

Empowering Future Leaders: Exploring Malaysian Undergraduates' Views on Learning Leadership Discourse

Nor Azikin Mohd Omar¹, Nur Salina Ismail¹, Junaidah Abdul Rahman² and Nor Jijidiana Azmi¹

¹Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia, ²Faculty of General Studies and Advanced Education, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia

Email: norazikin@unisza.edu.my

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v15-i10/26571>

Published Date: 07 October 2025

Abstract

The role of discourse in shaping how people see the world and in gaining authority has long been recognised. Using a language-focused approach that pays attention to interaction and context, many fields now look at leadership by asking how it actually happens and how it adds to the dynamics of the leadership process by critically examining authentic texts in authentic settings. Despite this, the recognition of language's role in shaping organisational realities has not been fully carried over into education, nor widely applied in research outside linguistically focused fields. This article examines students' awareness of leadership discourse and their experiences of engaging with it in the classroom. The participants are undergraduates at a Malaysian university who were introduced to leadership discourse as part of their Discourse Analysis course. Students were asked to analyse leadership through linguistic features of their choice, such as politeness, speech acts (including requests, apologies, and directives), or gendered language. The findings indicate that students perceive leadership discourse as highly relevant to both their everyday and professional lives. This article continues to promote a socially conscious approach to language and argues that future professionals will be better prepared to recognise underlying power dynamics and to practise leadership with greater reflection, critical awareness, and ethical responsibility.

Keywords: Leadership, Leadership Discourse, Discursive Leadership, Organisational Skills, Language Awareness

Introduction

Leadership discourse has gained increasing attention among researchers, as reflected in various journals and studies (Holmes, 2017; Clifton, 2019, Schnurr and Mohd Omar, 2021; Darics 2022; Mohd Omar and Habil, 2023; Mohd Omar et al., 2024). It focuses primarily on discourse in leadership contexts, particularly speeches and other forms of spoken

communication. Its significance lies in examining real-life scenarios in which global leaders employ discourse as part of their leadership enactment. However, the concept of leadership discourse remains relatively unfamiliar to many, including undergraduates. This may be attributed to the limited exposure to leadership from a discourse perspective, as many university courses do not explicitly address the topic. For example, students studying leadership in management and business programmes are often not introduced to the concept of leadership discourse (Darics, 2022). Similarly, while students in language studies at local universities may take discourse analysis courses, the specific focus on leadership discourse is often minimal.

This lack of familiarity with leadership discourse is not confined to students but extends to the wider public. For example, leadership training conducted by Malaysian organisations such as Institut Aminuddin Baki (IAB) has, until recently, focused primarily on developing personal traits deemed suitable for leaders, with an emphasis on behavioural change theories. Singh (2019) notes that activities in the National Professional Qualification for Educational Leaders (NPQEL) at IAB are largely lecture-based, supplemented by quizzes and assignments assessing knowledge of leadership theories. Such an approach tends to prioritise peripheral aspects of leadership while overlooking its process-oriented nature. Similarly, on campuses across the United States, universities offer degrees in Leadership Studies, and due to the subject's interdisciplinary nature, 'leadership' is housed in various departments and programmes such as Educational Leadership, Organisational Leadership, Management Studies, Human Resources and Leadership Development, and Global Leadership (Gavino and Portugal, 2013; Goff, 2003; Kelly, 2014, Jackson and Parry, 2011). Leadership development also extends beyond the classroom through programmes, training sessions, and conferences. Nonetheless, in both contexts, these initiatives tend to overlook the role of discourse in the enactment of leadership. Instead, the emphasis remains on leadership theories, rather than on how discourse shapes leadership practice (Darics, 2022).

The emphasis on behavioural traits is not wrong, given that early definitions of leadership often framed it in terms of individual characteristics, behaviours, ranks, positions, the environments in which leadership is enacted, and followers' responses to leaders (Yukl, 1998). Smircich and Morgan (1982, p. 258) argue that a leader's effective characteristics are essential for achieving organisational goals. Similarly, Barrett and Davidson (2006, p. 9) define leadership as the ability to influence people to do things they would not otherwise do. These definitions highlight the mobilisation of a group or community to achieve a shared purpose (Schnurr and Schroeder, 2018). More recent perspectives, however, view leadership as a skill or process that any individual can develop through appropriate guidance and training, provided the individual has the necessary motivation.

Building on these traditional perspectives, more recent scholarship reconceptualises leadership as a process. Yukl (2012, p. 7) defines leadership as the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done, how it can be done effectively, and facilitating both individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. This definition highlights the dynamic nature of leadership, in which leaders provide direction through continuous communication with their subordinates. From a linguistic perspective, leadership can be examined through how leaders use language to construct meaning around the leadership process. As Taylor and Robichaud (2004) note, one cannot analyse "language

without reference to context, or context without reference to language” (p. 409), emphasising the importance of language in both practising and analysing leadership. An important implication of this is that language in use provides evidence of broader contextual phenomena. Despite the growth of scholarship in leadership discourse, there remains limited integration of these insights into leadership education and training, particularly in Malaysia. Accordingly, this study responds to the gap by examining how students perceive the value of leadership discourse.

As leaders spend much of their time in the workplace, effective communication in leadership language becomes essential. Similarly, as future leaders, youths need to be equipped with leadership language as one of the crucial life skills. One way to integrate this is through relevant courses and programmes, such as Discourse Analysis. Discourse Analysis refers to a course that trains students to examine spoken or written discourse, often in naturally occurring contexts. While it is typically offered to students majoring in language, linguistics, or communication, its scope need not be limited to these fields.

Having the privilege of teaching Discourse Analysis and holding a research interest in leadership discourse, we have had the opportunity to engage students in exploring and analysing leadership discourse. The participants in this study were Semester 6 undergraduates at a public university in Malaysia, enrolled in a Bachelor of English with Communication programme, majoring in language and linguistics with communication as a minor. The Discourse Analysis course, offered in the students’ second year, introduces them to the analysis of both spoken and written discourse in real-life situations. Prior to this course, students had completed modules such as Sociolinguistics and Introduction to Language and Linguistics, providing them with foundational experience in discourse analysis.

This study examines their perceptions of leadership discourse after at least two semesters of exposure to the concept through coursework and analysis activities. It aims to highlight the significance of familiarising future leaders with leadership discourse in order to build the requisite knowledge, strategies, and dispositions that constitute 21st-century competencies in contemporary leadership. This article draws on students’ experiences of analysing real-life texts from global leaders and is guided by the following research question:

What are the students’ perceptions regarding the importance of learning leadership discourse?

In this article, we conceptualise leadership as a social practice that extends beyond traditional notions of hierarchical (re)distribution of authority or the right to power, as often suggested by conventional indicators, or symbols of achievement. This study is novel in highlighting students’ perceptions of leadership discourse, an area that has received limited attention in existing scholarship, particularly in non-Western contexts. Its contribution lies in broadening the scope of leadership discourse research beyond political and organisational domains to the higher education setting. In so doing, the study advances discourse consciousness and reinforces the applied significance of leadership discourse within the social sciences.

The following sections provide an overview of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) and leadership studies in Malaysia, and the concept of discourse analysis, before presenting the methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion of the study.

Leadership Education in Malaysia

The Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) (Ministry of Education, 2013) serves as the central policy document guiding educational reform in the country, with a strong emphasis on benchmarking Malaysian student performance against international standards (Bush et al., 2018). It was developed to respond to global shifts in higher education, such as globalisation, student diversity, new funding models, accountability, and rapid technological change. In addressing these challenges, the MEB aligns with the broader aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015), particularly SDG 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education, and SDG 8, which emphasises equipping individuals with the skills necessary for employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship.

As Malaysia pursues the 2030 Agenda in alignment with the Malaysia MADANI framework, universities have increasingly been recognised as pivotal spaces for cultivating leadership (e.g., Bryman, 2007; Fullan & Scott, 2009; Middlehurst & Elton, 1992). Within this context, higher education institutions must acknowledge the importance of introducing leadership courses for undergraduates. Such courses, whether offered as stand-alone modules or embedded within broader programmes, are particularly valuable at the university level as they provide students with early exposure to the significance of leadership discourse. This, in turn, fosters the development of leadership skills that can be sustained across both personal and professional domains. Depending on the programme undertaken, leadership may be introduced through disciplines such as business and management, education, communication, and language studies.

While research on leadership is well established within discourse studies, its practical implementation in higher education remains limited. In many cases, naturally occurring texts are not analysed; instead, students are primarily introduced to leadership theories and behavioural traits (see discussion in the introduction on the IAB focus). As a result, undergraduates often lack sufficient language awareness and discourse consciousness in organisational practices (Darics, 2022). This observation is further supported by the systematic review conducted by Bush et al. (2018) on *School Leadership Theories and the Malaysia Education Blueprint*. Their review found that most leadership studies continue to focus on prescriptive approaches, situated mainly within the fields of leadership and management, and educational leadership. Consequently, the public often relies on these prescriptive theories, assuming they are the only legitimate way to learn leadership. This highlights that leadership studies remain highly prescriptive, with limited awareness of leadership discourse, and minimal exposure to it at the higher education level.

Even when the language of leadership is emphasised, many studies do not examine the social practice of leadership itself. Instead, they often rely on interviews to gather opinions about what constitutes good leadership. For example, Syed Syaharuddin and Harun (2022) investigated Gen-Z leaders' sensemaking of leadership and language use in a public secondary school through a qualitative study using focus groups and in-depth face-to-face interviews. While such methods are valuable for encouraging reflection on leadership

enactment and raising awareness of language use, they lack the authenticity and observing actual practices of leadership. This can create a discrepancy between what participants claim they do and what they actually do in real-life contexts. As the authors themselves acknowledged, the study was limited because it did not examine participants performing actual leadership acts in real-life settings.

Hence, leadership viewed through the lens of discourse analysis seeks to address this gap. As strong proponents of this approach, we aim to explore students' perceptions of learning leadership by exposing them to ways in which leadership can be observed and analysed as a social practice. Bringing this concept into play also allows for a reinterpretation of the educational process. Our intention is to reveal how the learning of leadership discourse influences and reframes our understanding of leadership. By raising students' awareness of language and discourse consciousness, this approach encourages a paradigmatic shift in recognising language awareness as a key soft skill (Darics, 2022).

Introduction to Discourse Analysis

The term *discourse* is used to refer to all forms of talk and text, including naturally occurring conversations, interviews, or any form of written text (Gill, 2000). Discourse analysis (henceforth DA), on the other hand, is the study of social life through the analysis of utterances, interactions, texts, and written materials for the purpose of uncovering both implicit and explicit meanings (Shaw & Bailey, 2009; Abd Rahim, 2018). It refers to a variety of approaches to the study of texts, which have developed from different theoretical traditions and diverse disciplines, such as sociology of science, media studies, technology studies and policy analysis (Gill, 2000).

Leadership can also be understood as a process rather than a fixed set of traits or positions (Fairhurst, 2007; Pomeratz & Denvir, 2007; Larsson & Lundholm, 2010; Yukl, 2013). Fairhurst (2007) and Clifton (2012) frame it as the management of meaning and influence distributed among members, while Yukl (2013, p. 23) describes it as influencing others to agree on what needs to be done, how to do it effectively, and facilitating collective efforts toward shared goals. Both perspectives highlight leadership as a dynamic, communicative process in which leaders and followers mutually guide each other.

From a discourse analytical perspective, Holmes et al. (2011, p. 7) view leadership as a transformational process that draws on diverse discursive strategies to integrate effective communication into everyday workplace interactions. In this view, leadership discourse encompasses not only vision-based tasks but also interpersonal communication skills. It shifts the emphasis from who performs leadership to how it is enacted in workplace practice.

To reiterate, in this study we adopt a discursive leadership perspective, emphasising a discourse analytical approach in which leadership is understood as a social practice. This perspective focuses on how leadership is enacted in interaction, rather than on the traits traditionally associated with (good) leadership.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design, with data collected via an online questionnaire administered to students at a Malaysian higher education institution. In Week

14 of their semester, students were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to capture their perspectives on learning leadership discourse and its personal significance. They were also asked to evaluate the learning activities associated with the task, including the poster presentation and the mini-project on analysing linguistic aspects of their selected global leaders. The questionnaire comprised five sections, excluding the consent form and demographic information. The sections addressed the following areas:

Table 1

Components in the questionnaire

<i>Component</i>	
Section A	Familiarity with leadership and discourse analysis
Section B	Perspectives on learning leadership discourse
Section C	Poster presentation research experience

The focus of this research is mainly on Sections A and B, with an emphasis on students' readiness with the concepts of leadership and discourse analysis, as well as their perceptions of the importance of learning leadership discourse. At the end of the questionnaire, students were invited to provide additional comments on the relevance of discourse analysis to their everyday lives and on how their understanding of leadership discourse could be further enhanced.

Participants

The participants of this study were 89 students of Semester 6 who enrolled in a Language and Communication major degree programme. They were required to take Discourse Analysis as a core subject. The majority were female and between 23 and 25 years old. These participants had previously completed a Sociolinguistics course in Semester 3, where they undertook an assignment analysing leadership language. In Semester 6, the assignment was more theoretically grounded. One of the assignments was a mini-project that enabled students to apply relevant theoretical frameworks to the analysis of leadership discourse. The task was assigned in Week 3, and students were required to begin presenting their projects as poster presentations in Week 7. Students worked in groups of four to five and were tasked with selecting a leader, either local or international, to analyse. The analysis focused on a specific discourse-related topic, such as speech acts or politeness, with an emphasis on linking the findings to leadership.

Following the instructions, students were asked to collect real-life examples from a leader of their choice. The figures they selected included Michelle Obama, Syed Saddiq, Anwar Ibrahim, John F. Kennedy, Jacinda Ardern, and Queen Elizabeth, among others. Each group was required to source at least two speeches by their chosen leader, which could be in video (e.g., podcast, YouTube) or written form. Broadening ideological perspectives and including diverse examples is critical to ensure that the materials are varied and relatable to all students. According to Jones et al. (2016), their Culturally Relevant Leadership Learning (CRL) model emphasises that increased diversity enhances the representation of culturally diverse students, which, in turn, broadens the range of ideas and perspectives and exposes all students to a wider variety of viewpoints (p. 17). While the majority of participants are monoethnic, choosing global leaders from various countries promotes inclusivity and introduces students to different styles of speech. By introducing key concepts of discourse

analysis with a focus on leadership, the course offers an opportunity to explore students' views on the value of studying leadership from a discourse perspective.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 25.0. Descriptive statistics (percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (independent samples t-test) were employed. For ease of analysis, responses from the original 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) were recorded into three categories: Disagree, Neutral, and Agree. Composite scores were then computed to determine the overall perceptions of learning leadership discourse.

Perceptions towards online learning are measured based on three components:

1. Students' familiarity with leadership and discourse analysis (3 items)
2. Perspectives on Learning Leadership Discourse (11 items)

Based on the categories classified by Oxford (1990), we have examined the level of the students' readiness and their perceptions on learning leadership discourse. The categories are determined based on the mean scores as depicted in Table 2. Analysis was also performed based on items in each category

Table 2

Classification of level of perception (adapted from Oxford, 1990)

<i>Level of perception</i>	<i>Mean score range</i>
Negative	1-2.33
Moderate	2.34-3.67
Positive	3.68-5.00

Table 3 presents the results for both individual and overall components. Based on the findings, students' familiarity with leadership discourse scored a mean of 3.98, which falls within the moderately high level. In contrast, their perspectives on learning leadership discourse achieved a higher mean score of 4.33, indicating a high level. When combining both components (*students' familiarity with leadership discourse and their perspectives on learning it*), the overall mean score is 4.16, which falls within the *high* level. This suggests that, in general, students hold positive perceptions about learning leadership discourse. They not only recognise the relevance of discourse analysis concepts to leadership but also view its application as meaningful for academic, professional, and real-life contexts.

Table 3

Results for both individual and overall components

<i>Component</i>	<i>No of items</i>	<i>Mean scores</i>	<i>Level</i>
Students' familiarity with Leadership Discourse	3	3.98	Moderately high
Perspectives on learning leadership discourse	7	4.33	High
Overall perceptions	10	4.16	High

When combined, the overall mean score is 4.16, which falls within the high level. This demonstrates that, in general, students hold positive perceptions of leadership discourse.

They not only recognize its relevance but also view it as a valuable resource for both personal and academic growth. However, the slightly lower mean for familiarity compared to perspectives highlights the need for more targeted instruction and practice to strengthen their foundational understanding and critical engagement with the concept.

Table 4 presents results for the component of students' familiarity with leadership discourse, by items. Based on the table, perceptions for two of the three components fall within a highly positive range.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics of students' familiarity with the concept of leadership and discourse analysis

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
V4	89	2	5	4.03	.698
V5	89	3	7	5.31	1.029
V6	89	3	5	4.11	.630

Table 4 presents the descriptive results for students' familiarity and perceptions regarding leadership discourse. The analysis shows that students reported a moderately high level of familiarity with the concept of discourse analysis (V4, M = 4.03, SD = 0.698). Their interest in analysing the linguistic styles of global leaders scored the highest (V5, M = 5.31, SD = 1.029), indicating a high level of engagement and curiosity in applying discourse analysis to real-world leadership contexts. Meanwhile, students also acknowledged the importance of such analysis (V6, M = 4.11, SD = 0.630). This reflects a shared understanding of its relevance to leadership discourse.

Overall, these findings suggest that while students are still developing technical and conceptual familiarity with discourse analysis, their high levels of interest and recognition of its importance create strong potential for deeper engagement and application in future learning. These scores collectively fall between moderately high and high levels, thus reinforcing that leadership discourse is perceived as both meaningful and useful for academic and practical contexts.

	<i>Statements</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
V7	Learning leadership discourse helps me better understand effective communication strategies.	89	3	5	4.40	.578
V8	Learning leadership discourse through analysing global leaders' linguistic styles could be a useful approach for students.	89	3	5	4.38	.594
V9	Learning leadership discourse is relevant to effectively leading	89	3	5	4.30	.664

	university projects.	group					
V10	Learning discourse is important for effectively leading in professional workplace settings.	leadership	89	3	5	4.35	.605
V11	The study of global leaders' linguistic styles can be applied effectively in real-life scenarios such as group work or presentations.	linguistic	89	3	5	4.38	.612
V13	The study of leadership discourse has the potential to be useful for developing my leadership skills.	leadership	89	2	5	4.25	.695
V14	Analysing speeches, interviews, or social media posts can be an effective way to learn leadership discourse.	speeches, interviews, or social media posts	89	2	5	4.25	.679

Findings for component perspectives on learning leadership discourse, which assesses the perceived importance of learning leadership discourse, are presented in Table 5. This component comprises seven items that measure how students view the relevance, usefulness, and real-life applicability of learning leadership discourse, particularly through the analysis of global leaders' linguistic styles.

The mean scores for all items in this component are relatively high, ranging from $M = 4.25$ to $M = 4.40$ on a 5-point Likert scale, suggesting that students generally agree on the significance of this area. The item with the highest mean score is *"Learning leadership discourse helps me better understand effective communication strategies"* ($M = 4.40$, $SD = .578$), reflecting strong agreement on the immediate benefits of such learning for communication competence.

Similarly, high agreement is recorded for items highlighting the practical application of leadership discourse. For example, *"Learning leadership discourse through analysing global leaders' linguistic styles could be a useful approach for students"* ($M = 4.38$), and *"The study of global leaders' linguistic styles can be applied effectively in real-life scenarios such as group work or presentations"* ($M = 4.38$). These results indicate that students value leadership discourse not only as a theoretical construct but also as a useful tool for real-life communication and leadership practice.

Items focusing on *leadership development and learning methods*, such as *"The study of leadership discourse has the potential to be useful for developing my leadership skills"* ($M = 4.25$) and *"Analysing speeches, interviews, or social media posts can be an effective way to learn leadership discourse"* ($M = 4.25$), also received favorable ratings, though with slightly

more variation ($SD = .695$ and $SD = .679$ respectively). This suggests that while students agree with the value of these approaches, perceptions may vary depending on different texts preferences or experience.

Overall, the findings reflect a *strong perceived importance* of integrating leadership discourse into learning, with consistent student agreement across all items. These results support the inclusion of leadership discourse in educational settings as a meaningful way to foster leadership-related communication skills.

Table 6 demonstrates the linguistic aspects that students had previously learned in their discourse analysis class. They were asked to rate which aspects they considered most important for learning and applicable to their daily lives.

Table 6

Linguistic aspects learned in discourse analysis class

<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Politeness strategies	65	73.0%
Grice Maxims	54	60.7%
Use of discourse markers	49	55.1%
Inclusive language	46	51.7%
Turn taking strategies	42	47.2%
Storytelling	25	28.1%
Repetition	17	19.1%
Speech acts	1	1.1%

Findings from Component 2 (perceptions on learning leadership discourse) are presented in Table 6. This component explores the specific aspects of leadership-related language use that students perceive as important for real-life application. Respondents were able to select more than one feature from a list of common discourse strategies relevant to leadership communication.

The analysis shows that politeness strategies emerged as the most frequently selected item, cited by **73%** of respondents. This finding suggests that students attach significant value to the role of respectful and considerate language in leadership contexts, where maintaining positive interpersonal relationships is seen as central. This is followed by Grice Maxims (61%) and the use of discourse markers (55%), both of which indicate a recognition of the importance of clarity, coherence, and relevance in communication.

Inclusive language was selected by 52% of respondents, reflecting growing awareness of the need for equitable and representative communication practices in leadership discourse. Turn-taking strategies (47%) were also considered important, indicating students' understanding of the dynamics of interactional balance in group or team settings.

While storytelling was identified by 28% of respondents, it appears to be seen as a supplementary strategy rather than a core soft skill. Similarly, repetition was selected by 19%, and speech acts received minimal attention (1%), suggesting that students may be less familiar with these terms or may perceive them as less directly applicable in real-world leadership settings.

Overall, these findings indicate that students prioritise discourse strategies that promote clarity, respect, inclusivity, and effective interaction. This points to a practical orientation in students' understanding of leadership communication, and offers useful insights for embedding discourse-focused components in discourse analysis courses, or more broadly, in leadership development programmes.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results presented above, the respondents generally expressed positive perceptions of learning leadership discourse. These findings are particularly encouraging, as the majority of students recognised its relevance for real-life applications. This study reaffirms that leadership should be understood more broadly. By viewing leadership as enacted *through and in* discourse and as a social practice, students become more aware that their everyday behaviours may contribute to leadership activities. They no longer regard leadership behaviours as innate but understand them as practices developed and performed through language.

Analysing real-life leadership examples further deepened this awareness. Students gained insights into how global leaders use language to enact leadership activities, such as demonstrating politeness, including or excluding audience members, and employing turn-taking strategies that reflect their leadership styles. With greater awareness, they began to recognise how such strategies could be applied in real life. When engaging with issues close to their lives, such as campus governance or community initiatives, students were able to link leadership discourse to concrete actions. In doing so, they came to see leadership not as a function of hierarchical roles but as something constructed *in* and *through* language. This helped them to apply leadership more effectively, developing not only stronger communication skills but also greater discourse consciousness. Hence, students now observed that leadership behaviours are not always grand but are often found in mundane practices, such as inclusive language or turn-taking. They came to appreciate that leadership lies not simply in *what* is done but in *how* it is enacted through language. These observations encouraged students to view leadership as accessible and within their reach. In this sense, leadership was no longer perceived as foreign, intimidating, or irrelevant, but as a skill that is familiar, valuable, and capable of being sustained over time.

This study also examined which aspects of leadership discourse students found most useful. Overall, they valued discourse strategies that supported interactional effectiveness, such as politeness, clarity, and inclusive language. For example, when analysing studies of global leaders applying Grice's Maxims in their speeches, students observed that adherence to these principles helped maintain cooperative, clear, and meaningful interaction. However, they also recognised that violating a maxim does not necessarily undermine credibility or authority; rather, depending on the context, leaders may intentionally depart from it to suit communicative needs. These linguistic strategies can therefore serve as supplementary tools alongside broader theories of management and leadership, such as authentic leadership or behavioural leadership theories.

Given that awareness of this area, particularly within the Malaysian context, remains limited, the introduction of such a course is expected to enhance students' understanding of leadership from a discourse perspective and highlight the central role of language in

leadership enactment. Previous studies (Holmes & Marra, 2011; Schnurr & Mohd Omar, 2021) similarly highlight that leaders spend much of their time communicating, and that leadership activities are enacted by individuals at all levels, regardless of formal position. It is therefore essential to identify leadership language and to equip students with the skills to use it effectively. This aligns with the broader goal of embedding SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 8 (skills for sustainable economic growth) within higher education curricula, ensuring that discourse-focused courses prepare future leaders with the linguistic resources required to enact leadership across real-world contexts. As stipulated by Darics (2022), the introduction of a socially conscious approach to language will empower future generations of professionals to question the taken-for-granted and enable them to develop a self-reflexive, critical and hopefully more ethical organisational practice.

While these findings are encouraging, positive perceptions do not automatically translate into leadership practice beyond the classroom. As this study is situated in a specific context, the findings may not be fully generalisable. Nonetheless, they are significant given that leadership studies remain largely prescriptive and trait-focused (Bush et al., 2018), yet these results suggest that undergraduates are receptive to discourse-oriented approaches. This raises important questions about how far higher education is prepared to move beyond traditional models and integrate discourse perspectives into leadership curricula. Future research should examine whether such awareness develops into sustained discourse consciousness, and how discourse-focused leadership learning can be applied across different disciplines and classroom contexts, particularly those outside language and linguistics.

References

- Bryman, A. (2007). Effective leadership in higher education: A literature review. *Studies in Higher Education*, 32(6), 693–710. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070701685114>
- Bush, T., Abdul Hamid, S., Ng, A. Y. M., & Kaparou, M. (2018). School leadership theories and the Malaysia education blueprint: Findings from a systematic literature review. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 32(7), 1245–1265. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-06-2017-0158>
- Clifton, J. (2019). Using conversation analysis for organisational research: A case study of leadership-in-action. *Communication Research and Practice*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2019.1629756>
- Darics, E. (2022). Language awareness in business and the professions. In E. Darics (Ed.), *Language awareness in business and the professions* (pp. 3–18). Cambridge University Press.
- Fairhurst, G. T. (2007). *Discursive leadership: In conversation with leadership psychology*. Sage Publications.
- Fetzer, A. (2011). Here is the difference, here is the passion, here is the chance to be part of great change. In *Power, discourse and change in leadership* (pp. xx–xx). <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.209.08fet>
- Fink, S. (2013). *Crisis communications: The definitive guide to managing the message*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Fullan, M., & Scott, G. (2009). *Turnaround leadership for higher education*. Jossey-Bass/Wiley.
- Gill, R. (2008). *Discourse analysis: Text, narrative and representation*. Open University Press.

- Gavino, J., & Portugal, E. (2013). Leadership framework: A preliminary qualitative research using the critical incident method. *World Review of Business Research*, 3(4), 40–52.
- Holmes, J. (2017). Leadership and change management: Examining gender, cultural and 'hero leader' stereotypes. In C. Ilie & S. Schnurr (Eds.), *Challenging leadership stereotypes through discourse, power, management and gender* (pp. 15–44). Springer.
- Holmes, J., Marra, M., & Vine, B. (2011). *Leadership, discourse and ethnicity*. Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, B., & Parry, K. (2011). *A very short, fairly interesting and reasonably cheap book about studying leadership*. Sage.
- Jones, T. B., Guthrie, K. L., & Osteen, L. (2016). Critical domains of culturally relevant leadership learning: A call to transform leadership programs. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 152, 9–21. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20205>
- Kelly, S. (2014). Towards a negative ontology of leadership. *Human Relations*, 67(8), 905–922.
- Larsson, M., & Lundholm, S. (2010). Leadership as work-embedded influence: A micro-discursive analysis of an everyday interaction in a bank. *Leadership*, 6(2), 159–184.
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2013). *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025*. <https://www.pmo.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Malaysia-Education-Blueprint-2013-2025.pdf>
- Middlehurst, R., & Elton, L. (1992). Leadership and management in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 17(2), 251–264.
- Mohd Omar, N. A., & Habil, H. (2023). Constructions of solidarity and leadership of powerful global leaders in post-pandemic recovery speeches. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 13(6), 39–52. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v13n6p39>
- Mohd Omar, N. A., Ku Ruslin, K. A. A., Ismail, N., Abdul Rahman, J., & Wahab, Z. (2024). A corpus-based analysis of ministerial speeches during natural crises. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(12), 241–257. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i12/23948>
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Heinle & Heinle.
- Pomerantz, A., & Denvir, P. (2007). Enacting the institutional role of chairperson in upper management meetings: The interactional realization of provisional authority. In F. Cooren (Ed.), *Interacting and organizing: Analyses of a management meeting* (pp. 31–51). Taylor & Francis/Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Schnurr, S., & Mohd Omar, N. A. (2021). Leadership and humour at work: Using interactional sociolinguistics to explore the role of gender. In J. Angouri & J. Baxter (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language, gender, and sexuality* (pp. 15–xx). Routledge.
- Schnurr, S., & Schroeder, A. (2018). A critical reflection of current trends in discourse-analytical research on leadership across disciplines: A call for a more engaging dialogue. *Leadership*, 0(0), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/xxxxxx>
- Singh, G. S. B. (2019). Restructuring the national professional qualification for educational leaders (NPQEL) in Malaysia: A summary report. *International Online Journal of Educational Leadership*, 3(2), 4–21.
- Smircich, L., & Morgan, G. (1982). Leadership: The management of meaning. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 18(3), 257–273.

- Syed Shaharuddin, S. S., & Harun, M. (2022). Making sense of leadership and language styles of student leaders in a Malaysian public secondary school. *Issues in Language Studies*, 11(2), 81–97. <https://doi.org/10.33736/ils.4377.2022>
- Taylor, J. R., & Robichaud, D. (2004). Finding the organization in the communication: Discourse as action and sensemaking. *Organization*, 11(3), 395–413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508404041999>
- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
- Yukl, G. (1998). *Leadership in organizations* (5th ed.). Prentice Hall.
- Yukl, G. (2012). Effective leadership behavior: What we know and what questions need more attention. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 26(1), 66–85. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2012.0088>
- Yukl, G. (2013). *Leadership in organizations* (Global ed., 8th ed.). Pearson.