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The Saturated Curriculum: Institutional Logics and The Governance of Higher Education

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Abstract

Curriculum is a central governance instrument in contemporary higher education systems. Expanding regimes of accountability, regulation and strategic coordination increasingly shape curriculum design. These regimes position pedagogy with market outcomes, inclusion mandates and institutional legitimacy. This paper introduces the concept of ideological curriculum saturation to explain how plural institutional logics reshape curriculum purpose and structure. Drawing on institutional logics theory and a qualitative comparative multi-case analysis of higher education in England and Ghana, the study examines how regulatory demands, market rationalities, developmental priorities and academic traditions converge in curriculum artefacts. The findings demonstrate that curriculum functions as governance infrastructure from which institutions translate and stabilise competing external expectations. Saturation emerges from five mechanisms: compliance encoding, purposive expansion, documentation layering, strategic mediation and identity scripting. These mechanisms generate dense curriculum architectures that carry multiple legitimacy claims simultaneously and strain pedagogical coherence. The study advances a theoretical model of ideological curriculum saturation and reframes curriculum as an institutional phenomenon shaped by governance density and plural legitimacy regimes.

1.Introduction

In contemporary higher education, curriculum has emerged as a central institutional artefact. It is a site where pedagogy, governance accountability, professional identity and societal expectations meet. Contemporary universities operate in environments shaped by regulations, competitions and expanding stakeholder demands. Curriculum templates carry strategic importance in the organisation of teaching and learning. Perspectives on employability agendas, internationalisation and quality assurance frameworks increasingly shape programmes' structure and learning outcomes across higher education ecosystems (Posillico et al., 2022; Renfors, 2021). Consequently, students, employers and policymakers view curriculum as a pathway to economic participation, institutional legitimacy and social mobility (Dockery et al., 2022; Painoli & Kukreti, 2022). Curriculum, thus surfaces as an arena where institutional priorities are translated into academic practice.

The expanding expectations introduce structural tensions into how curriculum is redesigned. For instance, continuous governance frameworks and scrutiny emphasise measurable outcomes, alignment structures and accountability procedures. Institutional audits and managerial governance systems embed these compliance routines in academic work (Erickson et al., 2021). Curriculum documentation then expands as institutions respond to the external evaluation regimes. Consequently, pedagogical coherence eventually becomes difficult to maintain as programme structures absorb multiple requirements. However, educational scholarship identifies saturation dynamics where institutional demands exceed integrative pedagogical frameworks (Gary, 2019; Giddens & Brady, 2007). Similar developments appear in school systems where governance expansion reshapes

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educational agendas (Thrupp et al., 2020). These developments reflect deeply on how curriculum is absorbed in institutional environments.

This tension and transformation is particularly visible in higher education delivery. Curriculum design in higher education purposely integrates employability, inclusion, digital transformation and decolonisation narratives into programme structures (Corbett & Hantrais, 2023; Schucan Bird & Pitman, 2020). The higher education institutions (HEI) respond to the demands by ensuring alignment processes to reconcile multiple expectations in a single curriculum architecture. Existing scholarship examines elements of this condition but often treats governance reforms, curriculum design and stakeholder expectations as separate debates (Ellison, 2017; Erickson et al., 2021; Damoah et al., 2021; Posillico et al., 2022).

This study emerges from this gap by introducing the concept of *ideological curriculum saturation (ICS)* – see section 3.2. The concept describes a structural condition in which curriculum accumulates layered institutional logics and demands. This study draws on a qualitative comparative analysis of higher education systems in England and Ghana to examine how saturation manifests across contrasting institutional environments (Amoako et al., 2023; Ellison, 2017). The study develops a theoretical model of ICS and examines its implications for academic agency and the future orientation of higher education curriculum.

1.1 Context – Higher Education in England and Ghana

Higher education in England and Ghana developed through different historical trajectories and shaped by global and colonial influences. From Europe, the British educational system expanded rapidly during the twentieth century as universities shifted from elite institutions to mass systems to serve broader social and economic purposes (Scott, 2012). Policy reforms introduced managerial governance and market-oriented competition across institutions, embedding accountability mechanisms and performance evaluation in university systems (Radice, 2013). That structural change continue to frame identity, and program demands in UK higher education (Brady, 2020). Yet, contemporary debates continue to examine the future role of universities in the ever changing social and technological environments (Blackledge, 2021). However, the Ghanaian higher education system emerged from a colonial template in Africa and evolved through national reforms – following its independence from Britain in 1957. Policy reforms in Ghana focus on widening access, strengthening national identity development and restructuring institutional governance (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016; Boateng, 2010).

International and institutional influences continue to shape both educational systems. Universities in the United Kingdom operate from and within global academic networks (environments) that promote internationalisation, mobility and knowledge exchange across borders (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). In contrast, Ghana's higher education engages international academic models while maintaining strong national development priorities. For instance, curriculum reforms in Ghana reflect continuous adjustment between global educational standards and local developmental goals (Adu-Gyamfi & Anderson, 2021). Historical studies describe education in Ghana as evolving through cycles of reform and continuity in response to social change and national priorities (Boadu, 2021). These dynamics position both systems in the wider global knowledge and policy structures.

Despite the different trajectories, the two educational systems share structural similarities and comparable challenges. Higher education systems in the two countries are engulfed in expanding architectures that embed governance frameworks into institutional practice. The universities, therefore, respond to multiple stakeholders including governments, employers and students. However, the expanding global space accelerates the exchange of policy models and institutional practices across national contexts (De Wit & Altbach, 2021). Consequently, governance policies expansion increase regulatory oversight and institutional accountability. For example, Ghana continues to balance national development priorities with institutional autonomy and academic traditions (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016; Boateng, 2010), while the United Kingdom navigates managerial

reforms and market-oriented governance structures (Radice, 2013). These pressures impact on how the universities operate and survive in complex governance environments to sustain educational purpose and institutional legitimacy.

2. Empirical Review

Institutional scholarship explains practices as socially embedded construct (artifact) shaped by cultural symbols and organisational norms (Aksom, 2022; Jepperson & Meyer, 2021). These values and norms shape everyday organisational practices in domains. Meyer and colleagues frame curriculum as a stabilising mechanism (and norm) through which education systems codify shared values and formalise knowledge structures (see McEneaney, 2015; McEneaney & Meyer, 2000). In practice, curriculum development is seen to support organisational coherence of purpose and the generation of public legitimacy. Contemporary reforms deepen this role through sustainability agendas, infrastructural change and institutional modernisation (McEneaney & Meyer, 2000; Senior et al., 2025). Empirical studies focus on linking educational practices with organisational purpose (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Cai & Mountford, 2022).

Institutional artefact communicates values to frame contested, logics-embedded social environment. In higher education environments, universities embed ethical commitments, cultural recognition and epistemic inclusion in programmes design. Research on Indigenous and decolonising curriculum, for instance, shows how design can express historical accountability and ethical engagement (Burgess et al., 2022; Le Grange, 2020). From this narrative, curriculum is presented as a visible statement of justice, recognition and plurality. In practice, however, educators struggle with tensions between pedagogical authenticity and governance expectations (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020). The structural protocols position curriculum design to serve both as academic document and normative organisational practice.

However, the expanding external pressures further widen the role of curriculum in higher education delivery. Emerging governance protocols compel universities to respond to demands for gender equality, student wellbeing, participation and equity. For example, gender-focused reforms provide evidence on how universities and advocacy groups can reconfigure programme priorities (Verge, 2021). Research on student engagement highlights expectations for inclusive learning environments and outcomes (Bond et al., 2020; Winstone et al., 2022). Curriculum template is presented as an active space where institutions respond to social change by connecting external values, organisational identity and programme structure.

Furthermore, curriculum development is also shaped by pedagogy, technology and strategic priorities of contexts. Foundational scholarship emphasises coherence, alignment and knowledge organisation (Grant, 2018). Instructional design theory specifically highlights structured cognitive and pedagogical frameworks (Sweller, 2021). New technologies, including artificial intelligence influence curriculum planning and evaluation (Ejjami, 2024). Foresight thinking also informs future-oriented curriculum design for sustainable agility (Kaytu, 2025). Internationalisation and employability now extend curriculum purpose beyond so many targets. Globalisation ethos promotes intercultural competence and justify the values of educational mobility (Leask, 2015; Robson, 2015), while employability discourse embeds labour market expectations into graduate outcomes (Bennett, 2019; Daubney, 2022; Römgens et al., 2020). At the centre of the tension are governance reforms which reinforce these shifts through policy frameworks and accountability systems (Oldham, 2017; Savage & O'Connor, 2015).

Institutional logics theory provides a useful lens for understanding these developments in theory and practice (Gümüsay et al., 2020)). Institutional logics shape cognition, guide action and structure decision-making through embedded norms and expectations (Ocasio et al., 2017). They define legitimate goals, accepted practices and recognised authority structures (Mountford & Cai, 2023). Recent scholarship presents logics as dynamic and enacted through everyday organisational activity (Lounsbury et al., 2021). Empirical studies show how these logics influence practice in complex

environments such as in higher education (McEneaney, 2015; Reay & Jones, 2016). Institutional framework explains how organisational priorities emerge, compete and stabilise in competing environments (Gümüsay et al., 2020).

Higher education is a clear case of institutional pluralism site. Multiple logics operate simultaneously in its environment. Market logics emphasise competition, rankings and employability. Regulatory logics introduce accountability and quality assurance. Academic logics protect disciplinary authority and scholarly tradition. Social justice logics foreground inclusion, equity and representation. State development logics shape curriculum through national transformation agendas (Cooney & Cohen, 2024; Edjah et al., 2025). In addition, research on hybrid organisations shows how actors build alignment strategies to manage tension while sustaining functionality (Gümüsay et al., 2020; Smets et al., 2015). Distinct logics also shape professional identities and interpretations of organisational purpose (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Durand & Thornton, 2018). These logics coexist and interact in the space of organisational practice.

However, curriculum development is where these plural logics become visible. Programme templates, learning outcomes and validation frameworks often combine market, regulatory, academic and social expectations within a single design structure (Edjah et al., 2025; Kohtamäki et al., 2022). Governance systems translate external demands into approval procedures, standards and evaluative frameworks that guide curriculum development (Cai & Mountford, 2022). Policy enactment occurs through interpretation, mediation and adaptation as actors navigate institutional complexity (Cooney & Cohen, 2024). Audit cultures, accreditation systems and performance monitoring intensify these processes and create continuous negotiations (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016; Weiner et al., 2021). Programme approval tools such as graduate attribute matrices, employability mapping and inclusion audits convert organisational values into measurable curriculum structures. Curriculum therefore evolves as an organisational response to institutional pluralism and governance translation.

2.1 Empirical Gap

Existing scholarship advances how plural institutional logics shape higher education through governance reforms, competing legitimacy claims and everyday organisational practice (Cai & Mountford, 2022; Ocasio et al., 2017; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020; Smets et al., 2015). However, its explanation gives limited attention to how these pressures accumulate within curriculum over time. Research explains policy translation and actor mediation but offers weaker insight into how repeated layering reshapes curriculum purpose, expands documentation and strains structural coherence. Evidence from the United Kingdom highlights regulation, market competition and employability pressures, while Ghana reflects on developmental priorities, stakeholder reform and competing governance demands (Alexander et al., 2018; Bell, 2025; Edjah et al., 2025; Hooley et al., 2023). Across both contexts, curriculum absorbs expanding expectations, but the threshold at which accumulation transforms curriculum into an overloaded organisational artefact remains under-theorised.

3.Theoretical Framework

3.1 From Institutional Pluralism to Saturation

Institutional pluralism reflects the organisational environment of contemporary higher education. Universities operate in environments of layered institutional logics that shape expectations and purpose. Vican et al. (2020) discuss how managerial, academic and economic logics influence faculty experience in decision-making process to reshape professional practice. These logics introduce persistent tension in the institutional environment as well as governance structures to guide organisational routines and operational procedures. As a result, programmes design, learning outcomes and validation frameworks are embedded with institutional demands (Cooney & Cohen, 2024). Therefore, curriculum output often reflects institutional complexity and the stabilisation of competing organisational demands.

However, curriculum theory reinforces this institutional interpretations and tensions. Educational design expresses ideological orientations that guide knowledge selection and institutional identity. Consequently, curriculum ideologies organise assumptions about educational purpose and structure learning around normative commitments (Crowley, 2021). Institutional change research for example, demonstrates that curriculum orientations evolve alongside external pressures and internal strategic priorities (Roberts, 2015). Logics plurality expand curriculum expectations by embedding diverse narratives – via employability agendas, governance accountability and social transformation. These expanding demands intensify the complexity, rendering curriculum as an organisational mechanism where universities coordinate and integrate diverse expectations.

Furthermore, existing scholarship identifies plural pressures and ideological tension in higher education delivery. For example, studies of neoliberal reform and post-colonial transformation show how external agendas restructure curriculum priorities and introduce layered demands (Gyamera & Burke, 2018). Logics research explains how organisational actors manage contradictions, ensuring alignment practices and governance processes (Vican et al., 2020). These analyses illuminate mediation and negotiation. They provide limited explanation of how accumulated institutional pressures transform curriculum structure over time.

3.2 Conceptual Definition – Ideological Curriculum Saturation

This study defines ideological curriculum saturation as a structural condition in which curriculum absorbs an expanding range of external, institutional and political mandates in a single design platform. In contemporary higher education, curriculum is expected to satisfy regulatory compliance, leadership priorities, widening participation agendas, employability strategies, assessment protocols, inclusion commitments, disciplinary standards and quality assurance requirements at the same time. These demands are embedded in cycles of programme specifications, learning outcomes, assessment regulations, validation documents and review processes. They accumulate, overlap and reshape curriculum form and structure. Saturation emerges when curriculum carries more purposes and obligations than its pedagogical structure can integrate. The concept extends earlier concerns with saturation in education into the higher education curriculum domain. It addresses a key gap by using institutional theory to explain how cumulative pressures transform curriculum structures over time (Anderson et al., 2025; Gyamera & Burke, 2018; Hall & Smith, 2016).

The concept is distinct from existing literature on institutional pluralism and institutional logics. Prior studies explain how multiple logics coexist, compete and shape organisational behaviour (Ocasio et al., 2017). Other works show how actors mediate competing demands through governance processes and everyday practice (Cai & Mountford, 2022; Cooney & Cohen, 2024). These contributions are important, but they focus mainly on coexistence, tension and mediation. They provide limited explanation of what happens when demands continue to accumulate inside curriculum itself. Ideological curriculum saturation shifts attention from the presence of plural logics to their cumulative load, structural density and consequences for curriculum coherence and educational purpose. This offers a clearer explanation of how curriculum changes under conditions of sustained governance expansion.

The conceptual model integrates institutional inputs, organisational processes and structural outcomes. The primary inputs are plural institutional logics that define legitimate goals, accepted practices and evaluative standards within higher education environments (Ocasio et al., 2017). The first process is governance translation, where policies, accountability systems, validation procedures and quality mechanisms convert external expectations into curriculum requirements (Cai & Mountford, 2022). The second process is strategic mediation, where academic leaders, programme teams and quality managers interpret, negotiate and reconcile competing demands during curriculum construction (Smets et al., 2015; Vican et al., 2020). Through these processes, curriculum emerges as the institutional artefact through which plural expectations are organised and stabilised.

The outcome of this interaction is the *saturated curriculum*. This is where curriculum evolves into a dense governance template characterised by compliance layering, symbolic alignment, expanding documentation and continuous negotiation (Anderson et al., 2025; Haigh, 2020). Under these conditions, curriculum shifts from a framework for knowledge development and disciplinary formation into a composite legitimacy instrument. Curriculum surfaces to carry multiple claims linked to employability, inclusion, retention, competitiveness and institutional reputation. The concept therefore contributes insights in three levels. It extends institutional theory through a curriculum-centred explanation of organisational change. It reconceptualises curriculum as an institutional integrator linking governance, legitimacy and academic practice. It also provides a new analytical framework for examining accumulation, purposive expansion and coherence strain in contemporary higher education ecosystem.

3.2.1 *Mechanisms of Saturation*

Ideological curriculum saturation surfaces visibly through organisational processes embedded in curriculum design. These mechanisms show how plural institutional logics move from abstract expectations into formal curriculum structures. They explain how curriculum becomes dense, layered and difficult to integrate. Four connected mechanisms are central – *compliance layering, symbolic alignment, purposive expansion and documentation growt*h.

Compliance layering explains how curriculum structures absorb successive requirements linked to regulation, inclusion, employability and disciplinary outcomes. New assessment frameworks, learning outcomes and pedagogical expectations are added over time with operational complexity increasing with each addition. Research on layered curriculum models shows how educational design can combine multiple institutional and pedagogical objectives in a single framework (Caughie, 2016; Haigh, 2020). Curriculum template therefore is built as a repository of accumulated demands.

The second mechanism is the symbolic alignment. Curriculum documents communicate conformity with dominant norms, values and external agendas. Institutions use mapping exercises, alignment matrices and policy language to demonstrate coherence and legitimacy. Studies of curriculum boundaries describe curriculum structures as symbolic artefacts that reconcile these competing expectations through formal representations of order (Shay, 2016). Curriculum mapping shows how alignment processes reveal ideological assumptions and growing structural complexity within programme frameworks (Anderson et al., 2025). Symbolic alignment, consequently, protects legitimacy while tensions remain unresolved.

Purposive expansion and documentation growth form additional mechanisms. Curriculum increasingly incorporates objectives linked to inclusion, global engagement, employability and governance accountability. These demands broaden curriculum purpose and multiplies evaluative criteria shaping programme design (Ocasio et al., 2017; Vican et al., 2020). Programme specifications, validation reports, assessment strategies and alignment statements expand as organisations formalise these expectations. Curriculum designers then negotiate competing demands through selective interpretation and strategic mediation in everyday practices (Smets et al., 2015). Through these processes, institutional pluralism appear vividly in observable curriculum form and saturation intensifies over time.

3.3 Theoretical Contribution

This study advances institutional theory by extending its analytical scope into curriculum studies. Institutional logics research explains how plural systems of meaning shape organisational behaviour and generate competing expectations in complex environments (Cai & Mountford, 2022; Ocasio et al., 2017). Higher education curriculum templates produces this environment of tension to navigate market, regulatory and academic logics in universities (Shields & Watermeyer, 2020; Vican et al., 2020). This study deepens these insights by examining curriculum as the organisational space where these logics converge and create stability. It unveils curriculum as the structural site where

institutional pressures are operationalised in academic practice. Institutional theory is used to provide analytical precision to understand curriculum as both material structure and symbolic representation.

The analysis reconceptualises curriculum as an institutional integrator that coordinates plural expectations across organisational domains. Curriculum scholarship has traditionally emphasised pedagogical design, disciplinary organisation and policy influence (Crowley, 2021; Roberts, 2015). However, institutional analysis reveals curriculum as an interface where external pressures connect with internal organisational practices. Additionally, governance systems embed institutional priorities into programme frameworks. Academic actors thus mediate these competing expectations from design practices to strategic alignment (Cooney & Cohen, 2024; Smets et al., 2015). The outcome is to unveil curriculum template that serves as the mechanism where universities integrate institutional complexity into structured educational form.

The concept of ideological curriculum saturation presents a new analytical construct in institutional theory. Saturation captures the cumulative embedding of plural institutional logics in curriculum design. Existing scholarship identifies institutional actors mediation but offers limited explanation of how accumulated institutional pressures reshape curriculum structures over a period of time (Gyamera & Burke, 2018; Anderson et al., 2025). Ideological curriculum saturation conceptualises the threshold where layered institutional demands transform curriculum into a dense organisational artefact – characterised by compliance layering, symbolic alignment and continuous negotiation cycles. The concept provides a systematic lens for analysing curriculum evolution under institutional complexity.

The theoretical contribution is from three levels: First, institutional theory is extended in a curriculum-centred analysis that clarifies mechanisms linking plural logics to organisational outcomes. Second, curriculum is reconceptualised as an institutional integrator that mediates legitimacy, governance and academic practice. Third, ideological curriculum saturation provides a new analytical framework for examining accumulation, purposive expansion and coherence strain in higher education structures. These contributions establish the conceptual foundation for the empirical analysis and methodological approach that follow.

4. Method

This study adopted a comparative qualitative multi-case design to examine ideological curriculum saturation across distinct higher education contexts. Comparative qualitative inquiry is well suited to the study of complex institutional phenomena embedded in specific socio-political environments (Blair-Walcott, 2023). The design treats curriculum as an organisational artefact shaped by institutional logics, governance processes and actor responses. Case study methodology offers analytical depth and contextual sensitivity for examining institutional complexity in practice (Feagin et al., 2016; Yin, 2012). It enables close analysis of how curriculum structures evolve through interaction between governance environments, organisational routines and professional action. Examining these processes in natural settings strengthens theoretical insight into institutional mediation and curriculum formation (Dumez, 2015; Stake, 2013). The approach also aligns with inductive theory-building traditions that develop concepts through iterative comparison between data and theory (Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Eisenhardt, 2021).

The research strategy integrated principles of qualitative comparative analysis to identify patterned similarities and differences across cases (Ghana and England) while preserving contextual nuance. Comparative approaches strengthen rigour by revealing how institutional logics operate differently across governance regimes and historical settings (Cilesiz & Greckhamer, 2020; Thomann et al., 2022; Van Mieghem et al., 2023). The study also drew on hermeneutic qualitative traditions that emphasise interpretation and contextual understanding of organisational processes (Nigar, 2020). Meanings embedded in policy texts, curriculum artefacts and professional narratives were interpreted in relation to institutional context in Ghana and England. This strategy enabled systematic tracing of

how external expectations were translated into curriculum structures across contrasting higher education systems.

Case selection followed a theoretically informed logic based on institutional contrast and analytical relevance (Ruffa, 2020). The United Kingdom and Ghana were selected because they represent distinct higher education configurations. The UK system reflects strong regulatory oversight, marketisation pressures and metrics-driven governance shaped by accountability frameworks and performance regimes (Alexander et al., 2018; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020). Employability rationalities and performance indicators influence curriculum design through institutional accountability structures and strategic positioning (Hooley et al., 2023; Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019). Ghana reflects a development-oriented higher education landscape shaped by colonial legacies, post-colonial reform trajectories and stakeholder-led curriculum innovation (Edjah et al., 2025; Gyamera & Burke, 2018). Curriculum reform in Ghana reflect negotiations of national development priorities and pedagogical transformation agendas (Addai-Mununkum & Setordzi, 2023; Bell, 2025). These contrasting contexts provided analytical leverage for examining how ideological curriculum saturation emerges under different governance conditions.

4.1 Data Sources and Data Collection

Data were collected from two complementary sources – documents and semi-structured interviews. Documentary sources covered the period 2015–2025 and included policy documents, curriculum frameworks, programme and module specifications, validation materials, quality assurance guidance and institutional strategic plans. These documents were selected through criterion-based sampling. Only documents with direct relevance to curriculum governance, programme design, regulatory expectations and institutional strategy were included. The rationale was to capture formal evidence of how institutional logics were encoded within curriculum artefacts through language, standards, metrics and alignment procedures. Documentary analysis therefore provided insight into official structures, stated priorities and formal governance demands.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants across the two contexts. Participants were selected through purposive sampling because the study required informed accounts from actors directly involved in curriculum design and governance processes. The sample included academic developers, programme leaders, senior academic managers and quality assurance personnel. These roles were chosen because they occupy key positions in programme approval, curriculum review, policy enactment and quality assurance. Their professional responsibilities gave direct access to the practical interpretation of external mandates and internal decision-making processes. Selection continued until sufficient depth, role diversity and cross-context coverage had been achieved. This approach ensured information-rich cases capable of addressing the research question.

Access to the sources was gained through institutional contacts and professional networks. Potential participants received an invitation explaining the study purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality arrangements and expected interview duration. Interviews followed a common protocol focused on curriculum development processes, responses to external mandates, governance pressures and professional judgement. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymised. Combining interviews with documentary evidence enabled triangulation and strengthened analytical credibility, transferability and methodological robustness (Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2010; Schwandt & Gates, 2018).

4.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded through thematic coding guided by institutional logics theory and established principles of qualitative rigour. In the first stage, all documents and interview transcripts were read repeatedly to build familiarity with the dataset and to identify recurring patterns, meanings and tensions across cases. This iterative immersion is central to rigorous qualitative interpretation because it strengthens sensitivity to context and emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Nigar, 2020). In the second stage, open codes were generated to capture references to governance demands,

curriculum change, professional responses, accountability pressures and competing priorities. Coding remained both inductive and theory-informed, allowing empirical insights to emerge while maintaining analytical connection to institutional logics scholarship.

In the third stage, initial codes were refined and grouped into higher-order categories linked to market, regulatory, academic, social justice and developmental logics. Constant comparison was used across documents, participants and cases to test consistency, identify variation and challenge premature interpretations (Cilesiz & Greckhamer, 2020). Analytical memos were maintained throughout the process to document coding decisions, category development and theoretical reflections. This created a transparent audit trail and strengthened dependability of the analysis. Credibility was further enhanced through triangulation between documentary evidence and interview narratives, enabling convergence and divergence across multiple data sources to be systematically examined (Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2010; Schwandt & Gates, 2018).

A cross-case comparative synthesis was then undertaken to identify similarities and differences between the United Kingdom and Ghana. This stage examined how contrasting governance environments shaped curriculum saturation through different pathways. Finally, process tracing was used to reconstruct sequences of curriculum design, approval and review decisions in order to identify mechanisms such as governance translation, strategic mediation, compliance layering and purposive expansion. Comparative synthesis and process tracing strengthened explanatory depth by linking observed patterns to institutional conditions and temporal sequences (Thomann et al., 2022; Van Mieghem et al., 2023). Through these procedures, the study examined ideological curriculum saturation as a robustly evidenced organisational phenomenon embedded within institutional pluralism.

5. Findings

The findings show that curriculum functions as a governance instrument embedded in institutional logics and organisational mediation processes. Evidence from England and Ghana demonstrates that curriculum template translate regulatory, market and developmental imperatives into structured academic formats. Documentary materials reveal how institutional logics appear through thresholds, submission limits, accreditation stages, validation cycles and reporting routines (Cai & Mountford, 2022; Ocasio et al., 2017). Curriculum maps emerge as organisational template where governance demands are operationalised. Institutional demands enter programme structures through outcomes, validation documents and reporting templates. Curriculum thus absorbs the varying expectations and transforms them into structured academic practice.

Table 1

Logics and Mechanisms of Saturation

Final Codes (Theoretical Logics)	*Compliance Infrastructure*	*Documentation Inflation*	*Bureaucratic Layering*	*Pedagogical Dilution*	*Strategic Ambiguity*
Regulatory Logic	Standards, metrics, accountability rules	Reports, templates, evidence returns	Audits, multi-stage approvals, QA checks	Standardised outcomes, reduced flexibility	Compliance language, managed discretion
Market Logic	Rankings, performance indicators, student outcomes	Employability evidence, performance data, marketing claims	Monitoring systems, competitive controls	Skills focus, reduced disciplinary depth	Reputation narratives, competitive positioning
Developmental Logic	National priorities, capacity goals	Progress reports, development plans, alignment statements	Stakeholder consultation, public oversight	Expanded social goals, strained coherence	Flexible development narratives
Academic Logic	Disciplinary standards, scholarly norms	Curriculum maps, learning outcomes, validation records	Committees, peer review, academic boards	Narrowed breadth, reduced experimentation	Negotiated academic values

Final Codes (Theoretical Logics)	*Compliance Infrastructure*	*Documentation Inflation*	*Bureaucratic Layering*	*Pedagogical Dilution*	*Strategic Ambiguity*
Social Justice Logic	Equity targets, access commitments, inclusion rules	Inclusion audits, equality statements, participation reports	Monitoring bodies, governance additions	Checklist inclusion, reduced transformation	Broad equity narratives, uneven practice

Multiple logics operate simultaneously. Their overlap produces cumulative pressures that intensify ideological curriculum saturation.

Comparative analysis identifies five mechanisms (see tab. 1) through which ideological curriculum saturation emerges: *compliance infrastructure, documentation inflation, bureaucratic layering, pedagogical dilution and strategic ambiguity*. These mechanisms appear across in both (The UK and Ghana) national contexts. Institutional expression differs according to governance environments. Interview evidence for instance, confirms the documentary analysis. Besides, academic actors interpret governance requirements as structural features of the curriculum design. The accumulated account captures curriculum as a dynamic governance document shaped by repeated institutional translation. From the active artefact, saturation is visible as design structures accumulate multiple institutional expectations.

5.1. Curriculum as Compliance Infrastructure

Curriculum runs as a compliance infrastructure in both the UK and Ghanaian contexts. The study showed that in England, regulatory frameworks embed performance metrics directly in curriculum evaluation structures. For instance, the Office of Students (OfS) B3 conditions define continuation, completion and progression (see tab. 2) as measurable regulatory objects in programme design and institutional monitoring (Office for Students, 2022b). These numerical thresholds translate educational outcomes into compliance triggers for institutional practice. They reflect on institutional dashboards of universities in the UK to stabilise comparability across providers and embed continuous monitoring in programme development processes (Office for Students, 2022c, 2022f). In effect, programme specifications integrate these metrics through outcome statements aligned with regulatory definitions. This approach introduces curriculum as accountability instruments through which institutional performance are visible and comparable.

Table 2

UK Office of Students Conditions

OFS Conditions	Threshold by Study Type		Numerical Threshold
	Undergraduate %	Masters %	First Degree Fulltime %
Continuation	75	80	80
Completion	65	80	75
Progression	45	70	60

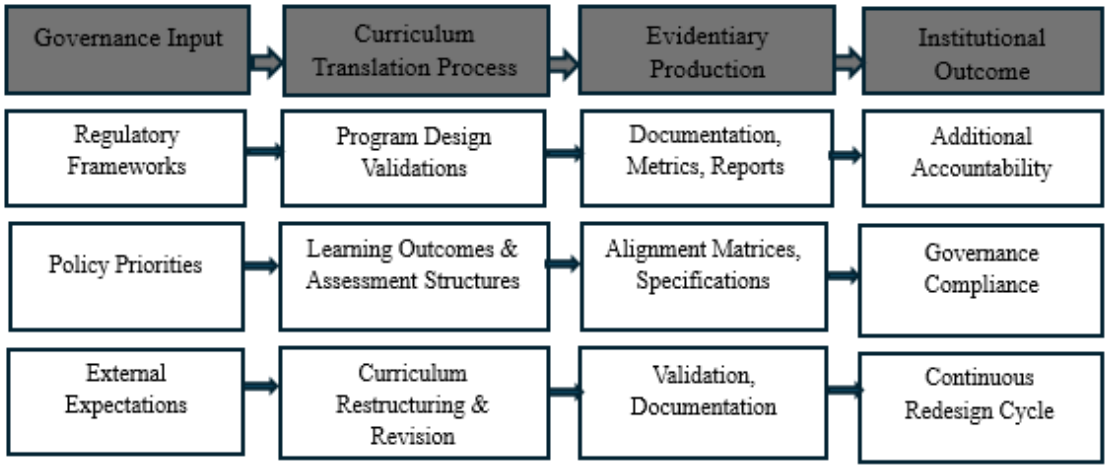
Higher education institutions have to comply with these graduate benchmarks. Penalties for failure includes sanctions, financial penalties, and possibly removal of degree awarding powers.

However, Ghana displays a comparable configuration organised through statutory governance structures. The Act 1023 (Parliament of Ghana, 2020) established the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission and consolidated regulatory oversight across tertiary institutions. The accreditation roadmap outlines sequential approval stages, defined timelines and formal evidentiary requirements guiding programme development (Act 1023, section 8). This institutional document embeds explicit compliance language into curriculum framework to guide outcomes (Adusei, 2025). The procedural nature of the process compels institutions to adhere to standard protocols to avoid closures (Act 1023, section 24). Academic managers from widening participation institutions in the UK described the accreditation process clearly compared to their counterparts in Ghana. It was clear in both contexts

that the accreditation process appears as "a structured pathway that shapes how curriculum must be organised before academic discussion begins," suggesting procedural sequencing in compliance.

This pattern reflects institutional logics theory which explains how governance processes translate field-level expectations into organisational routines (Ocasio et al., 2017; Cai & Mountford, 2022). The interview participants for example, described curriculum development as anticipatory governance work claiming that "writing curriculum now means anticipating regulatory interpretation". Participants generally agreed that the curriculum document design "must prove alignment before teaching begins." These compliance protocols shape curriculum design at the earliest stage of programme construction and serve as the interface between institutional accountability and educational practice (see fig. 1).

The comparative pattern reveals a clear structural distinction in both context. Compliance appears metricised in England and procedural in Ghana. However, both contexts adhere to and embed governance scripts directly into curriculum design. It reflects how institutional recursion is visible through continuous cycles of policy translation, documentation production and programme redesign.



The figure shows the governance cycles that shape and reshape curriculum design for institutional compliance.

Figure 1. Governance-Curriculum Translation Loop

5.2. Design inflation and Bureaucratic layering

The inflation of documentation is a clear manifestation of ideological curriculum saturation, discerned in England and Ghana. Regulatory texts in England show a substantial documentary scale for guidance and compliance (refer to tab. 3). The OfS B3 thresholds document for example, is over 121 pages long (Office for Students, 2022) with an additional revision that is 41 pages (Office for Students, 2024). However, the broader regulatory framework spans 222 pages (see Office for Students, 2022a, 2022c). These documents are further supported with the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) guidance which introduces strict page limits and expanding evidentiary requirements in submissions (Office for Students, 2022d, 2022e). Additionally, recurring statistical returns such as the HESES24 reinforce continuous reporting cycles across institutions (Office for Students, 2024). These governance demands increase documentary layering, textual density and reporting frequency on institutions. They make curriculum design boundaries actively entrenched with regulatory documentation systems (Soin & Huber, 2023).

The contextual evidence in Ghana runs parallel to England as show in table 3. The Parliament of Ghana (2020), Act 1023 extends to over 72 pages and establishes statutory governance structures for tertiary education in Ghana. In addition, the Programme-Based Budgeting framework issued by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) Ghana, is about 104 pages, integrating accountability measures in

institutional planning (Ministry of Finance, 2024). The Tertiary Educational Institutes (TEI) of Ghana report reaches 92 pages and structures national higher education requirements and outcomes (see the National Accreditation Board, 2019). Additionally, the accreditation roadmaps in the country introduce sequential submission requirements and define review windows for programme approval (GTEC, 2019). These regulatory protocols form a documentary ecosystem that structures curriculum governance in Ghana in layering institutional expectations.

Table 3

Documentation Inflation: Comparative Governance Artefacts

Governance artefact	*Country*	*Page span*	*Reporting cycle*	*Evidentiary requirement*
OfS B3 thresholds	England	121 pages (Office for Students, 2022a, 2022c, 2023).	Continuous monitoring	Performance metrics, outcome thresholds
OfS Regulatory framework	England	222 pages (Office for Students, 2022a, 2024).	Periodic regulatory review	Compliance evidence, programme alignment
TEF guidance	England	Controlled submission length, (Office for Students, 2022d, 2022e).	Evaluation cycle	Narrative evidence and performance indicators
HESES Statistical return	England	Recurring institutional return	Annual	Student numbers, institutional metrics
Act 1023 (GTEC Act)	Ghana	72 pages (Act of Parliament, 2020).	Statutory framework	Governance compliance and institutional oversight
Programme-Based Budgeting (PBB)	Ghana	104 pages (Ministry of Finance, 2024).	Annual planning cycle	Institutional targets and performance indicators
TEI Statistical report	Ghana	92 pages (National Accreditation Board, 2019).	National reporting cycle	Institutional statistics and sector reporting
Accreditation roadmap	Ghana	Procedural framework	Programme approval cycle	Submission documentation and review evidence

The comparative analysis table reveals a shared structural pattern and saturation of demands across both contexts.

Study participants acknowledged that the documentations expand cumulatively during curriculum design processes. This implies that academic actors perceive curriculum documentation as a repository of institutional alignment. For example, quality assurance officers in England explained their feedback that each “new framework adds another mapping layer” such that nothing disappears but remains visible in the curriculum file. This bureaucratic layering accumulates iteratively from guidelines, benchmarks, matrices and validation forms. Their demands are then incorporated in curriculum templates as programme specifications, validation documentation and alignment statements. Meanwhile, successive governance protocols continue to add expectations, expanding the design complexity and compliance saturation.

5.3. Loss of Pedagogical clarity

Programme specifications often serve as alignment matrices in contemporary curriculum systems in higher education practice. Institutional frameworks require structured mapping between learning outcomes, assessment strategies and programme objectives (Maki, 2023). Consequently, the annual review procedures reinforce iterative alignment processes that maintain institutional accountability in curriculum templates (Crowley, 2021; Haigh, 2020). Mapping tools provide visualised relationships in outcomes (see the data dashboard, Office for Students, 2026), assessments and teaching activities through structured diagrams (Burnett et al., 2021). For instance, institutional handbooks in England standardise design practices through template guidelines embedded in programme documentation. Curriculum artefacts accumulate representational density as benchmark references to reflect employability indicators, equity commitments and regulatory standards which converge in programme specifications.

Participants provided evidential explanations to demonstrate the pedagogical implications of this structural expansion. For example, academic actors describe curriculum guidelines as “increasingly

complex" to manage. Developers (in England and Ghana) explained that curriculum reads like a "compliance narrative". They believe that teaching intention is "hidden behind alignment language." Curriculum design appears largely to respond to governance work while pedagogical articulation is often difficult to sustain in such dense documentary structures. In practice, the conceptualisation of curriculum activity surfaces as boundary negotiation of competing expectations (Shay, 2016). Crowley (2021) for instance, describes curriculum as an ideological text shaped by institutional logics and value commitments. The findings, however, reveal how governance encoding competes with pedagogical articulation during curriculum design in these contexts (see tab. 4).

Table 4

Pedagogical Articulation and Governance encoding in Curriculum Design

Curriculum element	*Governance function*	*Pedagogical function*	*Observed outcome*
Learning outcomes mapping	Demonstrates regulatory alignment	Defines intended learning	Alignment language dominates articulation
Assessment matrices	Shows accountability and comparability	Connects learning to evaluation	Increased structural complexity
Programme specifications	Provides evidence for validation and review	Explains pedagogical design	Narrative density expands
Curriculum maps	Visualises governance alignment	Clarifies learning structure	Representational layering increases
Institutional handbooks	Standardises programme documentation	Guides curriculum construction	Template systems shape design practice

Governance structures introduce alignment frameworks to shape curriculum documentation, making pedagogical clarity difficult to sustain in layered documentation systems.

In Ghana, institutional policy portfolios incorporate entrepreneurship, equity and community engagement in their programme purpose statements. Quality assurance frameworks also integrate audit language directly into academic governance structures (Tetteh et al., 2021). Hence, curriculum narratives expand to incorporate national development agendas and institutional strategy priorities. In this approach, pedagogical coherence is invariably distributed across multiple institutional objectives, making coordination outcomes difficult. In effect, the curriculum template absorbs plural institutional logics from the expanding narratives and structures.

5.4. Strategic Ambiguity in purpose

Strategic ambiguity emerges as a stabilising mechanism in curriculum design under institutional pluralism. Regulatory frameworks in England for example, define graduate progression into managerial or professional employment as measurable outcome criteria (Office for Students, 2022b). TEF submission rules impose structured formats while permitting interpretive narratives across defined reporting boundaries (Office for Students, 2022d). The institutional narratives combine diverse expectations and educational excellence in a single outcome framework (Bridgstock & Jackson, 2019; Hooley et al., 2023). This implies that curriculum design has to integrate multiple legitimacy claims in the same design structure (see tab. 5). As a consequent, the programme purpose expands over multiple narratives and integrates regulatory, strategic and academic mandates (see Crowley, 2021).

Table 5

Strategic Ambiguity in Curriculum Purpose

Institutional context	*Governance expectation*	*Curriculum narrative integration*	*Institutional outcome*
England	Graduate progression metrics and TEF evaluation	Employability, excellence, and student experience narratives combined in programme specifications	Multiple legitimacy claims embedded in curriculum
England	Regulatory accountability frameworks	Structured narrative reporting within validation and evaluation documents	Strategic alignment with performance indicators

Ghana	Development-oriented policy frameworks	Internship and employability goals integrated with academic programme purpose	Curriculum aligned with national development agenda
Ghana	Accreditation and institutional governance policies	Entrepreneurship, equity, and community engagement embedded within programme documentation	Institutional legitimacy through policy alignment

Curriculum design functioning as a mechanism of multiple institutional logics expectations.

However, Ghana's development agendas appear relatively different as they intersect with accreditation structures in programme design. For instance, required internship policies (during and after graduation) integrate employability expectations into academic purpose statements to meet government and institutional demands. In practice, institutional teaching policies embed entrepreneurship and equity commitments as core narratives to meet programme outcomes (GTEC, 2019). This approach has purposefully expanded the objective of curriculum, connecting academic identity, national development priorities and institutional governance. The institutional logics theory highlights this process as mediation across plural legitimacy demands in organisational practice (Ocasio et al., 2017; Smets et al., 2015).

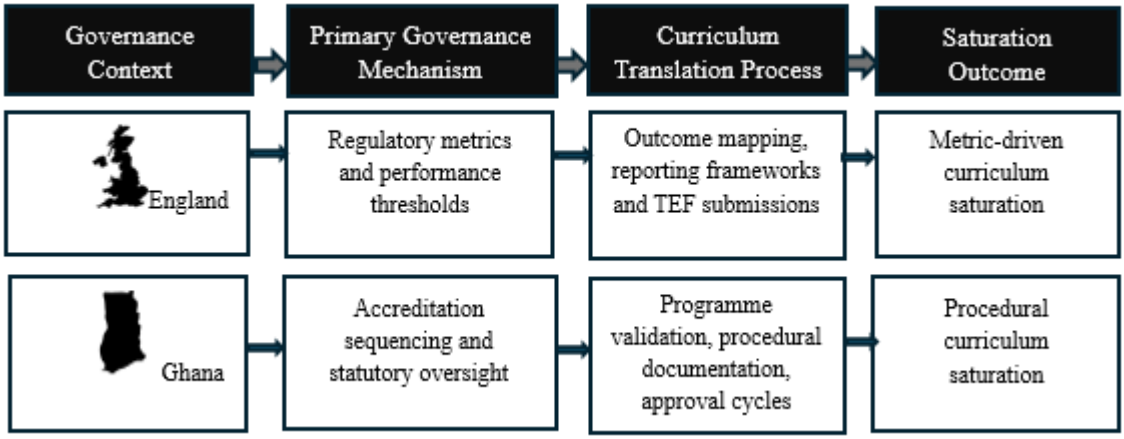
5.5. Contextual Differences: England and Ghana

The study, however, also reveals different trajectories on how ideological curriculum saturation develops in England and Ghana (see tab. 6). The process in England starts as a metric-driven and governance benchmarks – including the B3 metrics and UKPSF (2023). The OfS thresholds and performance indicators structure curriculum effectiveness in evaluation and assessment quality. These systems include 423 registered higher education providers (Office for Students, 2024) and more than two million full-time students thus intensifying regulatory comparability across institutions (Office for Students, 2024). The routine protocols such as the B3 conditions frame and appraise current programme design in UK higher education landscape. These quantitative indicators link curriculum directly to performance monitoring frameworks to shape curriculum evaluation (see the data dashboard of Office for Students, 2026).

Table 6

Comparative Governance Structures and Curriculum Implications

Dimension	*England*	*Ghana*	*Curriculum Implication*
Governance Structure	Metrics-driven regulatory oversight	Procedural accreditation governance	Curriculum aligns with performance or procedural validation
Institutional Scale	423 registered providers (Office for Students, 2026).	278 accredited institutions (MoF, 2024).	System scale influences governance monitoring intensity
Regulatory Mechanism	Quantitative thresholds and performance metrics	Sequential accreditation review stages	Curriculum artefacts integrate evaluation frameworks
Dominant Institutional Logics	Market and managerial logics	Developmental and post-colonial logics	Programme purpose shaped by distinct legitimacy expectations
Curriculum Outcome	Metric-aligned programme design	Accreditation-aligned programme structure	Saturation emerges through different governance pathways



Distinct governance mechanisms shape how institutional demands are translated into curriculum structures, producing different pathways to ideological curriculum saturation.

Figure 2. Comparative Pathways to Ideological Curriculum Saturation

5.6. Curriculum saturation through diverse protocols and processes in Ghana and England.

It was evident, however, that Ghana's process follows designed procedures that underpin the ecosystem. The established accreditation sequencing and institutional negotiations govern program design, approval and reviews for 278 accredited tertiary institutions (Ministry of Finance, 2024). The frameworks define clear stages for programme submission, evaluation and accreditation decisions. Decision timelines organise review cycles and reinforce negotiation between universities and regulatory authorities (GTEC, 2019). The guidelines for curriculum reflect the processes such the approval templates, accreditation reports and validation procedures. Again, institutional logics differ across the two contexts. England embeds market and managerial logics through performance measurement systems (Alexander et al., 2018; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020). However, Ghana adheres to developmental and post-colonial logics through national reform agendas and statutory governance (Gyamera & Burke, 2018; Bell, 2025).

Furthermore, the systems in Ghana and England display the structural dynamics of ideological curriculum saturation (see fig. 2). They demonstrate that curriculum design absorbs expanding expectations linked to governance mandates and development priorities. The mechanisms vary in terms of reach, approach and form. However, the underlying structure remains consistent across both contexts showing that curriculum has become the organisational infrastructure that stabilises institutional pluralism across different governance environments.

6. Theory Development

The empirical findings establish the ideological curriculum saturation as an observable organisational condition. The findings show how curriculum absorbs governance demands through regulatory translation, documentation expansion and strategic mediation in higher education practice. Evidence from England and Ghana demonstrates how institutional logics are heavily embedded in curriculum design outcomes. This section develops the theoretical articulation of this condition. It moves the discussion from being an empirical observation to a conceptual explanation. It specifies the structure of saturation, identifies generative mechanisms and integrates curriculum theory with institutional logics and strategy-as-practice scholarship. The objective in this quest is for conceptual clarity.

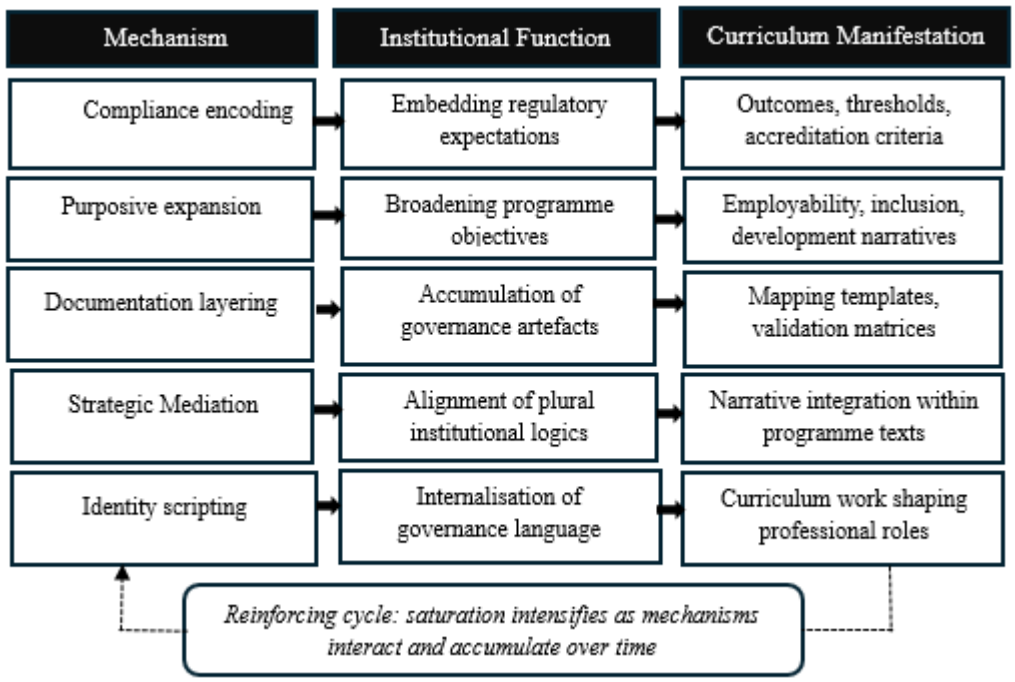
6.1. The Ideological Curriculum Saturation Model

Ideological curriculum saturation describes a condition in which curriculum template integrates and stabilise multiple institutional logics in a single design template (see figure 3). The study findings demonstrate how curriculum documents (in England and Ghana) incorporate diverse mandates and

frameworks in different contexts (see section 5). Evidence of dense organisational logics prescriptions frame governance expectations in academic practice. Empirically, institutional theory (Ocasio et al., 2017; Lounsbury et al., 2021) provides explanations on how logics organise meaning, guide attention and define legitimacy towards organisational purposes (Cai & Mountford, 2022; Gümüsay et al., 2020)

In curriculum design, institutional demands travel from policy environments into governance through translations (Jepperson & Meyer, 2021; Kohtamäki et al., 2022). The recursive translations frame the learning outcomes and assessment matrices which govern quality assurance frameworks (Lowe & Galstaun, 2020; Tetteh et al., 2021). The focus of most programmes eventually, is to stress design protocols to embrace diverse narratives – employability, inclusion and development commitments. In practice, the institutional expectations emerge from field artefacts, and these artefacts tend to stabilise ideological commitments in the curriculum structures (see figure 1). Institutional scholarship reframes curriculum template as a site of intensive macro-institutional scripts shaping knowledge organisation and contextual legitimacy (McEneaney & Meyer, 2000; Savage & O'Connor, 2015).

Again, curriculum saturation is fostered when cumulative institutional demands expand curriculum architecture beyond integrative pedagogical coherence (refer to tab. 4). The findings from the two contexts (England and Ghana) provide results to show that curriculum documents carry condensed mandates and expectations for diverse logics (see tab. 5). These mandates reflect the accumulation of competing logics demands. Empirical studies document growing tensions generated by competing universities and post-colonial curriculum systems (Gyamera & Burke, 2018; Le Grange, 2020; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020). The ideological curriculum saturation model conceptualises this layering as structural density – of composite governance template.



Sources of institutional logics demands and implication on curriculum template. Practice mechanisms convert institutional pluralism into structural curriculum saturation.

Figure 3. Ideological Curriculum Saturation Model

The model advances curriculum theory by integrating institutional analysis with pedagogical scholarship (see also Cai & Mountford, 2022; McEneaney & Meyer, 2000). Curriculum orientations appear to reflect more of institutional priorities and ideological commitments in educational structures (Roberts, 2015; Crowley, 2021). This growing identity shapes institutional logics scholarship and

provides insights on how plural legitimacy regimes frame organisational behaviour (Ocasio et al., 2017; Smets et al., 2015). The saturation model unites this perspective. Curriculum, therefore, emerges as an important institutional infrastructure, integrating governance, strategy and pedagogical design in one organisational document. Hence, any reform in these environments thickens the ideological density, mapping and alignment commitments (Anderson et al., 2025; Haigh, 2020).

6.2 Mechanisms of Ideological Curriculum Saturation

The empirical analysis identifies five mechanisms that generate ideological curriculum saturation (see fig. 3). These mechanisms translate institutional pluralism and demands into observable curriculum structures. The first mechanism is compliance encoding. Regulatory objects enter curriculum architecture through pathways of learning outcomes, accreditation criteria, thresholds and audit templates (refer to tab. 6). Empirical evidence in England for example show how B3 metrics shape programme and curriculum designs. In the Ghanaian context, accreditation sequencing govern programme approval and legitimacy. These governance protocols frame curriculum outcomes via formal design procedures (see fig. 2). This process is also conceptualised in institutional theory where field-level logics activities translate into governance and routine practices (Ocasio et al., 2017; Reay & Jones, 2016).

The second and third mechanisms involve purposive expansion and documentation layering. Curriculum mandates expand as additional institutional demands, entering programme rationales and strategic frameworks (Maki, 2023). Empirical studies demonstrates how employability rationalities shape curriculum priorities across national systems and labour market expectations to influence programme design in higher education (Damoah et al., 2021; Hooley et al., 2023). Furthermore, studies of graduate outcomes and internationalisation do illustrate how market orientation and global competence narratives are core imperatives in programme structures (Bennett, 2019; Leask, 2015; Renfors, 2021; Römgens et al., 2020). These mandates pile continuously and intensify governance protocols and documentation layering (see tab. 4, pp. 15). This process shapes curriculum to accumulate through validation matrices, desired frameworks and regulatory reporting structures. Again, research on curriculum mapping and design models explain how institutional expectations inflate programme documentation in practice (Anderson et al., 2025; Caughie, 2016; Haigh, 2020). These layering are documented in institutional scholarship in plural organisational environments (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Bertels & Lawrence, 2016).

The fourth and fifth mechanisms involve strategic mediation and identity scripting. Strategic mediation implies the integration of competing institutional logics in programme narratives and alignment structures (see Cai and Mountford, 2022; Cooney & Cohen, 2024). Strategy-as-practice scholarship conceptualises this process as an organisational activity embedded in everyday institutional work (Smets et al., 2015). Organisational hybridity provides further explanations on how institutions engage incompatible logics through flexible alignment practices (Gümüsay et al., 2020) to shape institutional outcomes. Again, identity scripting complements this mediation process in practice. For instance, academic actors internalise governance language and implement it through curriculum design and quality assurance participation. The internalisation produces values to shape managerial decisions and professional conducts in university programmes (Erickson et al., 2021).

7. Implications for Governance and Academic Agency

The study shows how curriculum has emerged as a central governance mechanism in contemporary higher education – as demonstrated in Ghana and England contexts. The two contexts demonstrate how institutional plurality and demands shape curriculum through regulatory thresholds, accreditation processes and accountability structures. This unearths curriculum governance and mandates as critical to programme specifications, outcome mappings and validation frameworks. The artefacts produce external expectations to underpin academic practice. These logics behaviour are documented in institutional theory which explains how actors legitimacy develop in organisational

routines (Cai & Mountford, 2022; Ocasio et al., 2017). In education, however, curriculum serves as the template where institutional policy and practice are enacted.

On this template, governance processes coexist with plural logics expectations – market prescriptions, quality assurance, employability and development priorities – all converge to structure programmes design. The study presents discussions on how England and Ghana apply different processes to achieve similar outcomes, guided by statutory reforms and national development priorities (Gyamera & Burke, 2018; Shields & Watermeyer, 2020). The governance mandates in the two contexts demonstrate layered rationalities in curriculum outcomes. This dynamic shifts governance towards design inscriptions. It ensures that curriculum design meets governance enactments through established and documented approval processes, validation procedures and alignment frameworks (Smets et al., 2015).

The ideological curriculum saturation model explains how governance expands via mandates and scripts accumulation. Each policy agenda introduces new representational demands in curriculum structures to extend curriculum purpose and evaluation (Hooley et al., 2023; Leask, 2015). Curriculum governance, consequently, develops through aggregation of institutional logics, framing governance as infrastructure that carries multiple legitimacy claims and stabilises institutional expectations.

However, the development of academic agency grows in the confines of these saturated conditions. Academics engage competing logics through curriculum design, validation and quality assurance work. Nonetheless, agency surfaces through mediation and interpretation of institutional expectations (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Lounsbury et al., 2021). These values produce integrated governance frameworks to shape curriculum design templates and accountability structures. Meanwhile, academics continuously translate the mandates into pedagogical form (Erickson et al., 2021). To ensure coordination, strategic mediation processes enable alignment between employability, disciplinary knowledge and stakeholder expectations (Smets et al., 2015). Curriculum work emerges as a relational principle used by academics to respond to demands by employers, students and institutions (Damoah et al., 2021; Winstone et al., 2022). The iterative development of academic agency stabilises institutional pluralism through routine curriculum practice.

7.1 Curriculum Futures

Curriculum futures unfold in environments shaped by institutional complexity and ideological accumulation. Higher education functions in governance systems defined by plural logics and expanding stakeholder prescriptions. Curriculum development evolves through iterative adaptation embedded in organisational processes (Law, 2022). The ideological curriculum saturation model clarifies this trajectory. It shows how institutional logics accumulate in curriculum templates and reshape development across systems. This positioning demonstrates a dynamic organisational structure that absorbs and stabilises institutional demands over time.

Future curriculum design will continue to embed commitments into programme structures. The employability discourse is likely to shape institutional strategy and programme orientation (Bennett, 2019; Hooley et al., 2023). Internationalisation goal will introduce global competence and intercultural learning within curriculum frameworks (Leask, 2015; Renfors, 2021). Decolonisation and representation debates will extend ideological commitments embedded in programme designs (Le Grange, 2020; Schucan Bird & Pitman, 2020). Again, technological transformation will intensify these dynamics. For example, artificial intelligence will shape curriculum design and programme evaluation through data-driven systems (Ejjami, 2024), implying that technology expansion and design capacity will strengthen governance monitoring. Consequently, curriculum will absorb these developments as additional layers in institutional design.

The comparative analysis (between England and Ghana) demonstrates variation in shared structural conditions. England's approach is economic-driven, largely shaped by performance and institutional comparability (Alexander et al., 2018; Corbett & Hantrais, 2023). However, Ghana tilts towards

development-oriented governance to shape national priorities and reform agendas (Edjah et al., 2025; Gyamera & Burke, 2018). These trajectories differ in form but converge in structure. Curriculum futures reflect this ideological saturation across the two contexts. Nonetheless, curriculum will continue to evolve as a governance framework shaped by institutional logics, academic mediation and societal expectations.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Reclaiming Curriculum Purpose

This study reconceptualises curriculum as a governance artefact framed by competing institutional logics and expanding ideological expectations. The findings demonstrate that curriculum is an organisational site where regulatory frameworks, market rationalities, professional norms and developmental priorities meet. A site where institutional logics transform curriculum into a dense organisational structure that carries multiple legitimacy claims in a unified architecture. The ideological curriculum saturation model captures this structural condition as a composite artefact, stabilising institutional complexity through documentation systems, alignment practices and recursive governance translation.

Reclaiming curriculum purpose requires an analytical clarity regarding the structural forces shaping contemporary curriculum design. The extension of pedagogical organisation into institutional governance practice leaves gaps in focus. The variations of assessment frameworks directly impact credible approaches. Consequently, the purpose of curriculum is diluted and distributed across multiple rationalities embedded in programme narratives. The impact will manifest in the articulation of pedagogical coherence and expectations of professional readiness, social inclusion, global competitiveness and regulatory accountability. The recognition of this structural condition clarifies the institutional character of contemporary curriculum work.

The analysis demonstrates that academic agency remains central in saturated environments. Academics have morphed into mediators who translate institutional logics into curriculum design decisions. This requires a balance of professional judgement to interpret, negotiate and align governance expectations (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Smets et al., 2015). Though curriculum design is a strategic practice, academic agency is achieved through interpretive work embedded in the structures. Therefore, academic practice is essential in ensuring institutional mediation and meaning construction.

The comparative analysis between England and Ghana confirms that ideological curriculum saturation emerges from diverse governance configurations. The structural variations in both contexts influence the form of saturation while the underlying dynamics remain consistent. This is the stabilising force of curriculum framing institutional articulation of strategic and societal expectations in formal educational structures. The theoretical contribution lies in reframing curriculum as an institutional phenomenon shaped by layered logics and governance density. Ideological curriculum saturation defines the structural condition of contemporary higher education and establishes a foundation for future scholarship examining curriculum governance, academic mediation and institutional transformation.

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