was able to accommodate a broad range of research questions, research design and sample sizes (Braun & Clarke, 2012) [3] while leveraging its simplified analytical process and optimising the interrogation of meanings which emerged from the lived experiences and interactions result from the repeated exposures of research participants.

**V. FINDINGS**

**Table 5: Summary of Findings**

Research Objectives	Findings
Brand management practices of selected HEIs	Despite demonstrating high awareness of the emerging competition trend in The Gambia's HE sector, there is no evidence of strategic marketing or branding practices by the selected HEIs. Academic portfolios developed with a product orientation are hardly differentiated, and there is no evidence of strategic stakeholder engagement.
Institutional Pedagogical Practices and Institutional Identity	The results indicate that staff and students in the selected HEIs are unaware of any institutional pedagogical values. This outcome is akin to evidence of a lack of pedagogy policy. However, teacher-centred transmissions of lessons emerged as the dominant pedagogical practice among the selected HEIs.
Institutional brand identity of selected HEIs	Evidence from the documentary content analysis shows that the selected HEIs have logos on their websites and social media pages. These visual elements emerged as the only identity symbols of the selected HEIs. This situation implies that there is no evidence of a strategic approach to articulating institutional identity as the foundation for forming institutional brand identity.
Relationship between Institutional Pedagogical Practices and Brand Identity	A consensus emerged among all categories of participants on the critical role of pedagogy policy in constructing the institutional reputation of HEIs. This outcome supports the findings of Peruta <i>et al.</i> (2015) [36] and Ng (2016), which indicate that HEIs can build a strong market presence through a pedagogy-based institutional brand identity formation and positioning.



VI. DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

A significant contribution of this study is the emergence of institutional pedagogical doctrines as critical elements of the brand identity of HEIs. This insight addresses the research question and eliminates the pedagogy paradox in higher education branding while validating the notion of institutional pedagogical identity. The findings indicate that formulating a pedagogy policy is a managerial action that defines pedagogical practices as institutional shared meanings while prescribing teaching and learning practices and experiences which emerge as unique brand associations. This outcome bridges existing knowledge gaps (Peruta *et al.*, 2015; Ng, 2016) on the relationship between institutionalised pedagogy and the brand identity formation of HEIs. Implicitly, this outcome validates the link between institutional pedagogical identity and the perceived value of HEIs. Lai, Mung, Lung, & Terence (2012) [21] buttress this in their seminal work on 'The perceived value of higher education: The voice of Chinese students'. Drawing on the Sheth Newman Gross model of consumption, these authors contend that the experience-based value perceptions of HE brands emerge as intricate functions of institutional pedagogy and the positioning strategies of HEIs. The implicit insight from this assertion is that institutional pedagogical identity, as a brand identity complement, enhances the brand and reputational equity of HEIs. Another key outcome of this study includes the evidence of the theoretical determinants of institutional pedagogical identity, especially in the SSA context. This outcome bridges the gap that existed in this area before this study. As shown in Figure 4 below, the findings indicate that pedagogy policy, stakeholder expectations and institutional environment influence the formation of institutional pedagogical philosophy. The insight that has emerged from this is that enacted pedagogical practices of HEIs are not the result of traditional conceptions of HE but the outcome of a strategy-driven understanding of prevailing knowledge and competence trends, stakeholder needs and aspirations, and institutional mission and values that would generally be encapsulated in the pedagogy policy. Hence, institutional pedagogy policy may be conceptualised as a phenomenon that draws on an institution's capacity to detect and respond to changing environmental trends, including adaptations to its institutional brand identity management process.

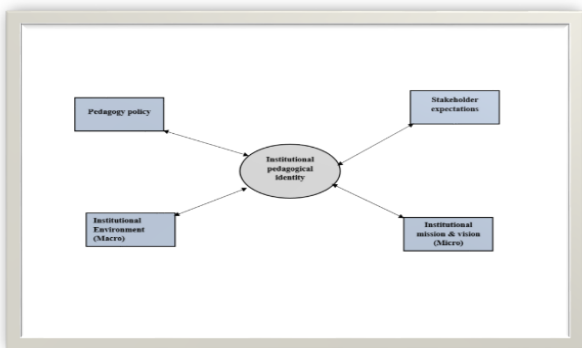


Figure 4: Institutional Pedagogical Identity Determinants

Source: Researcher’s construction

The third key outcome of this study is evidence of the relationships illustrated in Figure 5. These relationships represent a logical framework that supports the formation of

institutional pedagogical philosophy and its integration into the brand architecture of HEIs. Thus, the framework bridges gaps in the HE branding literature while establishing a process-based synthesis underpinning a pedagogy-based higher education brand identity matrix (P-HEBIM) in Figure 6 as a dedicated framework for HE branding.

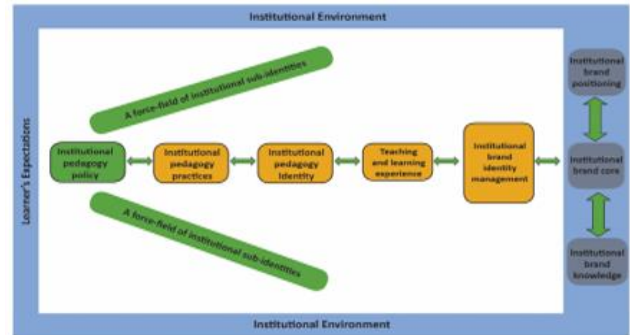


Figure 5: Link Between Pedagogical Practices and Brand Identity

Source: Researcher’s Construction

A. The Emergence of the Pedagogy-based Higher Education Brand Identity Matrix (P-HEBIM)

Figure 6 illustrates a synthesis of micro (institutional elements) environmental factors which interact with an institution's external environment to influence institutional behavioural patterns. These patterns consequently evolve to become institutional symbols of identity. This understanding is further evidenced by Heding, Knudtzen, and Bjerre (2015) [16]. These authors highlight the evolution of strong brands from the era of their conception as positivist-determined organisational assets to an era of their conception as phenomenological constructions that evolve simultaneously with the needs and aspirations of stakeholders. Following an ongoing debate on the compatibility of existing branding models with HE branding, this study proposes the pedagogy-based higher education brand identity matrix (P-HEBIM) in Figure 6 as a dedicated framework for HE branding. Hence, the P-HEBIM emerges as a distillate of nine interlocking components that attempt to eliminate the paradox of excluding pedagogy from prior, HE branding studies and activities.

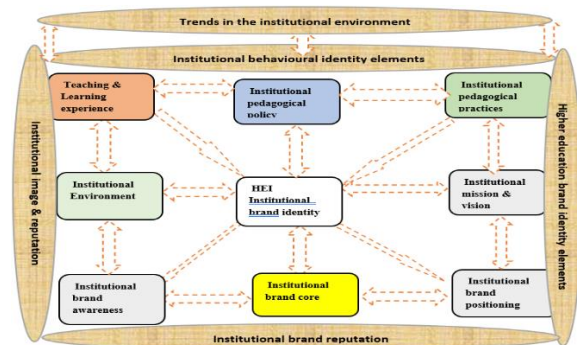


Figure 6: Pedagogy-Based Higher Education Brand Identity Matrix (P-HEBIM)

Source: Researcher’s Construction

The P-HEBIM emerges as a matrix of three strategic priorities (strategy development, operational elements that target competitors, and brand communication strategies) that interact during HE brand design and marketing. The matrix proposes that the process of forming HE brand identity be undertaken by aggregating the elements in the matrix based on their respective diagonal, vertical and horizontal relationships. The composites of the right-leaning diagonal (institutional brand awareness, institutional brand identity, and institutional pedagogical practices) underpin the concept and strategic implementation of institutional strategy. These composites also support the evaluation of the fit of an institution's strategic choice with institutional values. This insight presupposes that institutional branding objectives must be pursued within the broader context of corporate strategy (Ikonne, 2022). The composites of the left-leaning diagonal relationships (institutional positioning, institutional brand identity, and teaching and learning experience) symbolise behaviours and activities that enable HEIs to maintain a differentiated and value-added market presence. These factors convey reputational and self-concept objectives by their positions in the matrix. The composites of the vertical relationship (institutional brand core, institutional brand identity, and institutional pedagogical policy) symbolise an institution's self-concept objectives within the broader context of constructing and communicating those shared meanings that underpin institutional value proposition. The composites of the horizontal relationship represent the structures and systems for externally focused brand communication. The goal of the horizontal relationships, as depicted in Table 6, is to draw on explicit knowledge of an institution's brand identity attributes to communicate the brand positioning to external stakeholders. However, it is pertinent to mention that the construction and validation of institutional brand identity remains a constant in all the relationship clusters depicted in the matrix. The constancy of the brand identity factor in all the relationship clusters of the P-HEBIM should not position institutional brand identity as an end in the institutional or corporate branding process. Instead, it should be seen as a pre-requisite process that unifies the configurations of all other factors in the effort to enhance the equity and perceived value of the brand (Xi, Yang, Jiao, Wang and Lu, 2022) through the strategic engagement of internal and external stakeholders.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This study's findings highlight the role of pedagogy policy in forming HEIs' brand identity. Hence, the enactment of statutes which motivate HEIs to formulate and implement institutional pedagogy policy is recommended. This regulation will incentivise university managers to enact and enforce guidelines for teaching and learning practices that will evolve as norms, values, and competencies upon the strategic positioning of the institution can be anchored. This conclusion draws on the insight that the collective brand reputation of HEIs in a country equals its national HE brands reputation. This outcome impacts the country-origin (COO) effect when a more holistic evaluation of a country's national competitiveness is conducted. Therefore, policymakers and HE managers need to recognise the emerging trend of service-dominant logic (S-D) in the programming of

contemporary HE while mainstreaming strategic marketing and branding practice in their proposition of value as HELs.

## DECLARATION STATEMENT

I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

- **Conflicts of Interest/ Competing Interests:** Based on my understanding, this article has no conflicts of interest.
- **Funding Support:** This article has not been sponsored or funded by any organization or agency. The independence of this research is a crucial factor in affirming its impartiality, as it has been conducted without any external sway.
- **Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate:** The data provided in this article is exempt from the requirement for ethical approval or participant consent.
- **Data Access Statement and Material Availability:** The adequate resources of this article are publicly accessible.
- **Authors Contributions:** The authorship of this article is contributed solely.

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