

# Apprenticeship by Another Name?

Media Discourses and the Vocational Turn in Nigerian Higher Education

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# WHY THIS STUDY?

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*What if higher education is no longer imagined as a space of knowledge, but as a pipeline for labour?*

## Context

- Post-COVID restructuring of HE
- Youth unemployment crisis ( about 25 million unemployed graduates, (Aririah, 2024)
- Introduction of Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards [CCMAS] (NUC, 2023)
- Public debates on “employability”, “Ideal graduates” and “useless degrees”

## Research Question

*How is Higher Education constructed in Nigerian public discourse during the CCMAS reform period?*

# WHY MEDIA? THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATION

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01

## Framing Device

Media shapes how the public understands higher education, defining problems and solutions. (Mendes, 2011)

02

## Gatekeeper

Media selects which voices enter public debate, silencing or amplifying different stakeholders. . (Mendes, 2011)

03

## Policy Legitimation

Media discourse legitimises policy reforms, making contested changes appear inevitable or necessary (Reyes, 2011).

04

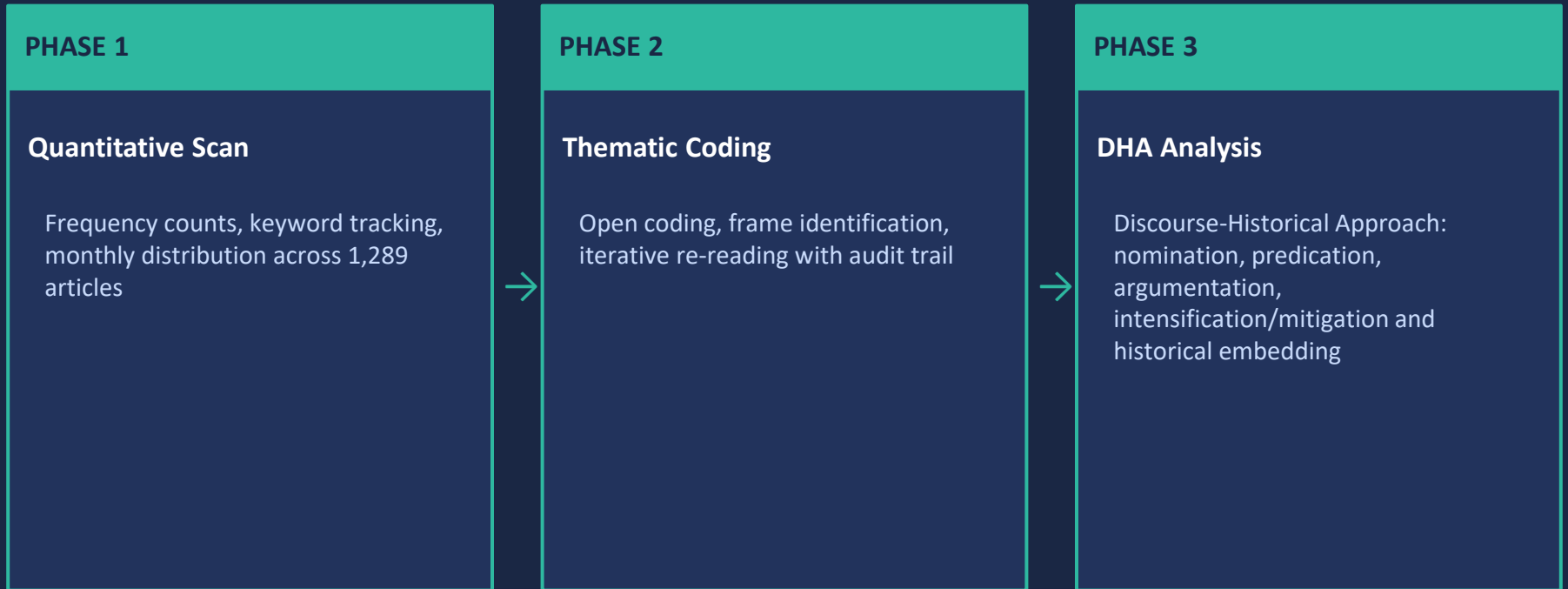
## Site of Institutional Discourse

Media is becoming where ideological constructions of HE are produced, circulated and normalized (Mendes, 2011).

*Media discourse: Framing → Legitimising → Normalising → Silencing*

# METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

*Mixed-Method Media Analysis + Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)*



*"This was not just counting words. It was tracing ideology."*

# SAMPLING STRATEGY: RIGOUR AND PURPOSIVENESS

## Data Sources

	Newspaper	Coverage	Corpus
1	The Punch	National	n=269
2	Daily Trust	Northern focus	n=52
3	Daily Post	Online national	n=10

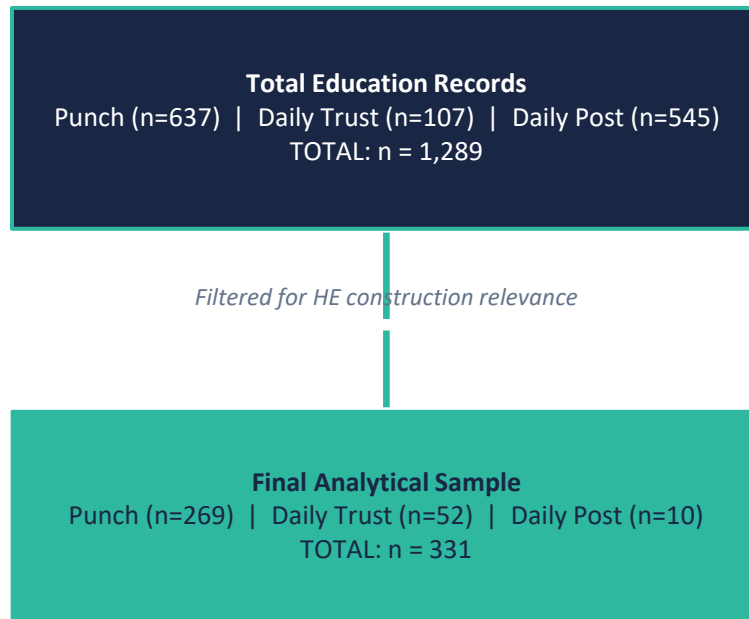
Period: 2021–2022 | Post-COVID and CCMAS window

Rationale: wide readership, national coverage, editorial diversity  
Purposive sampling for regional and readership representation

Search Keywords: *apprenticeship, vocational training, entrepreneurship, employment, CCMAS*

Excluded: *campaign materials, advertisements, public notices*

## Filtering Process (Figure 1)



# PHASE 1: QUANTITATIVE MAPPING

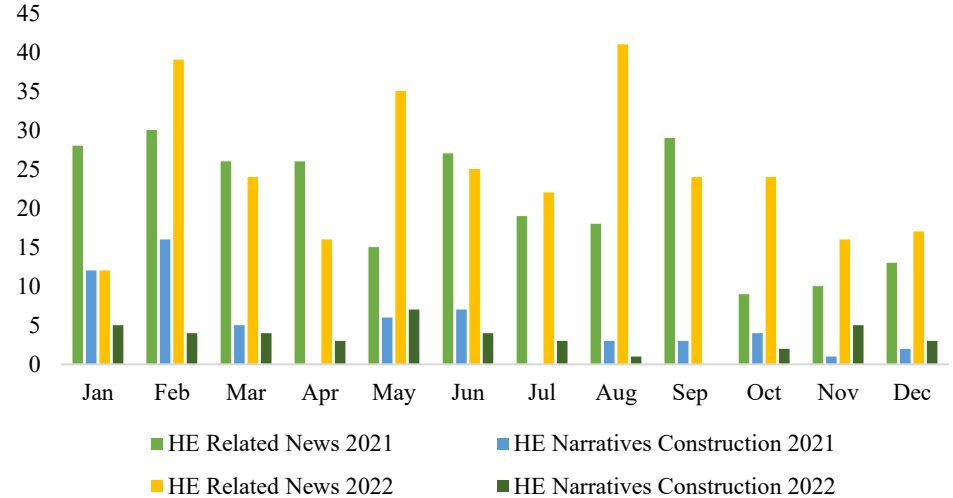
## What This Phase Did

- Descriptive frequency counts of HE-relevant articles
- Monthly distribution mapped against reform timeline
- Keyword tracking: “employability”, “skills”, “entrepreneurship”, “apprentice’ship”, “CCMAS” “university” “higher education”

### Key Insight

Article spikes in Feb, Apr, Jun, Aug aligned with ASUU strike actions and CCMAS policy announcements. Quantification revealed narrative intensity patterns.

## Daily Post Media



*Monthly distribution of HE-relevant articles 2021 and 2022*

*Two dominant constructions emerged: (1) HE as economic recovery mechanism | (2) HE as vocational/entrepreneurial shift*

PHASE 2 and 3

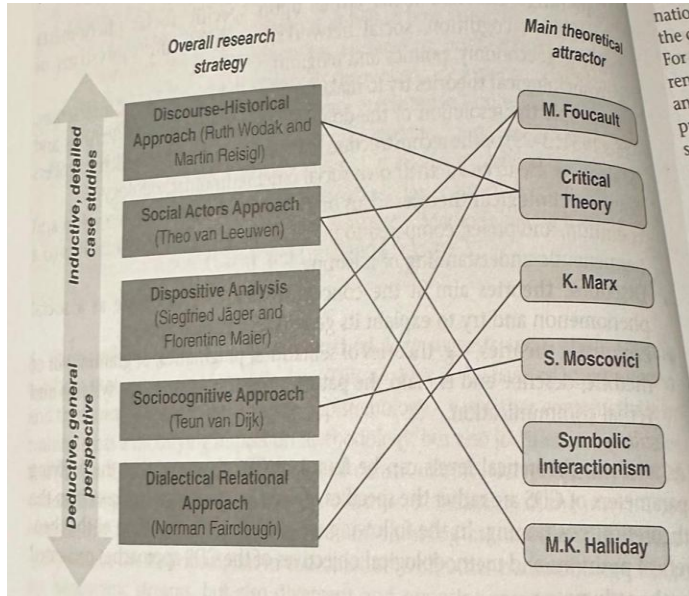
# Thematic Coding and Discourse-Historical Approach

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*DHA (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016) connects language to historical context, critique, ideology, discourse and power. It allowed me to uncover how higher education was being ideologically narrowed, not just described.*

# THE DISCOURSE-HISTORICAL APPROACH (DHA): THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

## Where DHA sits



*DHA thinking, research strategies and theoretical background (Wodak and Meyer, 2016)*

## CRITIQUE

“Refers to the examination, assessment and evaluation, from a normative perspective, of persons, objects, actions, social institutions and so forth. It can relate to a quest for truth, to specific values and ethics, ...to enlightening and emancipation...” (Wodak and Meyer, 2016.p.24)

## POWER

“For DHA, power relates to an asymmetric relationship among social actors who have different social positions or who belong to different social groups.” (Wodak and Meyer, 2016.p.26). The possibility of enforcing one’s own will within a social relationship against the will or interests of others. (Weber, 1980)

## IDEOLOGY

“In DHA’s view, it is seen as a perspective (often one-sided), i.e., a worldview and system composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes, values and evaluations, which is shared by members of a specific social group” (Wodak and Meyer, 2016, p.25).

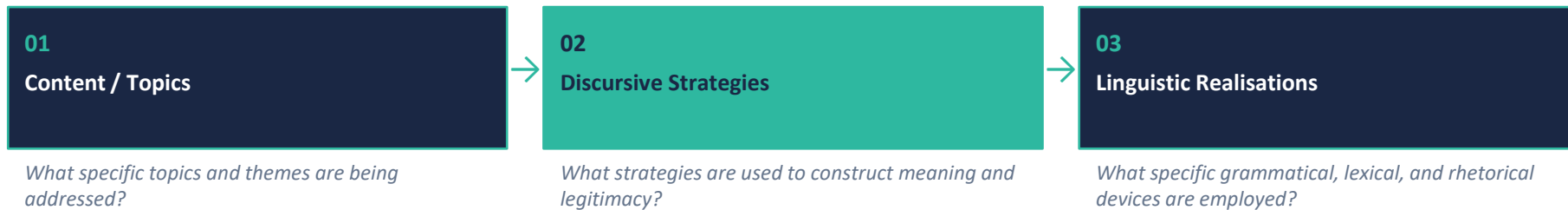
## DISCOURSE

A cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices:

- texts are parts of discourses
- Situated within specific fields of social action
- Socially constituted and constitutive
- Linked to argumentation about validity claims

# DHA IN PRACTICE — THREE DIMENSIONS & DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES

The DHA is three-dimensional — in analysing any discourse or text:



In this study, Dimension 2 (Discursive Strategies) was the primary analytical lens applied to Nigerian media texts.

## Five Discursive Strategies (Wodak and Reisigl, 2016)

Strategy	Objective	Devices	Example from this study
<b>NOMINATION</b>	How HE, actors and events are named and referred to linguistically	<i>Membership categorisation, metaphors, synecdoches, verbs denoting processes</i>	<b>HE as “workforce pipeline”; graduates as “unemployable”</b>
<b>PREDICATION</b>	What characteristics and qualities are attributed to social actors	<i>Evaluative adjectives, relative clauses, predicative nouns</i>	<b>Universities “struggling”; graduates “lacking skills”</b>
<b>ARGUMENTATION</b>	What arguments justify or question reform claims	<i>Topoi (formal &amp; content-related), fallacies</i>	<b>Crisis topos, competitiveness topos, necessity topos</b>
<b>PERSPECTIVIZATION</b>	Whose viewpoint is expressed; involvement or distance signalled	<i>Deictics, direct/indirect speech, discourse markers</i>	<b>Government voices centred; student voices absent</b>
<b>INTENSIFICATION / MITIGATION</b>	Modifying the force and epistemic status of utterances	<i>Diminutives, modal particles, hyperboles, indirect speech</i>	<b>Crisis amplification; reform urgency escalated</b>

Source: Wodak & Reisigl (2016), Adapted to: Nigerian media discourse on NUC CCMAS reform (2021–2022)

# CODING PROCESS (TRANSPARENCY AND AUDIT TRAIL)

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1

## Open Coding

Initial unrestricted coding of themes across the 331 article corpus

2

## Frame Identification

Identify dominant recurring frames, how HE is talked about

3

## Apply DHA Categories

Nomination, predication, argumentation, intensification strategies

4

## Contextual Re-reading

Re-read texts within their socio-political and historical moment

*Rigour markers: Audit trail maintained | Reflexive memos | Iterative re-reading*

# DHA IN ACTION: DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION (More Specific)

## NOMINATION

How social actors are represented, and HE is named

- “Engine of productivity”
- “Solution to unemployment”
- “Driver of national development”
- “Workforce pipeline”

*HE reduced to an economic instrument*

## PREDICATION

Qualities and characteristics attributed to social actors or how actors are described

- Universities: “struggling with quality of graduate”, “outdated”
- Grads: “lacking skills”
- Grads: “not industry-ready”

*Creates moral urgency for reform*

## ARGUMENTATION

How reform is Justified

- Crisis topos: “No business in economy”
- Competitiveness: “Global standards”
- Necessity: “Must embed entrepreneurship”

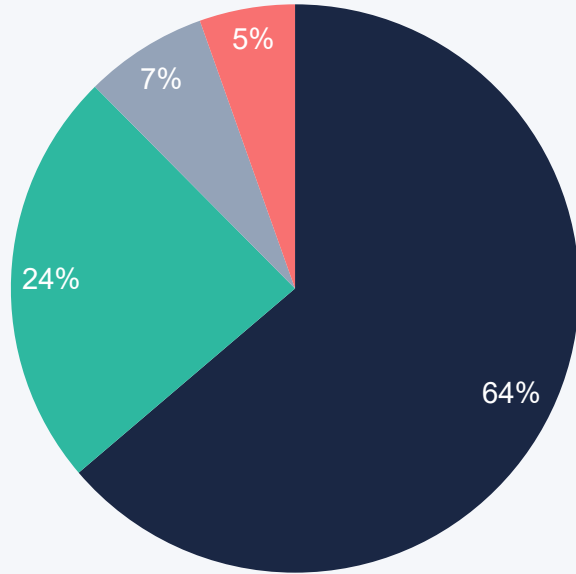
*Reform becomes inevitable*

## HISTORICAL EMBEDDING

- Colonial manpower logic
- Structural Adjustment marketisation
- Neoliberal policy borrowing

*CCMAS reproduces older labour-market logics*

# POWER AND SILENCES, WHOSE VOICES DOMINATED?



■ Government Officials ■ Academics ■ NGOs ■ Students

**63.8%**

**Government officials**

*State voices dominated framing*

**5.4%**

**Students**

*Those most affected, largely silent*

*Implication: Whose knowledge counts? Whose silence is policy-produced?*

# Thank You

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**Citation:** Olaniyan, Y (2025) 'Apprenticeship by another name? Media discourses and the vocational turn in Nigerian higher education', *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*. DOI: 10.1108/HESWBL-05-2025-0182

Media Analysis

Discourse-Historical Approach

Nigerian Higher Education

CCMAS

Vocational Turn

Policy Discourse