

# COMMUNICATION & LANGUAGE at work

## **We Are Not “Newly Appointed Staff”: The Dark Side of Ghana’s ‘New’ Public University Management Discourse**

Dennis Puorideme

Senior Lecturer, Department of Communication Studies  
SD Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies, Ghana

[puorideme@ubids.edu.gh](mailto:puorideme@ubids.edu.gh)

[puorideme@gmail.com](mailto:puorideme@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

In contemporary societies, corporate organisations’ discourses are progressively colonising the everyday practices of individuals or collectives in organisational settings. In Ghana, the government mobilizes state institutions’ technologies for colonising the everyday practices of staff and management of public university organisations. One of such state institutional technologies and practices is the state’s migration of university staff onto the government mechanized payroll. The question is, how do state institutions colonize and control the everyday management practices of public university organisations including employee socialization practices, and what are the ramifications? Data for this study include text in the form of letters and press releases realised from mediated interactions between government institutions and university management and workers’ unions, and talk realised from interview. The data is analysed in relation to the new public universities’ management discourse inspired by dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse studies. This study demonstrates that the discursive practices of the government institutions and the migration of the staff of SDD-UBIDS onto the government mechanized payroll, IPPD2 technology is a political strategy to control public universities. The ramifications are that such institutionalized practices curtail academic freedom and competitiveness of public universities locally and globally as employees’ competing discursive practices, contestations and enactments are ignored. The highlight of this article is that, generally, in preparing the new public university bill and implementing new public universities’ regulations in Ghana, the government and the management of public universities strategically align and go along. However, an inclusive and pluralistic discourse to shape public universities’ regulation and management in Ghana to ensure academic freedom, and a competitive national and global higher education is badly needed.

### **Keywords**

Discourse, Ethnography, Organisation, Corporate Colonisation, Public University Management

## 1 Introduction

“We do not deny that universities have certain responsibilities towards the economic sphere in their research and their teaching, but we reject the current attempt to reduce them to a role of servicing what those who control the economy, aided and abetted by those in government, see as its needs.”  
(Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p.8)

In contemporary complex societies there is a tendency to recontextualise and transform the lifeworld into a corporate resource – a persistent systemic colonialization of the lifeworld (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Organisational socialization and systemic regulations are some of the key practices towards the corporate colonization of the lifeworld (Deetz, 1992) to the extent that organisations are the important places where human identity is formed in contemporary societies (Mumby, 2013). Thus, technocratic and bureaucratic discourses (McKenna & Graham, 2000; Sarangi & Slembrouck, 1996) and key aspects of organisational discourses, which focus on key features of organisations such as culture, identity, power relation and interaction (Iedema & Wodak, 1999) are associated with the corporate colonisation of the lifeworld. The processes of corporate colonisation have ramifications for individual employees within organisations, and the discursive features, practices and technologies of the organizations themselves. Thus, there is a shifting away from a subjectivist perspective of action to more complex social action perspective in society in which individual and collective actions are shaped and being shaped through language use and power relations (Habermas, 1984, 1989; Foucault, 1972, 1998). The ramifications of corporate colonisation are more worrying in contemporary societies where bureaucratic institutions of the state appear to naturalise disciplinary and regulatory power technologies (Foucault, 1998, 2010) over the lifeworld of groups and individual employees in public sector organisations.

This study aims to shed light on the ‘dark side’ of employee socialisation and control in a public university organisation through the use technologies in relation to the recent dynamics of contemporary public university management discourse in Ghana. The question is, how do key government institutions colonize and control the everyday management practices of public university organisations including employee socialization practices and control, and what are the ramifications? To provide answers to the question above, this study takes the systemic colonisation of organisations, socialisation and control of employees in Ghana’s public universities as its empirical point of departure in relation to the broader discourse of the new public universities management bill and the new tertiary education regulatory apparatuses in Ghana. Habermas’s (1984, 1989) theory of communicative action and Foucault’s (1998) critical reflection on the concept of power relations in discourse in contemporary societies underpins this study. Also, the study employs an ethnographic discourse study strategy and draws on critical discourse studies features (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) to analyse the discursive practices and actions of actors in discourse.

## 2 The Study Context

This section provides a brief overview of the study context – the spatiotemporal and social dimensions of the lifeworld<sup>1</sup> (Habermas, 1989) and focuses on the discourse (Foucault, 1972) of the public university management in Ghana. Also, the section describes the institutional and legal framework as well as the management structure of the specific university organisation discourse under study, its relations with workers unions within, and with the relevant state regulatory institutions. Until the year 2020 when the contested Ghana public universities’ bill titled Public University Act, 2020 was prepared, the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana restricted the president of Ghana from heading or appointing someone to head any public university in the country. Also, the constitution clearly emphasises the promotion of academic freedom. However, in the year 2020, the Government drafted a Public University Bill (PUB) to be passed into law, and in the bill the Acts of all public universities in Ghana were repealed. According to those in

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<sup>1</sup>Lifeworld, in the context of this study, is the “transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the objective world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements.” (Habermas, 1989, p. 126)

government, the new Public University Bill “seeks to harmonise public universities’ finances, administration, and governance structure” (Affre, 2021, para. 11).

In the same year, on August 21, 2020, the President assented to a new Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023) to form the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) to regulate tertiary education in Ghana (Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, 2020). Thus, the then National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) and the National Accreditation Board (NAB) were merged under the new Act, 2020 (Act 1023). Unlike the new Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023), which was passed without resistance from public universities, the new PUB faced fierce resistance and contestations from the academics and the stakeholders of public universities in Ghana. The concern was that the new PUB was a strategy of the government to circumvent the provisions in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and give the president unfettered control over public universities in Ghana to serve the needs of those in government but not the common good of the public in a democratic state.

“The Public University Bill (PUB) attempts a work-around of the provisions in the constitution that bars the president from taking the position of chancellor or appointing officers to institutions of higher education, research or professional training. The PUB seeks to effectively make the president the head of all public universities by having him/her name the chancellor, nominate the chairperson of the university council, and appoint the majority of council members.”  
(Anyidoho & Ampofo, 2020, para. 4)

Consequently, the new PUB was withdrawn for further scrutiny and wider public consultation and engagement. However, the implementation of the new Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023) to regulate tertiary education in Ghana through the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission remained in force. Consequently, there appears to be a wedge in the sense that the PUB and the new Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023) were meant to complement each other towards the regulation of tertiary education in Ghana. In this way, the new Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023) is implemented alongside the individual Acts that established each of the fifteen public universities in Ghana, one of which is the Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies (SDD-UBIDS) in Wa. Whereas the government insists the new bill will improve standards in the management of public university institutions in Ghana, the public universities’ stakeholders, especially, employees construe the bill to be retrogressive, and that it will stifle academic freedom in Ghana if passed into law.

The Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies (SDD-UBIDS) in Wa was the Wa Campus of the University for Development Studies (UDS) in Tamale. Whereas the UDS was established in 1992, the Wa Campus of the UDS started full operation in 2002 with only one faculty – the Faculty of Integrated Development Studies (FIDS). The SDD-UBIDS was established in 2019 by the Government of Ghana ACT 1001; thus, the Wa Campus of the UDS ceased to exist with the establishment of the SDD-UBIDS as an autonomous public university in Ghana. However, “*per standard practices when new universities come into being they adopt the statutes of old universities ... until recently they [UDS] were still running our [SDD-UBIDS] payroll*” (In-depth interview with a University Official (UO1), November 1, 2021). Internally, the university is governed by the governing council, and the core university leadership, some with and others without voting rights. The governing council is the highest decision-making body of the university, and it comprises government appointees (one of whom is the chairperson of the council), institutional representatives within (Convocation and University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG) representatives), and outside the university (Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) representative). In attendance are the Pro Vice Chancellor, the Registrar, and the Director of Finance, all without voting rights. Members in attendance without voting rights can only shape council decisions by providing relevant institutional context to enable the governing council to take informed decisions. However, the council chairperson has a casting vote right (the chairperson can vote twice in case of a tie in relation to votes cast on a decision).

In addition, the core leadership<sup>2</sup> of the university organisation oversees the everyday management practices of the institution and there are several organised workers’ unions championing and providing voice for the workers in the

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<sup>2</sup> The core leadership in the context of this study describes principal officials steering the everyday management practices of the university immediate context.

organisation. Hence, there is a continuous dynamic interaction between the core leadership and the workers of the university through the workers' unions. Additionally, it is important to note that the internal governing and management structure and practices of the university organisation in which the lifeworld and everyday practices of individual workers and collectives (Habermas, 1989) are intelligible, take shape and are governed at a distance (Rose, 1999) by institutions mandated by the political government to ensure compliance; for example, the GTEC plays a key role in the management of public universities in Ghana. Also, for public financial management in public institutions such as the public universities in Ghana, the Controller and Accountant-General's Department (CAGD) of Ghana plays an active role. The CAGD receives staff records of newly established public universities in Ghana for action; consequently, "*GTEC initiated the process of sending us (the staff of SDD-UBIDS) to controller*" (In-depth interview with a University Official (UOI), November 1, 2021). In brief, government has control in the management of public universities in Ghana. For instance, through institutions like the CAGD and the GTEC, the government is progressively colonising the everyday management practices of unique individual public universities in Ghana. However, the workers' unions of the public universities that existed prior to the new Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023) contest the progressive colonisation and control strategy of the newly established political government institutions such as the GTEC and other relevant institutions.

### 3 Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are Habermas' (1984, 1989) theory of communicative action and Foucault's (1998) critical reflection on the concept of power in modern societies. Both theories explicate changes in contemporary societies leading to a dissolution of an autonomous self as the centre of action. Beyond the core purpose of achieving understanding, communicative action also emphasises the key role language plays in coordinating the actions of individuals and the socialisation of these same individuals (Habermas, 1989). Also, moving further away from the individual subject as the centre of action, Habermas (1989) introduced the concept of lifeworld to serve as the necessary context of communicative action. The lifeworld is "the horizon within which communicative actions are 'always already' moving – is in turn limited and changed by the structural transformation of society as a whole" (Habermas, 1989, p. 119). Thus, Habermas postulates "a progressive colonisation of the 'lifeworld' by the economy and the state, entailing a displacement of 'communicative' practices by 'strategic' practices, which embody a purely instrumental (modern) rationality" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 97). However, Habermas's theory of communicative action appears to create space for legitimising bureaucratic or technocratic discourse and power leading to the colonisation of the lifeworld without creating space for resistance but insisting on legitimacy and consensus. Also, Habermas appears to gloss over the fact that the social actors of communicative events are not equally equipped with the needed discursive resources to influence communicative outcome and for that matter the actors do not benefit equally. Thus, instead of glossing over power relations, this study argues for a scrutiny of embedded unequal social actors and unequal power relations in communicative actions and the role of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1998) in influencing communicative outcome unevenly. Consequently, to account for the role of uneven power relations in communicative events and outcomes, this study turns to Foucault's critical reflections on power to address the taken-for-granted view of power dynamics in the theory of communicative action in the public sphere where the participants in discourse are not equally endowed and positioned. It appears Habermas took the discourse-power nexus in the theory of communicative action lightly.

"Discourse is aimed at producing consensus; power is relevant in establishing the procedures which allow this to happen by guaranteeing open access and equal chances to contribute, but problematic differences of identity which will give rise to a power dynamic within discourse are assumed to be bracketed."  
(Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 87)

Moreso, like Foucault (1972, 1998), Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) emphasised the dialectical relation between discourse and power as the systemic colonisation of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1989) establishes a fertile link with the main agenda of critical discourse studies, which is to question power relations dissolved in taken-for-granted legitimacy and consensus. "Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64). In contemporary societies, "the interventions of social

movements in response to colonisation bring into the agenda struggles over discursive practices as part of social struggles” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 89)<sup>3</sup>.

A struggle over discursive practices is a struggle of power relation in the sense that the concepts of discourse and power are related, and they produce, reproduce, and reinforce each other. The relationship between discourse and power is explicitly expressed in Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical works (Fairclough, 1992). Discourse entails practices that form subjects and objects and modifies practice itself; thus, the products of discourse are entangled in strategic relations (Foucault, 1972, 1998). Power is a “complex strategical situation” that establishes certain relations in society and such power relations are “both intentional and non-subjective”; thus, “there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives”, but resistance is immanent in power relations (Foucault, 1998, pp. 94–95). Foucault (1998) coined the term “bio-power” to describe the ways power in modern societies disciplines bodies, regulate populations to produce docile bodies, which are adapted to the demands of modern forms of economic production (Fairclough, 1992). Bio-power “brought life and its mechanisms into the realms of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (Foucault, 1998, p. 143). The technocratic infiltration and colonisation of lifeworld appears to be the point where Habermas’s normative theory of communicative action and Foucault’s critical perspective of power intersect. In brief, the systemic or corporate colonisation of the lifeworld in contemporary societies is not power neutral in the sense that the processes and practices of colonisation are power laden and implicates power relations and discursive struggles between actors in the two domains.

## 4 Methodology

This study employs ethnography and discourse studies in a critical sense towards exploring naturalised and taken-for-granted power relations in discursive practices and actions in relation to employee socialisation, control and sensemaking in Ghana’s public university organisations. Discourse studies “works together with ethnographic research that locates discourse as part of a wider set of social practices in the familial local context” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 45). Ethnography as a research strategy facilitates researcher involvement in selected socio-political and institutional domains of research and access to the archives, and creates space for the analysis of situated social practice and discourse (Foucault, 1972). Also, ethnography facilitates the interpreter’s meaning making in the local context where actors’ discursive practices are embedded. In so doing, this study employs ethnographic discourse data collection techniques and procedures including the observation of social actors’ interactions and the institution’s practices imbued with power relations. For reflexivity, the researcher is a staff of the university organisation and a member of the university’s workers unions; thus, the researcher sat in union meetings, interacted with colleague staff members, and participated in discussions relevant to the purpose of this study.

In terms of timeline, the government of Ghana prepared a new public university bill (PUB) in the year 2020 to be passed into law, but it met resistance from the public and stakeholders of public universities; thus, it was withdrawn for scrutiny. Whereas the government argues that the bill will improve standards in university institutions, public universities’ stakeholders, especially, employees construe the bill to be retrogressive. Also, in the same year (2020), the new Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 1023, which establishes the GTEC as the tertiary education regulatory body in Ghana was passed. Consequently, in the year 2021, the Ministry of Finance, the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission, and the Controller and Accountant General’s Department (CAGD) started the process of migrating the employees of public universities onto the government mechanized payroll, IPPD2 technology, towards the new public university organisations’ management discourse. Thus, the shift from the internal management of public universities to a fully integrated governmental management system in line with the IPPD2 technology was institutionalised. The question this study asks is, how do key government institutions colonize and control the everyday management practices of public organisations including employee socialization practices, and what are the ramifications?

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<sup>3</sup> Inspired by Fairclough (1992) and Foucault (1972, 1991) this study understands discursive practices as particular ways of language use and social practices in social context, which sustains or reproduces social relations and relations of power, and the idea that discursive practices modify social domains.

### 4.1 Integrating ethnographic-discourse data sets

The researcher observed the mediated interaction between the core management of the university organisation and the university’s workers unions. In addition, the researcher observed mediated interaction between the key government institutions and the management of the university. Thus, the researcher retrieved concrete textual data in the form of letters from the central administration of the university. Interestingly, the key government institutions did not interact directly with the employees or workers’ unions of the SDD-UBIDS in respect of the ongoing discourse and discursive practice. The key government institutions’ practices towards the employees and workers unions were usually done through the management of the university organisation. The researcher observed that the interactions between the key government institutions, core universities management and the employees or workers’ unions were hierarchical and exclusionary in respect of employees participating in the communicative event, which implicates unequal positioning and power relation between the actors in the ongoing discourse. In addition to the mediated text retrieved in the form of letters, the researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with a key official at the central administration of the university. Out of five key officials that were purposefully selected to be interviewed, only one was willing to speak to the researcher due to the sensitive nature of the issue being studied. Thus, the interview with the officer lasted a little over twenty minutes (00:21:30), though it was scheduled for thirty minutes (00:30:00). However, the officer was able to provide needed information (e.g., key actors, their relations, affiliations and hierarchies, potential and manifest enactments in respect of employees) to support the analysis and findings. More importantly, the interview provided direction as to the selection of the relevant mediated texts – letters for the study. For instance, the key government institutions involved in the ongoing discourse were identified and selected, and subsequently the mediated interaction between them and the university management, which manifested in concrete text in the form of letters relevant to the ongoing discourse were purposefully selected and retrieved from the central administration archives.

Thus, this study integrates central features of critical discourse studies with an ethnographic approach to collect and analyse the discursive practices and actions of government institutions, unit(s) heads and the workers unions of the university (SDD-UBIDS) in relation to the migration of the staff of public universities to the government mechanized payroll, IPPD2 technology. As mentioned above, the university (SDD-UBIDS) was established just a year (2019) before the new PUB was prepared and the GTEC established by the new Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 1023 in the year 2020. Fairclough’s (2016) dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse studies, which critiques power as its central feature, inspired this study. Thus, the integrated ethnographic discourse study design implemented in this study analysed texts excerpts drawn from letters from the government institutions mentioned above and a press release and letters from the university workers’ unions’ interactions in relation to the broader discourse of regulating and managing public universities in Ghana. The press release was not a letter addressed to any specific government institution but directed at all the government institutions involved, the management of the university and the public. It was included as one of the relevant texts to be analysed, for there is evidence of concrete manifestations of resistance and contestations in respect of the discursive practices and actions of the government institutions participating in the communicative event or ongoing discourse. In addition to the press release and interview transcript, excerpts of letters on the relevant subject, outlined in table 1, were extracted and processed to support the analysis and findings of this study.

**Table 1. Mediated text realised from the actors in discourse**

S/N	Text type	Subject	Date	Source	Destination	Remarks
1	Letter	Re: Request for active payroll data of employees	Feb 15, 2020	GTEC	V.Cs of All Public Universities	Retrieved by Researcher
2	Letter	Re: Placement of newly appointed staff of three new universities on Government payroll; IPPD 2)	Feb 23, 2021	GTEC	V. C SDD-UBIDS and two others	Retrieved by Researcher
3	Letter	Re: Notice of intention to embark on industrial action	April 23, 2021	GTEC	V.Cs of All Public Universities	Retrieved by Researcher
4	Letter	Reminder: Submission of UTAS and UBIDS Migration Base Data	July 19, 2021	GTEC	V. Cs of UTAS and UBIDS	Retrieved by Researcher

5	Letter	Re: Notice of Intention to embark on industrial action	April 8, 2021	CAGD	GTEC	Retrieved by Researcher
6	Letter	Request for Submission of Migration Base Data	April 21, 2021	CAGD	GTEC	Retrieved by Researcher
7	Letter	Reminder: Submission of UTAS & UBIDS Migration Base Data	June 25, 2021	CAGD	GTEC	Retrieved by Researcher
8	Letter	Re: Placement of newly appointed Staff of the Three New Universities on Government Payroll, IPPD2	Feb. 17, 2021	MoF	UBIDS	Retrieved by Researcher
9	Letter	Rejection of Decision to Migrate Staff of SDD-UBIDS to CAGD, IPPD2	March 3, 2021	UBIDS Workers Union	GTEC	Retrieved by Researcher
10	Letter	Notification not to Submit Payroll Particulars to CAGD for Migration to IPPD2	March 3, 2021	UBIDS Workers Union	The Registrar UDS	Retrieved by Researcher
11	Letter	Fears Over Likely Migration of Staff of SDD-UBIDS to CAGD, IPPD2	July 13, 2021	UBIDS Workers Union	The Vice Chancellor SDD-UBIDS	Retrieved by Researcher
12	Letter	Re: Notice of Intention to Embark on Industrial Action by Workers' Unions of UTAS & UBIDS	March 9, 2021	UTAS & UBIDS Workers Unions	NLC	Retrieved by Researcher

(Source: SDD-UBIDS Administrative Unit, 2021)

In brief, the ethnographic-discourse approach enabled multiple and integrated types of data sets to be collected and analysed to support the findings. Within the university organisation context, the ethnographic-discourse study data collection process is done by observing mediated interactions between actors and retrieving concrete texts realised from the interaction in the form of letters on various subject matters from the actors in the ongoing discourse. Also, the researcher interviewed a key official in the institutional setting.

#### 4.2 Analytical approach

In line with the theoretical perspective and methodology outlined above, this study draws on critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the analytical point of departure. CDA approaches discourse as a form of social practice in “a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), and institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). Also, CDA sees discourse as socially constitutive, and discursive practices have effects and produce and reproduce unequal power relations between classes of people in the ways the discursive practice represents and positions them in a discursive event. CDA “aims to contribute to addressing the social ‘wrong’ of the day (in a broad sense – injustice, inequality, lack of freedom etc.) by analysing their sources and causes, resistance to them and possibilities of overcoming them” (Fairclough, 2016, p. 88). Thus, CDA has an emancipatory interest and aims at making concealed unequal power relations and domination explicit. The CDA approach employed in this study is inspired by Fairclough’s (2016) dialectical-relational approach to analysing critical discourse in relation to the three-dimensional notion of discourse as text, discursive practices, and social practice (Fairclough, 1992, 2010). Thus, the analytical approach of this study focuses on the “*description* of the language text, *interpretation* of the relationship between the (productive and interpretative) discursive processes and the text, and explanation of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 132). The critical analytical approach of this study “has both a ‘negative’ and a ‘positive’ character” in the sense that it analyses unequal power relations that affect the well-being of people (Fairclough, 2016, p. 88); also, CDA analyses and explains the ways in which domination and unequal power relations are resisted to improve the well-being of people. The dialectical-relational approach emphasises that the analysis must focus on the link between meaning-making practices of social actors and the social practices and processes involved in meaning production (Fairclough, 2016). The analysis is

presented below in relation to the question(s) asked in the introduction and methodology sections above. Thus, first, this study analyses the discursive practices of the government institutions towards placing the university workers on the government ‘mechanized’ payroll, IPPD2. Second, the analysis of the university workers’ unions struggles and resistance to the migration of the university staff onto the government ‘mechanized’ payroll, IPPD2, and the ramifications of the discursive struggle. The discursive struggle between the two actors (the government institutions and the university workers’ unions) points to the fact that translation of technologies of government in the lifeworld has a ‘dark side’ as demonstrated, elsewhere, in the analysis of the proxy means test technology in Ghana’s flagship social protection programme – the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme (Puorideme, 2020).

## 5 Data Analysis

The researcher retrieved relevant textual data in the form letters (8) from the university administration. The letters came from different sources including four from the Ghana Tertiary Education commission (GTEC), three from the Controller and Accountant-General’s Department (CAGD), one from the Ministry of Finance (MoF). Also, a press release and four letters were retrieved from the Secretariats of the university workers’ unions. Thus, the total number of letters considered for analysis was twelve (12). The letters, authored between January 2020 and August 2021, formed part of the textual data for this study. This timeframe was the peak of the discourse under consideration – the preparation and tabling of the contested new public university bill, the promulgation of the new Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023) a few months after the promulgation of Act 1001, which established SDD-UBIDS as a public university in Ghana. Also, the discursive struggles between workers’ unions, the university management and the state institutions such as the GTEC and CAGD were rife. Another source of data for this study includes planned interviews with key informants (5) that are heads of key departments, units, and representatives of union in the university. However, only one respondent from a core unit of the university administration honoured the interview within the timeframe scheduled for data collection. In this study, interviews are approached from the critical ethnographic discourse perspective with the understanding that the interactional and social contexts are relevant for meaning making and that data from interviews are contextually dependent and jointly and interactionally accomplished (Stefansen, 2012). Although data from different sources serve the purpose of triangulation, the key idea is to gather data from the systems’ world in terms of state institutions and the lifeworld in terms of the union members of the university and the university everyday management practices. The letters (as a form of written text) “allows communicative interaction to take place at a temporal and spatial distance” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 42), also, the letters are mediated, so the contexts in which they are produced and received are different. More importantly, the letters or texts promote certain beliefs, reality and sets up power relations between people in action and social practices (Jones, 2019).

### **5.1 Place new employees on “Government Payroll, IPPD2”: MoF directs GTEC and CAGD**

As indicated in the section above, this section focuses on analysing the discursive practices of the government institutions (MoF, GTEC, and CAGD) in the context of this study. The analysis focuses on the meaning making practices of the government institutions in relation to the social practices and processes in the socio-political context (Fairclough, 1992, 2016). The text extracts presented and analysed below are taken from written letters from the three government institutions comprising the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the GTEC, and the CAGD in relation to the discursive construction of ‘new staff’ for SDD-UBIDS workers/staff, and the discursive positioning of the university organisation itself. In a hierarchical order, text extract 1 is a letter from the MoF to the GTEC, an apparatus of government for regulating tertiary education in Ghana, text extract 2 is a letter from GTEC to the university organisation (SDD-UBIDS) directing it to submit staff data, and text extract 3 is a letter from the CAGD to the GTEC asking for the university staff data.

*Extract 1. Letter from MoF to GTEC, Feb 17, 2021*

1 RE: PLACEMENT OF NEWLY APPOINTED STAFF OF THE  
2 THREE NEW UNIVERSITIES ON GOVERNMENT PAYROLL, IPPD2



3 Following establishment of the [...] under listed universities,  
4 approval is hereby, given for placement of their staff on  
5 appropriate salary levels and corresponding allowances on  
6 government payroll, IPPD2 (Integrated Personnel payroll Database)  
7 [...]  
8 Consequently, the Single Spine Grade Structures hereby attached  
9 [...]  
10 are to be used to effect payment of salaries of Senior Members  
11 and Senior and Junior staff of these universities.

*Extract 2. Letter from GTEC to SDD-UBIDS, Feb 23, 2021*

1 RE: PLACEMENT OF NEWLY APPOINTED STAFF OF THE THREE NEW  
2 UNIVERSITIES ON GOVERNMENT PAYROLL; IPPD2  
3 Following approval by the Ministry of Finance (Appendix 1) on the  
4 above subject matter, the GTEC is initiating the necessary steps  
5 to have your university migrated onto the mechanized payroll of  
6 the Controller and Accountant-General's Department on the payment  
7 of salaries of the newly appointed staff. [...]  
8 We respectfully entreat all Vice-Chancellors to treat this request  
9 as urgent and submit the requested data to GTEC latest 2nd March  
10 2021 and email a soft copy of the excel template[...]

*Extract 3. Letter from CAGD to GTEC, April 21, 2021*

1 REQUEST FOR SUBMISSION OF MIGRATION BASE DATA  
2 Reference is made to Ministry of Finance letters with reference  
3 [...] requesting for the migration of the following underlisted [...] new  
4 Universities onto the Government IPPD2 Payroll System.  
5 [...] CAGD has began (sic) arrangements to migrate the outstanding two,  
6 i.e. [...] and UBIDS.  
7 Consequent to this, request is hereby made for the submission of  
8 Base Data for [...] UBIDS. It will be appreciated if the data can be  
9 submitted to CAGD [...]  
10 Please be advised that submission of the data is critical to the  
11 commencement of the migration process.

The texts above are hierarchically ordered extracts of letters from hierarchically ordered and positioned government institutions aimed at colonising the practices of an autonomous public university institution – SDD-UBIDS (Habermas, 1989; Fairclough, 1992). Prior to such discursive practices – the production of the letters issuing directives – the staff of the SDD-UBIDS were staff of UDS on the Wa campus. However, with the establishment of the SDD-UBIDS as an autonomous university, the staff of UDS on Wa campus became staff of SDD-UBIDS by default yet the MoF, in its letter to GTEC in extract 1 above, discursively constructed the staff of SDD-UBIDS in the title of the letter as “NEWLY APPOINTED STAFF” (line 1). Also, the MoF positioned the university in the category of “NEW UNIVERSITIES” (line 1) to be placed on the “government payroll, IPPD2 (Integrated Personnel payroll Database)” thereby legitimising the implementation of the IPPD2 technology as “appropriate” (extract 1, lines 5 and 6). Apparently, the practices of the government institutions appear to be a hegemonic control in an unequal power relation (Foucault, 1998 and Fairclough, 1992) aimed at legitimising a political strategy towards a total control of public universities in the country as contained in the contested public university bill. Thus, the implementation of the IPPD2, a centralised government technology, places absolute management of public universities’ staff, salaries and allowances in the hands of central government, and such practice would stifle academic freedom as the government decides who manages the

public university and in what position and capacity without recourse to the unique internal, localised and situated management practices of the universities.

The above three extracts from the three government institutions suggest that the MoF is the origin of the discursive construction of the “new employees” and their subsequent migration to the government payroll, IPPD2. The staff were discursively constructed as ‘new’ to legitimise their migration to the government payroll, as it is an evident political strategy of the government to migrate public universities onto “the mechanized payroll of the Controller and Accountant-General’s Department” (extract 2, lines 5 and 6). In extract 1, the author of the letter hid the actor giving the approval; for example, “approval is hereby, given for the placement of their staff” (extract 1, line 4). Thus, the author of the letter (the Chief Director) is just a speaking subject but not the source of the discourse (Foucault, 1972). It appears the source is contained in the contested PUB that has been withdrawn following pressure from the public and public universities’ stakeholders. If it is the PUB that gives the Minister of Finance the powers to author the discourse, then it is possible to suggest that the “placement” of the staff on IPPD2 is problematic because the minister does not have the power to do so at the moment. Thus, the Ministry of Finance used the GTEC, an apparatus of government, as established by the Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (ACT 1023) to compel the university institution – SDD-UBIDS to adhere to the migration process in the sense that the discourse is traced to the MoF in GTEC’s discursive practices in the socio-political context (Fairclough, 1992). For example, “Following approval by the Ministry of Finance ... on the above subject matter, the GTEC is initiating the necessary steps to have your university migrated onto the mechanized payroll” (extract 2, lines 3, 4, and 5). The GTEC is the institutional apparatus of government for translating government actions and directives of the MoF to influence the practices of the public university organisation in Ghana. However, the directive from the MoF appears problematic as mentioned above, so GTEC does not have legitimate grounds to coerce public universities to place/migrate their staff on to the IPPD2 technology, unless the new PUB is passed into law. Thus, the intertextual links and the orders of discourses are evident in the discursive practices of the three government institutions (Fairclough, 2016). Conspicuously, the CAGD letter to GTEC refers to the directive from MoF to migrate “new universities onto the Government IPPD2 payroll system” (extract 3, line 4). The CAGD did not explicitly mention “new employees” as the MoF discursively identified the workers of UBIDS even though the “new universities” identity implies and includes “new” workers; but, CAGD legitimising the migration of the workers to the government payroll, IPPD2, discursively indicated in the letter to GTEC that one of the universities is “outstanding”; thus, a “request is hereby made for the submission of Base Data for ... UBIDS” (extract 3, lines 7 and 8). However, what is worrying is the fact that the public university bill, which the government intended to pass into law to give it unfettered access to the management of public universities in Ghana was withdrawn due to resistance and contestation from the academic community and stakeholders of public universities in Ghana; yet evidently, the GTEC and CAGD appear to rely on the authority of the Minister of Finance in clause 26 (1)<sup>4</sup> to effect the migration of the university workers to the government payroll system.

Consequently, the implication of migrating the university workers to the government payroll, IPPD2 is that the CAGD takes control over management of the university workers’ salaries and allowances, which were internally managed by the university organisation (In-depth interview with a University Official, November 1, 2021). Also, it implies that the employees of the university acquire new socialisation practices relating to CAGD practices as prescribed by government (MoF) through GTEC in relations to the management of staff salaries and allowances. Thus, the internal processing of the university workers’ salaries and allowances would not be internally handled by the university organisation any longer, but by an ‘academically distant’ state institution. However, the workers of the university organisation contested the “new” employee identity discursively constructed by the MoF for the purpose of migrating the university workers onto the government payroll, IPPD2. Thus, the workers resisted the “new” employee socialisation and the relations of power set up by the MoF in relation to their migration onto the government payroll. In the next section, the discursive contestations of the university workers are analysed.

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<sup>4</sup> “A public university shall prepare and submit the annual estimates of revenue and expenditure of the public university through the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission to the Minister responsible for Finance for approval in the form and at the times determined by the Minister” (Government of Ghana, 2020, p. 15).

## **5.2 We are not “Newly Appointed Staff” of a new university**

The directive of the MoF, and the actions of GTEC and CAGD to migrate the university workers onto the government payroll, IPPD2, thereby restructuring and rescaling employee’s socialisation and relation in the university organisation is contested by the workers’ unions. The workers through their various unions produced a series of letters, held press conferences, and embarked on industrial action contesting the directive of the MoF, and the actions of GTEC and CAGD in relation to the practice of migrating the university workers onto the government payroll. The text (extracts 4 and 5) presented and analysed below are taken from letters produced by the workers’ unions and addressed to the GTEC and the management of SDD-UBIDS. Also, extract 6 is taken from the press conferences of the workers’ unions declaring the industrial action as a way of overcoming government control to improve the wellbeing of their members.

### *Extract 4. Workers Unions letter to GTEC, March 3, 2021*

1 REJECTION OF DECISION TO MIGRATE STAFF OF SDD-UBIDS TO CONTROLLER  
2 AND ACCOUNTANT GENERAL’S DEPARTMENT PAYROLL (IPPD2)  
3 We, the workers’ unions of the [...] (SDD-UBIDS) [...] wish to express an  
4 outright rejection of any move to migrate staff to the Controller  
5 and Accountant General’s Department (CAGD) payroll (IPPD2).  
6 Following the sighting of your letter dated February 23, titled  
7 “RE: PLACEMENT OF NEWLY APPOINTED STAFF OF THE THREE NEW  
8 UNIVERSITIES ON GOVERNMENT PAYROLL; IPPD2”, asking SDD-UBIDS to  
9 provide staff information for purposes of migrating staff to the  
10 payroll of the CAGD, members of UTAG, GAUA, SSA-UoG and TEWU  
11 held separate emergency meetings on Wednesday, March 3, 2021,  
12 to discuss the content of the letter.  
13 Members of the workers’ unions expressed discontent and outrage  
14 at the decision to migrate staff of SDD-UBIDS to CAGD’s payroll  
15 [...]. Members find it discriminatory, and unacceptable [...].  
16 Members are further discontented that the staff of SDD-UBIDS are  
17 described as ‘Newly Appointed Staff in your said letter. We wish  
18 to state emphatically that staff of SDD-UBIDS are not newly  
19 appointed staff and per the pay structure appended in the  
20 Ministry of Finance letter dated February 17, 2021, also titled  
21 “RE: PLACEMENT OF NEWLY APPOINTED STAFF OF THE THREE NEW  
22 UNIVERSITIES ON GOVERNMENT PAYROLL; IPPD2”, the said migration  
23 will be a downgrade in our salaries, allowances and other  
24 conditions of service and hence our welfare.  
25 Following from the above, we completely reject the decision to  
26 migrate staff of SDD-UBIDS to CAGD’s payroll. We demand that the  
27 said letter asking our university (SDD-UBIDS) to supply staff  
28 information for the purposes of migration to CAGD’s IPPD2 be  
29 withdrawn with immediate effect and communicated to us by  
30 Thursday, March 11, 2021.  
31 If by the said date our demand is not honoured, we will advise  
32 ourselves accordingly.

As pointed out in the analyses of the text (extracts 1, 2, and 3) in the first section of the analysis above, the government institutions including the MoF, the GTEC, and the CAGD started a process of migrating the university workers onto the government payroll by discursively constructing and positioning the staff and the university organisation as ‘new’ employees and ‘new’ university respectively. As observed above, the practice is a political strategy to legitimise the government control of public universities in the country. However, the workers’ unions produced counter discourse

resisting the ‘new employee’ identity and the discursive positioning of the university organisation as ‘new’ in relation to other public universities in Ghana. For example, according to the workers’ unions, in a letter to the GTEC, their members are “discontented that the staff of SDD-UBIDS are described as ‘Newly Appointed Staff’ in your said letter. We wish to state emphatically that staff of SDD-UBIDS are not newly appointed staff” (extract 4, lines 16 to 19). They do not want to be identified and socialised as ‘new employees’ in a so-called new university as construed by the government institutions, and the subsequent migration of its staff onto the government payroll as directed by GTEC and CAGD. Thus, it is evident from the contestation of the ‘we’ (staff) as opposed to ‘your’ (government) in lines 3, 6 and 17 of extract 4, the workers unions are working out a way of overcoming the government control of the university and staff to improve the wellbeing of their members.

Conspicuously, there is a discursive struggle between the workers unions of UBIDS and the government institutions – MoF, GTEC, and CAGD, which centres on the migration of university workers to a mechanized government payroll, IPPD2, against the fact that “the said migration will be a downgrade in our salaries, allowances and other conditions of service and hence our welfare” (extract 4, lines 22, 23, and 24). Consequently, “we completely reject the decision to migrate staff of SDD-UBIDS to CAGD’s payroll” and the letter should be “withdrawn with immediate effect” (extract 4, lines 25, 26, and 29). Moreso, the workers unions “expressed discontent and outrage” because they construe the action of the government institutions as “discriminatory” (extract 4, lines 13 and 15). It should be noted that the discourse of a mechanized government payroll for the staff of public universities in Ghana is linked to the new public universities bill, which was publicly contested and subsequently withdrawn from parliament as mentioned earlier. Interestingly, as a staff observed, “if you look at their correspondences, they [the government institutions] started even equating us [staff of SDD-UBIDS] with the technical universities ... and that is one of the problems” the government institutions are creating for the workers of the university (In-depth interview with a University Official, November 1, 2021). Thus, the university official construes the actions of the government institutions as a social ‘wrong’ that the university workers union must overcome.

*Extract 5. Workers Unions letter to VC, SDD-UBIDS, July 13, 2021*

1 FEARS OVER LIKELY MIGRATION OF STAFF OF SDD-UBIDS TO CONTROLLER  
2 AND ACCOUNTANT GENERAL’S DEPARTMENT PAYROLL (IPPD2)  
3 We the workers’ Unions of SDD-UBIDS namely UTAG, GAUA, SSA-UoG and  
4 TEWU wish to express an outright rejection of any move to migrate  
5 staff to the CAGD payroll. The available information indicates  
6 that UDS Tamale intends to wean us off from their payroll  
7 by the end of July 2021. At an emergency meeting of  
8 union executives of UBIDS held on the 13th of July 2021,  
9 we wish to know the plans management has put in place for  
10 subsequent salary payments of staff from August 2021.  
11 We want managers to respond to this petition  
12 latest by 19th July 2021. The union leaders need this information  
13 urgently to inform decisions at our up-coming meetings.  
14 Thank you.  
15 ((officer 2 writes on workers union letter))  
16 (officer 3)  
17 [...] acknowledge receipt of the letter from the unions...  
18 management appreciates their concerns ... they should continue  
19 their discussions with the Fair Wages Commission,  
20 the Ministries of Education, Finance, and the GTEC to have  
21 all outstanding issues concerning their compensations  
22 and allowances. Management has no intention to go and borrow  
23 money from the open market to pay salaries, because we don't  
24 have the means to do so, and we also do not have a functioning

25 council at the moment. That the unions will be informed  
26 when management has received information from our Regulator  
27 and the Ministry. Management is also disappointed in  
28 the tone of their letter, using threats and deadlines.  
29 (sign)19/07/2021

In the text extract above, lines 1 to 14 comprise the content of the letter the workers' unions wrote to the VC, SDD-UBIDS and lines 15 to 29 in the same text extract comprises the response of management to the workers' unions. However, to reinforce their (workers' unions) resistance, contestation and counter discourse, in the letter to the VC, the workers' unions expressed "an outright rejection of any move to migrate staff to the CAGD payroll" (extract 5, lines 4 and 5). In so doing, the workers' unions "want to know the plans management has put in place for subsequent salary payment" (extract 5, lines 9 and 10) as "UDS Tamale intends to wean us off from their payroll" (extract 5, line 6). However, in preparing a response to the workers' unions demand, the management of the university organisation expressed disappointment "in the tone of their [*workers' unions*] letter" and blamed the workers' unions of "using threats and deadlines" in demanding a response from the management (extract 5, line 28). Surprisingly and evidently, "the unions will be informed when management has received information from our Regulator and the Ministry" (extract 5, lines 25, 26, and 27) is the summary response to the workers' unions. The Regulator and the Ministry used in the text refers to GTEC and MoF respectively. Thus, the statement suggests that the management has strategically aligned itself to the discursive practices of the government institutions and by extension the broader discourse of the government in relation to the new PUB. The management resistance to act contrary to the practices of the Regulator and Ministry, for instance, "Management has no intention to go and borrow money from the open market to pay salaries" (extract 5, lines 22 and 23) emphasises its strategic alliance with the two institutions. In so doing, it is evident that the actions of the management are self-colonising practices and actions as it internalises the government discursive practices, the Regulator and Ministry as contained in the new PUB, yet to become law. Consequently, the actors are not equally endowed with the needed discursive and power (Foucault, 1998) and resources to equally participate in the communicative event or the ongoing discourse. Thus, the possibility of the workers' unions influencing change and shaping the ongoing discourse and the new PUB is absent. However, the workers' unions persisted in their demands and proceeded with a press conference to declare an industrial action as an expression of staff discontent. In the press conference, the workers' unions described the actions of the government institutions particularly GTEC and CAGD as "illegal" thereby discursively delegitimising the actions of the government institutions above, including the Ministry of Finance. An extract of the press conference is presented and analysed below in detail.

*Extract 6. Press conference of workers' unions to embark on industrial action*

1 PRESS CONFERENCE TO EMBARK ON INDUSTRIAL ACTION OVER THE  
2 INTENDED ILLEGAL MIGRATIONS OF STAFF OF SDD-UBIDS TO CONTROLLER  
3 AND ACCOUNTANT GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT (CAGD) PAYROLL (IPPD2)  
4 [...]  
5 We, the workers' unions of the Simon Diedong Dombo University  
6 of Business and Integrated Development Studies (SDD-UBIDS),  
7 [...]  
8 wish to embark on an industrial action following  
9 the clandestine  
10 move by the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) to  
11 migrate staff of SDD-UBIDS [...] onto the Controller and  
12 Accountant General's Department (CAGD) payroll (IPPD2) in  
13 violation of the conditions precedent in the recent agreement  
14 between the university workers' unions in Ghana, CAGD, and  
15 GTEC under the order of the National Labour Commission (NLC).  
16 [...]. We therefore believe that the GTEC is trying to exploit  
17 the financial and resource vulnerability of the SDD-UBIDS [...]  
18 to forcefully migrate staff to CAGD. It is highly unethical

19 and unlawful for state institutions to take advantage of the  
20 vulnerability of other institutions and persons. We, the  
21 workers' unions, have particularly taken notice of the  
22 negative posturing of GTEC towards the SDD-UBIDS. The GTEC  
23 led by Prof. Mohammed Salifu in cahoots with other state  
24 agencies has consistently tried to undermine the SDDUBIDS in  
25 several fronts, including granting limited slots for staff  
26 recruitment, impeding the creation of faculties and running  
27 of academic programmed, characterizing staff of SDD- UBIDS as  
28 newly recruited staff, recommending for SDD-UBIDS staff to be  
29 placed on conditions of service (salaries and allowances)  
30 below other public universities, and the unrelenting attempt  
31 to isolate and migrate SDD-UBIDS staff to CAGD's payroll  
32 prematurely. The GTEC has forcefully placed the Vice  
33 Chancellor, Ag Pro-Vice Chancellor and Finance Director of  
34 SDD-UBIDS on salaries and allowances below what their  
35 counterparts are earning in other public universities. We are  
36 therefore absolutely convinced that this intended migration  
37 will lead to reduced salaries and allowances of the other  
38 workers of SDD-UBIDS. This discrimination and undermining of  
39 staff and the university as a whole must cease henceforth.  
40 The SDD-UBIDS was created by an Act of Parliament as a public  
41 university and any attempt to reduce its competitiveness will  
42 be met with resistance. [...]

In the above text (extract 6), the workers' unions construed the actions of the government institutions as illegal, clandestine, and a violation (lines 2, 9, and 13), which are at variance with the principles of deliberative democratic practices, legitimacy and consensus envisaged in communicative action (Habermas, 1984). Thus, an agreement between workers' unions and the government institutions (line 13) was breached as the government institutions appear to "forcefully migrate staff to CAGD" (line 18). In fact, "the new public universities they established were sent to controller straight away, so it is the same thing they have gone to do with this university too" (In-depth interview with a University Official, November 1, 2021). In this way the actors in discourse failed to reach consensus envisaged in the communicative practice as the government institutions appear to exploit the vulnerability of the university institution resources and the positionality of staff in the ongoing discourse to their advantage (lines 16 to 20). For example, in lines 32 to 35, "The GTEC has forcefully placed the Vice Chancellor, Ag Pro-Vice Chancellor and Finance Director of SDD-UBIDS on salaries and allowances below what their counterparts are earning in other public universities" in the country. In fact, the workers' unions' account of the actions of the government institutions (extract 6, lines 22 to 32) towards the staff and the university (SDD-UBIDS) has ramifications on the university's resource capacity. For instance, to avoid the prescribed socialisation practices including the migration of staff to CAGD, a practice that is ready to take effect in public universities in Ghana, many academic staff left for other existing public universities including the UDS from which SDD-UBIDS was created in the year 2019, and to avoid being placed under the total control of the government. Also, many of those employees, in making sense of the ongoing discourse, are leaving, while others are threatening to leave SDD-UBIDS. They are concerned about their compensations and allowances should they be placed under the control of the government (In-depth interview with a University Official, November 1, 2021). Consequently, the workers' unions embarked on an industrial action to contest the actions of the government institutions that described them (the staff) and the university organisation as 'new', and the subsequent migration of staff onto the mechanized government payroll, IPPD2 as discussed in the previous sections. According to the workers' unions, they are "convinced that this intended migration will lead to reduced salaries and allowances of the other workers of SDD-UBIDS" (lines 35 to 38). Thus, the workers insisted that any systemic control over the staff of the university institution (SDD-UBIDS) from the government institutions "will be met with resistance" (line 41 and 42).

In brief, it is evident from the analyses above there is a discursive struggle between the government institutions namely the MoF, the GTEC, the CAGD, and the workers unions or staff of the university organisation. The discursive practices of the government institutions mentioned above are construed as a hegemonic political strategy aimed at taking absolute control of the university organisation and other public universities, an action the institutions appear to legitimise through the migration of university workers onto the ‘mechanize’ government payroll, IPPD2 technology. The workers unions and staff of the university organisation construed the actions of the government institutions as ‘wrong’, “illegal”, and inimical to the wellbeing of unions members in the university institution. Thus, the workers unions contestations and resistances to the discursive practices of the government institutions creates opportunities and possibilities to overcome the control of the government institutions and improve the wellbeing of unions members and improve academic freedom in Ghana. Thus, the top-down actions and control of the government institutions aimed at altering workers identities, socialisation process and power relations are contested from the bottom by the workers unions of the university organisation. On the ‘dark side’, the management of the university is self-colonised and in strategic relations and alliance with the government institutions, which appear to be implementing sections of the contested new public universities bill, behind doors as it was withdrawn from parliament for further scrutiny, it is yet to see the light of the day.

## 6. Discussion

Evidently, the analysis above revealed interesting findings worth discussing further. First, the discursive practices of the government institutions namely the MoF, the GTEC, and the CAGD is a political strategy aimed at progressively controlling the management of public universities in Ghana. The systemic colonisation of the lifeworld – the everyday experiences and practices of employees – is a feature of organisations and corporations in contemporary societies (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Deetz, 1992; Habermas, 1989), but it is not just a contemporary phenomenon, also, it is an exercise of power and political control (Foucault, 1998).

In addition, this study demonstrates that the corporate colonisation of the lifeworld by state institutions is a political strategy, an exercise of power and unfettered control of employees by the government and an institutionalisation of unequal power relations in the furtherance of the political control. Undoubtedly, institutionalising political domination is a social ‘wrong’ worthy of critical investigation to unmask its concealed ramifications (Fairclough, 2016) and taken for granted nature, which this study demonstrates. Second, the key government institutions’ actions and practices embedded the contested public universities bill (PUB) in Ghana that is yet to be passed into law. However, the operationalisation of the contested public university bill as observed in the discursive practices, the orders of discourse and intertextual links of the government institutions analysed above demonstrate that new power relations, new identities, and new ways of being are enacted in relation to the so-called new university organisation management discourse (Fairclough, 1992). Thus, the withdrawal of the contested new public university bill from parliament did not stop its translation in the discursive practices of government institutions towards the management of public universities in Ghana; this ‘dark side’ is quite worrying. Also, the translation of the public universities management bill in the discursive practice of the government institutions suggest the bill is discursively linked to the new Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 1023, which established the GTEC as the tertiary education regulatory body in Ghana in the year 2020.

Third, the actions of the government institutions towards the migration of the university (SDD-UBIDS) staff onto the government ‘mechanized’ payroll, IPPD2 is limiting the already scarce resource capacity of the university organisation as the academic staff are leaving for other public universities to avoid government control. Thus, the employees’ meaning making practices and enactments are evident. In so doing, the power relations enacted in discourse and the new identities the government institutions constructed are contested and resisted (Foucault, 2007) by the workers’ unions of the university organisation to protect the wellbeing of their members, and improve the academic freedom enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. Furthermore, this study reveals workers’ unions contestations and resistance unmasked concealed political control in the university organisations, a way of overcoming unequal power relations as well as protecting the wellbeing of employees or the staff of the public university organisations in Ghana. The resistance and contestations from employees in relation to the key government institutions

are evident and these contestations put up by the workers' unions would persist if the public universities management discourse rests on the powers of the Minister appointed by the President, and with GTEC only taking and acting on the directives of the Minister as it is evident in the analysis section presented above.

Fourth, the management of the university organisation is self-colonised as it internalises the discursive practices of the government institutions, thus, the management and the government go along in the ongoing discourse. The actions of the core management of the university demonstrates that within the same university organisation, the employees' unions and the university management do not have equal access to discursive resources to influence the direction of communicative outcome. So, normative consensus and equal participation of social actors in the communicative event in the public sphere is undermined (Habermas, 1989). Ultimately, the three actors, government, core university managers and employees or the representatives of workers' unions are not equally endowed with needed discursive resources to participate equally in the communicative event or discourse. It is evident that the core management of the university will align with government in the current public university management discourse for which there are resistances and contestations (Foucault, 2007) from the employees. Consequently, an unfettered political control of public university institutions in Ghana has ramifications for staff and the university organisations itself including limited academic freedom and global competitiveness of Ghana's higher education.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that the discursive practices and actions of the government institutions towards the migration of the university (SDD-UBIDS) staff onto the government mechanized payroll, IPPD2 technology embeds the controversial new public university bill that is yet to be passed into law. Thus, the actions of the government institutions are in line with the discursive practices of the new PUB's strategy to progressively control public universities. Also, the actions of the government institutions in relation to the new PUB and the implementation of the 'new' management system, if not adequately monitored and collectively scrutinised will gradually curtail academic freedom and the competitiveness of Ghana's public universities regionally and globally. Thus, from a critical discourse perspective, this article contributes to improve knowledge and understanding of tertiary education regulation, especially, public universities' management discourse, and the nature of academic freedom in Ghana. At the policy level, this study informs and highlights discursive struggles in Ghana's higher education policy making and implementation. Practically, the findings point to and call for an inclusive and pluralistic planning and management of public universities in Ghana to ensure academic freedom and global competitiveness. However, the study has some limitations for pragmatic reasons.

First, the topic of this study is politically sensitive, so it was difficult gathering information through interviews with some key officials, consequently, the researcher was successful in getting only one key official of the university to respond to an interview request, and he/she was subsequently interviewed. However, the above limitation was mitigated by resorting to existing textual data realised in the form of letters from mediated interactions between actors in the ongoing discourse. Second, the actions and practices of university employees, officials, and that of key government institutions towards one public university organisation (SDD-UBIDS) out of the fifteen public universities was purposefully chosen to afford the researcher the opportunity to participate in the activities of the university workers' unions as the discourse unfolds and materialises forcefully in context. Certainly, SDD-UBIDS is one of the few public universities in the category of 'new' public universities, which are targets of the key government institutions and the IPPD2 technology mentioned above. However, it is possible that a comprehensive study of the actions and practices of employees of all the public universities could yield more interesting findings, thus future research can consider expanding the sample size to involve all public universities and the key government institutions and university management officials in public universities in Ghana.



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