

Impact of Accountability Regimes on The Curriculum Policy-Practice Nexus at Higher Education

Tazila Parveen Ramputh

National University of Ireland Maynooth

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 (macro, meso, micro and nano) 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.

Keywords: actor-network theory, case study, Foucauldian governmentality, neoliberal agendas, socio-political perspective