



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***SPEECH ACTS, STRATEGIES AND LEADERSHIP VALUES IN  
OBAMA'S APOLOGY DISCOURSE***

**SUSANNA BITHIAH VARMA A/P RAJA RAVI VARMA**

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By

**SUSANNA BITHIAH VARMA A/P RAJA RAVI VARMA**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies,  
Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts**

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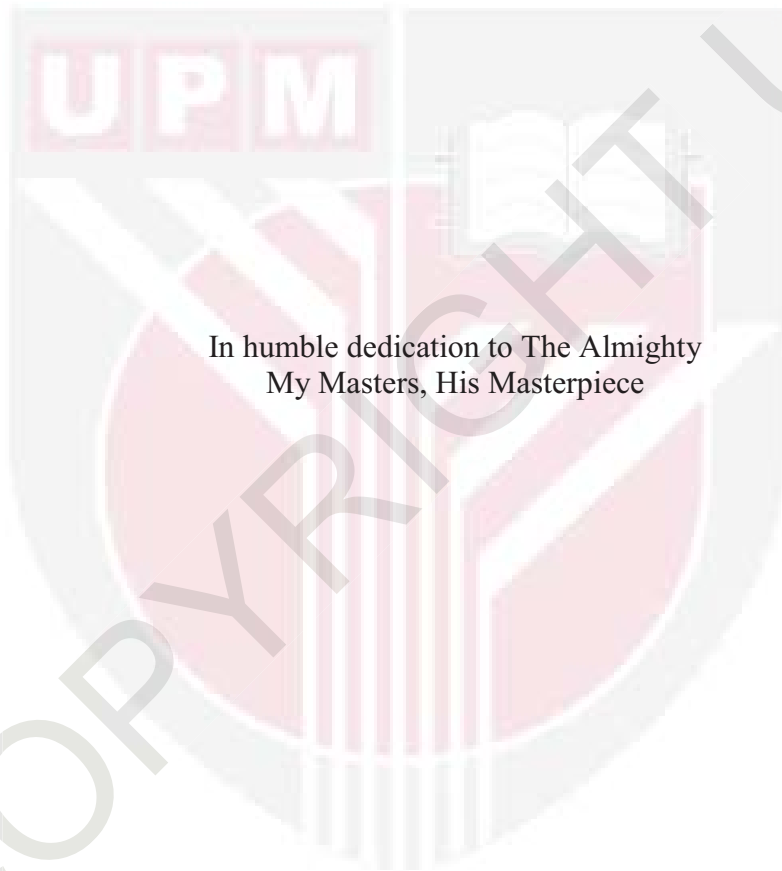
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## DEDICATION

In humble dedication to The Almighty  
My Masters, His Masterpiece



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts

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**SUSANNA BITHIAH VARMA A/P RAJA RAVI VARMA**

**March 2018**

**Chairman : Associate Professor Shamala Paramasivam, PhD**  
**Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication**

Much of the research on leadership has focused on gaining an understanding of what constitutes effective leadership. These research, however, approach leadership from the aspect of organisation and management focusing on performance of leaders mainly on traits and behaviours of effective leaders. Although discourse has been long acknowledged as a crucial aspect of leadership performance, only few studies in recent years have begun to examine leadership from the perspective of discourse. These research suggest an intricate relationship between language and leadership. The present study addresses this gap in its aims to explore how leadership is displayed linguistically through the discourse of apology. The study analyses leadership apologies in order to gain insights into effective leadership performance from the perspective of apologising as an act. Habitually, leaders seldom apologize. However, a growing body of literature suggests that leaders are not only vulnerable to making mistakes, but they maybe more prone to make mistakes because of the complexity of their position. In fact, one displays the maturity of leadership by being enough of a leader to own up to one's mistakes and apologize. Apology is, in fact, a leadership behavior and practice. This study focuses on Barack Obama as a politician and examines his apology discourse for leadership qualities. The study examines the speech acts and apology strategies that are used to construct his apologies, and the leadership values that emerge. The study relies on Speech Act theory (Searle, 1969) and Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The research design is qualitative and the data was collected through purposive sampling. Two apologies of Obama were obtained from electronic websites based on their availability of text and extensive news coverage for contextual information to assist in the understanding of the case study of each apology. The study employed pragmatics and positive discourse analysis as approaches to discourse analysis. Suitable frameworks of analysis were used, mainly Searle's (1969) framework for illocutionary speech acts, Murphy's (2014) framework for apology, Fairclough's (1995) and Halliday and Hassan's (1976)

techniques for lexical analysis to establish leadership values. The findings revealed that the use of speech acts and strategies varied and were based on the intensity of the crisis in both apologies. The findings also found 'dual' speech acts which are a combination of two speech acts such as 'representative declarative' and 'representative commissive'. The new finding to the apology strategies were the emergence of two other strategies; 'To sympathize/recognize victim's affliction' and 'To appreciate/comfort/conciliatory expression'. Both texts had an array of values birthed out from different apology situations through the speech acts and strategies. Among the values found were responsibility, determination and dedication to duty, trustworthiness and truthfulness, regretful, and appreciative of the victim's service/sacrifice. The study determined the leadership styles of Obama through his use of speech acts, strategies and leadership values. The findings showed that both transactional and transformational were styles that helped Obama in performing the apology. The study then concluded that leadership should be versatile for a leader to be able to perform efficiently in crucial situations. It is important for a leader to have the ability to blend acts and strategies to display good values to perform the speech act of apology well. A leader should have the awareness and knowledge on how to apologize effectively because in doing so, they will be able to bind themselves well in good rapport with their followers which creates unity in the relationship. The significance of the study can be viewed in the potential to reframe apology as an empowering and favorable act that can positively impact leaders' image rather than an act that is viewed as taboo or ineffective for leadership.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sastera

## **TUTURAN LAKUAN, STRATEGI DAN NILAI KEPIMPINAN DALAM WACANA KEMAAAFAN OBAMA**

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Banyak penyelidikan terhadap kepimpinan berfokus kepada penambahan pemahaman mengenai perkara yang membentuk kepimpinan yang efektif. Penyelidikan tersebut, walau bagaimanapun, mendekati kepimpinan dari aspek organisasi dan pengurusan yang memfokuskan prestasi pemimpin, terutamanya mengenai trait dan tingkah laku pemimpin yang efektif. Walaupun wacana telah lama diiktiraf sebagai suatu aspek prestasi kepimpinan yang penting, hanya sedikit kajian kini telah mula meneliti aspek kepimpinan dari perspektif wacana. Penyelidikan tersebut memperlihatkan hubungan yang rumit antara bahasa dan kepimpinan. Kajian ini yang mengutarakan jurang tersebut bertujuan untuk meneroka bagaimana kepimpinan dipamerkan secara linguistik melalui wacana kemaafan. Kajian ini menganalisis kemaafan kepimpinan supaya dapat menambah penanggapan terhadap wujud prestasi kepimpinan yang efektif dari perspektif memberi kemaafan sebagai suatu lakuan. Secara semula jadi, pemimpin jarang memohon maaf. Walau bagaimanapun, sejumlah besar literatur memperlihatkan bahawa pemimpin bukan sahaja mudah rentan kepada membuat kesilapan, malah mereka juga lebih terdedah kepada melakukan kesilapan kerana kekompleksan kedudukan mereka. Pada dasarnya, seseorang memperlihatkan kematangan kepimpinan dengan menjadi seseorang pemimpin yang dapat mengakui kesilapan dan memohon kemaafan. Kemaafan sebenarnya ialah suatu tingkah laku dan amalan kepimpinan. Kajian ini memfokuskan Barack Obama sebagai seorang ahli politik dan meneliti wacana kemaafan beliau sebagai kualiti kepimpinan. Kajian ini meneliti tuturan lakuan dan strategi kemaafan yang digunakan untuk membentuk kemaafan beliau, dan nilai kepimpinan yang wujud. Kajian ini bergantung kepada Teori Tuturan Lakuan (Searle, 1969) dan Teori Bersebab (Strauss dan Corbin, 1990). Reka bentuk kajian ini ialah kualitatif dan data telah dikumpul melalui persampelan purposif. Dua kemaafan Obama telah diperoleh dari laman sesawang elektronik berdasarkan kesediaan teks dan liputan berita ekstensif bagi maklumat kontekstual dalam membantu pemahaman kajian kes bagi setiap kemaafan. Kajian ini

menggunakan analisis wacana pragmatik dan positif sebagai pendekatan analisis wacana. Kerangka analisis yang sesuai telah digunakan, terutamanya kerangka Searle (1969) bagi tuturan lakuan ilokusionari, kerangka kemaafan Murphy (2014), teknik analisis leksikal Fairclough (1995) dan Halliday dan Hassan (1976) bagi mendapatkan nilai kepimpinan. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa penggunaan tuturan lakuan dan strategi adalah pelbagai dan berdasarkan intensiti sesuatu krisis dalam kedua-dua kemaafan. Dapatan juga mendapati 'dual' tuturan lakuan yang merupakan kombinasi dua tuturan lakuan, iaitu '*representative declarative*' dan '*representative commissive*'. Dapatan baharu tersebut bagi strategi kemaafan merupakan kewujudan dua strategi lain, iaitu; '*To sympathize/recognize victim's affliction*' dan '*To appreciate/comfort/conciliatory expression*'. Kedua-dua teks mempunyai sejumlah nilai yang wujud daripada situasi kemaafan yang berbeza melalui tuturan lakuan dan strategi. Antara nilai yang didapati ialah tanggungjawab, keazaman dan dedikasi pada tugas, kebolehpercayaan dan kebenaran, kekesalan, dan penghargaan terhadap perkhidmatan/pengorbanan mangsa. Kajian ini meneliti stail kepimpinan Obama melalui penggunaan tuturan lakuan, strategi dan nilai kepimpinannya. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua transaksional dan transformasional merupakan stail yang membantu Obama dalam melaksanakan kemaafan. Kajian ini, oleh itu, menyimpulkan bahawa kepimpinan haruslah versatil bagi seseorang pemimpin supaya mereka dapat bertindak secara efisien dalam situasi yang penting. Penting bagi seseorang pemimpin supaya mempunyai kebolehan untuk mengadakan lakuan dan strategi bagi memperlihatkan nilai yang baik bagi melaksanakan tuturan lakuan kemaafan secara berkesan. Seseorang pemimpin harus mempunyai kesedaran dan pengetahuan mengenai cara memohon maaf secara efektif kerana dengan melakukannya, mereka akan dapat menjalin hubungan baik dengan pengikut mereka yang kemudiannya mewujudkan perpaduan dalam perhubungan. Kepentingan kajian ini dapat dilihat dari segi potensi untuk merangka semula kemaafan sebagai lakuan pemupukan dan disenangi yang secara positif dapat memberikan impak terhadap imej pemimpin dan bukan hanya sebagai suatu lakuan yang dilihat sebagai tabu atau tidak efektif bagi kepimpinan.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNN	Cable News Network
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
US	United States
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the introduction of the study. It begins with the background of the study, followed by the statement of the problem, theoretical framework, objectives and the research questions of the study. The chapter also introduces the concepts used in this study. The chapter then continues with the operational definitions, significance and the limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter closes with a summary of the chapter.

### 1.2 Background of study

Apologies are powerful and is of great importance in reuniting a divided community and nation. It makes amends for misunderstandings and strengthens relationships for both interpersonal and diplomatic reasons. Habitually, leaders seldom resort to the habit of apologizing. However, a growing body of literature suggests that leaders are not only vulnerable in making mistakes, but they are more likely inclined to make mistakes because of the complexity of their position as leaders (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). As a matter of fact, one displays the maturity of leadership by taking ownership as a leader to admit the mistake and apologize. Therefore, it is important that a political leader believes and practises the virtuous act of apology on his behalf as a frontrunner of the country.

Liu (2010: 233) pointed out that “mistakes and failures are weighed against not only the leader’s capabilities but also their character and moral integrity.” In this prospect, apologies are awarded as the chief of a moral act (Luke, 1997; Robinson, 2004) and even a form of healing (LeCouteur, 2001). Davis (2002: 171) supported this belief by recognising that “apologising can therefore be a lynchpin of moral growth,” which is crucial in the world today. According to Goffman (1971: 40), remedial apologies are compensatory actions that help to restore and maintain social equilibrium and harmony for “the apology allows people to go on their way, if not with satisfaction that matters are closed, then at least with the right to act as if they feel that matters are closed and that the ritual equilibrium has been restored.” Fraser (1981: 259) considers remedial apologies as reactions to offences such as a violation of social norms or a failing to fulfil a personal expectation. He regards the speech act of apology as an action performed by the offender to restore a relationship and to change an offensive act into an acceptable one.

From another perspective, Leech (1983: 124) asserts that as the speaker commits an offence that harms the hearer, an imbalance is created in their relationship. In the viewpoint of Leech (1983: 104), the deed of apologizing is a “convivial speech act, the purpose of which coincides with the social goal of maintaining harmony between the speaker and hearer.” Researchers agree that apologies have the effect of paying off a debt, thus compensating the victim for the harm done by the offence (Searle, 1969; Katz, 1977). By right, “an apology is called for when social norms have been violated, whether the offense is real or potential” (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983: 20). The act of apologizing obliges an utterance or action with the intention to set things right. Therefore, the function of the apology is for the speaker to restore the balance. In agreement, Holmes (1990: 159) defined an apology to be the reparation to the victim’s face-needs that the offender intends to take responsibility for the restoration of the social equilibrium between both parties.

However, Gill (2000: 24) states that apologies are tools for holding offenders to be accountable to the community, whereby they are expected to avoid violations to strengthen the community in the future. In addition, Lazare (2004: 23) defines the process in which the offender and victim experience the act of apology. According to him, “apology is an encounter between two parties in which one party, the offender, acknowledges responsibility for an offence or grievance and expresses remorse or regret to the other party, the aggrieved. Each party may be a person or a larger group such as a family, a business, an ethnic group, a race, or a nation. The apology may be private or public, written or verbal, and even at times, nonverbal.” From the viewpoint of apology as a form of communication, a bridge of reconciliation between the affected communities is then able to be built.

Goffman (1971:113) argues that “an apology is a gesture through which an individual split himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offense and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule.” Goffman (1971) reasoned that an apology is to distinguish the ‘bad-self’ who needs to apologize for a wrongdoing from the ‘good-self’. This notion was seconded by Schlenker (1980: 154), who illustrated that an individual apologizes to show that “the wrongdoing should not be considered a fair representation of what the individual is really like as a person.”

Much of the literature on apology has heavy influence of the Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1978) whereby the sole purpose of an apology is a compensation of face-threatening acts. ‘Face’ in this theory is a public expression of self-worth, whereby the apologizer in the act of apology loses ‘face’ to the public. Metts and Grohskopf (2003) mapped two types of facework. Preventive facework involves taking actions to avoid loss of face before it happens, while corrective face is concerned with efforts to restore face after it has been lost. However, the cause and effect of the media portrayals to the public results in the offender to lose face because of their actions. Public figures are often concerned of their ‘face’ which is their public image as the act of apologizing or not apologizing are both equally face-threatening. The former can be perceived as a humiliating act that decreases a leader’s

distinguished power, whereas the latter is perceived as breaching moral codes of apt behaviour when matters of social justice are at risk (Kampf, 2009). This is often the reason to why leaders rather not apologize to protect themselves than to face the consequences (Brubaker, 2015). A decision to apologize has potentially higher risk for a political figure than it would for a commoner. This is largely because society tends to associate errors with incompetence (Edmondson, 1996) rather than regarding them learning steps. Kellerman (2006) acknowledges that even the wisest of leaders face the complexity of knowing when and how to apologize for their mistakes.

### **1.3 Statement of problem**

Studying and analysing apologies warrants serious attention for many reasons. Apologies have the potential to unlock doors separating individuals and communities, laying the groundwork for beneficial associations in the present and future; relationships based on common ground and common interests (Edwards, 2010). Lazare (2004: 42) emphasized on this potential power when he stated “as the world becomes a global village, apologies are growing increasingly important on both national and international levels. In this international community, apologies will be vital to the peaceful resolution of conflicts.” Consequently, an apology performed at this level has significant changes both domestically and internationally by universal morality and ethics (Bagdonas, 2010). Therefore, an apology from a political leader is a hope that it will foster a welcoming communal bond and future relation.

The aim of this study is to investigate apologies as used by a leader. Being leaders, there is not much choices but to be socialized into the world of language, as it is language that governs our basic human relations as human beings (Grint, Jones & Holt, 2016). Although there is an abundant of research on leadership, studies on leadership from the linguistic perspective is insufficient in the literature despite language being acknowledged as an important component in leadership performance (Schnurr, 2009). Most of the research on leadership has been primarily focused on the aspect of understanding what constitutes effective leadership behaviour and performance in organisations and managements. However, it is necessary to realize that the relationship between language and leadership is also equally important because it is more than simply a supplementary aspect of leadership performance. According to Mayfield and Mayfield (2018: 19), “many leadership communication problems are not intentional, but a reflection of educational deficit which can be corrected” in the area of language and leadership. Although discourse has been long acknowledged as a crucial aspect of leadership performance, only in recent years have studies begun to examine leadership from the perspective of language use. Schurr (2009: 2), for instance, noted that “discourse is more than simply an ancillary aspect of leadership performance – it affects leaders’ effectiveness on various levels and it lies at the heart of the leadership process.” In fact, she said that “imagining leadership outside of language is all but impossible” (Schurr, 2009: 2). Mayfield and Mayfield (2018) also believed that leadership communication constraints can be lifted when leaders mindfully expand and enrich their linguistic ranges. Scholars have suggested that leadership is manifested linguistically through ‘dynamic performance’ in ways of



using language to co-construct meanings (Schnurr and Zayts, 2011: 40). However, in spite of this intricate relationship between leadership and language, there are very few studies which look at leadership performance from a linguistic perspective (Holmes, 2000; Mullany, 2007).

Therefore, there is a call for more research to approach the apologies of a leader from the linguistic angle of research. This study serves to fill in this gap of literature by not only adding to the literature of apology as a speech act, but also to apology as used by a leader from a linguistic approach. The leader chosen for this study is Barack Obama. Obama as the previous President of the United States performed many apologies during his reign in the political arena. This stands in contrast to Obama's third immediate predecessor, America's 41<sup>st</sup> President George W. H. Bush, who declined to apologize for the Americans' use of the atomic bomb against Japan in 1945 (Govier & Verwoerd, 2002). For Bush, his unwillingness was apparently a general principle: "*I will never apologize for the United States of America, I don't care what the facts are,*" he declared during the 1988 election campaign (Weisberg, 1998). Here, it is evident that the ideology of both Barack Obama and George W.H Bush about their role as president to America differs; the prior to promote social harmony and the latter to uphold the pride of the country and undeniably its arrogance as well. Hence, the dynamism of both leaders to this country differs in the perspective of leadership.

Among the most remarkable attitude that Obama has as a leader is the nature to not withhold an apology when one is needed to resolve a misunderstanding. For example, when Obama was a president-elect, he made a careless remark at his first post-election press conference. Asked about his meetings with former presidents, Obama said, "In terms of speaking to former presidents, I've spoken to all of them that are living." Immediately recognizing the sarcasm in that sentence, he added, "I didn't want to get into a Nancy Reagan thing about, you know doing any séances," referring to the former first lady's consultations with an astrologer (Battistella, 2014: 179). Obama subsequently called her to apologize for the insensitive remark that he made. A few months later, Obama also apologized for an offhand reference to the special needs group. Discussing his poor bowling score on The Tonight Show, he joked that "it was like the Special Olympics or something." Immediately after the show, Obama personally telephoned the chairman of the Special Olympics, Tim Shriver, to apologize for his insensitive joke (Battistella, 2014: 180).

Obama's habit of apologizing became a popular tease that it became the theme of Mitt Romney's unsuccessful presidential campaign (Obama's Apology Tour) and book biography (No Apology: The Case for American Greatness). The book was centred around Obama's diplomacy tour around the world apologizing for America. Among the countries that Obama apologized to were to the United Nations General Assembly at New York; apology to the Muslim World (interview with Al-Arabiya); apology to Muslims after Benghazi; apology for U.S. policy toward the Americas; apology to France and Europe; apology to the Summit of the Americas in Spain, Trinidad and Tobago; apology for Guantanamo in France and Washington; apology before the Turkish Parliament in Turkey and Cairo; apology at the G-20 Summit of World

Leaders in United Kingdom, apology for the War on Terror in Washington; apology for the mistakes of the CIA; apology to Poland; apology to Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom; apology to Afgan President Hamid Karzai; apology to Californian Attorney General Kamala Harris; apology to art history teacher; apology to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid; and apology to the American people and U.S. troops (Gardiner & Roach, 2009; Notaro, 2013)

Romney's biography book claims that "Never before in American history has its President gone before so many foreign audiences to apology for misdeeds. Obama has apologized for what he deems to be American arrogance, dismissiveness and derision; for dictating solutions, for acting unilaterally, and for acting without regard for others; for treating other countries as mere proxies, for unjustly interfering in the internal affairs of other nations and for feeding anti-Muslim sentiments; for committing torture, for dragging our feet on global warming and for selectively promoting democracy" (Holan, 2011:2). The Heritage and Foundation publishers called this habitual act as 'Obama's Top 10 Apologies: How the President has humiliated a superpower (America)'. This political framing suggests that for a president to apologize is to deny America's power and greatness. According to Maass (2018), President Obama was the first president who's not afraid to being perceived as weak by apologizing. This change of mentality and American culture led to President Obama winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009.

Being the first iconic black president of America, many studies has been centred on Obama, but not much on his apology speeches. It is the common practice that most political speeches and press statements are written by paid script writer's to be read by leaders. However, the case was not so with Obama. "Obama was not accustomed to using a speechwriter. From the time he was in state senate, he actually used to prepare texts, write remarks to himself, often in longhand on a yellow legal pad or on the back of scrapes of paper. He crafted most of his major speeches by himself, among them were *Dreams from My Father*, *The Audacity of Hope*, and his personal penned best-selling autobiography" (Berry & Gottheimer, 2010: xxv). Obama's chief speechwriters, Favreau and Gibbs, came into importance when the President had to attend to more pertaining issues and therefore had less time to draft his speech. Even then, "Obama would sit down with Favreau and dictate his thoughts. Favreau would take down the notes on his laptop, pen the first draft and then send to Obama for edits. Obama would usually toil on the speech late into the night" (Berry & Gottheimer, 2010: xxv). Whenever Obama was travelling, he would speak to his speechwriters on the phone. "In some cases, Obama would e-mail comments to the speechwriter from his Blackberry or send a document with tracked changes directly from his laptop. In short, Obama worked on his speeches until the last minute sometimes adding finishing touches on the draft only minutes before he delivered it" (Berry & Gottheimer, 2010: xxxi). Therefore, it is safe to deduce that Obama decides on the script of his speeches with the aid of his speechwriters. These speeches contain originality for they communicate the President's direct thoughts and emotions, which is worth analysing for its insight.

Reviewing a huge amount of literature that centres around Obama, it has been found that many research has been generated from different perspectives and subject matter. Many researchers have studied Obama's speeches countlessly throughout his political career for power and persuasion (Berry & Gottheimer, 2010; Shayegh & Nabifar, 2012), stereotyping and Afrocentric analysis (Plant, Devine, Cox, Columb, Miller, Goplen, & Peruche, 2009; Howard, 2011; Tope, Justin, Ryon, & Jonathan, 2014), critical discourse analysis (Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014; Stobbs, 2012; Wang, 2010), and strategic campaign messages (Sheckels, 2013; Kaid, Fernandes & Painter, 2011; Rowland, 2010; Morris & Johnson, 2011; Gaffey, 2014; Hart & Lind, 2010; Jenkins & Cos, 2010). However, there is a minimum account on Obama's apologies. There are limited studies that have come close to this subject: image repair discourse of Obama (Davis, 2009), Obama's leadership campaign speeches (Hargrove, 2009) and Obama's transformational leadership and communication (Hanson, 2014). Nevertheless, these studies were not centred in an apology context. Therefore, this warrants an investigation to study how Obama apologises as a political leader from a linguistic insight. This study also intends to fill in the gap of literature in Obama's apology discourse for leadership qualities in the light of his political career.

#### **1.4 Objectives and Research Questions**

This study aims to explore Obama's leadership qualities that are projected through his apology discourse. This research attempts to study the selected apologies through the lens of a pragmatic and thematic analysis. The analysis explores the speech acts and apology strategies that are used to construct the apology, and the leadership values that emerge from its construction.

The study addresses the following objectives:

1. To examine the speech acts that construct Obama's political apologies.
2. To analyse the strategies that constitute Obama's political apologies.
3. To explore the leadership values exemplified in Obama's political apologies.
4. To investigate the leadership style personified in Obama's political apologies.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the speech acts that shape Obama's political apologies?
2. What are the strategies that constitute Obama's political apologies?
3. What leadership values arise from Obama's political apologies?
4. How is leadership displayed through Obama's discourse of apology?



## **1.5 Approaches to Discourse Analysis**

Under the frame of discourse analysis, Wilson (1990: 15) states that when it comes to the language used by politicians, “the question that is interesting from the linguistic point of view is how they do it, not whether they should have done it or not.” This means that the research is interested in describing what happened, not in prescribing what should happen. Therefore, the study employs pragmatics and positive discourse analysis as approaches to discourse analysis.

### **1.5.1 Pragmatics**

The pragmatic aspect of this study begins with the speech act theory and continues gradually to the speech act of apology which comprises an array of strategies. Pragmatics, which is derived from the Greek word ‘Pragma’ means ‘act’. It is the nucleus of linguistic action that functions as a basis of communication that interlocutors adhere to as they interact in social contexts (Bublitz & Norrick, 2011). Pragmatics operates with the meaning in context which can be perceived from various perspectives of both the hearer and speaker. It is driven by the discipline that language is utilised more than mere words that constructs sentences; but it is however the meaning that can be interpreted from the words (Vaughan & Clancy, 2011). In this study, the cornerstone of pragmatics which is the speech act theory will be used as a theoretical foundation to analyse the meaning behind the speech acts that takes place.

### **1.5.2 Positive Discourse Analysis**

In discourse analysis, the notion of context is a key factor that determines the approaches to data analysis. Positive discourse analysis (PDA) is an approach that constructively and optimistically views a social context through a positive perspective. Deciding on a leader’s speech as a research data is expected to be a profitable goldmine in discourse analysis for its rich and diverse findings, especially from the perspective of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA primarily uncovers ideologically driven discrimination and deconstruction, with respect to gender, ethnicity, class, power and other related social variables (Martin, 2006). Nevertheless, as a new perspective for discourse analysis, J. R. Martin introduced positive discourse analysis (PDA) at an international seminar in Birmingham with his paper entitled Positive Discourse Analysis: Solidarity and Change. He claimed that the “object of linguistic analysis should not only contain unequal bad news, but also welcome peaceful good news” (Ting Su, 2016). The purpose of this approach was to suggest a complementary perspective on language and semiosis to gently emphasize the function of discourse construction in order to construct a harmonious and better world.

The development of discourse analysis from CDA to PDA is of great substance, which aids from being deconstructive to being constructive (Ting Su, 2016). Nonetheless, PDA is not an absolute denial of CDA in terms of its theoretical and analytical

methods, but a supplement and development to it (Ting Su, 2016). Zhu Yongsheng (2006) explains that PDA advocates a positive attitude to the solution of social contradictions and expects to build a harmonious community by discourse analysis. In a recent study, Yuan Lijuan and Zhang Faxiang (2011) conducted an analysis of Obama's speech on the end of combat mission in Iraq from the perspective of PDA. The findings proved that PDA can do better in advocating positive social ideology and improving the social life for it aims at the active construction and peaceful solution to the problems.

## **1.6 Theoretical framework**

Within pragmatics, speech act theory (Searle, 1969) is used and within positive discourse analysis, grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) is used to analyse the political apologies.

### **1.6.1 Speech Act Theory**

The pragmatic aspect of this study is based on Searle's (1969) speech act theory that helps to determine the pragmatic realization of Obama's apologetic utterances. Speech act is the action performed through utterances. The purpose of employing the speech act theory in this study is to unravel Obama's use of language to perform the apology. Developing on Austin's model, Searle (1969) presented his classification of speech acts which he introduced as illocutionary acts: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. He subcategorised each category of the illocutionary acts.

These aforementioned illocutionary acts will be used as part of the analytical framework to analyse the data. Searle stated that a 'sincerity condition' or rather, a 'psychological state' of the speaker is what differentiates these groups from each other. For example, the representatives represent the speaker's belief; the directives represent the speaker's desire; the commissives represent the speaker's intention; the expressives represent the speaker's emotions; and lastly the declaratives represent a new operational reality pronounced by the speaker. Yarahmadi and Olfati (2011: 2523) emphasize that in studying the five taxonomies of illocutionary speech act as presented by Searle (1969), "the ability to read between the lines and interpret the underlying meaning is an important skill to understand what people want to say." They emphasize on the vitality of this skill for it generates "efficient communication and makes our everyday life function more smoothly" (Yarahmadi & Olfati, 2011: 2523). The speech-act theory belongs to the field of pragmatics relating the ways in which words can be used not only to present information but also to carry out actions.

Part of the analytical framework that finds support in the speech act theory is apology strategies by Murphy (2014) (refer to Table 2.3). Narrowing down from general speech acts to apology as a speech act, the present study uses Murphy's (2014)

apology strategies as a guideline to identify the various formation that an apology can take form (refer to Table 2.3). The speech act theory (Searle, 1969) supports the use of Murphy's (2014) apology strategies as a framework to guide the analysis of apology strategies because of the notion of direct and indirect that was found in Murphy's strategies which consisted of three broad categories: an explicit (direct) expression of apology, conventional (indirect) apology formula, and non-conventional (indirect) apology strategy. Each of these broad categories have sub-strategies ranging from two to seven categories. Besides that, Murphy (2014: 39) also derived a proposed set of felicity conditions specifically to warrant the apology speech act (refer to Table 2.2) from Searle's generalised felicity conditions that applied for all speech acts. Both these similarities allowed Murphy's (2014) framework to be supported by the speech act theory (Searle, 1969).

### **1.6.2 Grounded Theory**

In order to study the leadership values contained in an apology, the study has to perform a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis is supported by Grounded Theory. Hence, within positive discourse analysis, the study employed grounded theory to perform a thematic analysis to elicit leadership values from the apology texts. Grounded theory was developed in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss. With its theoretical orientation based in sociology, grounded theory strives to understand and explain human behaviour through inductive reasoning processes (Elliott & Lazenbatt, 2005). Grounded theory is a research methodology that results in the production of a theory that explains patterns, trends, and relationships in the data. The phrase 'grounded theory' refers to theory that is developed inductively from a corpus of raw data. In the words of Gibbs (2010), grounded theory is the most common, widely used, and popular analytical technique in qualitative analysis. According to Bryant & Charmaz (2007), grounded theory has developed into the most cited qualitative research method in different disciplines of study.

In line with Charmaz (2008), 'emergence' is a fundamental property of grounded theory. Moreover, one of the pioneer authors of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967), regarded the role of emergence as a central nucleus in his work and viewed the "emergent categories of meaning as objective, general and abstract" (Charmaz, 2008: 158). Emergence is a progressive concept for it "presupposes a past, assumes the immediacy of the present, and implies a future" (Charmaz, 2008: 157). Grounded theory involves creative problem solving and imaginative interpretation. It prompts early analytic thinking and keeps researchers interacting with their data (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory begins with an inductive logic but moves into abductive reasoning as the researcher seeks to understand emergent empirical findings. Abductive reasoning allows intuitive interpretations of observations and creative ideas that might account for them (Reichert, 2007; Rosenthal, 2004). It is a form of logical inference which starts with an observation then seeks to find the simplest and most likely explanation.

Grounded theory is a method that allows emergent categories of meaning to be directly driven from raw data, which requires the researcher to gain intimate familiarity of the studied phenomenon. The researcher will be able to see a direct relationship between the data and the abstract categories, because its procedure requires the researcher to immerse themselves with the background of the case study, as if the researcher was present in it as the first person (further explained in subtopic 3.4.2 Stages of data coding). Grounded theory as method provides us with guidelines on how to identify categories, how to make links between categories and how to establish relationships between them. Categories in grounded theory emerge from the data, they are not mutually exclusive and they evolve throughout the research process. These categories of meaning are elicited through a series of coding phases. The coding process maintains its momentum by moving back and forth between the identification of similarities among and differences between emerging categories. Having identified a common feature that unites instances of a phenomenon, the researcher needs to refocus on differences within a category in order to be able to identify any emerging subcategories. Constant comparative analysis ensures that the researcher does not merely build up categories but also breaks them down again into smaller units of meaning. This way, the full complexity and diversity of the data can be recognized, and any homogenizing impulse can be counteracted. Ideally, the researcher continues data analysis until theoretical saturation has been achieved, that is, the coding is complete until no new categories can be identified, and until new instances of variation for existing categories have ceased to emerge. The smaller the unit of analysis, the more numerous the descriptive categories that emerge initially. Later stages of analysis will integrate a lot of these into higher-level analytical categories. Line-by-line analysis ensures that the analysis is truly grounded and that higher-level categories or theoretical formulations actually emerge from the data, rather than being imposed upon it.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a reliable method to encode qualitative information in analysing textual patterns of meaning for it is directly data-driven. Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2008) have only provided guidelines into executing the coding phase in grounded theory. Therefore, to conduct a thematic analysis in the coding process, the study relies on lexical analysis, specifically lexical repetition and meaning relations, as a device to uncover the underlying leadership principles and values which are important in organizing, orienting and shaping themes in discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Halliday & Hassan, 1976). Linguists affirm that lexical repetition of nouns and adjectives, meaning relations of synonymous and antonymous nouns, and adjectives are established cohesive tools in discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Halliday and Hassan, 1976).

However, although the grounded theory's ultimate goal at the end of the rigorous process is to develop a theory, the current study aims to only adopt this theory as part of its framework in order to facilitate a procedural method for data analysis. The study is not geared to build a theory based on the findings, but to draw a deduction of Obama's leadership in a context of apology based on the categories of values found. The reason to this is because the sample of data is too small to generate into a theory.



Besides that, for a theory to be generalized, it would be proper for multiple perspectives to be incorporated in the emerging theory. However, given that this study is conducted by a single researcher with limited time frame and data collection, using grounded theory's method as a coding framework is the best option. This is because coding is the core process in classic grounded theory methodology (Holton, 2010). Grounded theory is a methodology that involves multiple stages of coding refinement and interrelationships of categories of information (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Therefore, in order for the current study to perform a thematic analysis to elicit values through the coding process, the Grounded Theory methodology has to be employed in this study. In a doctoral study, Paramasivam (2010) also adapted grounded theory as an umbrella term to conduct a process of coding core themes in his data.

### **1.6.3 Political leadership style**

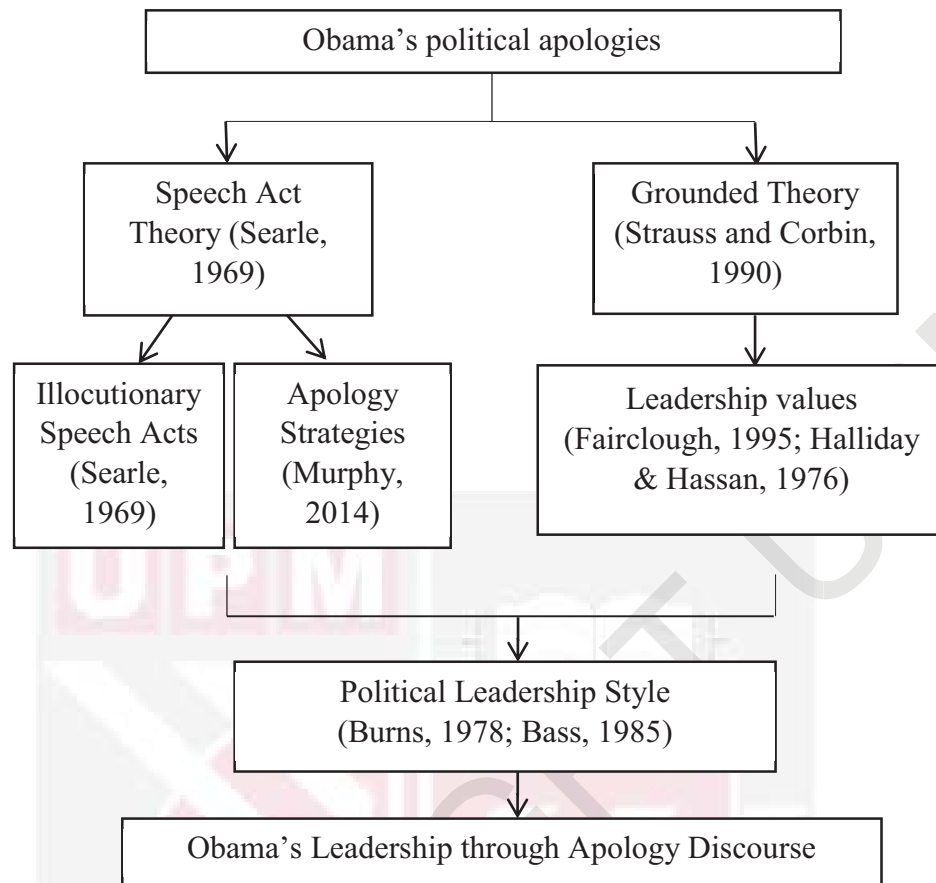
In the context of this study, Burns (1978) and Bass's (1985) understanding of political leadership is used to study Obama's leadership style through his discourse of apology. The rationale of the leadership theory enquiry in this study is to help analyse the fourth research question pertaining to Obama's leadership style. Burns's (1978) publication on political leadership made an influence in the development of leadership theory and the evolution of transformational leadership concept. He was the first to conceptualize leadership theory as a social process that involves both leaders and followers interacting and working together to achieve mutual common interests, whereby the significance of the followers in the leader-follower relationship is elevated. Burns defines leadership as "leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers" (Burns, 1978: 19). Burns (1978) describes two basic types of leadership: transactional and transformational. Both these leadership types constitute the most widely researched models of leadership. Transactional leadership occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things. Both parties acknowledge the power relationships of the other and together they continue to pursue their respective purposes. The people are not bound together by a mutually similar purpose.

In contrast, transforming leadership occurs when one or more person engages with one another and they increase their levels of motivation and morality. The power base mutually supports a common purpose. This latter form of leadership seeks to "raise the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of the leader and follower, thus it has a transforming effect on both" (Burns, 1978: 20). A transforming leader looks for "potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower" (Burns, 1978: 4). The result of this leadership is a mutual relationship that converts followers to leaders and leaders into moral agents (Stewart, 2006). "The concept of moral leadership is proposed as a means for leaders to take responsibility for their leadership and to aspire to satisfy the needs of the followers" (Stewart, 2006: 9). Burns affirms that leaders evolve from a structure of motivation,

values and goals. He contends that leadership is a moral undertaking and a response to human wants as they are expressed in human values.

Bass (1985, 1996) built upon Burns (1978) original idea of 'transforming leadership'. He empirically examined and revised the theory as 'transformational leadership'. The distinction that Bass (1985) made is that where Burns theory focuses more on social reform by moral elevation of follower's values and needs, Bass transformational leadership focuses more on attaining practical organizational objectives (Yukl, 2010). According to Bass (1985), transformational leaders are able to achieve three things: (1) make followers aware of the importance of task outcomes, (2) induce followers to transcend personal interest for the sake of the organization, and (3) move followers towards higher-order needs. Therefore, it is deduced that transformational leaders possess these four categories: (1) idealized influence, (2) individualized consideration, (3) inspirational motivation, and (4) intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1997). On the other hand, transactional leadership include contingent reward, management-by-exception, and laissez-faire/non-leadership behaviour. The transactional components deal with the basic needs of the organization, whereas the transformational practices encourage commitment and foster change. Bass (1996) believes that both these leadership models can be complementary and believes that an effective leader makes use of both types of leadership.

Figure 1.6 shows the concepts and theories to carry out the investigation on Obama's apology discourse.



**Figure 1.6 : Theoretical framework**

## **1.7 Operational definitions**

The following are definition of terms related to this research.

### **a) Political Apology**

Murphy (2014: 15) defines a political apology as “any apology produced by a political actor in public, where it is likely to be scrutinised by the press and the electorate. Thus, an apology made behind closed doors by a politician would not be classed as a political apology, but a politician repeating an apology publicly and perhaps drawing attention to the existence of a private apology makes it public.” Irrespective of the realm in which the offence took place that necessitated the apology (whether it was in a political actor’s private life or in his work as a politician), if an apology is made in the public sphere, Murphy (2014) regards this as a political apology.

## **b) Speech acts**

A speech act is concerned with the ways in which words can be used not only to present information but also to carry out actions. It is an act that speakers perform through utterances which is defined by the speaker's intention and the perlocutionary effect it has on the listener. According to Searle (1969), there are five constructs of illocutionary speech acts: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations.

## **c) Apology strategies**

Apology strategies are techniques used to convey an apology. Murphy's (2014) apology strategies will be used to analyse the apology texts in this study (refer to Table 2.3). There are altogether 13 strategies contained under three categories: a) Explicit expression of apology, b) Conventional (indirect) apology formula, and c) Non-conventional (indirect) apology strategy.

## **d) Leadership**

Leadership is understood as "leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of both leaders and followers" (Burns, 1978: 19).

## **e) Values**

Values are moral principles and standards of behaviour that one believes. It is one's judgement of what is important in life and about what is wrong and right (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018).

## **1.8 Significance of study**

Influential leaders in the political world require discernment and tact in their manner of apologising. This is because 'an apology communicates awareness and acceptance of moral responsibility for an offensive behaviour' which is important as a social action for a superpower to protect their career and maintain social harmony (Robinson, 2004: 293). Therefore in regards to this significance, the study will provide an insight to political leaders of second and third world countries to exhibit and example a first world class leader's apology style to deliver an impactful apology. This would be of a useful reference to leaders and raise the bar on the art of apology.

A well-meant apology can do immeasurable social good (Murphy, 2014). Apology is a remediable speech act which is cultured, respectful and a civil moral deed. Learning more about apologies will help readers to practice this highly-appraised act daily in necessary situations. This study will educate readers of the diverse apology strategies



that can be applicable in the context of both personal and professional relationships. Readers will be able to incorporate the knowledge that they gain from this awareness to enhance harmony and moral growth. This culture is recommendable and polite to enhance citizens with a first-class mentality. In this fast-paced time of modernism, the hunger for wealth and power has resulted in mankind becoming greedy, ignorant and selfish, losing humanness. Greed is infectious and contaminates the world (Carter, 2017). It alienates the individual from family, friends and God. It does not have a heart or concern for the damage it causes (Carter, 2017). Eventually, man develops an individualistic character with no concern for others. This form of behaviour can be avoided by offering others an apology when required to make amends. This idea supports Emerick's (2005) principle that views apology as a practice of moral repair. In the words of Dalai Lama, "The planet does not need more successful people. The planet desperately needs more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of all kinds" (Knapp, 2014).

Lastly, the study will contribute and enrich the literature of public and political apologies made across the world for further linguistic analysis on Obama's apology. Lakoff (2001) points out that the multifaceted nature of apologies means they are contributions to a larger discourse, thus open to analysis from various perspectives. According to Harrison (2018: viii), "since leadership happens everywhere, it is important for students, scholars, practitioners, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders to learn more on the concept of leadership." Due to minimal research on the apology discourse of Obama, this study may serve of a reference guide in generating more studies on his other apologies from various linguistic perspective.

### **1.9 Limitations of study**

This study has three limitations that should be addressed. Firstly, the sample size for analysis is small. Due to a limited scope of time for a Master's research, only two data were chosen for the study. Perhaps a bigger number of data could be analysed thoroughly for a PhD research which is warranted by a longer time scope. Another reason to the limited selection of speeches in this study is because apologies that were sensitive with religious/cultural sentiments were not considered for this research. An example of such apologies was the apology issued in the United Nations speech where Obama denounces the Anti-Islam film "Innocence of Muslims" and also the apology issued to Afghan President Hamid Karzai over the burned copies of the Koran.

Secondly, the largest challenge to using the grounded theory method are the need to set aside research bias and theoretical ideas (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory fails to recognize the embeddedness of the researcher and thus obscures the researcher's considerable agency in data construction and interpretation (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). However, Charmaz (2006) argued that it keeps the process more flexible and includes the researcher as part of the data, which draws on the constructive theory. Similarly, Konecki (2009) explained that the mind works creatively by comparing and sequencing action to a process that uncovers behaviours, which is the same function

that takes place within grounded theory analysis, thus making the researcher an integral part of the methodological process. One way to increase the validity, strength, and interpretative potential of a study, decrease investigator biases, and provide multiple perspectives is to use methods involving triangulation (Denzin, 1970). Triangulation is the combination of two or more data sources, investigators, methodologic approaches, theoretical perspectives (Denzin, 1970; Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevenson, 1991), or analytical methods (Kimchi et al., 1991) within the same study. Hence, to tackle this limitation, the researcher has employed a few approaches, theories and framework (refer to 3.5.1 Reliability and validity process) that are relevant to the study to construct a triangulation of theories to avoid research biasness. The researcher also employed a member-check to function as a secondary investigator upon the results and discussion of the research.

Another limitation in this study is that it does not permit an emerging theory at the end as in this study, grounded theory is only used as a method of inquiry to probe, code and draw a deduction. Annells (1996: 177) forewarned researchers that this approach is “not simple” and must not be “hurried”, as it will take a long period of time to fine tune the theory around the categories. Myers (2009) also note that grounded theory usually generates lower level theories that have multiple limitations and risks. El Hussien, Hirst, Salyers and Osuji (2014: 5) note that “the coding level is tiring, time consuming and a laborious process. The process of abstracting and encompassing concepts is not an easy task.” Hence, instead on focusing on the development of a theory, the study is unrestricted to accomplishing the task of discovering new ideas and themes that emerge from the data. The process of coding itself will allow to capture new emerging categories that may stand as values of leadership. For that reason, this study is not interested to draw a theory, but rather a deduction to help determine Obama’s leadership attitude. A suggestion to enhance this research would be to study a bigger sample of data without a period of time strain to help unfold and strengthen a theory and examined by a few researchers to validate the findings of the data.

### **1.10 Summary of Chapter**

To summarise, this chapter has given a brief introduction on the background of study, statement of problem, theories and approaches that will guide the study, objectives and research questions, significance and limitations of the study. The study will now proceed to the review of literature.

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