An Evaluation of the Influence of Accountability Regimes on the Curriculum Policy-Practice Nexus at Higher Education in Ireland

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Dedication

To my late father, **Mahmood Ramputh**, for the dream you aspired for me.

To my mother, **Nessah Ramputh**, for inspiring me.

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Abbreviations

ANT – Actor-Network Theory

DES – Department of Skills and Enterprise

ECTS – European Credit Transfer System

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

EU – European Union

HE – Higher Education

HET – Higher Education and Training

IEM – International Education Mark

NFQ – National Framework of Qualifications

NPM – New Public Management

OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OPP – Obligatory Passage Point

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

QQI – Quality and Qualifications Ireland

RTA – Reflexive Thematic Analysis

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WTO – World Trade Organisation

Abstract

Literature contends that external pressures, particularly neoliberal agendas have strengthened the role of accountability in education policy internationally, through relentless measurement and by the introduction of intense benchmarking, ranking and testing regimes. Despite contestations about its effectiveness in achieving the intended goals in education, literature criticising accountability deficits has mainly focused on descriptive arguments.

This study provides conceptual and empirical means to investigate the impact of accountability mechanisms applied to the curriculum policy implementation process at various sites of enactment (supra, macro, meso, micro) at higher education in Ireland from a socio-political perspective.

A pragmatic approach is adopted using a dual conceptual framework combining Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Foucauldian governmentality. An embedded single case study design is used to study the varied perceptions of reality through semi-structured interviews of policy actors.

While the results determine the importance of higher education to be accountable to the number of stakeholders it serves, a mix of controversial actors were identified, stipulating for the balance of foundation, pedagogy and professional practice that require reconsideration. Critical voices came to light, taking the shape of a campaigning propaganda classified under four categories; emerging pattern of competitive ethos, commodification of knowledge, compromised professional identities and conducted curriculum.

The overall findings are particularly pertinent to Irish higher education policy makers. They are also of multinational interest as they are significant for the tensions between envisioned and enacted practices. Furthermore, the dual conceptual framework developed offer insights in informing curriculum policy-making and redesigning of accountability systems for education.

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Curriculum is envisioned in different ways by different social actors for multiple reasons including the political, sociocultural, historical and biographical (Priestley, Philippou, Alvunger & Soini, 2021). The original root of curriculum comes from the Latin word ‘currere’ which means ‘a course to be run’ (Cherryholmes, 2002, p. 116). In common dictionary terms, the curriculum is either defined as a course of study provided by an educational institution or a particular course of study within a disciplinary or professional field. However, the concept of curriculum has been much disputed. While some argue that the curriculum includes everything occurring under the aegis of the educational institutions (Ladson-Billings & Brown, 2008), others continue to debate on the broad principles of the curriculum particularly in terms of content, product and as a process (Eisner, 1979; Kelly, 1999; Levin, 2008). Acknowledging the differential views of the curriculum and informed by previous conceptualisations (Dewey, 1990; Priestley, 2019), an alternative definition is presented in the context of this research:

> the continuous process of deliberation, analysis and communicative practices that occurs within social assemblages tangled in an intricate web of policy discourses and constituting of a complex amalgamation of interconnected domains through which education is developed, enacted and assessed.

To clarify terminology, ‘assemblages’ encompass a range of elements involved in a process of devising, ordering, organising and knowledge development (Dempsey, Doyle & Looney, 2021). The definition of the curriculum put forward helps to understand the complexity of the curriculum through its composite and influential relationship with various constituents of the education system where heterogeneous interchanges occur amongst the interconnected domains and actors.

Curriculum practice therefore requires dynamic processions of interpretation, mediation, negotiation and translation within education systems across various sites (Priestley et al., 2021), the supra, the macro, the meso, the micro and the nano, as attributed by Thijs and van den Akker (2009). See Table 1.1 below for further explication of the actors at the different sites.

Table 1.1 Sites of curriculum making (Adapted from Priestley et al., 2021).

Sites	Context	Activities	Actors
Supra	International	Transnational curricular discourses, policy borrowing and lending, policy learning	World bank, OECD, UNESCO, EU
Macro	National	Policy frameworks, legislation to establish agencies	Government, government agencies, statutory/professional bodies
Meso	Institutional	Leadership, support and guidance for curriculum making and supply of resources	Head of schools, programme/course leaders, external examiners
Micro	Programme/Discipline	Programme design and lesson planning	Lecturers
Nano	Individual/Student	Pedagogic interactions in classrooms	Students

The dynamic processes of curriculum practice are influenced by a number of conditions including necessary resources for fulfilling educational policy (Møller, 2009), space for agency (Fitzgerald, 2021) and exercised autonomy (Skerrit, 2019), beliefs and values (Lundström & Parding, 2011) and professional knowledge of curriculum actors along with other stakeholders involved (Rawdon, Gilleece, Denner, Sampson & Cosgrove, 2021). Hence, contrarily to a passive implementation, curriculum actors are actively making the curriculum, imbued within their respective intricately multifarious contexts alongside many other social actors (Priestley et al., 2021). These varied contexts mutate with the changing envelopes (Law, 1986c) of the different interacting and intersecting sites in a complex interplay, where power flows in non-linear ways (Priestley & Philippou, 2018). The higher education system is therefore perceived as an actor-network, where these curriculum actors along with other entities are able to exert force and produce effects as they assemble together forming associations or networks that may expand across broad spaces and time periods (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Power is translated throughout this network by educational policies through numerous connections with other actors, creating assemblages of heterogeneous entities such as texts, bodies, tools and desires, amongst others, that demand considerable work to maintain (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).

Policy is a key concern for education and training as it contextualises practices and is also the source of changes in practice. Policy making and implementation are the cornerstones fundamental to the educational process. The state, governing authorities and the numerous ideologies advising politics and policy are central to educational discussions in addition to the perceived discontinuity between policy intentions and their effects when they are translated across the networks that they are expected to influence. The areas of governing and educational policy have witnessed a surge of activity in response to the global economic crisis. The idea that educational policy is subordinate to the knowledge economy as a global discourse has become critical where the knowledge economy is influenced by the contemporary phase of globalising processes, supported by a neoliberal ideology. (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Neoliberalism which constitutes both a body of economic theory and policy stance (Kotz, 2000) has become a popular ideology critique of educational policy for the globalised knowledge economy (Ball, 2016; Barry, Osborne & Rose, 1996; Jankowski & Provezis, 2014; Lolich, 2011; Olssen, 2006; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Varman, Saha & Skålén, 2011; Yates & Young, 2010). The key realm of debate is the evident educational accord to the knowledge economy demonstrating a convergence of globalised education norms with exercised authority by international agencies such as the OECD and UNESCO. In analysing globalisation and education policy, some researchers identified trends in policy with the need for change. These were diffused in economic terms by reinforcing the connection between education, employment and trade, focusing on change in governance, standards, accountability and testing, with a more direct control over curriculum (Ball, 1998a; Levin, 1998; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). These have generated more vigorous accounts of political discourses with materialising effects in higher education curricula.

Higher education institutions exist within a political arena where external demands for accountability occur within a market-driven environment (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014). Curriculum framing and implementation is highly sensitive to external pressures particularly neoliberal agendas where employability of learners in an increasingly competitive economic environment is emphasised through the promotion of employability-related skills and quantitative performativity-driven metrics (Holland, Hughes & Leitch, 2016; Yates and Young, 2010). Some authors have discussed the marketisation of higher education in connection to Foucault's concept of neoliberal governmentality (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Peters & Roberts, 2007). Governmentality is defined as the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 1978, p.104) in respect of governing by seeking to mould behaviour through a series of rules. Foucault describes governmentality as a new form of governance acting on the possibilities of people's action (Lolich, 2011). Consequently, Foucault's concept of governmentality lays out a rationale upon which neoliberalism can be examined. An investigation into the way people are governed and the role of education in creating learning societies is required for a governmentality perspective of education (Masschelein, Simons, Bröckling & Pongratz, 2006). It is contended that neoliberal governmentality has strengthened the role of accountability in international education policy (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Jankowski & Provezis, 2014; Winter, 2017), transitioning from what Foucault called a disciplinary society to a controlled society living through relentless measurement and assessment (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014). This is achieved by the introduction of intense benchmarking, ranking and testing regimes (Yates and Young, 2010). Ranson (2003, p.459) argues that, 'neo-liberal corporate accountability' has ruled the education sector since the late 1970s, with the aim of increasing educational standards to satisfy the rising demands of the knowledge-based economy and enhance human capital (Stobart, 2008). Controversially, heated debates have been raised over the suitability, effects and ways of conducting evaluation (Winter, 2017). While accountability is believed to promote improvements in education by some (Brill, Grayson, Kuhn, O'Donnell & National Foundation for Educational Research, 2018; Wyse & Torrance, 2009), others are adamant in believing that it has a marginalising and pervasive impact on the curriculum which further widens the gap between envisioned and enacted practices (Conway & Murphy, 2013; Ehren & Hatch, 2013; Jankowski & Provezis, 2014; Kavanagh & Fischer-Ari, 2020; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Lipman, 2013; Lolich, 2011; O'Neill, 2013; Skerritt, 2019; Winter, 2017). Higher Education curricula in Ireland have already been remoulded in measurable forms focusing on definition of specific learning outcomes (Holland, Hughes & Leitch, 2016). The priority of such concerns therefore rely on the provision of empirical means to contextualise curriculum policy discourses and the comprehensive effects of accountability, hence, directing curriculum policy research to put forward a model of enhanced intelligent accountability and improved influence on the curriculum.

As advanced by Connelly (2013), curriculum is a complex system that requires to be perceived systemically, raising the question of how it all functions together rather than which contextual factors define high achievement. This study therefore seeks to explore and understand the process of curriculum making and its entanglement with contemporary regimes of accountability as they are translated at various nodes across the multiple domains within the Irish higher education network. Actor-network theory assisted by the governmentality frame offer a critical understanding of policy making and actions that are implemented along with the emerging effects from the various networks of curriculum making and enactment.

The research conceptualises the dimension of curriculum policy enactment from a socio-political perspective with emphasis on the influence of contemporary regimes of accountability. As posited by Wahlström (2018), curriculum research is closely linked with educational policies and societal concerns at large, due to the role of education in the society and its associations with the political domain. Moreover, there is a high demand of evidence-based policy and practice from policy-makers (Wahlström, 2018). In order to evaluate the influence of accountability on the process of curriculum making and enactment, accountability regimes as focal actors and their interactions with each other and other actors to produce effects (Latour, 1987) in the HE network are followed. Furthermore, analysis undertaken in this study sheds light on the various forms of political knowledge, techniques and accountability mechanisms employed as conduct (Dean, 2010) to shape curriculum making.

1.2 Problem Context and Significance

1.2.1 Global Neoliberal Trends in Higher Education Policies

Over the last decades, the globalised neoliberal context has significantly modified educational systems encompassing the introduction of market-oriented policies, institutional autonomy, performativity, high-stakes outcomes, competitive funds, data-driven decision making and new forms of rigorous accountability (Apple, 2007; Ball, 1998a; Ball & Youdell, 2008; Burbules & Torres, 2000; Daun, 2004; Maroy, 2004; van Zanten, 2002; Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998). These waves of educational reforms have been criticised in literature as influences leading to grim consequences ranging from contestations in the idea of democracy (Apple, 2007; Foner, 1998), knowledge to be taught at educational institutions (Apple & Apple, 2004), a metastasis that only what is measurable is important, threatening creative and critical practices (Aronowitz, 2000; Lipman, 2004) and a tighter control over curricula and values (Apple, 2006). Supranational economic and political agencies, such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have also participated in framing and promoting performance-driven reforms (Lingard, 2000; Morrow and Torres, 2000).

Reflecting international discourses, there is a growing concern about the range, potency and intent of accountability policies, characterised as a ‘rising tide’, that has increased remarkably in Ireland in recent years to include management of higher education by neo-liberal economic theories and new public management (Conway & Murphy, 2013, p.13). A synchrony between the market sector and education has been evident in Irish policy discourses (O’Donnell, 2014; O’Hara et al. 2007; Skerritt, 2019). An analysis of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) strategies by Gleeson & O’Donnabháin (2009) demonstrate a liberal use of consumerist language in market-led terms such as “customer/client interests and needs” (DES, 1997, p.10), “deliver a high quality education” (DES, 1997, p.21) and “appropriate legislative, financial and accountability frameworks” (DES, 1997, p.22). Further statements by the DES such as the 2005/2007 Strategy Statement also highlights the needs to deliver high quality education service at all levels to fulfil the needs of customers, clients and learners.

Educational policies have therefore evolved in complex and sophisticated ways with market-led policies injected into new accountability policies. When market-led policies are combined with the new mechanisms of state regulation such as accountability policies, the state retains its control through de(centralising) strategies. New ways are created to maintain power and control over a dispersed network of higher education stakeholders. These macro principles foreground quality assurance at meso and micro sites of curriculum engagement, devolving responsibility away from the state (Gilleece & Clerkin, 2020; Skerritt, 2019; O'Donnell, 2014; Conway & Murphy, 2013; Lynch, Grummell & Devine, 2012). While policies do not literally dictate their execution, they create circumstances that restrict or alter the range of options in decision-making (Ball, 2000) through subtle ways of securing implementation using mechanisms like curriculum standardisation and accountability regimes. However, the accountability regimes implemented are different and their effects on the curriculum are varied due to the enrolment of multiple stakeholders with varied goals within diverse contexts. Therefore, while prevailing policy discourses pledge institutional autonomy, the state paradoxically drive educational targets and curricular outcomes. Figure 1.1 illustrates an overview of the background and underlying principles affecting the development of education policies.

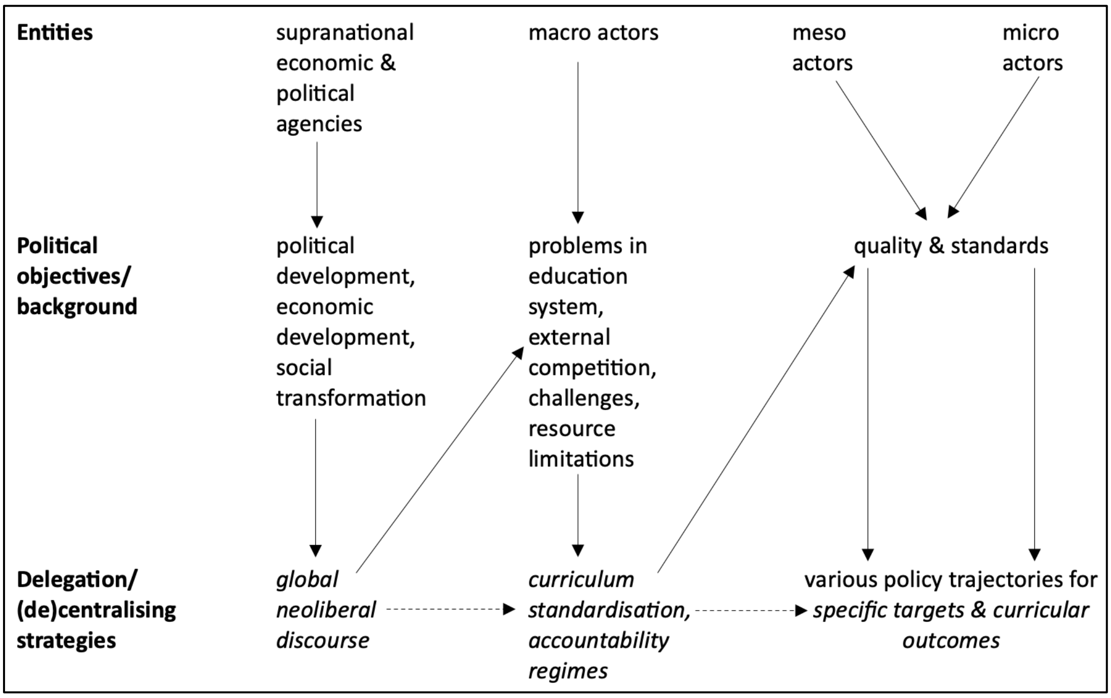

Entities
supranational economic & political agencies
macro actors
meso actors
micro actors
Political objectives/ background
political development, economic development, social transformation
problems in education system, external competition, challenges, resource limitations
quality & standards
Delegation/ (de)centralising strategies
global neoliberal discourse
curriculum standardisation, accountability regimes
various policy trajectories for specific targets & curricular outcomes

Figure 1.1 Overview of the principles underlying the development of educational policies derived from external competition and global trends.

This mixed configuration about the role of international organisations and transnational alliances such as the European Union (EU) has attracted profuse debates in the conception of its dual nature such as ‘decentralised centralism’ (Karlsen, 2000) ‘quasi-market’ (Levačić, 1995), ‘public-market’ (Woods, Bagley, and Glatter, 1998) and ‘post-bureaucratic model’ (Maroy, 2009; Vandenberghe, 1999), as the nation state becomes increasingly entwined in the webs of the globalising processes. While previous engagements in ideology critique have attempted to expose the ‘real’ interests of policy as matters of fact, this research approaches policy making from an alternative framing around matters of concern. As articulated by Latour (2005), it is unfair to portray entities as matters of fact, since they are much more complex, heterogeneous, far reaching, uncertain, risky and networky than the hybrid that forms between matters of fact. This study primarily draws on actor-network theory facilitated by the governmentality frame to provide clarity about how authority and influence come to be in policy making and enactment, what forms of rationality are employed in the practices of governing, as well as what values are assumed by actors involved . As suggested by Rizvi and Lingard (2010) in an analysis of globalisation and education policy, it is important to focus on the nexus of authority and values. Analysis of this research therefore provides an understanding of the source of authority underpinning policy and how they are delegated to guide curriculum making and enactment.

1.2.2 Higher Education as an Entangled Actor-Network System of Curricular Activities and Policy Discourses

The global revolution of neoliberal discourses as discussed above have also permeated Irish education policies which is evident in many ways. Accountability as a means that indicates effective and quality education is a core concern for the government, as well as, the potential impacts of accountability models at macro, meso and micro sites of curriculum representations (Fitzgerald, 2021). With the rise of neoliberal influences, the government’s reliance in education as a way of fulfilling economic imperatives has boosted an intensified interest in education policy discourses around regulation and accountability mechanisms within education systems (Barber, 2004; Conway & Murphy, 2013; Gleeson & O’Donnabháin, 2009; Møller, 2009; Ozga, 2020; Skerritt 2019). There has been a conspicuous shift towards a (de)centralised decision-making with responsibility diverted away from the government in the form of institutional autonomy but increased quality audits and self-evaluation (Skerritt, 2019; Lynch et al., 2012). However, other statutory bodies and professional bodies, such as Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) through compliance with regulations by professional bodies such as the Teaching Council through professional quality assurance, significantly contribute to this process with an increased emphasis on institutional autonomy with accountability through external inspections and internal reviews. Therefore, under this remit, HEIs are bestowed with the responsibility of both developing and guaranteeing delivery of high quality education, where it is envisaged that the decentralisation of decision-making will empower institutions to tailor curriculum development to students' needs (Skerrit, 2019). However, accountability agendas have been criticised as radically undermining curriculum actors' professionalism through intense performativity in terms of measures, targets, audits, benchmarks, tables and audits in the name of improvement at the neglect of curriculum (Ball, 2016). Managerial frameworks espoused by accountability principles focus on countable outcomes (Lynch et al., 2012) with an increased workload for curriculum actors who are expected to fulfil policy remits. For example, an array of professional standards and expectations have been set out by the Teaching Council as part of changes in education policy (Conway & Murphy, 2013). Furthermore, an overreliance on external accountability agendas informed by performance management accountabilities have incited a diversion in curriculum actors' responsibilities (Conway & Murphy, 2013; Lynch et al, 2012). Hence, there is a perceived hegemonic influence of these accountabilities that could threaten curriculum actors' professionalism (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2014), with a consequential impact on curriculum. The notion that accountability models lead to better quality and enhanced performance in education has therefore been strongly criticised (Ball, 2016; Conway & Murphy, 2013; Møller, 2009; Ozga, 2020).

Fenwick & Edwards (2010) affirm that focusing on policy in terms of networks and network enactments points to new ways at inquiring into implementation gap. Hence, higher education is perceived as an entangled actor-network system of curricular activities and policy discourses, where different entities or actors, such as higher education institutions, curriculum actors, students and other stakeholders are ordered in time and space. Changes in governing lead to the repositioning of actors and problem solving in the network (Popkewitz, 1996), thereby, reconfiguration of relationships and exercises of power. Accountability policies can therefore be treated as governing techne for control. Thus, depending on their form or type, they can guide certain pedagogical activities in a particular sequence and align curricula in a certain way across space and time, limiting curriculum actors' agency and freedom. Therefore, functioning as quality control agents and law enforcing actors, they can also affect funds. Drawing a parallel between an example used by Waltz (2006) about school playground equipment combining with children's behaviours to produce particular activities, the point is that material things like funds are performative; they can act together with curriculum actors' behaviours to produce particular activities and regulate particular forms of participation. This research allows a focus on accountability regimes and associated technologies and techniques that is helpful to untangle the heterogeneous relationships with curriculum across the HE network, tracing their durabilities along with their weaknesses.

While there is an assortment of previous education policy studies' that has widely contributed to the understanding and the history of accountability in the field of education under various forms (Brill et al., 2018; Conway & Murphy, 2013; DeBray, Parson & Woodworth, 2001; Ehren & Hatch, 2013; Haertel & Herman, 2005; Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari; Ranson, 2003; Toma, 2008; Valenzuela, 2005a), they are mostly focused on descriptive arguments criticising accountability deficits. Hence, there still seem to be a lack of empirical evidence of the influence of accountability regimes on curriculum policy enactment. As Burke (2005) suggests, accountability is the most advocated but least analysed notion. Evidently, there is a need for critical evaluation of accountability influence on the curriculum policy and practice linkage empirically to generate evidence of their appropriateness in higher education. Furthermore, as Locke (2009) argues, dichotomous approaches to the research-policy-practice nexus may have embraced a futile conception of research and an idealised visualisation of policymaking and implementation as a rational and linear process. This research adopts a new approach in attempting to build relations among the three domains, offering a forward-looking perspective on addressing the discernible gap between intended accountability policies and their effects on curriculum as they are translated into the various contexts of higher education.

1.2.3 Accounting for Curriculum-making within an Institutional Context in Ireland

All HEIs are required to comply with curricula development through the use of QQI awards standards for curriculum development and validation. This systematic and standardised approach also includes programme review and validation. The generic higher education and training (HET) awards standards that have been designed in tandem with the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ), are broadly divided into three strands of learning outcomes; knowledge, know-how and skills and competence, with eight sub-strands (QQI, 2014). The NFQ also regulated by QQI, maps to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). While this standardised approach allows transparency and consistency, it may also be viewed as restrictive, impeding creative curriculum development. At macro sites of curriculum design and implementation, curriculum matters are highly debated in terms of its purpose and nature in terms of outcomes-based prescriptions, where bureaucratic state elites hold control of curriculum. However, it is quite obvious that curriculum reforms are themselves complex in enactment that do not usually yield what is intended. Fenwick and Edwards (2010) assert that, by observing the enacted curriculum, tensions between what is intended and what is achieved can be witnessed.

Lingard (2021) argues that curriculum must be regarded as a concept that covers multiple social practices across various sites of curriculum activity, with curriculum in a state of becoming, being made through practice, through enactment. Hence, the mutual interdependence of part-systems and the interplay of factors within the whole system in this research is inescapable (Ashworth & Greasley, 2009). Curriculum making occurs "across multiple sites, in interaction and intersection with one another, in often unpredictable and context-specific ways, producing unique social practices, in constant and complex interplay, wherein power flows in non-linear ways, thus blurring boundaries between these multiple sites." (Priestley & Philippou, 2018, p.154). As posited by Priestley et al. (2021), such a framing is not normative and recommend the application of heuristic framing (sites of activity) to curriculum making for application to different contexts that allows flexible exploration and analysis of the differences within and between these sites of social activity defined by their nature, instead of their administrative system level.

A simple heuristic by Fenwick and Edwards (2010), identifying some factors that impact on the curriculum as it is enacted encompasses contextual, organisational, micro-political and individual factors. For this reason, a temporal dimension of scale and space becomes relevant to curriculum making. Furthermore, an in-depth elucidation is required to elucidate the unique features of the case. An idiographic approach allows for a deep understanding of contextual factors and subjective experiences of social groups as they create, modify and interpret the milieu in which they find themselves (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). This research therefore undertakes a pragmatic approach in an attempt to idiographically explore processes of curriculum making and enactment under accountability regimes at multiple sites of curriculum activity – supra, macro, meso, micro and nano as described by Priestley, Philippou, Alvunger and Soini (2021) to gather evidence on the policy-practice nexus from a socio-political perspective through the engagement of political narratives, policy makers and actors to explain the unintended and occasionally irrational consequences of envisaged policies and initiatives.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

As per Newman et al.'s (2003) framework of research goals, this research encompasses the understanding of complex phenomena while adding to the knowledge base with a social and political impact on curriculum policy enactment. The main aim of the research is to evaluate the impact of accountability regimes on the curriculum policy-practice nexus at various sites of enactment (supra, macro, meso, micro and nano) within the Irish higher education context in order to understand the impact of accountability on curriculum. In this sense, policy will be considered as both a process and a product (Taylor, 1997).

From Johnson and Christensen's (2004) major research objectives, the research involves description of the accountability phenomenon while elucidating the relationship between the latter and the curriculum, providing explanations for the occurrences of events. In this respect, the objectives are threefold:

- To understand how accountability impacts on the curriculum from policy formation to implementation.
- To develop a framework to interpret the issue (influence of accountability on the curriculum) in terms of actors and processes at multi-levels.

- To propose a model of enhanced HE accountability systems with improved influence on the curriculum.

1.4 Research Questions

The purpose of the proposed research is to critically evaluate the impact of accountability regimes on the curriculum in the context of higher education in Ireland. The intention is to gather evidence on the curriculum policy-outcome linkage under the influence of accountability, disclosing impediments, unreliability and instability in findings with possibilities of proposing ways in which institutional accountability systems can be improved to minimise detrimental impacts on the curriculum within higher education milieu.

The broad research question is:

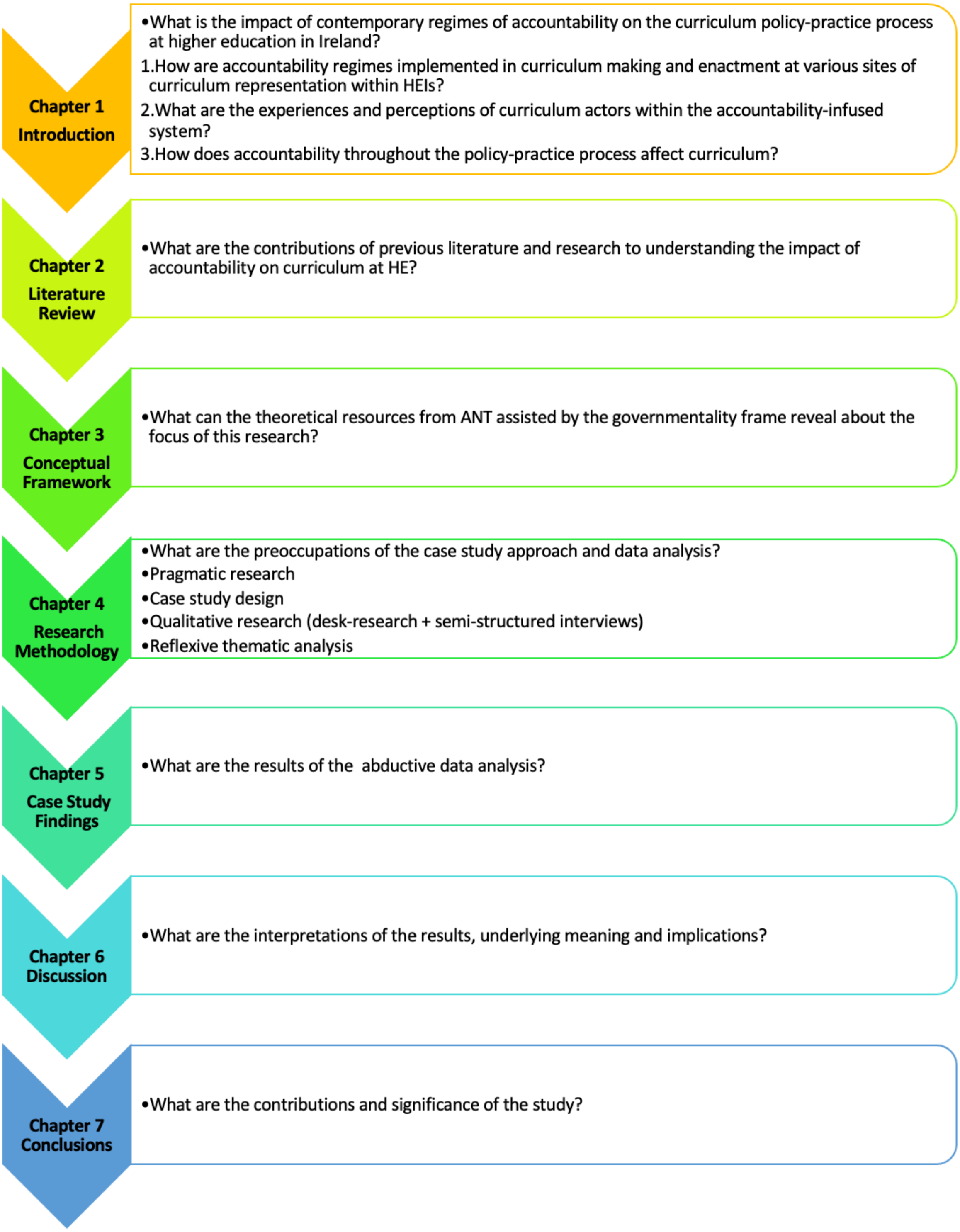
> What is the impact of contemporary regimes of accountability on the curriculum policy-practice process at higher education in Ireland?

Considering the complexity of the system, multiple sites of curriculum activity will be contemplated including the wider context of governance and the deliberation of multiple perspectives of policy actors who actively translate policy intentions, which in turn, are consequently mediated by a range of other factors. In this instance, three subsidiary research questions were formed to answer the overarching research question.

1. How are accountability regimes implemented in curriculum making and enactment at various sites of curriculum representation within HEIs?
2. What are the experiences and perceptions of curriculum actors within the accountability-infused system?
3. How does accountability throughout the policy-practice process affect curriculum?

1.5 Research approach

This section provides a brief note to the research approach and the methodological choices to address this case study. Introductory details provided in this section help to ground the reader in the research process and anticipate the methodological implications of the study. Figure 1.2 provides an overview of the evolving nature of the research, primarily conducted through ANT analysis and informed by the governmentality frame. This research was conducted in two parts. An initial desk-based research was conducted that provided valuable insights in analysing the gap in research and designing the research approach. Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with curriculum actors across multiples sites of HE curriculum activity. As the research evolved, ANT was adopted as a lens to evaluate the data collected. Some aspects of the data appeared to lack rigour. Therefore, the governmentality frame was used to make sense of these underlying concerns. The data were then abductively analysed through a pragmatic approach of three recursive and intertwined stages of reflexive thematic coding to address the research questions.



Chapter 1 Introduction

- What is the impact of contemporary regimes of accountability on the curriculum policy-practice process at higher education in Ireland?

1. How are accountability regimes implemented in curriculum making and enactment at various sites of curriculum representation within HEIs?
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Chapter 2 Literature Review

- What are the contributions of previous literature and research to understanding the impact of accountability on curriculum at HE?

Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework

- What can the theoretical resources from ANT assisted by the governmentality frame reveal about the focus of this research?

Chapter 4 Research Methodology

- What are the preoccupations of the case study approach and data analysis?
- Pragmatic research
- Case study design
- Qualitative research (desk-research + semi-structured interviews)
- Reflexive thematic analysis

Chapter 5 Case Study Findings

- What are the results of the abductive data analysis?

Chapter 6 Discussion

- What are the interpretations of the results, underlying meaning and implications?

Chapter 7 Conclusions

- What are the contributions and significance of the study?

Figure 1.2 An overview of the evolving nature of the research.

1.6 Thesis Outline

The following provides an outline of the overall structure of the rest of the thesis.

Chapter two provides key literature in relation to curriculum practice from a socio-political perspective and the influence of accountability on curriculum practice as argued in literature. It explores the differential views of curriculum and presents an alternative definition in the context of this research. The chapter reviews literature criticising accountability regimes at various domains of curriculum representations. It concludes by outlining the requirement for this research in providing explanations for the persisting divide between curriculum policy and practice and recommendations for an enhanced accountability system.

Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical aspects of the research and presents the dual conceptual framework of Foucauldian governmentality and ANT's sociology of translation. It provides an explanation of how the framework informs data analysis and also some critiques of the theoretical resources.

Chapter 4 discusses the philosophical underpinnings and the ethical and practical considerations of the study. It sets out the design of the empirical investigation and the approach adopted to analyse the data.

Chapter 5 presents the findings and factual conclusions from the case study using the theoretical concepts presented in chapter three. The findings are organised into four major themes and sub-themes.

Chapter 6 draws on findings from the previous chapter to address the research questions and present interpretive conclusions.

Chapter 7 provides a final commentary by reflecting on the research undertaken. A summary of the research is presented along with key findings. Conceptual conclusions are drawn followed by an analysis of the research's contribution. The chapter also acknowledges limitations of the study and concludes by setting out some recommendations with scope for future research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of previous accountability literature in terms of its heterogeneous effects on curriculum at higher education. It focuses on the interconnectedness that has an influence on curriculum. The chapter is organised into four broad sections; curriculum making from a socio-political perspective; the accountability epoch, the curriculum policy-practice dissonance and the rise of global panopticism in higher education.

2.2 Curriculum Making from a Socio-political Perspective

Curriculum policy enactment is the implementation of curriculum plans within the operational domains of the HE system involving the interactions of policy actors where shared conceptions, interpretation and tacit understandings that drive translation of curriculum policy elements take place. As Karseth and Sivesind (2010) posit, meaning-making and negotiation is inherent among the different curriculum enactors at the various positions of this assemblage. Hence, the fidelity of curriculum policy may be challenged by the range of elements governing this assemblage. In spite of the internal and cognitive dimensions of knowledge and institution content (Moore & Young, 2001), curriculum can be considered as social from the very outset (Moore, 2000). According to Goodson (1997), negotiations revolve around valid knowledge and values in these social settings where curriculum development is regarded as a social enterprise. Moreover, Letschert and Kessels (2004) contend that constructive educational provisions and curricula are not fundamentally the result of design and construction but rather lie in the intrinsic nature and product of effective negotiations by competent "social engineers" who, as stated by Kessels (1999, p.69), skilfully manage the social enterprise (curriculum development) of educational decision-making. It is contended that effective educational provisions are therefore not constructed but socially negotiated (Kessels, 1999). Thus, as affirmed by Hamilton and Hilier (2006), the activities, beliefs and values of actors involved in curriculum designing are deemed to be imperative in this process. In this respect, pragmatic consideration is required to address the overarching purpose of the curriculum and conceptions of knowledge. Furthermore, context and system dynamics, perspectives and experiences of social actors and the role of policy discourses as drivers and barriers to curriculum making all require considerations; whether the goal is to improve curriculum design and enactment or to radically alter educational practice. Hence, the research adopted a blend of social and political perspectives to conceptualise the curriculum policy enactment dimension at multiple sites of curriculum activity.

Various perspectives to study curriculum policy have been identified in literature (Malen & Knapp, 1997). Short (2008) posits that there is no singular way of conceptualising these possible perspectives. Furthermore, McNeil and Coppola (2006) have accentuated the effectiveness of using multiple perspectives in curriculum policy research. Van den Akker (2003) also differentiates between multiple levels of curriculum representations such as, supra level (international agencies), macro level (state, nation, system), meso level (educational institution), micro level (classroom, teacher, lecturer) and nano level (individual learner). However, Priestley et al. (2021) has critiqued the existing thinking of such a way of depicting curriculum activity sites because it illustrates the policy to practice process as occurring through linear and hierarchical chains of instruction and instead, describes educational systems as complex, with intertwined sites of curriculum activity, all operating together to shape it. The higher education system is therefore conceptualised in a delineated manner (Figure 2.1).

Drawing from the differential views of curriculum, this research presents an alternate definition (as previously stated in the previous chapter), conceptualising curriculum as:

> the continuous process of deliberation, analysis and communicative practices that occurs within social assemblages tangled in an intricate web of policy discourses and constituting of a complex amalgamation of interconnected domains through which education is developed, enacted and assessed.

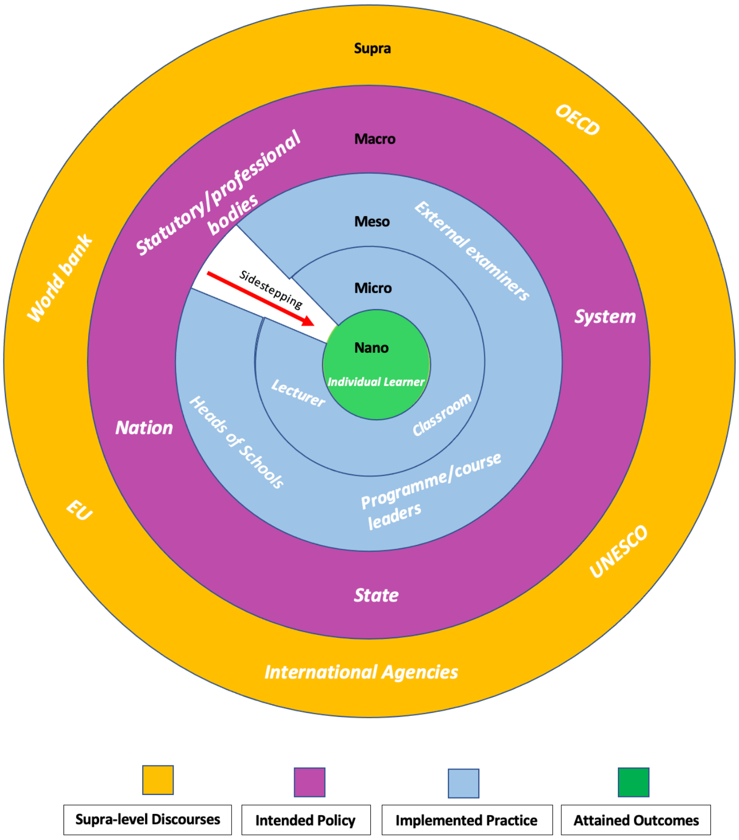

Supra
OECD
World bank
Macro
Statutory/professional bodies
Meso
External examiners
Micro
Sidestepping
Nano
Individual Learner
System
Lecturer
Classroom
Nation
Heads of Schools
Programme/course leaders
EU
UNESCO
State
International Agencies
Supra-level Discourses
Intended Policy
Implemented Practice
Attained Outcomes

Figure 2.1 Social involvement of the multiple actors of curriculum policy in various arenas of the political sphere within adverse accountability environments.

Additionally, Remillard and Heck (2014) proclaim the importance of investigating the various places within the educational system in terms of levels of curricular objectives, where translation and transformation of curricular elements occur. In order to investigate the influence of accountability on curriculum in terms of processes and outcomes, a further classification of curriculum representation is considered based on the works of Schmidt et al. (1996) in terms of intended, implemented and attained result and Goodlad's (1979) as formal, operational and experienced curriculum. Although they include intentions, aims and goals,, no rigid demarcations of intended policy, implemented practice and attained outcomes were established. Conversely, they were assumed to be all embedded in the process at different stages as part of an expanding network in time and space.

Enmeshed in the accountability sea, curriculum policies framed at macro site, are envisaged to be implemented at meso/micro site to produce desirable outcomes at nano site, measured by various league tables' performance indicators (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). It is this phenomenon of 'accountabilization', a term coined by

Macheridis and Paulsson (2021, p. 15) and its effect on the curriculum through these sites of curriculum enactment that this study is concerned to highlight.

2.3 The Accountability Epoch

Accountability is a term generally perceived as ambiguous and fragmented which depends upon factors such as the objectives of governance and ideologies (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011; Findlow, 2008; Huisman and Currie, 2004). Nonetheless, accountability has been largely defined as a government's technique to hold educational institutions answerable for the delivery of high quality education (Brill, Grayson, Kuhn & O'Donnell, 2018). The concept may be framed in terms of three main approaches that are, compliance with regulations, adherence to professional norms and achievements of results (Conway & Murphy, 2013; Anderson, 2005). However, outcomes-driven accountability approaches are usually accentuated which tends to overshadow the other types of accountability embedded in the cultures of schooling and education that also exert an influence on the key structures of education including the curriculum, pedagogy and professional practice (Conway & Murphy, 2013). In the context of this research, accountability is viewed as a social relationship that involves many stakeholders with various requirements, interests and objectives within HE institutions in different ways (Macheridis & Paulsson, 2021; Romzek, 2000). To this end, a compounded system of different but parallel accountability relationships subsist that may be both externally and internally oriented. The proposed study seeks to understand how accountability influences the curriculum in various ways.

Whilst accountability measures are imposed to ensure improvement in quality and academic activities, it also signifies the emergence of governing at a distance in HEIs (Vidovich, 2002) which focuses on outcomes at the expense of curriculum consideration and institutional dynamics. In order to solve educational accountability problems, certain policy levers have been set including rigid curriculum control through a technical 'one-size-fits-all' standardised curriculum configuration with prescribed outcomes, curriculum knowledge specification, core competencies and concepts, high-stakes standardised testing, statistical analysis and reporting (Winter, 2011, 2017). Besides designating and legitimating validated knowledge, objectives, skills and assessment criteria, curriculum policy at the same time has an effect on pedagogical relationships and practices, organisation of the institution, resources (Gerrard & Farrell, 2013) and teacher and learner meaning-making. Nonetheless, accountability is becoming one of the most advocated and contested subjects in education (Brill, Grayson, Kuhn, O'Donnell & National Foundation for Educational Research, 2018; Conway & Murphy, 2013; Ehren & Hatch, 2013; Jankowski & Provezis, 2014; Javanagh & Fischer-Ari, 2020; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Lipman, 2013; Lolich, 2011; O'Neill, 2013; Skerritt, 2019; Suspitsyna, 2010; Winter, 2017; Wyse & Torrance, 2009).

For more than a decade, there has been a revolution of accountability emphasis in higher education policy agendas over geographic territories from Europe (Huisman & Currie, 2004) to Asia (Peng & Wang, 2008) to Australia and New Zealand (Vidovich & Slee, 2001) to America (Toma, 2008). There has been significant work within Europe over the last fifteen years to create a European higher education space, identified by Lawn and Grek (2012) as the project of governing a new policy space. In some countries, accountability is institutionalised with the belief that increased attention to the public and measurable accountability with the government's retreat from closely monitoring higher education is adequate in increasing institutional autonomy, but it is still a contested issue in others (Huisman & Curie, 2004). Along with notions of decreased academic freedom and professional autonomy, the intended and unintended consequences of accountability have gained momentum in literature (Conway & Murphy, 2013; Ehren & Hatch, 2013; Jankowski & Provezis, 2014; Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari, 2020; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Lipman, 2013; Lolich, 2011; O'Neill, 2013; Skerritt, 2019; Winter, 2017).

Global economic pressures have tremendously influenced the propagation of accountability systems internationally (Karseth & Sivesind, 2010; Yates & Young 2010). The promotion of technical accountability in education is endorsed worldwide to varying extents through performativity regimes, high-stakes testing and datafication which have harsh impacts on the curriculum (Hursh 2009; Cochran-Smith, Piazza & Power 2013; Winter, 2017). Reflecting these consequences and international discourses, the range, potency and intent of accountability, characterised as a 'rising tide', has increased remarkably in Ireland in recent years to include management of higher education by neo-liberal economic theories and new public management

(Conway & Murphy, 2013, p.13). The Irish society where only values have the ability to be commercialised, is deemed to be deeply unequal in affective terms (Lolich, 2011). The HEA's key visions encompasses oversight and guidance of the Irish HE performance through a delivery of excellence and innovation; accessibility, sustainability, autonomy and accountability; fit-for-purpose, stepping up to achieve – and exceeding – national ambitions: economically, societally and culturally; global connection and international recognition for the experience that it offers students, and the outcomes it delivers, whilst protecting valuable institutional diversity. The HEA's Strategic Plan 2018-2022 lowers education to the exclusive aim of serving the economy which has led to a disparage of the principles of developing educated citizenry with disregard to the curriculum. Higher educational institutions' improvements are now linked to a focus on accountability as a means to ensuring better economic performance.

The connections between globalisation and knowledge are closely related to the processes of curriculum development and enactment (Yates & Young, 2010). On one hand, policy is influenced by supra-level discourses, emphasising the need for a more skilled, flexible and competitive workforce and the importance of targets, audits and accountability in aiming for improvements (Humes & Priestley, 2021). However, when the excessive audit culture that operates on mistrust pervades educational institutions, the legitimate grounds of knowledge are challenged. The authority and professionalism of academics are suppressed and overridden by bureaucratic authority in evaluating the validity of curricular knowledge, espousing control over education (Shore, 2008). Accountability measures, high-stakes testing, scripted curricula and the proliferation of undermined agency of curriculum actors all reify power structures and relationships (Kavanagh & Fischer-Ari, 2020). This audit culture fosters a paradox of neoliberal governmentality. While on one hand, neoliberalism originates from the idea of entrepreneurialism coupled with a decreased influence of the state, on the other hand, regimes of accountability depends on a greater state engagement in educational activities with high impacts on the curriculum (Apple, 2006; Shore, 2008).

The Department of Education and the Higher Education Authority identify greater transparency and robust accountability structure as one of their priorities for action (Department of Education, n.d; HEA, 2018-2022). Some of the performance-based systems and indicators established are league tables, national frameworks, modularisation and learning outcomes. Originated from the Bologna Process in the early 2000s (NFQ, 2000), learning outcomes (LOs) have pervaded higher education playing an important role as a key disciplinary technology with an ever-sturdy linkage with module aims, goals and other taxonomy of LOs that are designed to assist in the expression of aims and accomplishments at modular and programme levels (Conway & Murphy, 2013). Values internal to the logic of the accountability regime or their derivation are not questioned or revealed by the technical procedures involved in the metrics (Sellar, 2013). On the other hand, these technical procedures have illogically promoted game-playing by policy-makers in this perilous venture coupled with imprudent assignment of descriptors that are the foundations of decision-making (Lingard, Creagh, & Vass, 2012; Lingard & Sellar, 2013). While the influence of political and accountability pressures on the curriculum is obvious in literature, there is still a rising demand for outcomes-driven accountability in Irish higher education. Hence, the urgent need for critical evaluation of accountability influence on the curriculum policy and practice linkage empirically to generate evidence of their appropriateness. Jankowski and Provezis (2014) claim that politics in the form of accountability can be understood as neoliberal governmentality. Hence, an analysis and description of the way people are governed and the role that education has played to create learning societies are key to a governmentality perspective of education.

Educational institutions are situated in a political sphere where demands for accountability occur within a market-driven environment to improve educational products. The arising competition led by public choice within the market is assumed to drive improvements in learning. Such curriculum discourses claiming to offer the same challenge to all through a common-core, disciplinary-based curriculum (DfE, 2010a; Brill, Grayson, Kuhn, O'Donnell, & National Foundation for Educational Research, 2018), confine knowledge to fixed conceptual categories, restricting alternative ways of thinking, due to pre-judged educational outcomes measured on the basis of pre-specified criteria and neglect preparation of learners for a changing world (Yates, 2009). This regulatory regime is described as 'deliverology' of the technical curriculum in the age of performativity (Ball, Maguire, Braun, Perryman and Hoskins, 2012, p.514). Deliverology includes comprehensive datafication of learner assessments, progress and achievements whereby assessment results become the essential focus for staff as well as learners (Ball et al., 2012), yielding variations of teacher and learner relationships and subjectivities (Ball, 2003; Winter, 2017). Policy hence dictate the system by the enforcement of testing and reporting until they are naturalised as obvious and unquestionable activities that are required to achieve necessary outcomes (Winter, 2017).

While objectivity, certainty and transparency emanate from the concept of performativity, it tends to abbreviate complex social processes associated with educational experience and subjectivity formation to codes and statistics and classified categories (Ball, 2003). Datafication and codification is facilitated by standardisation of specified curriculum objectives, configuration of knowledge, criteria of assessment and benchmarks for statistical representation and analysis which are only attainable by assigning and redefining meanings to satisfy the requirements of system input, process and output (Winter, 2017). With the aim of raising standards and comparing with other benchmarks, the concept of performativity provides a totalised evaluation mechanism in education systems by providing examination scores, attainment indicators, rankings, progress levels, assessment benchmarks and targets (Winter, 2017). The outcome of such processes thus result in changes affecting the curriculum and assessment to reflect the set of accountability measures (Ehren & Hatch, 2013). Although education actors relate to policies and engage with them differently in varied contexts, it is acknowledged that teacher overload, lack of time and autonomy are prevalent (Ball et al., 2011a; 2011b). Diverse effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum and pedagogy emerged from a number of research studies such as teachers fulfilling the role of technicians (Hargreaves, 1994), shift to competitive approaches and identity construction through assessment (Reay & Wiliam, 1999), cramming to 'excel' in tests (Cunningham & Sanzo, 2002), boosting reproduction of dominant social relations in education through the structuring of knowledge, actively selecting and regulating student identities and contributing to the regulation of students' educational success (Au, 2008), desensitising curriculum to cultural difference (Klenowski, 2010, 2011), promoting shallow and superficial learning (Lobascher, 2011) and distortion of teaching practices, curriculum constriction and narrowing of students' educational experiences (Polesel, Rice, & Dulfer, 2014; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

2.4 The Curriculum Policy-Practice Dissonance

The disparity between envisioned and enacted practices in curriculum policy has been substantially discussed in policy implementation literature (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Honig, 2006; O'Toole, 2000; Schulte, 2018; Van Meter & Van Horn , 1975). Policies envisioned by policy makers metamorphose into something very different when enacted. Distinctions were made between objectives of a policy and allocated resources to that policy, taking into account the contextual factors, including the economic, professional, social and political conditions that impact on policy implementation (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Van Meter & Van Horn , 1975). With a strong value placed on transparency, measurement and evaluation, accountability has become an ideology difficult to oppose. The excessive focus on outcomes fails to view curriculum as a social process. Schulte (2018), argues that political narratives provide a shortcut between the government and the policy actors, thus evading consideration of the actors' immediate institutional environments throughout these system sites that mediate policy translation processes and their effects. Hence, the widening gap between intended policies and implemented practice when the curriculum is blindly enacted through emphasis of procedures that are measurable and accountable.

This persisting divide under the influence of accountability discourses, stresses the need for a more fine-grained analysis of accountability systems. Nevertheless, the lack of empirical evidence of their appropriateness remains outstanding (Conway & Murphy, 2013; Huisman, 2018; Stensaker & Harvey, 2011). Despite the plethora of accountability literature in higher education, there is no consensus on the outcome of the desire for increased accountability (Romzek, 2000). Nevertheless, there is a rising demand for outcomes-driven accountability in Irish higher education where greater transparency and more robust accountability structures have been identified amidst priorities for action at macro level (DES, 2014; HEA, 2018-2020).

Such incessant measurement overemphasising performance and outcomes is claimed to be the driving force behind the persistent divide between envisioned and enacted practices where policy actors are found to disregard the logic of action within their enactment sites in favour of accomplishing the objectives of larger political narratives (Schulte, 2018). This study is an attempt to fill or reduce this gap through fulfilment of the stated objectives.

Moreover, these regimes are established on the belief that evidence-based policy is important for development and the need of knowledge banks with comparative data (Karseth & Sivesind, 2019). There is therefore an urgency for research and development pertaining to these regimes in order to produce a systematic knowledge base leading to more research-informed educational policies and practice (Burns & Schuller, 2007). This research seeks to put forward a framework with focus on content and process as well as status quo and radical transformation in order to provide explanations for the curriculum policy and practice disconnection under the influence of accountability, while avoiding reduction of this divide to simple antagonisms of any dichotomous nature such as macropolitics vs. micropolitics, structure vs. agency and/or global and national actors vs. local actors as argued by Schulte (2018).

2.5 The Rise of Global Panopticism in Higher Education

Governmentality has been defined by Foucault (1978, p.104) as "the conduct of conduct". It is a calculated management of sets of behaviours. As discussed by Simons (2006) and Lolich (2011), all educational institutional processes and actions of citizens are considered accountable as regulation of the population under neoliberal governmentality. Accountability requires information to be widely shared for use in decision-making processes. Responsabilisation as defined by Peters (2005), is a form of government that requires individuals to make choices where responsibility is shifted away from the state.

Neoliberalism can be conceived as 'the responsibility of political government to actively create

the conditions within which entrepreneurial and competitive conduct is possible' (Barry, Osborne, & Rose, 1996, p. 10). It is a theory of political economic practice framing human well-being in its economic terms of freedom to sell and buy in free markets (Lolich, 2011). The theoretical strength of the governmentality concept as argued by Lemke (2001) is that it portrays neoliberalism not solely as an ideological rhetoric or political economic rationality, but most importantly as a political project that attempts to create an already existing social reality. Thus, as asserted by Jankowski and Provezis (2014), Foucault's conception of governmentality provides an adequate base upon which to examine neoliberalism. Masschelein, Simons, Bröckling, & Pongratz (2006) propose that a governmentality perspective of education requires an analysis and description of the way people are governed and the role that education has played to create learning societies. In higher education, this encompasses demographics in the form of access and massification, economy in the form of transparent markets and politics as accountability can all be perceived as neoliberal governmentality (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014).

As termed by Lingard, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013, p. 540), a new wave of 'global panopticism' is being witnessed at supra level with the rise of accountability infrastructures where educational systems are positioned within the global market space and regulated in terms of policy as numbers in the educational policy field commensurate as a space of measurement. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and its protrusive comparisons of performance particularly via PISA functioning as a regulatory mechanism for nations, incite countries to benchmark their policies against others, permeating notions of what the curriculum is and how it should be conceptualised and organised (Elstad, 2009; Yates & Young, 2010). As proclaimed by Karseth and Sivesind (2019), organisations like the OECD has played an important role in the new global governance of education (Woodward, 2009), keeping nations under a global panoptic gaze through the endorsement of a political technology that ignores or even flouts formalised curriculum making in favour of assessment and accountability systems. These occurrences are part of a wider modification of state structures and policy frames with reverberations on the education policy cycle (Lingard et al. 2013). As Ball (2013a) affirms, new technologies of governance via market, management and performance have an effect on agenda setting, production of policy text and curriculum enactment within education systems.

As highlighted by Novoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003), the way the phenomenon of global panopticism at supra level is effected through accountability systems is concerning as it functions in a regulatory capacity within states at macro level to advance a form of neoliberal governance in terms of the ranking and marketing of education systems both internally and internationally. The impact of this global panopticism on curriculum cannot be ignored.

2.6 Summary

This chapter examined the connection and interactions between curriculum making and accountability in higher education with a focus on the curriculum policy-practice linkage.

A review of key literature around curriculum making and accountability is presented. Four key perspectives identified from literature were reviewed. In the first one, the socio-political context of curriculum is described to provide a general understanding of curriculum making at higher education where the study is situated. Then, a review on key literature on accountability is provided. This is followed by a literature analysis of the disjuncture between curriculum policy and practice. In the last section, increasing panopticism in higher education is explored.

In order to study this seething area of complexities, there was a need to develop a conceptual framework that used both ANT and governmentality to frame this messy research, as Law (2007, p. 596-597) writes:

> In practice research needs to be messy and heterogeneous. It needs to be messy and heterogeneous because that is the way it – research – actually is. And also, and more importantly it needs to be messy because that is the way the largest part of the world is: messy, unknowable in a regular and unroutinized way. Unknowable, therefore, in ways that are definite or coherent.

3 Conceptual Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the conceptual framework for the research. First, a brief outline of the use of a composite approach merging the analytics of Foucauldian governmentality with the interpretive tools of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to analyse the impact of accountability on curriculum practice is provided. The chapter then discusses the core theoretical resources of the governmentality frame and its relevance to the study. Subsequently, the key concepts of ANT and its valuable contribution to this research is evaluated. Then, aspects of Callon's model of translation, a central tenet of ANT upon which the study is drawn is presented. This is followed by discussion on how the conceptual underpinnings of this case study will elucidate the ways in which government regimes of accountability are translated within socio-political networks of curriculum practice with discernible effects.

3.2 A Composite Approach to Analysing the Impact of Accountability on Curriculum Practice: ANT's Sociology of Translation and Foucauldian Governmentality

This study is based upon the analysis of the accountability phenomenon in the Irish higher education spaces of curriculum evaluation as a contribution to the knowledge base, through a critical evaluation of the contingency, concatenations and potentialities of the different policy trajectories composing the current curriculum arrangements and experience. To fulfil this objective, a blended approach combining the governmentality framework adapted from Dean (2010) and concepts of ANT encompassing the four stages of translation is used (Callon, 1986). These two approaches and their associated concepts provide the theoretical bridge between the two phenomena under study; accountability and curriculum practice.

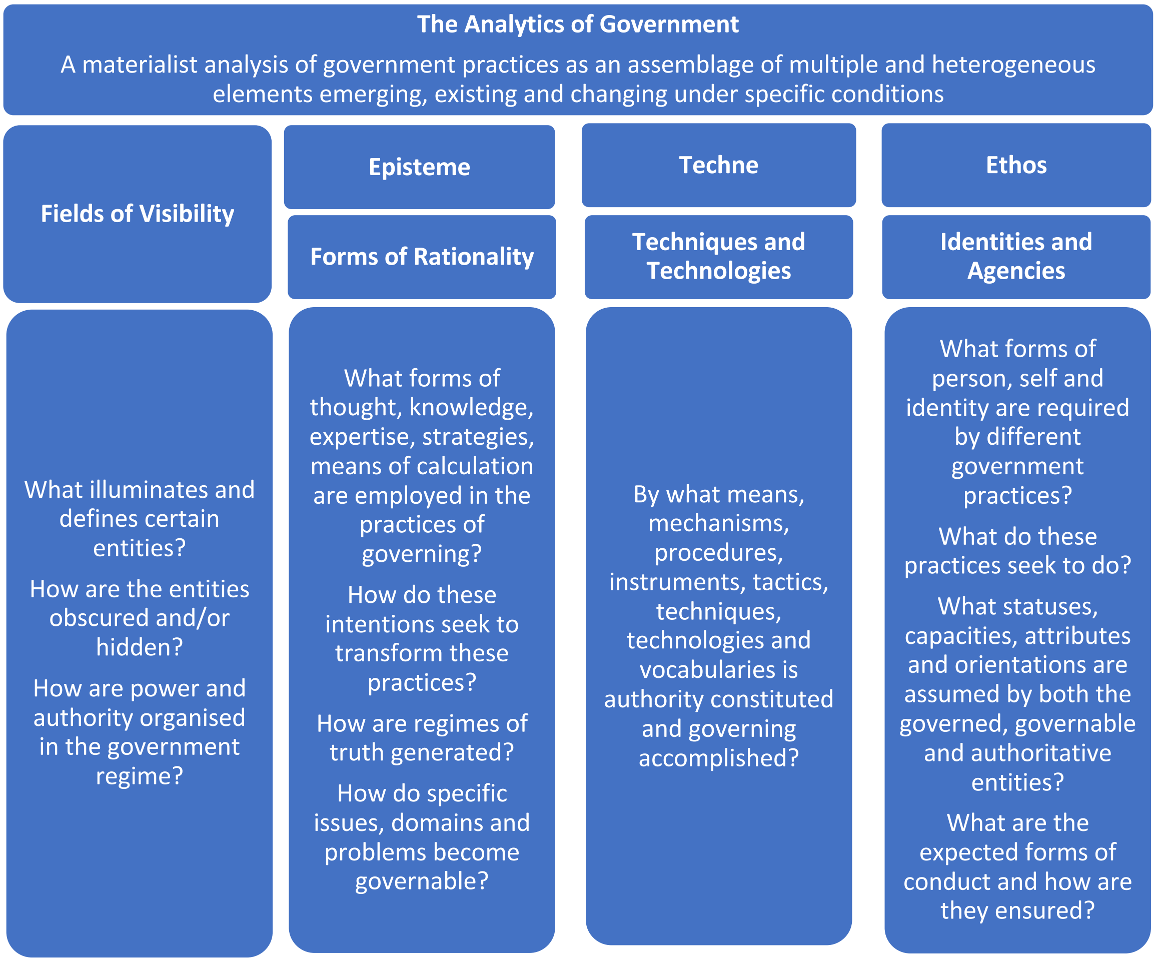
3.2.1 The Governmentality Framework as Analytics of Government

The term 'government' has been defined by Foucault (1982, p. 220-221) as the "conduct of conduct" that teases out several senses of the word 'conduct'. While this term implies leadership, direction and guidance and some sort of projection of a course of action, it may also be perceived reflexively in an ethical or moral senses as the conduct of oneself which emphasises self-direction or self-regulation as appropriate to certain circumstances. Additionally, conduct also refers to the articulated set of behaviours including actions such as professional conduct or norms. Therefore, compiling these senses of conduct, Dean (2010, p.18) describes government as:

> … any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs of various actors, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes.

An analysis of government is therefore concerned with the forms of knowledge, techniques and practices, entities to be governed, its conception along with the effects and outcomes. In Foucault’s terms, governmentality is the reasoned way of governing through organised practices including mentalities, rationalities and techniques while simultaneously reflecting on the best possible way of governing (Foucault, 2008). Activities of educational institutions and associated stakeholders are accountable as part of neoliberal governmentality (Lolich, 2011) which requires information to be shared widely to be used in decision-making processes. Hence, as affirmed by Peters (2005), self-government requires individuals to make informed choices through which responsibility is shifted from the state to the individual. Thus, Foucault’s concept of governmentality provides an adequate basis upon which to examine political influences on the curriculum at various sites of evaluation within the higher education system.

Analysis of the ethical government of the self involves four aspects concerned with, firstly, the governed entity to act upon, secondly, the governing mechanisms, thirdly, the governable subjects and finally, the governing goals that concerns the ethical practices (Foucault, 1985; 1986b). Educational institutions exist within a macro political context where supra influences and their agendas interact with the balance of power between internal and external factors and discourses. External factors include global economic forces combined with neoliberal ideology with the aims of improving educational outputs and seeking to become more market-driven under the assumption that competitiveness amongst institutions, propelled by public choice will promote enhancements in learning (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014). Consequently, government implies multiplicity and heterogeneity that involves various agency types and authority with different types of thoughts. This research, as in many governmentality studies (Foucault, 1991b), is more concerned with the way policy ideas and intentions operate within organised ways of conducting accountable regimes of curriculum practices with its effects. In this study, accountability is perceived as a set of distinct and intentional forms of ideas seeking to reform part of the government regime in education where regimes of government are considered as systematically organised ways of managing the conduct of the self and others (Dean, 2010). To analyse these specific conditions under which certain entities become visible, exist and transform, insights are drawn from Dean's (2010) analytics of government perspective through the interpretive lenses of Foucauldian governmentality. An analytics of government accord these regimes of practices their own reality, density and logic, thus avoiding any precipitated reduction to any order or level of existence. Regimes of government centrally concerned with processes of governing and being governed, their emergence, operation and transformation can be extended along four independently varying but interconnected dimensions namely, fields of visibility characterising ways of seeing and perceiving, distinctive ways of acting made up of particular forms of rationality (episteme), techniques and technologies (techne) and identities and agencies (ethos) (Dean, 2010; Grimaldi & Barzano, 2014). Although it avoids any kind of a priori reductionism or determinism including power and authority, the governmentality frame (Figure 3.1) does engage a specific set of questions revolving around the ways in which regimes of government practices operate and change due to transpositions and repositions taking place during the process.



The Analytics of Government

A materialist analysis of government practices as an assemblage of multiple and heterogeneous elements emerging, existing and changing under specific conditions

Fields of Visibility	**Episteme**	**Techne**	**Ethos**
	Forms of Rationality	**Techniques and Technologies**	**Identities and Agencies**
What illuminates and defines certain entities? How are the entities obscured and/or hidden? How are power and authority organised in the government regime?	What forms of thought, knowledge, expertise, strategies, means of calculation are employed in the practices of governing? How do these intentions seek to transform these practices? How are regimes of truth generated? How do specific issues, domains and problems become governable?	By what means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies is authority constituted and governing accomplished?	What forms of person, self and identity are required by different government practices? What do these practices seek to do? What statuses, capacities, attributes and orientations are assumed by both the governed, governable and authoritative entities? What are the expected forms of conduct and how are they ensured?

Figure 3.1 An analytical matrix supporting problematisation of current educational discourses through the lenses of Foucauldian governmentality. Adapted from Dean (2010).

The first dimension of the frame, fields of visibility, are imperative to the operation of particular regimes. The second dimension, episteme, makes up the set of ideas and assumptions that underlie what is accepted as knowledge and what stimulates governing activities. While forms of rationality inspire governing and are engaged in the conduct of conduct, these regimes of truth generate fields of visibility that illuminates certain objects, meanings and understandings but obscures and hides others (Dean, 2010). These therefore allow visualisation of the fields to be governed drawing attention to questions of who needs to be accountable and for what, how different entities are related to one another in the political arena, what issues are to be resolved and what objectives are to be met. The third dimension, the techne of government conditions governing activities, defining and imposing limits over possibilities of actions. The final dimension, ethos, involves the forms of individual and collective identity that operate governing as well as those identities and agencies that specific government practices attempt to form by eliciting, promoting, facilitating, fostering and attributing various capacities, standards and statuses to specific agents (Dean, 2010; Grimaldi & Barzano, 2014).

3.2.2 Critiques and Limitations of Governmentality

Although explanations provided by governmentality continue to hold promise in political research, concerns have been raised by this approach. Foucault's approach is perceived as a top-down conceptualisation of power where subjectivity, contradiction and struggle are subordinated to a seemingly positive and productive system of power that may become a theory of social reproduction rather than one of transcendence (Kerr, 1999).

Consequently, conception of power and governmentality is believed to undermine social subjectivity, creating a notion of entrapped humanity that can never escape systems of the political system. Nevertheless, the proposition that Foucault developed a theory of power was rejected by himself (Foucault, 1989b). Kerr (1999) asserts that the political stance adopted by Foucault actively ordains a free market produced by neoliberal governmentality and demands that power and government be instead reconceptualised in terms of contradictory forms of social subjectivity. However, while some (Dean, 1994; Gordon, 1991) admit that power could be understood in terms of determining the subject, they also affirm that this concern can be addressed by political rationality, technologies of government, techniques of the self and the aesthetics of existence concerned with ethical practice. The notion of governmentality is supposed to achieve some sort of interconnectedness between the 'techniques of power' and 'techniques of the self'. Nonetheless, while the thought space between 'practices of the self' and 'practices of government' are interweaved without any reduction of one or the other, it appears to reproduce the notion of power as constitutive, where techniques of domination are supplemented by techniques of the self (Kerr, 1999).

3.2.3 An Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

Much has been written in literature about the factors impacting on the curriculum as it is enacted from various perspectives including individual, organisational, micropolitical and contextual approaches (Bloomer 1997; Edwards, 2011). However, these approaches have been reproved for representing the curriculum as a black box which is bounded by a context distorting it in unpredicted ways (Edwards, Biesta & Thorpe, 2009). These factors are considered to be placed external to curriculum-making practices, placing emphasis on explaining why curriculum enactment yields unexpected results and thus establish a rationale for exercising control over it. Such approaches tend to be based upon a priori asymmetrical divergences of knowledge practice like human-non human, theory-practice, subject-object, nature-culture to produce explanatory constituents by examining one factor in terms of the other, in order to regulate the world via human objectives and agency (Edwards, 2011).

This study undertakes an alternative perspective emphasising difference and multiplicity in curriculum-making practices through the use of Actor-Network Theory, known as ANT, to elucidate the impact of accountability on curriculum practice. A priori distinction is a key preposition of ANT, termed by Callon (1986) as the principle of free association. Limiting curriculum practice to a single explanatory ontology is therefore not established in this approach but rather, curriculum-making and enactment are regarded as multifarious and heterogeneous in relation to the animate and inanimate entities with agentic effects in networks. Hence, the focus is shifted from the factors that can be arranged in a particular way to provide explanations for differences between the intended and implemented curriculum for better alignment, to actors in the plurality of curriculum practices without human intention and agency being predominantly prerogative (Fountain, 1999).

ANT is an approach that allows tracing of the ways that different elements assemble and act in a certain manner. Law (2007, p. 595) refers to ANT as a ‘diaspora’ in terms of a disparate set of:

> ... tools, sensibilities and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations.

Actions are therefore not considered as the consequences of human intentions but the result of networks mobilisation where relational tactics are jointly performed by both animate and inanimate entities in unpredictable arrangements within networks distributed along space and time (Edwards, 2011). The aim is to understand how the order and stability of these entities produce agency and temporary network effects such as rules, instruments, policies and reforms. The principle of generalised symmetry, one of the core prepositions of this actor-network approach is its concern with how actors, both human and non-human being regarded as having equal significance in enactment (Callon, 1986), are unified in stable heterogeneous networks of aligned interests withstanding its own dominance as yet another reductionist theory (Law, 1992; Law 2007). ANT assumes that humans do not possess a privileged a priori status in the world but rather to form part of it (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).

Any entity that has the ability to act, through which it can exert discernible influence on others has been termed by Law (1986) as an actor. Therefore, the notion of actor will apply to all entities exerting any kind of influence within the socio-political networks of curriculum-making. The concept of actors has been categorised by Latour (2005) into mediators and intermediaries. Intermediaries encompass various heterogeneous materials such as texts and inscriptions including strategy papers, laws and regulations and codes within the context of curriculum policy framing. While intermediaries are actors that operate more like a stabilised black box accounting for predictable outcomes because they convey a force or meaning without modifying it, there is less certainty with mediators that are unpredictable. Mediators such as perception of accountability, conception of curriculum, knowledge of evaluation approaches, students grades, databases and ideas about standards amongst others, that actively influence entities and events can be adjusted, adapted, interpreted and redirected. However, an intermediary may break down and become a complex mediator blowing out in multiple directions and mobilises more mediators, in the same way that a mediator can transform into an intermediary that would require more work to be accounted for (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Mediators and intermediaries work together in interactive flows to produce networks, another central tenet of ANT such as political rhetoric and texts, institutional regulations, student actions and societal expectations (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). ANT's concept of networks indicates to interactive assemblages of various relationally heterogeneous actors, both human and non-human, with chains of associations between them (Murdoch, 1997). These networks are prone to reflect both the multiplicity of materials used in their construction as well as the established relations among its combined elements (Dolwick, 2009). As these components assemble together, they form alliance or networks that can keep extending to stretch across broad spaces, long distances or time periods (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). For example, the networks of curriculum evaluations influence the subjectivities of human actors and their relations with other actors and actants ranging from compliance, resistance, controversy and debate, altogether shaping curriculum practice. Hence, the term actor-network where things that have formed part of this actor-network are effects generated by certain interactions with one another. Law (1997, p.3) refers to the actor-network concept as deliberately 'oxymoronic' because on one hand it points to a centred actor and a decentred network on the other. Thus, both terms are linked in such a way that one cannot be elucidated without the other, as an actor-network is simultaneously an actor that is actively networking heterogeneous elements while also being a network possessing the ability to redefine what it is made of (Callon, 1987). As posited by Priestley and Philippou (2018), curriculum-making processes occur in non-linear ways across multiple sites in unpredictable ways and producing unique practices.

3.2.3.1 The Sociology of Translation

Actor Network Theory can be used to conceptualise the development and implementation of curriculum policy as a process of translation (Callon, 1986; Gaskel & Hepburn, 1998; Hamilton, 2012). This approach acknowledges that policy as texts do not have clear or fixed meanings and the carry-over of meanings from one political site to another is susceptible to interpretational slippage and controversy (Ball, 2013). Problematisation of the conduct of conduct, as a historical process challenging an existing political system or government regime enacted through chains of assemblages coupled with the idea of policy text being prone to evolution through contestations and negotiations by political networks of a multitude of social and material actors aligns closely to the ANT model of translation (Callon, 1986). It is a useful concept for understanding what happens to a policy agenda as it circulates through a policy network during the implementation process (Latour, 1987). Through the concept of translation, ANT also enables an understanding of the roles of actors in the reformulation of policy.

Callon’s (1986) ANT approach and its model of translation comprises of four interrelated moments or phases as represented in Figure 3.2: problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilisation.

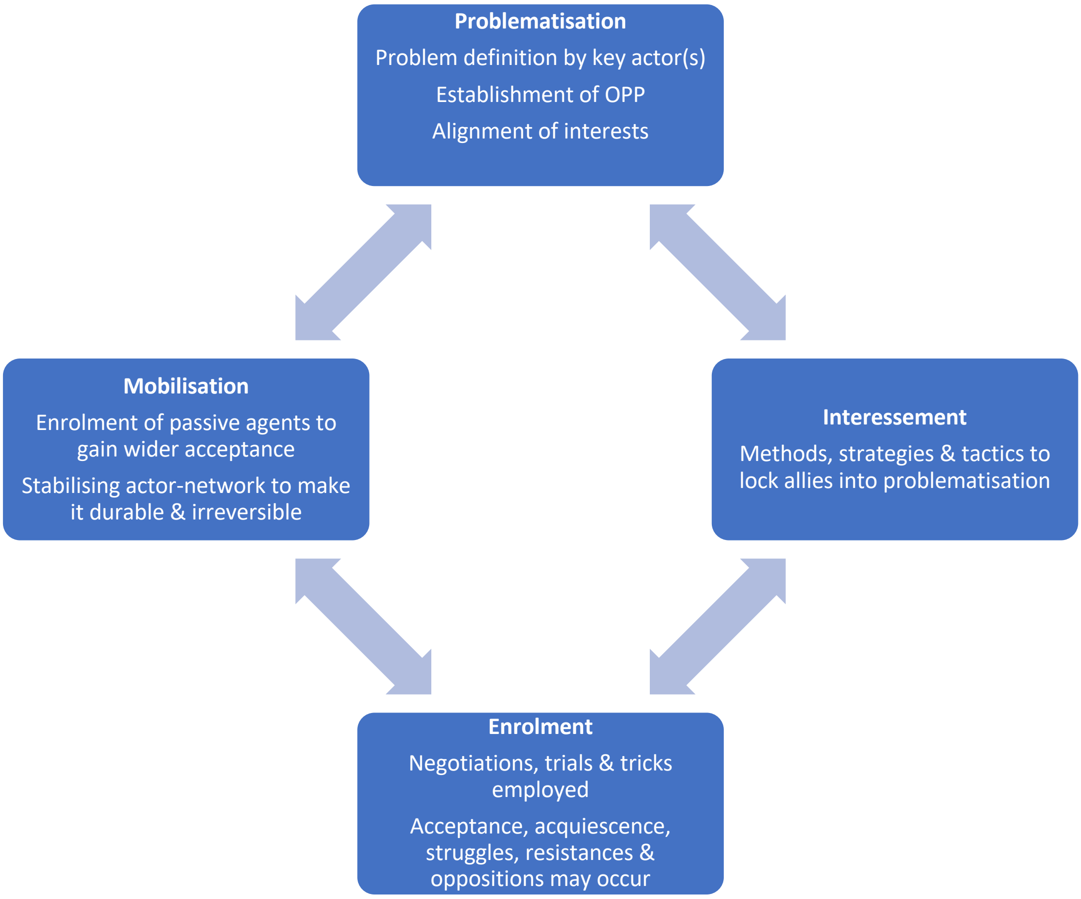

Problematisation
Problem definition by key actor(s)
Establishment of OPP
Alignment of interests
Mobilisation
Enrolment of passive agents to gain wider acceptance
Stabilising actor-network to make it durable & irreversible
Interessement
Methods, strategies & tactics to lock allies into problematisation
Enrolment
Negotiations, trials & tricks employed
Acceptance, acquiescence, struggles, resistances & oppositions may occur

Figure 3.2 The four interrelated moments of translation. Adapted from Callon (1986).

In the first phase, problematisation (Figure 3.3 Research actions to fulfil the objectives of the study.), one or more key actors attempt to persuade other actors that they have the required skills, knowledge and resources to resolve a problem, by framing the nature of the issue in their own terms (Tatnall & Burgess, 2002). In addition to configuring an initial problem-solving actor-network by identifying a number of actors and establishing roles, the controlling actors establish an Obligatory Passage Point known as OPP through which they render themselves indispensable (Callon, 1986). The controlling actors thus impose their ideas upon the other actors suggesting that their problems would only be resolved by passing through the OPP where they must modify their interests, aligning them to those of the controlling actors and accept a set of specific rules.

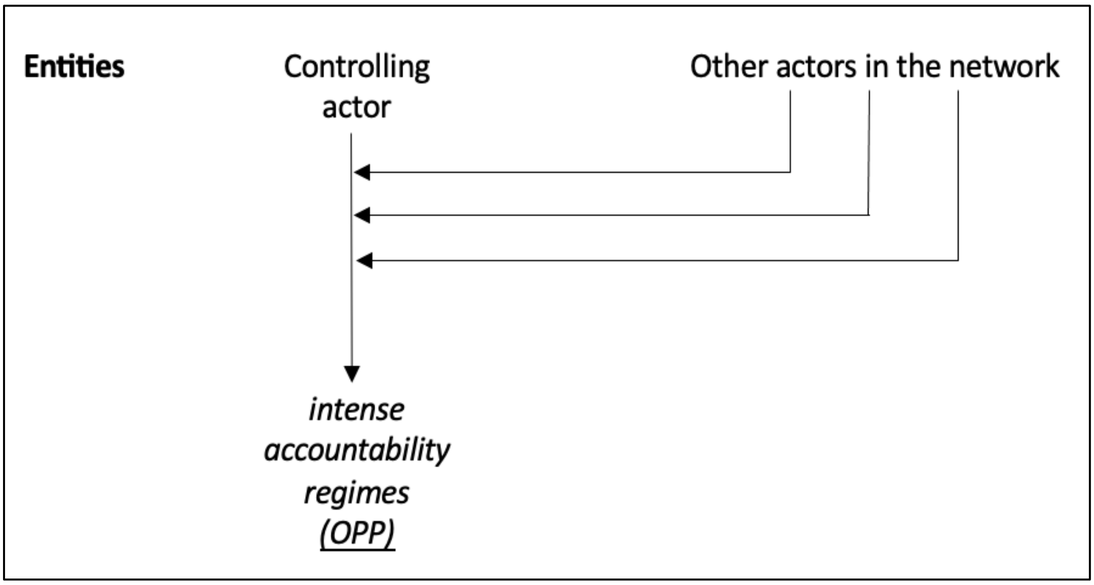

Entities
Controlling actor
Other actors in the network
intense accountability regimes (OPP)

Figure 3.3 Problem definition in other actors' own terms.

Interessement (Figure 3.4) implies the action of building interest by which an actor interests others enough to accept its proposal (Callon, 1986). In this process of persuasion of other actors, the controlling actor or actors employ various methods, strategies and tactics to retain their interests and ensure that the roles assigned to them are performed.

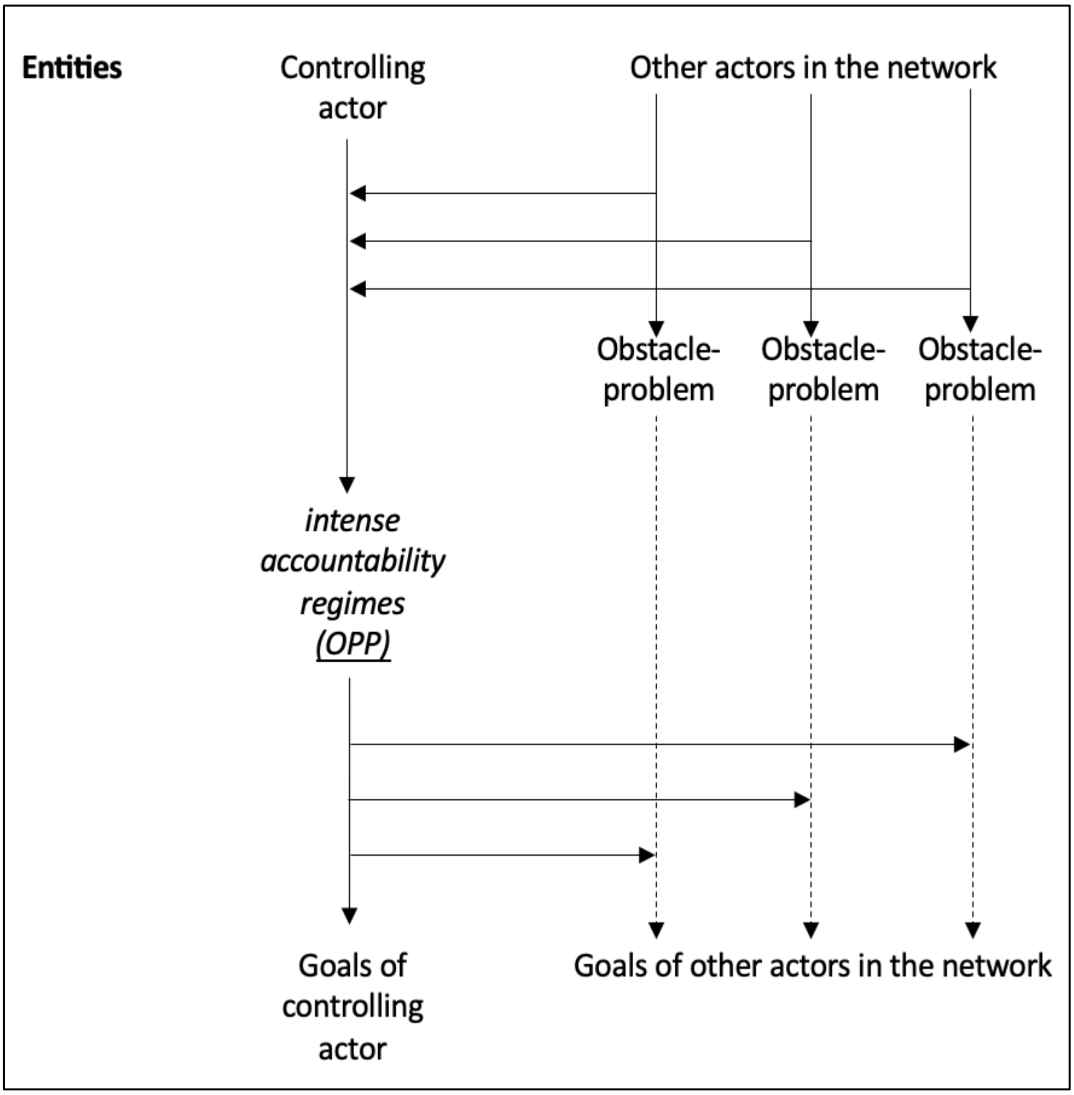

Entities
Controlling actor
Other actors in the network
Obstacle-problem
Obstacle-problem
Obstacle-problem
intense accountability regimes (OPP)
Goals of controlling actor
Goals of other actors in the network

Figure 3.4 Interessement of other actors.

Following successful interessement, enrolment (Figure 3.5) of a sufficient body of allies which comprises of negotiations, trials and tricks is enforced so that actors are inclined to participation in particular ways to maintain the network (Walsham, 1997) as certain actors may also threaten the stability of the network.

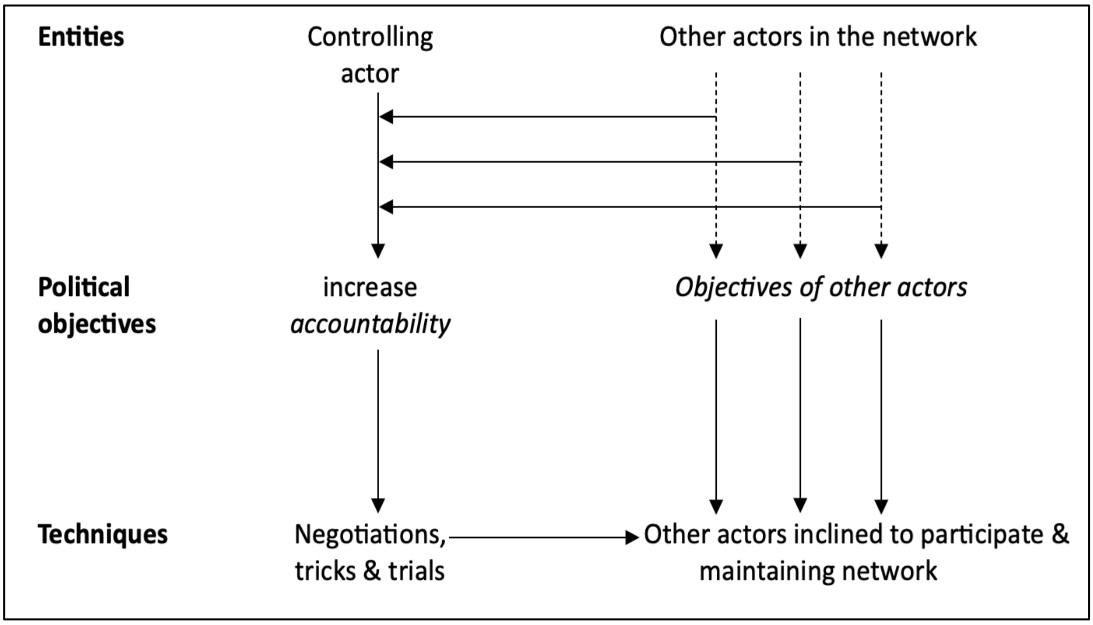

Entities
Controlling actor
Other actors in the network
Political objectives
increase *accountability*
Objectives of other actors
Techniques
Negotiations, tricks & trials
Other actors inclined to participate & maintaining network

Figure 3.5 Enrolment of allies.

The last moment of translation is about mobilisation (Figure 3.6) of allies where the controlling actor gathers enough allies to alter the belief and behaviour of other actors (Latour, 1980) by enrolling passive agents to gain wider acceptance and stabilise the actor-network making it durable and irreversible (Tatnall & Burgess, 2002).

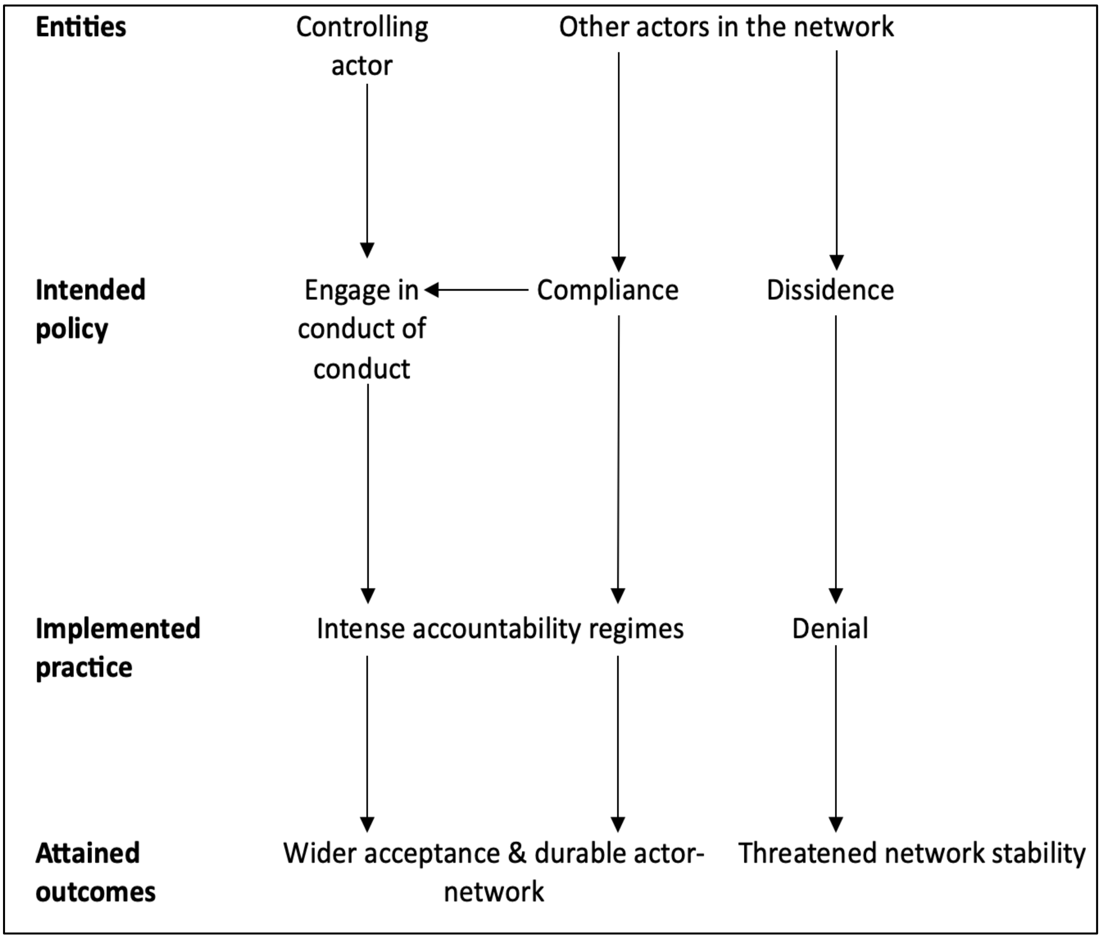

Entities
Controlling actor
Other actors in the network
Intended policy
Engage in conduct of conduct
Compliance
Dissidence
Implemented practice
Intense accountability regimes
Denial
Attained outcomes
Wider acceptance & durable actor-network
Threatened network stability

Figure 3.6 Network mobilisation.

If accountability discourses that influence the development of curriculum policy text is taken as an example, it can be postulated that they bring together and freeze in one form, a number of formal and informal consultations and negotiations conducted in private and public spaces, an array of voices and opinions of various stakeholders nationally and internationally, a range of conflicts and debates amongst key actors and many explored and rejected ideas and possibilities. This policy text then flows across spaces, gathering allies, framing thoughts and actions and consequently generating new networks (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Depending on the amount of allies and networks, who or what these allies are and the representation of these networks, the political agenda set out in the text may emerge in diverse ways including to be more robust, feeble, or completely distorted.

3.2.4 Critiques and Limitations of ANT

ANT studies have often been criticised for tending to overshadow the actual approaches (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). However, Sørensen (2009) asserts that logical meaning and coherence of the concepts used is less important than how they provide assistance in carrying out empirical evaluation and the kinds of studies and analyses in which they result. Nonetheless, the stance adopted when using ANT should be made explicit (Whittle & Spicer, 2008). Pertinent to this study, key limitations of ANT were noted.

The debate around ANT' s principle of generalised symmetry between human and non-human actors is remarkable. ANT attributes agency to both humans and non-humans, where they are both viewed as active entities. Ascribing symmetrical treatment to human and non-humans have been condemned as intellectually and morally problematic due to humans being excluded from their essential role (Munir & Jones, 2004). However, the symmetrical stance adopted in this research was required in order to suppress the overemphasis onto humans as powerful actors. Nevertheless, reducing the distinctive richness of human agency is controversial as it is believed to adopt amoral and apolitical stances (Walsham, 1997). In spite of everything, assuming a symmetric approach towards humans and non-humans in the context of this research has enabled a critical examination of the role of accountability throughout the curriculum making process. As Callon and Latour (1992) suggested, this principle should be used as an analytical stance and not from an ethical position. ANT also raises disaccord in relation to its reflexive approach Cordella and Shaikh, 2006; Whittle and Spicer, 2008). Murdoch (2021) claims that there is a tendency to adopt an objective stance under the assumption that, as proclaimed by Whittle and Spicer (2008), theory have the ability to provide an expert view as opposed to naïve explanations. Furthermore, there may be an inclination towards applying ANT's four-phase translation unreflexively while attempting to verify its universality. It is therefore important to acknowledge the crucial role played by the researcher where reality is a continuous process of construction and interpretation. Moreover, ANT was adopted in this study as an analytical tool to explore the two phenomena under investigation and not to test the conceptual tools provided by ANT.

Moreover, ANT has also been criticised for over-emphasising control and management where privileged actors' objectives are to create more stable networks while ignoring other possibilities of network development (Gad and Bruun Jensen, 2010) such as power is actually a function of networks rather than actors (Whittle and Spicer, 2008). It is therefore important to maintain sensitivity to complexity keeping in mind the distinction that Latour (1986) made between a diffusion model of power and a translation model of power.

3.3 Framework to Study the Dynamic Interplay of Accountability Discourses, Actors and Networks in Curriculum Practice at Higher Education

Through meaning-making in curriculum which is regarded as a social process (Moore, 2000), content and boundaries that seem uncomplicated are established for what is incorporated or eliminated in the planned educational practice and the expected outcomes. When portrayed as a social and cultural entity, curriculum content is not a stable, fixed body of knowledge, nor a logical manifestation of a discipline or a political decision that is well-defined (Karseth & Sivesind, 2010). Hence, the influence of accountability on curriculum is strengthened through considerations and negotiations around what is considered valid knowledge and values within specific historical and social settings (Karseth & Sivesind, 2010). Curriculum forms a powerful mechanism over stakeholders' experiences of education which influences their subjectivity. Lingard, Martino, & Rezai-Rashti (2013) posit that educational researchers understand curriculum as systemic policy enacted in institutions through pedagogy which is framed by systemic evaluation, assessment and testing policies. However, besides designating and legitimating validated knowledge, objectives, skills and assessment criteria, curriculum policy at the same time has an effect on pedagogical relationships and practices, organisation of the institution, resources (Gerrard & Farrell, 2013) and teacher and learner meaning-making (Todd, 2001). Thus, curriculum enactment involves heterogeneous interactions of actors (who are both politically and socially related) across many domains or networks. In this research, policy is considered as both a process and a product (Taylor et al., 1997) in order to explore the development and implementation of the higher education curriculum within the wider context of network governance and to investigate the growing reliance of governments on actor-networks to formulate and enact policy (Ball & Junemann, 2012).

To capture this dynamic interplay of accountability and curriculum within and across the different policy enactment sites, the combined approach of the governmentality frame and ANT (See Figure 3.7 below) offers a powerful lens through which to examine the complex dynamics, ruptures and ambiguities of the curriculum enactment process while at the same time presents a means to intervene in educational issues and reframe practices.

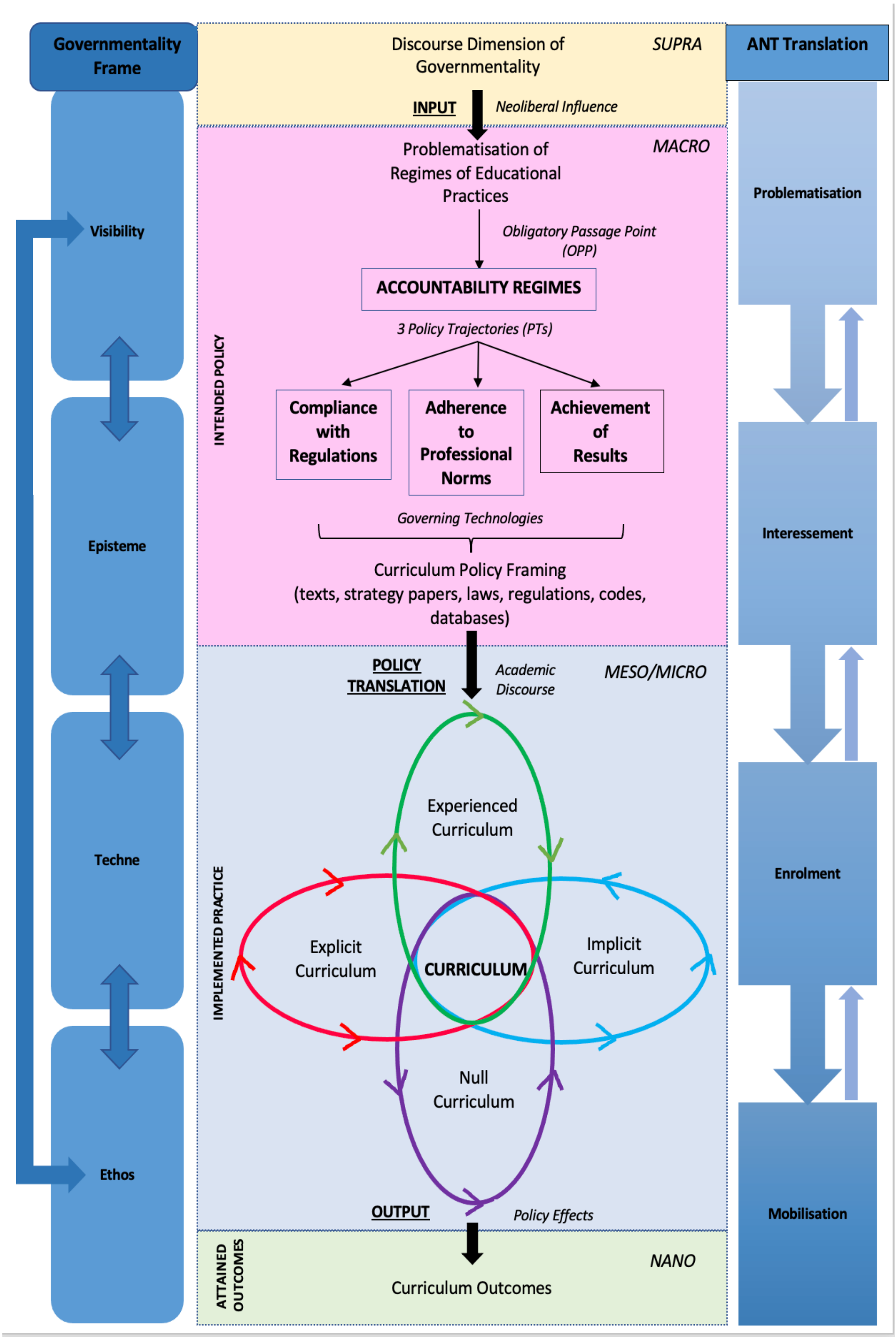

Governmentality Frame
Visibility
Episteme
Techne
Ethos
Discourse Dimension of Governmentality
SUPRA
INPUT
Neoliberal Influence
Problematisation of Regimes of Educational Practices
MACRO
Obligatory Passage Point (OPP)
ACCOUNTABILITY REGIMES
3 Policy Trajectories (PTs)
INTENDED POLICY
Compliance with Regulations
Adherence to Professional Norms
Achievement of Results
Governing Technologies
Curriculum Policy Framing (texts, strategy papers, laws, regulations, codes, databases)
POLICY TRANSLATION
Academic Discourse
MESO/MICRO
IMPLEMENTED PRACTICE
Experienced Curriculum
Explicit Curriculum
CURRICULUM
Implicit Curriculum
Null Curriculum
OUTPUT
Policy Effects
ATTAINED OUTCOMES
NANO
Curriculum Outcomes
ANT Translation
Problematisation
Interessement
Enrolment
Mobilisation

Figure 3.7 Conceptual underpinnings for the research to examine the complex dynamics, ruptures and ambiguities of curriculum enactment under the influence of accountability.

This framework represents the intertwined matrix of Foucauldian governmentality and ANT's sociology of translation (as discussed above) to conceptualise the influence of external discourses of governmentality and local contemporary regimes of accountability on the dimension of curriculum at higher education. Contemporary regimes of accountability are represented as three main policy trajectories as identified in literature; compliance with regulations, adherence to professional norms and achievement of results. Emphasis is laid on policy events, production of truth, authority mechanism and practices of subjectification and resistance (Miller & Rose, 2008) between blurred boundaries across multiple sites of curriculum activity (supra, macro, meso, micro, nano) where power flows in non-linear ways.

The adopted strategy employs the Foucauldian-inspired concept of 'problematisation' in a dual sense. Firstly, it operates as a method of analysis to "thinking problematically" (Foucault, 1977, p. 185-186), scrutinising believed truths and associated subjectivities, the relation between self-understanding and governing modalities as well as the role played by bodies of knowledge theorised as truths by various authorities. Secondly, problematisation is viewed as an overlap of a historical process of producing material for thought at particular moments that also draws attention to policy genealogy, taking into consideration the evolutionary development of social actors' engagement with policy including the effects of subjectification (Bacchi, 2012; Foucault, 1984). Problematisation in this instance captures how and why certain things such as behaviour, phenomena and processes become a problem and thus, become the foci of the study (Foucault, 1985a). Analysis of the issue in the study transfers from how accountability structures are implemented to why it comes to be disputed and evaluated at specific times and under particular circumstances. Foucauldian governmentality as analytics of government (Dean, 2010) provides helpful analytical lenses for this study framing problematisation as a critical ethos of government regimes with a set of specific objectives as intended policy. At the same time, ANT's Sociology of Translation offers valuable interpretive tools to determine the role of mobile thoughts and knowledge, technologies and subjectivities in the establishment of accountability regimes to characterise implemented practice as well as analysing its impact on curriculum practices in terms of attained outcomes.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has discussed the theoretical resources adopted by this study. It has presented a clear picture of ANT perspective as a distinguished research approach informed by Foucauldian governmentality. This combined research framework is well adapted to investigate the impact of accountability regimes on the curriculum policy-practice process. The chapter also included a critique of potential limitations of both ANT as well as the governmentality frame.

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research design and methods used to collect and analyse data. The researcher's positionality is presented and the philosophical choices are discussed. Delimitations of the research are stated and an explanation of how ethical issues were addressed is provided. The chapter concludes with an outline of data trustworthiness.

4.2 Researcher's positionality

The relationship between knowledge and empirical work is closely connected. In my view, the researcher is always implicated in the study of a phenomenon and hence, can never claim a neutral stance. Therefore, it can be anticipated that the prior experiences, beliefs, assumptions and values will always intercede with their investigation. Hence, what might be described as biases in positivist approach can be perceived as layers of complexity and meaning-making processes to be understood rather than shortcomings (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In the context of this research, my role as a researcher is to deconstruct the impact of accountability regimes on the dimension of curriculum practice. At the same time, it is also deemed appropriate to raise awareness of the status quo conditions to initiate change in socio-political relations and practices aiming towards enhancement of accountability systems in place. In qualitative studies, my role is considered as the human instrument (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This concept emphasises the distinctive role played by the researcher's knowledge, perception and subjectivity in the process of data collection and analysis.

Avoiding the insider-outsider dichotomy as suggested by Kipnis, Bebek and Bröckerhoff (2021), I position myself somewhere between these demarcated boundaries in relation to the three areas outlined by Savin-Baden and Major (2013); the research topic, the participants and the research process. In my role of a quality assurance director at a private further education institution, I am responsible for the development, implementation, monitoring and review of QA procedures to ensure quality in curriculum delivery. I also assist in the planning and delivery of curricula. Hence, as a meso curriculum actor, my identity constantly shifted between the practitioner and the researcher throughout the research process. In this instance, my professional identity positioned me as an insider towards the participants of the research who are also curriculum actors, although from a wider range from curriculum activity sites. While my personal interactions with accountability regimes bring benefits to this research, it also raises challenges in interpreting and analysing data. I could relate to my interview participants' experiences and truly understood what they meant when they spoke of supressed freedom, having to prove their professionalism, working under pressure and intense workload and still being judged as incompetent for not meeting performance measures . However, I was also an outsider because I work in further education as compared to my participants (meso and micro) who were from higher education. Nonetheless, reflexively questioning my positionality vis-à-vis various aspects throughout the research helped to ease out challenges and dilemmas. As asserted by Tritter (1995), reflexivity renders researchers more aware of their own responses. While struggling through the journey of this research, steering insider-outsider positionality, I have developed better understanding of myself as a researcher in various contexts with a non-static positionality.

4.3 Philosophical Positioning

4.3.1 The Pragmatic Paradigm

The main aim of the research is to reveal the effectiveness of accountability in the curriculum policy-practice process at higher education through analysis of its influence on curriculum outcomes. Hence, the objectives are also to make an impact in order to bring change in practice through the development of a framework to interpret the issue in terms of actors and processes at multi-levels and proposing a model of enhanced intelligent accountability systems with improved influence on the curriculum. These views are well supported by the pragmatic paradigm that holds a worldview which focuses on research outcomes including the actions, situations and consequences of inquiry (Creswell, 2012).

Indeed, as John Dewey, a key figure in the pragmatist school articulated, education needs to be approached as an active rather than passive process implying that inquiry is by nature oriented towards future action (Dewey, 1998). The essence of pragmatist ontology is concerned with actions and change and the interplay between knowledge and action, where human actions are in a sustained state of becoming (Goldkuhl, 2012). As Blumer (1969, p. 71) claims, “the essence of society lies in an ongoing process of action – not in a posited structure of relations”, which implies that if structures of relations between people are considered devoid of the ongoing process of action, then they are meaningless. Consequently the need for a pragmatic research paradigm to guide methodological reflection and empirical investigation is established, aiming for constructive knowledge that is useful for action. The study is based on a coherent pragmatic approach consisting of three main features: 1) the perception that generation of knowledge is a social and discursive activity; 2) recognition of the interconnections among experience, knowing and acting and 3) the orientation of the research towards the production of practical knowledge. The pragmatic paradigm advocates an ontology of non-singular reality implying that all individuals have distinctive interpretations of reality, a relational epistemology whereby relationships in research are deemed to be best determined by what the researcher esteems to be appropriate in the context of the study and a value-laden axiology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In a strict epistemological sense, as posited by Polkinghorne (1983), pragmatic truth is not a justified belief but somewhat the effectiveness of knowledge which is demonstrated by the effectiveness of action.

4.3.2 Rationale for the Research Stance

Justification for the chosen methodology suggest a context-specific instance of research demonstrated to be in theoretical congruence with the pragmatist research paradigm for examining the influence of accountability on curriculum design and implementation at higher education in Ireland. It is posited that accountability is a social phenomenon and its investigation at multi-levels within an institution is dependent upon the understanding of social assemblages and discursive practices. It was deemed inadequate to reduce such a complex social phenomenon to quantitative figures through interpretation of facts or quantifiable entities while assuming that context is unimportant as is the case with the positivist paradigm (Fadhel, 2002; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The question did not lie in yielding sufficient amount of quantitative data to establish a certain theory to account for the social behaviour of curriculum actors under the influence of accountability pressures. Rather, information was being sought about its implications, impact and efficiency through social diffusion. Hence, a positivistic methodology was conceived to be epistemologically inconsistent with the type of knowledge being sought in this particular instance of research where a more open and nuanced way to study and analyse the accountability complexities was required. The critical paradigm was also not deemed to be a viable option as the focus of the study was not focused on analysing the power relationships within social structures created by accountability undertaking to disclose concurrence of politics, morality and ethics (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This research constituted of both interpretive elements seeking to understand interpretations of reality by curriculum actors and poststructuralist aspects seeking to deconstruct prevalent accountability discourses that constantly change based on cultural, political, social and economic positions. Hence, a pragmatic approach was used to address the research problem.

Lukenchuk and Kolich (2013) also assert that pragmatism has connections with the interpretive paradigm. Ontologically, interpretive researchers assume that the social world is produced and reinforced by human actions and interactions (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). While this study is compatible with a qualitatively-dominant interpretivist perception of social reality, pragmatic stance was theoretically more consistent with the objectives of the proposed research where values and meanings of data were interrogated through evaluation of its practical consequences (Morgan, 2014b). Understanding of the social reality that was under investigation within the higher education context of this research was believed to be inter-subjectively constructed by social actors (policy actors) through sets of practices at various enactment sites within an institution where meaning is given through language. Maarouf (2019) posits that pragmatism allows researchers to conceptualise their research on the basis of the reality cycle which implies that reality depends on a certain context to exist and that this reality is perceived by social actors differently, which in turn influences their behaviours leading to the construction of a new context over time, ultimately generating a new reality. This concept maps perfectly with the proposed research scenario in the sense that accountability regimes are perceived differently by curriculum enactors in a social assemblage at multiple sites of implementation situated within different contexts, influencing their behaviours which becomes evident in practice, constructing new contexts with disparate outcomes.

Through the pragmatic stance, both views of external reality and varied perceptions of this reality in the minds of social actors can be investigated (Maarouf, 2019).

Goles and Hirschheim (2000) also state that pragmatism undercuts the traditional dichotomy between paradigms through the provision of a philosophical basis grounded in pluralism. In this instance, the research strategy of abduction is proposed to allow for a more practical and pluralistic approach involving a combination of methods to elucidate the behaviour of participants along with the beliefs that stimulate those behaviours as well as the resulting consequences in a case study design (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Moreover, using pragmatism to explore and understand the relatedness between knowledge and action in context has the potential of transforming practice (Biesta, 2010) and therefore makes it a more appropriate basis for intervening into the world through actionable judgements rather than mere observation and interpretation (Dewey, 1998).

4.4 Case Study Research Design

In line with the pragmatic paradigm presented above, a case study methodology was deemed to be appropriate for this research. Case study has been defined as an empirical enquiry of “the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). Since case study investigates an existing phenomenon within its naturally occurring context where the contextual conditions are taken to be noteworthy in its understanding (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) and the boundary between phenomenon and context are not distinct (Yin, 2009), it is considered particularly effective when evaluating the context and system dynamics, perspectives and experiences of social actors at multiple levels and the role of policy discourses as drivers and barriers to curriculum making. Moreover, case study is the comprehensive examination of a small sample (Tight, 2010) and provides an in-depth analysis of a particular real-life project, program, policy, institution or system from various perspectives in order to capture its complexity (Simons, 2009). Therefore, the lack of existing empirical evidence pertaining to the influence of accountability discourses in higher education (Huisman, 2018; Stensaker & Harvey, 2011) makes a case study approach suitable to investigate the interaction and engagement between accountability and curriculum in the complex higher education context in order to yield rich descriptions and details. In order to produce these rich in-context descriptions and details of the phenomenon under study, case study involves multiple sources of information (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Simons, 2009). Hence, a case study was notably worthy of the pragmatic approach of this research drawing on data from different sources. As the investigation consists of many contextual levels (supra, macro, meso, micro and nano) as per Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier's (2013) explication of case study, a 'Russian doll' approach (Chong & Graham, 2013) will be used to understand the case to catch the complexity of the situation.

There are many several types of case study determined by their purposes, led by discovery or theory (Denscombe, 2014). Merriam (1998) identifies three types of case studies in terms of their function as descriptive to produce narrative accounts, interpretative to inductively develop conceptual categories so as to examine initial assumptions and evaluative that serve for explaining and judging. Similarly, Yin (2009) also points out three types based on the outcome of the research namely, exploratory which could be used to develop propositions that are tested in further enquiry, descriptive providing narrative accounts and explanatory to develop and test theories. While this research might have been characterised as being both interpretive and exploratory to develop an understanding of the effects of accountability from policy formation to implementation due to a lack of empirical evidence in contrast to mere postulations in literature, it is ultimately evaluative. However, Adelman, Kemmis and Jenkins (1980) argue that case studies do not solely serve as preliminary studies to others, but rather, they exist as a significant and legitimate research method in their own right.

For the purpose of this research, an embedded single case study design as identified by Yin (2009) was considered appropriate in which more than one unit of analysis where multiple sites of curriculum representations was integrated into the case study design of a higher education institution with various data collection methods adopted to investigate the case. This case study research design facilitates exploration of the richness of a single case while allowing investigation of the peculiarity of each embedded unit with an elaborated explanation of the case as a whole.

4.5 Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research involves the collection, interpretation and analysis of data that is subjective such as what people do, feel or say (Schwandt, 2007). As this research involved an investigation of HE accountability systems through the experiences and perceptions of curriculum actors, the voices of the latter were essential. Hence, qualitative research was deemed more suitable in gathering experiences, opinions and feelings of participants. As Creswell (2014) assert, a case study involving qualitative approach is helpful in exploring and understanding ascribed meanings to a social or human problem by individuals or groups. Qualitative research emphasises inductive, generative, constructive and subjective processes, giving importance to small samples nested in their contexts (Cassell & Symon, 1994) which was most appropriate to the study.

4.5.1 Desk-based research

Desk-based research was used to investigate the views of external reality. It refers to secondary data or data that can be researched without fieldwork. In the context of this research, the term constitutes of literature including academic journals, books, policy documents, government reports, conference proceedings and industry publications. Information from desk-research was used to narrow down the study area and support the synthesis of the research questions. Literature reviews and meta-analyses were valuable sources of synthesised knowledge that allowed gap analysis in existing research and literature.

Data from desk-based research was used to provide context to the messy and highly convoluted HE network, inform the development of interview questions as well as draw out the selection criteria for study participants. Empirical evidence from the primary research was also critically evaluated against different viewpoints and theories to inform the research design and the emerging processes of the data analysis. While a qualitative desk-based research allowed access to diverse information without primary data collection, it was also integrated with the findings from the primary research interview data to support arguments. Care was taken to ensure data credibility by selecting relevant data that are more focused on the topic of study around the research questions. Data quality was also considered on the basis of the research questions.

4.5.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews are verbal interchanges where the interviewer attempts to elicit information from the interviewee through a series of questions (Dunn, 2005). Interviews were chosen because they are able to explore issues in depth to comprehend how and why ideas are framed in a certain manner as well as the reasons and ways connections are made between ideas, events, values, behaviours and opinions (Hochschild, 2009). As Kvale (1996) frames it, interviews serve for the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of interviewees vis-à-vis interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena. For this research, interviews were chosen to interpret the perceived reality in the minds of curriculum actors in terms of their experiences, as it is the best way to evoke statements of experience and explanation of perspectives (Hammersley, 2013). As Schulte (2018) argues, political narratives provide a shortcut between the government and the policy actors, evading consideration of the actors' immediate institutional environments. Therefore, it was considered necessary that the range of accountability structures in place throughout these system sites mediating policy translation processes and their effects are investigated through the experiences and perceptions of the policy actors as individuals have multiple interpretations of reality.

Interviews have been categorised in a number of ways yielding various types (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Oppenheim, 1992; Patton, 1980). Kvale (1996) argues that interviews differ with respect to the openness of their purpose and the degree of their structure. However, Wellington (2015) posits that the degree of structure itself reflects the purpose of the interview. Contemporary texts differentiate amongst structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Bernard, 2002; Crabtree & Miller; 1999; Fontana & Frey, 2005). Structured interview uses closed questions and is convenient when the researcher is aware of what is not known, therefore framing questions to provide the required knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They frequently used to generate quantitative data. In contrast, unstructured interview is practical when the researcher is not aware of what is not known using open-ended questions to allow more flexibility and freedom (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). However, the issue of fitness for purpose in this study is neither to gain quantitatively comparable data nor to obtain extensive amounts of overly non-standardised personalised information. Instead, the purpose of using interviews in this research is to gather data about the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees about accountability structures that impact on curriculum. Hence, semi-structured individual in-depth interviews were used. Semi-structured interviews are those where a series of questions to be explored is prepared, ensuring that the questions elicit open responses while avoiding deviation from the prepared interview schedule (Brown & Danaher, 2019). Semi-structured interview therefore differentiates from entirely naturalistic and unstructured discussion (Madill, 2011). Although a list of predetermined questions was prepared (See Appendix C Interview Protocol), the semi-structured interviews were expected to unfold in a conversational manner enabling participants to explore issues they felt were important (Longhurst, 2016). While on one hand interviews are conceived to provide precise data given that rapport is established by the interviewer and questions are formulated in a clear and acceptable manner, another conception is that it may inevitably be biased if not recognised and controlled, by a number of factors including mutual trust, interviewer's control, social distance, interviewee's comfort level and power issues. While efforts were made to build and sustain rapport, attempts were also made to minimise influence on the informants as advised by Hammersley (2003).

Insights for the semi-structured interview questions were drawn from the desk research through the screening of policy documents, analysis of emergent themes and gaps in literature along with my own professional experiences. The utility of the protocol was assessed by piloting it in two interview sessions with individuals reflecting the criteria for participating in the study. The data gathered in the pilot interviews were not included in the analysis. Nonetheless, they helped in enhancing clarity of the questions, enabling editing of the wording of the interview questions and interview structure that were rearranged for a more appropriate data collection. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix C.

The interview questions were not made too specific to allow interviewees to talk in their own terms to facilitate a span of possible responses. Every question asked was mapped to the relevant research questions for clarity of the purpose that each question served in its contribution to the research topic. Some interviews were face to face while others took place on Teams as some participants were not comfortable to do so in times of COVID. Interviews lasted approximately an hour and were audio-recorded. Those that took place on Teams were also video-recorded with the participants' consent. While face to face interviews took considerably more time than online interviews, it enabled good rapport-building with interviewees. As with online interviews, technological issues were experienced with only one interviewee with poor internet signal and low sound quality. However, online interviews allowed instant transcription, with only few corrections, which saved an enormous amount of time. Furthermore, online interviews also enabled participation of one supra actor. Additionally, as online interviews were also video recorded with the interviewees' consent, there was very little need to take notes during the conversation; something that I find challenging to do while also concentrating on the interview.

4.6 Sampling and Selection

Sampling was guided by policy/curriculum actors from multiple sites of curriculum representation (supra, macro, meso and micro). A generalised view of actors who participated in the research is provided in Table 4.1 below to maintain confidentiality. As this study was conducted at one HEI, the identity of the participants may become obvious. The inclusion criterion was based on participants' knowledge and understanding of accountability and curriculum, those who are particularly involved in curriculum design, development and enactment working closely with accountability structures. It is worth noting that supra and macro actors in the HE network are more directly involved in policy envisioning, with the design and development of educational accountability in their roles and responsibilities, whereas, meso and micro actors are more directly engaged in policy implementation and curriculum making (See Table 1 in Chapter 1, sites of curriculum making). The knowledge and experiences of actors, based on their contexts and activities therefore have significant implications on the data collected.

A reputational snowball sampling strategy was used where further contacts known to the participants are identified to be involved in the research (Farquharson, 2005). Due to the inclusion of supra and macro policy actors in the study who are influential in the field and difficult to approach (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011), reputational snowball was deemed most efficient. Attempts were made as much as practicable, for the sample to be gender balanced and from a range of disciplines to enable a fairer distribution of representations from higher education actors. Moreover, the more experienced they are, the more as they would have confronted changes during the last few years regarding the accountability bloom, thus benefitting the research.

Table 4.1 Details of the interview sample involved in the research.

Site of Curriculum Representation	**Actors**	**Number of Policy/Curriculum Actors**
Supra	international organisation	1
Macro	government agencies, statutory/professional bodies	3
Meso	senior administrative university official, teaching and learning official, heads of schools, programme/course leaders	5
Micro	lecturers	4
Total number of interview participants		13

4.7 Data Analysis

4.7.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

First and foremost, initial data scoping of the literature surrounding discourses of accountability and its impact on the curriculum was completed. The desk-based research (See section 4.5.1 above) was followed by semi-structured interviews. All interviews were recorded by agreement. Significant field notes were taken for use in data analysis. Both empirical and contextual data were extracted from all participants in the form of ‘rich data’. Analysis were descriptive in terms of narrative and with the use of exemplar quotes from respondents, to aid understanding by the reader. The proposed analysis of interviews were completed through MAXQDA using Braun and Clarke’s (2012) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). RTA is a theoretically interpretative approach to analysing data qualitatively. It facilitates the identification and analysis of themes in a given set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Analysis using RTA encompasses six stages organised in a logical sequential but recursive and iterative manner as necessary in a flexible manner in line with the data and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2020) as follows:

1. Familiarisation with the data
2. Initial codes generation
3. Themes generation
4. Review of potential themes
5. Definition and naming of themes
6. Report production

A fully detached researcher does not ideally exist as a particular position in time and space is always adopted that plays an active role in eliciting and generating accounts. Therefore a pragmatic approach was adopted through acknowledgement of my own involvement (See section 4.2 above on positionality). Reflexive notes were taken throughout data collection and analysis.

4.7.2 Abductive Approach

While data analysis of the interviews is compatible with an inductively-dominant reasoning to interpret the perception and experiences of socially constructed reality by the social actors, a pragmatic perspective was adopted using an abductive approach that allowed conceptualisation of the research on the basis of a certain existing context which influences the behaviour of the social actors to generate reality. Hence, this approach avoids focusing only on the interpretation of human actors and allows consideration of non-human entities and their effects on social processes. A deductive approach was not deemed necessary for this research as humans' interpretation of their social world is ignored and the aim is not to seek generalisation for the development or testing of a theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The influences from theories evident in literature along with my own prior experience and phronesis as a researcher were inevitable and were viewed as an indispensable element in the analytical relational dynamic among the subject of study, theory and the researcher (Thomas, 2010). The process involves a constant critical reflective dialogue among the researcher, theory and data (Haig, 2005) and thus facilitates the exploration of the phenomena through close evaluation of individual cases (Thomas, 2010). The focus on using more than one source of evidence influenced by theory, data and analysis is essential to discover new dimensions of the research problem through direction and redirection. The research questions and combined conceptual framework were therefore used reflexively to thematically sort the data of the completed interviews using an abductive approach to generate both theory-driven (deductive) and data-driven (inductive) codes.

Data gathered were analysed through a process of coding and subcoding constituting of three iterative and interlaced steps in order to ensure reliability and analytical accuracy. Firstly, data were deconstructed through initial open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in order to identify relevant actions and events, sorting them into first-order concepts. Then, the emerged concepts were re-assembled using axial coding to produce second-order concepts stimulated by the analytical questions of the Foucauldian governmentality frame. Finally, links and hypothetical relations in light of the interpretive tools of ANT's sociology of translation were established generating the four themes of problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilisation as the last step in the analytical process.

4.8 Research Limitations

This qualitative investigation has been conducted with only one case study. Criticism of the findings is therefore limited to responses of a relatively small sample of participants (13 interviews) at supra, macro and meso/micro curriculum actors from only one HEI in Ireland. Due to the volume of qualitative data making interpretation and analysis time consuming, it was therefore not feasible to conduct the research on a larger scale. Therefore, generalisation of the findings were not sought. However, this may be an area for further research for a more diversely represented set of HEIs contexts. It may be more relevant to combine qualitative strategies with large-scale quantitative methods to capture the complexities of curriculum practices with their market positions to include the wider contextual dimensions.

Moreover, given that only one higher education institution was considered in the study, participants may have been motivated to illustrate a non-representational aspect of curriculum enactment and attained outcomes. Nonetheless, coupled with desk research of literature, the pragmatic application of the blended conceptual approach enabled a critical in-depth investigation and analysis of the stated issues in response to the research questions.

4.9 Delimitations

Qualitative studies are generally time consuming. Participants were reluctant to participate in the research due to its political nature and excuses were made with regards to covid although some interviews were conducted on MS Teams as well. Therefore, certain parameters were set due to time restriction and access. Findings of this research could have been emphasised through further data triangulation, using data from student population as well. However, due to the delayed responses of participants, student population was not considered. While literature and curriculum actors acted as different data sources, secondary data were not used either for reasons of inaccessibility. Otherwise, methodological triangulation, the use of different methodologies to approach the topic could have been adopted by quantitatively analysing a student survey that would have added value to the findings by providing an alternative perspective to the problem.

4.10 Ethical Considerations

An application for ethical approval was developed and ethical approval was sought from the institution's ethics board. As asserted by Kumar (2005), it is unethical to gather any data without participant's knowledge, expressed willingness and informed consent. Therefore, all participants were informed of their voluntary contribution to the research along with their rights of free will to withdraw at any time up until the research findings were anonymised. A broad outline of the subject (See Appendix A Research Information Sheet for Interview Participants) was also provided prior to conducting the interviews. Written consent (See Appendix B Consent Form for Interview Participants) was received from each participant prior to commencement, with full details of the proposed research and the use of the information from the data gathered. Furthermore, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of interview participants and all recorded data was stored securely using encryption to prevent unauthorised access. No information pertaining to the individual or institution were supplied to any third party prior, during or subsequent to the interview and research process. All documentation are securely held and will not be released to any third party, without the expressed written consent of the individual participant.

4.11 Trustworthiness of Data

All researches are concerned with the ethical production of reliable and valid data knowledge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout this research, reflexivity was practised to ensure awareness of biases and assumptions and refrain from judgement before and as decisions were made. Notes and memos were taken to brainstorm and reflect on alternatives to engage with the data. Moreover, analysis and findings were also presented to scholars and academics at various doctoral research forums to elicit unbiased feedback in order to increase the confirmability of the findings.

A clear schema identifying themes, sub-themes and codes have been documented. Measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness of data collection and analysis. The interview questions were piloted and the data gathered in the pilot interviews were not included in the analysis. However, they allowed for rephrasing, order, clarity and usefulness of certain questions as well as structure of the interview that was redesigned for appropriate data collection. Interpretations of interview questions were cross-checked by comparing interviewees' (from same curriculum sites) description of the same aspects against another. Member checking for accuracy and validity (Charmaz, 2006) was carried out during data collection by summarising and confirming interpretation of participants. The interview questions were also adjusted for them to be more relevant to actors' roles and responsibilities at the multiple sites. Furthermore, triangulation was used to increase the validity of the study. As posited by Creswell and Creswell (2018), triangulation requires at least two sets of data describing the phenomenon in question. Theoretical triangulation was adopted through the use of a dual conceptual framework primarily based on ANT's sociology of translation assisted by approaches of Foucauldian governmentality to inform the data analysis for ensured credibility. Additionally, to ensure dependability, the coding process involved data analysis triangulation using an abductive approach through three rigorous, recursive and intertwined stages for more coherence, consistency and clarity. Additionally, transferability was achieved through a thick description of the findings.

4.12 Summary

This chapter presented the researcher's positionality along with the philosophical assumptions. The research design, data collection and analysis methods to investigate the influence of accountability discourses on the curriculum through the perspectives of curriculum actors were described. Rationale for the various choices and decisions made with respect to the research methodology were embedded within the discussion.

5 Case Study Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the findings derived from the semi-structured interviews and desk-based review conducted for the research.

The aim of the research was to evaluate the impact of accountability regimes on the curriculum policy-practice nexus at various sites of enactment (macro, meso, micro and nano) within the Irish higher education context in order to understand the relationship between intended curriculum policy and its effects through analysis of implemented practice. Critical evaluation of the findings address the problem statement and research aim through emphasis on how the accountable actor-network stemmed, developed and ensued over time and space, providing insight into the interrelation among different actors within the networks and along a governed course of curricular practice.

The analysis which is congruent with the pragmatic paradigm, is informed by the combined approach of Foucauldian governmentality and key concepts of Actor Network Theory as previously outlined in Chapter three. The following section is organised and presented under themes and subthemes as outlined in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 An overview of the key themes and sub-themes generated through abductive thematic analysis.

Codes	**Sub-Themes Derived from Abductive Coding**	**4 Key Themes Inspired by the Governmentality Frame aligned to ANT's Sociology of Translation**
Accountability Improves Outcomes, Accountability Allows Transparency, Accountability Ensures Trustworthiness	Accountability Rationalised as a Governable Issue (OPP)	Problematisation of the Political Fields of Visibility Presented by Accountability at Higher Education
Accountability to Whom?, Accountability for What?	Governable Fields of Visibility in Curriculum Practice	
Compliance with Regulations, Achievement of Results, Adherence to Professional Norms	Policy Mediators as Governing Technologies	Interessement of Governing Techne for Generation of Accountable 'Truths'
Policy Texts, Codes, Strategy Papers and Compacts, Standard Guidelines/Frameworks, , Learning Outcomes	Policy Intermediaries to Build Network Conditions	
Government Statutory Bodies, Professional Bodies, External Stakeholders	Authoritative Entities to Maintain Network Stability	Enrolment of Allies for Expected Forms of Conduct
Funding, Scholarships, Performance-based Contracts, Promotions	Accountability Mechanisms to Reinforce Interest	
Funding, Scholarships, Rewards, Publications, Promotions	Emerging Pattern of Competitive Ethos	Mobilisation of the Curriculum

Knowledge as Raw Material, Education as a Product, Datafication	Commodification of Curricular Knowledge	Implementation Network
Undermined Academic Freedom, Challenged Professionalism, Intense Administrative Workload, Increased Focus on Quality, Negative Impact on Wellbeing, Ethical Conduct	Compromised Professional Identities	
Explicit Curriculum, Implicit Curriculum, Experienced Curriculum, Null & Hidden Curriculum	Conducted Curriculum	

The core themes highlighted in this chapter are inspired by the questions projected by the governmentality frame and have been aligned to the trajectory of the actor-network under study. These themes are further broken down into sub-themes, which have been derived from the three recursive stages of coding described in the Methodology Chapter (Section 4.7). Excerpts of interview participants' quotations from the raw data sharing their experiences and perceptions are also provided as empirical evidence to support explanations. To aid understanding, interpretation and discussion, the study findings have been presented in terms of the four moments of translation as postulated by Callon (1986): Problematisation, Interessement, Enrolment and Mobilisation. However, it should be noted that the perspective adopted in this study visualises the moments of translation as an iterative process with potential overlaps and sometimes in a disorderly manner instead of a linear one-way operation. As suggested by Attride-Stirling (2001), a thematic network analysis was completed to show how the theoretical themes were derived from the empirical codes which also facilitated illustration of the results and discussion as shown below in Figure 5.1.

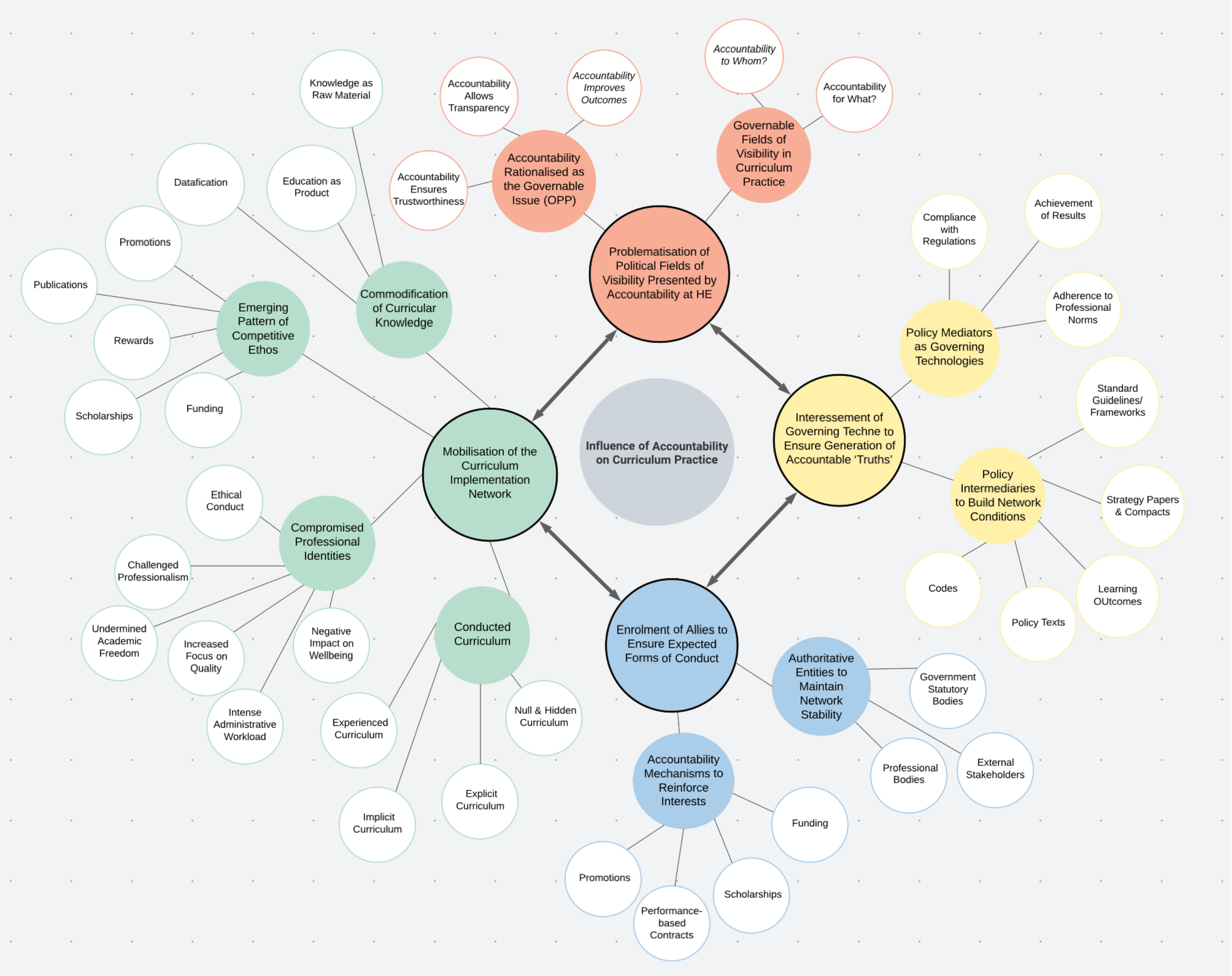

Influence of Accountability on Curriculum Practice
Problematisation of Political Fields of Visibility Presented by Accountability at HE
Accountability Rationalised as the Governable Issue (OPP)
Accountability Allows Transparency
Accountability Improves Outcomes
Accountability Ensures Trustworthiness
Governable Fields of Visibility in Curriculum Practice
Accountability to Whom?
Accountability for What?
Interessement of Governing Techne to Ensure Generation of Accountable 'Truths'
Policy Mediators as Governing Technologies
Compliance with Regulations
Achievement of Results
Adherence to Professional Norms
Policy Intermediaries to Build Network Conditions
Standard Guidelines/ Frameworks
Strategy Papers & Compacts
Learning OUtcomes
Policy Texts
Codes
Enrolment of Allies to Ensure Expected Forms of Conduct
Authoritative Entities to Maintain Network Stability
Government Statutory Bodies
External Stakeholders
Professional Bodies
Accountability Mechanisms to Reinforce Interests
Funding
Scholarships
Performance-based Contracts
Promotions
Mobilisation of the Curriculum Implementation Network
Commodification of Curricular Knowledge
Knowledge as Raw Material
Education as Product
Datafication
Emerging Pattern of Competitive Ethos
Promotions
Publications
Rewards
Scholarships
Funding
Compromised Professional Identities
Ethical Conduct
Challenged Professionalism
Undermined Academic Freedom
Increased Focus on Quality
Intense Administrative Workload
Negative Impact on Wellbeing
Conducted Curriculum
Experienced Curriculum
Implicit Curriculum
Explicit Curriculum
Null & Hidden Curriculum

Figure 5.1 An overview of key themes, sub-themes and codes generated through thematic network analysis.

5.2 Theme 1: Problematisation of the Political Fields of Visibility Presented by Accountability at Higher Education

During the first phase of translation, policy problematisation takes place where accountability becomes rationalised as a governable issue. The controlling actor defines the problem in such a way that other actors in the network recognise it as their own (Tatnall & Burgess, 2002). The set of ideas and assumptions presented by accountability become accepted as regimes of truth and knowledge that generate governable fields of visibility in curriculum practice and guide governing activities, engaging in the conduct of conduct (Dean, 2010). The process includes identifying the main actors and their roles to play towards achieving the intended objectives, configuring an initial problem-solving actor-network. In ANT, actors act in conjunction with other actors where non-humans can also have agency. Accountability regimes are therefore established as the Obligatory Passage Point (OPP) by the controlling actor, by passing through which, the various relevant actors of the networks would achieve their own interests (Callon, 1986).

From the data, two sub-themes (Figure 5.2) were developed capturing participants' actual vision and conceptualisation of accountability, namely:

1. Accountability rationalised as a governable issue (OPP)
2. Governable fields of visibility in curriculum practice

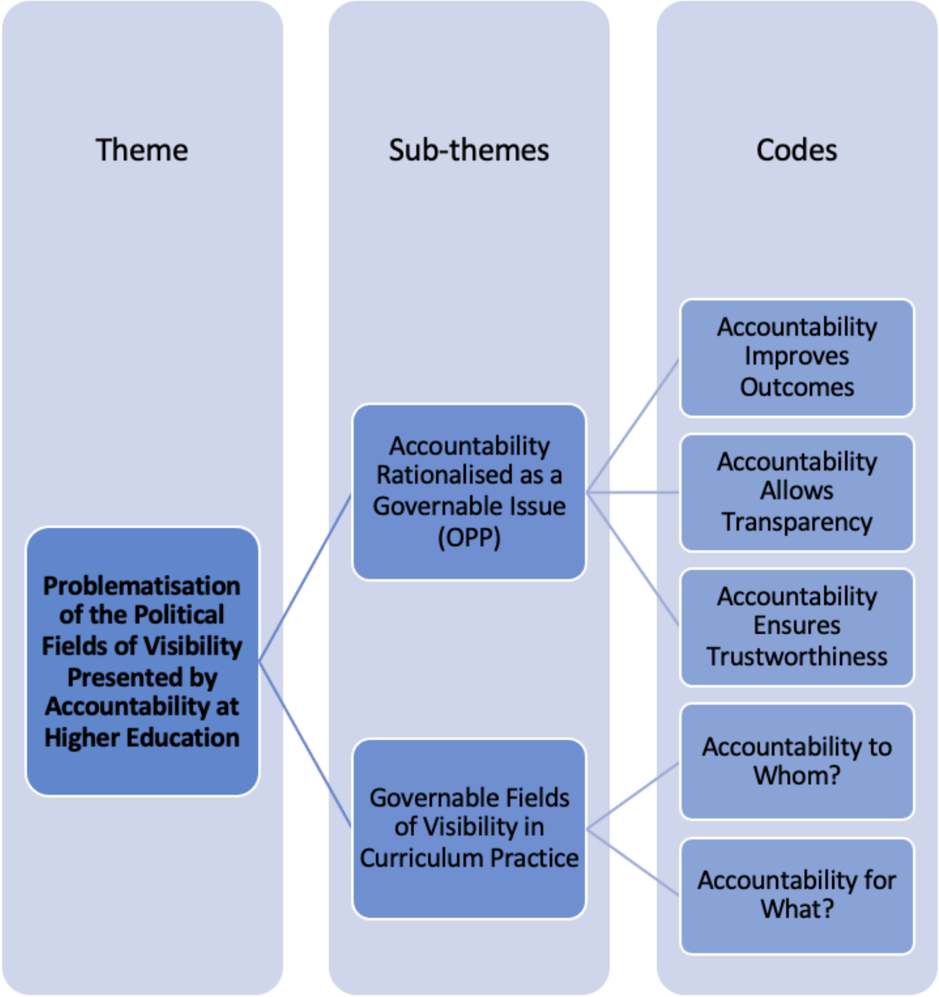

Theme
Sub-themes
Codes
Problematisation of the Political Fields of Visibility Presented by Accountability at Higher Education
Accountability Rationalised as a Governable Issue (OPP)
Governable Fields of Visibility in Curriculum Practice
Accountability Improves Outcomes
Accountability Allows Transparency
Accountability Ensures Trustworthiness
Accountability to Whom?
Accountability for What?

Figure 5.2 Problematisation of the political fields of visibility presented by accountability at higher education.

5.2.1 Accountability Rationalised as a Governable Issue (OPP)

It was important to find out what forms of rationality are employed in governing at HE and how do these intentions inspire curriculum practices (Dean, 2010). Participants' views about accountability helped to define and elucidate how issues of curriculum practice under accountability regimes became accepted as governable activities. A general positive perception of accountability with varying degrees of appreciation with the current accountability structures embedded in the HE system from human actors was observed. The term was defined in various ways by the participants based on their knowledge, views and experiences. As stated by one participant, *"accountability has become somewhat conceptually laden"* (Meso 4).

In order to protect the interests of the initiating network, the government, who is the controlling actor of the network uses inscriptions from the supra-level discourse dimension of governmentality as advocates to persuade other actors to support the emerging network. As conveyed by the supra actor:

> *"there is one project that is currently dedicated to curriculum development and curriculum analysis … it's not something to provide recommendations for the countries in terms of which curriculum they should develop. It's more a conceptual reflection with the countries and the range of stakeholders on the future skills that education systems should develop"* (Supra).

The participant further confirmed a two-way obligation in place by affirming that their work is done "*to respond to the needs expressed by the member countries, so it is the countries which steer and guide and monitor our own work. We do work at the request of the countries."* (Supra).

These supra-level intended rational thoughts and ideas gain momentum by development of information into a critique of competences, effectiveness and ultimately improvements. As proclaimed by one participant, a lot of research is being done in terms of progression rates, completion rate around socio economic background, access to higher education and success rates. This plan not only extends beyond access to a greater focus on participation and student success, but is also pertinent to other areas of the HE system that are not prioritised for funding.

Additionally, within a certain system performance framework, *"all of these different areas around curriculum and teaching and learning would be measured. So there are certain measures that's all on our website as well, so we would take certain measures around the performance of an institution."* (Macro 1).

The identification of measurable units of teaching and learning in terms of rates, points towards the hunt for accountability targets and benchmarks to feed into the system as evidence for improvement. By using information from internationally and nationally-evaluated data critiquing the effectiveness and competences of education, the controlling actor integrate aspects of political practices based upon these concepts to upgrade the overall performance of higher education whereby processes of inputs, implementation and outcomes would be more transparent, efficiency and coherence would be improved and professional conduct would be enhanced. Hence, in seeking to transform curriculum practices, the controlling actor establishes accountability as an OPP rendering regimes of accountability indispensable in the network. However, actors passing through the OPP would also have to confront certain challenges associated with its implementation where they may have to modify their interests by aligning them to those of the controlling actors and abiding by a set of specific rules. The claim that improvements in education is brought by accountability has been advocated by participants in the study through expression of their views by relating accountability to improved outcomes, enhanced transparency and increased trust.

Accountability Improves Outcomes

Participants have acknowledged the importance of accountability in setting performance standards and in aiming to improve the quality of outcomes. The supra level actor posits that*"…it might indeed generate incentives to improve outcomes. So it is a function that is needed and all individual agents need to be accountable…and in particular to identify those who are not performing at the desired level."*. The supra participant clarified that they focus on *"student outcomes as a measure of accountability…because it is easier"* but also acknowledged that this is an example of accountability being *"done the hard way and has some potentially detrimental effects"*.

One participant admitted that the audit process and report writing *"required the (HEI) department to reflect about what they were doing, and it helped them to think about what they were trying to achieve and to improve their standards."* (Meso 1). Another emphasised that accountability *"actually gives us meaningful information on teaching and learning and how to improve our own practice."* (Meso 2). While many have acknowledged the real benefits of institutions' commitment to accountability, at the same time, they find it *"challenging because it does require effort and engagement."* (Macro 3). Nonetheless, in the same participant's voice, it is believed that *"where there's complete independence if and there's no challenge, that can also lead to that kind of lack of innovation. So really what you're looking for I think, would accountability mechanisms as a sort of creative tension"*. Here, notions of accountability are found to illuminate certain thoughts such as improvement of standards and innovation while at the same time obscures other associated experiences such as challenges, effort and engagement. Political narratives of accountability therefore seem to disregard how institutional actors mobilise policy to implement curricular practices and instead focus more on achieving the objectives.

Accountability Allows Transparency

Participants from macro sites of curriculum implementation also highlighted a moral and societal framing which focused on the need for accountability in order to ensure transparency and trust which are important in leading to the intended objectives. Thoughts around the requirement of transparency of information were linked to societal and moral responsibility in terms of the learning service provided.

> *"I do think in the modern world, we have to be much more transparent with the information that we make available and we have a moral responsibility, I think to learners to do that...and accountability isn't just about how money is spent, it's about your role in society if you are...you know...pushing your institution and wanting to bring in students…It needs to go beyond maybe just reputation…it needs to be transparent and…what are you are offering in terms of learning to prospective learners…I think that's an area that needs further development."* (Macro 3).

While discussing moral and societal accountability, the need for fiscal accountability was also highlighted.

> *"…in an ideal world, maybe higher education institutions would absolutely like to be left to their own devices, but then on the other side, I mean they are funded by taxpayers money to some degree."* (Macro 3).

Moreover, the supra actor affirmed that *"governments are trying to steer the way they institutions use that money so that it achieves societal objectives"* but it is challenging to ensure that." (Supra).

The need for fiscal accountability was expressed to ensure transparency in reporting institutions' actions to the public. However, this responsibility was extended to providing information to students as a marketing strategy in order to attract them to particular institutions. The aim was configured with reference to satisfying the needs of students who are redefined as 'consumers' of the provision called 'education' regulated by the state via market-led mechanisms. As affirmed by Ozga (2020), widely distributed information advises consumers' education choices.

Accountability Ensures Trustworthiness

It was highlighted that stakeholders of the HE system, *"users of university qualifications need to be able to trust in the quality of the learning outcomes"* (Macro 2) of university qualifications. The element of trustworthiness emanated from the need to be more transparent as it embodies institutional integrity. As noted from participants, the flip side of accountability for them signifies understanding and trust.

> *"I think there are examples of very good practice out there. I also think there's ineffective practice as well. I do think we need greater transparency because as well as one of the tensions I find is ... I'm not unsympathetic but I do hear a lot of talk from institutions about how great they are but then...you know, there's a certain unwillingness then to demonstrate out effectively by being transparent with information in particular."* (Macro 3).

Accountability is viewed by this participant as a social practice pursuing particular objectives defined by evaluative procedures to provide relevant information. Therefore, trust is based upon this relationship of control among the various stakeholders that encompass evaluative procedures in order to ensure that rules and regulations have been adhered to. Nevertheless, this process also indicates certain undefined, obscured and hidden practices that require consideration. Conceivably, rationalised decisions with regards to accountability may have laid out a shortcut between the controlling macro actor and nano actors, bypassing the logics and dialectics of meso and micro actors who may be struggling to alter and align their own interests with those of the controlling actor and abiding by the set of specific rules. Hence, the reluctance to demonstrate transparency.

5.2.2 Governable Fields of Visibility in Curriculum Practice

Fields of visibility are crucial to the operation of particular government regimes where certain objects, their meanings, understandings and influences are illuminated while some others are obscured and hidden (Dean, 2010). Accountability regimes are not new in the education system. However, as stated by Anderson (2005), the difference between the previous system and the current one lies in the matters of 'for what' and 'to whom'. As regimes of accountability become accepted as the common problem stimulating governing activities, these rational thoughts generate fields of visibility drawing attention to two important questions; accountability to whom and accountability for what. These elicit further thoughts about the relationship amongst different entities in the political arena, consideration about the matter in question to be addressed and the objectives to be met. Accountability therefore seems to no longer be a choice for higher education but simply a challenge to meet in response to these two questions that become crucial to respond to.

To encourage critical thinking, participants were probed about what it meant to them for HE to be accountable. Participants offered their definitions by linking accountability with the stakeholders to whom higher education is accountable as well as for what higher education is held accountable.

Accountability to Whom?

Participants' perceptions about accountability as it relates to stakeholders were varied. None of the participants limited their response to a singular group and all provided encompassing answers. While recognising that the system demands compliance with statutes and regulations, comments were generally related to the financial resources consumed by higher education institutions that have a fiduciary responsibility in accordance to their mission and in the best interest of the public.

The most mentioned category was accountability to the society in an attempt to make education useful for the society. However, every response about societal accountability was complemented by highlighting the tough duty of ensuring the proper use of public money. As stated by one participant, *"the main challenge in higher education, as I said is to ensure that institutions of higher education that receive public money use that money in a way that is useful for society."* (Supra). This reinforces the importance of transparency that is required to gain societal trust and maintain recognition of the social value of education. As stated by a macro participant, legal arrangements and relevant regulations are employed to achieve public trust through accountability policies.

> *“there's accountability structures that universities have to governing authorities and academic council… there's also accountability to a national policy … for public investment in the universities”* (Macro 2).

However, while this strategy may strengthen the relationship between certain stakeholders such as the government and society, it may also mean a tighter control on HE institutions through top-down laws and regulations via vertical accountability. Tensions on behalf of institutions within such vertical accountability demands were noted when accountability pressures from different angles are faced. As another participant concurred, *“universities are institutions of public good, where at the centre of knowledge creation and skill development, there is societal accountability which is harder and harder to codify, I think.”* (Macro 2). Through the legal top-down arrangements, the government exert its authority by empowering the society, creating a space for it in the networks of relationships in which they are embedded to hold HE institutions accountable as a substitute for direct control. Even macro actors admitted that they engage in an intense process of accountability with HEIs.

> “*They pinpoint opportunities and challenges and then after the review visit, there is a report made by the panel. I'm from the institution that needs to kind of make an action plan on the basis of the recommendations made in the panels reports. So it's a drawn out process. It's a very comprehensive.”* (Macro, 2).

References were also made to government funds as a singular entity in relation to universities being held accountable: *“They advocated for their autonomy and we like to ask the government to send us money and not to hold us accountable. Beyond that, the government of course tends not to want to do that.”* (Meso 1). Hence, there is a kind of pressure to conform to the standards and regulations of governments to achieve objectives. As commented by another participant*, “Accountability is under a real tension there… particularly when you have public institutions that are funded by the state.”* (Macro 3). Consequently, the aim of establishing robust monitoring and evaluating systems to inform decision-making, understand the effectiveness of practices, identify areas of improvement and learn from successes seem to take the back seat while the focus is shifted towards producing rich data sets as evidence in order to demonstrate compliance with regulations for funding.

Throughout discussion addressing the ‘Accountability to whom?’ question, interestingly, only two participants prioritised accountability to students over other stakeholders where moral values were evident besides strategic motivation to accomplish accountability goals .They were both from the micro networks of curriculum practice. One participant affirmed that *“I think we need to be first and foremost accountable to our students.”* (Micro 3). The other stated that *“I provide opportunities like I actually try to live my values and…bring in an accountability with the students for having you know for thinking about making this curriculum more effective whether it's coming from an external stakeholder”.* (Micro 4).

Despite the range of stakeholders mentioned by the participants, it becomes apparent that there is an established field of visibility at play through an organised government regime that comprises of different stakeholder relationships amongst governing structures, the society, HEIs, curriculum actors, students and other stakeholders like sponsors and external experts. Accountability mechanisms therefore influence stakeholder relationships determined by power and legitimacy where certain stakeholders’ expectations are prioritised over others through indirect and direct strategies. The difference in the perception of accountability in relation to stakeholders can also display a dependency on relational structures demonstrating an imbalance of competing interests. As concluded by the study of Reynolds, Schultz and Hekman (2006), balancing interests across decisions tends to generate more instrumental value and are regarded as being more ethical than balancing interests within decisions. Once stakeholders are identified, their expectations are prioritised which sheds light on the objectives to be met as well as issues to be resolved.

Accountability for What?

Participants responses on their interpretation of what should higher education be accountable for largely rely on two aspects of accountability namely, professional integrity and quality improvement that encompasses issues of performance and results.

Accountability as defined by this participant means *“taking responsibility and being responsible for the quality of what you do.”* (Meso 1). Professionalism was also reported by this participant when defining accountability: *"There's also professional integrity and what we understand is being professional practice and good practice. In the distance, there are the norms and values of the discipline."* (Meso 5). Unfortunately, as professionalism is usually assessed by indirect unquantifiable means, such as through observable behaviour, feedback, opinions and self-assessment, it becomes more difficult to hold curriculum actors accountable for that. Hence, this additional workload to demonstrate adherence to professionalism in response to the political emphasis on goals and standards of quality outcomes that demands greater transparency appears to be consistent with literature highlighting the existing tension between concepts of professional 'responsibility' and 'accountability' (Green, 2011; Englund & Solbrekk, 2010). While emphasising similar points about accountability, another participant had reservations about the results of the actual accountability structures in place pondering about how such intentions seek to transform practices: *"On the one hand, as I said, this is a necessary, you know absolutely crucial, fundamental value that has to be lived, what I was talking about, professionalism and so on. But on the other it isn't. It can be incredibly draining and there can be a lot of doubt about really well what good changes are going to come out of this. Like what? How is it going to be better?"* (Micro 4). Consequently, curriculum actors do find that demands of accountability challenge the moral and societal dimensions of their professional responsibility. However, not all consequences of accountability lead to positive change.

Similarly, another participant highlighted the need for accountability to maintain quality but at the same time, also had apprehensions about the rigidity of accountability structures calling attention to the possible unintended outcomes:

> *"It seems to me that if you don't have some kind of accountability and quality assurance measures, there's a risk of quality falling, and you could get irresponsible staff who didn't prepare well or didn't teach well. You could get modules that were poorly delivered and had a lot of students not passing, and you wouldn't necessarily know. So there's a real risk to quality if you don't have some kind of quality assurance and accountability. But on the other side, if you have measures and structures that are too strong and too rigid, what I think you actually do is two things. One is you force people to game the system and so you lose the flexibility and they focus on what the student needs and you*

> *get a focus on meeting the accountability requirements. And the second thing is you remove all sorts of flexibility and adaptability out of the system."* (Meso 1).

All curriculum actors upheld the need for accountability to maintain a quality HE system. This participant commented on the dynamic tension that exist with accountability structures emphasising the risks associated with too low or too intense accountability measures, where either way, there is a danger of quality falling. Others also narrated how increasing accountability demands that result in greater bureaucracy and paperwork shift their focus away from responsibility and trust, leaving less room for freedom and resilience. As the tensions and conflicts associated with the implementation of accountability regimes are discernible, incentives therefore have to be given to identified actors in the network to lock them into problematisation for them to play their roles towards achieving the intended objectives.

5.3 Theme 2: Interessement of Governing Techne for Generation of Accountable 'Truths'

Once accountability is established as the OPP gaining ground as the most feasible and practicable condition to improve curriculum outcomes, disregarding any other aspects of the issue, the new network starts to emerge. The controlling actor cognisant of the importance to identifying other relevant actors, persuades them to modify their interests, aligning them to those of the controlling actor's, accept specific set of rules and take up their new roles. As framed by Callon (1986, p. 207 -208), interessement is the range of "actions by which an entity attempts to impose and stabilise the identity of the other actors it defines through its problematisation.". Those supporting the unfolding network provoke actors into fixed places Tatnall and Burgess (2002), weakening the influence of other actors that may disrupt the emerging network (Linde, Linderoth & Räisänen, 2003). In this moment of translation, the actors selected for interessement may also be concomitantly implicated in the problematisation stage of other networks where their identities and priorities may differ from the interests of the developing network. Therefore, in order for successful interessement to occur, different approaches and plans of action need to be deployed (Sarker and Sidorova, 2006). A common tactic is to place stratagems between the controlling actor and those being interessed to “speak in the name of others” (Callon, 1986, p. 214). As Harman (2009) postulates, the work of mediation must be carried out at all times to reimpose or sustain links between actors. Consistently with the neoliberal development which increasingly contributes to the competitive economic environment, positioning of governing technologies and techniques became necessary which would illuminate the ones who achieve the required objectives and eliminate the less capable. This theme is explored under two sub-themes (Figure 5.3) focusing on:

1. Policy mediators as governing technologies
2. Policy intermediaries to build network conditions

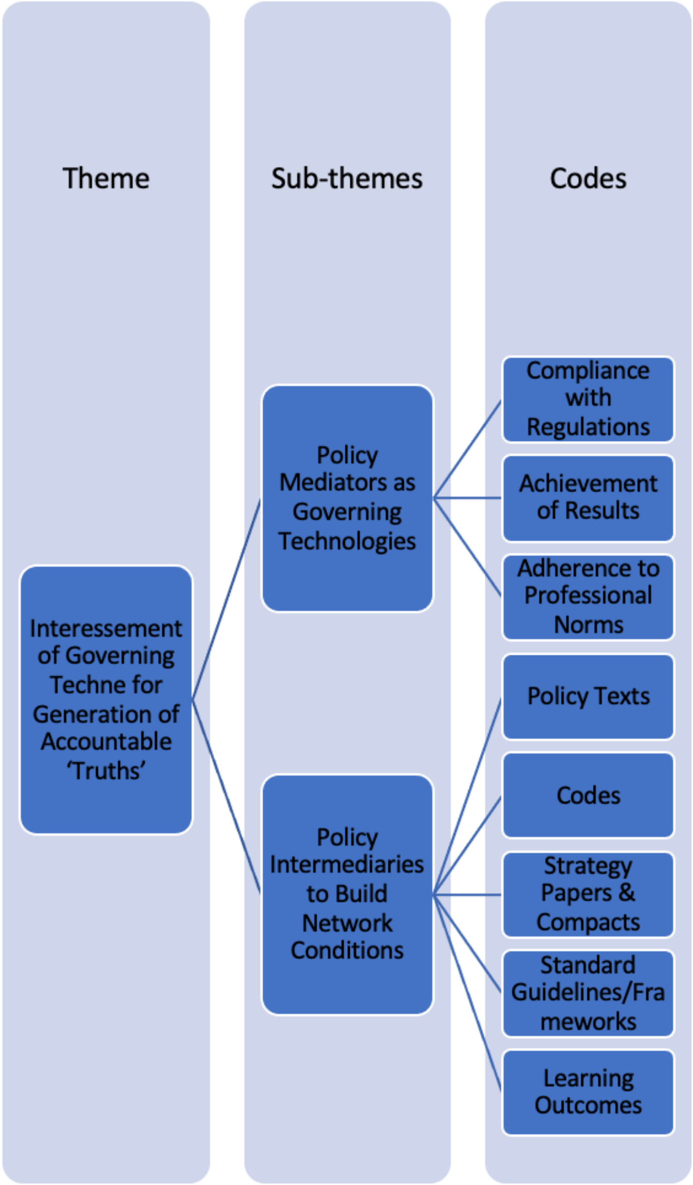

Theme
Sub-themes
Codes
Interessement of Governing Techne for Generation of Accountable ‘Truths’
Policy Mediators as Governing Technologies
Policy Intermediaries to Build Network Conditions
Compliance with Regulations
Achievement of Results
Adherence to Professional Norms
Policy Texts
Codes
Strategy Papers & Compacts
Standard Guidelines/Frameworks
Learning Outcomes

Figure 5.3 Interessement of governing techne for generation of accountable ‘truths’.

5.3.1 Policy Mediators as Governing Technologies

To accomplish a successful interessement, the emerging network's controlling actor has to investigate the interests of the other main actors in order to analyse effective strategies to ensure that their interests align. However, it appears that there were some omissions in negotiating with the curriculum actors to translate their interests in supporting the implementation of accountability policies where misunderstandings and feelings of betrayal occurred where outcomes of consultations and negotiations were ignored. Hence, curriculum practices were not necessarily aligned to the interests of the curriculum implementation actor-network . As affirmed by one participant*," industry will also tell us, (government agency) will tell us if something is not working, but really it's about looking at the data, analysing the data and talking to the institutions through strategic dialogue."* (Macro 1). The macro curriculum actor was of the view that data is best trusted because it genuinely measures and depicts the actuality of the situation. This statement foregrounds the central role played by data in generating regimes of truth through particular meanings of accountability associated with measures and outcomes in line with literature (Conway & Murphy, 2013; Ozga, 2020; Skeritt, 2019). Additionally, the importance of ongoing interaction with institutions around the issues of interests was accentuated. However, curriculum actors evidenced the neglect in collaborating in meaningful ways with relevant curriculum actors for an effective outcome.

> *"I very collaboratively work with others to build ownership around curriculum. All too often curriculum I think is changing and I think you know we're seeing somewhat of a shift …and very often curriculum designers is quite top down and you know there's emphasis on consultation, but it's not meaningful consultation"*(Meso 4).

> *"the (government agency) had a big consultation on their research strategy...we submitted something for that and now it's in a black hole. I don't know, never heard it...Like I got an automated reply thanks for your submission and that was it."* (Meso 5)

> *"transparency of criteria is another very important aspect and who decides the criteria and what is your relationship with that? Do you feel as if you're a*

> *participant in that? Do you feel recognised and respected in that process?...Stakeholders and those kind of partnership models I think are really important, but…that is not assumed or even particularly promoted or welcomed, you know sometimes."* (Micro 4)

Curriculum actors expect a more transparent, authentic and collaborative engagement, not an *"audit of curriculum, allowing it a low risk, proper collegial conversation…developing in some sense more organic set of criteria around how we measure if we're doing a good job"*. (Micro, 3)

Participants further explained how despite series of discussions held by controlling actors at events, conferences and consultation papers, the outcomes of those negotiations feel like *"working with orders"* where *"filleting in terms of taking the bits that really are kind of meaningful orders"* (Meso 5) to embed in practice is carried out. As stated by Fenwick and Edwards (2010), when actors come together, negotiation occurs via a number of ways including persuasion, coercion, mechanical logic, allure, resistance, pretence and subterfuge and hence, the resulting situation is unpredictable. Translation may thus be partial, incremental or delayed due to the weak connections established or even disconnections (Fenwick and Edwards, 2010). Therefore, for translation to be successful, governing technologies are deployed to act as mediators between the controlling actor and those being interessed to modify contradictory accounts attributed to its role and conduct. In order to identify the governing technologies circulating through the HE network, participants were asked about their experiences and perceptions of the accountability structures that they engage with in their role as curriculum actors. Consequently, three policy trajectories resonating with literature (Conway & Murphy, 2013; Anderson, 2005), namely compliance with regulations, achievement of results and adherence to professional norms that are often applied concomitantly in education systems were identified through thematic analysis.

Compliance with Regulations

Compliance with regulations was promoted through the enactment of various levels of management and administration. Impressively, a range of regulations vis-à-vis aspects of curriculum practice were distinguished which outnumbered the other two

types of accountability policy measures in HE as described by one participant's response: *"I think there is actually a creeping influence and growing influence around standards…and the lexicon that has emerged around curriculum"* (Meso 4).
Institutions at HE are required to periodically undergo layers of both internal reviews and regulations as well as external quality assurance processes *"which ensures quality and best practice internationally… a lot of recommendations came back through that that we then act on."* (Meso 2).

As per the information derived from the interview data, the first level of regulation is self-accountability of the actors themselves in terms of reflection involved in curriculum practice followed by student feedback amidst other internal regulations such as adherence to learning outcomes, assessment criteria and cross moderation. As much as feedback is considered an important part of quality assurance, participants conveyed that the situation now requires evolving because of low response rates and little variation in responses. Instead of *"happy sheets"* to gather only good feedback in a vacuum, one participant recommended obtaining meaningful feedback by *"trying to work with the students to have a conversation around the kind of feedback that will be really helpful and also kind of, getting beyond the assumptions that we give feedback to students and they can give us the feedback that we really can use and can work with."* (Meso 4). As asserted by Barber (2004), feedback provided by this approach is used to promote continuous improvement which helps to maintain the public's trust in the education system's quality of service.

Apart from that, institutional reviews are implemented where formal meetings are held for the purpose of reviewing conditions in the network and reports are drawn to retain actors' interests and ensure regulatory compliance with the process.

> "*There is an independent review panel which is established and… visit the institution. There's really intense type of meetings with actors all over the institution…then after the review visit, there is a report made by the panel. And from that the institution needs to kind of make an action plan on the basis of the recommendations made in the panels reports. So it's a drawn out process. It's very comprehensive."* (Macro 2).

As HE institutions are accountable to other entities of the education systems, there is also a system of external authentication where external examiners review performance data, particularly student results. Additionally, there is a programme review process and finally, a cyclical quality review of HEIs which typically occurs every seven years. Under this remit, HEIs are expected to ensure compliance with regulations, upholding measures of bureaucratic accountability.

Achievement of Results

Quality assurance and evaluation demonstrate institutions' improvement and effectiveness towards improving students' educational experiences and outcomes. With regards to outcomes, a concomitant emphasis on achievement of results was noted which tends to be interwoven with the other two types of accountability often concealing them as affirmed by Conway and Murphy (2013). However, the data from this study showed an amplified response rate with regards to compliance-oriented accountability with regardless, significant insights about results-driven accountability.

As a whole, systemic evaluation, assessment and testing policies are adopted in HE to achieve enhanced results. A number of measures and indicators of accountability to improve results were mentioned by participants, encompassing student feedback, satisfaction surveys, graduation rates, employer surveys, promotion and progression rates, standardised testing, etc. As declared by one participant: *"So accountability for us is all based on evidence and measures of evidence."* (Macro 1). Furthermore, *"Student outcomes are used as a measure of accountability…it is positive in the sense that we'll be putting pressure on the different agents to perform better"* (Supra). The role of curriculum actors, particularly those at micro sites of curriculum representation who directly interact with students have been set forth as being central to institutions' improvement efforts with a strong influence on students' achievement exceeding distinct effects of educational institutions (Gilleece & Clerkin, 2020; O'Donnell, 2014). Although, the idea that micro curriculum actors' actions can really make a positive difference towards students' experiences and the achievement of results can be liberating to them, this expectation also places a responsibility load on them when they are held accountable for fulfilling political directives under scrutiny (Barber, 2004). Under pressure for results, instead of looking at the overall standards, external examiners are

> *"being used as second markers, so typically what had started to happen was that departments would ask the external examiner to look at the marginal cases and decide whether they should pass or not … so they were in effect marking and we said that's not the best use of an outside expert who didn't teach the course and doesn't know the curriculum."* (Meso 1)

As per this statement, the role of the external examiner as an important curriculum actor seems to shift away from its key responsibility of ensuring academic standards and quality of teaching, learning and assessment while also confirming consistency with the institution's specified outcomes and comparable to equivalent of those nationally and internationally. With respect to the need to benchmark the higher education system against other countries, one participant responded that:

> *"I really resist quantitative approaches. You know…Ireland national testing and so on, at various levels is creepy. In Ireland, the benchmarking of both teachers and learners against that, I think is very insidious and the impacts of accountability systems on teacher wellbeing and on learner wellbeing really…but I don't think there is robust data or evidence for that, you know."* (Micro, 4)

As achievement of results is usually attributed to performance of micro curriculum actors, such as teachers, the additional stress and pressure due to rising accountability and performance measures creates an overemphasis on results at the expense of both students' and teachers' wellbeing. Amidst the surge of performativity accountabilities in place in the Irish HE, potential issues associated with an over-reliance on achievement of results also appears to be a neglect of non-cognitive outcomes which also contributes towards an effective output. Nonetheless, due to the increased expectation for curriculum actors to fulfil policy remits and evidence improvement through achievement of results, there is an increase in administrative workloads which unfortunately also undermine the actors' professional ability (Ball, 2016) creating a strain on their responsibilities against accountability as previously described in section 5.1.2 above (Green, 2011; Englund & Solbrekk, 2010).

Adherence to Professional Norms

While bureaucratic accountability and performance accountability both seem to affect professional accountability, the latter appears to be more subtle, making it more difficult to analyse as it was the least described by participants. Most of its description was nuanced into some level of regulations with focus on curriculum actors' expertise, especially those at meso and micro sites of curriculum implementation whereby they are assigned responsibilities to manage activities on the basis of their knowledge and skills. The relevance of professional self-regulation was highlighted as part of teacher (lecturer) evaluation: *"Teacher evaluation as any type of evaluation again as the developmental and the accountability function is important for teachers to understand what they're not doing well to improve their own practice, so the formative function."* (Supra). As proclaimed by Møller (2009), professional accountability is also horizontal where curriculum actors are accountable for their actions to their peers within their professional remit. This was referred to by another participant in a teaching role as *"informal accountability"* when talking about peers who do not put effort in their practice (Micro 2). As a means of addressing drawbacks and in attempting to support each other, another participant proclaimed that in conjunction with other curriculum actors in the network, they have established a framework for professional conduct setting out core values and ethics that underpin their work:

> "*we had a number of meetings to come up with this conceptual framework…we call it ethical relational conceptual framework. So our purpose is mostly about ethical relations of a teacher…not just about conceptual teaching…we base all our responses to that conceptual framework"* (Meso 3).

This participant claims that emphasis is laid on ethical leadership and decision making through a supporting peer network underpinned by ethical principles. Moreover, professional integrity was also defined as *"what we understand is being professional practice and good practice."* (Meso 5). Nonetheless, while curriculum actors are entrusted to manage curriculum practice on the basis on their expertise, they are also required to be accountable for adhering to professional norms. Other participants, especially those in a teaching role shared their frustration with *"pressures from the* *university system…from the broader higher education system around what we measure and how we demonstrate our value."* (Micro 3). This participant felt torn between responding to students' needs and promoting public good through the state while at the simultaneously adhering to the set out standards of practice including professional knowledge, skills, competence and conduct (Teaching Council, 2016). As asserted by Rawdon et al., (2021), teachers need to be recognised as agentic professionals giving them ownership in its true sense with the opportunity to build on their existing knowledge and manage what best suit their needs and those of students allowing democratic processes to become embedded within institutions' ethos and curriculum practice.

5.3.2 Policy Intermediaries to Build Network Conditions

In a process of interessement characterised by legitimation, a new assemblage of human and non-human actors is summoned to reinforce the problematisation of accountability and endorse its functional indispensability. Entitled to generate accountable truths in a political game of visibility about the effectiveness and quality of the HE system, the controlling actors offer their own lenses through which curriculum practice under accountability becomes governable. However, as mediators are unpredictable and may be adapted, interpreted and redirected, blowing out in multiple directions where attitudes, opinions and passions bifurcate at every turn (Latour, 2005), policy intermediaries act as an important strategy introduced to initiate alliance with the governing technologies and interested actors of the network.

The three policy trajectories distinguished as mediators above in section 5.2.1; compliance with regulations, achievement of results and adherence to professional norms, trigger the release of an acute mobility of policy tactics as intermediaries to build network conditions that must be accounted for by more work. In contrast to the policy mediators, these intermediaries function more like a black box, transporting a force or meaning without transforming it (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). As stated by Latour (2005), intermediaries circulate between actors, connecting them in the network and assist in defining the relation between them. Intermediaries both order and form the network medium they describe (Callon, 1991). Hence, the intermediaries guide and support the actors in matters related to curriculum implementation and thus ensure stability of the network. These evaluating networks therefore mould curriculum practice as well as the subjectivities of curriculum actors and their relations (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).

Callon (1991) identifies four types of intermediaries: literacy inscriptions (texts), human beings (particularly their skills and knowledge), money (as an institutional means of exchange) and technical artefacts (such as machines and scientific instruments). A mix of the first three types of intermediaries were identified from the data. However, they were used for disparate functions at different stages of translation, during interessement and enrolment as shown in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2 The roles and functions of intermediaries identified in the study.

Intermediaries	Role and Function	As Related to Moments of Translation
Standard Guidelines/Frameworks, Compacts with Statutory Bodies/Strategy Papers, Learning Outcomes, Policy Texts, Codes	As Policy Intermediaries to Build Network Conditions	Interessement of Governing Techne for Generation of Accountable 'Truths'
Government Statutory Bodies, Professional Bodies, External Stakeholders	As Authoritative Entities to Maintain Network Stability	Enrolment of Allies to Ensure Expected Forms of Conduct
Funding, Scholarships, External Stakeholders, Performance-based Contracts, Promotions	As Accountability Mechanisms to Reinforce Interest	

As further stated by Callon (1991), the definition of an intermediary is not static; while at one time, they may be enrolled by others to circulate through networks to support translation, at other times an intermediary may put other intermediaries into circulation, mobilising them to create new arrangements for the purpose of securing an appropriate network outcome. The role of each intermediary identified in connecting different actors and their influence was explored.

Policy Texts

Policy texts act as a communication between the controlling actors and other actors in the system having an influence on the role definition of actors in the network as their actions are elucidated. As specified by one participant, *"there's accountability to a national policy you know…with public investment in the universities…something like the systems performance framework which we set out as objectives for the HE system"* (Macro 2). Policy texts therefore help relevant actors to take decisions and actions as per the inscriptions. Curriculum actors are thus, persuaded to retain their interests and ensure performance of the roles assigned to them through policy inscriptions: *"I think the quality assurance and quality enhancements and processes impact on the curriculum. I think engaging with professional bodies impacts on the curriculum. I think the direction of national policy and national funding impacts on the curriculum."* (Macro 2).

As posited by Ball (1993), policy texts are encoded in complex ways including struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations. Intermediaries such as text particularly have the power to enable action at a distance (Latour, 2005). Hence, national policy acts as an intermediary as it is able to define the relationship between the curriculum actor and the curriculum.

Codes, Strategy Papers and Compacts

Policy as code which is a method of defining and managing rules, criteria and conditions was also mentioned in an attempt to enhance outcomes: *"each individual institution will have to demonstrate compliance with the code, so we were working under development of the code and we'd be engaging with stakeholders over the course of this year with a view to introducing a process for the international education mark."* (Macro 3). The participants' role was to engage with stakeholders with a view to introduce a process for the International Education Mark (IEM). As stipulated by the participant, *"we need to be able to tell the outside world that this is a very very* *high quality system."* (Macro 3). Under this remit, the institutions take up the responsibility for developing and committing to the delivery of quality education and make it known internationally. As strategy statements continue to highlight quality service delivery of education to fulfil the needs of customers, clients and learners at all levels of education (Gleeson & O'Donnabháin, 2009), strategy papers and compacts or agreements have been documented to set overall aims that support development of a specific plan of action to achieve them while ensuring compliance with relevant legislations:

> *"we have compacts with the (statutory body) and all those compacts say we will do certain things and we have a statutory obligations through the universities act so we have the objects of the act and then we have to deliver on the objects of the act so that is a legislative underpinning in terms of our accountability for the fact that we're funded by the public purse."* (Meso 5).

Curriculum actors plan their actions and activities according to the clauses contained in the compacts. Therefore, the compacts and strategy papers assist in connecting curriculum actors with statutory bodies while at the same time, help to shape the actions of the curriculum actors to achieve the desired network conditions.

Standard Guidelines/Frameworks

Statutory bodies lay out standard guidelines and frameworks to guide curriculum actors and help them expand on curriculum practices. As declared by Meso 1, *"The standards that are involved in the European Credit Transfer System and the National Framework of Qualifications and all of our programs are automatically aligned to the national framework of qualifications."*. HEIs are required to look all the time at the statutory body's criteria to match the standards that are involved in the European credit transfer system and the national framework of qualifications to ensure consistency. Quality was evidently linked with learning outcomes that provide an overarching framework for programme recognition promoting a context for national credit transfer and within European context (Gleeson & O'Donnabhaín, 2009; Gleeson 2011). It was stated that HE has to be *"accountable to the students. So it has to ensure that it is providing a good quality and good learning outcomes for students through its curriculum."* (Macro 1). This demonstrates how actors in this network interact together with standard guidelines and frameworks working as intermediaries to shape actors' interaction and define their actions in the network.

Learning Outcomes

Another macro actor affirmed his engagement with the introduction of learning outcomes into the curriculum as a *"major piece of work"* (Macro 3) and another attested that *"part of the movement here over the last 12 years mostly have everything documented in terms of learning outcomes"* (Meso 1). The main focus of this type of managerial accountability was enforced to ensure improvements in students learning outcomes with the view that learning outcomes will assist in the expression of aims and accomplishments at modular and programme levels (Conway & Murphy, 2013) while at the same time providing clear information on institutions' performance (Møller, 2009). While this arrangement depicts a more rigid structure of regulations, the same participant declared that *"Even within those frameworks we have a lot of autonomy because the universities are classified as designated, awarding bodies and within the frameworks we have quite a lot of freedom."* (Meso 1).

The fact that this participant claims having much autonomy in curriculum development only to ultimately map their work to the externally designed framework, indicates the complex and challenging role of the participant as a curriculum actor where the participant's leadership and professional identity are developed in response to the mediation of external policy mediators and intermediaries in the form of policy directives and standard frameworks. Besides, Connell (2013a) and Lynch, Grummell and Devine (2012) presumed that the neoliberal imagination would re-shape curriculum actors' insights akin to business managers under the new public management wave for a maximised quality service. Based on the curriculum actors' shared experiences and perceptions, these policy trajectories seem to be more enforced rather than negotiated with regards to the misalignment of interests and apparent tensions within all three accountability approaches. Nevertheless, these dominant elements of problematisation take the floor while the underlying concernments they carry remain shadowed.

5.4 Theme 3: Enrolment of Allies for Expected Forms of Conduct

As interessement does not automatically lead to successful alliances, it needs to be supported by enrolment of a sufficient body of allies to achieve eventual translations (Callon, 1986). Moreover, Callon (1986) explains that translation needs to be in the interests of the allies for them to agree to engage in particular ways of thinking and acting for maintenance of the network stability. Hence, through a political process of negotiations and persuasion, other actors are convincingly engaged in embracing the underlying ideas of the arising actor-network while also defining their roles with respect to the scheme as proposed in the OPP to keep their actions in line with the specific arrangements.

However, it has been noted from the data that enrolment does not always require negotiations or even persuasions because in some instances, some actors readily accept and actively support and participate in the proposed solution, enrolling themselves into the actor-network without any resistance as proclaimed by this participant: *"some institutions in some parts of the system are very obedient… that's almost our culture. If there's a new policy, they'd be forced out to implement it…some institutions would see it as a badge of honour."* (Macro 3). In such cases, the actors share the problematisation statement. Nonetheless, the identity of the actors, both those that are targeted and those who can potentially threaten the network's stability, are secured through negotiations by employing various methods, strategies and tactics disguised in a series of intermediaries as presented in table 5.2 previously. In this respect, two sub-themes (Figure 5.4) became apparent:

1. Authoritative entities to maintain network stability
2. Accountability mechanisms to reinforce interest

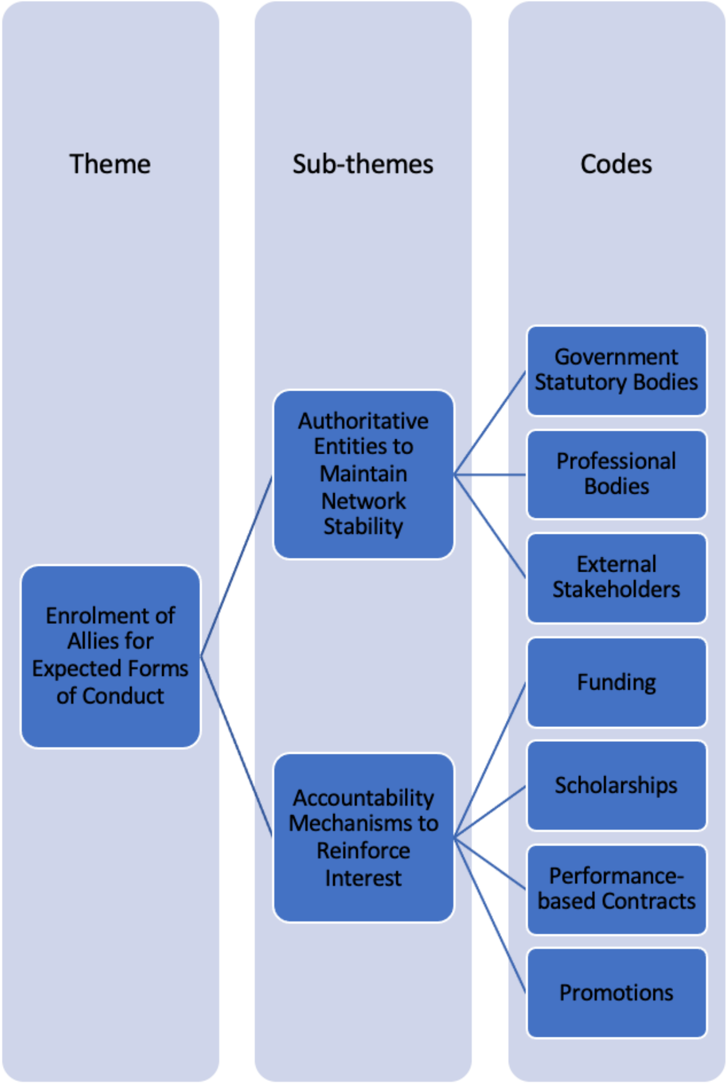

Theme
Sub-themes
Codes
Enrolment of Allies for Expected Forms of Conduct
Authoritative Entities to Maintain Network Stability
Accountability Mechanisms to Reinforce Interest
Government Statutory Bodies
Professional Bodies
External Stakeholders
Funding
Scholarships
Performance-based Contracts
Promotions

Figure 5.4 Enrolment of allies for expected forms of conduct.

5.4.1 Authoritative Entities to Maintain Network Stability

The dominating relevance of authoritative entities such as government statutory bodies, professional bodies and external stakeholders in the Irish HE system have been outlined by participants.

Government Statutory/Professional Bodies

Government statutory bodies are enrolled for enforcement of strategies to encourage participation of actors in particular ways to ensure maintenance of the network as certain actors may also jeopardise the network stability. As previously described, statutory bodies regulate the network stability through compacts documenting statutory obligations that HEIs have to commit to, thereby framing curriculum practice to suit the network conditions. Furthermore, professional bodies accrediting universities or joint-accrediting the institutions as a means of regulating them to practice in that profession can be quite influential. Participants commented on the relationship of the professional bodies with universities that may make practice challenging if they do not have much engagement and do not work closely enough. However, those working in strong partnership with the institution felt like they are "*so influenced …sometimes hamstrung by the demands of the professional body*" (Meso 5). A series of visits taking place as a means of enforcing accountability regimes is apparently central to their operation.

> *"Professional bodies are all anxious to have more involvement in the internal operation of universities. So the government is changing the legislation. At the moment the (government statutory body), is going through…that gives them more power to regulate universities so the whole direction of travel is having more control over universities, and I think a lot of that is control over student numbers and financial affairs of universities, but also part of it would be measures to ensure quality."* (Meso 1)

Some participants talked about receiving guidance from professional bodies through *"published standards guidelines…and they're quite detailed"* (Meso 4) while others also felt like they were being *"dictated by the professional training bodies"* (Micro 2).

External Stakeholders

Another way of influencing curriculum actors' practice is to ensure the participation of external stakeholders in the management of institutions of higher education. So institutions of higher education have boards that basically manage the institution and *"those boards now have external members so that they bring societal interests."* (Supra). As such, human and non-human actors both play a significant role in the changing eduscape enabling new prospects and modern course of action according to the OPP logic. As quality is related to students' results and indicate performance of an institution, participants have communicated their discontentment about the insistence of accreditation bodies to cap repeat students' achievement at a bare pass mark which only *"allow them to just pass, but never get a higher mark in passing, but they're insisting on it and threatening to withdraw accreditation if we don't. So we may be forced to do that."* (Meso 1). Standardised and objective approaches therefore become key drivers of the translation of quality from the network of discourse to the network of practice.

5.4.2 Accountability Mechanisms to Reinforce Interest

While the authoritative entities are used as intermediaries to seek immediate enrolment of allies through enforcement of strategies, they also in turn, generate new processes of interessement and permitting other non-human actors to enter the scene as other intermediaries to circulate through the network in terms of accountability mechanisms to reinforce their interests. As further revealed in the interview data, these mechanisms were developed in an attempt to enhance the stability of the implementation network, as incentives to gain wider support of key actors (Tatnall & Burgess, 2002). Specific strategies were identified from the data as rewards and prizes including funding and scholarships, performance-based contracts and promotions to lock in the interests of the other actors so as to successfully enrol them into the actor-network enabling them to perform their given roles. However, an evaluation of the actors' engagement with the range of mechanisms showed varied reactions ranging from immediate acceptance, to acquiescence, through struggle, resistance and opposition thus menacing the sturdiness of the network.

Funding/Scholarships

Funding was exceedingly the most mentioned accountability mechanism in the interview data. One way of ensuring alignment with the government's objectives is through funding because the rules can be defined in specific terms to suit the needs of the government.

> *"There's a range of specifications that the institutions who have been successful in acquiring funding have to meet which directly go into the design of the curriculum, and they are all around designing a curriculum that meets the needs of employers in a range of different areas not just in terms of content, but also into the way they're delivered"* (Macro 3).

This seems to be the most effective mechanism to maintain the network as almost all participants indicated that there is never enough funding in HE. One participant communicated the difficulty some departments face to shape their approach to the content of the curriculum due to how resources are aligned against this particular neoliberal agenda that has been defined as an "*aggressive posture*" (Micro 3) that lacks credibility. Therefore, curriculum actors find great interest in becoming the pioneers of funding, readily accepting the detailed conditions and assuming the defined roles in order to meet demands of the labour market. As asserted by one participant, *"Funding drives behaviour you know."* (Macro 1). A competition is therefore launched whereby institutions and curriculum actors engage with and mobilise other actors in order to prepare themselves for the new challenge.

Competitive calls for student scholarship and institutional funding was acknowledged: *"in many countries, for instance, there's a shortage of students going into sciences and engineering, for instance. So you can always orient through the supplier programme, but also actually through the demand of scholarships and the choice of those programmes"* (Supra). Another participant further added: *"and theoretically, if we fail significantly to meet those objectives, they can withdraw part of our funding, and if they wish, they can give us bonus funding."* (Meso 1).

Policies are being developed in different countries including Ireland to influence the mix of programme offerings in institutions of higher education where the development of courses that specifically meet the needs of the economy are required.

Performance-based Contracts

The government can also establish given objectives for institutions by developing performance-based contracts for them through definition of set objectives along with the funding amount, *"so they can steer by basically signing contracts with certain conditions to grant that funding."* (Supra). This highlights the challenge in higher education, of ensuring that institutions that receive public money use it in a way that is useful for society. Therefore, governments are trying to steer the way the institutions use that money so that it achieves societal objectives. Hence, if the interests of curriculum actors and controlling actors in the network do not match, there will be negative consequences for one or the other. In this case, curriculum practice is under distress insofar as one participant admitted that in her experience of working in academia, *"teaching isn't always the primary aim of a lecturer; researching and getting funding is more than likely going to be the primary aim. So it really depends on the individual and how well they want to do"* (Micro 2). Interview findings therefore revealed that the funding mechanisms were not only limited to influencing curricular outcomes but also actors' individual drive to perform or advance in their employment in terms of getting promoted. Other than that, participants also included remarks about personal accountability discussing the impact of their attitudes on the curriculum in terms of educational practice and students learning experience. Some participants admitted that the measures of evidences have been used as part of an application for promotion. *"Once you accept that and start using that in promotion, I think you give people a huge pressure or incentive to game that number to do things that will increase student satisfaction, even if they reduce quality and I can make my students happy"* (Meso 1).

Such an approach would be tempting for academics to do if it starts to get linked to promotion, and so, the more accountability measures, the lesser will it be valued, although such forms of accountability are publicly acceptable. Additionally, others conveyed ideas about not being honest about the network's weaknesses if evaluation has an impact on the promotion, rewards or salary undermining the formative function.

5.5 Theme 4: Mobilisation of the Curriculum Implementation Network

The existence of enrolled actors forms the basis of mobilisation (Callon, 1986). Entities that have formed part of this actor-network are effects generated by certain interactions with one another. The process of representation taking place in a cascade manner, using chains of intermediaries that enacted as spokesmen, becomes visible during this stage (Callon, 1986). Hence, some codes distinguished at enrolment resurfaced during mobilisation, but, with altered effects. Furthermore, the effects of entities determined at enrolment manifested differently than intended. Successful translation depends on the strength of the cascade relationships. While the actors may absolutely preserve their own specific plan, they however need to find it valuable to form part of the emerging network based on alliances in relation to a definite subject. Once the allied network is in place, they may well then speak on behalf of others. Thus, the emerging actor-network's sustainability depends upon the magnitude of difficulty to change the actors' orientation. The vulnerability of the actor-network depends on how easily actors return to their initial positions by severing their alliance with the key actors. Where translation has succeeded, an actor-network is mobilised to undertake a certain role and implement practice in a particular way.

The following interview findings highlight the mobilisation(or not) of the network. As per Callon (1986), mobilisation happens when an idea (network) is no longer seen as controversial and it becomes taken for granted. This study's data has captured a mix of actors that were influenced in various ways, stipulating for HE the balance of foundation, pedagogy and professional practice that require reconsideration. Several critical voices came to light, taking the shape of a campaigning propaganda classified under four sub-themes (Figure 5.5):

1. Emerging pattern of competitive ethos
2. Commodification of Knowledge
3. Compromised Professional Identities
4. Conducted Curriculum

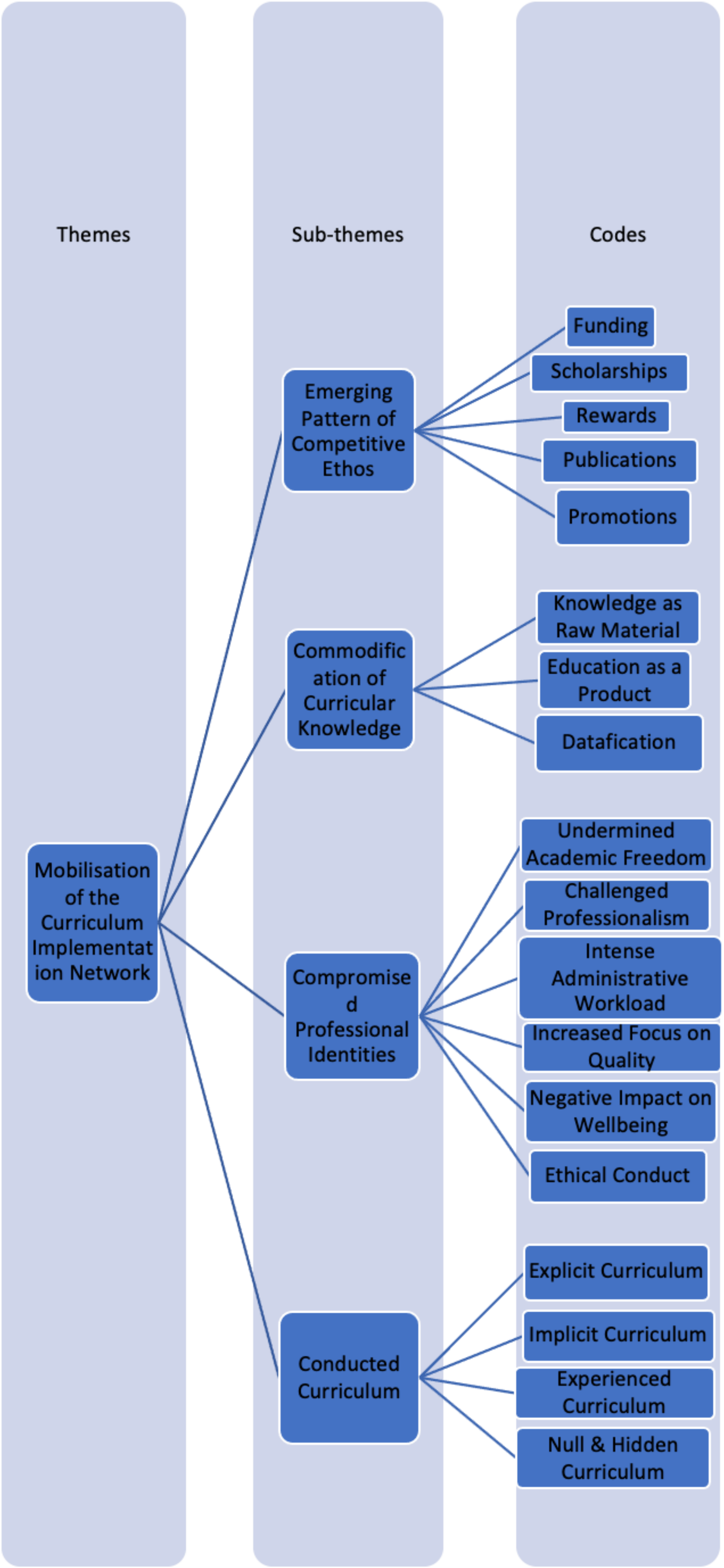

Themes
Sub-themes
Codes
Mobilisation of the Curriculum Implementation Network
Emerging Pattern of Competitive Ethos
Funding
Scholarships
Rewards
Publications
Promotions
Commodification of Curricular Knowledge
Knowledge as Raw Material
Education as a Product
Datafication
Compromised Professional Identities
Undermined Academic Freedom
Challenged Professionalism
Intense Administrative Workload
Increased Focus on Quality
Negative Impact on Wellbeing
Ethical Conduct
Conducted Curriculum
Explicit Curriculum
Implicit Curriculum
Experienced Curriculum
Null & Hidden Curriculum

Figure 5.5 Mobilisation of the curriculum implementation network.

5.5.1 Emerging Pattern of Competitive Ethos

Funding/Publications/Research/Scholarships/Rewards/Promotions

The process of representation involving series of intermediaries employed to lock actors' interests, above all, evolved into technologies of competition. The research data portrays an exacerbating rise in the tendency for competition in the HE network at various levels including funding, publications, research, scholarships, rewards and promotions.

> *"there's a political economy here and you know the funding for higher education continues to shrink in real terms…and I will report the number of publications and all those kinds of metrics. One of its central engines is how much money you can bring in…the universities sadly, interest in hiring external full professors to boost their reputation in terms of research metrics that never change that consume vast amount of resources and offered nothing really, if any matters to the intellectual community, but maybe boost the metric around publications or research funding."* (Micro 3)

Performance funding was frequently mentioned as being insufficient which drives competition and increased pressure in accountability to the general public in terms of data which some think is not worthwhile. Institutions lacking the required expertise to fulfil the requirements of accountability therefore hire external full professors to keep them in the league. While accountability was rationalised as improving outcomes, allowing transparency and ensuring trustworthiness, scarcity of resource provision on the other hand has raised many disturbances as highlighted by the participant. A large part of the process ostensibly relies on trust as previously discussed, which affects transparency and hence outcomes.

The State influence on the curriculum is in large measure through funding placing the needs of the economy at the foreground. As disclosed by this participant, *"My first role is in the engagement with enterprise and higher education institutions and the development of courses that meet the skills needs of the economy. So how we do that is through a number of competitive calls to institutions for funding"* (Macro 1). Where financials are concerned, the need for results-based accountability systems are emphasised in order to make performance publicly acknowledged giving importance to quality.

> *"The government body that funds the university's outreach for meeting with all these structures …gives us guidance about what to do and funds those by a formula. And for the last seven or eight years the HE has had a system of having a performance contract with us and that performance contractors they lay out if they agree with our series of objectives and then they meet us annually to see how we're doing against those objectives."* (Meso 1)

The focus is ultimately on performance where this scenario is facilitated by an increased focus on data-driven modes of accountability to get ahead in the competition between institutions. Such a model of accountability that fosters competition and deprive its stakeholders of equity have been criticised in literature (Ball, 2016; Conway & Murphy, 2013; Ozga, 2020) and by participants as they do not produce just outcomes. *"If we could take funding out of the equation and ensure that we had a properly funded higher education system, then the outcomes for us will probably be better and more aligned to our needs."* (Macro 1). One participant optimistically added that *"this can be a really positive... if our policymakers believe and I hope they do, that the education for sustainable development is absolutely crucial and if they put funding towards that then that allows institutions to develop programmes or parts of programmes that respond directly to education process and development."* (Meso 5).

While referring to the expectations and ambitions of the State for higher education needs in relation to the marketplace in terms of skills and placement, one participant expressed concern about the impact competition for funding has on educational practice affirming that

"in my experience of working in academia, teaching isn't always the primary aim of a lecture, you know, researching and getting funding is more than likely going to be their primary aim." (Micro 2).

5.5.2 Commodification of Curricular Knowledge

Knowledge as Raw Material/Education as Product/Datafication

Increasing an institution's financial autonomy provides an opportunity to treat knowledge as raw material to be eventually commodified into education as a product. With the economy's need at the foreground, there is an intense pressure for results-based accountability and performativity. The interview data illustrate a significant prominence of datafication encompassing quantified targets and curriculum outcomes, student feedback, benchmarking, promotion and progression rates, satisfaction surveys, retention and graduation rates, employment rates and students marks and grades.

> *"Most of them (practices)…I'm not against them because these are also relevant for when we look at the literature, but still like…making their planning everything according to the numbers, credit numbers...it is challenging and… you cannot report all these things in terms of numbers…the experience is also important."* (Meso 3).
>
> *"You know we review and try to enhance and reflect and revise the processes and procedures and the kinds of systems around that, but it doesn't capture everything you know and there's so much of the richness and so much of the embodiment and the relationships and the... kind of the social and political aspects of it which aren't put in and can never be put in numbers. So we have designed a system which works. It operates, it succeeds in the sense that it helps the students develop.*
> *And it helps us be able to show things to the external examiners and show things the (professional body) and show things to ourselves and, you know, try and evaluate the, the quality, try indicators of what we might consider to be quality. But it is a limited tool. You know it's a limited system of tools and biased in various ways."* (Micro 4)

These evidence the central role played by data as it generates and propagates particular meanings associated with accountability through statistics. There was a sense of helplessness felt around discussions about the drawbacks of data-driven modes of accountability as they persist in terms of widely accepted benchmarks of quality and performance in the HE system to fulfil policy remits.

Potential negative effects of the implementation of accountability driving a focus on results were expressed.

> *"Obviously, teachers/lecturers aligning with the interest of students will then focus on what is measured in those examinations, which again is only a subset of learning objectives. So high stakes examinations also lead to narrowing of the curriculum, teaching to the test …"*(Supra).
>
> *"I think if accountability regimes are too rigid, it stifles creativity and innovation."* (Macro 3).

There is a knock-on effect from engaging with an intense testing actor-network that impacts on a lessened focus on educational practice. An increasing interest on using only a limited subset of student learning outcomes to improve results and teaching to the test has been reported where teachers focus only a subset of learning objectives to set examinations, teaching to the test. Furthermore, the adoption of high-stakes assessment questions the purpose of HE. Eventually, this tension between the political and professional domains with respect to educational power and responsibilities create remarkable issues for the implementation of accountability (Møller, 2009). Further pressure is experienced by curriculum actors due to the focus on results as an indispensable indicator of students achievement, treating education as a product for commercial transaction.

5.5.3 Compromised Professional Identities

The struggles that originated from the enactment of the curriculum under accountability policy trajectories were disclosed by participants. Human actors' experiences of curriculum influences their subjectivity. There is an evident tension between autonomy and accountability in the emerged actor-network. The importance of *"Intellectual autonomy"* (Micro 3) was highlighted in curriculum enactment where students feel that their needs are being met while having a balance between autonomy and quality. This was emphasised by another participant when asked about designing an effective curriculum: *"the word that always goes hand in hand with accountability for me is autonomy and the balance between autonomy and* *accountability"* (Meso 5). Some participants were of the view that universities have more autonomy because they are classified as designated awarding bodies describing it as *"autonomy under scrutiny rather than a kind of performance framework that is imposed"* (Meso 1). While some participants felt that much autonomy is given in terms of the content for the modules taught others felt otherwise. *"Now, that's particularly true for modules that are electives… we have modules that are in a way if you like, dictated by the professional training bodies."* (Micro 2).

Hierarchical accountability is believed to enforce laws and regulations compliance by placing the onus of quality education upon its stakeholders which apparently gives them more autonomy. This participant asserts that there are *"pushes and pulls on the universities that influence how they do that…so there's a lot of boxes are ticked…the institutions tend to lean on the agency and the agency has a paternalistic or maternalistic depending on which member of staff was dealing with the institutions".* (Macro 3). This participant further accentuated on the fact that *"it's important that academics have a good sense of ownership of the curriculum. I think they always have to question how they deal with that and how they think it should be used"* (Macro 3). While universities legally have *"full responsibility for the development of their programmes…really the state influences programme development under the curriculum in large measure through funding rather than direct regulation of the curriculum"*(Macro 3). All participants, shared positive comments of the data requirement aspects of the current accountability structures in place as a means to gauge outcomes. However, perspectives in relation to the level and types of reporting and information provision to stakeholders were varied. Some participants felt that their professionalism was being challenged at the same time by intense administrative procedures in evaluating the validity of curricular knowledge. They felt that they were striving to maintain a desired level of quality in the process of delivery which leaves limited time for any innovations, consultations and enactment. There was a general consensus about the amount of time that the work load of accountability policies and procedures consumed. Other criticisms were around the ever-increasing specialised accreditation of programmes and audits or reviews that involve intense administrative workload, excessive audits, testing, data collection and reporting aspect of programmes based on specific criteria that some curriculum actors (as follows) admitted are burdensome and would not do if they did not have to fulfil certain requirements.

> *"I suppose some of the challenges are that perhaps it gets quite rigid and there is a loss of flexibility, and that becomes quite bureaucratic and kind of a box ticking exercise as they say."* (Macro 2).
>
> *"I think our quality assurance processes need to be more flexible, and I think they're quite bureaucratic and burdensome and I think in order for them to achieve what we want them to achieve, I think they I think they need to be more flexible."* (Macro 2).
>
> *"Yes, I don't feel comfortable because there are clear boxes that you have to fill out with word limits. So it is challenging."* (Meso 3).

This nurtures a paradox of accountability regimes. While on one hand, accountability regimes imply acceptance of responsibility for honest and ethical conduct in the delivery of high quality education by educational institutions with a decreased influence of the state, on the other hand, there is a dependency on the state engagement through funding and quality procedures. *"So the big challenge is to ensure that institutions of education are steered in their use of public funds to align with societal objectives, but without undermining academic freedom and also fundamental research being developed."* (Supra). Furthermore, robust quantitative approaches of accountability is reportedly impacting on teacher and learner well-being opening spaces of unfavourable learning experience.

Some curriculum actors feel that this constant scrutiny for quality education causes increased pressure due to the administrative burden failing to address the point by eliminating the intended functions of evaluation which are to support development and improvement. As highlighted in literature, over-inspection and scrutiny reduces trust, affects the well-being and deprives curriculum actors of their sense of professional ownership. As per the OECD (2013), some countries are tagged as 'hard/soft' and 'high/moderate/low' depending on the emphasis placed on the models of regulation and accountability used to demonstrate quality assurance and evaluation.

5.5.4 Conducted Curriculum

Curriculum is not merely a stable fixed body of knowledge but also concerns negotiations among various human and non-human actors in the society and education system (Wahlström, 2022). Socio-political networks of curriculum evaluations influence subjectivities of human actors and their relations with other actors and actants ranging from compliance, resistance, controversy and debate, altogether shaping the conception of curriculum which in turn impact on its practice. Negotiations around expected knowledge, skills and values modulate the influence of accountability on the curriculum in various ways including the explicit, implicit, experienced, null and hidden. As new political actors such as sponsors of education programmes get enrolled into the HE network for accountability regimes to gain wider acceptance, spaces are created for these actors to actively participate in the delivery of education services (Skerrit, 2019) including curriculum development. Hence, from the perspective of funding, the focus becomes skewed towards accountability to its stakeholders, constrained by a conducted approach in order to ensure value for money (Gleeson & O'Donnabháin, 2009).

When asked about curriculum goals, most participants had aligned their thoughts with the intended objective of the key actors in the network and responded in terms of providing employability skills. It was noted that besides content-oriented curriculum, participants also mentioned competency-oriented curriculum where curriculum expresses scenarios of knowledge in terms of expectations of skills to achieve, because of the current emphasis on employability skills which shifted the focus of stakeholders in education.

> *"I think the emphasis on employability now is really strong and that emphasis comes from several stakeholders and certainly comes from students as well. They want when you ask them about why higher education is important for them one of the things they want is to get a good job at the end of it."* (Meso 5).

Responses also encompassed emphasis on transversal attributes beyond transferable skills and how they are embedded across the curriculum which is believed to have resulted from both hard and soft accountability forces. However, one significant weakness of the current objective of the network was noted by one participant:

> *"when you think about competence or kind of forward dimensions to confidence…there's knowledge under skills and very often a lot of outcomes are kind of shaped around knowledge and skills. But there's also two other dimensions to being a competent person and they are values and attitudes, and they're much more challenging in terms of trying to shape tangible outcomes that are verifiable."* (Meso 4).

As previously documented, achievement of learning outcomes have tremendously gained grounds in determining effectiveness of the curriculum. The participant declared that standardised assessments have been introduced with close alignment to international performance regulating organisations standards of knowledge, skills and competence emphasising harshly on producing tangible outcomes, while neglecting students values and attitudes that also help in determining performance. It was also pointed out that learning outcomes around values are also more challenging to be stated in writing and assessed.

Hence, as affirmed by Sahlberg (2010), the more need for a culture of shared responsibility and trust allowing curriculum actors at all level of interactions to judge what is best for their students. Macro 3 states that:

> *"The teacher as part of the great academic has always felt a real sense of ownership of it and I think there will be very strong feelings amongst academics. That is their domain, their expertise…as opposed to the state or other interests who want to influence the curriculum there isn't attention and that can manifest itself you know, particularly in the context of accountability under a real tension"*.

Some actors' strongly-held beliefs constrain them from enacting the active student-centred approaches thereby re-theorising curricula as theories of action which creates a clear mismatch between assumptions about teaching and learning, their practice and the experienced curriculum.

The significance of the experienced curriculum was called for attention by very few participants. As stated by this one with regards to the definitions of the assessments of the modules:

> *"So although the lecturers should decide on this, they clearly define it, what practices they should complete in school plus placements…I can see that these are up to date practices...I'm not against them because these are also relevant*

> *to literature, but still…planning everything according to the numbers, credit numbers...it is challenging and sometimes, you cannot report all these things in terms of numbers…the experience is also important."* (Meso 3).

Another participant responded that the experienced curriculum is packed with chicanery to achieve set goals at the expense of students' experiences:

> *"That's probably the practical kind of aspects of curriculum, and there's something a little bland, a little uninspiring, perhaps about that aspect, and I could say a lot more about it, but just to kind of move it, I think there's also like kind of duty reticle, kind of conceptual kind of aspects, the experiential aspects, the social, the political aspects, which probably interests me slightly more."* (Meso 4).

In the race of improving outcomes, the null and hidden curriculum which has been obscured by the others, was only mentioned by one participant because they are not the entire point of the explicit or implicit curriculum.

> *"I am more interested in thinking about the hidden curriculum and the null curriculum…so I'd be very concerned about the power relationships and the relationality of all this, the embodied experiences of all of this and what isn't named or visible, made visible and the whole kind of series of norms on the normativity of both"*(Micro 4).

Hidden curricular issues result from assumptions and expectations that are not fully communicated within learning environments and may have both positive and negative influences as indicated by this participant. As many different entities may influence and shape the hidden curriculum including rules and regulations which impacts on the interpersonal relationship of students and micro curriculum actors, it therefore needs to be also considered where accountability is concerned in order to move towards a more enlightened future with a positive impact on HE.

5.6 Summary

This chapter illustrates findings from semi-structured interviews exploring the impact of accountability regimes on curriculum practice. The study was guided by my conceptual framework, a dual approach of Foucauldian governmentality and Actor Network Theory. Participants shared their perceptions and insights of accountability regimes they engage with and how these experiences influenced their curricular practices.

Following Callon's (1986) definition of mobilisation, it can be gathered that the interests of actors remain aligned over a period of time where they acted in agreement with the interests of the controlling actor, despite many of them retaining their own specific plan. However, it can be deduced that the HE actor-network did not fully mobilise despite having stability for some time and over a wide space because the actor-network is unable to fully meet its objectives of compliance with regulations, adherence to professional norms and achievement of results due to the unintended and undesired side effects of curriculum outcomes that emerged. The full enrolment of critical actors was challenged through the emergence of an array of new actors that threatened the network stability. Despite the efforts of the controlling actor to fully enrol key actors into the implementation network, disruptions were caused. Hence, the actors of this network therefore need to be repositioned to enhance the stability and address the attained outcomes. This calls for a re-allocation of actors within the implementation network and maybe also within the intended policy network.

6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is focused on addressing the overarching research question:

What is the impact of contemporary regimes of accountability on the curriculum policy-practice process at higher education in Ireland?

In order to evaluate this broad question, the sections below encompass responses to the three subsidiary research questions:

1. How are accountability regimes implemented in curriculum making and enactment at various sites of curriculum representation within HEIs?
2. What are the experiences and perceptions of curriculum actors within the accountability-infused system?
3. How does accountability throughout the policy-practice process affect curriculum outcomes?

While the previous chapter presented factual conclusions in line with the research statement in terms of themes and subthemes, this chapter brings key contents of the previous chapters together to answer these research questions through detailed analytical evaluation of the empirical findings. The chapter unpacks the black box of curriculum which is usually perceived to be bounded a certain context that distorts it in unpredicted ways (Edwards, Biesta & Thorpe, 2009) where all the negotiations that bring it into being is concealed. The networks of complex associations are brought to light based on the findings, with respect to social actors' engagement with policy. The effects of subjectification are critically analysed to provide an unconventional understanding of the impact of accountability regimes on curriculum practice at higher education. This is presented through how accountability is problematised and implemented in curriculum making through experiences and perceptions of curriculum actors and why it becomes disputed at specific times under particular circumstances, to its impact on curriculum practices in terms of attained outcomes.

In this research, policy is treated as both a process and a product (Taylor, 1997). However, no clear demarcations of intended policy, implemented practice and attained outcomes were established in analysis and they were perceived to be all embedded in the process at different stages. Hence, interpretive conclusions are presented in terms of themes or concepts where the answers emerge through critical analysis and discussion (Trafford & Lesham, 2008), instead of direct mapping to the relevant research questions. As Latour (2005, p.12) suggests, evaluation approaches ought to “follow the actors” to track emerging patterns and linkages among humans and non-human entities within networks along with the mediations working upon them, drawing particular attention to occurrences in the background including the series of interactions and consequences emerging from a single action.

6.2 The Socio-political Rationality Underpinning Neoliberal Governmentality in Curriculum Framing and Practice at Higher Education

Governmentality is made up of the semantically related words ‘govern’ (conduct) and ‘mentality’ (modes of rationality) which indicates that, in order to study the techniques and technologies of governing, an analysis of the rationalities underpinning them also becomes essential. The notion of governmentality defined as the “conduct of conduct” has been used by Foucault (1982, p. 220-221) comprehensively, geared towards different senses, closely linking forms of power and subjectification processes. Besides its political meaning to control, manage and regulate, the term ‘government’ also implies self-control in an ethical or moral sense as the conduct of oneself. Through self-government, it becomes indispensable for individuals to take well informed courses of action through which responsibility is shifted from the state to the individual (Peters, 2005). Therefore, as affirmed by Dean (2010), an analysis of government concerns agencies that seek to transform the interests of various actors by employing multiple techniques and forms of knowledge to ensure expected forms of conduct.

Hence, Foucault’s concept of governmentality as the rational way of governing through systematic practices including mentalities, rationalities and techniques while concomitantly reflecting on the best possible way of governing (Foucault, 2008), provides an appropriate basis to examine neoliberal influences on the curriculum at various sites of evaluation within the higher education system. Neoliberalism is construed as the political government’s responsibility to actively produce the environment within which entrepreneurial and competitive conduct is viable (Barry, Osborne & Rose, 1996). Jankowski and Provezis (2014) classify politics in terms of accountability as neoliberal governmentality. As argued by Lemke (2001), the concept of governmentality is theoretically strong for the fact of seeing neoliberalism primarily as a political project that undertakes to produce a social reality that already exists and not only as an ideological rhetoric or a political-economic rationality. Simons (2006) and Lolich (2011) contend that all educational institutional activities and actions of citizens are accountable as regulation of the population under neoliberal governmentality as a way to manage risk. Hence, in order to investigate which kinds of rationalities are being used in governing and how these intentions inspire curriculum practices at HE, a materialist analysis of government practices as an assemblage of multiple and heterogeneous elements emerging, subsisting and transforming under specific conditions was conducted through the interpretive lenses of Foucauldian governmentality. Participants of the study have defined accountability as conceptually-laden which reaffirms its multidimensional conceptualisation by many in literature (Chen, 2016; Møller, 2009; Ranson, 2003). It has been defined broadly as a government's technique to hold educational institutions accountable for the delivery of high quality education (Brill, Grayson, Kuhn & O'Donnell, 2018). The idea of presuming that accountability practice is directly related to improvements in education underpins policy. As Foucault (1991b) affirmed, practices do not exist without a certain regime of rationality. The data was therefore examined to determine how forms of rationality become inscribed within networks of practices and to evaluate the role they play within them. The governmentality concept was adopted to determine how neoliberal rationality functions as politics of truth to formulate new forms of knowledge and innovate new notions and concepts that contribute to the regimes of new domains of regulation and intervention (Foucault, 1985b; Lemke, 1997).

The study reveals that, entangled in the neoliberal webs of the globalised knowledge economy, the state relies on information published by international organisations and transnational alliances to critique the effectiveness and competences of HE, thereby opening a case for upgrading its overall performance by rendering accountability regimes indispensable in the network. While global socio-political environments are believed to influence national and local curriculum policy envisioning and enactment (Holland, Hughes & Leitch, 2016; Yates and Young, 2010), data from this study shows some evidence of the opposite as well in the form of a two-way obligation between the supra and macro domains of policy development. It was noted that works undertaken by international agencies are guided by the needs expressed by member countries. When domestic 'best practices' of certain states are considered as excellent by international ranking tables, they achieve fame and thus become promulgated worldwide through the circulation of published recommendations by international agencies (Schulte, 2018), where policy cloning as part of the new neoliberal orthodoxy take place. Neoliberal worldview has enormously influenced the expansion of accountability systems globally with particular emphasis on performativity, high-stakes outcomes and market competition (Hursh 2009; Cochran-Smith, Piazza & Power 2013). Yet, as highlighted by Schulte (2018), global environments can be considered and established very diversely across time and space among heterogeneous groups of actors. Despite the emerging global orthodoxies, it is nonetheless crucial to recognise the enduring influence of particular sociocultural contexts as well as the extent to which these factors mediate and shape policy at regional and local levels that result in more complexities than are often envisioned (Burdett & O'Donnell, 2016).

With the rising stakes for education around the world, the call for greater and better use of scientific evidence as the foundation for educational policymaking has also increased (Luke, 2003; Oakley, 2002; Slavin, 2002). This trend is based on the belief that educational processes and products need to be validated and legitimised where it is taken for granted that policymakers make decisions that are evidence based. Therefore, empirical evidence is assumed to be an efficient indicator of knowledge and learning (Wiseman, Whitty, Tobin & Tsui, 2010). However, when evidence-informed policy and practice respond to matters of fact as though facts are invincible, matters of concern appear to take the back seat. As articulated by Latour (2005a, p.19), politics around matters of fact are *"…much more interesting, variegated, uncertain, complicated, far reaching, heterogeneous, risky, historical, local, material and networky…"*. Matters of concern denote the intricate assemblages and attachments across which policy and politics can be implemented (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Latour (2005) argues that while ideology critique is inclined to questioning matters of fact, it is itself usually postulating an alternative matter of fact by completely reframing politics around convening matters of concern. Hence, it can be argued that policy-making processes cannot be configured as a plain dichotomy of formulation and implementation. Burdett and O'Donnell (2016) assert that there is no ideal blueprint for policies as well as for policy borrowing because they are extremely complex, dynamic and very well embedded in the environment within which they exist. Moreover, they further affirm that the process is more cumbersome when the impetus for educational policy change is strongly influenced by powerful currents surrounding the socio-political milieu instead of being solely related to educational reasons and outcomes (Burdett & O'Donnell, 2016).

Evidence interpreted in the context of this study indicates that the introduction of accountability regimes has its roots in the ideological, in addition to the educational. In order to evaluate the impact of these regimes on curriculum, these elements were examined within a wider range of socio-political relationships and norms using the combined lenses of governmentality and actor-network theory. Data illustrate that the government creates a discursive field framed around these global concepts, within which to exercise power "rationally" through the use of international information and nationally-evaluated data to critique the overall effectiveness and competences of HE. These particular knowledges regarded as 'evidences' of best practice become powerful through the establishment of obligatory passage points (OPPs) rendering regimes of accountability indispensable in the HE network. Hence, however problematic and extensively critiqued they may be, these educational initiatives exert powerful influence. Nevertheless, what seems to be irrefutable power is actually an always shifting and heterogeneous assemblage where may also exist openings for its interruption (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Therefore, to critically analyse the influence of this power on the curriculum, its micro strategies need to be traced to evaluate how entities, including themselves are translated into the HE network to produce normalised effects, yet unstable alliances in continuous webs of action.

The study therefore identifies three main policy trajectories (discussed below) in terms of governing technologies, stabilised as having certain ideological assumptions and intentions based on socio-political rationalisation of a pragmatics of guidance namely, compliance with explicit regulations (bureaucratic accountability), adherence to a profession's discipline and ethics (professional accountability) and achievement of results (performance accountability). Concisely, the success of these accountable governing technologies appears to be determined by: 1) the provision of certain kinds of resources by the global network, for a time, in expectation of some sort of return; 2) the setting up of a local network using resources provided by the global network to eventually offer some kind of return whether symbolic, economic, cultural or material to actors of the global network; and 3) their establishment as OPPs between the two networks (Section 6.3.1, 6.3.2 and 6.3.3).

6.3 (Im)proving Higher Education Standards

Based on the study, accountability measures are politically rationalised as a governable issue. Governing actors are entitled to (im)prove the overall performance of HE at the cost of proving accountability, whereby processes of inputs, implementation and outcomes would be more transparent, efficiency and coherence would be improved and professional conduct would be enhanced. As regimes of accountability become established as the OPP, a set of specific conventions, rules, assumptions and ways of operating must be accepted by other actors of the network.

These accepted regimes of truth and knowledge generate governable fields of visibility (Dean, 2010), drawing attention to two important questions; accountability to whom and accountability for what (Fitzgerald, 2021) eliciting further thoughts about the relationship amongst different entities in the political arena, consideration about the matter in question to be addressed and the objectives to be met.

Table 6.1 below illustrates a summary of the relationships (further discussed below) among these entities.

Table 6.1 Rationalised models of accountability and the related matters of consideration within the context of this study.

Illuminated Fields of Visibility		**Rationalised Systems of Accountability**	
Accountability to Whom	**Accountability for What**	**Expected Forms of Conduct**	**Types of Accountability**
Society, Students and other Stakeholders	Public funds, Quality education, Learning outcomes, Information provision, Institutional performance, Transparency, Trust	Achievement of results	Performance accountability
Government Entities	Robust monitoring and evaluating systems, Quality education; Learning outcomes, State funds; Professional standards	Compliance with rules and regulations	Bureaucratic accountability
Society, HEI, Students and Academics	Education standards, Professional integrity, Moral and ethical values, Attitudes	Adherence to professional norms and standards	Professional accountability

Models of accountability essentially provide a theoretical ideal. Analysis of the data show that accountability regimes are implemented simultaneously in HE based on three main models of regulation in line with literature namely; compliance with regulations, adherence to professional norms and achievement of results (Anderson, 2005; Conway & Murphy, 2013). Results of the study revealed underlying assumptions that compliance with regulations and adherence to professional norms improves achievement of results, where performance reporting allows transparency which in turn ensures trustworthiness in the system. Consequently, compliance-oriented and results-focused systems often conflict (Anderson, 2005) because of their direct effects on each other. It was further revealed (typically by supra/macro actors) that performance data is used in a 'positive sense' to put pressure on actors to perform better. Hence, the focus is primarily laid on attained outcomes on the basis of envisioned policies, ignoring the dynamics involved throughout implementation including curriculum actors' ideas, visions and interactions with other institutional actors as documented by Schulte (2018).

Although formally distinct, these three main types of policy mediators have been analysed in line with literature (Anderson, 2005; Conway & Murphy, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2021) as dispersed but interrelated courses of action of a wider agenda to lead, direct and guide conduct in curriculum practice according to the accountability rationale. Despite the observed overlap among the different accountability models on the basis of the data analysed, key differences emerge in the level and types of reporting and information provision to stakeholders.

6.3.1 Performance Accountability

Accountability was commonly interpreted by curriculum actors in terms of performance reporting (achievement of results) as a means to demonstrate accountability to the society which was the most mentioned category of stakeholders. This supports Anderson's (2005) assertion that performance accountability systems utilise reporting to the public to a larger extent than the other two. This type of outcomes-driven accountability approach often overcast the ongoing powerful bureaucratic accountability and subtle professional accountability that are interwoven into everyday curricular practices (Conway & Murphy, 2013). It is believed that information provision on educational outcomes is necessary for the appraisal of the proficiencies of HEIs. As asserted by Lessinger (1971) many decades ago, accountability is a proof-of-results policy. Furthermore, the responsibility of information provision in terms of institutional performance measures is evidently being used as a marketing strategy to attract students, to particular educational institutions. As per Ozga (2020), widely distributed information advises consumers' education choices. Literature asserts that students are being redefined as consumers of services of education that are regulated through market-led mechanisms reflected in global education policy (Ball, 2016; Conway & Murphy, 2013; Ozga, 2020; Skerritt, 2019). Proponents argue that feedback is provided by this market-led approach that is used to promote continuous improvement which encourages the society to maintain faith in the public education system, reducing over-reliance on private alternatives (Barber, 2004). Yet, under the neoliberal influence of market-led approaches of accountability that have become extended across education systems (Conway & Murphy, 2013; Lynch et al., 2012), political power has been transferred from the state to new private political actors such as sponsors for funding education programmes, think-tanks, consultants and philanthropists, who now have an active role in the delivery of education services (Skerritt, 2019) in addition to curriculum development (Fitzgerald, 2021). Therefore, the main concern currently appears to be, ensuring that education institutions fulfil their fiduciary responsibility in accordance to their mission and to the best interest of the public. This reinforces the need for more transparency about the use of public funds. This type of accountability raises two questions. Firstly, this mode of regulation implies that there is unanimous consensus on behalf of all HE actors about the objectives of education being the achievement of quantified results and that the resulting information will be useful in addressing the concerns of all stakeholders. However, by establishing accountability as an OPP, the views of the controlling actor are imposed on others, suggesting that their problems would only be resolved by surrendering to the OPP where their interests need to be modified and aligned to those of the controlling actor (Law, 1986b). Hence, the other actors in the network may have to confront some conflicts and tensions associated with its implementation when their interests are altered. Secondly, although performance data may surely address educational proficiencies based on matters of fact, information provision per se, will not address inadequacies in outcomes. Yet, there has been an increasingly significant move towards achievement of results accountability (Conway & Murphy, 2013).

6.3.2 Bureaucratic Accountability

In order to prevent or correct inadequacies in outcomes, compliance with regulations, a more technical policy for governing, is endorsed and amplified as affirmed by Conway and Murphy (2013) and then complemented with by performance accountability to raise the standard as well as ensure favourable results, making curriculum practice at HE more efficient. This type of accountability is usually based on government statutes viewing educational institutions as the embodiment of constant processes attributed to achievement of results (Anderson, 2005). The data relay that audit process and report writing involved have urged curriculum actors to reflect on their practices, providing them with meaningful information to improve their standards. Participants of the study posited that setting performance standards generates incentives to improve learning outcomes. Some actors interpreted accountability mechanisms as some sort of creative tension, without which, there would be a lack of innovation. Despite the benefits of committing to accountability, challenges have also been disclosed. As Dean (2010) affirmed, notions of accountability engage actors in the conduct of conduct through regimes of truth and knowledge generated by fields of visibility illuminating certain entities, meanings and understanding , while obscuring and hiding others. Hence, the focus is shifted away from matters of concern such as the dynamics of power relations and the calculative spaces in curriculum practice and instead, focus more on matters of fact, the attained outcomes. In line with Schulte's (2018) contention, instances of strong ideological alignment between macro actors and micro/nano actors were evident where accountability regimes were found to sidestep important institutional and curriculum actors in favour of attending to political rationalities to meet the intended objectives. Hence, meso/micro actors struggle to modify and align their own interests with those of the controlling actor and adhere to the set of specific rules.

Curriculum actors engaged in the study, viewed accountability as a social practice meeting particular objectives defined by a relationship of control based on the trust that rules and regulations are adhered to. A range of strategies of regulations was identified that included layers of internal reviews and regulations as well as external quality assurance processes. Through enforcing legal arrangements and relevant regulations to achieve particular objectives, it is assumed that HE outcomes would be improved. Presumably, societal trust would be gained by emphasising transparency of these regulations and thus, recognition of the social value of education would be maintained. Societal role as having the moral responsibility for transparency of information to ensure trust in the quality of learning outcomes is deemed to be important in leading to the intended objectives. The element of trustworthiness embodies institutional integrity. Integrity is described as the expectation that the trustee will act in a fair and just way (Oomsels & Bouckaert, 2017). Besides, integrity, two other aspects of trust become effective; benevolence, expectation that the trustor's interests and needs are cared about and competence, expectation that the delegated task will be competently completed (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). When accountability is established as the OPP, vulnerability occurs as it becomes evident that actors will have to face tensions and conflicts associated with its implementation because they may have to align their interests to those of the implementation network. Hence, robust monitoring and evaluating systems are seen as an attempt to address the vulnerabilities inherent in trust. However, the flip side of accountability is understanding and trust. As argued by Ehren, Paterson and Baxter (2020), accountability is based on distrust and rectification of identified deficiencies. Therefore, the irony is the use of accountability to ensure trustworthiness when accountability and trust are positioned as opposites. As suggested by Sahlberg (2010), where horizontal forms of accountability are emphasised, trust and autonomy along with good leadership are required to reinforce both individual and collective responsibilities. In terms of accountability, over time, the internal mechanism of dialogic and reflective practice should contribute to trustworthiness of the educational institution (Tolo, Lillejord, Petour & Hopfenbeck, 2020). However, it should be recognised that such a process requires systematic work. Hence, an enhanced accountability framework needs to be put forward to promote trust by balancing the expectations of integrity, benevolence and competence of all actors involved through adequate support and engagement. By empowering the society, authority is indirectly exerted by the government through the top-down arrangements, by creating a space for it in the networks of relationships within which they are embedded to hold HE institutions accountable. While these approaches work well in strengthening the relationship between the government and the society, conversely, they enforce tighter control on HE institutions. Government control is promoted and reinforced through this system of evaluation and audits. Such top-down hierarchical accountability is termed vertical accountability that places the onus of quality education upon its stakeholders (Burns & Köster, 2016). This type of educational governance encourages operation within state structures through accountability regimes by framing curriculum policies and practices at macro domains that are expected to be implemented at meso/micro domains, according to evidence provided by the supra domain through various league tables' performance indicators (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Data in terms of varied measures and indicators of accountability encompassing student feedback, standardised tests, graduation rates, satisfaction surveys, employer surveys, promotion and progression surveys were identified as crucial indicators of quality that are scrutinised during a series of both internal and external evaluations. Barber (2004) affirms that feedback provided during audits is considered an important part of quality assurance where data collected is used to promote continuous improvement that helps to retain the public's trust in the education system's quality of service. However, curriculum actors mostly at meso/micro networks of implementation have revealed that feedback is meaningless and requires attention because of low response rates and little variation in responses. This view clearly contrasts to macro actors' who report that data are trustworthy as it reliably measures and genuinely represents the actuality of the situation. This clearly depicts a misalignment of interests between actors of the different sites of curriculum representation. As public HE institutions are funded by the state, they are therefore required to produce rich data sets as evidence to demonstrate compliance with regulations for funding. Consequently, the objectives for meeting the criteria for funding overshadow the aim of establishing robust monitoring and evaluating systems to inform decision-making. Issues arise when data expectations are not met, perhaps due to a number of factors such as; access to limited resources that the institution or relevant curriculum actors are unable to fulfil the demands or even due to conflicts among the interests to meet accountability targets or objectives of the different actors of the network. Hence, the incapacities as matters of concern are required to be addressed through support from controlling actors. As argued by Oomsels and Bouckaert (2017), capacity is a precursor for trust and accountability, whereby inability to provide sufficient resources needed to achieve accountability targets results in failure to build trust. Such an accountability structure portrays a one-sided approach that lacks reciprocity. Neglect in collaborating with meso/micro curriculum actors for an effective outcome was also evidenced through a lack of transparency of criteria for regulations and meaningful consultation with respect to curricular decisions as well as research strategies and outcomes. Where consultation do take place with actors throughout the HE network, the outcomes of these consultations are not disseminated. Hence, while accountability is strengthened to enhance transparency on behalf of the governed actors, the same is not reciprocated on behalf of the governing actors. Yet, international organisations claim that sharing of research and effective use of knowledge is a vital form of innovation which can provide a useful basis to inform policy making and professional practice (OECD, 2022). This reinforces Locke’s (2009) assertion that governments are highly selective about evidence they use and tend to favour using those which they have commissioned or have influence over. As Shattock (2003) posits, decision-making by policy makers are largely based upon personal experiences and arm chair analyses, which then creates tensions and conflicts associated with the implementation of policies due to a misalignment of interests.

The study validated tensions faced by curriculum actors from government entities including government agencies, policy makers and the Department of Education and Enterprise. Meso/micro curriculum actors revealed that they are facing a lot of pressure created from greater bureaucracy, to conform to standards and regulations to achieve the defined objectives that demonstrate quality education. Curriculum actors, particularly at micro sites of curriculum implementation, entrusted with the responsibility of making a positive difference to students’ experiences and achievements are centrally positioned for institutions’ improvement efforts (Gilleece & Clerkin, 2020; O’Donnell, 2014) and are further held accountable for fulfilling political directives under scrutiny (Barber, 2004). Increased administrative burdens tend to shift away their focus from their key responsibilities of ensuring academic standards, quality of teaching, learning and assessment and trust, leaving less room for freedom and resilience in their profession.

6.3.3 Professional Accountability

Professional accountability was the least described by participants of the study because it is more subtle than the other two types of accountability system which makes it more difficult to analyse. However, professional performance has also been subject to evaluation (Anderson, 2005). While professional norms complement both compliance and performance systems (Anderson, 2005), results of the study further indicate that it is also affected by both bureaucratic and performance accountability. Poor outcomes of results-based accountability are also attributed to weaknesses in educational practices (Anderson, 2005), rather than any other student-related factors such as motivation, attributes and backgrounds.

While curriculum actors are accountable for compliance with regulations, they (typically meso/micro actors) are also centrally placed to take the blame for poor results, besides demonstrating adherence to professional norms. As argued by Honig (2006), the focus regarding implementation of education policy has often been on meso/micro curriculum actors. These meso/micro actors are in a constant mode of translation working within their immediate contexts, while also balancing and translating external policy objectives into internal rationales. As Schulte (2018) affirm, translation strategies may then include both isonymism, where actors proclaim to engage with a particular policy or concept without actually implementing it or isopraxism; silent borrowing where a certain concept or idea is being implemented without officially admitting it. Professional accountability is focused on the expertise of curriculum actors particularly meso/micro actors who are entrusted with the responsibilities to manage institutional/curricular activities based on their knowledge and skills, with emphasis on leadership in teaching and decision making (Fitzgerald, 2021). Questions of trust and distrust are therefore scrutinised on the basis of professional knowledge development as well as the professional discretion to support professional accountability in HEIs. Furthermore, Møller (2009) proclaims that professional accountability is horizontal where curriculum actors are accountable for their actions to their peers which includes setting out core values and ethics that underpin their work performance to influence results. In addition, as posited by Anderson (2005), curriculum actors are also accountable for adherence to standards. This includes professional self-regulation as a formative function to improve their practice. For example, the Teaching Council (2016) has set out standards of practice including professional knowledge, skills, competence and conduct that have to be adhered to for teacher education. Submerged under a sea of responsibilities, curriculum actors have evidenced feeling torn between attending to the needs of students and promoting public good through the state while concurrently abiding by specific standards. The increasing workload coupled with the over-reliance on results therefore have negative consequences on curriculum actors' professional ability (Ball, 2016). However, meso/micro curriculum actors shared inferences about working together developing a shared ethical framework with peers that reportedly helped them get through difficult times. As suggested by O'Donnell (2014), curriculum actors need to collectively decide on a means to fulfil their professional duties consistent with upholding standards as well as curricular activities that extends beyond market-led goals. Hence, curriculum actors are required to become more "critically reflexive" and "politically aware" (Ball, 2016, p. 1046). Foucault (1980) reminds us that the responsibility for truth and knowledge is double-edged and that there is therefore a need to persistently be on guard, continuously reflecting and conscientiously analysing our own thoughts, knowledge, action and practices instead of unknowingly applying rules reinforced by institutions which are further strengthened by putative practices.

6.4 (In)visible Translation of Power in Curriculum Making

The translation of accountability, which is the governing actor, entails the emergence of an actor-network consisting of numerous human and non-human entities that are enrolled to the network to support the process. Curriculum, being one of the many other governable actors, is therefore not deemed to be an isolated entity but instead forms part of the emerging network. Hence, through its connections to other actors, curriculum can therefore be influenced. At the same time, curriculum implementation also enfolds the emergence of an actor-network with its own translation process to yield curriculum outcomes. For a successful translation to take place, the curriculum is required to strengthen its relations with other actors and align its interests to those of the larger network supporting accountability (the OPP).

6.4.1 Obligatory Passage Point (OPP)

Literature states that the core aim of market reforms introduced in the 1980s was to modernise the public sector to enhance efficiency and transparency through market-oriented policies (Fitzgerald, 2021; Hood, 1991). Findings suggest that international agencies play a key role in defining the inefficiency of the Irish HE system through the two-way obligation between the supra and macro domains of policy development as previously described (section 6.3.1). Supra neoliberal influences from international economic and political agencies such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), led to the framing of macro accountability discourses in the public HE that became rationalised as the OPP and pushed meso/micro actors' possible diversion from this modernisation (in Callon's terms) out of the picture. Analysis of the data collected in this study based on the experiences and perceptions of curriculum actors, attempts to address the dynamics of power relations that are rendered invisible through policy translation. As posited by Callon (1998), policy framings can help in tracing the ways in which actors and relationships are promoted and marginalised in policy discourses.

Entities that become OPP are important dynamics in the power relations circumscribing education (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Through problematisation, the controlling governing entities determine a group of other actors, defining their identities in such a way that they establish themselves an OPP in the network of relationships they are constructing, thereby rendering them indispensable (Callon, 1984). Furthermore, the governing actors also bespeak the compelling interests of the other actors in accepting the generated "truths". While the government is concerned about the efficiency of the HE system and demands the introduction of intense accountability regimes to upgrade its performance, the other actors: the society; HEIs; curriculum actors and students are directly brought into account through the questions formed by the governing actors: accountability to whom and accountability for what. As affirmed by Fitzgerald (2021), these two questions remain central in discussions pertaining to accountability models in education. The data reveals that these identified actors (the society, HEIs, curriculum actors and students) are defined in a way (section 6.4.2) that illustrates how they are necessarily concerned by the formulated questions. The establishment of accountability regimes (the OPP) as the magic formulae for modernising HE by allowing more transparency to ensure trustworthiness and thus improving outcomes activates and are prompted by a vigorous mobility policy objectives, techniques and technologies, identities and agencies.

6.4.2 Identity Definition and Persuasion

The data reveals different stakeholder relationships defined by the organised government regime which are influenced by power and legitimacy where certain stakeholders' expectations are prioritised over others through indirect and direct strategies.

Once stakeholders are identified, their expectations are prioritised which sheds light on the objectives to be met as well as issues to be resolved. Through a process of interessement, the controlling actors attempt to impose and stabilise the other actors' identity (Callon, 1986) persuading them to modify or shift their interests and align them to their own using tactics like persuasion. Figure 6.1 illustrates the system of hypothetical alliances between entities that defines their identities and the techniques and forms of rationality used to lock the allies into place.

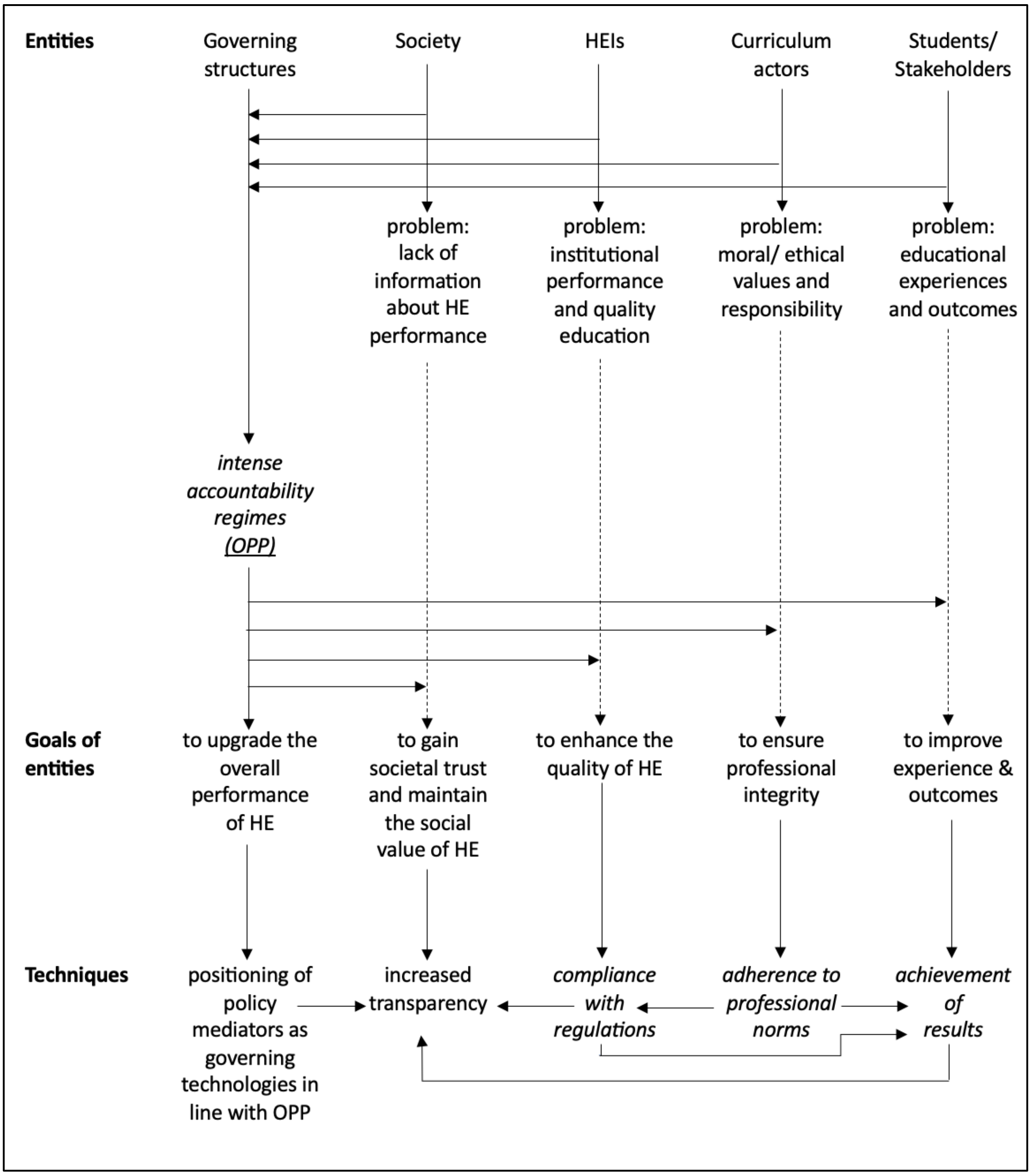

Entities
Governing structures
Society
HEIs
Curriculum actors
Students/ Stakeholders
problem: lack of information about HE performance
problem: institutional performance and quality education
problem: moral/ ethical values and responsibility
problem: educational experiences and outcomes
intense accountability regimes (OPP)
Goals of entities
to upgrade the overall performance of HE
to gain societal trust and maintain the social value of HE
to enhance the quality of HE
to ensure professional integrity
to improve experience & outcomes
Techniques
positioning of policy mediators as governing technologies in line with OPP
increased transparency
compliance with regulations
adherence to professional norms
achievement of results

Figure 6.1 The dynamic properties possessed by problematisation and the association between entities during interessement.

Interestingly, the governing actors, although the central ones exerting power in the network of relations and practices assume a subsidiary position, placing the onus of quality education upon its stakeholders as affirmed by Burns & Köster (2016). Instead, as demonstrated in Figure 6.1, the society is turned into a key knot with significant focus on the achievement of results and increased transparency.

As largely defined in literature (Brill, Grayson, Kuhn & O'Donnell, 2018), accountability is the government's technique to hold educational institutions liable for the delivery of high quality education.

The data evinces that the society is considered to endure a lack of information about the performance of HE. Therefore, advocating accountability regimes (the OPP) would increase transparency. The society would thus gain trust in HE and would value the quality of education. Particularly where HEIs are publicly funded, macro curriculum actors posit that there is a moral responsibility to make information available to society. HEIs are assumed to have the most responsibility for developing and guaranteeing the provision of quality education. Therefore, by complying with regulations (bureaucratic accountability), framing curriculum practice to suit the network conditions, the quality and standards of HE would be restored, results would improve and thus the value of HE will be reinstated. It has often been expressed that an institution's effectiveness along with the role and quality of curriculum actors' (particularly teachers/lecturers) are central to students' experiences and outcomes (Barber, 2004; Gilleece & Clerkin, 2020; O'Donnell, 2014).

Curriculum actors are entrusted to manage curriculum practice on the basis of their expertise. Thus, they are held accountable for fulfilling educational policy and are expected to also comply with regulations and demonstrate moral values and ethical principles that are also assessed through bureaucratic accountability. Hence, by adhering to professional norms (professional accountability), professional integrity which is one of the core values and standards that underpin curriculum actors' work would be ensured.

Certainly, students and other stakeholders need to trust in the quality of educational experiences and learning outcomes. Therefore, achievement of improved results (performance accountability) are required in order to demonstrate performance where published results would increase transparency and improved outcomes would restore societal trust in HE.

As stated by Tatnall and Burgess (2002), the actors are therefore secured into fixed places. The argument that is developed is sustained for all the other identified actors in an attempt to weaken all the links between the actors and any other group of entities, whether visible or invisible, that may disrupt the emerging network (Callon, 1984; Linde, Linderoth & Räisänen, 2003). If the society wants trust and value HE (for whatever reasons), if HEIs want to enhance their performance and quality of education provision (through whatever mechanisms), if curriculum actors want to demonstrate their professional standards (no matter what their beliefs and principles are), if students and other stakeholders want to improve educational experiences and outcomes (irrespective of what their motivations may be), then they must firstly, know the answer to the two questions of accountability to whom and for what, and additionally, recognise the benefit of their alliance around these questions. In a game of shadows and lights, the set of ideas and assumptions about the inefficiency of HE presented by the governing actors as regimes of truth and knowledge, become the monocle through which fields of curriculum practice are made understandable and governable. As interpreted by Callon (1984), the other actors are persuaded by the governing actors that they are fettered and only the detours proposed can help them achieve their objectives by forging alliances. While improvement of HE standards and innovation are brought to light through an emphasis on accountability evidence to increase transparency, associated experiences such as challenges, effort and engagement are obscured. As revealed by the data, the agencies of the other actors in the network are thus neglected and instead, identities and agencies required by the defined government practices are emphasised through different mechanisms.

6.4.3 Balance of Power through Delegation

Accountability as the OPP can be understood as being itself an effect resulting from not only the materially heterogeneous networks of entities that brought it into existence, but also the socio-political networks' conceptual content that it draws on, including actors' interests and professional practices. The circulation of accountability regimes and their effects can therefore gather powerful centres that progressively gains wider reach of networks to secure them in place. Power is circulated through the networks from a distance through a process of delegation (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Figure 6.2 displays the power relations between allies in the political HE network during enrolment and mobilisation.

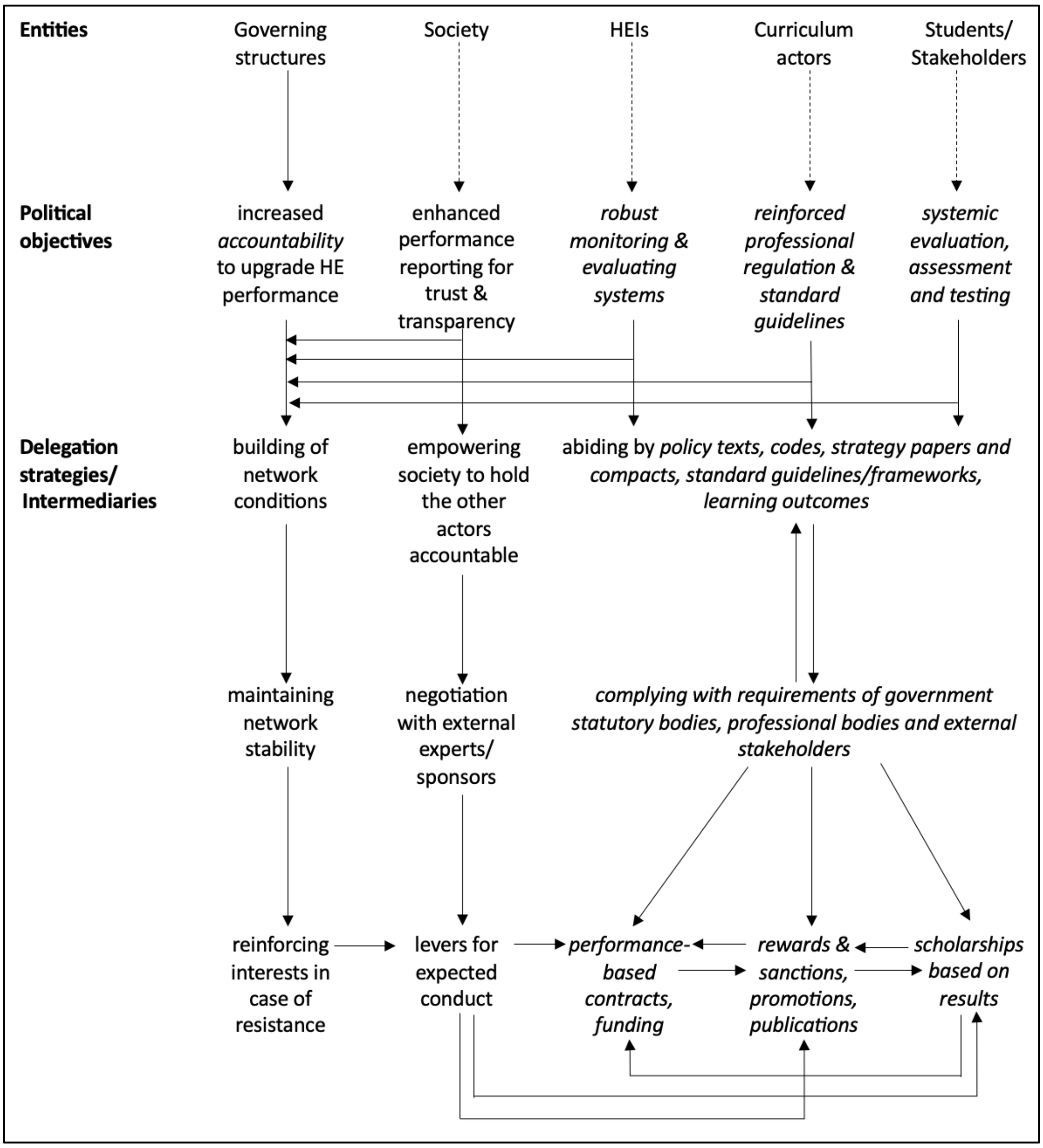

Entities
Governing structures
Society
HEIs
Curriculum actors
Students/ Stakeholders
Political objectives
increased *accountability* to upgrade HE performance
enhanced performance reporting for trust & transparency
robust monitoring & evaluating systems
reinforced professional regulation & standard guidelines
systemic evaluation, assessment and testing
Delegation strategies/ Intermediaries
building of network conditions
empowering society to hold the other actors accountable
abiding by *policy texts, codes, strategy papers and compacts, standard guidelines/frameworks, learning outcomes*
maintaining network stability
negotiation with external experts/ sponsors
complying with requirements of government statutory bodies, professional bodies and external stakeholders
reinforcing interests in case of resistance
levers for expected conduct
performance-based contracts, funding
rewards & sanctions, promotions, publications
scholarships based on results

Figure 6.2 Enrolment of allies through series of negotiations, trials and tricks and mobilisation of allied actors to stabilise the actor-network.

As the actors identified for interessement may also be involved in the problematisation of other networks with possibly different identities and priorities, successful interessement has to be ensured. Therefore, different approaches and plans of action need to be deployed (Sarkar & Sidorova, 2006) either as interessement devices or spokespersons to help monopolise the entities to be enrolled (Callon, 1986). Callon (1984, p. 10) referred to these stratagems as “trapping devices” and states that irrespective of how convincing and constraining they are, success is never assured. These devices, originally called ‘immutable mobiles’ by Latour (1987) act at a distance, functioning as delegates of these networks to extend their power into new spaces, articulating a set of behaviours and actions. They are therefore able to define the relationship between curriculum actors and the curriculum. However, these immutable mobiles are not so immutable. They are only visible within a particular relations network where they can still be silent, disregarded or overruled by other active entities despite their developed solidity to move about, holding their relations in place (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Hence, in order to understand how translation takes place in networks and how these tokens (as singularly referred to in early ANT analyses) circulate through networks, performing particular functions, mediators and intermediaries were identified based on Latour’s (2005b) description.

An intermediary transports meaning or force without transforming it (Latour, 2005b). While the inputs of intermediaries are enough to define their outputs although they can internally be made of many parts, the inputs of mediators on the other hand, are never good predictors of their outputs and their specificity have to be considered in every case (Latour, 2005b).

Accountability is the OPP as it inscribes the outcomes of the three policy mediators as governing technologies; compliance with regulations, adherence to professional norms and achievement of results, but translates them to embrace the full range of thoughts, knowledge, understanding, strategies and expertise that are required. As explained by Latour (2005), mediators are actors with less certainty. While they can circulate through the network actively working upon entities and events, they can also transform, misrepresent and alter the meaning in the elements it is to conduct. An apparently simple mediator may become complex, leading in multiple directions. The links formed by mediators can incite or prohibit certain behaviours as well as interpret and modify action (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Hence why, further multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks are required for interessement to succeed through the enrolment of further actors as intermediaries.

When policy mediators are translated, the interests (goals, problems, solutions) of the other actors are displaced (Callon, 1991) and the objectives of the other entities therefore become aligned with those of the governing actors, where the other actors modify their focus to primarily address the objectives of the governing actors:

increasing accountability to upgrade HE performance (figure 6.2). While the policy mediators are themselves translated into the diverse activities associated with curriculum policy implementation (robust monitoring and evaluating systems; reinforced professional regulation and standard guidelines; systemic evaluation, assessment and testing), they also become invisible as references are made to the OPP instead (intense accountability regimes), where emphasis is laid on fulfilling its objectives (increased accountability to upgrade HE performance). Accountability therefore becomes a key actor in curriculum-making, a focus for strategies bringing together a range of intermediaries, as identified from the collected data, for curriculum practice. The mediators act as the main stimulant of the resulting remarkable changes in the implementation network of relations and are translated into different types of faithful intermediaries as literacy inscriptions, authoritative entities and accountability mechanisms (as identified from the data in section 5.2.2). Besides, Law and Singleton (2005) proclaim that the abstraction of the object is not relevant, whether it is an idea compared to an instrument, but instead, it essentially has to be identified, having reality in particular networks of relations, that make it visible.

In the HE context, literacy inscriptions are used as policy intermediaries to build network conditions while authoritative entities are enrolled to maintain the network stability. As posited by Callon (1991), one intermediary may mobilise another one in order to establish new arrangements with the aim of achieving an adequate network outcome. Literacy inscriptions provides a definition of the relationship between curriculum actors and the curriculum, whereby the former enact the assigned roles through monitoring and evaluation, professional regulation and assessment in line with the political objectives to achieve the desired network conditions (figure 6.2). When the government negotiates with the delegated authorities to enhance the authority of governing, the latter are considered to be representatives of the other entities and thereby speaking in the name of others. These authoritative entities ensure maintenance of the network by guiding curriculum actors in framing curriculum practice in particular ways that suit the network conditions.

Additionally, accountability mechanisms in terms of levers for expected conduct including funding, publications, research, scholarships, rewards and promotions, are deployed to reinforce actors' interests and gain wider support of key actors (Tatnall & Burgess, 2002).

Data indicate that the provision of funding is a way of ensuring alignment with the government's objectives with the definition of a range of curricular specifications around design, content as well as delivery, that HEIs have to meet according to the needs of the government. HEIs and curriculum actors are required to achieve an array of set objectives in order to acquire funding so as to ensure the correct utilisation of public money in a way that is useful for the society. Hence, the government is able to steer actors to achieve societal objectives through signed contracts underlining the conditions for funding.

As postulated by Harman (2009), mediation must be executed constantly in order to reimpose and restore alliances between actors. However, the diversity of intermediaries have to be accounted for by additional work and data indicated diverse reactions of the curriculum actors' engagement with these levers including both co-optation and dissidence.

6.4.4 Co-optation and Dissidence

The fidelity of the immutable mobiles as they move through the different networks of curriculum representation (macro, meso, micro, nano) including the encountered barriers and the sustained damages to the internal network relations are explored. ANT analyses however, eschews scale as ontologically distinct layers, revealing instead a more nuanced and multi-faceted circulation of power (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010) as part of an extended network of forces acting upon curriculum practice and knowledge. ANT therefore focuses on the connections among the various sites and conduits, following the actors that continue to modify one another and tracing their circulation within networks, as well as the empty spaces between them. Nonetheless, this study does not fully abolish the separation of scale which is often characterised by the flattening-out effects of a network ontology (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Ideally, while Latour's (2005) analytic method of tracing policy assemblages is used, these are perceived to be contained within a larger context constructed through aggregated social imaginaries and structures distinguished by multiple domains.

Strategies to build network conditions (figure 6.2) such as the use of literacy inscriptions are regarded as being very important, although incomplete, in enrolling the interests of other actors into the policy process. As Callon (1986) asserts, for allies to engage in particular expected forms of conduct, translation needs to be in their interests to maintain network stability.

While some actors readily accept the conditions laid and join the network, others require negotiations and even persuasion. The difference in stakeholders' perception of accountability can also display a dependency on relational structures which exhibits an imbalance of competing interests. Reynolds, Schultz and Hekman (2006) assert that balancing interests across decisions tends to generate more instrumental value and are regarded as being more ethical than balancing interests within decisions.

Policy consultations through events, conferences, texts and strategic dialogue have been highlighted from the data. Yet, curriculum actors suggested a more transparent, authentic and collaborative engagement as the consultations were found not to be meaningful, the outcomes of which feel like coercion. Besides, consultations can prove to be perilous for the course of governing as responses elicited may undermine the very policies to be promulgated (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Policy texts that initially act as mediators may change in the process of consultation to become intermediaries.

As pointed out by Ball (1994), typically privileging policy makers' reality, policy initiatives in education assume that practices will be adjusted accordingly by curriculum actors, bypassing the messy material complexities and political negotiations of policy texts in diverse enactments.

Therefore, as expected, policy directives that move through and across various networks in attempting to link them, are found to be approached differently by different communities of curriculum actors. The policy objectives translated as texts (Figure 6.2) act as boundary objects (Emad & Roth, 2009) that colonise intersecting social domains while also satisfying the specific information requirements and practices of each group.

However, policy as texts are encoded in complex ways including struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations (Ball, 1993). While macro curriculum actors' focus are on the wider network around ensuring accountability to the national policy and stressing on the need to showcase the Irish HE as a very high quality system, meso actors concentrate on delivering quality outcomes by fulfilling the statutory obligations through the universities act and ensuring appropriate alignment of curriculum standards to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). Micro curriculum actors enact professional accountability in diverse ways concurrently; as textual representation of statements, as complex classroom activities where other networks and standards interact with the official teaching and learning standard and also as political consultation processes. Compelled by the new focus and expectations, curriculum actors are co-opted to align their interests with the modified political objectives of the different types of accountability. As indicated by the data, in doing so, while they attempt to juggle these spaces simultaneously, changes and distortions occur in their practice.

Supra and macro curriculum actors claim that the accountability policies designed give enough flexibility to HE stakeholders for curriculum enactment. In the move towards decentralisation of decision-making and responsibility is instead, given to educational institutions as evidenced (Fitzgerald, 2021). While on one hand, institutional autonomy is projected through the accountability policies, the setting up of authoritative entities to maintain network stability by mobilising the policies on the other hand, emphasises consistency of institutions' specified outcomes with national frameworks and international benchmarks. Furthermore, the policies are perceived as ambiguous, locally indecipherable and incongruent with curriculum practices. Thus, amidst the frolics of autonomy, the best move for some curriculum actors appears to be adaptability to the 'guidance' offered by the system. Meso actors though, view as the same autonomy under scrutiny in the form of institutional evaluations and reviews with the enrolment of statutory/professional bodies. Conversely, others, typically micro actors admitted feeling dictated by these bodies through performance frameworks. Consequently, each community of curriculum actors enact disparate versions of accountability, assembling various heterogeneous actors in different ways and thus, created multiple translations of the political objectives. Where diverse meanings appear to emerge and conflicting ways of enacting are at play, further accountability mechanisms to reinforce interests in maintaining the expected forms of conduct become necessary.

Funding was found to be the most effective mechanism in driving the anticipated behaviour because of its scarcity in HE. Similarly, the choice of programme offerings or development of courses can be also be oriented through scholarships where there is a shortage for particular fields or subjects to meet the needs of the economy. Although difficulties and struggle were expressed in shaping curriculum practice to meet the specified criteria for funding, curriculum actors therefore readily accepted their defined roles in tailoring curriculum to meet the demands of the labour market.

Hence, while many curriculum actors were fully co-opted into the various authority-building, negotiation and reinforcement processes, others recalcitrated and only adhered to filleted bits of the policy, partially preserving their own specific plan. Nonetheless, none of the curriculum actors who participated in the study challenged or refused enrolment. Due to the strong cascade of relationships among the chains of intermediaries within the curriculum implementation network, curriculum actors were successfully hooked to remain within the allied network. Hence, the network has achieved some level of stability, although probably temporarily. As asserted by Callon (1986), translation continues but with a modified equilibrium where reality begins to fluctuate. Accordingly, in effect, different, simultaneous and overlapping ontological politics are created (Mol, 1999).

6.5 (Un)planned “Curricular Reform”

While the power delegation strategies helped to position the implementation of accountability in curriculum practice, the HE network is evidently struggling to meet its intended objectives. Challenges with the enrolment strategies were noted where the emergence of several new actors affect and threaten the stability of the network. For mobilisation to happen, a network should no longer be regarded as controversial (Callon, 1986). However, there was a surge of critical voices encompassing four major collateral realities that were interpreted as unintended outcomes. Figure 6.3

illustrates these obscured realities of accountability that resulted from the powerful modus operandi of the enforced accountability regimes.

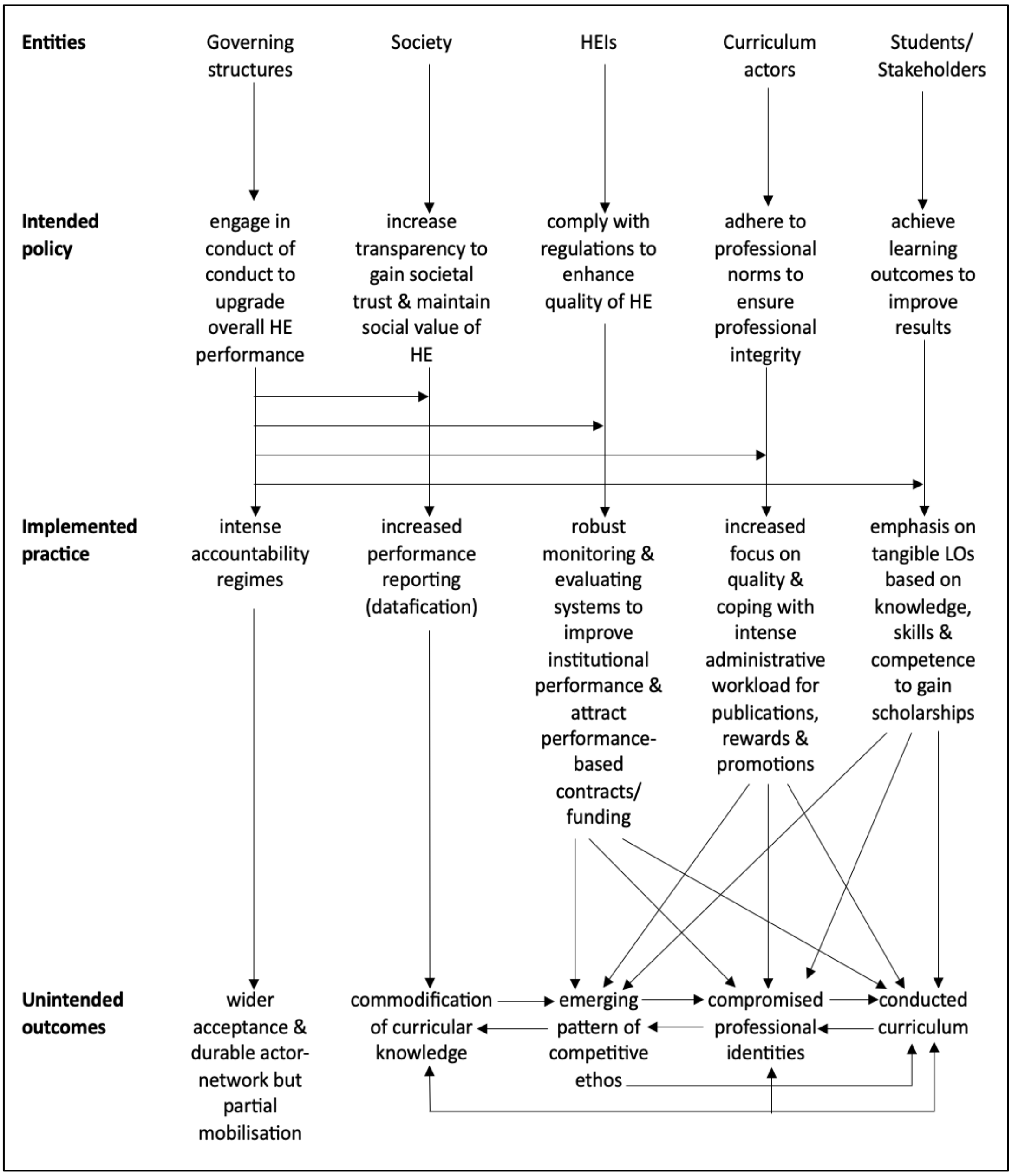

Entities
Governing structures
Society
HEIs
Curriculum actors
Students/ Stakeholders
Intended policy
engage in conduct of conduct to upgrade overall HE performance
increase transparency to gain societal trust & maintain social value of HE
comply with regulations to enhance quality of HE
adhere to professional norms to ensure professional integrity
achieve learning outcomes to improve results
Implemented practice
intense accountability regimes
increased performance reporting (datafication)
robust monitoring & evaluating systems to improve institutional performance & attract performance-based contracts/ funding
increased focus on quality & coping with intense administrative workload for publications, rewards & promotions
emphasis on tangible LOs based on knowledge, skills & competence to gain scholarships
Unintended outcomes
wider acceptance & durable actor-network but partial mobilisation
commodification of curricular knowledge
emerging pattern of competitive ethos
compromised professional identities
conducted curriculum

Figure 6.3 Dramatic change in the network alignment of intended policy, implemented practice and attained outcomes.

The intermediaries used as levers for expected conduct eventually evolved into technologies of competition. Where public financials are concerned, bureaucratic accountability is emphasised to improve institutional performance to produce enhanced results. Performance contracts are set up by governing authoritative bodies to guide institutions towards acquiring funding by specific formulae and objectives.

Powered by the ‘central engine’ of HE as termed by one curriculum actor, funding drives institutions to arm themselves with robust monitoring and evaluating systems as specified by performance contracts to compete for the challenges it presents. Rather than direct regulation, the state influences curriculum development through funding. External experts are hired by HEIs to undertake the professional responsibilities of curriculum actors and thus, boost their reputation through research metrics for research funding and consolidate their position in the league. Hence, in order to acquire funds, there is an exorbitant pressure in accountability to the society in terms of data. Thus, performance accountability becomes imperative to prove achievement of results.

While the process aspires to increase trust in HE, where honesty and ethical conduct is implied through professional accountability, at the same time, the same requirement implies an erosion of trust on HEIs and curriculum actors. This presents an oxymoronic view of accountability regimes.

The pressure for data provision is further extended to curriculum actors, urging them to focus more on publications as well as their performance and advancement of their employment through incentives given to them through rewards and promotion. Therefore, professional accountability becomes necessary. Lamentably, this minimises the value of curriculum and as attested by curriculum actors of this study, has led towards the use of measures of performance as evidences to be used as part of applications for promotion. This ultimately reinforces and is at the same time reinforced by the game of numbers that in turn, automatically augments competition. The attitudes of curriculum actors with respect to their personal accountability therefore impacts on the curriculum affecting educational practice and students learning experience.

In attempting to cope with the emerging competition for performance contracts, funding, publications, rewards and promotions, the primary aim of curriculum actors is therefore shifted away from curriculum practice.

Such a model of accountability that fosters competition and deprive its stakeholders of equity have been criticised in literature (Ball, 2016; Conway & Murphy, 2013; Ozga, 2020). It is therefore crucial that necessary funds and resources are made available by policymakers and the government to educational institutions as required in the implementation of designed policies. Furthermore, as suggested by Fitzgerald (2021), relevant CPD opportunities and programmes for meso/micro curriculum actors are needed to support them in their work. However, there is evidence that competition is calculatedly being induced by macro curriculum actors through funding in order to direct the design of HE curricula towards meeting the skills needs of the economy for a more sustainable growth.

By empowering the society to render education more efficient and transparent and foregrounding the needs of the economy, education becomes redefined as a commodity with students and other stakeholders as consumers of education services. Modes of regulation becomes market-oriented (Chen, 2016), where accountability is achieved via market-led mechanisms through stakeholder involvement (Mattei, 2012). The motivation for HEIs, curriculum actors and students to achieve the objectives of the society is fostered by performance enhancing incentives such as funding, rewards, promotion and scholarships financed by new political actors acting as both sponsors and curriculum developers (Fitzgerald, 2021; Skerritt, 2019).

While such strategies give the society, students and HE stakeholders a more central role in curriculum design, boosting society's trust in public education, it also extends the reach of accountability systems, increasing HEIs' accountability in delivering the service particularly through achievement of results, high-stakes consequences and market competition.

Furthermore, as Barber (2004) affirm, continuous improvement promotes faith in the public education system. However, the same simultaneously implies an erosion of trust in the academic profession. As communities are dynamic, diverse and always changing in response to external forces of the society and economy (Fitzgerald, 2021), an increase in datafication was therefore observed from the study data in an attempt to provide feedback, with quantified metrics to gauge curriculum outcomes so as to inform and guide consumers' education choices. The use of education as a means to fulfil economic imperatives by the government thus frames knowledge as raw material in the manufacturing of education as a product to meet the government's objectives. As asserted by Lynch et al. (2012), New Public Management (NPM) principles immensely focus on the product in terms of what is attained, counted and countable. The need for curriculum actors to become cognisant of the hegemonic influence of NPM and the ways in which it can jeopardise curriculum actors in fulfilling their duties as professionals is highlighted by Solbrekke and Sugrue (2014).

As particular meanings of accountability are generated and distributed through data (Carlbaum, 2016; Ozga, 2020), the approaches used to measure performance and outcomes require much contemplation. The current accountability system promotes a value-for-money orientation as argued in literature (Gleeson & O'Donnabháin, 2009; Lynch, et al, 2012) with incessant testing and proving strategies under the remit of upgrading HE performance.

Many authors have contested such models of accountability questioning the improvement of educational outcomes (Conway & Murphy, 2013; Gleeson & O'Donnabháin, 2009; Lindgren, 2016; Møller, 2009; O'Donnell 2014; Ozga, 2020; Skerritt 2019). With the intensity of datafication and standardisation in the race, curriculum practice suffers from neglect where only a subset of learning outcomes are targeted by curriculum actors for high-stakes assessment who are under pressure to produce results as an indispensable indicator of achievement, trading education as a product for commercial transaction against funds and rewards. Adding to the argument that this form of governance produce socially unjust outcomes (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2016; Connell, 2013b) where HEIs and curriculum actors have to toil for resources and supports, this study also substantiate an emerging drudgery between political power and professional responsibilities.

The transfer of political power from the state to private sponsors and stakeholders external to the HE impacts on curriculum actors as it becomes difficult for them to act politically, preserve their interests and mediate policy texts, thereby challenging their professionalism. Therefore, the relationship between HEIs and the authoritative entities becomes stronger as HEIs rely on them for clarity of specifications for conduct. Under the spell of totalising specifications, laws and regulations, the onus of quality HE is placed on its stakeholders seemingly giving them more autonomy. While the aim of authoritative entities are endorsed as providing help and guidance to HEIs to achieve the common political goals, many curriculum actors on the other hand, felt deprived of their intellectual and professional autonomy as they are dictated by professional training bodies and scrutinised for their effectiveness and implementation of their own internal quality assurance procedures. It is known that curriculum has a fundamental role in influencing student subjectivity (Winter, 2017). Similarly, curriculum actors relayed that their experiences also impact on their subjectivity. As pointed out by Møller (2009), the strain between the political and professional domains therefore creates notable barriers in the implementation of accountability with an ensuing effect on curriculum practice. Autonomy in terms of module contents were relayed by some. Nonetheless, besides the explicit curriculum, effects on the implicit, experienced as well as the null and hidden curriculum also require consideration, giving equal value to all aspects of the curriculum. As expressed by Sahlberg (2010), deeper and broader learning that emphasises growth of an individual's personality, creativity, moral character along with knowledge and skills needs to be encouraged. Hence, this also calls for a review of the reconceptualisation of curriculum by macro actors including the new external 'experts' that are enrolled into the network to guide or direct curriculum practice. The big challenge is to ensure alignment of the use of public funds with societal objectives without undermining academic freedom and challenging curriculum actors' professionalism.

While the requirements for data to gauge curricular outcomes is widely accepted as legitimate, the nature and magnitude of reporting proved to be problematic for most curriculum actors which was acknowledged by actors across all domains from supra to micro. Intense administrative workload was identified as a major issue. In attempting to evaluate the validity of curricular knowledge, curriculum actors are struggling to keep up with the administrative procedures, where many succumb to fulfilling the tasks as a tick-box exercise. Ardent data collection, vigorous testing, excessive audits and committed reporting were proclaimed to be burdensome by curriculum actors who admitted that they would rebuff those if they had the choice. They feel trapped where their professionalism are suppressed by the rigid regimes of accountability. Therefore, due to time poverty and overload, curricular innovations are neglected, consultations are abandoned and enactment becomes apathetic.
Nonetheless, HEIs and curriculum actors keep playing the blame game due to the incentives provided in terms of funding and rewards. Given that institutional

improvement is brought about by curriculum actors' professional collaboration of networks (Sahlberg, 2021), a culture of shared responsibility and trust should on the other hand, prevail in the HE system where curriculum actors and their professionalism in carrying out judgement are valued. For this reason, curriculum actors are urged to combine their efforts, taking the lead themselves in solving tensions created by competing accountabilities (Møller, 2009).

Where an increased emphasis on quality and publications are linked to rewards and promotion, ethical conduct becomes corrupt and precise weaknesses of the network and the realities of accountability are concealed, undermining the very formative function of quality and nature of professional integrity. Additionally, the introduced culture of technology through datafication further opens up spaces in the network for external technocrats. By taking away the sense of ownership of the curriculum from curriculum actors, the latter's sense of ethical responsibility withers. In line with the definition of curriculum presented in the context of this research (Chapter 2 Literature Review), curriculum practice should therefore give curriculum actors the freedom to act rationally by balancing intellectual and professional autonomy against accountability, as Biesta (2010) posits, allowing them to know, configure and express the nature of being human and using the acquired knowledge in the process as the foundation for subsequent action. Governing educational discourses through pre-defined conduct blocks the development of alternative notions of being and becoming (Winter, 2017).

6.6 Summary

This chapter answers the research questions of the study. Collected data analysed and presented in chapter five has enhanced understanding of the impact of contemporary regimes of accountability on the curriculum policy-practice process at HE in Ireland.

Findings suggest that both accountability and curriculum are complex phenomena. The network that lies behind accountability is not seen because its network is effaced into one single actor through a "precarious simplificatory effect" referred to as punctualisation (Law 1992, p. 385). Accountability as the key actor, therefore, becomes the focus for assembling a range of other actors. Nevertheless, the relationships between the actors of the network have been weakened by other actors external to the network, threatening its stability. Furthermore, the views of curriculum as a black box, bounded by a context that distorts it in unpredicted ways, impedes the ability to investigate its collective, dynamic and highly contextualised nature.

The theoretical resources of Foucauldian governmentality and ANT have helped to shed light on these concerns, overcoming limitations found in literature and previous studies, where actions of the various actors and their effects are described in more depth. Despite the strong cascade of relationships between the chains of intermediaries and other actors, full mobilisation of the HE network did not occur. For the actor-network to achieve stability, the proposed solutions have to gain wide acceptance by all the actors of the network and no longer be viewed as controversial, establishing the notion of irreversibility. As much as the dominant HE network of comprehensive accountability claims to be a trustworthy system bringing improvements in outcomes, a closer analysis reveals major shortfalls in curriculum considerations which lie at the core of HE practice. In lieu of achieving the intended objectives, unintended and unfavourable outcomes emerged. Hence, a realignment of the network is required with the repositioning of actors to consolidate the relationship between them with consideration to matters of concern that transpired through this study as collateral realities of accountability regimes in HE.

7 Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

The concluding chapter of this thesis presents a reflection on the study undertaken, describing how the various components of the research fit together. A summary of the study is presented highlighting key findings in line with the research questions. The conclusions drawn are gleaned from interpretation of the data collected and findings, literature review and conceptual framework from this study. Limitations of the study are identified and contribution to knowledge and practice are outlined. Finally, recommendations and areas of further study are suggested.

7.2 Research Summary

This research involved a series of linked activities based on the rationale for key decisions undertaken throughout the process. Moreover, besides the practical links between the different stages and among the various components of the research as implied by Bouma (1993), their “conceptual interconnectedness” (Trafford & Leshem, 2008, p. 170) was also contemplated. Figure 7.1 illustrates the combination of methodological and relational factors that underpinned the decisions determining the research actions. The sequence of research actions, findings and interpretations are explained in the subsequent sections below.

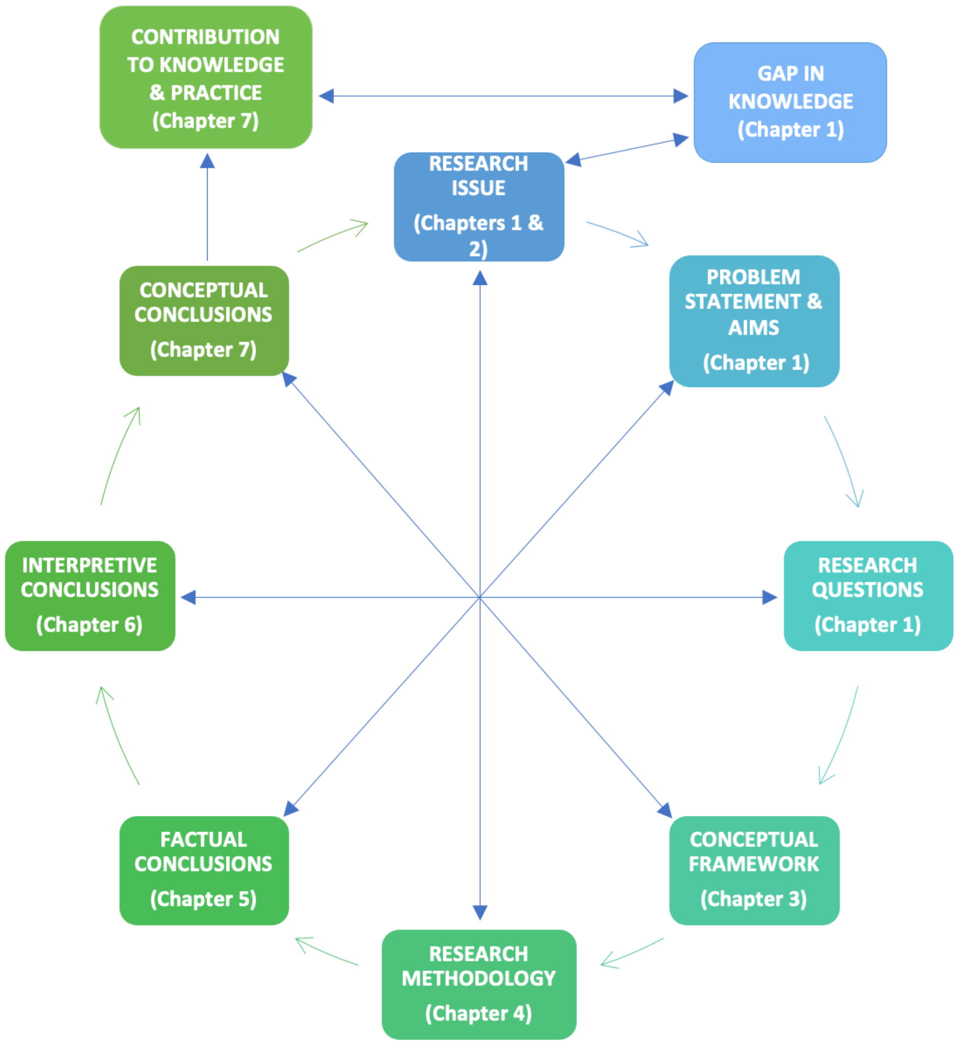
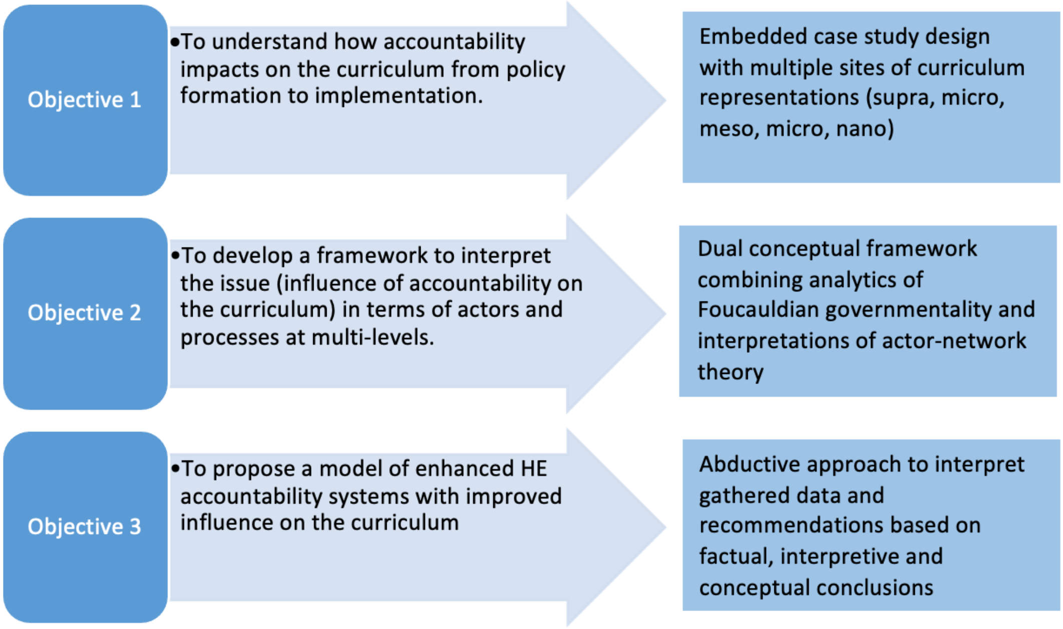

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE & PRACTICE (Chapter 7)
GAP IN KNOWLEDGE (Chapter 1)
RESEARCH ISSUE (Chapters 1 & 2)
PROBLEM STATEMENT & AIMS (Chapter 1)
RESEARCH QUESTIONS (Chapter 1)
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK (Chapter 3)
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (Chapter 4)
FACTUAL CONCLUSIONS (Chapter 5)
INTERPRETIVE CONCLUSIONS (Chapter 6)
CONCEPTUAL CONCLUSIONS (Chapter 7)

Figure 7.1 The research process demonstrated as a system of interconnected parts. Adapted from Trafford & Leshem (2008).

7.2.1 Primary Purposes and Boundaries of the Research

An intensive literature review (Chapter 2 Literature Review) was conducted to identify the gap in curriculum research (Chapter 1 Introduction) where both what is known and unknown were noted. It was found that previous literature criticising accountability deficits was mainly focused on theoretical and descriptive arguments and that understanding of the cause and effect relationship between the policy-practice nexus of the curriculum under the influence of accountability is limited by a lack of empirical research. Furthermore, with a continued disjuncture between intended and implemented curriculum practices, gaps were also noted in Ireland at HE level, where most accountability research and its influence on curriculum are found to be conducted at primary and secondary levels. The need for a more fine-grained analysis of accountability systems to generate evidence of their appropriateness in HE was therefore identified as a specific research issue.

The main aim of the research (Chapter 1 Introduction) was to investigate the impact of accountability regimes on the curriculum policy-practice nexus at various sites of enactment (macro, meso, micro and nano) within the Irish higher education context in order to understand the cause and effect relationship between intended curriculum policy and the attained outcomes through analysis of implemented practice. The research objectives (Chapter 1 Introduction) and the process through which they were achieved are shown in Figure 7.2.



Objective 1

- To understand how accountability impacts on the curriculum from policy formation to implementation.

Embedded case study design with multiple sites of curriculum representations (supra, micro, meso, micro, nano)

Objective 2

- To develop a framework to interpret the issue (influence of accountability on the curriculum) in terms of actors and processes at multi-levels.

Dual conceptual framework combining analytics of Foucauldian governmentality and interpretations of actor-network theory

Objective 3

- To propose a model of enhanced HE accountability systems with improved influence on the curriculum

Abductive approach to interpret gathered data and recommendations based on factual, interpretive and conceptual conclusions

Figure 7.2 Research actions to fulfil the objectives of the study.

The overarching research question was:

What is the impact of contemporary regimes of accountability on the curriculum policy-practice process at higher education in Ireland?

Three subsidiary research questions were put forward, considering the complexity of the case study.

1. How are accountability regimes implemented in curriculum making and enactment at various sites of curriculum representation within HEIs?

2. What are the experiences and perceptions of curriculum actors within the accountability-infused system?
3. How does accountability throughout the policy-practice process affect curriculum outcomes?

The research questions led to the theoretical perspectives derived from the literature which, in turn, enabled the development of the conceptual framework (Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework). The theoretical perspectives also confirmed the intellectual foundation for the gap in knowledge about the curriculum blind spot and provided boundaries for the research. The dual conceptual framework combining the governmentality framework adapted from Dean (2010) and the concepts of ANT encompassing the four stages of translation was essential in the research design and data analysis (Chapter 4 Research Methodology). It provided a theoretical bridge between the two phenomena under study; accountability and curriculum practice, informing and supporting decisions taken throughout the research process. Foucault's concept of governmentality provides an adequate basis to explore neoliberal influences on the curriculum at various sites of evaluation within the higher education system. At the same time, the ANT model of translation is a useful concept for understanding translation of the accountability policy agenda as it circulates through the HE political network and the roles of curriculum actors during the implementation process. Hence, the blended framework offers both analytical lenses and interpretive tools to unravel what lies in the curriculum black box as it is contorted in unpredicted and unintended ways by accountability pressures.

Although the study was compatible with an interpretivist stance, a pragmatic paradigm was deemed to be more consistent with this research as it required interrogation of the values and meanings of data through an evaluation of practical consequences. The multiple units of analysis (different sites of curriculum representations) of only one higher education institution required an embedded single case study design. While research of literature was used to investigate the views of external reality, semi-structured interviews provided deep insights into the varied perceptions of this reality in the minds of social of the social actors. Sampling was guided by policy actors from the multiple sites of curriculum representation, based on participants who are particularly involved in curriculum design, development and enactment through a reputational snowball sampling strategy. The interview data was analysed thematically through three recursive and intertwined coding process using abductive approach. The data collected consequently enabled the generation of factual (Chapter 5 Case Study Findings), interpretive (Chapter 6 Discussion) and conceptual (Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations) conclusions.

7.2.2 Key Findings

Analysis of the study data identified three main types of overlapping and competing accountability systems reflecting literature, in the process of curriculum making and enactment at the various domains of curriculum practice at higher education. These different accountability typologies namely; bureaucratic accountability (compliance with regulations), professional accountability (adherence to professional norms) and performance accountability (achievement of results) indicates the varied and nuanced emphasis laid on the various processes associated with the different models. These accountability models were found to be dispersed but interrelated in the conduct of curriculum practice in line with the accountability rationale. However, key differences were noted in the level and types of reporting as well as information provision to stakeholders. A range of regulations with regards to compliance-oriented accountability embedded into curriculum practice, were distinguished which outnumbered both performance and professional accountability. However, a strong emphasis on performance accountability interwoven into the other models was also evident. Professional accountability was the least described by curriculum actors although data suggest that it is strongly affected by both bureaucratic and performance accountability. The data implied that accountability can act as a continuous form of influence on curriculum enactment even without any interpersonal contact through animate actors or inanimate actants such as texts, codes, strategy papers, laws and regulations. Discourses of accountability (compliance with regulations, adherence to professional norms, achievement of results) that are transformed into measures of educational inputs, circulate through the networks in terms of text, databases, codes and academic discourses by translation to govern curriculum enactment. These immutable mobiles travel back and forth across the various domains of accountability and prescribe undergoing processes of curriculum including and transforming the domain into an accountable network where curriculum outcomes are held into account in terms of policy as numbers.

Accountability impacts on humans as an external force that emerged from socio-political interests and therefore has the potential to structure and influence social interactions, curriculum actors' experiences and their perceptions. All curriculum actors acknowledged the importance of targets, audits and accountability in aiming for improvements and were of the view that all educational institutional processes and actions of citizens are accountable as regulation of the population under neoliberal governmentality as a way to manage risk because educational institutions are situated in a political sphere where external demands for accountability occur within a market-driven environment. However, perspectives in relation to the intensity of reporting and information provision to stakeholders were varied. Meso/micro curriculum actors feel that their professionalism are being challenged by excessive administrative workload in evaluating the validity of curricular knowledge. Due to the increased focus on quality, they feel that they are striving to maintain a desired standard in the process of delivery which then ultimately leaves limited time for any innovations. Amidst the surge of performativity accountabilities along with the rising expectation to fulfil policy remits and prescribed criteria in both developing as well as implementing curriculum, curriculum actors also feel that their academic freedom is being undermined through erosion of their autonomy. The added stress and mounting pressure due to the increasing accountability measures consequently have a negative impact on curriculum actors' wellbeing. Some also admitted that the prime aim of their practice has even changed in response to the accountability pressures, compromising their ethical conduct in order to avoid negative consequences.

The socio-political networks of curriculum evaluations under accountability pressures were found to influence the subjectivities of curriculum actors and their relationship with other actors in many ways including compliance, co-optation, controversy and dissidence. The experiences of the curriculum actors therefore creates multiple conceptions of curriculum which impact on their practice. As new political actors enter the network to fund educational programmes, a conducted approach in curriculum practice is established with reinforced accountability measures in order to ensure the efficient use of funds. Curricular knowledge is treated as a mere commodity with students as consumers of education. Hence, there is an inclination towards performance accountability to stakeholders in determining effectiveness of the curriculum, compliance with regulations to prove quality education and adherence to professional norms to demonstrate professional integrity so as to gain societal trust and maintain the social value of HE. As development of HE curricula are directed towards the needs of the economy, there is a strong emphasis on employability and transferable skills. While this benefits students in finding jobs after their course of study, the shift towards competency-oriented curriculum may also overlook important values and attributes that are more challenging in shaping tangible and verifiable outcomes. Curriculum practice therefore suffers from neglect where there is an augmented interest in restricting students learning outcomes to only a subset of tangible learning objectives with emphasis on producing indispensable indicators of students' achievement, reducing their associated meanings and values to numbers. With a sense of lost ownership of the curriculum coupled with an increase in performance reporting that overburdens curriculum actors, the latter's focus are shifted towards rewards and promotions at the expense of curricular attention. The intense testing actor-network thus entails a lessened focus on curriculum (explicit, implicit, experienced, null and hidden) practice. As the attitudes of curriculum actors with respect to their personal accountability impacts negatively on the curriculum, its value is minimised. As Biesta (2023) argues in his recently published article and is reflected in the findings of this study, the integrity of education and the future of educational studies is being undermined by external forces and run the risk of being continuously governed by pressures that may hit the target but miss the very point of what education is about.

7.3 Conceptual Conclusions

This study addressed the evaluation of policy processes constituting contemporary regimes of accountability in the Irish higher education system and their impact on curriculum practice. The framework established in this research is a critical toolbox merging the analytical lenses of Foucauldian governmentality (Dean, 2010; Foucault 1991b) with the interpretive concepts of ANT, offered by the sociology of translation (Callon, 1996). This blended framework has enabled problematisation of the current discourses of accountability emphasising policy processes and the intricate interlace between the generation of accountable truths, power relations, the formation of new authorities and the formation of subjects. The sociology of translation has simultaneously provided an understanding of the performative effects of such policy problematisations along with the challenges associated with their translation in curriculum practice. The transformations introduced in the mechanisms and technologies of accountability regimes are regarded as the modernising result incited by the neoliberal form of rationality to enhance efficiency and transparency.

The interessement of the new regimes to generate accountable truths and the enrolment of tyrannical entities and mechanisms seem to violate the principles of democratic and welfarist education, gaining instead, more space and thus power and authority to establish hegemonic network conditions. While the inefficiency of higher education is highlighted, all other associated problems and difficulties remain obscured. Theses regimes are therefore capable of co-opting democratic values such as individual liberty and choice, social equality and equity, creative and critical skills, self-determination, participation, respect and trust to create new fields of visibility, opening up spaces for new actors and supressing voices of different interests. The established regimes as OPP are fostered and reinforced by the governing techne. Relentless testing and incessant reporting become the absolute and irrefutable technology to gauge standards of HEIs, measure professional competence and evaluate achievement of results.

As multiple actors become mobilised into the translation processes, modifications in the configuration of alliances within the higher education network occur where traditional dichotomies in policy making and enactment between education and economy, professional and administrative, local and international become visible. The managerialist approach and borrowing of technological repertoires to act as levers for expected conduct from these alternative networks implicitly represents curriculum actors as dishonest, unprofessional and recalcitrant subjects (contrary to the doctrine of educational professions) who require governing through a range of patronising carrot-and-stick strategies (rewards, promotions, performance-based contracts, funding, etc.). Instead of promoting engagement amongst curriculum actors and HEIs, these governing tactics on the other hand, introduce a wider divide between thriving and unsuccessful entities through the sustenance of a competitive ethos. Highly performing curriculum actors and HEIs rated through performance indicators therefore become valued, and are encouraged to focus on their stature through rewards rather than curricular processes. These discourses therefore challenge the professionalism and dignity of curriculum actors, compelling them to transform into competitive subjects and reconceptualise the curriculum as a commodity. Data analysis has clearly shown how the intended policy and accountability mechanisms proved to be inconsistent and dubious even in relation to their own objectives.

7.4 Contribution to Knowledge

Through achievement of its main purpose, this research has provided a number of contributions encompassing three broad areas: firstly, through the creation of new understandings of persisting issues of accountability and the disparity between policy and practice; secondly, through the combination of disparate theoretical concepts in a distinctive way to investigate the stated problems and finally, by identifying emerging as well as hidden issues that require investigation and elucidation. While these contributions accentuate the value of the research, they also point towards practical implications and indicate the need for further research.

The study has provided empirical means to investigate the impact of accountability regimes applied to curriculum policy implementation at various sites of enactment (macro, meso, micro and nano) at higher education in Ireland from a socio-political perspective. While the findings of this research is particularly pertinent to Irish higher education policy/curriculum actors, they will also be of multinational interest as they are significant for the tensions between envisioned and enacted practices.

The combined lenses of Foucauldian governmentality and ANT's sociology of translation applied through the established framework enabled discernment about the continued gap between intended policy and attained outcomes. Using the two theoretical approaches together in one case study provided complementary insights to evaluate the impact that accountability regimes have on shaping curriculum practice, which would have otherwise been difficult through the use of one single approach. While previous studies and literature has enhanced understanding of the factors affecting curriculum under accountability regimes, this research has foregrounded the obscured aspects in former curriculum studies where deliberations that brought distortion to curriculum practice were concealed. In order to deepen understanding of the dynamics between accountability and curriculum, methods that assist in the exploration of phenomena of highly contextualised character had to be used.

This study is particularly relevant to understanding what forms of rationalities are employed in the practices of governing through accountability regimes, how do these seek to transform curriculum practice through fields of visibility, by what techniques and technologies, to produce what forms of identities and forms of conduct. Complex associations in relation to curriculum actors' engagement with policy and the effects of subjectification were brought to light through an unconventional approach. In contrast to previous studies, no clear demarcations between distinct layers of intended policy, implemented practice and attained outcomes were made while they were perceived to be embedded in the process as more nuanced. Instead, the actors were tracked to trace emerging patterns, emphasising connections among various sites and conduits and interactions among relevant entities. The tactics of governing were not only identified but also made evident. The adopted conceptual resources implicitly suggest the need to refrain from explanations that merely explore what occurs within the boundaries of curriculum and instead focus on the context that surrounds the curriculum in more depth.

The dual conceptual approach of this research has enabled critical analysis of the influence of power on the curriculum where micro strategies were also evaluated to highlight matters of concern. Analysis demonstrated the balance of power through delegation and how power becomes invisible through translation to produce normalised effects. Spaces are created for other actors through whom the dynamics of power relations are transferred, shifting the focus away through regimes of truth generated by fields of visibility illuminating certain meanings and obscuring others. The process revealed how the agencies required by the defined government practices are emphasised through different mechanisms at the expense of others. The framework also enabled the study of non-human actors as critical in the shaping of the curriculum, demonstrating how they exhibit influence in different ways, enabling, constraining, pressurising, etc. Furthermore, the study has also revealed that in contrast to what is widely perceived and argued for in previous research, macro actors rely on information published by actors from supra networks to create discursive fields of global concepts to exercise power locally. Hence, in lieu of external pressures of neoliberal agendas seemingly, influencing the role of accountability in education policy at HE, there is in fact, an established two-way obligation between the supra and macro domains of policy development. It is therefore also essential to recognise the influence of sociocultural contexts and the extent to which they may mediate and shape policy.

Moreover, the dual conceptual framework developed has offered insights in informing curriculum policy-making and redesigning of accountability systems for education. A number of conflicting objectives of accountability were observed. The enforcement of accountability to ensure trust is self-contradictory as accountability is itself based on distrust. Ironically, curriculum actors are entrusted with the responsibilities of managing curricular activities on the basis of their knowledge and skills in teaching, leadership and decision-making, but they are not trusted with their own self-regulation. Therefore, the onus is on them to produce proof of their professionalism because of their expertise. Furthermore, they are also co-opted to modify their interests in alignment with the political objectives. While there is an aspiration to increase trust in the HE system, there is a simultaneous erosion of trust on HEIs and curriculum actors. This oxymoronic view of accountability implies a need for practical balance between accountability and trust. Moreover, while continuous improvement and transparency is promoted to maintain societal trust in the public education system, reducing over-reliance on private alternatives, political power are being transferred to private political actors as sponsors to fund educational programmes. While meso and micro actors are accountable for transparency, the same is not maintained for macro actors where a lack of transparency about outcomes of consultations and research are not communicated. Yet, sharing of research and effective use of knowledge is claimed to be a vital form of innovation for informing policy making and professional practice.

Finally, by presenting an alternative definition of the curriculum, this study has also shown relevance to the curriculum as an evolving process and suggests that curriculum should not be studied as a stable phenomenon which undermines the ability to consider its dynamic and evolving character:

"the continuous process of deliberation, analysis and communicative practices that occurs within social assemblages tangled in an intricate web of policy discourses and constituting of a complex amalgamation of interconnected domains through which education is developed, enacted and assessed."

7.5 Implications for Policy and Practice

In an era where educational innovations come in surge by introduction of government policies and interventions, there is a strong belief that evidence-based practice are unproblematic or works better (Karseth & Sivesind, 2019). This puts an emphasis on outcomes-driven accountability in higher education where greater transparency and vigorous accountability structures are prioritised for action (DES, 2014; HEA, 2018-2020). This stresses for an urgent need to produce more research-informed education policies and practice (Burns & Schuller, 2007). However, accountability policies should be enforced to improve practice rather than to prove performance. Although performance data may attend to educational proficiencies based on matters-of-fact, it should be noted that performance reporting will not address inadequacies in outcomes. As an alternative, testing policies may be reduced by introducing qualculation (qualitative value and quantitative accounts merged in acts of calculation), an after-ANT framing, instead of calculation as suggested by Callon and Law (2005) for understanding educational accountability.

Foucault (1991b) affirmed that practices do not exist without a certain regime of rationality. A deconstruction of political rationalities underpinning current discourses of accountability is therefore required to revisit key questions about the integrity of higher education. For instance, discussions about the meaning of the quality of HE, the role of neoliberal rationalities in HE networks, accountability to whom and what, the rationale for choosing policy levers and the load of additional work, the core ethical principles to be developed and the concepts contributing to the new domains of regulation and intervention. This study along with other future research can contribute towards suggestion of political alternatives other than the market-created hegemonic accountability truths for a more democratic and welfarist HE system. For example, research into the supra-macro relationship of policy actors to determine what resources are provided by the global network, how do these benefit the macro actors and what returns (whether symbolic, economic, cultural or material) are provided by the local network. However, understanding and identifying what works contains a multitude of complexities and challenges. It should be recognised that interventions often unravel in unexpected ways due to the complex interplay of participants, possibilities and occurrences and rarely work fully as intended (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

The following discussion is focused on the development of enhanced accountability systems with improved influence on the curriculum at higher education in the Irish context.

The changing micro dynamics of curriculum implementation and their requirements such as availability of resources within sociocultural contexts needs to be considered when policies are developed as these factors can mediate and shape policy at different levels resulting in more complexities than are often envisioned. Institutional rationalities amongst others, besides political rationalities intersect with each other simultaneously. Poor performances may also be related to a multitude of factors concurrently. Hence, policy formulation should not be based upon a dichotomy of formulation and implementation. Matters-of-concern need to be considered prior to responding to matters-of-fact evidence that seemingly inform policy.

On the basis of findings of this research, a holistic adaptation of the performative system is proposed considering the close connectedness of actors and the cascade of relationships evidenced within the highly competitive network. Even if partial changes to policy were to occur, they would still be bypassed and ignored because of the rewards associated with competition.

HEIs and curriculum actors are nonetheless, constrained by intermediate bodies acting as authoritative entities. Instead of being driven by compliance and performance criteria, HEIs and curriculum actors could instead be guided with long-term institutional improvement processes. Curriculum actors should be encouraged to become more politically aware and critically reflexive to fulfil their duties while upholding standards. This study has emphasised the importance of trust that should be promoted through the balance of expectations of integrity, benevolence and competence of all actors through adequate support from controlling actors for reciprocity and engagement for discussion and consultation of curriculum actors' interests. Curriculum actors should be trusted with their own self-regulation as a formative function to improve their practice in contrast to an over-emphasis on explicit curriculum. Therefore, the conception of curriculum across the higher education network needs to be consulted as it influences curriculum practice. The development of a more collaborative ethos through two-way equity regulations to build dialogical relationships rather than a competitive one would be more beneficial. A promotion of engagement, open discussion and collective judgements and decisions of actors from every domain would enhance professionalism. Additionally, as the socio-political milieu exerts powerful influence on practice, curriculum actors should be at the centre of considerations for all matters-of-concern from the rationalisation of governable truths to the development and delivery of the curriculum where they should be given more control of their own professionalism.

7.6 Final Thoughts

The evolution of the machinery of neoliberal governmentality discussed in this thesis along with the associated processes of marketisation, subjectification and commodification is a matter of concern for further study. Research concerning accountability policies and curriculum is of utmost importance as neoliberal forces continue to gain grounds in Ireland, especially with the introduction of the IEM by QQI. I argue that current accountability regimes have not attained their intended outcomes. On the other hand, they have conflicted with their own objectives, botched up the democratic system of HE, trivialised curricular knowledge, intensified competition, undermined professional identities and impoverished curriculum practice. It is essential to question the instrumentalisation of education and the commodification of curriculum in order to reclaim the identity of academic professionals and the integrity of education for a sustainable future.

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9 Appendices

Appendix A - Research Information Sheet and Consent Form

Maynooth University
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

Research Information Sheet for Interview Participants

Purpose of the Study. My name is Tazila P. Ramputh. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Education, Maynooth University.

As part of the requirements for the doctorate, I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr Majella Dempsey and Dr Bernie Grummell.

The study is concerned with the implementation of curriculum policy under the influence of accountability structures at higher education in Ireland.

Curriculum framing and implementation is highly sensitive to external pressures particularly neoliberal agendas where employability of learners in an increasingly competitive economic environment is emphasised through the promotion of employability-related skills and quantitative performativity metrics. It is contended in literature that such pressures have strengthened the role of accountability in education policy internationally, through relentless measurement and by the introduction of intense benchmarking, ranking and testing regimes. Despite contestations about its effectiveness in achieving the intended goals with a persisting divide between curriculum policy and practice, there has been a global revolution of accountability in higher education policy agendas for more than a decade. This study will address such concerns by providing empirical means to contextualise curriculum policy discourses and the comprehensive effects of accountability that will help elucidate the perplexities involved.

What will the study involve? You will be asked to attend for a face to face semi-structured interview. The date and time will be mutually agreed and confirmed. The interview itself shall be approximately between 60-90 minutes in duration where audio and/or video recording will take place along with some notes, subject to your approval prior to the interview.

In the event of restrictions imposed due to Covid 19, interviews will move to online via Teams.

There may be a requirement for a short follow-up interview to ensure accuracy and understanding of some of the information received.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics committee. You may have a copy of this approval upon request.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been requested to participate in this research because of your position and involvement in the curriculum policy-practice process at Higher Education in Ireland. Your understanding and experiences of accountability and its dynamics are invaluable to this research.

Do you have to take part? No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. Your participation is voluntary, and there are no consequences should you decide not to participate. However, we hope that you will agree to take part and give us some of your time to participate in the interview as outlined above. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are anonymised. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with Maynooth University.

What information will be collected? I will not be collecting any personal information. You will be asked to discuss your perceptions, ideas, opinions and thoughts about your experiences of your engagement with the curriculum policy-practice process at higher education. Individual names should not be mentioned.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. The interview session will be audio and/or video recorded with your consent and transcribed. No names will be identified at any time. Hard copy Information sheets/consent forms and data collected will be held securely in locked cabinets, locked rooms or rooms with limited access on campus. Electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by the named researcher.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion. However, there are circumstances where data is required by law: *It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such* *circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.*

What will happen to the information which you give? All the information you provide will be kept on the Maynooth University server in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed by Dr Majella Dempsey. Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by Dr Majella Dempsey in Maynooth University.

What will happen to the results? The research will be written up and presented as a doctorate thesis. The results may also be presented at national/international conferences and/or journal articles. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I don’t envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part. If you feel that you are at risk of embarrassment or have apprehension in discussing your experiences, be assured that confidentiality of identifiable information will be maintained. Your identity will not be published on any reports or papers and all data will be anonymised.

On the other hand, your voice will bring invaluable contribution to this study and allow you to reflect on your perspective about your role, responsibilities, objectives and strategies.

What if there is a problem? The topic to be discussed during the interview does not involve any material of a sensitive nature. At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience. You may also contact my supervisor (as follows) if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Dr Majella Dempsey, Department of Education, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.
Phone: 01 7083529
Email: majella.dempsey@mu.ie

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me:
Tazila P. Ramputh
tazila.ramputh.2020@mumail.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Appendix B - Consent Form for Interview Participants

I……………………………………agree to participate in Tazila P. Ramputh’s research study titled *An Evaluation of the Influence of Accountability Regimes on the Curriculum Policy-Practice Nexus at Higher Education in Ireland.*

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing and have read the Information Sheet provided to me.	
I have been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.	
I am participating voluntarily.	
I give permission for my interview with Tazila P. Ramputh to be audio-recorded.	
I give permission for my interview with Tazila P. Ramputh to be video-recorded where the interview is conducted virtually.	
I agree not to mention any names during the interview; if I inadvertently do so, I understand this will be deleted and not be used in the research.	
I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at ar time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.	
I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to the point of anonymisation.	
It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.	
I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information shee	
I agree to the use of anonymised quotation/publication of extracts from my interview in academic publications.	

Signed…………………………………… Date……………….

Participant Name in block capitals ……………………………………………..

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed…………………………………. Date………………

Researcher Name in block capitals ……………………………………………..

(Participant's electronic signature is also accepted)

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection. ***Two copies to be made: 1 for participant, 1 for PI***

Appendix C - Interview Protocol

Interview Number:	**Date:**

Introduction

1. Introduce myself
2. Explain research focus and aims
3. Ensure consent form is read, fully understood and signed
4. Ensure that participants are clear that:
    - the interview is being recorded
    - the possible length of the interview itself is between 60-90 minutes
    - the only people who have access to the transcripts are myself and my supervisor who will only have access to anonymised data at the analysis stage of the process.
    - they may withdraw at any stage of the process up to when their data are pooled and anonymised and before the findings have been published, without repercussions
5. General talk to put interviewee at ease, whilst ensuring equipment is working effectively and accurately

Area of Questioning

Time	Questions	Research Question
	1. Could you tell me a bit about your role and responsibilities and how do you interact with the curriculum?	
	2. What is your understanding of the curriculum?	

	- Why is curriculum important according to you? - What is the aim and the role of curriculum? - What do you consider a good curriculum?	
	3. In your role, how do you ensure design and enactment of an effective curriculum? - Are there any feedback collected? - How to you measure high quality curriculum outcome?	
5 mins	4. What are your perceptions of the meaning of accountability? Probes: - What does it mean for HE to be accountable? Attempt to set the tone for the interview and to encourage critical thinking about accountability in HE from the participant's perspective - To whom should HE be accountable? Stakeholders to whom HE is accountable - For what should HE be accountable?	2
10 mins	5. What are the accountability structures in place that you engage with in your role and how they are implemented? Probes: - What approaches of accountability are used in your current practice? - What is considered evidence of accountability in your practice?	1
10 mins	6. Accountability is becoming one of the advocated and contested subjects in education. What are your views about curriculum making/enactment under accountability regimes? Probes: - How would you describe your experience of working under the accountability regimes	2, 3

	while engaging with the curriculum? (positive influences, challenges and outcome)	
10 mins	7. In your opinion and from your practical experience, how do you think accountability impacts on the curriculum? • How effective are contemporary regimes of accountability in achieving the intended curriculum outcomes? • What are these intended curriculum outcomes?	2,3
5 mins	8. Research on accountability indicates a gap between intended curriculum policy (practices that are envisioned) and practices that are actually implemented. As a professional in this field, what could be the reasons for this difference?	2, 3
5 mins	9. What expectations do you have for accountability as a HE leader/academic regarding the curriculum? Probes: • What changes do you foresee? • If you could make changes/recommendations about the Irish HE system under the accountability infrastructure, what would those changes be?	2
10 mins	10. How have you reviewed curriculum policy and procedures with respect to accountability over time? (May prompt reasons for persisting practices of intense accountability features). Probes: • How often have you had opportunities for review? • What were the main changes?	1,2,3

	- What factors triggered the changes? / Reasons for no change? - How did the changes made influence the curriculum?	
5 mins	11. Is there anything that I have not mentioned or that you think is important that we have not covered? Probes: Would you like to add any comment accountability regimes or curriculum policy and practice?	

After the Interview

1. Switch off recorder
2. Review what has been discussed
3. Outline what now happens with the information
4. Explain that I may need to contact them again or arrange another short interview to
   ensure accuracy and clear up any points I may not fully understand
5. Thank them for taking time out of their busy schedule to take part in this interview.

End