Mechanisms conditioning the implementation of an integrated quality assurance and enhancement approach at a South African University of Technology

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By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is a presentation of my original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Emily Mabote
June 2023

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Rekwele Alice Shago and my late father, Modisaotsile John Shago. They both supported and encouraged me throughout the many years of my academic journey.

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ABSTRACT

Literature related to quality in higher education argues that achieving an integrated approach which balances improvement and accountability in a single quality assurance (QA) system, is not easy. In response to the literature, I decided to conduct a realist study to identify mechanisms that can enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach in a single quality assurance system at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). The scope of my study was limited to teaching and learning as one of the University's core functions. An integrated approach encouraged a deliberate focus and attention on transformative learning and teaching.

The main research question, "what mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement at the Tshwane University of Technology," underpinned this study. I used Bhaskar's critical realist philosophy as an underlabourer for the study and Archer's social realism as an analytical framework to enable me to seek answers to the research questions. The study took the form of a case study at TUT. Data was generated through document analysis and thirty-five semi-structured interviews with agents from across the various levels and campuses of TUT. In keeping with a social realist study, I used Archer's concept of analytical dualism to analyse structure, culture, and agency separately, and their interplay.

My findings indicated that compliance and accountability are related cultural mechanisms and were dominant in the University's cultural system. This signalled a strong emphasis on *quality assurance* (QA) rather than *quality enhancement* (QE). In addition, the findings showed that the University has established sufficient structural and agential enablements to *assure* the quality of learning and teaching. However, there is a need to integrate transformative cultural mechanisms into the University's QA system. Furthermore, there were limited structural, cultural, and agential enablements to encourage *enhancement*. In this regard, I recommended mechanisms that should be in place for an integrated QA and QE approach to be successful at TUT. My main argument is that an institutional context that encourages structural, cultural,

and agential QA and QE mechanisms to work in tandem can enable an integrated QA and QE approach.

TSHOBOKANYO

Dikwalo tse di amanang le boleng ba nonofo ya thuto e godimo di tsibosa gore go fitlhelela itlhagiso e e kopantsweng e e lekalekanyang tokafatso le maikarabelo mo thulaganyong ya boleng jo bo netefaditsweng bo le bongwe, ga go bonolo. Go araba dikwalo tse, ke ne ka tsaya tshwetso ya go dira dipatlisisiso tse di netefetseng go supetsa mekgwa ya go dira e e ka kgontshang kgotsa ya kgoreletsa itlhagiso e e kopantsweng mo thulagayong e le nngwe ya boleng jo bo netefaditsweng kwa Yunibesithing ya Thekenoloji ya Tshwane (TUT). Patlisiso ya me e tsepame mo go ruteng le go ithuta jaaka e le dingwe tsa ditiro tse e leng boleng jwa yunibesithi. Itlhagiso e e kopantsweng e baka thotloetso mo go totobiseng maikaelelo mo go ruteng le go ithuta go go tlisang diphetogo.

Potsokgolo ya patlisiso e, ya re “ke mekgwa efe ya go dira e e kgontshang kgotsa e kgoreletsa tiriso ya itlhagiso e e kopantsweng (lotaneng) mo netefatsong le tokafatso ya boleng kwa Yunibesithing ya Thekenoloji ya Tshwane.” Mo patlisisong eno ke itshetlegile ka Filosofi ya tshekatsheko ya bonnete ya ga Bhaskar mme ka dirisa dikakanyo tsa leago tsa ga Archer jaaka letlhomeso la molokololo go nthusa go bona dikarabo tsa potsokgolo ya me. Ke ne ka dirisa mokgwa wa thuto ya motlhala kwa TUT mo patlisisong e. Tshedimosetso e ne ya kgobokanngwa ka go sekaseka dipuisano di le 35 tse di sa rulaganngwang le baemedi ba maemo a a farologaneng ba dikhampase tse di farologaneng tsa TUT. Go itshamaganya le dipatlisiso tsa bonnete tsa leago, ke ne ka dirisa kakanyo ya ga Archer ya tshekotsheko-bobedi go sekaseka popego, setso le boemedi ka go farologana ga tsona mme ka boa ka di pataganya go bona mokgwa o di dirisanang ka ona.

Ditshwetso tsa me di bontshitse gore kobamelo le maikarabelo di amana le mekgwa ya tiriso ya setso e bile gape di a rena mo setsong sa yunibesithi. Se, se bontshitse kgatelelo e ntsi e mo boleng jo bo netefaditsweng go e na le mo boleng jo bo tokafaditsweng. Le teng gape, ditshwetso di bontshitse gore yunibesithi e tlhomile sebopego le boemedi tse di tlhomameng go netefatsa boleng ba go ithuta le go ruta. Le fa go le jalo go a tlhokega go kopanya mekgwa ya go dira ya setso e e tlisang diphetogo mo tsamaisong ya netefatso ya boleng ya yunibesithi. Go feta foo go ne go

na le tlhaelo mo sebopegong, setso le boemedi go tlhotlheletsa tokafatso ya boleng. Ka jalo, ke tshisinya gore mekgwa e e tshwanetseng e nne teng gore mokgwa o o kopanetsweng wa boleng jo bo netefaditsweng le boleng jo bo tokafaditsweng e atlege kwa TUT. Kgangkgolo ya me ke gore setheo sa thuto se se tlhotlheletsang gore sebopego, setso le boemedi mo boleng jo bo netefaditsweng le jo bo tokafaditsweng di dire mmogo go ka kgontsha gore di atlege fa di kopantswe.

(Setswana version of the abstract)

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ASG-QA	: African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
CEPs	: Cultural Emergent Properties
CHE	: Council on Higher Education
CR	: Critical Realism
DHET	: Department of Higher Education and Training
DQP	: Directorate of Quality Promotion
EQA	: External Quality Assurance
HE	: Higher Education
HE Act	: Higher Education Act, 101 of 1997 (as amended)
HEI	: Higher Education Institution
HEQC	: Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQSF	: Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HoD	: Head of Department
IQA	: Internal Quality Assurance
NPM	: New Public Management
NQF	: National Qualifications Framework
NQF Act	: National Qualifications Framework Act, No. 67 of 2008 (as amended)
OECD	: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEPs	: Personal Emergent Properties
QA	: Quality Assurance
QAF	: Quality Assurance Framework
QC	: Quality Council
QE	: Quality Enhancement

QEP : Quality Enhancement Project

QM : Quality Management

SAQA : South African Qualifications Authority

SEPs : Structural Emergent Properties

SR : Social Realism

TUT : Tshwane University of Technology

UoT : University of Technology

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Quality assurance (QA) regimes have gained prominence in the global higher education landscape as regulatory mechanisms in response to the ever-changing nature of the higher education context. As a result, most countries globally have introduced national QA systems for their higher education institutions (HEIs). As higher education operates in a complex and changing landscape, it necessitates innovative approaches to assuring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching, research, and community engagement. The complex nature of the higher education landscape has resulted in multiple stakeholder demands, needs, and expectations which must be attended.

Such needs and expectations include increasing calls for efficiency in the higher education system by the government's regulatory agencies, growing pressure for accountability, ensuring curriculum responsiveness, transformation, and producing graduates with skills matching the country's socio-economic and knowledge needs. The need for higher education institutions to be held accountable for their actions has grown in importance. This has resulted in concerns about rising tuition costs, low retention and graduation rates, an absence of graduate employability skills, and declining social value systems (Panagiotakopoulos, 2012 as cited by Prakash, 2018).

In South Africa, QA was identified by the democratic government as one of the levers for steering the transformation of higher education to ensure that there are equitable, high quality, and sustainable institutions that are responsive to the knowledge needs and socio-economic growth of South Africa (DoE, 1997a). In consideration of this, higher education institutions were expected to establish QA systems to assure and improve the quality of their core academic functions; to enable HEIs to be responsive to the expectations and policy imperatives of the democratic government. I provide a more detailed discussion of this in Section 5.4.

1.2 Context of the Study

Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) was established in 2004 as a result of the restructuring of the higher education sector in response to the urgent need to transform higher education in post-apartheid South Africa. The newly established university was founded on January 1, 2004 through the merger of three technikons: Pretoria, North-West, and Northern Gauteng. TUT became one of South Africa's six universities of technology. The merger of these technikons was intended to "redress historical inequalities by providing access to all of our communities and an academic home for all of our students" (TUT, ISP 2020 – 2025). Transitioning from a technikon to a university of technology[1] (UoT) resulted in TUT needing to take on the new culture and identity of a university of technology, which meant that the new institution had to define what it meant to be a UoT in the context of teaching and learning, academic programmes, research, staff profiles, and community engagement.

As a result of the merger, there were significant internal structural reforms at the institution and department levels. Amongst the many changes brought about by the merger at TUT was the consolidation of academic programmes, organisational policies, governance and management structures, integration of systems and policies for human resources, implementation of a new strategy for managing campuses, and creation of new structures for the academic sector.

TUT is a large, complex, multi-campus UoT with nine learning sites spread across three provinces (Gauteng, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga), and two service centres in Cape Town and Durban for distance education students. After the merger, TUT became the largest contact university in South Africa (TUT, ISP 2020 – 2025). TUT prioritises equity of provisioning due to the University's size and multi-campus nature. TUT offers qualifications across various disciplines and fields of study ranging from Engineering and the Built Environment, Science, Arts and Design, Information and

[1] University of Technology: Technikons were reconfigured through mergers in 2003 and were called universities of technology. Some of the characteristics of UoTs are their primary focus on vocational and professional education, applied research, technological capacities, and being research-informed (Du Pré, 2010).

Communication Technology, Humanities, Management Sciences, and Economics and Finance. More than 60,000 students enrol annually in undergraduate programmes (94%) and postgraduate programmes (4%) across the seven faculties. The 94% undergraduate enrolment signals the significance of quality teaching and learning, as well as a transformative student experience.

To build its credibility in the higher education landscape, TUT embraced quality early after its establishment. It established various structures to oversee the quality of its core functions. The structures were established as guided by the statutes of the University. It was imperative that the quality structures established at TUT enable the assurance, enhancement, and monitoring of the equitable quality of provisioning across TUT's multi-campuses.

1.2.1 Institutional Approach to Quality

The University's approach to quality has been influenced mainly by global and national QA mechanisms, as outlined in Sections 5.2 and 5.4. The national policies for the transformation of the higher education context, such as the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education: Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997a), the Council on Higher Education founding policy framework document (CHE, 2001), White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (DHET, 2013), and other national QA policies had a significant influence on the conceptualisation of the TUT strategies and policies for QA. I elaborate on the national policies in Section 5.4. Transformation, quality, and access with success were some of the main ideas that underpinned the conceptualisation of the institutional QA approach when QA was conceptualised at TUT after the merger. See Chapter six for an in-depth discussion of the mechanisms underpinning the TUT approach to quality.

1.3 Definition of Concepts

The main concepts underpinning this study include quality as the central concept and then QA, QE, and integrated quality. Understanding the conceptualisations of these

concepts is essential as it helped me delineate the focus of this study. In this chapter, I briefly introduce the concepts that will be described in more detail in Chapter three.

1.3.1 Quality

I derived my understanding of quality from the Council on Higher Education (CHE)'s founding document (2001), which defines quality as "fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation" (p. 9). See Section 3.2.2 for a much more comprehensive discussion on the concept of quality in higher education.

1.3.2 Quality Assurance (QA)

My conceptualisation of QA also draws from the CHE's (2004) definition, which defines QA as "processes of ensuring that institutional arrangements for meeting specified quality standards or requirements of education provision are effective" (CHE, 2004, p.23). See Section 3.3.1 for a more detailed discussion of how QA is defined in the higher education literature.

1.3.3 Quality Enhancement (QE)

QE is explained by Williams (2016) as having two strands: first is the enhancement of individual learners, and the second is improving the quality of an institution or programme. See Section 3.3.6 for a more detailed discussion on how QE is defined in the higher education literature.

1.3.4 Integrated Quality Assurance

The CHE (2021a) describes an integrated approach to QA as "being able to demonstrate a high level of functionality of the various elements of the internal QA system in an institution and being able to use quality-related data in an integrated and coherent way" (p. 39). Fragmentation and complex QA systems are seen to be disadvantageous towards achieving effectiveness in higher education (CHE, 2017). Therefore, a coherent QA system is essential for achieving effectiveness and

efficiency. Effectiveness refers to a “system that accomplishes its intended purpose”, while efficiency refers to a “system that accomplishes its intended purpose while using time, effort and resources well” (CHE, 2021b, p. 7). In this study, I am investigating the mechanisms that have the potential to influence the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT.

1.4 Justification of the Study

My interest in conducting this study emerges from my professional life as well as from my reading of the literature on QA and QE in higher education. Over time, the literature has indicated that QA systems do not yield the envisaged improvements. For example, studies conducted by Biggs (2001), D’Andrea and Gosling (2005), and Ansah et al. (2017) suggests that higher education institutions should reconsider their QA systems in favour of enhancement-driven systems that create a balance between accountability and improvement. However, several studies have suggested that achieving a balance of improvement and accountability in a single QA system is not easy (Harvey, 1998; Luckett, 2006; Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013; and Ansah, 2015). By conducting this study, I aim to identify the conditions that can enable or constrain the implementation of an approach that fulfils both accountability and improvement expectations in a single system.

Biggs (2001) and Singh (2010) emphasise the importance of higher education institutions establishing comprehensive approaches to quality that emphasise enhancement-driven QA and which focuses on student learning (balances accountability and improvement). D’Andrea and Gosling (2005), caution that if QA systems do not improve or enhance teaching and learning, they will be regarded as expensive exercises in futility, and it will be challenging to defend spending money on QA processes. This concern is addressed by identifying mechanisms that may be influencing the institutional context. In addition, I make recommendations that could enable the University to better position itself to implement an integrated approach that is more focused on addressing the quality of learning and teaching.

In addition, QA is perceived by many academics as predominantly associated with compliance, bureaucratic processes, criteria and standards, involving surveillance, regulatory tools, lack of trust, control, intrusion of professional autonomy, and ritualised practices (Middlehurst, 1997; Shore & Wright, 2000; Hoechst, 2006; Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013; Jarvis, 2014; and Davis, 2017). These trends and issues raise critical questions for me in relation to how the best QA processes can be implemented to improve learning and teaching. In trying to understand these experiences better, I analyse the institutional context to identify the mechanisms that could be influencing the experiences of TUT academics with QA.

From my engagement with the literature, I have also noted the latest developments that have taken place in the national QA context. The Council on Higher Education[2] (CHE) has introduced the new national Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for the higher education sector in South Africa. The focus of the QAF is to enable higher education institutions to develop integrated and coherent internal QA systems that strengthen and enhance the quality of learning and teaching, research, and community engagement (CHE, 2021a). This national QA development has also strengthened the justification for conducting this study. I believe that some of the findings will enable TUT (and perhaps other HEIs) to be ready for the QAF rollout in 2024 by the CHE.

My interest in conducting this study was also influenced by the outcomes of the meta-evaluation exercise that TUT conducted after completing the first cycle of programme reviews in 2012. The focus of the meta-evaluation was about establishing to what extent programme quality reviews, as the primary QA mechanism at the University, contributed to the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. The meta-evaluation findings and recommendations indicated a need for the University to shift from a predominant assurance approach to a more balanced approach that includes QE. However, such a recommendation needed to be informed by an in-depth study of the TUT context before it could be implemented. As a result, I have undertaken this study.

[2] Council on Higher Education is an apex regulatory body for higher education in South Africa.

TUT's dynamic, complex, and interesting historical context inspired me to choose it as a case to conduct this study. Although I recognise that the findings and outcomes of this study are not necessarily broadly generalisable, the findings may contribute to debates about integrated QA and QE approaches in other higher education contexts.

My study typifies an insider researcher as I am a researcher and a quality manager in the same institution where I conducted my study. I am the Director of the Quality Unit at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). My role is to support, implement, and advise the University on QA and enhancement to ensure compliance with external and internal regulatory requirements. My experience in higher education spans almost twenty years, and sixteen of those years were in the field of QA. See Section 4.5 for a more detailed reflection on my positionality and how it impacted this study. Due to the multidimensional nature of quality and the complexity of higher education, the scope of this study only focused on teaching and learning as one of the core academic functions of the University.

1.5 Meta-theoretical and Analytical Frameworks

The metatheory underpinning this study is critical realism (CR), which originates from the work of Roy Bhaskar in the 1970s and 1980s. As an underlabourer to this research, CR provides ontological and epistemological underpinnings that enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the causal mechanisms that influenced events that enabled or constrained the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. CR's philosophical underpinnings and theoretical concepts have given this study the ontological depth needed to study a complex social context such as a higher education institution.

I chose Margaret Archer's social realism (SR) as an analytical framework to analyse institutional conditions at TUT within the domains of structure, culture and agency and their emergent properties and powers. Furthermore, SR allows for an in-depth study of a complex social organisation by examining how the interplay of structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms enable or constrain an integrated QA and QE approach.

The compatible nature of CR and SR has enhanced this study's theoretical, methodological, and analytical rigour. The use of CR and SR assisted me in identifying possible mechanisms that influenced institutional conditions to enable the successful implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. Bhaskar (1998) describes a mechanism as a causal structure that can cause events to occur. I discuss CR and SR in detail in Chapter two.

1.6 Goals and Objectives of the Study

As a realist study, my primary research goal was to identify the causal mechanisms that could potentially constrain or enable the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach for TUT.

In addition, I also had these three sub-goals for undertaking this study:

i. Personal goal of gaining an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the current and emerging trends in QA and QE in the higher education landscape.
ii. Intellectual goal of contributing to the body of knowledge on quality, QA and QE, especially the emerging trend of integrated QA. In addition, use the findings of this study to contribute to new knowledge and debates around integrated QA in higher education.
iii. Professional goal of making a difference in my professional environment as a quality manager and quality practitioner. I hope that the research findings will inform quality approaches at other universities.

The following objectives guided this study:

i. Critical analysis of how the concepts of quality, QA, and QE are conceptualised in the higher education context to identify the attributes of an integrated QA and QE approach. See Chapter three for an in-depth discussion of these concepts.
ii. Identify the mechanisms that can potentially enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated QA and enhancement approach at TUT. See

Chapters five and six for a discussion of the global, national, and institutional mechanisms that account for the conditions in the TUT context.

iii. Recommend structural, cultural, and agential conditions that could contribute to the successful implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach. Chapter seven concludes the study with these recommendations.

1.7 Research Questions

My study was guided by the following main and sub-research questions:

1.7.1 Main research question

What mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement at the Tshwane University of Technology?

1.7.2 Sub questions

i. What structural mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement at TUT?

ii. What cultural mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement at TUT?

iii. What agential mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement at TUT?

iv. How does the interplay of structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement at TUT?

1.8 Overview of Thesis Chapters

My thesis is divided into seven chapters.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework: Critical and Social Realism

In this chapter, I discuss the significance of CR and SR as theoretical tools for guiding my explanations and analysis of the social context in which this study was conducted. CR provides the theoretical and philosophical concepts I could use to conduct a causal analysis and provide deeper explanations and theorisation about the mechanisms at play at TUT. Given the complex nature of the CR theory, I have only used relevant philosophical concepts to help me achieve the objectives of this study. I also discussed how SR acts as an analytical framework to enable me to conduct an analysis of the mechanisms and their interplay at TUT.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framing of the Study: Quality in Higher Education

The focus of this chapter is on understanding the contested and multidimensional nature of 'quality' as the central concept for this study. I argue for why some conceptions are relevant to higher education and why others are not. I draw from the QA literature globally and from the national context. An in-depth discussion of the concepts of QA, QE, and their relationship is also part of the chapter. Finally, I briefly discuss several models of educational quality in higher education to inform my understanding of the mechanisms conditioning the transformative and comprehensive approaches to QA and QE as outlined by different authors.

Chapter 4: Research Design

The chapter elaborates on the research design and methods I have used to access the transitive and intransitive domains. I describe how the various processes of this study unfolded, from data generation to data analysis, and the theoretical justifications for the choice of methods I used to ensure consistency with CR and SR. Furthermore, I discuss various approaches I have used to address research rigour in this study to ensure that the findings and conclusions were as trustworthy and credible as possible. Considering that this study typifies insider research, it was critical that I clearly discuss my positionality and discuss how I have mitigated concerns resulting from insider

research. Addressing ethical considerations was also central to this study, and I close the chapter by identifying possible limitations of this study.

Chapter 5: Cultural, Structural, and Agential Mechanisms in the Global and National Context

Using CR and SR theoretical lenses, I analysed the systemic conditions that have shaped the emergence of QA structures and culture globally and in South Africa. I discuss how global discourses such as globalisation, massification, democracy, internationalisation, new public management, neoliberalism, and managerialism have impacted the emergence of QA structures and the cultural system. In addition, I discuss how these global discourses and QA structures have shaped and influenced the experiences of agents globally and how the agents have enacted their agency. I also discuss how the interplay of cultural and structural mechanisms at the global level and their emergent powers have enabled and constrained the continental and national structures and cultural systems for QA in higher education.

Chapter 6: Cultural, Structural, and Agential mechanisms at the Institutional Level

In this chapter, I answer the research questions by discussing the analysis of the empirical data guided by CR and SR theoretical lenses. I outline and discuss the themes that have emerged from the empirical data. Furthermore, for each theme, I identify structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms and how their interplay enables and constrains conditions that account for the events and experiences evident at the institutional level. I also discuss how each theme could potentially enable or constrain an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I address the main retroductive question of “what must be in place at TUT for an integrated QA and QE approach to be possible?” I provide recommendations regarding mechanisms without which an integrated approach will not be possible at TUT. Through making these recommendations, I contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of QA and QE in higher education.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL AND SOCIAL REALISM

2.1 Introduction

A theoretical framework is a significant part of any research project. It influences how researchers think about their research and how they make sense of the world. The importance of theory cannot be overemphasised as it provides a basis from which to explain phenomena. Grant and Osanloo (2014) compare a theoretical framework to a blueprint used when constructing a house as it provides a structure and foundation from which knowledge will be constructed. In addition, they explain that a theoretical framework provides the researcher with theoretical lenses through which to view the world and supports the researcher's thinking about the problem, choices of research methods, and data analysis.

In this chapter, I describe the meta-theoretical and analytical frameworks underpinning my study. I discuss the theoretical aspects that I have used to guide me in seeking answers to the research questions and making sense of the data. I have identified critical realism (CR) as a meta-theory that provided me with the theoretical lenses to interpret reality, generate knowledge, and provide theoretically and methodologically coherent explanations. In addition, I chose Margaret Archer's social realist (SR) theory as an analytical framework that allowed me to explore a complex system such as a university and engage in causal analysis of the interplay between structure, culture, and agency of the social context of this study. Critical realism is an under-labourer to Archer's SR theory by providing ontological, epistemological, and methodological grounding. A few South African studies relating to QA in higher education used CR and SR for example, Luckett, 2007; Quinn & Boughey, 2009; Luckett, 2010; McKenna & Quinn, 2012; Masehela, 2015; and Boughey & McKenna, 2017.

I start the chapter by providing a brief discussion of CR. Given the complex nature of the CR meta-theory, I have selected certain philosophical concepts of CR to guide my explanations and analysis of the TUT context, and I discuss the relevance of these

concepts in the later sections of this chapter. The theoretical concepts I chose to achieve the study's aim and objectives include ontological realism, epistemic relativism, judgemental rationality, retroduction, and abduction. Even though retroduction and abduction are mentioned in this chapter, I discuss the two concepts in more detail in Chapter four on Research Design. Following a brief discussion on CR, I then provide a detailed discussion of the SR concepts used for this study. I discuss concepts of structure, culture and agency, analytical dualism, and morphogenetic framework.

2.2 Critical Realism

CR has become popular over the past decades as a philosophical framework for social scientific research (see for example, Fletcher, 2017; Archer, 1995 and 1996; Healy & Perry, 2000; Patomaki & Wight, 2000; McEvoy & Richards, 2003 and 2006; Scott, 2005; and Carter & New, 2004). CR provides a philosophical stance that asserts that there is an objective reality that exists independently of our experiences and knowledge and that reality is multi layered (Bhaskar, 2008).

The emergence of CR resulted from Bhaskar's (1998) critiques of constructivism and positivism. Other scholars contributed to the development of CR as a philosophical system, positioning it as a viable alternative to the positivism and interpretivism paradigms. Bhaskar (1998) critiqued positivism for supporting the 'epistemic fallacy,' which reduces ontology (the nature of the world) to epistemology (our knowledge of reality) by restricting reality to what can be scientifically known. The epistemic fallacy is one of the most important philosophical foundations of CR (Bhaskar, 1998). The existence of reality and our knowledge of it should not be conflated (Luckett, 2010). CR philosophy cautions that what I, as an insider researcher, observe, how I experience reality, or know about the TUT context should not be conflated with the reality of the context, as my observations or knowledge are fallible. Failure to separate ontology from epistemology would weaken the explanatory value of this study.

Bhaskar's (1998) critique of constructivism argues that reality is not entirely constructed as a result of human thought. According to CR, knowledge of the external

world is made up of subjective interpretations that can be understood in a number of different ways. As a result, the interpretations are fallible as they are shaped by the theories and concepts within which the researcher operates (Bhaskar, 1998). Positivism and constructivism are considered to reduce reality to what can be known by humans (ibid).

McEvoy and Richards (2006) remind us that the main objective of research should not be limited to identifying generalisable laws (positivism) or identifying the lived experiences or beliefs of social actors (interpretivism), but rather to developing greater depths of explanation and understanding of the social world. CR allows the researcher to engage in causal analysis, making CR useful for analysing social issues and proposing solutions for social change (Fletcher, 2017). CR provided me with philosophical underpinnings that enabled me to conduct a causal analysis of how the conditions in the institutional and external context enabled or constrained the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT.

CR's epistemology emphasises that knowledge is not facts or opinions that we hold; it entails a judgement that needs to be evaluated. Bhaskar's CR philosophy is underpinned by the following three assumptions that should inform our basis for knowledge and knowing in general and in how we practice science: 'ontological realism', 'epistemic relativism', and 'judgemental reality', which I discuss in the next sections.

2.2.1 Ontological Realism

A critical realist ontology argues that the nature of reality is structured, differentiated, and stratified (Danermark et al., 2002). Researchers therefore need to recognise that there is a reality that exists independently of human perception, and as I have explained already, critical realists have accepted that scientific observations are fallible (McEvoy & Richards, 2003). CR argues that reality is not transparent; it has powers and mechanisms that cannot be observed but can be felt indirectly through their ability to trigger events to occur in the world (Danermark et al., 2002). Causal mechanisms operate at various levels of reality (McEvoy & Richards, 2003). Therefore, the primary

purpose of scientific inquiry from a CR point of view is to obtain knowledge about underlying causal mechanisms (ibid). Through this study, my aim was to identify mechanisms that tend to constrain and enable the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT.

According to Bhaskar (2008), to develop knowledge of the world, it is essential to understand the notion of a stratified ontology that asserts that reality is stratified into three ontological layers, i.e., the 'Empirical, Actual, and Real'. The first level is the **Empirical** level, which is about how we experience the world using our senses. These experiences can be empirically measured and are frequently explained using common sense. This level entails the transitive level of reality, where social ideas and meanings occur (Bhaskar, 2008). Transitive means that our understanding of a phenomenon is open to being challenged and can change.

The second level is the **Actual**, where events occur regardless of whether we experience or interpret them. What takes place at this level differs from what is perceived at the Empirical level (Danermark et al., 2002). This domain of the Actual "comprises all mechanisms that have been activated, even if they have not been observed" (Gorski, 2013, p. 665).

The third level is the **Real** (intransitive) level, which is the deeper layer of reality where structures with generative powers or causal mechanisms exist. Causal mechanisms are defined broadly as causal structures that generate or trigger observable events when activated (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011). They are relatively stable but can be triggered by the interplay of objects (ibid). For CR researchers to identify causal mechanisms, which have enduring causal powers and properties, they should excavate this deep layer of reality (Boughey & McKenna, 2017). CR as an approach encourages researchers to dig beneath the surface to uncover the underlying mechanisms that explain both natural and social phenomena (McEvoy & Richards, 2006).

Bhaskar's overview of the three stratified layers of reality is summarised in Table 1 below.

	Domain of Real	Domain of Actual	Domain of Empirical
Mechanisms	√		
Events	√	√	
Experiences	√	√	√

Table 1: Bhaskar's three domains of reality (Bhaskar, 2008, p. 2)

A stratified ontology considers the world to be an open system. In an open system, there are no definitive connections between cause and effect, because when multiple generative mechanisms interact with each other, it becomes more difficult to predict the outcomes (Danermark et al., 2002). Generative mechanisms entail "causal powers or ways of acting of structured things" (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 187). Critical realists argue that the social world functions as a multidimensional open system with effects resulting from the interplay of social structures, mechanisms, and human agency.

Of importance, according to Bhaskar (2008), is that conditions in the open social world can either hinder or encourage the actualisation of a structure's causal powers, suggesting that it may or may not have an observable impact at the Empirical level. Higher education is an open, complex, and multi-layered system. Understanding any aspect of it requires careful analysis of the interplay and interconnections between structure, culture, and agency (see Section 2.3.1 for a discussion on these concepts). My analysis of the institutional conditions at TUT was undertaken to identify the causal mechanisms at the level of the Real and to understand how mechanisms produced events that enabled or constrained the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT.

A critical realist epistemology posits that our knowledge of reality is always historically, socially, and culturally situated, and our perspectives have limitations (Bhaskar, 2008). CR maintains that dimensions of reality are deep-seated, and researchers cannot reduce reality to experimental observations but should instead try to understand the causal mechanisms that produce events (Danermark et al., 2002). In conducting this

study, I ensured that my approach considered both the ontological and epistemological underpinnings as espoused by CR, by seeking to understand social phenomena beyond just the experiences of the people in my study but by digging deeper into the domains of reality.

Bhaskar (1975) argues for a distinction between the 'transitive and intransitive' dimensions of knowledge. Knowledge that is changing is regarded as transitive, while the other kind of knowledge, which is relatively enduring and unchanging, makes up the intransitive knowledge domain. Social phenomena and other kinds of propositional knowledge comprise the intransitive dimension of science, while theories about the world and discourses are part of the transitive dimension of science (Sayer, 2000). When theories in the transitive domain change, it does not necessarily result in changes in the intransitive domain. Sayer (2000) argues that this distinction between the transitive and intransitive domains of science implies that "the world should not be conflated with our experience of it" (p. 11).

The essential task of research is to explain social phenomena by identifying the causal mechanisms which produce events in the social world (Danermark et al., 2002). As a researcher, it was my role to understand the mechanisms that generated events in the TUT context. However, I had to keep in mind that there isn't a linear relationship between cause and effect and what is observed and experienced in the domains of the Actual and Empirical cannot be reduced directly to the mechanisms in the Real (Case, 2013). In the analysis of my institutional conditions, I attempted to find answers by interrogating causality through the three layers of reality, especially the level of the Real, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the possible structures and discourses that enabled or constrained the implementation of an integrated approach at TUT. McEvoy and Richards (2006) argue that the "causal mechanisms cannot be apprehended directly as they are not open to observation, but they can be inferred through a combination of empirical investigation and theory construction" (p. 69).

The results of the interplay of the mechanisms at the level of the Real can either constrain or enable events that occur at the level of the Actual. The emergence of any

phenomena is the result of the interaction of the mechanisms. For an integrated approach to be implementable at TUT, I needed to identify the mechanisms that interact and whether that interaction has the tendency to produce the kinds of events that can influence the implementation of QA and QE at TUT. Digging deeper to identify the mechanisms resonates with Danermark et al.'s (2002), assertion that "things do not happen by chance or without reason. Behind events and courses there are powers generating them" (p. 198). I continue this discussion on the interplay of mechanisms in Section 2.3 on social realism.

Mechanisms do not act in isolation; the enabling and constraining effects of a mechanism can be intensified or lessened by the existence of other actualised mechanisms (Danermark et al., 2002). To analyse conditions at TUT, I needed to excavate the level of the Real to uncover which mechanisms are interplaying at the level of the Real and if that interplay is aggravating or mitigating the actualisation of events at the level of the Empirical or Actual. Danermark et al. (2002), argue that if we want a more accurate analysis of the social world, we must look beyond just the experiences and dig deeper and engage in retroduction to identify possible causes within the intransitive and not just the transitive dimensions. Retroduction is described as a "method for finding the prerequisites or basic conditions for the existence of the phenomenon studied" (Danermark et al., 2002, p.1). I discuss retroduction in detail in Chapter four where I discuss the research design of this study.

2.2.2 Epistemic Relativism and Judgemental Rationality

As stated earlier, CR philosophy is committed to epistemological relativism, which asserts that all beliefs are socially produced and hence potentially fallible (Danermark et al., 2002). Knowledge is therefore regarded as relative. This critical realist philosophy impacted on how I analysed my data and the conclusions I came to as I had to acknowledge that it was impossible to achieve an objective account of the conditions constraining or enabling the implementation of an integrated quality approach for TUT.

In trying to analyse and understand the conditions enabling or constraining an integrated QA and QE approach, I had to posit the most likely account of the mechanisms at play that did or did not influence the implementation of integrated QA and QE through using CR's concept of judgemental rationality. For the implementation of QA and QE to be possible, certain conditions must be satisfied, and I had to exercise judgemental rationality to account for the explanations of the workings of the mechanisms that I had identified.

Due to the intransitive nature of human knowing, any theorising about the mechanisms or likely explanations that I provide are likely to be fallible and can be challenged. Hu (2018) states that judgemental rationality allows "researchers to evaluate and compare the explanatory power of different theoretical explanations and, finally, to select theories which most accurately represent the 'domain of Real', given our existing knowledge" (p. 13). CR's philosophy asserts that through judgemental rationality, I could theorise and decide which of the mechanisms at play presented the strongest possible account of the emergence of the events and experiences. The explanations that are considered the best are usually those that have been recognised to have the greatest explanatory power (McEvoy & Richards, 2006).

2.2.3 Emergence

In his explanation of his CR ontology, Bhaskar (1979) refers to the concept of emergence. Case (2013) explains emergence as "when two or more objects can give rise to a new phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the properties of the original objects" (p. 39). The interplay of multiple causal mechanisms at the level of the Real might or might not result in the emergence of an event or experiences at the level of the Actual or Empirical, respectively. Carter and New (2004) assert that what differentiates an emergent property from just an aggregate of factors will be the "internal and necessary relations between the components of an emergent property rather than merely regular co-occurrences of diverse features." (p.14).

In the following section, I discuss Margaret Archer's social realist (SR) theory, chosen because it provided an analytical framework that allowed me to explore a complex

system such as a university and engage in causal analysis of the interplay between structure, culture, and agency at the intransitive level of the Real. Social realism is underpinned by CR philosophy and its ontological and epistemological understandings.

2.3 Social Realism: Analytical Framework

Archer's (1995) SR theory offers researchers a practical theory that advocates for a methodology that takes context and history into account to explain patterns of social phenomena. Social realist theory provides theoretical lenses that enable researchers to explain experienced or observed phenomena that point to causal relations at the intransitive level (Case, 2013). Furthermore, using SR theory, researchers can analyse how social events and experiences emerge from the interplay of mechanisms over a period by examining the interaction between people and social structures.

Archer (1995) describes a society, or the social world, as being comprised of the "parts", that is, structure and culture; and the "people", that is, the agents; and the interplay between the "parts" and the "people" has emergent properties. She argues that an analysis of structure, culture, and agency should be central to any study of the social world. According to the stratified ontology, the strata comprising the social include social structures, cultural systems, and agents (ibid). In the next section, I provide an explanation of the distinctive meanings that Archer (1995 & 1998) attaches to the concepts of structure, culture, and agency as mechanisms that operate at the ontological domain of the Real. In my explanation, I also tried to demonstrate how these concepts provided theoretical lenses for analysing my institutional context.

2.3.1 Structure, Culture, and Agency

Structure, culture, and agency are generative mechanisms, each with their own distinct emergent properties and powers within the realm of the Real. Their emergent properties emerge as a result of the interplay between them. I discuss the concept of interplay in Section 2.3.2 below. Archer (1996) has termed these emergent properties 'structural emergent properties' (SEPs), 'cultural emergent properties' (CEPs), and

‘personal emergent properties’ (PEPs). SEPs and CEPs relate to the “parts” while PEPs relate to the “people”.

Archer (1995) makes a distinction between SEPs and CEPs. SEPs include “systems, institutions, and roles with a primary dependence on necessary material resources and their distribution” (Luckett, 2012, p. 341). CEPs entail existing ideas and beliefs that are held loosely together in particular discourses (ibid). In real life, structure and culture are intertwined, but Archer (1995) emphasises that they are analytically distinct as each possesses independent distinct properties and are therefore distinguishable from each other. Changes taking place in the structural domain can influence the cultural domain, and vice versa.

2.3.1.1 Structure

Archer (1995) distinguishes between two types of structures, namely social and physical structures. Social structures refer to pre-existing features of the world into which we are born, and they are relatively enduring (ibid). Examples of social structures are social class, race, gender, education, and economic systems. These structures have causal powers. Physical structures in this study include institutional committees, policies, procedures, roles, positions, and infrastructure. Archer (1995) posits that structures can either enable or constrain access to material goods of the world.

An analysis of structure can be undertaken at the macro, meso, and micro levels of the context (Danermark et al., 2002). Global and national education structures can have an influence on meso and micro level discourses and structures, as well as how people in these contexts react to structural enablements and constraints. In Chapter five, I discuss how the global macro structures influenced the emergence of the structures for quality at the national and institutional levels, respectively.

Human agency is a necessary condition for a social structure to exist or function (Pleasants, 2019). Although structures exist only through human activity, they are not

reducible to such activity because social structures exist independently of human activity (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011). Social structures possess powers of enablement and constraint; they can *"*only condition the actions of agents but not determine them" (Pleasants, 2019, p. 7). The behaviour of agents is not solely influenced by social structures as they can respond innovatively to the circumstances, resulting in agents' ability to transform or reproduce social structures (McEvoy & Richards, 2003). Archer (1995) argues that structural emergent properties (SEPs) should be identified independently of the people occupying those structures. These SEPs include "distributions, roles, institutional structures, social systems" (p.176).

A structure can have different enabling and constraining effects on different groups of agents. For example, structures of discrimination can have constraining effects on the discriminated while enabling the discriminators (Carter & New, 2004). In the context of this study, a policy document can enable some agents while constraining others. In Chapter six, I identify the structural and cultural mechanisms that constrained and enabled how the agents exercised their PEPs to respond to QA at TUT.

2.3.1.2 Culture

Archer (1998) defines culture as the ideas, beliefs, values, and theories that manifest through discourses used by people at a given time and can shape people's actions in any context. These beliefs and values exist whether or not people are aware of them (ibid). Quinn (2006) describes a discourse as a cultural emergent property that has enabling and constraining powers. Furthermore, discourses have the power to shape people and events in the world. Identification of prevalent discourses in a particular context is one way of uncovering cultural items. I was interested in identifying the prevalent discourses in the higher education cultural system that influenced the conditioning of the higher education context and how it constrains and enables an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. Discourses are intransitive and relatively unchanging mechanisms (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). They exist, but the ideas that underpin them evolve. In the context of the South African higher education system, examples of some of the discourses underpinning quality in higher education include transformation, accountability, improvement, and others. Part of this study entailed

analysing the values, assumptions, and ideas that underpin the conceptualisation of quality, QA, and QE in higher education. I discuss the discourses underpinning the quality concepts in Chapter three.

2.3.1.3 Agency

Agency is about people, and it refers to individuals and their social roles. It is related to people's capacity to take voluntary action. Archer (1995) differentiates between three types of agents: primary agents, social actors, and corporate agents. She explains primary agents to include those who are inarticulate in their demands, lack interest, and lack a say in structural or cultural modelling; social actors as individuals who can claim a strong identity due to their particular role in society, and lastly, corporate agents refer to a group of people who are brought together by common interests. Corporate agents are active and interact with other agents strategically to achieve certain outcomes. Examples of corporate agents include "self-conscious vested interest groups, promotive interest groups, social movements, and defensive associations" (Archer, 1995, p. 258). Corporate agents engage in coordinated efforts to "re-shape or retain" the structural or cultural systems (ibid). Archer (1995) argues that these agential categories are not fixed and can change over time, where a primary agent in one domain can be a corporate agent in another.

Agents operate within a particular cultural or social system. For example, the agents in my study, e.g., Deans, Heads of Department, Lecturers, operate within a higher education cultural or social system and are conditioned by it. Therefore, how agents can or cannot exercise their agency is influenced by structural and cultural conditions. In this study, structural and cultural conditions such as policies, procedures, and institutional values governing the University can shape how Deans, Heads of Department, and Lecturers execute their roles. In Chapter six, I explore these structural and cultural conditions in the institutional context.

Agents have the power to "maintain or modify the world", and they can collectively exert influence by virtue of their numbers" (Carter & New, 2004, p. 10). An example of how agents collectively exerted power to influence change is the #MustFall student

movements that gripped South African higher education institutions in 2015 and 2016. Student protestors called for free education, the decolonisation of university cultures, and decolonisation of the curriculum (Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam, 2019).

The human process of internally reflecting on the enabling and constraining effects of structures, culture, and agency takes place through a process called reflexivity (Archer, 2010). Reflexivity is defined by Archer (2003), as “a generative ability for internal reflexive deliberation upon external reality” (p. 20). Reflexivity is, thus, a generative mechanism with causal powers that influences how an agent responds to conditioning mechanisms that have an impact on their roles. Furthermore, reflexivity is exemplified by internal conversations that people have with themselves as they deal with social structures and agency (Archer, 2003).

Reflexivity entails agents drawing on their PEPs and CEPs to respond to the structural and cultural constraints and enablements. For example, in the context of this study, a Dean or Head of a Department might be confronted by a rigid institutional policy, which could be constraining transformative learning and teaching in their faculty. Through exercising reflexivity or ‘internal conversation’, the Dean can activate their PEPs (exercising their power to make a choice) or CEPs (drawing on ideas or discourses that promote transformational learning and teaching) as a way of challenging and responding to the constraining structural conditions (rigid policies). The Dean’s or Head of Department’s response may result in the emergence of an event at the level of the Actual, which could lead to a review of the rigid institutional policies. This may have an impact on the experiences of agents at the level of the Empirical.

2.3.2 The interplay of the “parts” (structure and culture) with agency

Structure and culture work together to “condition the environment that human agents will enter” (Case, 2013, p. 44). Furthermore, Archer (2010) contends that the conditioning influence of structure and culture works by shaping situations in which agents find themselves in such a way that their course of action is impeded and discouraged, while others are facilitated and encouraged (p. 277). Agents exercise

their PEPs when they interact with structure and culture. Therefore, the interplay of structure and culture can either enable or constrain agency.

However, when exploring the interplay between structure and agency, it should be noted that structure and agency should be distinguished in terms of time as structures predate agency. In addition, structures (as emergent entities) are irreducible to the people, and because "people also have their own emergent properties, they can either reproduce or transform social structures" (Archer, 1995, p. 71). The conditioning effects of culture, structure, and agency on events and practices can be separated and analysed separately (ibid).

Archer (1995) advises researchers to adopt a non-conflationary theorising approach to understanding the interplay and interconnections of entities, properties, and powers to see how they are related. She argues against the 'fallacy of conflation' when two entities (structural and cultural, or structural and agential domains) are reduced to one entity when they are analytically distinct. In response to the 'fallacy of conflation', Archer (1995) argues for 'analytical dualism'. Before moving to analytical dualism, I first discuss Archer's conception of conflation.

2.3.3 Conflation

Archer (1995) describes conflation as "one-dimensional theorising where one side tries to dominate the other without taking the relations between the entities, properties, and powers into account" (p. 6). She distinguishes three types of conflation: 'upwards,' 'downwards,' and 'central,' by distinguishing between the 'parts' and the 'people' (Archer, 1996). Upwards conflation happens where 'people' are privileged over the 'parts', and the 'people' are seen to be monopolising causal powers and the social structures are seen as by-products. In downwards conflation, the 'parts' are seen to be dominating the 'people' by monopolising causal powers and resulting in the people being seen as by-products. Central conflation happens when the 'parts' and the 'people' are collapsed and seen as the same thing (Archer, 1996). For the purpose of this study, it was necessary to avoid conflating the 'parts' and the 'people,' but rather to focus on how their interplay conditioned the institutional context. It was therefore

critical for this study that I separated the ‘parts’ and the ‘people’ for analytical purposes using the analytical dualism approach, which I discuss next.

2.3.4 Analytical Dualism

‘Analytical dualism’ is a process of separating structure, culture, and agency to examine their interplay for analytical purposes to understand which aspect had the most influence at a particular time and in a specific context (Archer, 1995).

Archer’s (1995) conception of analytical dualism is based on two premises. “Firstly, it depends upon an ontological view of the social world as stratified, such that the emergent properties of structures and agents are irreducible to one another, meaning that in principle they are analytically separable”. Secondly, analytical dualism asserts that “structures and agents are also temporally distinguishable, and this can be used methodologically to examine the interplay between them and thus explain changes in both over time” (p. 66).

To theorise in an open system, it is necessary to differentiate the properties of structures from those of people (Archer, 1995). The separation of structure and agency is necessary to “identify the emergent structure(s); to differentiate between their causal powers and the intervening influences of people due to their quite different causal powers as human beings; and to explain any outcome at all, which in an open system always entails an interplay between the two” (Archer, 1995, p. 70). According to Sayer (1992), as cited by Danermark et al. (2002), social structures must be kept apart from the people who are at a given point in time occupying different positions and specific practices.

As a researcher, I was careful not to conflate structures and the people occupying positions within those structures. In this study, I examined structures separately from culture and the agents. Analysing the data using ‘analytical dualism’ was helpful as it enabled me to identify the structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms in the realm of the Real and how their interplay had the most conditioning influence on the TUT

context. The term 'conditioning' refers to how the context creates constraints or enablements for the exercising of human agency (Case, 2015).

2.3.5 Morphogenetic Framework

According to Archer (1996), the morphogenetic / static framework provides a working methodology which is aligned with a social realist ontology. It allows for examining the interplay between structure, culture, and agency over time and can be used to analyse social change. The morphogenetic argument that "structure and agency operate over different time periods is based on two propositions: structure pre-dates the action(s) which transform it and structural elaboration post-dates those actions" (Archer, 1995, p. 76). Morphogenesis is sequential over time and has a character of a cycle that involves three phases, i.e., structural or cultural conditioning, socio-cultural interaction, and socio-cultural elaboration (Archer, 1995). Figure 1 below represents the basic morphogenetic / static cycle. This study only focuses on the first phase of the cycle, i.e., structural and cultural conditioning of the TUT context.

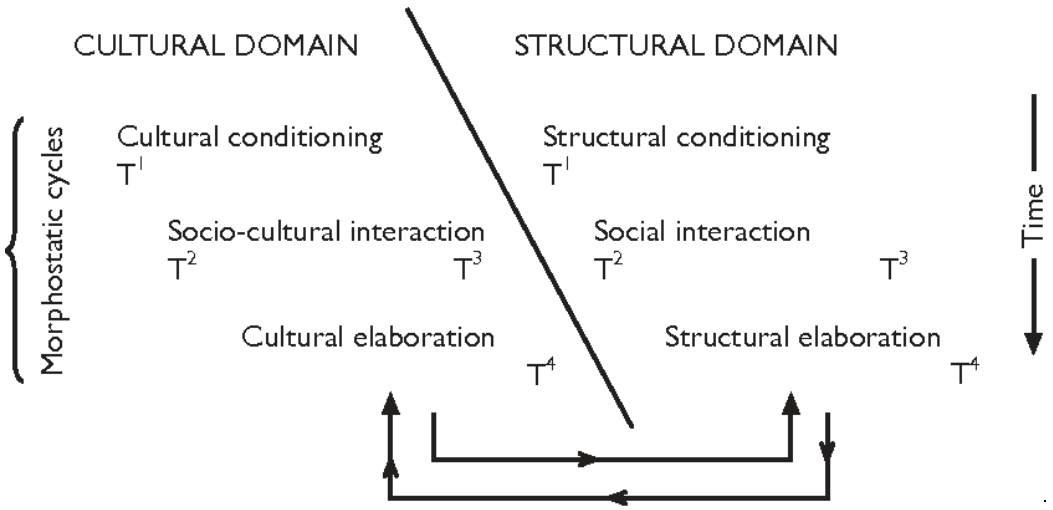

Figure 1: Structural and cultural configurations generating morphogenetic cycles in society (Archer, 1995, p. 323)

In the morphogenetic framework, T^1 represents the start of the morphogenetic cycle which refers to a specific historical point in time, which for my study is the period between 2005 to 2018. The timeframe for my analysis spans from the time after the institutional merger in 2005 up to 2018 when TUT reconceptualised its approach to QA. The experiences of the agents at T^1 are shaped mainly by the CEPs and the SEPs

that they were confronted with when they entered the context. At T^1, agents are confronted by a social world that has been conditioned by complex outcomes of previous interactions between agents and their structural contexts (Carter & New, 2004). This study is only located in T^1. I briefly discuss the application of the morphogenetic framework to this study in Chapter four on Research Design.

2.4 Limitations of Critical and Social Realism

A limitation that Bygstad and Munkvold (2011) and Fletcher (2017) identified with CR is the lack of an explicit methodology for data analysis when searching for generative mechanisms in the empirical data. This limitation is compounded by the acknowledgement that mechanisms are unobservable at the level of the Real. However, I have indicated in Chapter four, how I have excavated the Real to identify the mechanisms through retroduction and abduction.

Archer's (1995) morphogenetic framework is central to Archer's SR theory. The morphogenetic cycle enables the researcher to explain social change in terms of structure, agents, and the interaction between them (Newman, 2017). However, the morphogenetic framework in its entirety was not applicable to this study as I was not studying the evolution of quality structures over time (social change), but my aim was to identify causal mechanisms at the level of the Real that potentially conditioned the institutional context for the implementation of an integrated approach. Therefore, the morphogenetic cycle in its entirety had limited applicability to the aim of my study. However, my study is a snapshot of time in T^1 in the morphogenetic cycle. What was key to Archer's theory is the analytical separation of structure, culture, and agency (analytical dualism), which I applied in Chapters five and six.

Several scholars such as King (1999), Tsilipakos (2015), and Caetano (2015) critiqued various aspects on Archer's SR theory. King (1999) mainly focused on the ontological assumptions of Archer's Morphogenetic social theory by critiquing the contradictory nature of the " autonomous social structure" on which Archer has largely based her morphogenetic social theory (p. 200). Tsilipakos (2015) acknowledges the explanatory

capabilities of the SR theory, however, critiques how social theorising has been conducted within the SR theory and how some of the concepts and some of the theoretical procedures are hindering progress with social theorising. Caetano (2015) critiqued Archer's work by arguing that the limited emphasis on the influence of society on the agents weakened the applicability of the theory. I acknowledge the critiques and applied the SR theory in the best way possible to enable me to answer my research questions. Other scholars, such as Knio (2018), expand on and debate some of the earlier SR critiques offered by others, such as King (1999).

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for the significance of CR and SR as theoretical tools for guiding my explanations and analysis of the social context in which this study was conducted. CR provided the theoretical and philosophical concepts that I could use to conduct a causal analysis and provide deeper explanations and theorisation about the mechanisms at play in the TUT context. I discussed how CR stratified ontology and relativist epistemology would underpin my knowledge claims in this thesis and guided me in interpreting reality.

I have also discussed how SR concepts enabled me to conduct an analysis of the structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms and their interplay in the TUT context. I also applied SR concepts in Chapter six to assist me in moving beyond the empirical data to the domain of the Real to uncover the causal mechanisms enabling and constraining the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach. The SR concepts of analytical dualism were also relevant to provide analytical lenses and approaches for this study.

In the next chapter, I discuss quality, QA, and QE as the main concepts in this study. Regarding quality as a tangible concept, I map its evolution, its emergence in higher education, and the purposes, discourses, trends, and big debates underpinning its implementation in higher education.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMING OF THE STUDY: QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on providing clarification and understanding the concepts of quality, QA, and QE and the main ideas and assumptions underpinning them. I was mindful that it is not possible to cover everything about the phenomena or concepts that are studied (Maxwell, 2012).

I discuss the contested and multidimensional nature of 'quality' as the central concept for this study. I begin the chapter by charting the emergence of the concept of quality in the higher education context. I discuss the key ideas linked to the discourses of quality and argue why some of the ideas are not applicable to the higher education context. This discussion of the conceptualisations of quality was important as it helped me delineate the focus of this study. I explain the concepts of QA and QE and the relationship between the two. Furthermore, I draw on the ideas and discourses that underpinned these two concepts internationally and in South Africa. I conclude the chapter by briefly discussing a few models of quality in higher education to inform my understanding of the mechanisms conditioning transformative and comprehensive approaches to QA and QE as outlined by different authors.

3.2 Quality as a Central Concept

My discussion of the concepts of quality, QA, and QE is preceded by tracing the emergence of quality in the higher education context by identifying the discourses or ideologies that underpinned its emergence. This brief historical overview highlighted discourses and concepts associated with manufacturing or industrial contexts, and I argue why some of these are not applicable to the higher education context.

3.2.1 The Emergence of the Concept of Quality

Quality in higher education is a concept that originated from the industrial and commercial sectors (Elassy, 2015) with the aim of assisting organisations to implement good quality management practices and thus improve product quality. Likewise, QA also "evolved from the manufacturing sector" where the focus was on "minimizing variability and ensuring that manufactured products conform to specifications" (UNESCO, 2020, p. 9).

The roots of quality can be traced to the concept of Total Quality Control (TQC), which was developed in 1961 by Armand Feigenbaum, the founding chairperson of the International Academy for Quality (Mandru et al., 2011). TQC evolved in the 1980s into what is known as Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM as defined in the ISO 9000: 2000 standard refers to "a management approach of an organisation, centred on quality, based on the participation of all its members and aiming at long-term success through customer satisfaction and benefits to the members of the organisation and to the society" (Mandru et al., 2011, p. 121).

TQM evolved over the years and was further developed by the quality gurus of the 1980s whose contributions assisted in the progression of TQM (Mandru et al., 2011). These quality gurus included Deming, who was regarded as the "father of quality", Juran, Crosby, Feigenbaum, and Taguchi. Each of these contributed in various ways to the development of TQM.

In summary, Deming's contribution was that "quality should be checked at each step of a process not by inspecting the product or service once it is completed" (Mandru et al., 2011, p. 122). Juran was known for promoting the concept known as "Managing Business Process Quality", which was a technique for executing cross-functional quality improvement. Juran's contribution, which he became known for, was his "quality trilogy which implied planning, control and quality improvement". (p.122). Crosby was known for introducing the concept of "zero defects" and emphasising that "things should be done right the first time and every time" (p.123). Feigenbaum extended the concept of TQC to cover all aspects of a business. In addition,

Feigenbaum emphasised that TQC's underlying principle is to ensure that "control must start with identification of customer quality requirements and end only when the product has been placed in the hands of a customer who remained satisfied" (p. 124). Lastly, Taguchi was passionate about improving the quality of manufactured products. His main concern with quality was to eliminate the mass inspection of products by building in the quality of the products already at the design stage. The 1980s and 1990s discourses of quality reflected mainly accountability-related demands that were associated with that period (Elassy, 2015).

According to Green (1994), the emergence of quality in the education context started in 1964 when Great Britain introduced the Council of National and Academic Awards (CNAA) to guarantee standards and quality in the polytechnic sector. The TQM's "manufacturing concerns were adapted and applied in higher education quality which later were refuted by the academic scholars" (Tanweer & Qadri, 2016, p.8). The introduction of the concept of quality in the higher education system was done to enhance the quality of learning and teaching, attain stakeholder satisfaction, and improve the processes and competitiveness of higher education institutions (Prakash, 2018).

3.2.2 Quality as a Multidimensional Concept

Higher education institutions have been "implicitly concerned with quality since the founding of the medieval universities in Europe" (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994 cited in Nguyen, 2018, p. 65), and they exercised this concern through a collegiate system.

Quality is regarded as one of the intangible concepts in the higher education discourse (Vettori, 2018). It is elusive, relative, and not easy to describe (Harvey & Green, 1993; Green, 1994; Schindler et al., 2015; Elassy, 2015; Vettori, 2018). The relative nature of quality makes it difficult to define. Quality is seen to be "relative to the user of the term" and the circumstances in which the concept is used (Harvey & Green, 1993, p.10). Additionally, definitions of quality are contextual and operationalised through

multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic approaches (Vlasceanu et al., 2004 as cited in Prakash, 2018).

There are various stakeholders in higher education who have an interest in quality, including “students, employers, teaching and non-teaching staff, government and its funding agencies, accreditors, validators, auditors, and professional bodies” (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 10). Each of these stakeholders attaches different meanings to the concept of quality. For example, parents’ perception of quality relates to the investment and the future employment prospects of their children; students’ expectations are related to the educational process and future employability; teaching staff view quality as relating to the entire educational value; and employers perceive quality as related to the fitness of the graduates for the workplace (Prakash, 2018). Higher education institutions have the task of ensuring that they meet these diverse expectations of stakeholders. Quality in higher education can therefore be conceptualised using different perspectives (Ansah, 2016), which are underpinned by diverse discourses. Due to the contextual factors and the perspectives of different stakeholders, there is no single construct of quality that is fit for all sectors and situations (Ansah, 2016).

Much of the literature on quality indicates that quality is a contested concept and some of these contested meanings reveal the tensions in how quality is implemented and understood by various stakeholders in higher education. I discuss these tensions in Chapter five when I discuss the debates relating to quality in higher education. In my attempt to define the quality concepts, I have considered both the national and international perspectives to ensure that my explanations are not limited to the South African context, as our country is part of the global economy, and this study has global relevance. In this regard, I have used Harvey and Green’s (1993) seminal work on defining quality to ground my understanding of the concept, especially in the higher education context. I have also drawn on the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa (CHE, 2001) conceptions of quality. As this study is located in the post-apartheid South African context, it is imperative that quality is understood from a social justice and transformation perspective, which encompasses redress, equity, and access (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007). My conceptual framing for this study is therefore

underpinned by these important ideologies. I discuss the South African transformation context in Chapter 5.

The most-cited conceptualisations of quality are those provided by Harvey and Green (1993), who suggest five discrete but interrelated conceptions of quality: “quality as exceptional, quality as perfection or consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation” (p.11). I briefly discuss these conceptualisations below.

3.2.2.1 Quality as Exceptional

Quality as exceptional focuses on three conceptions. The first being quality as distinctiveness; the second quality as excellence, and the third, quality as passing minimum standards. Quality as distinctive is regarded as something special, exclusive, and elitist. Unfortunately, this view of quality does not resonate with higher education, as it does not offer, “a definable means of determining quality” (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 11). Quality as excellence is linked to high standards and “zero defects” (ibid). Excellence is linked to the discourses of inputs, outputs, and institutional reputation. Quality of output is therefore understood to be a function of the quality of the inputs (Harvey & Green, 1993). This assumption implies that a university must recruit the right quality of students (input) and provide them with a good quality environment for their development (input) to help them attain quality graduate attributes (output). However, the concern for quality should not only be about the quality of inputs or outputs but should also focus on the quality of the processes of teaching and learning.

The third notion of quality as exceptional understands quality as fulfilling the minimum standards set by the monitoring body. This could be called “conformance to standards” (Harvey & Green, 1993). This conception of quality assumes that improvement of quality will happen if standards are raised. Thus, assessing quality in terms of standards focuses on the quality of the product or service in terms of how it conforms to the specification. “In higher education and quality assurance, ‘standard’ denotes a principle (or measure) to which one conforms (or should conform), and by which one’s quality (or fitness) is judged” (UNESCO, 2020, p. 10). Standards can either be expressed quantitatively or qualitatively (ibid).

Green (1994) explains that the origins of the notion of quality as standards can be traced to the notions of quality control in the manufacturing industry. Even though Green (1994) problematises the notion of standards for education, Cheng's (2012) study found that academics' interpretation of quality related mostly to academic standards (Elassy, 2015) which was indicative of the importance afforded to the concept of standards in higher education. However, the approach of quality as standards seems to imply that quality can easily be measured, which is not the case in the higher education context (ibid).

3.2.2.2 Quality as Perfection or Consistency

Quality as perfection or consistency is linked to the discourses of "zero defects and getting things right the first time" (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 15). This notion sees quality as conforming to predefined and measurable specifications. The zero defects concept focuses on ensuring that there are no faults, and that everything is done consistently every time. The discourses of zero defects and consistency are not suitable for an educational context, where the focus is on the student's development and preparation for the future. These are discourses that are more suitable for an industrial or manufacturing setting. The student is not a product that can be controlled in a "closed system" and be moulded according to some stated specifications in trying to avoid defects.

3.2.2.3 Quality as Fitness for purpose

Fitness for purpose is a commonly adopted definition by policymakers in higher education globally (Green, 1994) and in South Africa. Cheng (2017) states that the most widely adopted approach to the evaluation of quality in higher education uses the fitness for purpose approach. Fitness for purpose views the meaning of quality "in relation to the purpose of a product or service" (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 16). This meaning moves away from the notions attached to quality as "perfection, consistency or excellence". Quality as fitness for purpose brings together the multiple dimensions to understanding quality, including (i) quality as meeting the customer specifications or requirements, (ii) quality as meeting the organisational mission and objectives, (iii) quality as meeting customer satisfaction (ibid).

Many authors, including Komotar (2020), have problematised the notion of students as customers, consumers, or clients, and they argue that students are participants and education should not be seen as a service offered to a customer, but rather as an ongoing process of transforming participants (p.81). This view resonates with the understanding of the purposes of higher education being to create opportunities for students to be active participants in their acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies that prepare them for the future.

Contextualising fitness for purpose for an educational setting means that quality is judged in terms of checking if the institution is achieving its purposes as stated in its mission and how effective and efficient an institution is in meeting its own goals and objectives (Harvey & Green, 1993). However, Cheng (2017) argues against solely focusing on the institutional mission as it "does not evaluate the quality of educational processes and its outcomes, but rather strengthens the external influences on the performance of the institution" (p. 154). Green (1994) held a different view, namely that fitness for purpose can be developmental and it can also be used to analyse quality at various levels in the institution. Fitness for purpose can be used as lenses to analyse the quality of institutional offerings from module level, programme level, up to institutional level.

As fitness for purpose is a widely adopted definition of quality in higher education, it is important that the concept of 'purpose' be thoroughly understood within the context of higher education to gain an understanding of what purpose, and whose purpose is being evaluated. A view advanced by Cheng (2017) is that the purpose entails meeting the needs of students and employers. This becomes a difficult objective to reach as the needs of stakeholders can be diverse. She also argues that the government's political ambitions are changing institutions towards a more competitive and economical dimension, including steering institutions towards complying with predetermined performance indicators. Higher education institutions should be cautious of putting too much emphasis on efficiency of the management processes to the detriment of the quality of educational processes. The overemphasis on quality for management purposes could result in insecurities and distrust of quality processes by academics (Cheng, 2017). The key to achieving quality in higher education is to rebuild

the trust of academics (ibid). There was an attempt in the South African national quality context to introduce the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP), which was more focused on the enhancement of learning and teaching and enhancing academics as teachers. However, the QEP ended. I return to the QEP discussion in Section 5.4.

3.2.2.4 Quality as Value for Money

Value for money focuses on accountability and efficiency in higher education. Public institutions are accountable to their funders and stakeholders. In the South African context, the CHE's understanding of quality as value for money focuses on the "effectiveness and efficiency in relation to a range of parameters" (CHE, 2021a, p. 30). The problem with efficiency (saving money and time) may be at the expense of effectiveness. Harvey and Green (1993) describe the notion of effectiveness in terms of control mechanisms and quantifiable outcomes in a form of performance indicators. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in South Africa has developed performance indicators to monitor institutional and programme efficiency and effectiveness, such as success rates, graduation rates, throughput rates, and other indicators. UNESCO (2020) provides the following benefits of performance indicators in higher education: "check accountability concerns, compare performances of similar institutions, provide a range of information about performance to steer self-improvement of institutions and effective management strategies, provide simple public information about the health of the institution in several areas of functioning and they can help shape policy formulations" (p. 33).

Saunders (2010 and 2011), cited by Cheng (2017), links the notion of quality as value for money to the "neoliberal ideology" which argues that "education should contribute to a country's industrial development" (p. 155). Neoliberalism redefines individuals as 'consumers' who use a cost-benefit analysis to make all their decisions (ibid). I discuss neoliberalism in Chapter 5. People who gain access to higher education, see it as an investment and an "opportunity to escape poverty" (Fomunyam, 2018, p. 46). Therefore, for higher education institutions to fulfil their social roles, they are expected to provide valuable and affordable education (Prakash, 2018) and are required to ensure effective and efficient teaching and learning and research (Fomunyam, 2018).

3.2.2.5 Quality as Transformation

Harvey and Green (1993) describe a transformative view of quality as being embedded in the understanding of quality as "qualitative change" while Harvey (2007) emphasises the improvement of the learning process. The understanding of quality as transformation "presupposes a fundamental purpose of higher education, namely, enhancing and empowering students and thereby transforming their life experiences" (Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 25). Harvey and Green's (1993) conception aligns with the CHE's (2001) definition where quality as transformation is defined as the "sense of developing the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth" (p.9). However, the CHE definition goes beyond Harvey and Green's individual transformation to also focus on the transformation of society. In the South African context, the idea of transformation is used to encompass the social, political, and economic transformation of South Africa. I elaborate more on this discussion in Section 5.4.

A transformative view encompasses two conceptions of quality (i) quality as enhancing the student, and (ii) quality as empowering the student. In the first view of transformative, quality is measured in terms of how the students' educational experience enhances their knowledge, abilities, and skills (Harvey & Green, 1993). The second view focuses on "giving power to participants to influence their own transformation" (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 25; Harvey & Knight, 1996). This can be done through (i) involving participants in decisions that influence their transformation, where the participant takes ownership of their learning process, and (ii) providing opportunities for self-empowerment.

The discourse of quality as transformation, enables higher education institutions to focus their attention on empowering students to be reflective learners. This understanding resonates with Campbell and Rozsnyai (2002), whose conception of quality as transformation places the focus on the empowerment of students with specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will enable them to contribute to the knowledge society. Transformation in education should not only be about adding to

the students' knowledge or skills and abilities but should be about enabling the "evolution of the way students approach the acquisition of knowledge and skills and relate them to a wider context" (Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 22). This view highlights the importance of understanding quality as offering learning that is fit for purpose and that "transforms the conceptual ability and self-awareness of the student" (ibid, p. 23). With this understanding of quality, education should therefore not be regarded as a service for a 'customer' but rather as "an ongoing process of transformation of the participant" (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 24).

There are various ways that higher education institutions can empower their students, such as involving them in student feedback, guaranteeing minimum standards of provision, and involving them in the monitoring of the quality of provision, giving students control over their learning and developing the critical abilities of students (Harvey & Green, 1993). Quality as transformation provides the kind of culture that could lead to the agency that is needed in higher education. These are ways in which cultural ideas can enable the agency of academics and students.

Context is very important when defining quality in higher education. There are various important contextual factors that higher education institutions should consider when conceptualising how to define quality. For example, "the institutional setting, autonomy of the institution, mission and vision, cultural aspects, the policies and state regulations, standards and guidelines, globalisation, and stakeholder needs" (Niedermeier, 2017, p. 30).

In the South African higher education context, quality is defined by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) as "interrelated demonstration of fitness of and for purpose, value for money, and contribution to social transformation, in line with the intent and values of the constitution of the Republic of South Africa" (CHE, 2014, p. 80). I decided to adopt the CHE's conceptualisation of quality for my study, as it is the apex regulatory body for quality matters in the South African higher education context.

The CHE (2001) asserts that the quality of teaching, learning, research, and community engagement is determined by the ability of the providers to offer learning

programmes that are responsive to the needs of the students and provide qualifications that address the knowledge, skills, and needs of the country. This understanding is encompassed by the fitness of purpose framework that is based on national goals and priorities. The CHE's definition of quality emerged because of South African history and the context of a fragmented and unequal past, and the inequities of the apartheid regime. Transformation of the higher education landscape was central to CHE's approach to QA in the national sector.

I have based conceptualisations of quality for this study on the following discourses: 'quality as fitness for and of purpose, value for money and as transformation'. See Figure 2 below, where I have summarised the key ideas underpinning conceptualisations of quality for this study. I have noted that some of the ideas could be contradictory or compatible, for example, transformation and value for money may be contradictory.

Figure 2: Summary of the ideas underpinning the conceptualisations of quality based on the literature and the CHE (2001) (Author's own work)

This study is underpinned by a transformative discourse of quality as it is linked to the ideas of 'qualitative change' and of quality as 'enhancing and empowering'. Drawing from the discourses of transformation in higher education, I argue that quality for TUT should not solely focus on administrative bureaucracy, but it should be about enhancing student learning, transformation, and taking into account the institution's history and context. The challenge for higher education institutions is how to practically and conceptually move away from the dominant discourses of quality as compliance and accountability to embracing the transformative notion of quality. I continue this discussion in Section 3.6.1 below where I discuss the transformative model of quality as developed by Harvey and Knight (1996).

I now move to discuss how quality has been operationalised through QA and QE as key overarching concepts for this study.

3.3 Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement

Analysing and understanding key concepts in a study is important to inform the operationalisation of concepts and for researchers to explain what could result from implementing a particular concept (Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013). Thus, I analyse QA and QE as key concepts that have operationalised the central concept of quality. I discuss these concepts to uncover the cultural ideas associated with QA and QE and to gain an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms conditioning QA and QE. QA and QE should be conceptually and practically distinct, and the purposes of each must be clearly understood by institutions in order to protect the integrity of the processes (Harvey & Williams, 2010). Williams (2016) argues that QA and QE are regarded as 'umbrella terms' for a variety of quality-related activities.

3.3.1 Quality Assurance (QA)

QA as one of the regulatory structures for higher education "originated in the late 19th century when the first accreditation organisations emerged in the United States" (Jarvis, 2014, p. 157). Since higher education was made up of small, relatively

homogeneous institutions that did not require formal management, QA was a minor concern. (Ansah, 2016). However, the changing dynamics of contemporary higher education changed the status quo. Similar to the concept of quality, there is no universally accepted construct or practice of QA in higher education due to the multiple meanings and terminologies that have been used to operationalise QA across different countries (Ansah, 2016) and probably by institutions in the same country. The implementation of QA is different across contexts, and it involves various practices and events (Swanzy & Potts, 2017). The ideas linked to QA include “quality control, quality management, quality audit, accreditation, validation, peer review, quality assessment, and quality measurement” (Ansah, 2016, p. 138). In some instances, these ideas (or terminologies) are even used interchangeably depending on the educational cultures of the different institutions. Williams (2016) indicates that many institutions appear to understand QA and accountability as the same thing.

QA is defined as “the collections of policies, procedures, systems, and practices internal or external to the organisation designed to achieve, maintain, and enhance quality” (Schindler et al., 2015). Harvey and Green (1993) explain that QA should not only be about specifications or standards but should be understood as encompassing “mechanisms, procedures, and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality is achieved” (p. 19). The implied assumption of QA is that if mechanisms are in place, quality can be assured. Igbape and Idogho (2014) advance the understanding of QA as a process of systematically reviewing educational programmes with the aim of maintaining acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure.

In this study, my conceptualisation of QA draws from the CHE (2004) definition, which defines QA as “processes of ensuring that institutional arrangements for meeting specified quality standards or requirements of education provision are effective” (CHE, 2004, p.23). However, in a later publication, the CHE focused beyond the processes to include “evaluating and providing evidence of the extent to which institutions have put in place the measures needed to achieve the goals and purposes they have identified for themselves and the programmes that are able to deliver a set of learning experiences which will support students in attaining the qualifications to which they

lead" (CHE, 2021a, p. 21). The CHE definition appears to have been revised to emphasise accountability for the quality of learning and student experiences by institutions.

The consolidation of the different ideas as presented in the literature indicate QA as being underpinned by discourses of accountability and compliance. However, Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2004) describe QA as having a dual focus on accountability and improvement. They argue that if the QA systems focus on improvement and address it properly, accountability will result. It is important to focus attention on improving the institutional processes, to improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching (Elassy, 2015). For a university to attend to both accountability and improvement aspects, there is a need for an evidence-based approach to quality improvement (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2004).

There has been an increase in the importance of an accountability discourse in higher education due to concerns such as "increasing fees, disappointing retention and graduation rates, the poor knowledge base of students, lack of employability skills, and deteriorating social values" (Panagiotakopoulos, 2012, cited by Prakash, 2018, p. 740). The positive aspect of accountability is that it is seen to be promoting transparency and adherence to regulations by some higher education institutions. Institutional leadership plays a very important role in driving QA in higher education (Prakash, 2018).

3.3.2 The conflation of Quality with Quality Assurance

Mkhize and Cassimjee (2013) argue that the emphasis on quality as a concept and how it has been used in higher education has traditionally placed emphasis on QA. It is understandable that there would be a conflation between the concepts of quality and QA, as the literature indicates quality to be a difficult and abstract concept to understand. This conflation of quality with QA has resulted in academics perceiving quality to be mostly about compliance with bureaucratic processes. I am hoping that

the findings of this study will assist academics in gaining a better understanding of quality and QA and the value QA could potentially bring to learning and teaching processes.

3.3.3 Purposes of Quality Assurance

There are various purposes associated with external QA including “accountability, control, compliance, and improvement”. I provide an overview of these purposes informed by Harvey (2007). My discussion attempts to clarify how QA can be beneficial for staff, students, and universities.

Accountability is reported to be the dominant rationale linked to the introduction of quality evaluations in higher education (Harvey 2007). Traditionally, QA has been closely linked to accountability, but Mkhize and Cassimjee (2013) argue that for higher education to benefit from the implementation of QA processes, the emphasis should not only be on compliance but also on the enhancement of quality. There are various discourses linked to the concept of accountability in higher education. There are discourses associated with accounting for the use of public resources, competition for public funding, value for money, and generation of public information for the funders and the public (Harvey, 2007). Another set of discourses focuses on the protection of students against low quality provisioning which brings accountability closer to the quality of the learning processes. This discourse is related to the focus of this study. Harvey (2007) posits that this understanding of accountability is consistent with a fitness for purpose definition of quality and the understanding of quality as transformation.

Control is associated with the discourses of the integrity of the higher education sector and the ensuring of the status and standing and legitimacy of higher education (Harvey, 2007, p. 4). These controls are discharged through restrictions placed to limit market expansion by using financial controls, accreditation, and increasing quality monitoring and external reviews (ibid).

Compliance is associated with the ideas and adoption of procedures, practices, and policies of the government to ensure “proper conduct of the sector and ensure its quality” (Harvey, 2007, p. 4). The compliance expectations by the government also focus on the achievement of government policy objectives (ibid). Compliance needs to be understood holistically from financial matters, and statistical reporting to government policy objectives. I discuss the South African democratic government’s policy objectives in Chapter five.

Lastly, the improvement aspect of QA is associated with the ideas of change and enhancement. However, improvement usually features as a secondary aspect of QA at the initial stages. Only when a QA system matures in its second or third phases, is there attention paid to improvement. The improvement function of QA procedures encourages institutions to reflect upon their practices, “with a view to enabling a process of continuous improvement of the learning process and the range of outcomes” (Harvey, 2007, p. 5). For improvements to happen there has to be some kind of evaluation that takes place in order to be aware of the current status of quality (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2004). It is also necessary for the evaluation to be followed up by activities that modify existing practices, and this entails follow-up on the changes to check if the expected improvements have taken place (ibid).

From the discussion above, QA purposes appear to lean more towards accountability and compliance-oriented and are less about improvement. I test this assertion in Chapter six, where I discuss my empirical data and identify the discourses underpinning the understanding of QA by my research participants.

3.3.4 Retrospective and Prospective Quality Assurance

QA can be viewed as either retrospective or prospective (Biggs, 2001). Retrospective QA entails an understanding of quality as accountability and conforming to external standards while prospective QA is forward-looking and focuses on quality as fitness for purpose of an institution and transformation, which is about enhancing the quality of learning and teaching (Biggs, 2001). Retrospective QA is seen to be more about providing summative judgements against external standards and is seen to be pushing

a managerial agenda with processes that are perceived to be bureaucratic instead of an academic agenda (Biggs, 2001).

Prospective QA is concerned with the continuous upgrading and improvement of learning and teaching through QE and on how well an institution is achieving its mission (ibid). Biggs (2001) argues for the value of prospective QA towards the continuous improvement of learning and teaching in universities. He suggests that prospective QA contributes to teachers teaching better, and for institutions to be more reflective of their practices and argues for the removal of institutional factors or structures that are “deleterious to learning and good teaching” (p. 236). This focus relates to my study as I aimed to identify mechanisms that seem to enable or constrain an integrated approach to quality at my institution. Based on my preliminary analysis of the institutional context, it would seem that TUT is gradually transitioning from a retrospective QA system to a more prospective QA system that focuses on ensuring continuous improvement of teaching and learning through quality enhancement.

It is thus important that an institution’s QA system not only concerns itself with accountability and managerial priorities but should also aim to balance managerial and academic priorities where institutional policies, processes, and structures are designed to support the continuous enhancement of quality learning and teaching. I draw on these arguments later in Chapter seven. The identification of these discourses has informed and framed my study. In addition, QA as prospective is more aligned with the attributes and purposes of QE, which acknowledges the importance of a transformative approach to learning and teaching and enabling academics to teach better and to trust the QA systems.

3.3.5 External and Internal Quality Assurance

Internal quality assurance (IQA) and external quality assurance (EQA) are complementary concepts with reciprocal accountability and improvement roles (Ansah, 2016). IQA consists of internal policies and processes aimed at improving the quality of provisioning (Ayoo et al., 2021). As a result, IQA promotes continuous improvement, while EQA fulfils the accountability role, leading to tensions that

negatively impact implementation (Ansah, 2016). The EQA is seen more playing a role of complementing the IQA processes by providing frameworks to guide the development of structures in higher education institutions (ibid). EQA examines the effectiveness of operations, processes, and systems for IQA (Ayoo et al., 2021). In the South African context, EQA is mainly the responsibility of the Council on Higher Education and other external regulatory structures such as professional councils, while IQA remains the responsibility of higher education institutions. This study mainly focuses on the IQA but also considers how the EQA conditions the institutional QA context.

3.3.6 Quality Enhancement (QE)

QE is explained as having two strands: first is the "enhancement of individual learners and improvement of learners' attributes, knowledge, ability, skills, and potential" (Harvey, 2004 as cited in Williams, 2016, p. 98). Second is the improvement of the quality of an institution or programme. Though the concepts of improvement and enhancement are used interchangeably, they actually have different meanings. "Improvement is often used to refer to a process of bringing an activity up to standard, whereas enhancement is about raising to a higher degree, intensifying or magnifying it" (Williams, 2016, p. 98).

The CHE's (2014) definition attempts to incorporate the two strands of QE by emphasising "taking deliberate steps at the institutional level, to bring about the improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students" (CHE, 2014, p.14). QE is also about extending the focus to "the development and implementation of initiatives by an institution to raise its standards and the quality of its provisioning beyond the threshold standards and benchmarks" (CHE, 2021a, p. 22). Harvey and Green (1993) link QE to the improvements in course design and content and the validation processes that are involved. Mkhize and Cassimjee's (2013) focus for QE is on the dissemination of good practices.

QE is associated more closely with the discourses of transformative change, improvement of quality, empowerment of students and academics, and value add.

Academics are more likely to naturally and comfortably identify with QE as it is integral to their teaching, and not merely a bureaucratic process to which they must adhere (Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013). QE is regarded as "less bounded" in comparison to QA, which provides more space for freedom for academics to continuously improve teaching and learning practices on their own accord. QE has the potential to broaden the quality agenda towards being more "critically self-reflective" (Filippakou & Tapper, 2008 cited in Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013). The discourses attached to QE represent cultural items that positively condition the environment that academics operate in and thereby have the potential to promote the ownership and trust of QA systems by academics. In summary, I would argue that an ideal QA system of a university should be underpinned by a cultural system that is strongly linked to discourses of transformative change.

3.4 Relationship between Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement

While QE focuses on deliberate, continuous, systematic, and measurable improvements, QA processes ensure that the required standards are met (CHE, 2014). Of importance is that QA should not be understood as opposing QE or vice versa, but the two processes should be understood as complementary and coexisting processes (ibid). Elassy (2015) provides a summary of the relationship between QA and QE as outlined in Table 2 below. The summary shows how the cultural ideas underpinning QA and QE are more complementary than contradictory even though they each serve two different purposes.

Quality Assurance (QA)	Quality Enhancement (QE)
A summative process	A formative process
Meets external standards	Meets internal standards
Tends to be associated more with assessment and accountability	Tends to be associated more with improvement and development
A quantitative performance	A qualitative performance
Less freedom (focuses on rules)	More freedom (uses flexible and negotiated ways)
Focuses on the past	Focuses on the present and the future

Given insufficient weight to teaching and learning processes	Gives considerable weight to teaching and learning processes
Gives greater space for administrators	Gives greater space for academics
Moves from top to lower levels	Moves from lower levels to the top

Table 2: Relationship between the cultural ideas for QA and QE (Elassy, 2015, p.257)

Based on Table 2 above, QA is understood to be a top-down process "characterised by inflexibility and based upon quantitative measurements", whereas enhancement is understood as a bottom- up, "negotiated process, based on qualitative judgement and engagement with academics" (Williams, 2016, p. 99). It is clear from the arguments above that QA processes on their own are not adequate; they should be complemented by QE processes (ibid). QA and QE processes are part of a continuum, where enhancement is dependent on QA processes (Elassy, 2015). This means that QA processes must produce meaningful QA data to inform QE (Williams, 2016). QA and QE should be considered as concepts that are on a continuum as in Figure 3 below, and institutions need to recognise the need for having both as an ongoing process (Elassy, 2015, p. 251).

Figure 3: The continuum of Quality (QA and QE) (Elassy, 2015, p. 256)

However, an important element of the process is to conduct follow-up processes after an evaluation was conducted to check that the improvements suggested were put in place (Williams, 2016). QA and QE can also be viewed as part of the same cycle where each part informs the next (Williams, 2016). The importance of the conditions and context of academics' work should be given more consideration by institutions and external quality bodies if academics are to continue playing a key role in efforts to improve the quality of learning and teaching. Otherwise, quality monitoring could be

associated with a “beast-like” presence that academics must “feed” with “ritualistic practices” to meet accountability requirements (Newton, 2000).

The literature on quality has pointed to the kind of culture related to QA and QE and the kind of cultural system that is most likely to result in agents doing the activities in ways that may impact on learning and teaching in positive ways.

3.5 Attributes and Antecedents of Quality Enhancement

Antecedents entail what should precede for a particular concept to occur (Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013). In Section 3.3, I discussed in detail ideas and purposes linked to QE and QA. In this section, I outline a few of the antecedents linked to QE. These antecedents to QE influenced my recommendations for an integrated QA and enhancement approach at TUT in addressing its contextual imperatives for improving the quality of learning and teaching (see Section 7.2 for mechanisms that need to be in place to enable the implementation of an integrated approach for TUT).

Mkhize and Cassimjee (2013) discuss the antecedents of QE as entailing the following:

- For QE to happen in an institution, it should form part of an institutional mission (ibid). However, the challenge lies in the institutionalisation of QE. Institutions should define conventions for QE and should put structures in place to drive the practices.
- QE needs a more proactive model of quality than just the one where current practices are measured and evaluated (Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013). Harvey and Knight (1996) argue for a quality model that enables a culture of continuous quality improvement (p. 118).
- Institutional policies and procedures should aim to promote and enhance the learning experiences and attainment of learning outcomes by students and contribute to ensuring a responsive curriculum.
- Effective top-level leadership and commitment of all staff is required.

- QE requires continuing professional development of academic staff to ensure their professionalisation; staff appraisal system, and lastly an environment where innovation and change management is valued. (Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013).

3.6 Quality Models in Higher Education

In accordance with the literature on QA in higher education, there has been an emergence of several quality models and frameworks that were developed for various geographical areas at different times (Nguyen, 2018). From the various models discussed in the literature, I have selected four models to analyse and identify the different dimensions and perspectives for educational quality in higher education. In addition, I have analysed these models to inform my understanding of the mechanisms conditioning the transformative and comprehensive approaches to education quality as outlined by the different authors. I refer to the models again in Chapter six.

I have chosen models proposed by Harvey and Knight (1996), Boyle and Bowden (1997), Gosling and D'Andrea (2001), and Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002, 2004, 2007), as outlined in Figure 4 below. I briefly discuss the four models in order of their occurrence in higher education.

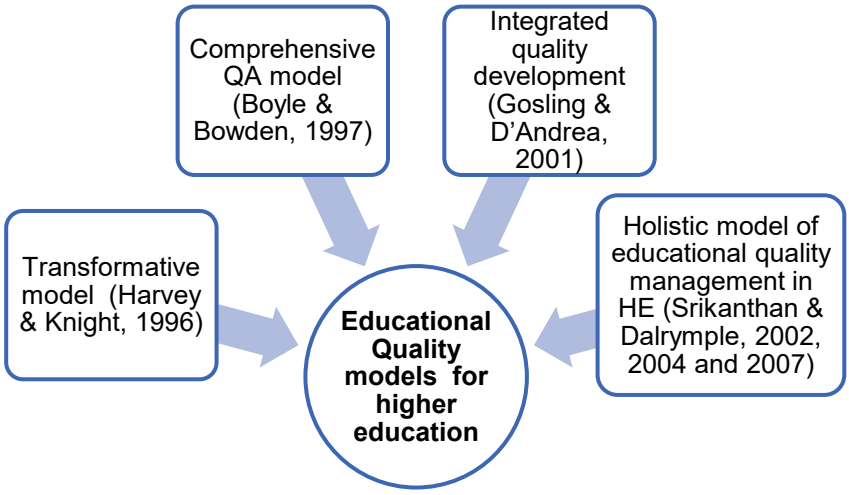

Figure 4: Overview of the selected educational quality models analysed (Author's own work)

The transformative model of Harvey and Knight (1996), the comprehensive educational QA model of Boyle and Bowden (1997) and the integrated quality development model proposed by Gosling and D'Andrea (2001) resonate with the goal of this study. The holistic model proposed by Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002, 2004, 2007) is also relevant to the purpose of this study as they argue for a more synergistic approach to educational quality. According to Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2004), a quality model should support a transformative approach to bring about the necessary change to improve teaching and learning and student empowerment. I have therefore used some of the elements of these models and my findings to inform my recommendations for TUT which I discuss in Chapter seven.

3.6.1 The Transformative Model

Harvey and Knight (1996) developed a quality model that enables higher education to refocus its attention and emphasis from external quality monitoring to internal actions that are effective and drive continuous quality improvement. However, they also argue for the importance of ensuring accountability through external audits conducted for quality monitoring purposes. To enable continuous quality improvement, they argue for an approach that accommodates a 'bottom-up' approach and a 'top-down' approach, where the 'bottom-up' approach is supported and encourages balancing with an effective external monitoring process. Although the model was mainly developed for European countries (Nguyen, 2018), I find it applicable to the South African context, given the importance of transformation in higher education.

The model is firmly entrenched in the transformative view of quality that promotes the enhancement and empowerment of participants (Nguyen, 2018) while encouraging a culture of continuous quality improvement. I draw on these principles in Chapter six, where I discuss my findings. Transformation is argued to be the most appropriate learning-oriented approach to quality (Harvey & Knight, 1996).

3.6.2 Comprehensive Model for Educational Quality Assurance

Trends in higher education indicate that more institutions were adopting comprehensive approaches to QA (Boyle & Bowden, 1997) in the 1990s. Boyle and Bowden (1997) propose a model for educational QA in higher education which has integrated several elements of the education environment. At the heart of their model is the continual improvement of student learning as the primary goal, with accountability as a consequence. The model outlines the enabling conditions for QA to be effective, a set of fundamental principles and values underpin the model. The main emphasis of the model is the integration of the enabling conditions with values and principles (ibid). I draw on these proposed principles and conditions together with the findings of my study to answer the study's retroductive questions in Chapter seven and propose enabling conditions for an integrated approach to be possible at TUT.

Some of the enabling conditions as suggested by Boyle and Bowden (1997), to enable the development of effective QA approaches include the commitment of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and key leaders of the development of a culture of quality and allocation of adequate resources for QA and QE. In addition, the primary focus of QA must be informed by the institution's primary purpose, which is the provision of the highest possible quality educational programmes, support of people through training and development. Lastly, a critical expertise-based group must exist which is responsible for facilitating the development of QA (p. 118):

3.6.3 Quality Development Model

Gosling and D'Andrea (2001) are proponents of a quality development approach for higher education. They argue for an integrated educational development model, which brings teaching and learning enhancement together with the university's standards monitoring processes. They suggest that educational development in universities entails initiating and managing academic development, learning development and quality development. The linkages between the three areas are shown in Figure 5 below.

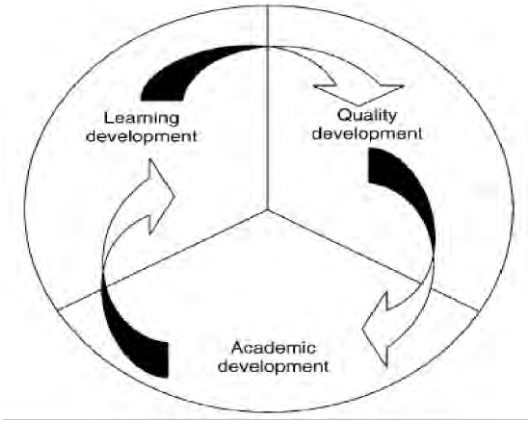

Figure 5: Educational development model (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001, p. 12)

Gosling and D'Andrea (2001) argue that the expertise that resides in the offices of learning development, academic development, and quality assurance can be linked and integrated to produce valuable results, ensuring that students are sufficiently supported to achieve the best results. The integrated educational development model advocates for a collegial working environment between academic development and quality assurance (ibid). The model moves away from emphasising documentation and instead emphasises the development of QA skills and practices that are perceived by staff to be of educational value to students. When QA and QE processes are part of an integrated approach within the university, it can lead to effective dissemination of educational policies and greater consistency in standards across the different areas of provision in the institution.

In summary, the model balances the need for accountability and enhancement of student learning by arguing for the need to integrate the functions offered by QA and academic development to create a 'quality loop'. The strength of the model is that it encourages academics to adopt reflective practice when evaluating their practices and identifying areas for improvement that can be addressed through the assistance of academic development.

3.6.4 A Holistic Model for Quality Management in Education

The holistic model is proposed by Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2002, 2004 and 2007). They propose a generic educational quality management model appropriate for a

university's educational processes. This model was developed based on synthesising several models of educational quality in universities. Due to the complex nature of higher education institutions, adopting a holistic approach for quality management of higher education addresses both the core functions of teaching and learning and service-related activities.

The key elements of the holistic model entail "institutional transformation for learning", "teaching for transformation", "assessment for transformation", "quality improvement", and "quality monitoring for learning" (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007, p.185). The model is underpinned by values of commitment, collaboration, and transformation. These values link with each other through a "causal loop" where an increase in commitment can inspire increased collaboration, which, in turn, could enable effective transformation leading to improved quality outcomes.

3.6.5 Synthesis of the Models

As discussed above, the models have provided various but complementary perspectives on educational quality. I have noted that the quality of educational provisioning cannot be achieved by focusing on one aspect of institutional operations, considering the complex nature of higher education institutions. To achieve the university's stated strategic goals, quality must be approached holistically and in an integrated way. Paying attention to one aspect (e.g., QA structures) may put the university at risk of not achieving quality in certain aspects and consequently compromising the envisaged outcomes. Institutional goals and priorities should guide the focus of the quality processes and activities. There appear to be no contradictions between the different models. Instead, the models complement each other in providing different lenses for understanding quality from different perspectives. The analysis of these models has enhanced my knowledge of the implications of having a holistic and integrated approach to quality in higher education.

All the models emphasise a comprehensive approach to educational quality in institutions. The transformative and collaborative approach to quality and enhancement of student learning are common features across all the models.

Furthermore, the transformation and continuous improvement of student learning is the primary focus of the models. The emphasis draws attention to the institutional arrangements that are necessary for the transformation of the institution and of the students.

I have also noted a few differences in the focus of the models. Boyle and Bowden's (1997) model focuses on enabling conditions that would make QA effective, together with values and principles to facilitate continuous improvement of student learning. Enabling conditions is an aspect not adequately addressed by the other models.

In addition to my findings, my recommendations for an integrated QA and QE approach draws from different aspects from each model. For example, the values, principles and enabling conditions, proposed by Boyle and Bowden (1997) contribute significantly to the mechanisms enabling an integrated QA and QE approach for TUT. In addition, in my recommendations, I also draw on the integrated development model by Gosling and D'Andrea (2001).

3.7 Conclusion

I have discussed the contested and multidimensional nature of 'quality' as the central concept for this study and argued why some concepts are relevant to higher education and why others are not. In summary, the ideas adopted to understand quality in this study entail "fitness for and of purpose, transformation and value for money".

Several authors describe the relationship between QA and QE as a continuous cycle whereby one component feeds into the next. Both QA and QE are complementary processes, each serving a distinct purpose. Elassy (2015) describes the relationship between QA and QE using a continuum to demonstrate the complementarity and importance of having both processes in a quality system. While QA is defined as a diagnostic process that generates data for QE, it is also concerned with compliance, regulatory processes, and standards. QE is focused on deliberate and ongoing processes of continuous improvement. The cultural mechanisms associated with QE

were complementary to the transformation discourse, which embraces transformative learning and teaching. As a result, I argue for an integrated QA and QE approach, which can be considered as a continuum in which QA serves both compliance and accountability functions while QE focuses on bringing transformative improvements to the University's learning and teaching function. QA alone is not sufficient to enable continuous improvement in higher education. Institutions need both QA and QE.

In the next chapter, I will describe the research design and methods I used to access the intransitive level to identify the mechanisms that tend to enable and constrain the integrated approach. I also discuss the theoretical justifications underpinning my research design.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the key concepts related to this study. This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical and analytical concepts that guided my research design and methodological decisions. As outlined in Chapter two, this study is underpinned by a realist ontology and a relativist epistemology. From a critical realist philosophical perspective, the purpose of scientific research is to gain knowledge of the underlying causal mechanisms that account for events at the level of the Actual and experiences at the level of the Empirical. In this study, I used some of SR's and CR's concepts to strengthen my methodological rigour in uncovering the causal mechanisms at the level of the Real that have the potential to influence the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT.

A carefully conceptualised research design is important for achieving theoretically sound and credible research findings. Although a research design is defined as "a plan to conduct research" by Creswell (2008, p. 5), Maxwell (2012) proposes a flexible, non-linear, and less prescriptive model for a qualitative realist study. The research design model I adopted is the 'interactive model' (explained below in Section 4.2).

In the sections that follow, I provide an outline of the research design. I discuss the theoretical justifications for adopting qualitative research and the case study strategy used to access knowledge in the transitive and intransitive domains (see Section 2.2.1 for an explanation of these domains). I describe how the various processes of the research unfolded from data generation to data analysis. I end the chapter by outlining how I attempted to ensure the rigour of this study (validity) and the ethical considerations that I considered to ensure that the findings and conclusions were as trustworthy and credible as possible.

To achieve the purpose of this study, namely, to identify the structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms in the intransitive domain that could enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated quality approach at TUT (events at the level of the Actual), I needed a logical and well-thought through research design.

4.2 Research Design

I used Maxwell's (A Realist Approach for Qualitative Research) interactive model for qualitative research to guide the research design and to ensure the alignment of my research goals, research questions, methods employed, and strategies to enhance the validity of the findings and conclusions. The model is inductive and allows for changing the research plan in response to the changing circumstances of the research (Maxwell, 2012). In addition, the model helped me to view the research process as an interactive process that is more appropriate for qualitative research (ibid).

The components of the model address: *research questions, goals, conceptual framework, methods, and validity* [emphasis added]. Maxwell (2012) advocates that none of the components are fixed or necessarily a starting point for the research as some of the essential aspects of the research process may be discovered or changed after the study has begun. The interactive model of research design is presented below in Figure 6.

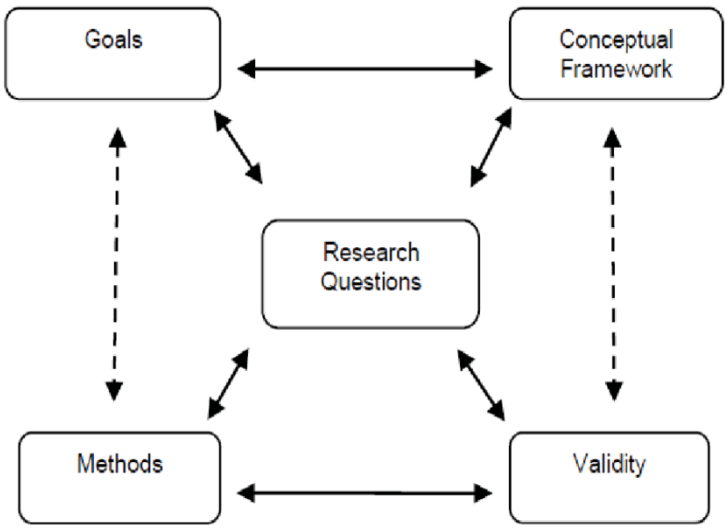

Figure 6: An Interactive Model for Research Design (Maxwell, 2012, p. 78)

In this chapter, I focus on the bottom triangle in Figure 6 above to explain how I tried to ensure alignment and integration between the research questions, methods (selection of participants, data generation and analysis), and validity considerations, that is, “the relationship of the conclusions and inferences drawn from the study to the actual phenomena studied” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 78). I outlined my research goals and objectives in Chapter one. All the components of the model are linked to the research questions. As the research unfolded, I was mindful of the iterative nature of the research process in ensuring that my research design did not compromise the integrity of the research findings.

4.2.1 Qualitative Study

A qualitative research approach was considered appropriate for this study and consistent with a CR ontology. Most qualitative studies attempt to understand the meanings and contextual influences impacting the phenomena or the individuals under study (Maxwell, 2012). Qualitative research is concerned with gaining insight, discovery, and interpretation (Noor, 2008). In CR terms, qualitative research allows the researcher to access the level of the Empirical to understand the experiences and observations of research participants.

In qualitative research, a relatively small number of situations is considered rather than generating data from large samples and aggregating data across situations. This approach allows the researcher to understand how events and meanings are influenced by the unique contexts under which they occur (Maxwell, 2012). Qualitative methods have the potential to allow themes to emerge during an investigation that could not have been predicted in advance (McEvoy & Richards, 2006). In addition, qualitative methods enable the researcher to study complex concepts and illuminate relationships that would not have been possible to analyse using predefined groupings or standardised quantitative variables (ibid). Danermark et al. (2002), sum up qualitative methods as being supported by the following main characteristics: “case study design, the study of the cases in their natural environment, orientation towards understanding, ‘thickness’, and theory-generating” (p. 158).

4.2.2 Research Questions

To analyse the TUT conditions, I needed to develop research questions that would enable me to generate data from the transitive domain and identify the causal mechanisms in the intransitive domain. I identified my main research question as "what mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement at the Tshwane University of Technology?" It was important that I examined the mechanisms at the level of the Real that might explain why the events appeared as they did and how these might have influenced the implementation of an integrated QA and enhancement approach for TUT. Data generated from interviews and document analysis enabled me to identify the some of the mechanisms that accounted for the events as discussed in Chapter six.

As previously noted in Chapter two, Archer's (1995) "analytical dualism" guided me as I analysed the interplay between structure, culture, and agency and how their emergent properties influenced the context. Using the research questions that I formulated, I was interested in identifying the structural, cultural, and agential conditions necessary to enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated quality approach. I formulated three sub-questions to help me identify the unobservable causal mechanisms at the level of the Real.

4.2.2.1 The three research sub-questions that guided my study were:

i. "What structural mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement at TUT?" I analysed a sample of documents and conducted interviews to identify the structures that guided and supported the implementation of QA both nationally and at TUT. In addition, from my empirical data, I investigated how the structures (structural emergent properties) enabled or constrained the implementation of QA and QE at TUT.

ii. “What cultural mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement at TUT?” I undertook a discourse analysis of my interview data and a sample of documents to better understand the beliefs, values, and theories underpinning the cultural system of QA at TUT.

iii. “What agential mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement at TUT?” In this regard, I aimed to access the understandings and experiences of agents in relation to QA and QE. I was also able to gain insight into the experiences and views of agents concerning enablements and constraints of internal and external conditions to the implementation of QA and QE. Following a realist epistemology, I was mindful that it is impossible to achieve an objective account of reality as human knowing is shaped by history and context and is therefore fallible.

iv. How does the interplay of structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement at TUT? By putting together the findings of all three sub-questions, I was able to access the level of the Real and identify the mechanisms that were more dominant or less dominant in terms of influencing the conditions in the intransitive domain.

4.2.3 Research Strategy: Case Study

Considering the exploratory nature of this study, my research goal, and the research questions, I required an approach that would enable me to conduct a deep and critical analysis of the TUT context. Therefore, I had to identify the most practical research strategy that would enable me to identify the causal mechanisms at the deeper intransitive level of reality. A case study is suitable for the type of research that either addresses “descriptive (what) or explanatory (how and why) questions with the aim of understanding events or people” (Yin, 2004, p. 2). In addition, I adopted a case study approach considering that a typical CR research design allows for a small number of cases where the researcher can examine the interplay between the layers of reality (Bygstad & Munkvold, 2011).

I found a case study approach applicable to this study as it allows researchers to study a phenomenon in its real-life setting by using multiple data sources (Yin, 1989). Using different forms of data generated from multiple sources enables the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of the social world (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2012).

Case studies are not meant to study the entire organisation, but an aspect or feature or a specific unit of analysis (Noor, 2008). In this regard, my unit of analysis was the institutional QA and QE events in the form of processes and practices, while TUT was my case. However, a critique of the case study method is that it limits the generalisability of a study. Considering this critique, qualitative research is not concerned with the generalisation of findings, but more with providing a rich explanation of the research phenomena and optimising understanding of the case, which is the objective of my study and also is consistent with a typical CR and SR study.

According to Stake's (1995) categorisation of case studies cited by Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2012), my case study takes more of an instrumental form. This is because my focus only concerns an aspect of the case, i.e. QA and QE processes and practices at TUT rather than the desire to capture the case in its entirety.

4.2.3.1 The Research Setting: The Tshwane University of Technology

The case study for this research is the Tshwane University of Technology. Case study, according to Yin (2004), "can refer either to single or multiple-case studies and the case can either be holistic or have embedded subcases within the overall holistic case" (p. 5.) In my study, analysing the institutional QA and QE processes and practices entailed the holistic case and the faculties from where I have generated the data, served as embedded subcases within the holistic case.

See Chapter one for an overview of the TUT context. Given the size of TUT and its geographical spread, I identified staff who worked in relevant QA and QE structures.

These included quality and academic development staff. I elected to limit my case to three faculties as the sub-cases for this study. I identified Heads of Department, Academic Section Heads, Lecturers and also members of executive and senior Management who could give me rich information regarding their experiences of QA and QE. The participants who I interviewed came from across the multi campuses of TUT. Figure 7 below provides a graphic overview of the three faculties and the TUT campuses where formal academic programmes are offered.

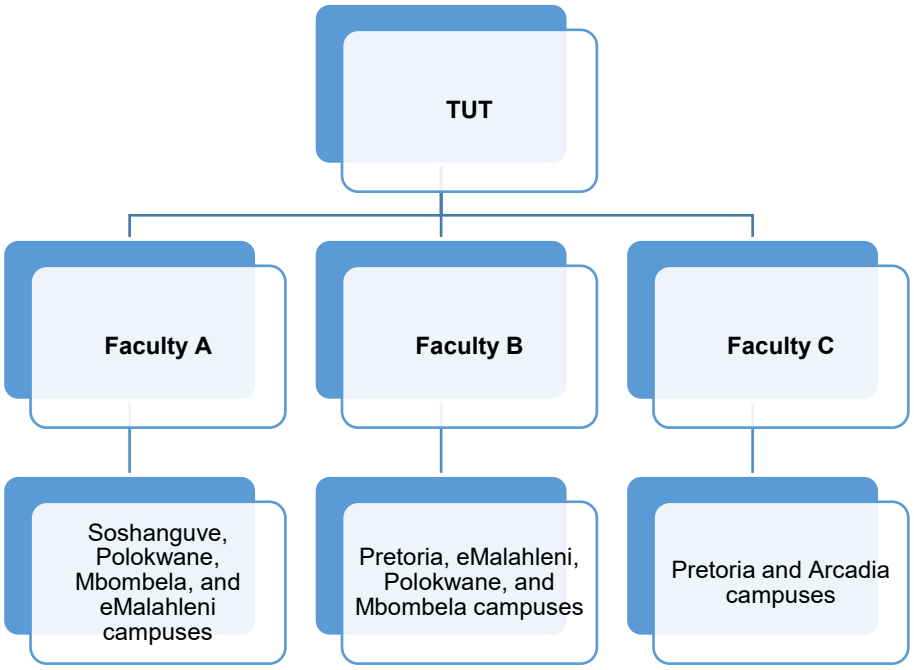

Figure 7: Selected subcases for my study

4.3 Research Methods

This section outlines the methodological approaches that I used to generate and analyse data to establish how the interplay between structure, culture, and agency at the Actual and Real levels potentially enabled or constrained the implementation of an integrated quality approach for TUT. My research methodology used multiple data sources and analytical strategies in an attempt to access the underlying causal mechanisms in the level of the Real.

4.3.1 Data generation

The data generation methods for this study entailed semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

4.3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

I used semi-structured interviews to elicit the perceptions and experiences of a sample of relevant agents. The interviews were guided by an interview protocol comprised of open-ended questions (see Appendix: A). I used the concepts of structure, culture, and agency to organise my interview questions. In total, I had 11 questions to guide my interviews. The interviews focused on how a sample of agents experienced QA in the institution and whether and how QA has contributed to the enhancement of the quality of teaching and student learning at TUT. Additionally, I asked participants to identify the enablements and constraints emanating from their respective roles. The interview data gave me insights into how agents in the institution responded to the structural and cultural conditions that confronted them since the inception of quality at TUT from 2005, after the merger. Given that my data generation phase took place during the global Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, I conducted most of my interviews via an online platform, Microsoft Teams. Only one interview was conducted face-to-face. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Reflecting on my interview protocol, I found it to be long, and some questions, though phrased differently, were repetitive. Some of the interview participants also indicated that some of their responses were applicable to other questions. However, it enabled me to generate rich data for analysis.

As I was working full-time and did not have time to conduct my own transcriptions, I sought two experienced transcribers to transcribe my interviews. The transcribers signed a confidentiality declaration to protect my research data (see Appendix B). I kept a reflective journal to record my observations and perceptions of every interview. In the journal, I noted the issues emerging from the interviews that I needed to consider

when analysing the data. Given the complex multi-campus nature of TUT, I tried to identify the number of participants that would provide a multi-campus perspective on the conditions enabling or constraining QA and QE at TUT.

4.3.1.2 Selection of research participants

In a critical realist study, the selection of participants is informed by identifying groups, settings, and individuals that characterise the phenomena of interest and are easily accessible and conducive to enabling the researcher to understand the phenomena being studied (Maxwell, 2012, p. 94). The decision to select the research participants was informed by the data I needed to answer my research questions and thus achieve my research goal. An essential consideration for selection is the relationship that the researcher has or expects to have with the participants in the research setting and how these relationships might hinder or facilitate the attainment of research goals (ibid).

Considering the realist nature of my study, I found the non–probability sampling method, specifically purposive sampling, to be the most suitable option for selecting my research participants. Purposive sampling entails strategically selecting where, when, and from whom data will be generated, guided by the study's objectives (Palys, 2008, cited by Maxwell, 2012). Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select individuals who are likely to yield a better overview of the issues under investigation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). I therefore selected three faculties from the seven faculties. I used the following criteria to identify the three faculties: two offering academic programmes on multiple campuses (Faculties A and B) and one offering professional programmes (Faculty C). My sample of participants was further stratified through targeted sampling to identify different levels or categories of participants. The strata I identified included academic, QA, academic development, and an external QA participant. I had to consider the multi-campus nature of TUT when selecting participants per strata.

Researchers require considerable knowledge of the context being studied to optimise their selection decisions (Maxwell, 2012). Given the complex nature, history and size of TUT , I identified 35 participants ranging from executive management to lecturer level. In Archerian terms, the former are called ‘social actors’, whereas the latter are referred to as ‘primary agents’ (see Section 2.3.1 for an in-depth explanation of these terms). It was also my intention to conduct an in-depth study as opposed to focusing on breath. Studies on sample sizes, such as those by Vasileious, et al. (2018) and Bekele and Ago (2022), suggest that deciding sample size in qualitative studies is debatable, with no clear guidelines, and no universal rules to guide the researchers. My sample size was determined by the scope of my study, nature of the topic, the research questions and the quality of the data (Vasileious et al., 2018; Bekele & Ago, 2022). According to Bertaux (1981), as cited by Bekele and Ago (2022), the smallest acceptable sample size in qualitative studies is 15.

The 35 included the following categories: The Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning (DVC: T&L) (1), Executive Deans (3), Assistant Deans for teaching and learning (3), selected Heads of Department (9), Lecturers (9), Executive Director for Institutional Effectiveness and Technology (ED: IE & T) (1), Senior Director: Strategic projects (1), Quality practitioners (4), Academic Development staff (1 Senior Director and 3 senior practitioners), and External participant (1). My rationale for selecting the participants was informed by the nature of their roles in the University and their roles in terms of involvement with QA and enhancement of teaching and learning.

My motivation for the selection was also based on the understanding that QA is a phenomenon that affects everyone in the University and touches every aspect of the core functions of a university, specifically focusing on teaching and learning. People occupying different positions have different responsibilities related to the implementation of QA and QE. Given the in-depth case study nature of this research, the relatively small sample of 35 interviewees accommodated the different levels of academics and support staff suited to generate the information needed to answer the research questions.

I decided that the participants in the executive management categories should have been at TUT for between 5 and 15 years with oversight responsibility for quality, academic, or academic support functions. The rationale for the time range is that some executives only hold these positions for a short time and are unfamiliar with the historical context of the areas under study. It was critical for participants to have prior knowledge of how QA and QE have evolved over time. Accordingly, all selected categories gave their perspectives of contextual enablements and constraints related to quality processes. It would not have been beneficial for my study not to include the various levels and participants from across all University campuses. Table 3 below shows the number of interviewees per category and, where applicable, the campuses represented. The other categories, such as DVC: T&L, ED: IE & T, Senior Directors, QA, are centralised services that represent an institutional view and are not campus-based views.

Category	Number planned	Number interviewed	Campus
Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Technology	1	1	Not Applicable
Executive Deans	3	3	Soshanguve, Pretoria, and Arcadia
Assistant Deans for teaching and learning	3	2	Arcadia and Soshanguve
Heads of Department / Academic Section Heads	9	10 (A = 2; B = 4; C = 4)	Soshanguve, Emalahleni, Arcadia, Pretoria, and Polokwane
Lecturers	9	8 (A = 3; C = 2; B = 3)	Soshanguve, Arcadia, Polokwane, Emalahleni, and Mbombela
Executive Director for Institutional Effectiveness and Technology (former Director of DQP)	1	1	Not Applicable
Senior Director: Strategic projects	1	1	Not Applicable

(former Director of Quality Promotion)			
Quality practitioners	3	4	Not Applicable
Academic Development staff (1 Senior Director and 3 senior practitioners)	4	4	Soshanguve, Pretoria, and Arcadia
External participant:	1	1	External Participant
Total	**Total initially planned = 34**	**Total interviewed = 35**	

Table 3: Breakdown of the number of participants interviewed by category

4.3.1.3 Document analysis

Document analysis enabled me to identify and understand the structures, cultural values, and beliefs that guided and supported the implementation of QA and QE nationally and at TUT at a specific time in history (T^1) – see Section 2.3.5 for an explanation of T^1. By undertaking a discourse analysis of key documents, I developed a better understanding of the ideas and values that informed the deployment of QA nationally and at my institution. The documents provided a historical context for the evolution of QA nationally and at TUT. I discuss these more in Chapters five and six. As part of my ethical clearance application, I had to obtain the gatekeeper's permission from TUT to access and analyse the documents listed under 'internal' in Table 4 below. The gatekeeper's permission letter is included as Appendix C. The external documents were downloaded from the Council on Higher Education's website. Table 4 below lists all the documents that were analysed as part of this study.

Name of Document	Internal (TUT) / External (CHE)	Data Analysed
1. **CHE Founding document (2001)**	External: CHE	Cultural system – discourses that underpinned the conceptualisations and implementation of QA nationally.
2. **CHE Framework for Programme Accreditation (2004)**	External: CHE	Ideas and values underpinning quality.
3. **TUT Policy on Quality Assurance (2004)** 4. **TUT Policy on Quality Assurance (2016)**	Internal: TUT	Ideas and values underpinning quality at TUT
5. **Quality Management Strategy at TUT (2005)**	Internal: TUT	Structures and cultural system of quality at TUT
6. **The CHE Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) framework document (2014)**	External: CHE	Ideas and values underpinning QEP
7. **CHE discussion document: An integrated approach to QA in higher education and other critical national policy and framework documents on QA and QE (2017).**	External: CHE	Ideas and values underpinning the integrated approach to QA
8. **TUT Transformation Framework (2017)**	Internal: TUT	Ideas and values underpinning the understanding of Transformation at TUT
9. **The Next Generation Quality Assurance Strategy (2018)**	Internal: TUT	Structural and cultural shifts regarding QA and QE at TUT.
10. **TUT Policy on Academic Reviews (2018)**	Internal: TUT	Ideas and values underpinning programme reviews at TUT
11. **TUT Institutional Strategic Plan: 2020 - 2025**	Internal: TUT	TUT's cultural system – ideas and values underpinning the quality at TUT Vision and strategic priorities of TUT regarding QA and QE or continuous quality improvement

Table 4: External and Internal documents that were analysed

4.3.2 Data generation: reflections and challenges

The data generation phase spanned over a year due to various challenges, including my workload. I conducted the interviews in between my work commitments. It was not easy as it was a busy and stressful period for academics and support staff in the University due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Academics and support staff were overwhelmed by the need to move to online multimodal teaching and assessment. Some research participants reported feeling exhausted, and some could not recall some of their QA experiences from years back. Some cited not having the relevant experience or knowledge to comment on the macro or meso QA matters but could share their experiences at departmental and subject levels. One academic could not participate due to ill health, and I had to replace them.

Most of the interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, and only one was conducted face to face. There were also challenges of load shedding that affected the scheduling of interviews coupled with poor network connectivity as most participants were connecting from their homes. I had to reschedule a few interviews. I struggled to download one of the interview recordings and had to redo the interview. Despite these constraints, I was able to interview all the participants who had accepted my invitation to be interviewed.

4.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis is about making interpretations after carefully considering the data; it is about assigning meaning to raw data in the form of concepts. Concepts are seen to indicate the researcher's understanding of "meaning implicit in the words and actions of participants" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 66). In this study, I tried to identify and better understand how the interplay of causal mechanisms can potentially influence the implementation of an integrated QA and enhancement approach for TUT.

To uncover the causal mechanisms from my empirical data, I had to analytically move beyond the transitive level and excavate the level of the Real. Archer's social realist theory enables the researcher to develop explanations of phenomena that point to causal relations at a level which cannot be observed (Case, 2013). Therefore, to analyse the interview and documentary data, I used Archer's concepts of structure, culture, and agency as my main analytical lenses. I used thematic and discourse analysis methods to transcend the transitive data and access the intransitive.

Following this section, I provide a more detailed explanation of the phases that I followed to conduct a thematic analysis and I explain these phases in 4.4.1 below.

4.4.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is regarded as a "foundational method for qualitative analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to organise and describe data sets in rich detail. It entails recognising a pattern within the data and identifying the emerging themes, which become categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006 cited by Bowen, 2009). These data patterns or themes are analysed and used to address the research questions (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). It is a theoretically flexible approach that can be used across various theoretical frameworks, as it is not limited to a specific epistemological perspective (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Thus, I was able to use it to help me make sense of the data and to deepen my understanding of what is going on in the context of this study. While doing thematic analysis, I was also mindful of my CR and SR theoretical lenses.

Although thematic analysis is flexible, there are some pitfalls that researchers should be mindful of, such as using the main research questions as the themes, as this is a reflection that data may have just been summarised and not adequately analysed (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Other pitfalls include failure to analyse the data and just collating extracts with little analytic narrative; too much overlap between the themes, or lack of internal coherence between the themes, and where you find a "mismatch between theory and analytic claims" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 94). A good thematic

analysis entails ensuring that “the interpretations of the data are consistent with the theoretical framework (ibid, p. 94)”. Underpinning my analysis were my analytical lenses, which assisted me in looking for enabling and constraining mechanisms across the structural, cultural, and agential domains.

As noted earlier, I had thirty-five interview transcripts and eleven documents that I analysed. I followed a flexible deductive approach to analysing my data. A deductive approach is a methodology consistent with CR ontology and epistemology (Fletcher, 2017). The literature review in Chapter three formed the basis of my analysis and enabled me to see patterns in my empirical data. The deductive approach also allowed for new data categories to emerge.

I must acknowledge my ontological and epistemological underpinnings, as discussed in Chapter two, as data should not be coded in “an epistemological vacuum” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). The research epistemology “guides what you can say about your data, and informs how you theorise meaning” (ibid, p. 85). For this study, this meant that the data analysis and decisions regarding the emerging patterns in the data were limited and fallible. I was mindful of the epistemic fallacy, and I know that the knowledge generated by my research is always open to change. As a researcher, I exercised judgemental rationality to come to the best findings I could derive from the data. See Sections 2.2 and 2.2.2 for explanations of the concepts of epistemic fallacy and judgemental rationality.

Thematic analysis is a realist method that can be used to report on the experiences, meanings, and participants’ reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). A theme or a pattern in the data is explained as “something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents meaning within the data set” (ibid, p. 82). I followed this advice when identifying the themes or patterns in my data. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise that researchers can exercise their judgement to decide what constitutes a theme, and the “keyness” of the theme should be about whether it “captures something important about the overall research question” (p. 82). When I was analysing the data for this study, I tried to identify themes or patterns of data

relevant to my research objectives. Specifically, my decisions for selecting the themes and patterns were informed by the following:

- Prevalence of certain concepts or ideas used by participants when describing their understanding of QA and QE. I also relied on the literature on how to cluster those various ideas into coherent 'themes'.
- For Questions 2 up to 10 (see Appendix A for the interview protocol), I was interested in identifying the agents' experiences of what they perceived as internal and external enablers and constraints to effective QA and QE in their context (institutional, faculty, department, or subject level). Under enablements or constraints, I was looking for responses that related to structural, cultural, or agential.
- On the last question of recommendations (Q11), I looked for ideas that indicated what structural, cultural, or agential changes necessary to enable an integrated approach to quality at TUT. For this question, I used a combination of prevalence and checking for ideas that pointed to critical issues impacting the effectiveness of quality processes at TUT.

I exercised flexibility in how I determined the prevalence of specific themes or patterns in my data. Braun and Clarke (2006) advise that there are no right or wrong approaches to determine prevalence. However, I had to ensure consistency in how I identified the themes or ideas.

To ensure a methodologically sound and systematic approach, I drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase approach to guide my analysis of empirical data. To be consistent with a CR ontology, I used discourse analysis to identify the cultural mechanisms at the level of the Real.

4.4.1.1 Phase 1: Familiarising myself with the interview data

I first familiarised myself with the data by reading through my transcripts several times, doing a 'soft eyes' analysis, and making notes from my initial analysis. 'Soft eyes' analysis entails initial thoughts about the data and what the concepts suggest (Maton

& Chen, 2016). This step of immersing myself in the data was crucial before I started using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis computer-aided software to help me construct codes from my empirical data. From the initial readings of the data, I could already see possible initial codes that I could use. All 35 transcripts were uploaded into ATLAS.ti to start the coding process.

4.4.1.2 Phase 2: Generating initial codes

To conduct a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, I used coding to help me categorise my data. Coding is reported to be the most widely used categorisation strategy in qualitative data analysis. It makes it easier for the researcher to understand their data and generate themes and theoretical concepts (Maxwell, 2012). Coding entails segmenting data into discrete units, grouping by categories, and examining and comparing both within and between categories (p. 111). Most researchers use coding as a strategy to develop a framework of connections or relational patterns amongst the data categories (Maxwell, 2012). I was cautious of how I used categorisation as it can create analytical blinders leading to failure to see alternative ways of understanding the data.

After uploading data onto ATLAS.ti, I started by segmenting transcripts according to participants' groups by creating document groups on ATLAS.ti. I had the following four participants' groups: academics, academic developers, quality, and external quality. See Table 5 below for a breakdown of the participants' groups and the associated number of transcripts.

Participant Group	Interviewee Category	Number of transcripts
Academics	Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Technology	1
	Executive Deans	3
	Assistant Deans for Teaching and Learning	2
	Heads of Department & Academic Section Heads	10
	Lecturers	8
Quality	Executive Director for Institutional Effectiveness and Technology	1
	Senior Director: Strategic projects in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor	1
	Quality practitioners	4
Academic Developers	Senior Director: Higher Education Development and Support (HEDS)	1
	Curriculum Development practitioners	3
External QA	External: Council on Higher Education	1

Table 5: Breakdown of participants' groups

After segmentation, I started with the initial coding process by allocating relevant codes to segments of the text in the transcripts. I used the coding approach to help me understand the events at the level of the Actual and to also access the level of the Real. Guided by my research questions, the coded extracts of the data were first coded under the categories of enablements and constraints. See Figure 8 below for an overview of the initial number of codes generated. These categories then became my coding framework to organise the data at this initial level of analysis. The categorisation was done to enable me to extract quotes that related to a combination of the categories. For example, I could extract data quotations relating to external constraints or internal enablements, and the document grouping made it possible to extract the data by participant group, e.g., academics only.

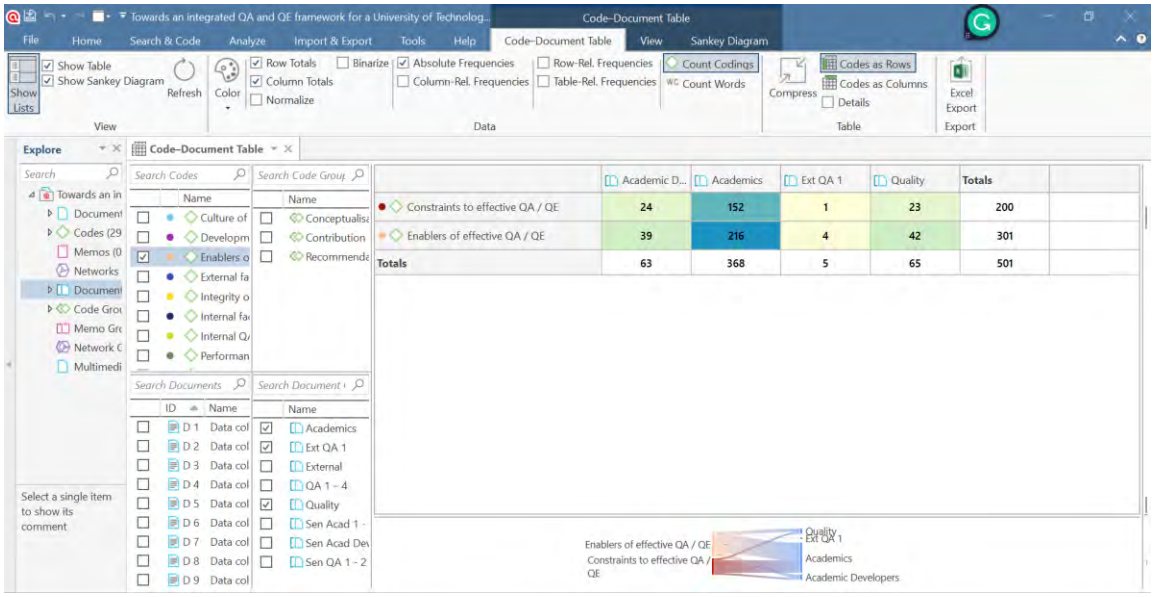

Figure 8: Overview of the initial number of codes generated by the participant group and by structure, culture, and agency

Braun and Clarke (2006) advise researchers to code all the actual data extracts then collate all the coded extracts within each code. At this first phase of thematic analysis, each of the 11 questions were coded guided by my broad coding framework (enablements and constraints), where possible. The initial coding process generated more than 500 codes across all categories. See Figure 9 below for an overview of the initial number of codes generated per participant group by structure, culture and agency.

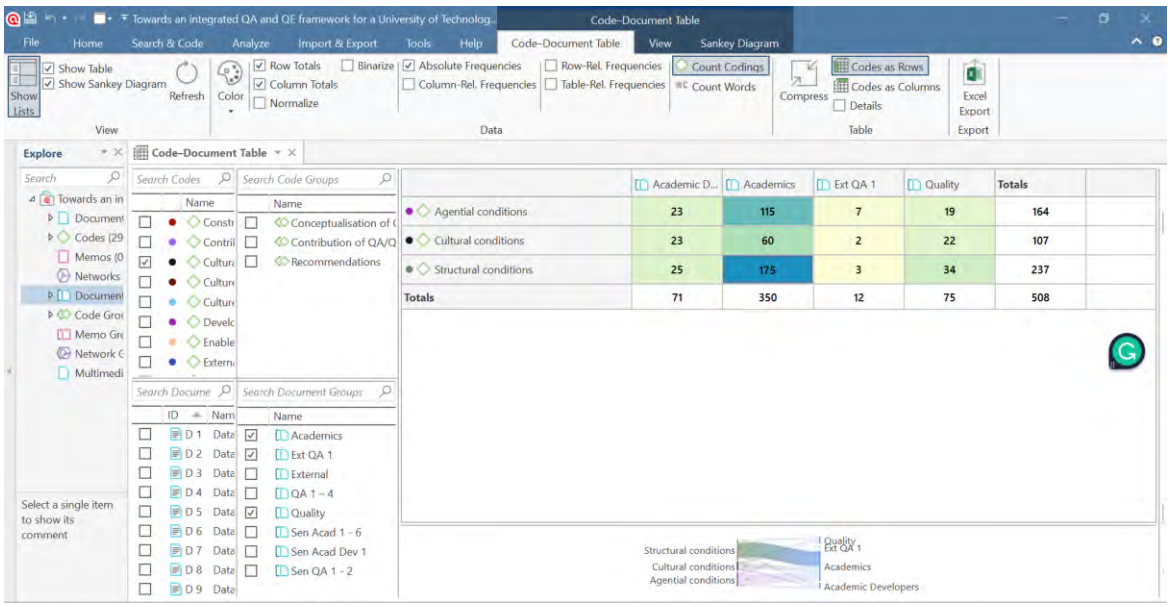

Figure 9: Overview of the initial number of codes generated by the participant group and by structure, culture, and agency

The coding process is regarded as part of the analysis, as it entails organising data into meaningful groups (Miles & Huberman, 1994, and Tuckett, 2005, cited by Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). The coding process allowed me to start identifying events at the level of the Actual and mechanisms at the level of the Real. According to Fryer (2022), using the CR concepts would primarily help the researcher to access 'experiences' from the empirical data, while codes would constitute 'events', and themes would help the researcher to access causal mechanisms.

Coding the data was not a linear process but a recursive one. I had to constantly revisit my interview notes and transcripts and sometimes had to revisit the literature. Creswell (2013) confirms that the data analysis process entails the researcher moving in analytic circles rather than following a fixed linear approach. I found this approach rewarding as it validated my analytical process and the themes that I eventually constructed.

4.4.1.3 Phase 3: Searching for the themes

Phase 3 of the analysis involved going through my initial long list of codes, sorting, and collating all the relevant codes together under a possible theme. I was mindful that different codes could be combined to form an overarching theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Figure 10 below provides an overview of some of the initial themes that I began categorising. Identifying themes was a way of enabling me to access the mechanisms at the level of the Real. This is the stage in the coding process where the researcher starts thinking about the "relationship between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes" (ibid, p. 90).

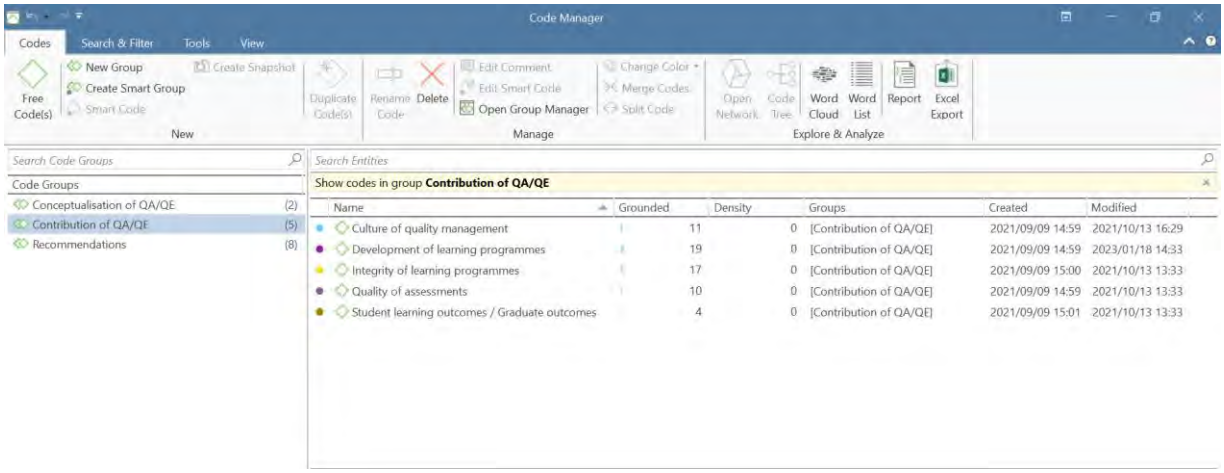

Figure 10: Overview of the initial number of codes generated by the participant group and by structure, culture, and agency

After the first coding phase, I then used 'abduction' to apply the theoretical lenses to identify and categorise my themes. Abduction involves applying a theory to interpret or understand something differently. Furthermore, abduction enables the researcher to engage in redescription or recontextualisation and give new meaning to already-known phenomena (Danermark et al., 2002). I applied abduction in Chapter six, where I discuss the themes. Analysis in social science entails "using theories, and frames of interpretation to gain a deeper knowledge of social meanings, structures, and mechanisms" (p. 92). However, "abductive conclusions in social science are seldom of the nature that we can ultimately decide whether they are true or false" (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 92). These conclusions or new insights may be fallible.

Segmenting the participants' groups enabled me to understand how structural and cultural mechanisms accounted for the experiences of the different groups.

4.4.1.4 Phase 4: Reviewing and refining themes

Phase 4 entailed reviewing and refining the initial list of themes. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) advice, I read again all the coded extracts linked to each theme to determine whether they formed a coherent pattern. Coherence meant that there was a fit between the coded quotes and the proposed theme. Some coded extracts were categorised under more than one theme, but I had to allocate them under a specific theme at the end of the refinement process.

After establishing coherence, I considered the validity of the individual themes. Validity means establishing whether the themes 'accurately' reflected the meanings evident in the data and document analysis. What counts as "accurate representation depends on the theoretical and analytic approach" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). I discuss validity considerations (trustworthiness) in Section 4.6 below. I identified patterns and relationships between the themes that could help me best address my research questions.

4.4.1.5 Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

This phase entailed defining and further refinement of the themes that I used in my analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain defining and refining as the process of "identifying the 'essence' of what each theme is about and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures" (p. 92). Each individual theme should be accompanied by a detailed analysis and coherent narratives and "as well as identifying the 'story' that each theme tells" (ibid). The stories must "fit into the broader overall 'story' that the researcher is telling about their data, in relation to the research question or questions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). At the end of this phase, the researcher should be able to define their themes clearly, describe the scope of each theme, and think about the names to use in the final analysis (ibid). The process of arriving at the eight themes that I identified was an iterative process. Generating themes allowed me to access the mechanisms at the level of the Real. See Chapter six for a discussion of the themes that I identified.

4.4.1.6 Phase 6: Producing the report

This final phase of the analysis process entailed the write-up of the report based on the analysis and the final list of themes identified. The write-up should be supported by sufficient data extracts "to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme" and should be "concise, coherent, logical, and non-repetitive". It should also provide an interesting account of the story within and across themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). During the write-up process, I drew on my SR theoretical lenses and the literature.

Following the analysis process, I had to interpret and contextualise my data and generate coherent arguments using data extracts[3] supported by literature (see Chapter six for the discussion of the findings). As this is a realist study, I used CR and SR principles to provide causal analysis and explanations of the possible causal mechanisms that most likely accounted for the themes that have emerged from my empirical data through the process of retroduction, which is the final phase of my analysis. I discuss retroduction below in Section 4.4.3. For example, one of the eight themes that have emerged is "compliance". I had to hypothesise about the possible causal mechanisms that accounted for the dominance of compliance discourse at TUT. Furthermore, I argue how the dominance of compliance could potentially constrain or enable the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT, an event at the level of the Actual.

Creswell (2013) explains this crucial step of interpretation in qualitative research to entail "abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the more significant meaning of the data" (p. 187). To complement the thematic analysis approach, I used critical discourse analysis to uncover dominant clusters of theories, ideas, beliefs, and values at the level of the Real from my empirical data and from the documents that I have identified in Table 4. I discuss Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) next in Section 4.4.2. The coding process was mainly done for the interview data.

4.4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) allows researchers to use text to understand a social phenomenon and its value in researching organisational change. Gee (2012) describes a discourse as:

> "composed of distinctive ways of speaking / listening and often, too, writing / reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools,

[3] I applied minimal editing to the interview data extracts to improve the readability of some of the extracts. I used square brackets to clarify omissions in the data extracts where necessary. To safeguard anonymity, I changed the names of some of the units.

> and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognized activities" (152).

Discourse analysis is generally understood to involve the systematic analysis of 'texts', i.e., written texts, spoken interaction, multimedia, etc. (Fairclough, 2005). Considering a much more comprehensive definition, Fairclough (1993) defines CDA as:

> "discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes, to investigate how such practices, events, and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony" (p. 135).

Fairclough (2005) states that CDA has explanatory intentions when applied within a CR ontological frame as it "aims at explaining social processes and events in terms of causal powers" (p. 926). He further argues for "locating the analysis of discourse within an analytically dualist epistemology which gives primacy to researching relations between agency (processes and events) and structure based on realist ontology" (p. 916).

Critical discourse analysis assisted me in identifying discourses that gave insights into the theories, ideas, values, and beliefs that were linked to possible conditions that gave rise to events that could enable the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach for TUT. In addition, my analysis of discourses focused on understanding how the ideas and values have shaped how the agents enacted their personal emergent properties in a way that enabled the integrated approach to be possible at TUT.

4.4.3 Retroduction

To further strengthen my data analysis and provide theoretical explanations for the empirical findings of this study, I used retroduction as a method of inferencing. Inferencing is explained as the thought process or reasoning process, interpreting, and drawing conclusions without using formalised rules (Danermark et al., 2002).

In the context of my study, retroduction has enabled me to explain and theorise about the underlying mechanisms in the level of the Real that account for the conditions that enabled and constrained events relating to an integrated QA and QE approach. In addition, through engaging in retroduction, I could draw inferences from the data regarding the causal mechanisms affecting the experiences of agents responsible for QA at TUT. Retroduction enabled me to move between the Empirical and deeper levels of reality to explain the phenomenon I was studying (Fletcher, 2017).

Through retroduction, I could theorise about mechanisms that could condition the institutional context for an integrated QA and QE to be possible. The following epistemological questions, which I adapted from Danermark et al. (2002, p. 97 & 100), underpinned my retroductive inferencing:

- What conditions must be in place at TUT for the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach to be possible?
- What must the world be like for an integrated QA and QE approach to be possible?
- How do I arrive at the conclusion that certain structures and mechanisms, but not others make up the conditions for X to be possible? (p. 100).

Retroduction involves moving from the level of observation and lived experience (transitive domain) to theorising about the underlying mechanisms that account for the phenomena involved (Mingers 2003, cited by McEvoy & Richards, 2006).).

4.5 Researcher Positionality

At the beginning of the study, I realised how important it was that throughout the study, I continuously interrogated how my position and positionality at TUT might affect the validity of my research. In addition, I had to reflect on the potential risks that came with insider research to enhance the credibility and integrity of my study.

Having worked at the University for more than 20 years presented several advantages for my study. Being an insider researcher meant that I understood the complex nature of TUT, and I had engaged professionally with most of the social actors and primary agents that I selected as participants. However, before accessing data and interviewing participants, I had to follow all research ethics protocols (see Section 4.7 below on ethical considerations). Being too familiar with the context could sometimes lead to the researcher losing objectivity, but it also had benefits such as easier access to the participants (Unluer, 2012). However, my insider researcher status meant that I had to be mindful of how my potential biases and assumptions could have influenced my analysis and interpretation of the data. I had to use theoretical tools to mitigate the possible analysis bias. I also used member checking, where my supervisor was my sounding board, to maintain “objectivity” when interpreting my data.

Due to the nature of the study, my insider status had the potential to create a possible conflict of interest and potential researcher bias. I managed this by assuring the participants that the research was not about evaluating their work practices and explaining to them how the results would be used and that the outcomes of the study would not impact the participants’ collegial working relations. Being familiar with most of the participants, I reminded each interviewee of my dual role status and encouraged them to give critical and honest answers to the interview questions. I paid careful attention to how the participants responded to the questions and recorded my reflections in my research interview journal.

Even though I did not anticipate any risks to emerge, I was conscious of the potentially sensitive views that could have emerged during the interviews. All the interviews were recorded, and I kept a research interview journal that recorded all my reflections on the interviews. In addition, I used strong theoretical lenses to ensure the theoretical validity of my conclusions.

In the next section, I reflect on how I mitigated potential researcher bias due to my insider researcher status in this study.

4.6 Research Rigour

Trustworthiness or research rigour in a qualitative study should be maximised or tested to ensure credible and defensible results. For a realist study, "validity pertains to the accounts or conclusions reached by using a particular method in a particular context for a particular purpose, not to the method itself" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 130). The main challenge to validity is "to explain how, if our understandings are inevitably fallible constructions rather than 'objective' perceptions or interpretations of actual phenomena" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 131). The researcher constructs meaning based on participants' accounts and data analysis. I have enhanced the rigour and trustworthiness of the findings of my study by addressing descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity; and through triangulation (see below for a discussion of these concepts).

To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of my study and conclusions, I addressed the following:

a) Potential validity threats associated with qualitative research include:

- **Researcher bias***:* "ways in which data collection or analysis can be distorted by the researcher's theory, values or preconceptions" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 243). I interrogated my positionality as a researcher and quality manager to be aware of the possible biases or conflict of interest created by my dual role. I also ensured that I clarified in the interview invitation letters (see Appendix F) and informed consent forms how I intended to mitigate against potential researcher

bias (see Appendix G for an example of the informed consent form that I used). In addition, I read out the section addressing the potential researcher bias in the informed consent form before I commenced with the interviews. None of the interviewees raised an issue with my possible researcher bias status.

- **Reactivity:** the researcher's influence on the people being studied (Maxwell, 2012). Unfortunately, reactivity is an aspect that is impossible to eliminate. To mitigate reactivity, I avoided asking leading questions and tried to be aware of how I was possibly influencing the participants' responses. Using an interview protocol (see Appendix A) helped to guide the interview process as objectively as possible.

b) **Trustworthiness** of my study was addressed through:

- **Descriptive validity:** is about factual accuracy and objectivity of information gathered, which can also be referred to as "descriptive accuracy". This threat was mitigated by recording all my interviews to enhance the accuracy of the data, accurately transcribing the data, and keeping an audit trail of all the interview records.
- **Interpretive validity:** Refers to the accuracy applied to the perspective of the individuals included in the account. It focuses on how as a researcher, I drew inferences from the words and actions of participants being studied. I had to ensure that when analysing the data, there was alignment between the meanings attributed to the views of the participants and the actual participants' perspectives. Even though there are no clear principles from the literature on how to mitigate this threat to validity, I have liaised with my supervisor for their opinion or assistance where I struggled to accurately analyse or interpret participants' views.
- **Theoretical validity:** Theoretical validity also includes theoretical frameworks developed by the researcher during the study in addition to describing and interpreting participants' perspectives. I mitigated this validity threat by conducting an in-depth literature review and used CR and SR theoretical lenses to interpret my data. Specifically, I used discourse analysis, retroduction and

abduction to provide theoretical explanations for the empirical findings of my study.

c) Generalisability

Generalisability refers to the "extent to which one can extend the account given of a particular situation or population to other persons, times, or settings than those directly studied" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 141). Generally, qualitative research is not intended to allow for systematic generalisations to a larger population (ibid). "Generalisation in qualitative research usually takes place through the development of a theory that not only makes sense of the particular persons or situations studied, but also shows how the same process, in different situations, can lead to different results" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 141). Although I cannot generalise the findings of my study, other similar institutions may find my findings useful for their contexts.

d) Triangulation

For a qualitative study, triangulation is a typical strategy that can improve the validity and reliability of research (Golafshani, 2003). Triangulation can be achieved using a combination of data generation and analysis methods (ibid). Furthermore, triangulation assists the researcher to reduce the risks of conclusions reflecting limitations or biases of methods or sources and allows the researcher to gain a broader understanding of the issues being investigated (Maxwell, 2012). The views of McEvoy and Richards (2006) resonate with Maxwell (2012), that researchers using a combination of methods can counteract the biases associated with single-method studies. To maximise the validity of my research, I used multiple data sources, conducted interviews to generate empirical data, and used discourse analysis to analyse both my interview data and the document analysis. These methods assisted in minimising validity threats for my study. I also recorded detailed notes of my analysis of documents, and the transcribed interview data is available as part of an audit trail.

As discussed in this section, the validity or trustworthiness of all aspects of my research processes was integral to ethical considerations for my study.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethically sound research, I sought ethical approval for my study from both Rhodes University (see Appendix D) and TUT (see Appendix E). My ethics applications emphasised 'respect and dignity; transparency and honesty; accountability and responsibility; integrity, academic professionalism, and researcher positionality'. I was granted ethical approval by both Rhodes and TUT. As my study also involved accessing and analysing TUT documents, I sought the gatekeeper's permission from the Chief Information Officer (CIO) (see Appendix: C for gatekeeper's approval).

The validity and ethical issues that were most important for me to consider were my positionality in this study, as discussed in Section 4.5 above. All interviewees received an invitation letter to participate in this study, and in the letter, I indicated the purpose of the research and how they would contribute. The letter also indicated that their participation was voluntary, and they could decline the invitation should they wish to do so. Only a few declined the invitation; some cited health reasons, and others did not have enough knowledge of quality to participate in the study. I replaced those who declined to participate.

4.7.1 Integrity and Academic Professionalism

As a professional staff member at TUT, maintaining professional relations with the research participants was crucial to how I conducted my study. I maintained the integrity of my research by ensuring that I recorded and presented the respondents' views accurately and ethically. I ensured that empirical data was authentic, generated through authentic interviews, and not fabricated interviews. I have provided a list of categories of participants I interviewed, and the actual interview data has been safely

stored for the audit trail. I need to acknowledge that although it was not my intention to research the institution's weaknesses in this study; some critiques have emerged from my data. I have used these critiques constructively and developmentally to avoid any reputational risk for individuals and TUT.

4.7.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity of the Participants

I developed a consent form (see Appendix G) that I used at every interview session to assure the participants that their responses would be treated with anonymity and protected from any unauthorised use for non-research purposes. I forwarded the informed consent form to all the interviewees to read and sign and I shared it before commencing the interviews. This ensured that participants voluntarily agreed to be part of the research and understood what they had agreed to. I emphasised that participation was voluntary, and I assured them that their identity would be protected and that any identifying information would be removed from the data.

In this regard, I anonymised the data by removing all the identifiers that could link individuals' responses using pseudonyms when recording the data in my filing system. Given that some participants were just one person, e.g., DVC: TLT, it was challenging to anonymise such responses completely. This aspect was also clarified in the informed consent form. I was cautious about how I saved such responses and how I used them in my analysis, especially where direct quotations are used to report the findings. I tried to safeguard the identity of participants as far as possible across the different phases of my research.

4.7.3 Respect and Dignity

I addressed the ethical principles of respect and dignity by protecting the privacy and confidentiality of participants as far as possible. I respected my participants' work time and requested an interview time as per their availability and convenience. As almost all interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, the preferred times varied

across all participants. I respected the rights of participants who did not wish to partake in my study. The participants who declined provided valid reasons for not participating.

4.7.4 Transparency and Honesty

Principles of transparency and honesty are central to ensuring a study that is based on strong ethical foundations. I addressed transparency and honesty by disclosing potential risks and benefits of my research to participants. In the informed consent form, I indicated that I did not foresee potential risks for participants; however, should any unforeseeable risk emerge during my study, I would have disclosed it immediately to my supervisor and the research participants. Participants were given a chance to ask questions to seek clarity on any aspect of the study or the interview. I reported the findings honestly and transparently.

4.8 Limitations of the Study

I identified two main limitations of this study. First, is the limited generalisability of my research findings due to the qualitative nature of the study and the use of a case study approach. The goal of qualitative research is not to generalise information, but to help clarify a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I conducted an in-depth case study only at TUT to gain a deeper understanding of the contextual conditions at TUT. The study would have been superficial should I have spread it across several higher education institutions. To have the opportunity to gain rich data, I conducted my research only at TUT. While offering depth on a topic, a case study does not provide enough evidence to form a generalised conclusion.

Second, my study sample was only limited to staff members, and students were not interviewed. The nature of the study and the research questions lend themselves to interviewing staff and not students. Other future studies can consider including the student perspective.

The findings can possibly contribute to new knowledge in the field of higher education-integrated QA and QE, and other UoTs or higher education institutions can establish if my findings are relevant or applicable to their context. Furthermore, future studies can research on the relevance of my findings to other higher education contexts.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter served a very important role in allowing me to carefully conceptualise and outline my research design as well as the methods to use to transcend the empirical data and access the transitive and intransitive domains. CR and SR theoretical lenses underpinned my methodological choices and decisions. I have shown how a thematic analysis method can be used in a CR and SR study and be complemented by discourse analysis to provide causal explanations of the mechanisms enabling and constraining an integrated approach to QA and QE. Through the data generation and analysis methods I have used, I managed to identify eight themes that I discuss in Chapter six.

As a qualitative study, maintaining research rigour was critical to ensure my findings and conclusions are as trustworthy and credible as possible. Considering that my study typifies insider research, it was critical that I clearly discuss my positionality and discuss how I have mitigated concerns resulting from insider research. Addressing ethical considerations were also central to my study, and I close the chapter by identifying possible limitations of my study. In the next chapter, I identify and analyse the mechanisms that influenced the emergence of QA as a series of events globally and in SA and the agents' experiences of these emergent events.

CHAPTER 5: CULTURAL, STRUCTURAL AND AGENTIAL MECHANISMS AT THE GLOBAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed my research design and the methods I used to generate and analyse data. For this chapter, I draw on the metatheory introduced in Chapter two to identify and analyse the mechanisms that have shaped the emergence of QA structures as a series of events globally and in South Africa and how they conditioned the agents. The analysis also enabled me to better understand how cultural and structural conditioning at the global and national levels influenced the events and people at TUT (see in Chapter six).

Although structure and culture are interconnected in any sociocultural setting, conditioning effects were analysed separately to avoid conflationary theorising (see Section 2.3.1 for a discussion on structure, culture, and agency). This analytical separation helped me explore how the systemic contextual conditions enabled and constrained the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. It was also important that I analysed and theorised how the interplay between the structural and cultural systems in the global context conditioned the national context for the emergence of QA structures. The outcome of this interplay in the systemic global context either constrained or enabled the events that happened in the institutional context (I discuss my findings in Chapter six).

I start this chapter by analysing the "cultural system (CS) because any socio-cultural (S-C) action is situated historically in a context of theories, beliefs, and ideas which were developed prior and will exert conditional influence on the CS" (Archer, 1996, p. xxi). I also discuss the experiences of agents (level of the Empirical) concerning quality in higher education. The discussion aims to identify the emergent structures (level of the Actual) that resulted from the effects of cultural conditioning and how these emergent structures shaped the emergence and evolution of quality structures at the national and institutional levels. Table 6 below summarises how I have applied stratified ontology to analyse the global and national contexts.

Domains of Reality	Application of the stratified ontology in analysing the global and national QA contexts
Empirical	**Effects of the events (observed or experienced):** Experiences of agents with QA.
Actual	**Events (events happen when causal mechanisms are actualised):** The emergence of QA structures as regulatory regimes globally and in South Africa.
Real	**Mechanisms (have invisible causal powers):** The cultural mechanisms (discourses) that account for the emergence of QA events at the level of Actual.

Table 6: How I have applied stratified ontology in my analysis of the global and national higher education contexts (Based on Bhaskar's stratified ontology)

In the next sections, I excavate the level of the Real to identify the cultural mechanisms that have influenced the emergence of QA structures in the global and national context.

5.2 Cultural Mechanisms at the Global Context

Higher education's macro cultural system is comprised of ideas and values that have shaped the higher education context and the emergence of QA. Social structures can be influenced by cultural systems (logical relations between ideas), and cultural systems can also be influenced by social structures (Archer, 2003) though indirectly through constraints and enablements. To uncover culture at the level of Real, I have used discourse analysis as a way of uncovering the ideas, beliefs, and values (see Section 4.4.2). Discourses are intransitive and relatively unchanging mechanisms. Through undertaking a thorough literature review, I was able to identify some of the main discourses at play in the higher education context.

The global culture of higher education at the international level is characterised by, amongst others, discourses of massification, globalisation, internationalisation, neoliberalism, new public management, and managerialism. These discourses have power and can influence higher education. The interplay of the ideas underpinning these global discourses and practices has conditioned the higher education context and resulted in the emergence of global, continental, regional, national, and

institutional quality structures. In the next sections, I discuss how these discourses have played out in higher education.

5.2.1 Massification

Massification is a structure that broadly represents the democratisation of access to education (Akalu, 2016) and it is underpinned by a set of ideas relating to the transformation of higher education from being an elite to a mass system of education.

Over the years, higher education globally has transformed from an elite system to a mass system (Barnett, 2004, Quinn & Vorster, 2019), resulting in more students with diverse profiles gaining access to higher education. The diverse student body included students from a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds rather than only elite students who had exclusive access to 'higher forms of learning' (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Therefore, the growth in participation rates by students became a worldwide phenomenon (Akalu, 2016, and Deeks, 2021). It is important to note that massification was also about "confronting social inequalities deeply rooted in history, culture, and economic structure that influence an individual's ability to compete" (Altbach et al., 2009, p. v., cited in Akalu, 2016). This growth in students accessing higher education can also be attributed to the demands of the knowledge economy (Quinn & Vorster, 2019). More countries need "skilled knowledge workers" (p. 3). In addition, it is hoped that the democratisation of education globally in higher education will play a key role in resolving social and economic inequalities through the granting of access to more students (Hornsby & Osman, 2014, cited in Quinn & Vorster, 2019).

Globally there has been a set of discourses around the role of higher education in a knowledge economy. In South Africa, the new democratic government, post-1994, placed greater emphasis on discourses of widening participation and access to higher education by previously marginalised groups. (I discuss the South African cultural context in Section 5.4.)

The diverse and heterogeneous groups of students entering higher education brought different learning needs and placed a different focus on quality in higher education institutions. The interplay between the massification discourses with other mechanisms at the level of the Real resulted in public concerns over whether the quality of education provided to students was being compromised (Akalu, 2016; Tight, 2019; and Ayoo et al., 2021). Evidence of quality concerns as a result of massification included “poor physical infrastructure, resource shortages, large class sizes, declining quality of research, and of the teaching and learning process” (Akalu, 2016). The results of the interplay between massification and the growing concerns of quality contributed to the emergence of events at the level of the Actual in the form of global quality structures.

5.2.2 Globalisation

Globalisation is a structure that represents interconnectedness, and it is supported by powerful transformative ideas that can both enable and constrain higher education institutions. Globalisation is defined as “the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, ideas across national borders” (Wit & Knight, 1999, p.14). It is driven by market pressures and the technological innovations (Badat, 2009). It also encompasses the “widening, deepening, and growing interdependence and convergence” of cultural ideas (Van der Wende, 2007, p. 274). Globalisation is considered to be a “powerful transformative force” which can shake “societies, economies and governance institutions and a new world order” (Välimaa, 2004, p. 30). It affects different countries differently due to each nation’s individual “history, culture, traditions, and priorities” (Wit & Knight, 1999, p. 14).

Globalisation is largely beyond the government’s and institutions’ control, and it affects higher education institutions in a variety of ways (Välimaa, 2004). A critique of globalisation is that it does not benefit everyone equally (Quinn & Vorster, 2019). For example, it can benefit some by enabling opportunities of studying and working anywhere globally, and conversely, it can constrain others by creating new barriers or reinforcing existing inequalities (ibid). It has influenced what is taught and what is

researched (Badat, 2009). As a result of globalisation, new types of higher education institutions emerged such as ‘polytechnics’ in the United Kingdom (UK) and ‘universities of technology’ in South Africa to address the different skills needs of the global economy (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Given the changes emerging from globalised higher education, governments moved towards the internationalisation of higher education as a possible and steerable response to globalisation that could potentially make institutions more effective (Van der Wende, 2007).

Due to the pressure of higher education institutions responding to globalisation forces, an internationalisation discourse emerged as a response to globalisation. As a result, the recruitment of international students increased, staff and students’ exchange programmes and partnerships increased, research partnerships between universities internationally increased, and resulted in universities encouraging the internationalisation of the curriculum (Khorsandi, 2014). However, these emergent events posed several challenges for universities, such as language barriers between partnering universities in foreign countries, high costs of tuition for foreign students, and the emergence of private providers offering non-accredited programmes.

The interplay of the ideas underpinning massification, globalisation, and internationalisation of higher education have resulted in the increased awareness and attention paid globally to QA. These global realities influenced the emergence of new QA structures (events) to assure the quality of higher education provisioning in the changing context of higher education and in response to the changing student profile. In addition, the growth of quality structures in higher education globally was accelerated by ideas linked to “privatisation, competition, the emergence of other modes of higher education delivery, the advent of diploma mills, cross border education, and deterioration of higher education standards” (Kwandayi, 2021, p.1). QA structures and systems slowly emerged as regulatory instruments for the massified higher education sector.

5.2.3 New Public Management

The new public management discourse emerged as a result of a set of ideas that were linked to the declining state fiscal capacity. This set of ideas encompassed massification, ineffective governance systems given the growth of the sector, the emergence of private providers, increasing mobility of students, and internationalisation of higher education (Jarvis, 2014). The interplay of these ideas with other mechanisms at the level of the Real resulted in stricter regulatory QA regimes being implemented by the states (events at the level of the Actual). In addition, a new set of practices which pointed to increased regulation by the state emerged as events at the level of the Actual. The increased regulation of higher education could be viewed as the 'politics of surveillance', through which quality assurance was used as a mechanism to enforce compliance (Jarvis, 2014). The new practices (events) associated with the discourses of new public management resulted in the management of higher education institutions using corporate governance approaches and ideas linked to compliance, accountability, and audit cultures (Jarvis, 2014).

The interplay of the ideas underpinning new public management resulted in the emergence of the discourses of neoliberalism and managerialism.

5.2.4 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism comprises a set of ideas that are dominated by the 'market logic' understood as the "economisation of every aspect of our lives", where human behaviour is conceptualised from a "cost-benefit analysis" (Boughey & McKenna, 2021, p. 4). For example, successful graduates are perceived as having acquired knowledge as a commodity, which they can then sell as knowledge workers in the global economy (ibid). It resulted in new practices linked to strict managerial controls (events). At the level of the Real, this new emergent discourse was also underpinned by ideas linked to free market principles (Lorenz, 2012).

Neoliberalism has also resulted in events linked to increased accountability and transparency for universities to account for spending and the quality of educational offerings. Jarvis (2014) argues that QA regimes in higher education should be considered as part of a broader set of agendas linked with neoliberal policy ideas. Another practice at the level of the Actual that characterises neoliberalism is the reduction of government spending on higher education which has resulted in pressure on universities to increase study fees (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). The interplay of ideas linked with the new public management and neoliberalism have resulted in the emergence of new offices / units in universities such as quality assurance, academic development, and institutional planning, as well as expanded the number of administrative personnel in institutions (ibid).

5.2.5 Managerialism

Managerialism is explained by Harvey and Knight (1996) as the tendency of managers "through their decision-making role, to alter academic processes based on non-academic criteria amongst which financial criteria have been prominent, or in response to management theories" (pp. 68 - 69). Managerialism comprises a set of practices (events) that centres on institutional performance and the capacity of the university to compete in the market and adapt to the changing environment. It derives from the practices linked to new public management, where the focus is on "outcomes, efficiency, effectiveness, quality, impact, focus on market opportunities, flexible approach to exploring cost-effective alternatives, and a focus on accountability" (Brunner & Uribe, 2007, cited in Lemaitre, 2018, p. 63).

Similar to the new public management practices, managerialism involves a "shift towards more formalised management structures and control", resulting in governments' direct management of higher education (Harvey & Knight, 1996, p. 69). Managerialism operates at different levels, including the institutional and the level of government. The government exercises control over higher education institutions through calls for accountability and funding from government agencies.

One of the discourses linked to managerialism is marketisation. The ideas linked to marketisation include the increasing information and communications technologies and the demands of a knowledge economy. The growing marketisation of higher education has resulted in the emergence of new practices (events) at the level of the Actual where higher education institutions compete amongst and within themselves (Välimaa, 2004), contributing to the commodification of higher education.

As noted earlier, the interplay of these discourses with other mechanisms has influenced the kinds of events that emerged at the global and national levels. The events that resulted include the establishment of QA structures to regulate and monitor the quality of academic provisioning to protect students against possible compromised quality. QA structures such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) guidelines on QA of cross-border education emerged as a response to safeguarding students against poor quality cross-border education (Van der Wende, 2007). In addition, QA regional bodies such as the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN) also emerged as events in response to the interplay of mechanisms at the level of the Real. I discuss these below in Section 5.3.

Understanding the global discourses that impacted higher education was key for my study, as these discourses and practices influenced the kind of governance and QA structures established to manage quality in higher education institutions including TUT.

5.3 Global QA Structures that emerged as a result of the interplay of structural and cultural mechanisms in the global context

The global QA structures that emerged in response to the interplay of the discourses with each other and with other mechanisms in the HE context resulted in events that

influenced the higher education context globally. I have conceptualised these emergent QA structures and practices as events at the level of the Actual.

QA regimes emerged during the mid-1980s when several countries around the world established national QA agencies (Uvalic-Trumbic & Martin, 2021). These regimes started in North America and then spread to Europe, Asia, and Africa (ibid). The QA regimes continued to spread and became central in regulating higher education globally. International and regional QA networks (events) emerged worldwide to address the obstacles to student mobility and lack of recognition of foreign qualifications (structural mechanisms). These regional QA structures were crucial in harmonising and advancing QA practices across the world (Uvalic-Trumbic & Martin, 2021). In addition, the establishment of international and regional QA structures provided opportunities for the capacity development of their members. Europe was the first to establish a regional higher education structure to harmonise higher education on a regional and sub-regional level (Uvalic-Trumbic & Martin, 2021). This harmonisation was done through the Bologna Process and other emergent structures (event), which I briefly discuss below. I also discuss the ideas (discourses at the level of the Real) that underpin such emergent structures.

5.3.1 Bologna Process

The Bologna declaration, understood as an emergent event, was signed in 1999 to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The discourse underpinning the Bologna declaration entailed “the promotion of the European cooperation in QA to develop comparable criteria and methodologies” (EHEA, 1999, cited in Uvalic-Trumbic & Martin, 2021, p 21). As a result of this emergent event, QA regimes became prominent in European higher education and the concomitant introduction and elaboration of institutionalised QA processes (Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018). Through the Bologna Process, the European higher education system endeavoured to make degrees and learning outcomes across their university system more comparable, thus enabling staff and students’ mobility across European higher education institutions (Teichler, 2012, cited by Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018). In addition, the Bologna Process

claimed to enable the comparability of individual universities' provisions and facilitated the establishment of formalised external and internal QA processes (Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018).

5.3.2 The Emergence of other Quality Assurance Structures at the Global Level

Following the Bologna Process, other QA structures emerged, such as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), which was established in 2000. These structures emerged from the interplay of mechanisms such as globalisation, internationalism, and neoliberalism as described earlier. The ideas supporting the role of the ENQA were mainly focused on the promotion of QA in Europe in line with the Bologna Process (Uvalic-Trumbic & Martin, 2021). In 2005, the standards and guidelines for QA (at the level of the Actual) in the European higher education area were established to guide good practices for both internal and external QA practices (Uvalic-Trumbic & Martin, 2021). The development of the European standards and guidelines was supported by the prominent structures such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which I briefly discuss below.

Six other QA structures emerged from other regions outside of the European area. These included the Asia- Pacific Quality Network (APQN); The Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education; the Ibero-American Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education; The Association of African Universities; The African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN); and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (Uvalic-Trumbic & Martin, 2021). Following the establishment of these structures, new sub-regional structures emerged to help promote cross–border higher education and the development of codes of good practice and associated toolkits (ibid).

5.3.2.1 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

As a result of the increasing number of students enrolling in higher education institutions outside their home countries, many governments chose to make the internationalisation of higher education and QA a policy objective (Ayoo et al., 2021). (See Section 5.2 for a discussion of the internationalisation of higher education). The emergence of structures such as the internationalisation policies for higher education institutions in many countries was underpinned by the need to recognise the benefits of international exposure and the growing opportunities for cross-border mobility (Ayoo et al., 2021) as a result of globalisation. The growth of cross-border mobility (event) resulted in the emergence of UNESCO as a global structure for regulating the recognition of higher education qualifications and reducing the obstacles that students, teachers, researchers, and job seekers encounter outside their home countries (ibid). The establishment of UNESCO resulted in the emergence of events such as the publishing of regulations for the QA of cross-border provisioning in higher education globally (Uvalic-Trumbic, & Martin, 2021). Next, I discuss how the emergence of these global events shaped and influenced the emergence of QA structures and events on the African continent.

5.3.2.2 Continental and Regional QA Initiatives and Developments

The emergence of QA structures in the global higher education context also influenced the emergence of QA events on the African continent. The discussion of the QA developments on the African continent is relevant to my study as it is located in Africa and specifically, in South Africa. In addition, the regional developments (events) and the discourses underpinning such events have an important bearing on South Africa.

When QA for higher education was first introduced in Africa, the context was conditioned by the ideas linked to colonial powers. This conditioning was seen in a form of QA structures that were linked to some “form of affiliations of higher education institutions with international institutions during the then colonial powers” (Materu, 2017; Odongo, 2017, cited in Ayoo et al., 2021, p. 103). In addition, at the level of the Real, the pressures of globalisation and internationalisation, and for gaining

acceptance and credibility, resulted in African higher education adopting QA structures (emergent event) from the higher education systems in the developed world (Ansah et al., 2017, p. 28). As a consequence, the resultant QA systems were mostly modelled on systems from the global north which were limited in terms of compatibility with the African context. It is important that QA frameworks are compatible with the particularities of the context for which they are established. This means that the ideas underpinning the establishment of such QA structures should be complementary to the envisaged purposes and outcomes of such structures. The peculiarities relevant to African higher education are characterised "by limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, inadequate staffing, relatively low research, mass student enrolment, and limited graduate employable skills" (Ansah et al., 2017, p. 28), which are events that resulted from the mechanisms of colonialism.

Flowing from the ideas linked to the concerns of the quality of provisioning, several countries established national QA agencies (emergent events) to safeguard the quality of their higher education institutions. One of the first countries in Africa to establish a national QA agency was Nigeria in 1962, and since then, by 2017, there was a total of 28 African countries with national QA agencies (Ayoo et al., 2021). These agencies mainly focus on the accreditation of institutions and programmes, institutional accreditation being the dominant approach (Materu, 2007, cited in Ayoo et al., 2021). The focus seems to have been influenced mainly by the new public management discourses and its emergent discourse of neoliberalism and practices linked to managerialism. Only a few agencies, including the South African quality agency, undertook institutional audits. The ideas underpinning audits are strongly linked to the discourse of new public management. One can see how these big global discourses have influenced the emergence of QA structures globally and in Africa. I discuss the historical trajectory of the South African national QA context in Section 5.4 of this chapter.

Developments in the African higher education system indicated an increasing focus on using QA as a key mechanism to make the African HE system more efficient and competitive (Ansah, 2015). The efficiency and competition discourses are associated with the new public management and neoliberalism discourses. Although QA

frameworks of many African quality systems appear to be robust, they are not adequately addressing the nature of the quality concerns experienced by higher education institutions in Africa (Ansah et al., 2017). Considering this critique, Ansah (2015) emphasises the importance of assuring that the framing of QA systems in new contexts should effectively address context-specific issues.

A critique relevant to the South African context, which students highlighted during the 2015 / 2016 protests was about the failure of South African universities to address the decolonisation of the curricula and institutional cultures (Albertus, 2019, and Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam, 2019). Students from South African universities protested against the unfulfilled promises of transformation and the persisting struggles for social justice, equity, and equality (Albertus, 2019). The students' protests were also influenced by South Africa's unequal and untransformed social and economic conditions. According to Albertus (2019), the experiences of the protesting students pointed to the apartheid discourses of marginalisation, which were still present in the cultural practices of some institutions.

The 'African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education' (ASG – QA) emerged as a structure at the level of the Actual to guide and create a unified framework on the African continent that would provide a shared understanding of QA systems at continental, regional, or national levels (Kwandayi, 2021, p. 2).

The shift towards establishing QA systems (events at the level of the Actual) in Africa is closely associated with:

> "the need to cope with ongoing transformations of the African higher education sector, rapid growth vs funding constraints, demands for accountability, privatisation, and perceptions of a decline in quality, the emergence of the knowledge economy, the repositioning of the higher education, internationalisation, and continental efforts for harmonisation of higher education." (Ayoo et al. 2021, p. 104).

These ideas underpinning the shifts towards the establishment of QA systems, as advanced by Ayoo et al. (2021) point to the significance of the QA structures in

enabling African higher education to cope with the evolving contextual demands while safeguarding the quality of education provisioning. In the next section, I discuss the structural and cultural mechanisms that influenced the emergence of QA structures and discourses in South Africa.

5.4 Structural and Cultural Mechanisms at the level of the National Context

1994 marked the official end of apartheid, and it also represented the advent of democracy in South Africa. Higher education is a structure that was seen as a vehicle for driving the systemic transformation of the apartheid structures that the democratic government inherited. The cultural system that the new democratic government inherited post-1994 was conditioned by discourses and structures of segregation and apartheid (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). In addition, other cultural mechanisms at the level of the Real were present in the higher education context, such as fragmentation, inequality, uneven provision, and lack of diversity. Other conditions emanating from the macro context, such as globalisation, massification, internationalisation, neoliberalism, new public management, demands of the knowledge economy, and marketisation of higher education also impacted the South African context post-1994. The interplay of the discourses with other mechanisms present in higher education, conditioned the higher education context that the democratic government inherited. For example, higher education in 1994 comprised institutions created by acts of government and were divided along “racial, ethnic, linguistic, and geographical lines” (Lange, 2012, p. 46).

Following 1994, the higher education system was required to support the new democratic government’s goals of eradicating apartheid’s legacy within all of its institutions, including society (Lange, 2012). Therefore, the ideology of transformation became the main overarching objective for all the reforms nationally. Furthermore, in South Africa, transformation was an ideology that characterised the nature and direction of change (ibid).

Due to the conditioning influence of apartheid ideologies, the democratic government had to introduce new social structures and discourses that would restructure the fragmented higher education system into a transformed, coherent and integrated system. However, the social conditions were not conducive to the new discourses of social justice, transformation, equity, and redress that the new democratic government aspired to. The apartheid values and discourses of discrimination and segregation had to be abolished first and replaced by the ideologies of transformation and social justice. In effect, what that means is that one set of ideologies had to be replaced by another. This required new forms of higher education and universities had to be open to all race groups, and a differentiated university system was put in place. Therefore, "higher education was regarded as both a condition and an agent for changing the social relations which characterised South Africa under apartheid" (Lange, 2012, p. 48).

Higher education as a structure in the democratic era had to serve different purposes that would enable the democratic government to achieve transformation of higher education. The purposes of higher education in South Africa had to be understood in the context of the country's need for reconstruction and development (Lange, 2012). The Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, (DoE, 1997a, paragraph 1.3), lists four purposes of higher education in South Africa:

i. "to meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes throughout their lives;
ii. to address the development needs of society and provide the labour market, in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent society, with the ever-changing high-level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy;
iii. to contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens; and
iv. to contribute to the creation, sharing and evaluation of knowledge".

In the first phase of higher education reform, the focus of the democratic government was on establishing new regulatory policy frameworks and other structures to facilitate change and enable the systemic transformation of the national higher education

system. The interplay of the discourses of transformation with other mechanisms resulted in the emergence of structures at the level of the Actual in a form of acts, policies, and frameworks to guide the transformation of the higher education landscape. The publishing of such policies (events) outlined a wide range of imperatives that South African higher education had to achieve in the new democratic government.

5.4.1 Examples of emergent structures

The Higher Education Act of 1997 and the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation on Higher Education (DoE, 1997a) emerged from the interplay of mechanisms as described above and they were published as events at the level of the Actual. They influenced the social conditions and discourses and the establishment of national QA structures for a democratic South Africa. The Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997a) placed the primary responsibility for QA with higher education institutions while the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (DoE, 1997b) established the Council on Higher Education (CHE), its composition and its functions. QA was identified by the state as one of the mechanisms for driving greater efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and responsiveness in the higher education system (Luckett, 2007). However, some of these mechanisms were incompatible, such as efficiency, which is about spending as little money as possible while effectiveness could be costly. The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (DoE, 1997b) allocated the responsibility for implementing a national QA system through the permanent sub-committee of the CHE, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). I discuss the emergence of the CHE in the section below.

The Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997a) provided “a conceptual architecture in which the purposes, principles, values, and the overall vision for higher education are interlinked” (Lange, 2012, p. 47). These policy documents were underpinned by the new discourses of transformation, quality, redress, equity, and democratisation (Boughey & McKenna, 2021).

The cultural system of higher education in South Africa was underpinned by the following values and principles as stated in the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997a): "equity and redress, quality, development, democratisation, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, effectiveness and efficiency, and public accountability" (DoE, 1997a, paragraph 1.18 – 1.25). These principles represented the official culture that conditioned the higher education context and influenced the emergence of the national QA and institutional structures to enable these strong discourses.

Other structures that emerged in response to dismantling the cultural and structural systems of the apartheid regime included the National Plan for Higher Education in 2001, which provided an overarching framework and processes to guide higher education institutions in implementing policy goals outlined in the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation on Higher Education (DoE, 1997a).

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (1995) guided the creation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF[4]) and established the "scaffolding of a national learning system that integrates education and training at all levels" (DoE, 2001, p. 9). SAQA was subsequently established in 1996. SAQA's role was to "establish standards, QA systems, and management information system to support the NQF" and ensure registration of standards and qualifications on the NQF, which were internationally comparable and consistent across providers (DoE, 2001, p. 22).

The National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008 assigned the HEQC with the responsibility of being a quality council (QC) for higher education and assuming the responsibility of managing its sub-framework on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the Higher Education Qualifications Sub Framework (HEQSF). As the quality council for higher education, the HEQC was also assigned the following QA functions by the NQF Act: (i) develop and implement the policy for QA; (ii) ensure the

[4] The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is the "set of principles and guidelines by which records of learner achievement are registered to enable national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge, thereby ensuring an integrated system that encourages life-long learning" (saqa.org.za). In addition, the NQF "provide learners, institutions, employers, and other stakeholders information about the equivalence of qualifications offered at various levels" (Ayoo et al. 2021, p. 103).

integrity and credibility of QA (iii) ensure that such QA is necessary for the HEQSF of the NQF is undertaken (CHE, 2021b, p. 31).

5.4.1.1 Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC) and the Quality Promotion Unit

Before the establishment of the Council on Higher Education in South Africa, there were structures responsible for external QA in higher education. These structures were the Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC), a statutory structure which was responsible for the erstwhile technikons and the Quality Promotion Unit (QPU) of the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA) responsible for the university sector. Quality in the universities and technikons was managed differently. There were 21 universities and 15 technikons in South Africa in 1990 (Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013).

SERTEC was established in 1988 as an autonomous statutory body through the Certification Council for Technikon Education Act of 1986 (Act No 88 of 1986) in terms of section 2 of the Act (CHE, 2000, p.14). SERTEC focused mainly on "minimum standards, programme evaluation, and statutory compliance" (Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013, p. 1265). The QPU, established in 1996, engaged in audits of universities (events) until 1999, when its activities were terminated (CHE, 2000). The QPU's role was to advise and assist universities in maintaining and improving the quality of their educational programmes (Selesho, 2006). The roles of SERTEC and the QPU were overtaken by the emergence of developments that were taking place in the national policy environment during the period 1996 to 2001 (Naidoo, 2009). According to Naidoo (2009), the establishment of the CHE as a single unified body responsible for quality in the South African higher education sector signalled the end of the SERTEC and QPU. It was a signal that the sector no longer needed two separate sectoral bodies responsible for the QA of higher education as "an integrated higher education system was envisaged" for South Africa (CHE, 2000, p. 34). This move was underpinned by mechanisms of transformation and the need to integrate the higher education system from the binary system that characterised higher education during the apartheid era.

5.4.1.2 Mergers

The interplay of transformation discourses with other mechanisms such as transformation policies resulted in an emergent event in the form of institutional mergers of higher education institutions. Mergers were implemented in 2003 by the South African democratic government as one of the ways of restructuring and diversifying the higher education landscape to be responsive to national needs (Du Pré, 2010). They were underpinned by discourses of transformation and redressing past inequalities. Mergers were understood in the context of dismantling the ideology of the apartheid legacy in the higher education landscape and further integrating South African higher education in the global discourses of a competitive and globalised economy (Jansen, 2003).

Mergers resulted in a differentiated higher education system with three different kinds of institutions: traditional universities, comprehensive universities,[5] and Universities of Technology[6] (Du Pré, 2010). The Universities of Technology (UoTs) were developed primarily to focus on vocational and professional post-school education and applied research (ibid). In this regard, TUT was one of the UoTs established as part of the restructuring of the higher education landscape. I discuss the TUT context in more detail in Section 1.2. Du Pré (2010) states that universities and institutes of technology around the world have contributed to their countries' and regional economies through their applied research, collaborative approach to finding solutions to societal and industry problems and preparing graduates for the world of work.

However, one of the critiques of the mergers is that some of the "traditional apartheid universities" such as 'The Universities of Witwatersrand, Pretoria, Stellenbosch, Rhodes, and Cape Town and to a very limited extent the Free State University (only took in the small QwaQwa campus of a homeland)' were not merged and were left

[5] Comprehensive universities resulted from the merger between traditional universities and technikons.
[6] University of Technology resulted from a merger between technikons.

untouched" (Karodia et al., 2015, p. 329). The decision not to merge other institutions was inconsistent with the merger objectives of transforming and restructuring the South African higher education landscape.

5.4.1.3 The Council on Higher Education

The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 established the Council on Higher Education (CHE) as a macro structure for a national system of QA in South Africa. The CHE was established to support higher education purposes and goals as outlined in the Higher Education Act of 1997 and the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation on Higher Education (DoE, 1997a). The interplay of the different discourses such as social justice, transformation, redress, and equity espoused in the different policy documents conditioned the higher education context for the establishment of the CHE. The CHE was formally established in 1998, and it later established the interim Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) in June 1999, followed by the publication of the HEQC Founding Document in 2001 (www.che.ac.za). The HEQC was officially launched in May 2001.

The functions mandated to the CHE by the Higher Education Act (1997) were to advise the Minister of Education on any aspect of higher education and, through the HEQC, promote QA in higher education, audit QA processes of higher education institutions, and accredit higher education programmes (DoE, 1997b). During its first years, the HEQC focused on consulting and sharing the discourses underpinning the functions of the CHE. The development and approval of key policies and frameworks (such as the Institutional Audit Framework, 2004, and the Programme Accreditation Framework, 2004), were some of the emergent events that guided the work of the HEQC. The implementation of these frameworks was underpinned by the discourses of improving quality and "enhancing accountability in an equitable manner across the higher education system" (CHE, 2017, p. 5).

This emergent structure at the national level cascaded down to universities and led to the emergence of quality offices across the sector (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). The HEQC's approach was underpinned by the overarching discourse of transformation.

The focus on transformation imperatives had set the CHE's approach apart from the other QA systems that were implemented mostly in the global north, where the focus was more on upholding quality standards and production of skills for the growing market economies (CHE, 2017). The HEQC sought to be proactive and responsive to advance the transformation agenda, which has been reflected in various national legislative requirements since 1994, and to ensure improved and sustainable quality. (CHE, 2015).

The national QA system evolved for two decades, starting from the first institutional audits from 2004 to 2011. Subsequently, the national system evolved to a period characterised by a focus on quality enhancement of teaching and learning from 2013 to 2017. From 2017 there was a renewed focus on the re-introduction of institutional audits and conceptualisation of a new QA framework for the South African higher education system. The CHE engaged in the initial sector consultations and development of the Audit Framework from 2017 to 2020, when the Audit Framework was approved by the HEQC. In the section below, I briefly discuss how the national QA system evolved over time, and the successes and challenges.

5.4.1.4 A period of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2004 – 2011)

Each of the periods of QA emerged as a result of the interplay of structures and mechanisms in the national and global contexts. Due to the conditioning of the higher education sector by the apartheid discourses of segregation and fragmentation, the first period was predominantly underpinned by the discourses of transformation, integration, and equity across the higher education sector, as I have discussed in the preceding sections. The HEQC subjected all institutions to the same approach and criteria to develop a shared understanding and approach to quality and QA in the sector (CHE, 2017). This initial period of QA was characterised mainly by events in the form of accreditation of new programmes, quality promotion, and the rollout of institutional audits, which spanned between 2004 and 2011, when the last audit report was released, and the audit cycle was concluded in 2017 (CHE, 2017).

As an emergent event in higher education, institutional audits were also underpinned by the overarching discourse of transformation, which accounts for much of the work of the CHE. The focus of the first cycle of audits was on assessing the institutional arrangements for assuring the quality of the university's core functions. All public institutions and eleven private institutions in South Africa were audited during the first cycle of institutional audits (CHE, 2021b). The rollout of the institutional audits in the sector did not go entirely as planned due to the challenges experienced by some of the higher education institutions, such as merger problems that persisted long after the mergers had taken place, and some higher education institutions that were put under administration.

The HEQC conducted an external evaluation of the first cycle of audits to determine the successes and areas for improvement. The external evaluation panel report highlighted some successes and areas for improvement regarding institutional audits. The external panel reported that audits contributed to the institutional awareness of the need for quality, and provided an opportunity for institutional self-reflection (CHE, 2021b). However, some critiques were also provided regarding the process being onerous and time-consuming, the one-size-fits-all audit criteria that did not consider institutional differentiation, and the failure of the audits to sufficiently consider institutional diversity with regard to size and shape. (CHE, 2021b).

Several South African authors such as Luckett (2007), Quinn and Boughey (2009), and Boughey and McKenna (2017) critiqued the HEQC's institutional audits methodology and approach. Quinn and Boughey (2009) argued that the HEQC audit methodology appeared to have mainly focused on the mechanistic implementation of the recommendations of the audits and failed to penetrate the level of the Real, a critique also identified by Luckett (2007). According to Luckett (2007), the audit methodology assumed a 'flat ontology' and thus was unable to penetrate the functioning of social structures and social agency in universities. This methodology limitation does not enable the institutions and the audit panels to understand and uncover the mechanisms giving rise to the conditions and events identified by the panels (Quinn & Boughey, 2009). Furthermore, Boughey and McKenna (2017)

identified other limitations regarding the effectiveness of the audit methodology. They argue that the audit approach managed to have some effects in the domain of structure and agency, while it was limited in terms of “challenging the dominant ideas that the institutions held regarding students, teaching and curricula” (p. 973). They made this critique in light of the audit methodology being underpinned by a transformational purpose the audits were supposed to serve.

5.4.1.5 A period of Quality Enhancement of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (2012 to 2017)

A series of events emerged in the second period as a result of the institutional audits that were conducted during the first period of QA. An event in the form of an evaluation of the QA principles and procedures used during the first period of QA was conducted by the HEQC (CHE, 2015). This evaluation was characterised by ideas associated with improvement, and as a result, the CHE’s role as a quality council for higher education was significantly revised (ibid). The evaluation revealed that there were various constraints that made it challenging to achieve the desired levels of quality in undergraduate teaching and learning (CHE, 2015). In addition, there were still persistent trends of poor pass rates and throughput rates in the higher education sector (CHE, 2017). Subsequent to the evaluation, which pointed to the limitations of the first period of QA, new events in the form of framework documents emerged to give effect to the revised role of the HEQC: “the Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education (CHE, 2013a), Framework for Institutional Quality Enhancement in the Second period of QA (CHE, 2014), and Framework for the National Review of Programmes leading to Qualifications on the HEQSF” (CHE, 2015) (ibid, p. 7).

Based on the lessons learnt from the first cycle of institutional audits, the quality enhancement period was characterised by discourses of improvement and accountability for the quality of teaching and learning at the undergraduate level. (CHE, 2015).

As a result of the interplay of the mechanisms that conditioned the second period, an event in the form of the CHE Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) emerged to address

the low throughput rates in the higher education sector. The QEP was approved by the HEQC in 2013 (CHE, 2021b). The QEP's focus was on the enhancement of teaching and learning with the aim of improving student success (CHE, 2014). The QEP was implemented from 2014 to 2017. The discourse used for the rationale of this period was on the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning at the undergraduate level across the higher education system to enhance student success. However, the CHE terminated the QEP after the QEP Phase 2 rollout in 2017. The termination of the QEP meant that the challenges associated with the quality of teaching and learning were not adequately explored.

5.4.1.6 A period of Integrated approach to QA and the re-introduction of Institutional Audits (from 2017 up to current)

Similar to the previous periods, the interplay of cultural and structural mechanisms in the higher education context led to the emergence of events in the form of the re-introduction of institutional audits. The outcomes of the new cycle of institutional audits are envisioned to lay a foundation for the implementation of the new QA framework (QAF) for the South African higher education sector (CHE, 2021b). It is still unclear how effective these audits will be; how higher education institutions will respond to them; and how effective the methodology will be considering the critiques I mentioned in the section above.

Another key event that emerged after the QEP was the conceptualisation of an integrated approach to QA in South Africa, which culminated in a "discussion document for consultation: An integrated approach to QA in higher education by the CHE" released in 2017. The ideas that underpinned the conceptualisation were informed by the lessons learned from the first cycle of institutional audits, the QEP and the rapid developments that were emerging in the global context. The CHE's ideas focused on better integration of QA methodologies by moving away from fragmented and complex approaches for QA to ensure the greatest possible impact on quality in the higher education sector (CHE, 2017).

In 2020, an event in the form of 'A Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for Higher Education in South Africa' emerged as a result of the need to restructure the CHE's approaches to QA. The QAF is also premised on the need for transformation and social justice in the sector. It takes into account the persistent challenges of quality of provisioning in the national higher education system. Furthermore, it attempts to fundamentally shift from a bureaucratic and top-down system that leans towards compliance to a system underpinned by ideas of accountability, fitness of and for purpose, and continuous improvement (CHE, 2021a). The QAF was approved in 2021, but as at 2022 it had not yet been implemented, thus, I cannot discuss its successes or critiques.

5.5 Agents' Experiences of QA Events

In this section, I highlight some of the experiences described as key debates that have emerged over the last three decades from the global discourses related to quality as described in the previous sections. What is clear from the literature is that there are widespread critiques of the values, ideas, beliefs, and theories, which underpin quality-related structures in higher education. It also highlights the different ways in which key agents at all levels, depending on how they position themselves in the debates, have contributed to quality structures and processes.

The experiences of some academics reported in the literature on quality and QA in higher education indicate that many academics perceive quality as predominantly associated with compliance with bureaucratic processes, criteria, and standards. The structures and systems put in place by the national government are experienced by many academics as being about surveillance, regulatory tools, lack of trust, control, intrusion of professional autonomy, and ritualised practices (examples: Davis, 2017; Hoecht, 2006; Jarvis, 2014; Middlehurst, 1997; Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013; and Shore & Wright, 2000). These ideas represent cultural mechanisms that potentially constrain how the agents enact their agency in relation to the quality of learning and teaching.

I argue that at the level of the Real, higher education institutions have conceptualised QA and QE in many different ways. An integrated QA and QE approach could potentially enable the academics to enact the kind of agency that embraces the QA and QE approach for the purpose of ensuring that the academic project is implemented in ways that meet the purposes of higher education. In Chapter six, I identify mechanisms at TUT that potentially enabled and constrained academics from enacting the kind of agency that embraces the QA and QE of learning and teaching to benefit their academic practice and professionalism.

The advent of QA has led to sets of discourses that have influenced how academics responded to QA. The two main discourses are those related to resistance and those that account for compliance. I now move on to discuss some of the ideas that have emerged from the analysis of QA and QE literature.

5.5.1 The Discourse of Academics' Lack of Trust in the Quality Assurance Systems

One of the discourses that emerged from my analysis of the literature is the lack of trust in QA by academics. Some of the literature points to ideas linked to QA being seen as managerial tools that threaten the academic or professional autonomy of academics (Shore & Wright, 2000). Research by Newton (2000) in Davis (2017), suggests that both internal and external quality systems and monitoring mechanisms are regarded as sources of anxiety by academics. QA processes are perceived to have increased the feeling of distrust amongst academics of academic leaders and QA practitioners. Cheng (2017) suggests that this may impact the integrity and confidence of academics in their subject expertise. In addition, the practices linked to the way quality evaluations have been conducted in terms of scrutiny on how efficient and effective academics are in performing their roles and responsibilities (the level of the Actual) has reportedly resulted in low morale in academics (the level of the Empirical), particularly academics with a strong sense of professional identity (Cheng, 2017). It is reported that quality evaluations increase pressure on academics to succeed in teaching measures by showing compliance with the set standards and criteria (ibid).

Gosling and D'Andrea (2001) caution that quality evaluations tend to undermine the trust and respect for the expertise of academics. Williams (2016) echoed similar sentiments that academics' seeming lack of trust is prevalent in the research on the experiences of academics with quality processes. These experiences at the level of the Empirical raise key questions on how best QA processes can be implemented at the level of the Actual to earn the trust and commitment of academics. I attempt to answer some of these questions in later chapters.

The insecurity and distrust experienced by academics result from an overemphasis on quality for management purposes (Cheng, 2017), which points to the potential influence of the ideas and practices linked to neoliberalism and managerialism. The distrust and the fear compel institutions and academic staff to focus on fulfilling quality evaluation standards which results in which results in the evaluation being treated as a 'box-ticking' exercise rather than making a meaningful contribution to the enhancement of learning and teaching. The nature of managerialism has caused 'ritualised compliance' (Davis, 2017) to QA in universities, resulting in quality being disregarded. Davis (2017) shows how cultural mechanisms linked to managerialism at the level of the Real, have resulted in events that have a negative effect at the level of the Actual. The combination of managerialism and the ideas underpinning QA have led to the implementation of QA measures that are meant to manage, steer, and control the work of academics. For many, QA cannot be considered outside the managerial tendencies of universities (Davis, 2017). Furthermore, some believe that QA mechanisms have been implemented to serve management's interests in ensuring efficiency, value, performance, and thus economic worth (Rosa et al., 2007, p.1 cited in Davis, 2017).

In response to findings from her research, Cheng (2017) recommends that a refined quality evaluation system that would rebuild the trust of academic professionalism and improve the students' capability to learn should be implemented at institutional and national levels. She argues that the outcomes-driven approach of quality evaluations where threshold standards are valued has not produced tangible improvements in student learning. This argument indicates that QA discourses that are not linked to ideas of transformative learning and teaching may not improve student learning.

According to Cheng (2017), quality evaluation needs to move away from being a mechanism of state surveillance to being responsive to academics' responsibilities for enacting and improving academic standards (p. 162). She also argues for QA to be underpinned by the ideas at the level of the Real that foreground learning and teaching and that result in the transformation of student learning. The improved quality evaluation must shift from serving as a managerial instrument for "cost-effectiveness and external accountability towards inspiring academics to achieve excellence and continual improvement in teaching and learning" (ibid, p. 9).

Quality evaluation needs to be implemented as a mechanism to support academics' self-regulation of teaching and learning and to develop motivation for improvement. Institutions can further support this drive by academics to improve teaching practice by introducing initiatives that promote recognition and rewards activities geared towards improving teaching practice. Higher education institutions need to conceptualise a quality system that could inspire academics to see quality evaluation as an opportunity for critical self-reflection, pursue excellence and internal accountability, and achieve continuous improvement.

Tensions at the level of the Empirical point to the need to rethink the ideas and practices that underpin the approach to QA in universities. There is a need to conceptualise and implement QA in a way that will attract the enthusiasm of academics to make use of reports generated from the QA mechanisms (e.g., programme evaluations) to innovate their teaching to be responsive to the evolving higher education context and the changing student profile.

5.5.2 Quality as a Bureaucratic Burden

The bureaucratic nature of QA has emerged as one of the main discourses that account for academics' resistance to quality. Academic staff members are key to the success of any academic QA efforts as they are key stakeholders in universities (Davis, 2017). The rapidness and impact of changes and processes taking place in the higher education context are felt by academics as more burdensome than as

opportunities to innovate their teaching. This tends to result in academics being resistant to QA systems (Anderson 2006 and 2008, cited in Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018). Even though it may seem as if academics have widely accepted QA, the processes are still largely seen as being a "bureaucratic burden and illegitimate interference from central management which holds too much power to regulate and discipline academics" (Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018, p. 259). These sentiments are seen in descriptions such as "quality assurance is a chore and imposition", "a regulatory tool which infringes on academic freedom and encourages mistrust" which provide insights into the conflicting cultural ideas and the inherent tensions that are created by the QA regimes" (Davis, 2017, p. 318). These experiences of agents at the level of Empirical indicate that QA regimes at the level of the Actual are not achieving their intended purposes of improving learning and teaching.

There is a need to rethink the kind of discourses that should underpin QA practices to improve the academics' experiences of QA. Williams (2016) argues that despite the enormous growth in the national QA systems in the UK, there have been serious doubts regarding their effectiveness in achieving lasting improvements. As noted earlier, South African researchers (Luckett, 2007, Quinn & Boughey, 2009 and Boughey & McKenna, 2017) have offered some critiques of the institutional audits in relation to improving teaching and learning.

5.5.3 Quality as "Rituals of Verification"

Another example of the discourse of resistance to QA events by academics is what Davis (2017) calls "rituals of verification", which she explains as QA having lost its meaning due to managerialism and being just a ritual for compliance instead of fostering innovative learning and teaching. Jarvis (2014) acknowledges that in the contemporary era, universities "sit oddly amid two narratives" which, on the one hand, "academic freedom and independence of thought and expression" is being promoted while other academics experience an increase of intrusive regulatory regimes that seek to steer and control the higher education sector to serve the interests of the state and the economy; where QA is used as an instrument of regulatory control (p. 156). Audits, as one of the emergent events of managerialism, are one example of a QA

regulatory tool that, according to Shore and Wright (2000), involve practices that have created a culture of compliance and a climate of fear that noncompliance would be penalised.

Audits are further seen as undermining staff and institutional autonomy, and the impact of audit processes on institutional culture has been seen as engendering “a coercive type of accountability” (p. 94). Davis (2017) argues that the format used for institutional audits may have been detrimental to innovative teaching and learning as it brought about ‘rituals of verification’ instead of encouraging trust in academics. Newton (2000) uses the metaphor of comparing QA tasks to a beast-like presence that require to be fed by ritualistic practices to meet the accountability requirements (Davis, 2017).

These discourses point to significant cultural mechanisms at the level of the Real indicative of how some of the QA processes and practices are constraining academics to enact the kind of agency that would enhance the quality of learning and teaching. Understanding how these mechanisms are at play at TUT has enabled me to understand the TUT institutional context and how agents have responded to the QA system and structures that have been established. This understanding has helped me to identify the structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms that can potentially condition the institutional context for the implementation of an integrated approach to QA and QE. See Chapter six for an in-depth discussion of the mechanisms at play at TUT.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified the systemic conditions that have shaped the emergence of QA structures and culture globally and in South Africa. I have shown how global discourses such as globalisation, massification, democracy, internationalisation, new public management, neoliberalism, and managerialism have impacted the emergence of events in the form of QA structures and the cultural system. In addition, I have also discussed how these global discourses and QA structures have shaped and influenced the experiences of agents at the Empirical level and how the agents have enacted their agency.

I argue that the interplay of cultural and structural mechanisms at the global level and their emergent powers have enabled and constrained the continental and national structures and cultural systems for QA in higher education. In the next chapter, I move to discuss the analysis of the data that I generated to better understand the conditions at TUT. I identify and discuss the kind of cultural, structural, and agential mechanisms that have the potential to enable and constrain institutional conditions for the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach.

CHAPTER 6: CULTURAL, STRUCTURAL AND AGENTIAL MECHANISMS AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the higher education context, highlighting the cultural and structural mechanisms underpinning the emergence of QA structures and events at the global and national levels. In this chapter, I discuss the data I generated at institutional level. I outline and discuss the key themes that I used to organise the interview and document analysis data. As stated earlier in Section 2.3.5, the timeframe (T^1) for my analysis is from 2005 to 2018. The question that underpinned my analysis was: 'What are the causal mechanisms that account for the events and experiences evident at the institutional level?' This is followed by abduction that is, the use of analytical concepts of culture, structure, and agency to identify the mechanisms which account for the themes that emerged from my data.

Within each theme, I identified the discourses and structures and how their interplay could potentially enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. Based on the analysis of the interplay, I was able to identify mechanisms that potentially had the most influence on enabling or constraining conditions that account for the events and experiences at the levels of the Actual and Empirical.

Before discussing the themes, I first provide a brief context of quality at TUT and the mechanisms underpinning the events associated with the Quality Unit.

6.2 Mechanisms underpinning the Quality Unit At TUT

In Section 4.6, I elaborated on the possibility of the effects of "reactivity" by participants, which means my indirect influence as a researcher on the interviewees due to the position or power that I hold. Unfortunately, it is an aspect over which a researcher does not have much control. I acknowledge that my position at the University could have influenced some of the positive responses that I received from the interviewees.

The analysis of the documents and data from the interviews uncovered a number of discourses that underpin the implementation of quality at TUT and the agents' experiences of QA and QE at TUT. I outline these discourses below.

The analysis of the first TUT Quality Management Strategy (TUT, 2005) showed the following discourses that underpinned the emergence of quality and the subsequent structures that were established post the merger at TUT: fitness for purpose (alignment with institutional strategic goals and objectives), compliance (adherence to policies and procedures), accountability (quality as a line management function), and improvement. Below is an example of a quote linked to accountability cited from the Quality Management (QM) Strategy (TUT, 2005).

> *"Quality management remains a line function. This implies that all environments link their activities to core institutional policies and develop appropriate processes, procedures, and documentation which are published on the intranet and subject to period review" (TUT, 2005, p. 3).*

The discourse of quality as developmental

When the Quality Unit was initially implemented at TUT after the merger in 2004, the institution adopted a developmental approach to quality. This developmental approach meant that the University established a set of discourses that constructed quality in a particular way and was accompanied by structures to support the emergence of particular kinds of events. In an interview with one of the senior QA managers, they suggested that the developmental approach to quality was complemented by discourses that privileged collegiality and accountability, which underpinned the cultural system in the new institution post the merger. See the extract below.

> *"We invested a lot of time and energy and resources in ensuring that we work with faculty, not against them. So, there was that, and then there was the approach that was used. The approach was always developmental in nature, and the attempt has always been to partner with faculty and not to burden*

faculty, and faculty didn't always see it that way, they saw some early efforts at improving quality as being burdensome" (SenQA1).

Based on the discourses that privileged the developmental approach, programme quality reviews, QA of learning programmes, and quality promotion emerged as events underpinning a developmental approach to quality at TUT.

Despite the developmental approach, some academics experienced some of these QA events as 'burdensome', as seen from the below quotes. On the contrary, some of the agents experienced these events positively. In Section 6.3 below, I provide examples of how the agents experienced the effects of these events at the level of Empirical.

"…people perceive these reviews as really being stressful..." (Acad8)

"…*going through the process, I think for the past 4 years or 5 years, I think firstly it's a very painstaking and time-consuming process, … At times… staff members tend to get very tired or burnt out during the process. So, it's not an easy process to undertake…" (AcadMan9).*

The Quality Unit's work was underpinned by both internal policies and strategies as well as external QA regulatory policy frameworks. These are structures at the level of the Real that have influenced the types of events that the Quality Unit established. The extract below by a senior quality manager indicates that the University applied and contextualised these external regulatory policy frameworks and discourses to be fit for purpose for the TUT context. Agents in the Unit drew on the discourses underpinning these regulatory frameworks to inform the work they did in the academic departments which enhanced their corporate agency in the University. Such frameworks are associated with power, as can be seen from my discussion in Section 6.3.1 on compliance below. See also my discussion on how the discourses of compliance and accountability are dominant at the level of the Real at TUT in Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2.

"What gave us the momentum was how we appropriated external policy directives for our internal purposes, and I think this is key for any institution. You can comply with an external policy directive, or you can appropriate that policy directive for your own ends, and that's what we did. We used this to propel the university onto the national stage and the world stage" (SenQA1)

The discourse of quality as transformative

The analysis of the revised TUT strategy for quality, namely the 'Next Generation Quality Assurance Strategy' (NGQA) reveals various discourses that influenced the events associated with how quality has been implemented at TUT post the merger. The NGQA, (TUT, 2018a) was underpinned by shifts in the discourses that underpinned the practice and events associated with quality in the University. The analysis shows the discourses of quality as the transformation and enhancement of student learning, as seen in the extract below.

"The cornerstone of the NGQA is a strong focus on transformation and on the enhancement of student learning experiences for improved student success. The NGQA, therefore, deploys quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms that are designed to: enhance student learning and learning outcomes, enhance student success, and contribute to the enrichment of the curriculum and ensure compliance with both internal and external regulatory policies and frameworks" (TUT, 2018a, p. 27).

However, the analysis of other institutional documents (TUT, 2016; TUT, 2017: and TUT, 2018a) indicates other ideas that are contradictory to the discourse of transformation. Ideas such as efficiency, compliance, control, assurance, and risk management appear to dominate at the level of the Real. These ideas are associated with the discourse of QA as compliance. However, other ideas which are complementary to the discourse of transformation were also mentioned in the NGQA (TUT, 2018a), such as curriculum transformation, equity, effectiveness, the responsiveness of curricula, enhancement of student learning, and social justice. I discuss these ideas further in Section 6.3.7, where I discuss agents' experiences and events at the institutional level associated with transformation.

The discourse of enabling the agency of academics

My analysis of the data suggests that the Quality Unit was one of the enabling structures for supporting and guiding primary agents and social actors in positions of power in quality matters. It would seem that the SEPs of the Unit were strengthened as a result of the interplay of discourses promoting quality as articulated by agents. As a result, the structure had the support of senior management in the University, as seen in the interview extracts below by quality practitioners.

> *"I would say that institutionally having a quality unit assists a lot because I think the unit serves as the overarching department that looks at quality holistically and also for support, we get a lot of support from the quality unit and also the policies which are in place. I think they are enabling to make sure that there is an effective QA and QE system in Faculties and in Departments and also at Institutional level" (SenAcad6).*

> *"…The division of quality has a very high level of buy-in from top management… The buy-in from institutional structures such as the Senate Committee for Postgraduate Studies - such big structures" (QA3).*

Structural mechanism of adequate resourcing of the Quality Unit

The following excerpt from a senior QA manager argues for the importance of senior institutional leadership in ensuring adequate resourcing of the Quality Unit, while also not reducing the Unit's role to compliance. The impact of a Quality Unit is based on adequate resourcing and understanding of its mandate beyond compliance.

> *"… If executive leadership does not see its [quality] worth and then under resource it and undervalue it. So, it will lead to your quality professionals within the institution becoming frustrated and finding that their efforts are not being acknowledged and their intent is to advance the institution…" (SenQA1).*

The agency of the quality staff is further enhanced by reporting directly to the Executive Director responsible for Institutional Effectiveness, a member of the Executive Management Committee, which is the highest institutional management structure. The

presence of the Executive Director in the Executive Management structure facilitates the buy-in and collaboration from other Executive Management members, which further strengthens the corporate agency of the Quality Unit in the University.

> *"it's the commitment from executive management and the support that executive management provides to the quality unit as well as faculties as well as the unit is structured in such a way that quality-related activities are able to filter through institutional committees like faculty boards." (QA2).*

The discourse of inefficiency of the centralised approach

The centralised approach of the Quality Unit was identified by a number of agents as constraining the effectiveness of the Quality Unit. At the level of the Empirical, some academics experienced some centralised functions of the Quality Unit as not working effectively due to the events associated with limited human resource capacity in the Quality Unit, too many submissions, and delayed turnaround times for feedback from the Quality Unit. It appears that the centralised approach works for some but not for others. Most of the academics who were interviewed called for the decentralisation of some of the functions of the Quality Unit, such as academic reviews, and to have dedicated quality practitioners to work directly with the faculties. The dedicated quality agent would then effectively support the faculty and serve as a link between the faculty and the Quality Unit.

> *"I strongly believe a quality assurance officer is needed. It should not be a centralised thing…" (SenAcad5).*

> *"Then the other issue is the capacity from the quality unit's side, whereby you will find that it's single people responsible for a specific activity that is happening in all Faculties. So, there are times when the turnaround time becomes very slow because the person is inundated with submissions" (SenAcad2).*

The discourse of balancing developmental and accountability mandates

A fairly strong critique of the Quality Unit that emerged from the data was that the Unit's focus was more on driving compliance and accountability to the detriment of the

developmental role that the Quality Unit should also be focusing on. One of the Senior Academic Managers reiterated the need to balance the accountability and developmental roles of the Quality Unit, as shown in the extract below.

> *"However, from where I am sitting, there has to be a combined role of the quality unit; there must be a developmental role as well as a compliance role… the quality unit actually needs to scale between the two" (SenAcad2).*

This critique shows the need for the Quality Unit to collaborate with the Academic Development Unit to focus on the quality developmental aspects. Mechanisms that could make this possible include the collaborative and collegial approach underpinned by Gosling and D'Andrea's (2001) integrated quality development model (see Section 3.6.3 for the integrated model). In addition, both the Quality and Academic Development Units could draw from discourses privileging quality development to exercise their corporate agency in a way that could enable transformative learning and teaching.

Another structural constraint that I identified from the data as raised by one of the senior QA managers was the absence of an institutional governance structure that directly oversees the activities of the Quality Unit.

> *"My observation right now is quality assurance is being driven from a lower level in terms of the central office and the people who are implementing at the operational level. We miss an accountability and governance structure on quality assurance like forming an institutional quality assurance committee…which can work together with a central office and that committee being composed and even led by more senior people, and then the quality unit also being accountable to that body…" (SenQA2).*

This social actor is expressing the need for structural mechanisms that will interplay with accountability mechanisms at the level of the Real to enhance the corporate agency of the Quality Unit. This constraint may also impact the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach. Establishing an institutional governance structure for

quality may result in events that can enable the monitoring of the quality improvement plans, which is currently a constraint. Establishing such a structure may also enable operationalising an integrated QA and QE approach.

In summarising this section, I argue that at the level of Real, the Quality Unit is underpinned by the discourses that can potentially enable and constrain the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach. Discourses such as quality as transformation, quality as fitness for purpose, and the structural mechanism of adequate resourcing can potentially enable the implementation of an integrated approach. However, other discourses that emerged show that at the level of the Real, the discourse of an inefficient centralised approach, and the failure to balance the developmental and accountability mandate of the Unit can constrain events and ideas associated with an integrated QA and QE approach. I now move on to discuss the key themes that emerged from my analysis of the documents and interview data.

6.3 Key Themes

Eight key themes emerged from my analysis of the interviews and key documents, see Figure 11 below. In this section, I focus on discussing the causal mechanisms underpinning these key themes and some of the emergent events and experiences triggered by the causal mechanisms.

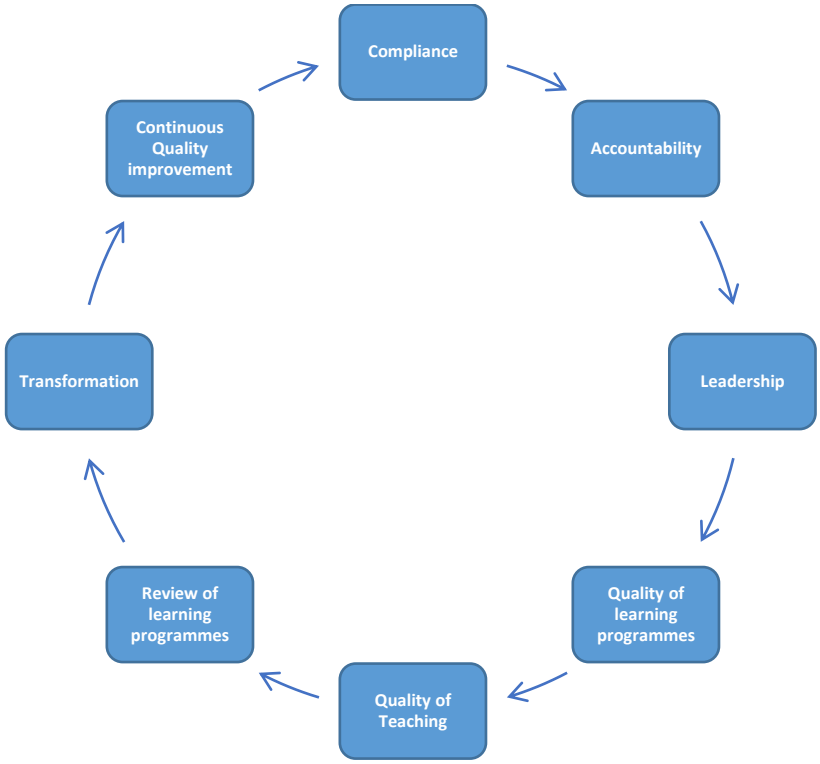

Figure 11: Overview of the key themes

6.3.1 Compliance

The analysis of data indicates that compliance was the most dominant 'theme' that I identified from the document analysis and interview data across all categories of participants. My analysis identified mechanisms at the level of the Real that could have led to the emergence of a particular set of events related to compliance. In CR terms, these sets of events refer to quality management systems, programme quality reviews, quality assurance of new and revised programmes for accreditation, and quality assurance of short learning programmes and student surveys (TUT, 2018a). These events at the level of the Actual are associated with discourses that have constructed QA as mainly about compliance and accountability. The analysis of interview data further confirmed that the agents experienced QA as being mainly about compliance.

In the discussion that follows, I present two arguments about compliance in relation to my study. First, compliance as enabling an integrated QA and QE approach followed by compliance as constraining an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. The latter

seems to dominate the way in which compliance has played out at the institutional levels.

It was not unexpected for compliance to be the dominant discourse, as TUT appears to have been influenced by major global and national structural and cultural mechanisms such as massification, new public management, neoliberalism, and managerialism. These cultural mechanisms account for how institutions implemented quality and the emphasis they have put on quality systems (See Section 5.4 for a discussion on the global and national discourses).

6.3.1.1 Compliance as enabling an integrated QA and QE approach

It has emerged from my data analysis that Compliance is underpinned by various cultural mechanisms in the form of discourses that can enable an integrated QA and QE approach as outlined in the section below.

The discourse of needing good management of quality to ensure equity of provisioning

TUT is regarded as a 'mega institution' that enrols more than 60,000 students annually; it is the largest residential university in South Africa (see Section 1.2 for a discussion on the TUT context). Massification has resulted in large classes across the nine learning sites. As a consequence of massification, there has been more emphasis on compliance and accountability, which represent discourses of needing good management of quality to ensure equity of quality of provisioning (event) across all the University's learning sites. See the extract below.

> *"… the various policies in the teaching environment that are meant to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. I will not be able to enumerate all of them. I mean, all sort of policies that relate to how, how teaching must be done, must be conducted. The number of hours, for example notional hours and so forth. Issues of assessment and so forth." (Acad2)*

The experience of a primary agent above indicates how they have seen QA controls in place (event) as a means of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.

The discourse of taking responsibility for quality and the discourse about institutional reputation

Further analysis of the data, has revealed the discourse of taking responsibility for quality and a discourse about reputation which I found to be closely related.

> *"And more importantly, each and every person, including Lecturers should understand themselves as leaders in their own right when coming to matters that relate to quality, you know. So, it's the question of making sure that the totality of the system must have this thing at the back of their mind that shapes their action, that shapes their attitude, that shapes their orientation…" (SenAcad3)*

> *"…I said earlier on there is no way that as a University, you can build a reputation in terms of what you are doing if you don't put more emphasis on quality and also insisting that each time that we embark anything that relates to our day-to-day business of the University, we always comply with the highest standards" (SenAcad3)*.

The two discourses account for how some of the social actors (for example, an Executive Dean) experienced QA and how they enacted their PEPs as can be seen from the extracts, where compliance with QA processes is seen as necessary for the advancement of the University. However, these discourses could be constrained by other discourses present in the institutional cultural system.

The discourse of QA as developmental and enabling continuous improvement

Analysis of the data revealed that discourse of QA as developmental and enabling continuous improvement account for how the QA agents experienced the purposes of external QA structures at the level of the Empirical. See the data extracts below.

"…I believe those external processes have helped to settle, even to improve and to devolve our own quality assurance mandate in the university and some of the processes that were established after the institutional audits as well as both the first cycle. The Quality Enhancement project led to a lot of policy review and policy development in the University" (SenQA2)

"The primary purpose is to be able to ensure and assure that an institution has got its own quality assurance systems, policies, procedures, strategies, etc. in place. That will allow it to manage its own quality in line with its own vision and mission and also to be able to manage it in such a way that is going to allow it to have continuous self-improvement and self-development strategies as well as enhancement" (ExtQA1).

The experiences provided mainly by the QA agents was how the national QA structures, such as policy framework documents for Institutional Audits, National Reviews, and Programme Accreditation (events at the level of the Actual), were enablers for QA and QE in the University. These national emergent events (policy framework documents) were deemed by some agents to be enabling the University to develop and improve its own internal quality management structures and systems.

The discourse of relevance

Another discourse that I identified from the data is the discourse of relevance as a mechanism at the level of the Real that has constructed how some of the social actors have understood the purpose of QA. I provide an excerpt from the interview data below.

"…we should be producing students that are able to be relevant within the markets... So that means whatever that we're doing should be at the highest level if it's a student who is a graduate walking the stage when they go out, they should be relevant, they should have the right information, the right knowledge to be able to contribute so that for me is quality" (AcadMan4).

The experiences of the social actor above indicate that the structures underpinning QA should be relevant and support academics in shaping the graduates with knowledge and competencies relevant to the socio-economic needs of this country. There are various ideas about the purposes of higher education, such as those advanced by Barnett (2004) and Ashwin (2020). Evident in the extract below is the emergence of discourses of entrepreneurship and discourses of employability at TUT.

> *"We need to empower students and make sure that the graduate attributes that they have enable them to be able to function independently if they want to become entrepreneurs or if they become employees…The ability to work as teams, the ability to work within unforeseen environments, creativity…" (Acadev3)*

The data quote above by an academic developer points to a particular view of the purpose of higher education.

6.3.1.2 Compliance as constraining an integrated QA and QE approach

The discourse of bureaucracy

The analysis of interview data revealed some of the agents' experiences at the level of the Empirical with how compliance is manifested in institutional and external QA contexts, as well as their experiences of emergent events. The experiences cited by most of the participants give an indication of a compliance-driven institutional context where participants are expected to comply with stringent internal policies, rules, and procedures (structures) and the resultant emergent events such as approval processes.

> *"…There are too many approval processes…" (SenAcad2).*

> *"…in our faculty, it's very much about procedures and policies because if people know what the rules are, then they stick to the rules and it's easy to stay inside the rules" (Acad4).*

The event (too many approval processes) at the level of the Actual could have resulted from the interplay of discourses such as bureaucracy and managerialism and structural mechanisms in the guise of policies and procedures at the level of the Real. The experience mentioned by the participant in the data extract above signalled how this social actor (senior academic) experienced QA as being about bureaucracy which is linked to rigid processes. Furthermore, the data extract above is an indication that rigid processes can become a constraint as agents do not understand why the internal processes need to be laborious.

The discourse of QA as time-consuming

The discourse of QA being time-consuming and how the mechanisms associated with the bureaucratic nature of QA as compliance tend to discourage agents from embracing the value of QA as it is seen to be a difficult and strenuous event. This observation was identified mainly from the experiences shared mostly by academic managers as can be seen from the data extract below:

> "…*going through the process, I think for the past 4 years or 5 years, I think firstly it's a very painstaking and time-consuming process, it's a very rigorous process indeed, and I think the paperwork, the turnaround time tends to be a long process and I think it's a lot of paperwork that has to be done and a lot of documents that need to be written up. At times, when we are writing up a programme, and it's always a team effort, staff members tend to get very tired or burnt out during the process. So, it's not an easy process to undertake…" (AcadMan9).*

If agents experience a process as time-consuming, they would possibly engage superficially with the processes at the level of the Actual to get the QA event done. The effect of these mechanisms has resulted in many more events and the level of the Actual where academics feel forced to engage in events related to QA rather than to focus on events related to their teaching and their students' learning. At the level of the Empirical, agents report burnout, which may affect how the agents enact their PEPs.

Another discourse that emerged linked to QA as time consuming was about quality being about inefficiency and red tape. This social actor was questioning some of the events in the form of a lengthy and bureaucratic process of applying for a new qualification.

> *"… the thing that is a little bit annoying is the process to which if you want to get the qualification with the right documentation and stuff like that, it will take you three years odd. So, for me, it's a quality process which then has a lot of delays and on the flip side of those delays you can start thinking is this really quality or red tape…" (AcadMan4).*

Such experiences as noted above, lead to quality being rejected or reduced to an emergent event in a form of a tick-box exercise by academics as it does not effectively contribute to improving teaching and learning and ends up constraining teaching and learning.

The discourse of lack of agility

From the analysis of data, I uncovered a discourse of lack of agility in the TUT processes at the level of the Actual. In the data extract below, it is clear that this agent's experience as a social actor is that the structures constrain them in activating agility and in contributing to the emergence of events which could be seen as 'agile responses.'

> *"…the way we view policies and the committee structures of the University. They are quite constraining…., Remember, I shared the values that I picked up in the policies; one value that is missing is responsiveness and agility. We are not agile at all; we are very rigid in terms of our processes" (SenAcad2).*

Compliance does not have to imply rigid and bureaucratic processes, as these can hinder the improvement of learning and teaching (Gunn & Cheng, 2015). Structures like a committee (a committee is comprised of a group of corporate agents) draw on discourses, and in this case, the committees are probably drawing on discourses of

compliance. Furthermore, the agent indicates that the policies are drawing on discourses of compliance.

The discourse of privileging the power of regulatory bodies

Further analysis of the data, revealed the discourse of privileging regulatory bodies and their power. I provide an extract from data by an academic manager below as an example:

> *"…in the South African context, the external bodies like our CHE, SAQA, are governing bodies and we cannot surpass or bypass these bodies. So, we need to adhere, and they have their own policies and their stipulations…" (AcadMan9).*

Related to this observation is the structure of higher education and the conditioning of TUT. As indicated in Bunting (2002), the former technikons were more conditioned by regulations and compliance than universities. So, the location of TUT in the South African higher education structure means that agents working at TUT would have been conditioned to think of regulatory bodies like the CHE and SAQA as having considerable power.

The discourse of rigidity and unnecessary bureaucracy

The experiences of some of the social actors in the data indicate a discourse of rigidity and unnecessary bureaucracy which I regard as mechanisms at the level of the Real. At the level of the Empirical, some academics appear to perceive some QA structures and events as managerial tools used to enforce regulatory controls. See examples of the extracts below for the experiences of one of the social actors:

> *"The other issue is that we don't see a policy as a guide, we see a policy as law. So, deviation becomes an issue if you want agility, at the end of the day if we have to deliver a programme that is required in a short space of time, we are not able to do so" (SenAcad2).*

"I am of an opinion that it [applications to offer a new programme] doesn't need to go through three Committees; because as it is now, it goes through the Task Team, then it goes to SCTL, then it goes SENEX, then it goes to Senate; and that takes time in terms of getting the documents out of the University to the external bodies" (SenAcad2).

The interplay of the discourse of unnecessary bureaucracy with other discourses of lack of agility and rigidity tend to constrain academics in being responsive to the need to introduce a new, or revise a learning programme. In addition, some of these QA processes, such as the completion of many forms (events), may lead to the agents feeling overwhelmed (Empirical).

The discourse of managerialism

Managerialism, one of the global discourses introduced earlier, and compliance are mechanisms at the level of the Real that tend to influence events at the level of the Actual and institutional structures. This is evident in the extract from the TUT Policy on QA below:

"This [QA] is delivered by establishing and maintaining appropriate structures, providing adequate resources and establishing and maintaining procedures for the execution, monitoring, control, audit, and continuous improvement of all the academic and non-academic services and products" (TUT, 2016).

The TUT Policy on QA (2016) emphasises processes, procedures, control, and audit. The logical relationship between the discourses of audit, and control with ideas underpinning QE are contradictory and as a result, may hinder QE from being possible. The discourses of audit, control, and processes are more compatible with compliance and QA.

Managerialism is argued to have contributed to "ritualised compliance" (Davis, 2017), which is an event in universities as a result of the formalised controls that are introduced by management structures in higher education institutions and by the

government as a way of gaining control of higher education institutions (see Section 5.2. for a discussion on the global discourses).

The experiences of TUT Quality agents below indicate how the discourses of managerialism at the level of the Real have resulted in an event where QA ends up being a 'tick-box' exercise instead of a reflective exercise. In addition, it is also an indication of academics not using PEPs, particularly the ability to be reflective.

> *"As mentioned earlier, some academics still see any quality-related processes as just a compliance exercise and when that happens the processes is not taken seriously it becomes a tick box exercise rather than as a genuine reflective exercise" (QA1).*

> *"Most people within TUT look at quality as an added activity within their environment. Rather than looking at it as an enhancer in their process management, so they tend to look at it at more of a compliance activity rather than enhancing what they do within the institution" (QA2).*

Managerial approaches foster distrust, undermining academic autonomy, and can lead to instrumentalism, in which academics are more likely to ensure compliance rather than critically reflecting on their academic practices (Gunn & Cheng, 2015). The more events associated with compliance discourses are imposed on higher education institutions, the more academics tend to experience them as a 'coercive' type of accountability and then end up engaging with "ritualised compliance". The establishment of more compliance events imposing more controls on the academic environment might result in the emergence of a culture of lack of ownership of quality.

The discourse of fear of being judged

From the experiences articulated by some of the agents in the data, I identified a discourse of fear of being judged. The data extract below is an example of how a primary agent has experienced QA at the level of the Empirical.

"...often quality assurance as such is really seen as an add-on to academic responsibilities. And the way the two are intertwined with each other, you know, often people really feel defensive about being involved in something like that, and I think one of the reasons for that is that people perceive these reviews as really being stressful, you know, almost like a judgemental type of process that takes place. …" (Acad8).

Furthermore, it appears that some of the agents have not established the link between the QA processes and the purposes of QA as expressed in the NGQA. The review of programmes is one of the QA events that are experienced as being stressful and judgemental.

The discourse of doing what we have to do to comply

Further analysis of the data indicated how at the level of the Empirical, the experiences of some of the agents showed the discourse of QA as compliance being understood as 'doing what we have to do in order to comply' and less about the deep concern about the quality of learning and teaching. See the data extracts below.

"Quality assurance looks at the way in which the institution would do their project, in line with compliance with the CHE as an accrediting institution. So basically, quality assurance for me is more of a compliance exercise in line with the accrediting bodies within the South African context, like CHE, SAQA and other professional councils" (QA2).

"…as far as I've observed those exercises appear to be for compliance purposes and I think for me that's short-changing ourselves because the processes are meant to improve the quality of our products and if we do not attend to issues that would have been raised then we are not cheating anyone but ourselves" (Acad2).

The discourse that is emerging from the experience of some of the primary agents such as Lecturers as seen from the above data extract, seems to indicate a discourse

related to a concern for the quality of learning and teaching. The agent seems to be drawing from a discourse of compliance but acknowledging the purpose of QA events.

The discourse of non-compliance with policies

Institutional policies and procedures are structures intended to guide practice and ensure consistency and should also be designed to support the enhancement of quality learning and teaching, but sometimes, there are constraints that hinder achieving these objectives. At times agents don't comply with the policies (structures). Agents that were interviewed identified several events and discourses that contributed to the non-compliance with University policies.

First, is the inadequate mechanisms at the level of the Real to encourage the kind of events that would lead to compliance with internal policies, was highlighted mainly by Academic Managers as constraining their efforts to motivate staff to comply**.** This concern points to the prevalence of a discourse of non-compliance at the level of the Real. In addition, the data extract below points to several agential mechanisms further hindering the efforts of Academic Managers.

> *"Sometimes in an organisation, you will have a few – I want to call them, people who don't want to understand anything, people who are opposed to anything that the University try to do, people who are destructive who only believe in what they do and not what others can do. I think this is one area that I can say is the only thing that can really push us away from doing what we are supposed to do" (SenAcad1).*

The non-compliance was attributed to certain events linked to the discourse of non-compliance such as agents being destructive, not interested, lacking commitment, and not cooperating with their Academic Managers. Other events at the level of the Actual such as the inadequate awareness and capacity development regarding policies contributed to non-compliance with policies.

In summary, my analysis showed that many agents viewed QA as primarily concerned with compliance in terms of the quality of provisioning. Even though the discourse of compliance is extrinsically driven from the external locus of control, the academics understood the impact of non-compliance on academic provisioning. As much as compliance ensures that there are policies and procedures to ensure proper conduct, compliance alone is not sufficient to enable transformative learning and teaching[7] (Harvey & Knight, 1996), which is at the core of an integrated QA and QE approach.

In closing this section, my analysis revealed that at the level of the Real, there are discourses that have constructed QA as being about compliance and some of these discourses were evident in some of the internal policies, such as the Policy on QA and external regulatory frameworks and policies. Therefore, the interplay of cultural and structural mechanisms at the level of the Real lead to the emergence of events that arguably can be observed or experienced as a compliant approach which is not going to lead to enhancement of quality. Therefore, for the integrated approach to be possible, compliance discourses should work in tandem with other mechanisms at the level of the Real that can lead to the emergence of an integrated approach that focuses on both assurance and enhancement of teaching and learning.

6.3.2 Accountability

Closely associated with the discourse of compliance is the accountability discourse. In this section, I discuss how the presence of the accountability discourse in my institutional context can enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach for TUT. I discuss this by presenting the discourses that underpin accountability as enabling an integrated QA and QE, followed by discourses underpinning accountability as constraining an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. The latter seems to dominate how accountability has played out at the institutional level. Through the data analysis, I could understand how the accountability

[7] Transformative learning and teaching focuses on promoting the enhancement and empowerment of students, with the emphasis placed on the improvement of their learning experiences (Harvey & Knight, 1996). See Section 3.6.1 for the discussion on the Transformative model of Harvey and Knight (1996).

discourse has played out in the TUT context and how the agents responded to the structures and culture that have emerged due to the presence of this discourse.

My main argument regarding accountability is that the results of the interplay of discourses that privilege accountability and supported by enabling structural and agential mechanisms may enable the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach, which is about transformative learning and teaching. However, some mechanisms which I discuss below tend to constrain or enable how agents respond to the conditioning influence of the discourse of accountability.

6.3.2.1 Accountability as enabling an integrated QA and QE approach

The discourse of protection of students against poor quality of provisioning

It has emerged from the data that the discourse of accountability is associated with ideas that support the protection of students against the low quality of provisioning**.** In addition, the accountability discourse is also associated with ideas that focus on how a university is accountable to various stakeholders, especially in shaping students who have the skills and knowledge relevant to the country's socio-economic needs**.** It is therefore important for the University's leaders, as social actors, to draw on the accountability discourse to lead to events which would constitute 'good' quality learning for students. As a result of drawing from the discourse of accountability, one of the social actors cited below engages in the type of events (sampling question papers) that would hold Heads of Department accountable for the quality of assessments.

> *"… after question papers have been set, he [DVC] used to go to the examinations office just to go and sample the question papers. If they find your signature, they will say X come and see us. When you go there you cannot say you didn't read because you have signed. That is what I am saying – accountability…." (AcadMan5).*

Many of the academics' responses indicated the importance of embracing the discourse of accountability as enabling the quality of provisioning and the essential role played by academics in shaping and producing quality graduates. They regarded the internal QA events, such as programme quality reviews, as evidence of how the University accepts accountability for the quality of learning and teaching. As Gosling and D'Andrea (2001) argue, if a QA system does not contribute to advancing the quality enhancement of the academic project, then QA would be regarded as a futile exercise in higher education.

The discourse of meeting standards

Another discourse that I uncovered from my analysis of the data was the discourse of meeting standards as can be seen from an example of an extract below:

> *"… In other words, giving key stakeholders and role-players an assurance that the academic offerings of a particular institution meet a set of standards or criteria (meets and exceeds) and that they can take comfort in the qualification or the programme or the learning programme is of a sufficient standard to ensure that it fulfils its objective. So, there's what I would term the accountability dimension, and to a certain extent, it has elements of compliance" (SenQA1).*

From the data extract above, a senior QA manager shows how the discourse of accountability is closely related to the discourse of compliance and how events linked to accountability support the events associated with the assurance of the quality of the learning programmes and that they meet the set standards. Further analysis shows how the discourse of meeting standards or criteria is linked to the discourse of accountability.

6.3.2.2 Accountability as constraining an integrated QA and QE approach

The discourse of lack of consequence management

Further analysis of the data, revealed a discourse of lack of consequence management as one of the mechanisms constraining some of the Academic Managers from exercising accountability. See examples of the data extracts below:

"…one of the main things which I have also raised at faculty is the fact that there aren't consequences for academics when they do wrong. So, a lot of things are almost now ending up to be like a ticking box exercise" (AcadMan4).

"I think firstly always is accountability. So, for me, in the whole TUT system, accountability is the problem. So, if you experience any problems with people that maybe do not comply, always the question is what's going to happen to that person. So, for me, there's nothing about accountability, that's for sure – lacking.." (AcadMan8).

The experiences of the Academic Managers above indicate that the absence of structural mechanisms at the level of the Real to address the lack of accountability towards quality by agents can lead to agents adopting a 'tick-box approach' to academic events (e.g., timely submission of student assessment marks).

Ineffective institutional accountability structures

The lack of effective institutional-level accountability structures is perceived as a constraint for some of the Academic Managers, as they are unable to do anything about some of the academics who compromise quality, such as poor assessments, late submission of marks, and so on. See, for example, the following comment:

"…as an HOD, I feel that my hands are sometimes tied when it comes to Lecturers that do not really do their part. You can say, for instance, try to reprimand them in a way or talk to them, but the processes of taking it further, there's no real support with regards to that… it's sometimes like you can't take the matter further. You can talk, but it is as if they have this mentality of nothing will happen…" (AcadMan3).

However, existing structural mechanisms such as Faculty Boards, Faculty Executive Committees, Departmental Teaching and Learning Committees, and institutional-level structures are there to encourage compliance to set quality standards of academic provisioning. There is an indication from the data that there are pockets of good practices in some environments, where certain structural mechanisms, such as the

Examination Committees, are effective and hold academics accountable for the quality of assessments. Institutional-, faculty-, and departmental-level structures need to drive accountability across all levels effectively. See the data extract below from an academic emphasising the importance of agents who occupy certain roles:

> *"Structures are as good as people who occupy them. You may have good structures, but they may not deliver what is expected of them, because they do not have the right people buy-in in those structures" (Acad2).*

A number of interviewees made the point that the lack of effective institutional structural mechanisms for enabling accountability may lead to agents not being accountable for the quality of learning and teaching.

Structural mechanism of labour unions constraining accountability

From the data analysis, some Academic Managers seem to draw from the discourse of accountability in how they enact their PEPs in accounting for the quality of the provisioning in their faculties. However, certain mechanisms, such as interference by labour unions, constrain their roles. See for example the following extract:

> *"In some cases, you have cases where probably you want to push for things to enhance quality, and you have the unions coming in to protect their members who may not be doing things that enhance quality - so that's also for me a constraint" (Acad2).*

Labour unions are seen to be protecting some staff members who are not accountable and do not comply with the expected standards of output and University policies.

The discourse of quality as an add-on task

Further analysis of the data, revealed the discourse of quality as an add-on task as can be seen in the example provided in the data extract below.

> *"I find that at the Management level, the HODs and the Assistant Dean and the Dean and so forth, they are quite clued up with what quality assurance is and*

what quality enhancement should be in the Departments, Faculty and the Institution. I find that the Lecturers when you talk about quality, it's as if you are giving them an additional job" (SenAcad6).

The data extract above by a Senior Academic Manager indicates that some Lecturers, as primary agents, see quality as an additional task which may impact how they exercise their PEPs towards embracing accountability for the quality of provisioning.

The discourse of lack of buy-in

Some agents who lack 'buy-in' can make it difficult for some of the Academic Managers to promote accountability. The discourse of lack of buy-in could be attributed to some of the causal mechanisms, such as work overload experienced by academics. See the extract below:

"The other thing about staff, is staff can be overloaded with work and not performing their duties as expected because they just can't see that they could follow all of the rules and policies and practices that are in place because they don't have the time" (Acad4)

In concluding this section on accountability, I argue that accountability is a positive and necessary cultural mechanism to underpin the type of events that could enable an integrated QA and QE approach. Accountability which is underpinned by the values of agents who perceive themselves as responsible for the quality of provision, for the protection of the quality of provision; for student learning, and the betterment and improvement, are likely to enable accountability, which encourages QE.

My findings have shown that structural and cultural mechanisms can enable or constrain social actors to be accountable for the quality of learning and teaching. Structural mechanisms such as faculty structures and programme quality reviews accounted for most institutional structural enablements for accountability. However, I identified more cultural and structural mechanisms which constrained social actors to be accountable for the provisioning quality.

Some of the structural constraints include a lack of effective institutional structures to influence the accountability of the agents and complex external regulatory documents with which academics struggled to engage. In addition, the following cultural mechanisms emerged as constraining agents to exercise accountability: the presence of a managerial culture in the institutional context, lack of buy-in, and quality being seen as an additional task. These constraints should be addressed to empower social actors to drive accountability in their respective environments to ensure quality provisioning. Therefore, accountability should be complemented by other mechanisms such as capacity development, commitment, transformation, and continuous improvement culture to condition the context for the implementation of the integrated QA and QE

6.3.3 Leadership

This section discusses how leadership is one of the key driving structural mechanisms which enable or constrain an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. I argue that leaders who are committed, empowered, and engaged can potentially enable an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT (Bendermacher et al., 2017, and Prakash, 2018). In higher education, the role played by institutional leaders in driving quality in an institution is very important (Prakash, 2018; and Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013). However, the presence of other structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms at the level of the Real which I discuss below may constrain or enable particular forms of the role of leadership in enabling an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT.

6.3.3.1 Leadership as enabling an integrated QA and QE approach

The discourse of a committed leader

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) responsible for teaching and learning, occupies a very senior position and plays a critical role in leading and promoting a culture of quality of learning and teaching at TUT. The analysis of my data indicates that at the level of the Empirical, some of the agents experienced the DVC as a visible and committed leader who promoted quality learning and teaching, especially in relation to

the assessment of student learning. In the extract below, an Academic Manager comments on the DVC's visibility:

> *"After question papers have been set, he [DVC] used to go to the examinations office just to go and sample the question papers" (AcadMan5).*

As a social actor, the DVC uses his PEPs and SEPs that accrued from his role at TUT to exercise his agency in a certain way.

> *"…To that extent, one can say that as TUT, we seem to have successfully managed to institutionalise leadership as it relates to matters of quality, you know. So, I am glad in so far as that is concerned, leadership that is committed to quality" (SenAcad3).*

> *"It's the commitment from executive management and the support that executive management provides to the quality unit…" (QA2).*

Further analysis of the data indicates the significance of institutional leaders in promoting a quality culture by creating enabling conditions for the implementation of quality as can be seen from the data extracts above.

The discourse of leadership as enabling 'future–ready' graduates

The Executive Deans, Assistant Deans, Heads of Department, and Section Heads who occupy academic leadership roles articulated their understanding of their roles concerning QA and QE and their roles in shaping learning and teaching and the quality of graduates. However, analysis of data shows that social actors enact their roles in different forms as a result of the mechanisms at the level of the Real.

> *"… if as a leader I do not have a clear vision on where I want to take my faculty, for instance, to give a simple example declaring that I am going to ensure that I produce future-ready graduates… that on its own will trigger quality systems that have to be put in place. We would immediately talk about quality teaching, quality assessment, exposure to advanced technology, state-of-the-art*

classrooms, student support, and exposure to industry and so on…" (SenAcad4).

The extract above from an interview with one of the Deans demonstrated how, as a social actor, they exercise their PEPs and the SEPs in a particular way. They are drawing on a mechanism, which in this case is a discourse that exists at an institutional level related to graduates needing to be 'future ready'. The discourse related to 'future readiness' is part of the TUT mission and vision which makes it part of the institutional cultural system. If this and other discourses come to dominate at TUT, then other people may also draw on them.

Further analysis of the data indicates the importance of some of the Deans drawing on discourses which identify particular ways of thinking about middle managers. See the data extract below.

"And more importantly also as the Dean, you must provide leadership in the sense of making sure that our HODs are as well fully equipped when coming to matters that relate to quality because these are the people that are that the coal face of managing teaching and learning programmes and therefore they should always understand what is expected of them in terms of making sure that they institutionalise quality" (SenAcad3).

The reflection above indicates the importance of the role of senior academic leaders (Deans) in enabling the middle management structures to effectively enact their roles in learning and teaching.

The discourse of leaders that enable a shared understanding of institutional culture

Analysis of the data indicated the following values underpinning the cultural system of the University: the duty of care for staff and students, empowerment of students, equity of provisioning, academic excellence, integrity, being the 'People's University' and compliance. The extracts below indicate the different values that emerged from the analysis of responses provided by some of the academic leaders:

"…we strive to the value of integrity because integrity is critically important to generate a sense of credibility in what we are doing as a University; because if we lose that, we are in trouble…" (SenAcad3).

"… because we are a multi-campus University, one of the values that stand out in our teaching and learning policies is equity of provisioning…" (SenAcad2).

Bendermacher et al. (2017), emphasise the importance of the role of leadership structures in establishing a context of trust and shared understanding of institutional values. It is important for such values to be part of the espoused institutional culture and for them to underpin the work of structures at the level of the Real so that social actors and other agents can draw from them to shape how they enact their agency to support the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach.

6.3.3.2 Mechanisms constraining leadership

The discourse of limited knowledge of quality assurance

It emerged from the data that one of the main constraints impacting some of the HoDs as social actors exercising their PEPs on quality matters was the limited knowledge of quality which may constrain their influence in leading quality matters at departmental levels. This extract focuses on the need identified by an Academic Manager for capacity development by the Quality Unit.

"The quality assurance, I think they need to sit with the Teaching and Learning Committee for the Faculty and then try and educate them… So, if we can have that workshop and educate the committees and staff members, that will help. And it should not be a once-off; it should be a continuous thing." (AcadMan10)

The constraint of limited knowledge of QA experienced by some of the agents at the level of the Empirical can be associated with the absence of institutional quality awareness or quality-related capacity development initiatives for Academic Managers

and Lecturers at the level of the Actual. The absence of capacity development on the quality of learning and teaching impacted negatively on how some of the social actors enacted their leadership roles related to the quality of learning and teaching.

The discourse of lack of continuity

Unstable leadership or management, lack of enforcement of handover processes and follow-up processes were also identified as constraining leadership.

> *"Again, another constraint can be unstable management, so either at the Dean's level or HOD's level where normally there wouldn't be any proper hand-overs when a manager either step down or leave the system. Follow-ups are not done properly which is very critical…Closing the loop becomes a problem because if I leave an institution at a stage where a review had already been done and perhaps a department is expected to compile an improvement plan and I leave and the next person now is not aware of what needs to be done hence I am talking about proper hand-overs – that can really interfere with quality processes hugely so and that is my experience" (SenAcad4).*

The extract above points to examples of important events that are absent at the level of the Actual such as lack of handover processes and lack of follow-up processes which impacts on continuity of quality provisioning.

The discourse of compliance

Analysis of data shows how the compliance discourse at the level of the Real influenced how some of the academic leaders as social actors enacted their role at the level of the Actual. See an example of the data extract below, from a senior academic participant:

> *"… as Deans, we are in the centre of making sure that whatever that we are doing complies with quality prescriptions within the system…" (SenAcad3).*

The extract above demonstrates that the social actor's experience at the level of the Empirical is more concerned with compliance and accountability than with

enhancement. The prominence of the compliance discourse in the institutional context could have strongly influenced how social actors enacted their agency.

Further analysis of the data indicates that the discourses of compliance, control, and accountability are entrenched in the cultural and structural domains of the institution which may impact the successful implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT.

> *"… policies at our Universities are more focused on compliance. They are very legalistic and actually quite stringent. So, one of the values that span out to me is compliance. And number two… Compliance and probably to a certain extent control" (SenAcad2).*

The University has established structures to lead and support quality at the institutional, faculty, and departmental levels. The data analysis indicates that the University is led by visible and committed leadership with strong PEPs to exercise agency on quality matters. Although the leadership's understanding of their role was predominantly focused on ensuring compliance and accountability, there was some indication of understanding quality holistically and linking it to the quality of the academic project and their role in shaping the quality of graduates. The interplay of cultural, structural, and agential mechanisms further enhances the capacity of leaders to lead and steer quality at various institutional levels including leading the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach.

The role of leadership is critical given the complex multi-campus nature of TUT. But leadership roles alone as a structural enabler is not sufficient without the relevant supporting cultural and agential enablers. More structural mechanisms emerged from the data as constraining the role of leadership in the institution than cultural or agential constraints. Archer (1995) reminds us that structure has the power to constrain access to material goods; therefore, the University should address these structural constraints. Only a few cultural and agential constraints emerged. The interplay of these structural and cultural mechanisms may constrain an integrated approach to QA and QE.

In summary, unsurprisingly, the support and guidance of the Quality Unit appeared to be the main structural mechanism enabling the various levels of leadership in the University. There are other structural mechanisms, such as policies and academic development, that also played a significant role in enabling the roles of leadership. However, a number of structural and cultural mechanisms constrained the role of leadership, such as the presence of a strong compliance discourse in the University context, limited knowledge of quality, resource constraints, and inadequate empowerment opportunities on quality matters. These constraining mechanisms at the level of the Real present the possibility of constraining the role of leadership in enabling an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT.

6.3.4 Quality of learning programmes

As indicated in Chapter one, the scope of my study is limited to only one of the core functions of the University, i.e., teaching and learning. In the section below, I discuss mechanisms that account for events and experiences linked to how quality of learning programmes can potentially influence the implementation of the integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. Quality is understood through the discourses of fitness for and of purpose, value for money and transformation (CHE, 2001). These understandings of quality are used across the higher education sector in South Africa.

Data analysis revealed that mechanisms enabling the quality of learning programmes have dominated the University's cultural system more than the constraining ones. The interplay of the identified mechanisms have resulted in certain events emerging at the level of the Actual. I explore these mechanisms and events further below.

6.3.4.1 The quality of learning programmes as enabling an integrated QA and QE approach

The discourse of support to enable fit for purpose curriculum

The interview data and document analysis indicated that the University has established structures to support the development of fit for purpose learning

programmes. The structures which emerged from my data as enabling quality learning programmes include the Academic Development Unit; the Quality Unit; policies and processes; a short learning programme on curriculum development; and institutional, faculty-, and departmental-level teaching and learning committees.

Evident in the extract below is the emergence of the discourse of a fit for purpose curriculum.

> *"Our Advisory Committee is also important in terms of quality assurance; we also use them to assist us and give input on curriculum design, which I think is important" (AcadMan7).*

A structural mechanism in the form of an advisory committee[8] enables a fit for purpose curriculum.

Another structural mechanism enabling the development of a fit for purpose curriculum is the institutional policy on Curriculum Development. Externally at the national level, the macro structures such as the HEQSF (CHE, 2013b) and SAQA level descriptors (SAQA, 2012) have helped shape the development of the learning programmes.

However, a critique of the HEQSF alignment process presented by Lange in Jansen (2017) argues that some of these curriculum reform events, such as the HEQSF realignment process, did not encourage critique of some of the structural and cultural mechanisms underpinning curriculum development, which resulted mainly in compliance. Lange argues that the alignment process only addressed the 'exoskeleton' of curriculum reform, which indicated that the curriculum reforms were focused on the outer frame of changes and not on the mechanisms of curriculum

[8] Advisory committee is a committee comprising representatives of internal and external role-players for a particular learning programme or group of learning programmes. This committee advises the Heads of Department or Section Heads on matters such as admission requirements, minimum standards of employability, programme content, curriculum development, and the needs of the industry, new developments, professional registration, continued professional development, and cooperative education.

design. This critique can be confirmed by the extract below by one of the Academic Development practitioners.

> *"We're very operational, too operational. We don't sit and ask ourselves these bigger philosophical questions." (AcaDev1)*.

To some extent, the extract above acknowledges the absence of critical reflection in the process of realignment to the new qualifications framework.

The discourse of agency of academic leaders

Additionally, my data has indicated the significance of exercising agency by academic leaders (social actors) as a key enablement for the quality of learning programmes. The discourse of leadership involvement in learning and teaching emerge strongly from the extracts below.

> *"…Management involvement, I believe, is very important. Our Management, especially in our area, teaching and learning, was so much involved and the Deans also" (SenAcad5).*

> *"…We have a very active Dean; in other words, he is very involved also in what is going on the campus, and because of that, he ensures that what is done on campus is perfectly aligned with what is going on all the other campuses." (AcadMan1).*

The enabling role of Deans, HoDs, Section Heads, Academic Managers, and Lecturers can be realised by exercising their PEPs towards enabling quality curricula. However, the roles of academic leaders as social actors are shaped by the structural, cultural, and agential conditions of the University. One Dean may be able to do certain things, but not all Deans will be the same; it depends on their PEPs and their ability to reflect on how to enact their roles.

Further analysis of the data indicated that most academic leaders are members of the various University structures where they can potentially exercise their agency and

influence the quality of learning and teaching through their reflections on how they enact their roles. This shows how a university's structural and cultural contexts shape the roles of agents.

The discourse of empowerment through professional development

The Academic Development Unit is one of the main structures established in the University to enable the professional development of academics. Data indicated that Academic Development is a structure with a strong corporate agency in the faculties and their roles are key in influencing and shaping events relating to learning programme development at TUT. As a structure which is part of faculties, they are positioned to influence academic practices at the level of the Actual. The faculty leaders rely on the Academic Developers to guide and offer various professional development initiatives and make faculty leaders aware of the mechanisms they can draw on to exercise their agency.

> *"We have our academic developers firstly that comes into play which assists us and guides us through the entire process of re-curriculation and quality assurance" (AcadMan9).*

Another important discourse which emerged from the data is that of empowerment of agents through professional development to enhance how the agents enact their PEPs towards improving the development of quality learning programmes. See the extracts below:

> *"…it is not only through meetings that people would be familiar with what is expected of them in terms of quality assurance. Training in the form of workshops, in the form of short courses could play a critical role in terms of helping people and improve, in producing quality" (Acad6).*

> *"I think a big factor would be capacity building. If the faculty staff are not capacitated on curriculum development and design, it will constrain the process. They don't have to be the experts, but they need to have some degree of knowledge on this" (SenAcad Dev1).*

When academics are empowered to develop fit for purpose learning programmes and to teach well, they are most likely to have intrinsic motivation at the level of the Empirical to improve the quality of programmes and teaching, which is about quality enhancement. A senior Academic Developer emphasised the importance of empowerment events for academic staff, exposing them to theories of both curriculum and disciplinary knowledge to enable them to design appropriate learning programmes. The empowerment of programme teams resonates with the holistic model suggested by Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2007). The model is discussed in Section 3.6.4.

The discourse of support

Further analysis of the data revealed the discourse of support as enabling the development of fit for purpose learning programmes. See the extract below by a Senior Academic.

> *"…Academic development and quality experts often interact with us in the Faculty board meetings, because you are constantly there, you come and make presentations, you make us aware of certain trends and developments in the field of quality assurance and quality enhancement. So, all these things for me are important factors that enable effective quality assurance and quality enhancement system in the Faculty and indeed in the University as a whole" (SenAcad3).*

The support received from the Quality Unit, the Academic Development Unit, and the capacity development initiatives provided by the CHE, which are all events at the level of the Actual, were found to be important and enabled the learning programme development processes. The role played by the Quality, and Academic Development structures are seen to be important as they make social actors aware of the mechanisms they can draw from to exercise their agency, as can be seen from the extract above by a senior academic.

The discourse of collaboration and collegiality

Analysis of data indicated the importance of the relationship and synergy that must exist between structures such as the Quality Unit and Academic departments. This analysis pointed to the discourse of collaboration and collegiality. See the extract below:

> *"…there need to be proper working relationships, not antagonistic relationships between the two, the quality unit and the departments. There must be synergy, there must be a way of proper understanding between the two with common goals to achieve high-quality programmes" (SenAcad2)*

The interplay of collaboration and collegiality mechanisms with structures at the level of the Real impacts how academics exercise their agency to design learning programmes. Even though the extract above was made by one of the senior academics, it pointed to the importance of collaborative relationships (Sattar & Cooke, 2012) and a collegial approach between the Quality Unit and the academic departments, as encouraged by Gosling and D'Andrea (2001) in their integrated quality development model discussed in Section 3.6.3. A collaborative relationship at the level of the Actual, complemented by good communication, is vital in addressing improvements (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007). A discourse of collegiality is evident when academics trust the quality processes and contribute to enabling quality enhancement.

A senior quality manager also concurred that a collegial approach, at the level of the Real enables events related to quality enhancement.

> *"Then your approach has to be collegial, and that's what will enable the process". (SenQA1)*

The emphasis on collaboration and collegiality mechanisms also point to the need for quality practitioners and academic developers to work together towards creating groups of corporate agents (see Section 2.3.1 for an explanation of corporate agents).

As a group of corporate agents, they are better positioned to introduce enabling structural and cultural mechanisms to the academics they work with. The creation of corporate agents resonates with Srikanthan and Darlymple's (2007) concept of learning communities.

6.3.4.2 Mechanisms constraining the quality of learning programmes

The discourse of lack of curriculum development knowledge and competencies

The history of UOTs relating to curriculum development practices from the former technikons could account for the curriculum development constraints that emerged from my data. The erstwhile technikons followed a practice called the 'convenor system', where the convenor technikons were given the role of leading the development of national curricula in a specific discipline. This process was overseen by the Committee for Technikon Principals (Sattar & Cooke, 2012). The convenor system did not allow individual academics the freedom to design curricula. They had to teach what the convenor institution had designed. Therefore, academics in the erstwhile technikons were conditioned by discourses of lack of academic freedom to design and teach curricula that were fit for purpose for their contexts. This constraint at the level of the Real, influenced the agency of academics in terms of how they shaped students' learning and attainment of graduate attributes through developing transformative curricula.

Agential constraints such as lack of programme development knowledge and competencies can hinder adequate and critical participation of academics in how they enact their PEPs in designing and developing curricula. As a result, not all academics can participate equally in the development of new learning programmes. Most academics and academic developers I interviewed emphasised the importance of empowering key agents with competencies and knowledge to develop curricula appropriate to the disciplines and programmes they teach. At the level of the Real, mechanisms of lack of knowledge and experience in designing curricula, fear of failure and of not doing the right things, and lack of interest possibly underpinned the lack of involvement by academics at the level of the Actual. The lack of exposure to curriculum

development in the technikon context due to the conditioning effects of the convenor system, as discussed above, may also have contributed to this lack of interest in curriculum development. The concern below was shared by a senior academic.

> *"…we try by all the means to involve the Lecturers, but oh no ways, they didn't want to, they'll have all the types of excuses of not doing it. That's why many HODs ended up doing it themselves, but my take was you can't as an HOD do these modules…You can't do that, because they have expertise in the Department that is supposed to do this, but they are the very same expertise which is the Lecturers that don't want to get involved" (SenAcad5).*

Although some academics reported having the support of their fellow academics, different faculties experienced different constraints regarding the participation of academics in curriculum development. As primary agents with subject expertise, academics should participate in the events to exercise their agency in curriculum development and to gain programme design and development competencies. These competencies will also come in the form of formal curriculum processes, such as understanding how credits, notional hours, outcomes, and criteria work. In addition, they also need disciplinary knowledge.

Not all Lecturers take up the opportunities (or are able) to attend programmes designed to give them the capacity needed for their role as educators who are capacitated to develop their own curricula.

> *"…staff members sometimes don't even know how to re-curriculate, they just do it for the sake of submitting the document and then sometimes you find that some Lecturers, they just do it, but they don't follow what is written in their document, what was approved. So, if maybe we can have workshops and then we can be allocated some people who will work hand-in-hand…" (AcadMan10).*

The interview extract above by an Academic Manager highlights the significance of capacity development and support in curriculum development and how its absence can result in an emergent event in the form of a 'tick-box' approach to curriculum development that may constrain transformative learning and teaching. Furthermore,

the extract highlights the importance of events at the level of the Actual such as workshops as enablements for capacity development on designing curricula.

The discourse of high workload

Another important mechanism that emerged from my analysis of data is the discourse of high workload. The development of quality learning programmes is also constrained by high workloads experienced by many TUT academics in my sample. See the extract below:

> *"…The very same person that must teach, mark and set exam papers and set test papers and still do research and still do community engagement, is also expected to do programme development. To me, that is the number one constraint in the whole process…" (SenAcad2).*

Workload entails the range of roles academics are expected to fulfil, which impact how they exercise their agency. The high staff workload linked to high student numbers and the insufficient staff was a recurring constraint voiced by many academics, including Academic Development and Quality practitioners. High workload results in academics not having enough time (Bendermacher et al., 2017) to adequately focus on curriculum development, as seen in the interview extract above by a senior academic.

A further constraining mechanism exacerbating the workload of academics is the high number of part-time academics, which is indicative of the changing nature of universities influenced by neoliberal mechanisms.

> *"…we are actually constrained in relation to the number of academics that we have as a Faculty; we end up with a high number of part-time Lecturers. And the part-time Lecturers have limited contribution to programme development, so the full-time academics are the ones that end up carrying the load" (SenAcad2).*

Participation of part-time staff members in curriculum development is limited, as shown in the data extract above by a senior academic.

Structural mechanisms of complex QA structures

My findings indicate that the external regulatory accreditation policies (structural mechanisms) tend to constrain some academics when developing curricula as they are found to be complex to apply. Example are shown in the data extracts below:

> *"…The interpretation of the policy. We wasted a little bit of time when we interpreted document 'X'. We, as the implementers, interpreted document 'X' in terms of the way in which we understood it, and we designed the programme the way we understood it… it went back and forth, up until we had a meeting with the policy custodians [policy owners] ... So that itself became a constraint". (Acadev3).*

> *"…then you find that the Lecturers do not understand the CHE's quality requirements, you know. So, if there is a lack of understanding, you'll find there's a misalignment between what they understand and what the CHE requires. And sometimes also I find that the CHE document, use a specific language, you know. It's a CHE language, which might not necessarily be a TUT language. So now you have to translate the CHE language into a TUT language…. So maybe the CHE terminology could be a barrier…." (SenAcad6).*

The interplay of complex structural mechanisms with other mechanisms constrains academics in applying their PEPs as they end up relying on the Quality Unit and Academic Development for assistance in responding to the criteria and standards. These kinds of structural constraints indicate that complex structural QA mechanisms at the level of the Real can constrain instead of enable academics to enact their PEPs in relation to curriculum development matters. The interview extract above by an academic developer indicates the constraining effect of some of the external structural mechanisms.

Structural mechanisms of inefficient QA processes

An additional constraint identified at the macro level structures is that of inefficient QA processes. This is particularly in relation to external approval and accreditation processes as can be seen in the data extract below:

> *"…So, for me, it's a quality process which then has a lot of delays, and on the flip side of those delays, you can start thinking is this really quality or red tape." "… But the red tape and the system to really get to a qualification is it really worth three-four years on, I am not sure about that" (AcadMan4).*

Most agents mentioned lengthy approval timelines as constraining curriculum development processes. This does not allow academics to take into account the rapid changes in the curriculum of specific fields of study / discipline. The discourses associated with bureaucracy at the level of Real could have influenced the lengthy approval processes that constrain learning programmes' approval and accreditation processes. The bureaucratic nature of the macro QA structures is associated with a managerial and a neoliberal culture.

In Section 6.3.1, I argued that dominant compliance discourses at the level of the Real constrained institutional efforts towards quality enhancement. Similarly, an approach to curriculum development underpinned by discourses of compliance tends to constrain the quality of learning programmes. I further argue that curriculum development needs to be underpinned by discourses and structures that balance the assurance and enhancement aspects of learning programme development to enable transformative learning and teaching.

In concluding this section, I argue for the importance of quality of learning programmes as one of the enablers for the successful implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach. Discourses of empowerment, support, development, collaboration, and collegiality emerged as cultural mechanisms enabling the quality of learning of programmes. In addition, the committee structures, Academic Development and Quality Units, curriculum development policy and processes, and the institutional short learning programmes emerged as structural mechanisms aimed at staff empowerment

in curriculum development. Structures enabling support and empowerment of agents to understand programme development as well as how to use a range of ways to elicit feedback on programme development and implementation are critical. The findings indicate how the interplay of structural and cultural mechanisms is necessary to enable the successful implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach.

The presence of other structural, cultural and agential constraining mechanisms such as lack of programme development knowledge and competencies, high workload, the historical context of UoTs, and complex external regulatory programme approval and accreditation structures could potentially constrain the learning programme development. These constraints must be addressed to create a conducive institutional context for the development of fit for purpose learning programmes and, as a result, enable an integrated QA and QE approach.

6.3.5 Quality of Teaching

Quality of teaching is central to the quality of student learning, especially in the context of the democratisation and concomitant rapid increase in student numbers, along with budget cuts and no increase in academic staff across the higher education sector globally and in South Africa (Seyfried & Pohlenz, 2018). Increasing accountability requirements, growing numbers of cross-border student mobility, online learning, and increased competitiveness amongst higher education institutions may all influence the quality of teaching (Harrison et al., 2022). It has therefore become significant for universities to assure and enhance the quality of learning and teaching (Biggs, 2001).

Continuous improvement of the learning and teaching processes is central to achieving quality enhancement (Biggs 2001), despite the dominant compliance discourse in the University. My analysis has enabled me to uncover the mechanisms that have the potential to enable or constrain quality teaching, which is about the fitness for purpose teaching across the multi-campuses of the University. According to my findings, enabling mechanisms have largely influenced the quality of teaching more than constraining ones. Through the analysis of data, I was also able to understand how the agents responded to the structures, culture and events that have emerged

due to the presence of these mechanisms. I explore these mechanisms and events below.

6.3.5.1 Quality of teaching as enabling an integrated QA and QE approach

Similar to my finding on the quality of learning programmes, the University has established several structures to enable fit for purpose teaching, such as institutional committees for teaching and learning (see excerpt below), policies, short learning programmes, vocational teacher training programmes, and funding resources for academic professional development.

> *"Our Departmental Teaching and Learning Committee will obviously look at things like learner guides, teaching methods, talk about issues with specific students" (AcadMan7).*

The discourse of fit for purpose teaching

Fit for purpose teaching has the potential to enable the transformation of students' perceptions of their world and how they apply their knowledge to solve real-world problems. Furthermore, Cheng (2014) suggests that the goal of learning should go beyond students assimilating knowledge and should include students becoming critical and independent thinkers, which she refers to as qualities of transformation. However, transformation is a mechanism that exists but is not always evident in the events related to teaching and student learning. The University, through the institutional Teaching and Learning Strategy (TUT, 2014), has acknowledged the need to transform learning and teaching through cultural and structural changes, as indicated in the extract below.

> *" …institutional transformation will require the culture of the institution to change by changing underlying assumptions as well as institutional behaviours and processes" (TUT, 2014, p. 8).*

In addition, quality teaching tends to also transform academics' conceptions of their teacher role (Biggs, 2001). Academics potentially have the power, in the form of PEPs,

to champion transformative teaching. However, underlying cultural and structural mechanisms tend to constrain or enable academics' efforts to provide transformative teaching. The statement below from the institutional Teaching and Learning Strategy (TUT, 2014) indicates how the University values quality teaching.

> *"Teaching should further be valued by developing a common understanding about the expectation for good teaching and how it can be improved" (TUT, 2014, p. 5).*

The University, through the teaching and learning strategy (a key structural mechanism), has acknowledged the need to implement events at the level of the Actual in form of strategies that can enable academics to implement assessments that encourage transformative learning, as evident in the extract below:

> *"Implement mechanisms and strategies to manage assessment practices that support transformative learning" (TUT, 2014, p.14).*

The discourse of promoting the professional development of agents

Underpinning transformative teaching is the discourse of continuous professional development of teaching, which has the potential to enable academics to meet the educational aims and outcomes of the curriculum (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001).

> *"…policies and procedures to reward transformative teaching practices, discussion forums to encourage and support pedagogy discourse and structures to support staff development aimed at transformative teaching and learning" (TUT, 2014, p. 8).*

The extract from the TUT teaching and learning strategy (TUT, 2014) quoted above indicates the University's acknowledgement of the need to establish structures to support the professional development needs of the academics aimed at transforming teaching and learning.

Closely linked to quality teaching is the quality of assessment which is also associated with the discourse promoting the professional development of agents. The importance of Lecturers attending pedagogical development opportunities (emergent events at the level of the Actual) to improve their teaching and assessment skills were emphasised.

> *"A range of developmental activities and programmes is available for the professional development of academic staff through the Directorate of Curriculum Development and Support" (TUT, 2014, p. 14).*

Continuous professional development is a cultural mechanism that leads to events in the form of workshops conducted by the academic development unit. Professional development of academic staff is an essential condition for QE to be possible (Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013), and the lack thereof may compromise certain events, such as the continuous quality improvement of learning and teaching.

> *"…quality is a process, you know. So, it must start with the Lecturer, then with the HOD, then with the Dean and the Assistant Dean and so forth. So, I find that if you do not have an understanding of quality at the Lecturer level, it's going to be very difficult for there to be a proper follow-through of quality" (SenAcad6).*

The interview extract above by a senior academic indicates the importance of understanding quality as fitness for purpose, which may be cascaded through empowering academics across all levels. Fitness for purpose should be understood through the vision and mission statements of TUT, and hopefully, this kind of understanding will permeate the institution.

The discourse of reflexivity enabling improvement of quality of assessments

The structural mechanisms potentially enabling the quality of assessments include the institutional and national assessment and moderation policies. The data extracts below show how some agents view the use of moderators' reports (events at the level

of the Actual) as contributing to improving the quality of assessments and helping align practice with the assessment policy.

> *"…to ensure that the question paper is in line with the study outcomes or learning outcomes and to ensure that whatever we are doing is moderated by other people outside. In terms of the latter, what happens is that after people have given us feedback, either in the form of moderators. As HOD or as a former HOD, what we used to do was to reflect so that we can look at what was the quality issues during examinations and then also what improvements can be done" (AcadMan5).*

Of importance from the extract above is how the HoD as a social actor, uses reflexivity and agency to improve the quality of assessment.

The discourse of protection of the integrity of assessments

My findings showed that there are several structures established at institutional, faculty, and departmental levels, such as the examination committee, to guide and oversee events in the form of assessments of student learning. The University, through the teaching and learning strategy (2014), commits to the establishment of structures to enable the quality of assessments.

> *"Provide targeted, ongoing professional development to enhance the teaching, assessment and curriculum design skills of all academic staff, permanent and part-time, on all campuses (including educational technology), utilising a variety of contact modes" (TUT, 2014, p. 15)*

These structures are underpinned by the discourse of protection of the integrity of assessments which is critical to safeguard the institution against events at the level of the Actual that can potentially harm the reputation and integrity of assessments and possibly compromise the quality of the competencies that students graduates with. See Section 6.3.1 for some of the mechanisms constraining the quality of assessments.

The discourse of change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged in 2020 as a mechanism at the level of the Real. In interplay with other mechanisms like age and chronic diseases like diabetes and asthma, it led to the emergence of symptoms (events) and experiences of those symptoms. For some, the symptoms were severe, and many people died. The pandemic also affected higher education learning, teaching and assessment processes. In higher education, a series of events emerged from the pandemic with other mechanisms. The main event was the need for emergency remote teaching, learning, and assessments to enable the continuation of learning and teaching. However, my findings showed how at the level of the Empirical, people responded differently to the requirement to implement emergency remote teaching depending on their PEPs and the SEPs in their contexts and perhaps also a range of different theories and beliefs (CEPs) underpinning their practices considering the constraints of online teaching. Capacity development initiatives were implemented to empower academics and assist them in coping with emerging events.

While some academics experienced the pandemic as a constraint to learning and teaching at the level of the Empirical, others experienced it as a catalyst for change that disrupted the University's traditional approach to teaching and learning provision and propelled it towards adopting blended learning and new and innovative teaching methods and assessing students (emergent events at the level of the Actual).

> *"…if there's one good thing about COVID, it is this. I can't tell you how long I've been trying to get our programmes or even Lecturers just to use the tools online or myTUTor[9] more effectively, and COVID came, and it's like, wow, great stuff" (AcadMan3).*

The interview excerpt from an Academic Manager above demonstrates how the emergence of the pandemic made it possible to use online resources effectively to support teaching and learning at the level of the Actual.

[9] MyTUTor is a learning management system used at the University

6.3.5.2 Mechanisms constraining quality of teaching

The discourse of constraint as a result of Emergency Remote Teaching

There is evidence from my data that there were emergent events at the level of the Actual that resulted from pivoting to emergency remote teaching, such as the shortening of teaching time due to rapid changes to virtual online teaching and, in some cases, Lecturers having to accept late or handwritten assignments.

Some of the events that emerged as a result of the pandemic constrained students' learning opportunities. As seen in the interview excerpts below, some of the academics interviewed provided examples of how the pandemic constrained students' learning and teaching activities during emergency remote teaching.

> *"…maybe they are living in an area that does not have an internet connection - even if they received data, computers and laptops, the access to computers and laptops could also be a constraint" (Acad4).*

At the Empirical level, students had to adjust to attending online classes remotely, which initially influenced the students' learning. Some constraints that influenced students' learning include a lack of devices (smartphones, computers, or laptops), limited or no Internet connectivity, and financial constraints that hindered them from affording mobile data and buying laptops. However, the University intervened by providing mobile data for remote teaching and learning, and hard copies of learning materials were printed and distributed to students who opted to have learning materials printed. My findings are limited in terms of elaborating more on the experiences of students at the level of Empirical as I only interviewed academics.

However, it is clear that the events that resulted from pivoting to emergency remote teaching had implications for QA and enhancement of learning and teaching. To protect the quality and integrity of learning and teaching, the University reviewed some of the existing academic structures, such as policies, rules, and guidelines. The review was undertaken to enable transformative learning, teaching and assessment, and to

address the constraints that could hinder students from graduating with appropriate disciplinary knowledge and competencies given the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The discourse of resistance to change

Analysis of data indicates that cultural and agential mechanisms, such as lack of awareness regarding some of the policies and resistance to change, may have constrained the quality of teaching. The extracts below by an Academic Developer highlight some of these cultural and agential constraints.

> *"If there is no awareness, they won't be able to understand and know what policies drive our teaching and learning. So, lack of awareness would be a negative part, lack of willingness to change and adapt and adopt the new policies that are there that we have." (Acadev3).*

> *"…If you still have Lecturers that don't change their paradigm in terms of their thinking. We are still going to have the challenge of implementing those policies…" (Acadev3).*

Further analysis of data indicates that although policies are in place, other related mechanisms could constrain the implementation of the policies, as shown in the interview extracts below.

> *"… we have this thing of having policies like for example, a policy on teaching and learning or a policy on the assessment, but when it comes to them being actualised, they are not being actualised… Whereas the tools are there, so the awareness for me is very important…." (Acadev3).*

> *"… if you just leave policies on the shelf and you don't bring it down and show the practicality of what needs to be done, it will never be enforced and done" (Acadev1).*

Having a structure to inform practice at the level of the Actual is inadequate if that structure is not supported by other enabling mechanisms such as effective

implementation and the kind of culture that embraces values of continuous quality improvement.

The discourse of rigidity and bureaucracy

The discourse of rigidity and bureaucracy emerged from the data as one of the mechanisms constraining quality of teaching. See the data extract below from an interview with one of the Academic Managers:

> *"Because there was too much red tape, again you cannot do this; you must wait for this, wait for that. Meanwhile, at the end of the day, all that I wanted to start earlier was implementing at the end of the day. So sometimes internal there are too many protocols and procedures and ask this person and that person permission to sometimes use creativity in the classroom" (AcadMan3).*

The data extract above indicates how the rigidity of internal processes and structures can result in events in a form of too many approval protocols, resulting in academics feeling constrained to be creative or innovative in their classrooms.

In concluding this section, I argue for the importance of discourse of quality teaching as one of the key enablers for an integrated QA and QE approach. Professional development programmes, teaching and learning policies, and committee structures emerged as the main structural mechanisms enabling the quality of teaching (fit for purpose teaching). On the other hand, there are several mechanisms that are constraining the quality of teaching, such as the discourse of constraint as a result of pivoting to remote emergency teaching, the discourse of resistance to change and the discourse of rigidity and bureaucracy, which hinder innovation in teaching. The pandemic emerged both as an enabler and a constraint for the quality of teaching. These findings demonstrate that establishing structures alone is not sufficient if the social actors are not empowered and supported to exercise their PEPs in ways that enable transformative learning and teaching.

6.3.6 Review of Learning Programmes

As a result of the emergence of the accountability discourse in higher education, events such as quality evaluations were introduced. Quality evaluations play a critical role in enabling QE in higher education (Williams, 2016). The review of learning programmes is one of the institutional structures established to evaluate the quality of learning programmes and enable the improvement of programmes offered at TUT (TUT, 2018b). Literature on quality in higher education indicates that programme reviews are widely used structures by most higher education institutions to review the quality of their learning programmes (Bornman, 2004; Sosibo, 2014). The term 'programme reviews' is used in institutional documents and by participants to refer to quality evaluations. Therefore, the two concepts are used interchangeably in this context.

A programme review involves a series of events, such as the preparation of a self-evaluation report, the appointment of a panel, conducting a site visit, and a panel site visit report, and is underpinned by certain discourses. These events lead to the emergence of experiences and observations at the level of Empirical. My findings have indicated that academics have experienced reviews differently. While some experienced them as helpful and positive experiences, others found them stressful. The purpose of the programme reviews is to promote critical reflection and thinking about improvement. However, there are mechanisms at the level of the Real and events at the level of the Actual that may constrain programme reviews from achieving their intended purposes of improving the quality of learning programmes. I discuss the constraining and enabling mechanisms in the sections below.

I argue that reviewing learning programmes is critical to enabling the quality of learning and teaching and, as a result, enabling transformative learning and teaching. However, the achievement of transformative learning and teaching depends on whether the agents being reviewed have an interest in the improvement of learning and teaching and have the required PEPs to critique what is being reviewed. However, my data, as well as other researchers in higher education, have shown that quality assessments do not always lead to enhanced teaching quality (Harrison et al., 2022).

As part of my analysis, I sought to identify the underlying mechanisms that enable or constrain the review of learning programmes (quality evaluations) at TUT. The review of learning programmes is potentially a critical structural enabler for the implementation of an integrated QA and QE to be possible at TUT.

6.3.6.1 Review of learning programmes as enabling an integrated QA and QE approach

In this section, I discuss mechanisms that potentially underpinned the positive experiences of social actors with reviews. These positive experiences were mainly described by social actors who are senior academics and academics in professional programmes, such as in the extracts below. These types of findings, where agents experience programme reviews as positive, contradict some of the critiques that emerged in the analysis of the experiences of academics with quality evaluations (see Section 5.5 on the experiences of QA by academics). Some of the discourses that I identified from the data associate programme reviews with the opportunity to learn, the enhancement of quality, and the betterment of the University which is key for the implementation of the integrated QA and QE approach.

The discourse of the betterment of the University

One of the discourses underpinning experiences of academics with the review of learning programmes as identified in the data related to the discourse of the betterment of the University. see the data extract below:

> *"I have said it numerous times, and I'll definitely say it again on the record is that quality assurance has really changed TUT for the better, I think and definitely the programme itself. It [programme review] prepared us better for the audit - I say it to all the programmes that undergo audits…" (Acad7).*

The ideas underpinning this discourse, as expressed above by an academic, are associated with change for the betterment of the University and preparations for external evaluations.

The discourse of support

Analysis of my data suggests that some academics understood the significance and value of reviewing learning programmes which were contrary to some of the experiences of academics as discussed in Section 5.5 (such as quality evaluations being seen as an intrusion of the professional autonomy of academics). The importance of the support provided by the academic leadership and the Quality Unit in realising the value of these reviews is highlighted in the interview excerpt below.

> *"…one of the most important factors is the internal review processes that are supported by the quality unit, you know, we get a framework against which we work and then also the support that we receive from the quality staff. So, I think that is a really important enabler, also the support from the leadership within the Department and then at large the Faculty as well" (Acad8).*

> *"For me, personally…I think it is, it's the outside quality review that we've had numerous times. So, all of those quality reviews and working with the quality unit really helped us a lot. So, the quality audits, although everybody hates them, I think they have a good purpose not only in telling you what you do right and what you do wrong, but it's also assisting you in learning more about the quality systems and the need of these quality enhancement and quality systems that need to be in place" (AcadMan8).*

The extract indicates events such as internal review processes supported by relevant structures (Quality Unit and a guiding framework) and underpinned by a discourse of support can enable positive experiences of learning programme review at the level of the Empirical.

The discourse of reviews as an opportunity for self-reflection and improvement

Some academics viewed some aspects of QA as a proactive process that identifies problem areas in curricula, learning and teaching, and provides opportunities for corrective action. A few of the academics in my sample viewed QA processes, such as reviews, as an opportunity to self-reflect on their practices and use the data from

quality reviews to continuously improve and enhance their academic practice, as highlighted in the interview extracts below. Internal reviews can be seen as a critical structural causal mechanism at the level of the Real.

> *"For both undergraduate and post-graduate programmes… the self-evaluation exercise that Departments have to do…has helped a lot because I remember the first self-evaluation exercise we had to do for our now NATED programmes. …we identified so many gaps"… (SenAcad6)*

> *"Well what I remember from the latest or the last reviews we have is that out of the reviews came an action list and then in the annual plan, that action list was put into objectives, measurable objectives which then was measured through the strategic plan for that Department or for the Faculty" ….(AcadMan1).*

The preceding point on using QA processes such as internal reviews as an opportunity to reflect suggests that, for some Lecturers, academic practices are underpinned by the discourse of a critically reflective practitioner. Critical reflection is underpinned by the theories of John Dewey and Donald Schön, who are recognised as founders of critical reflective practice. Its strength is that it promotes a culture of academics adopting a reflective practice mode of being (Biggs, 2001) when evaluating their practices and identifying areas for improvement that can be addressed through the assistance of academic development. Being a critically reflective practitioner is based on a self-initiated practice and underpinned by values of reflexivity, critical analysis, critical thinking, logical reasoning by some lecturers, and the ability to question one's assumptions (Ali, 2022). Evaluation of teaching practices as events at the level of the Actual should be part of an ongoing reflective cycle that contributes to improved student learning opportunities and curricula (Chalmers & Hunt, 2016). I argue that programme reviews as events at the level of the Actual can enable quality but only if they promote thinking and engagement at the level of the Empirical.

It also emerged from my findings that some academics embraced QA as an opportunity to reflect on their practices to use the data from quality reviews to continuously improve their academic practice. See the extract below.

> *"… So, it's really a continuous cycle of improvement, and with that, it also then provides evidence of accountability of what people are busy with, and it's not only to the institution or to TUT, so in other words, not only internal accountability but also to external stakeholders" (Acad.8).*

However, the extent and depth of the reflection depends on the PEPs the agents have.

Some constraining mechanisms also emerged from the data relating to external and internal quality evaluations, which I discuss below.

6.3.6.2 Mechanisms constraining the review of learning programmes

The discourse of the 'tick-box' approach to programme reviews

Analysis of the data revealed more mechanisms constraining meaningful reviews than enabling ones. The enabling effect of programme reviews is constrained by structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms which result in a series of events, such as the need to deal with complex and lengthy documents. An interview extract below by one of the primary agents confirms the constraint of lengthy documentation for learning programme reviews which could be seen as a bureaucratic process.

> *"… It would be the very lengthy documentation that's required to be completed, and I think it can be condensed a lot more, and a lot of things can be put together..." (Acad7).*

The agents experience the volume of work required as crippling, given their workload. Also important is that most academics lack PEPs in the form of QA knowledge and competencies. These constraints tend to limit academics' critical self-reflection and may result in a 'tick box' approach. This may mean that the value of learning programme reviews is not fully realised (Cheng, 2017).

The discourse of bureaucracy as constraining review of programmes

Analysing some of the events constraining reviews, such as lengthy documentation, points to bureaucracy as a mechanism at the level of the Real. This reveals that the emphasis that QA processes place on bureaucratic processes and lengthy documentation, tends to be detrimental to critical self-reflection by academics. It also points to the inadequate emphasis on the empowerment and development of QE competencies to benefit academics and enhance the quality of learning programmes (Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001).

The discourse of the absence of dedicated support

Further analysis of the data indicated the discourse of an absence of dedicated support for academics in the faculty as shown the data extract below:

> *"We do not have a person who is just dedicated to quality in the Department, and I don't suppose we ever will, but it would be marvellous if we could have somebody like that" (AcadMan6).*

The interview extract above from an Academic Manager is an example of a structural constraint in the University in which faculties lack dedicated quality practitioners to guide and support academics in QA activities, especially regarding preparing for programme reviews. The academics' need for quality personnel support was strongly emphasised throughout the data.

The discourse of competing priorities

Another cultural mechanism that emerged in the data as constraining the review of learning programmes was the discourse of competing priorities. The interview excerpts below by an Academic Manager, indicate that when academics are faced with competing events at the level of the Actual, such as developing self-evaluation reports or working on developing a quality manual versus setting assessments, marking, teaching, and conducting research, the quality-related event is often compromised.

"…if I have to sit with the exam or look at writing something about quality, I'm going to do the exam first, and I will make sure that that's good quality" (AcadMan6).

"…sometimes the actual writing of a quality manual and sitting down and documenting everything is sometimes a little bit difficult. Especially when you are not doing a tick list, but you've got to write a narrative about everything, it does take time…" (AcadMan6),

These competing events point to the underlying discourse of competing priorities at the level of Real. Furthermore, the discourse of competing priorities tends to influence the extent and commitment of academics to the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning. Effective review processes are also hindered by time constraints (Harrison et al., 2022).

The discourse of reviews as judgemental

Learning programme reviews as one of the key QA events yielded different responses from the academics. While some expressed the value of the QA processes in improving academic practice, other academics experienced the QA processes as judgemental and an opportunity to criticise their academic practice. The discourse of reviews as judgemental was evident in the data.

"…people perceive these reviews as really being stressful, you know, almost like a judgemental type of process that takes place." (Acad8)

If at the level of the Empirical, agents experience learning programme reviews as judgemental, it may influence how they exercise their PEPs as they respond to programme reviews. In addition, these forms of evaluations are viewed as a form of surveillance and a threat to academic freedom by some academics (Chalmers & Hunt, 2016).

The QA participants pointed out the delicate balance between implementing programme reviews in a way that is seen by academics as being a punitive exercise as compared to being a collegial and critical self-reflective exercise. QA approaches

underpinned by a collegial discourse at the level of the Real tend to encourage buy-in by academics, consequently making the context conducive for transformative learning and teaching (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2007). In addition, this balance is an indication of the need to maintain the balance between academics' accountability towards quality learning and teaching and the need to enhance student learning, which is critical for an integrated QA and QE approach.

Professional bodies impose certain requirements on universities, such as external reviews which are events for accountability purposes. However, at the level of the Empirical, as the extract below shows, some academics experience these events as complex and not within their competencies. As a result, the events result in academics feeling stressed and despondent.

> *"It's almost as though a person is caught up in the middle of what your Institution expects from you and what is expected from the Professional Board in terms of their documentation. So very often, it's not knowing how to address what's expected. So very often, you know, the documents would be handed out in these review processes and you just need to complete it and it's not academics' area of expertise, and that I think is really something that makes it stressful and people try and avoid it, and it gets passed on to people that are willing to do it or just have to do it, ja. So that I think is just the big thing just that not having the knowledge to address what is expected of you" (Acad8)*

My analysis shows that there is an absence of mechanisms at the level of the Real that encourage academics to take responsibility for the professional board reviews, resulting in reviews being fit for purpose exercises.

To summarise this section, I argue that a review of learning programmes is a necessary structural mechanism to enable the successful implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. An institutional context underpinned by a supportive Quality Unit, the discourses of reviews as an opportunity for self-reflection and improvement, and critical self-reflective practitioners, is likely to influence how academics enact their PEPs towards the review of learning programmes. The interplay

of these discourses with agency and structure, in turn, enables the integrated approach.

On the other hand, the discourses of reviews as a 'tick-box' exercise; the discourse of bureaucracy, the absence of faculty-dedicated quality agents, the discourse of competing priorities, the discourse of reviews as being judgemental, and the discourse of reviews as ritualised compliance emerged as the main mechanisms constraining the review of learning programmes. These cultural and structural constraints need to be addressed to enable a context that is conducive to the review of learning programmes. The review of learning programmes should work in tandem with other mechanisms of empowerment of academics, transformation discourses, dedicated quality agents to support faculties, less bureaucratic and more agile structures to enable an integrated QA and QE approach.

6.3.7 Transformation

Transformation is a significant discourse for most aspects of higher education, especially in relation to the quality of learning and teaching and the integrated QA and QE approach. A possible structural mechanism influencing the conditions at TUT is the TUT Transformation Framework (TUT, 2017). The development of the framework was underpinned by various national structures (TUT, 2017)[10]. See Section 5.4 for a discussion on some of these national structures. The framework has been in place since 2017 to drive transformation at TUT. The primary focus of the framework is to outline the "deep and shared understanding of transformation across the University, which will underpin its strategic and operational priorities, set measures and targets for the various operational environments, and enable effective monitoring of the extent of implementation and identified improvements" (TUT 2017, p. 6).

Analysing the institutional Transformation Framework, a structure that shapes the understanding of transformation by agents at TUT, provided an indication of various

[10] The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 as amended; the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education; the National Plan for Higher Education of 2001; the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training: Building on Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School Education of 2013.

ideas associated with transformation at TUT. The transformation of learning and teaching (academic project as referred to in the Transformation Framework), is underpinned by a diversity of ideas as elaborated in the TUT Transformation Framework (2017). The ideas promoted associate transformation with being about radical change across the University (both personal and institutional), academic freedom and innovation, and emphasis on collective responsibility by everyone. In addition, other ideas were about the fitness of purpose, where transformation is associated with responsiveness to the needs of society, the economy, and individual students and staff, and ideas about students' access with success. Transformation of the curriculum, advancement of knowledge, including indigenous knowledge, strengthening the identity, belonging, and inclusion of staff and students were also ideas that underpinned transformation. Lastly, transformation also included awareness of issues related to race, gender, and disability.

I also drew some of the ideas and values underpinning the discourse of transformation from the QAF (CHE, 2021a). Some of the ideas associated with transformation include "social equity, quality and fundamental institutional cultural and academic change" (CHE, 2021a, p. 30). In addition, ideas about the widening of formal and epistemological access, curriculum transformation, pedagogic renewal and the flexibility of provision (CHE, 2021a) also underpinned the discourse of transformation. I also identified the idea of quality development which is described as focusing on the "concepts of quality as fitness for purpose, system flexibility, and transformation" (CHE, 2021a, p. 30). I now discuss how some of these ideas were enacted in the Institutional context.

6.3.7.1 Transformation as enabling an integrated QA and QE approach

The discourse of the transformative work of the Quality Unit

Analysis of the data showed that the idea of transformation as enabling institutional structural and cultural change was mainly evident in the QA practitioners' interview responses. The data extracts below could account for why some QA agents consider the work they do as transformative. Specifically, the extract below by a Senior QA

manager shows the implications of the Quality Unit's work for transformation and what transformation is meant to achieve.

> *"I think the work that we do is quite transformative within the University, and we do have an opportunity to actually effect changes in policies in the way we interpret the external changes in the sector" (QA4).*

> *"…. we should realise that within higher education and our history in the country, it [quality] is also used as a driver to transform the system…" (SenQA2).*

Furthermore, the data indicated that the Quality Unit has the corporate agency to influence transformative changes in the University. The agency of the QA practitioners could be used to enable events associated with the transformation of learning and teaching in the University. Therefore, the Quality Unit is one of the key structural mechanisms that will be central for the integrated QA and QE approach to be possible. The interplay of this structural mechanism with the ideas underpinning quality as transformation has the potential to enable the successful implementation of the integrated QA and QE approach at TUT

6.3.7.2 Mechanisms constraining transformation

The discourse of absence of ideas relating to transformation

Of concern from the analysis of the interview data was the absence of ideas associated with the transformation discourse in the responses by academics. As discussed in the preceding sections, academics' experiences of quality at the Empirical level and how they approach quality at the level of the Actual is largely underpinned by discourses of managerialism, being overwhelmed, compliance, accountability, control, and others which may have contributed to the absence of some of the ideas associated with transformation. In addition, the absence of ideas associated with transformation in the responses by academics could be attributed to the results of the interplay of compliance and accountability mechanisms present in the institutional context. Thus,

for the implementation of the integrated QA and QE approach to be possible at TUT, transformation should be a key discourse underpinning the integrated approach.

The absence of reference to the discourse of transformation also highlights how the institution possibly engages with transformation discourses broadly at the institutional level and how the ideas filter or do not filter down to influence institutional processes and structures. I noted that structures (e.g., committees and the Transformation Framework) on their own will not drive transformation. Agents occupying positions in these structures should exercise their PEPs by critically engaging with and monitoring the activities of the structures and how these activities embrace transformation.

Practices that are underpinned by a discourse of critical engagement are needed to contribute to a better understanding of what transformation means. Therefore, the interplay of structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms is crucial to the success of transformation across the University at the level of the Actual. Transformation is one of the primary underpinning principles for the integrated QA and QE approach. A lack of agential engagement and understanding of the implications of transformative learning, teaching, and assessment may constrain the integrated approach. I have already argued in Section 6.3.5 for the importance of the empowerment and development of academics as possible agential mechanisms for enabling the transformation of the academic project.

The discourse of grappling with the basics

Discourses, such as curriculum transformation and decolonisation, did not emerge from the data. One of the AD practitioners suggested that academics are still 'grappling with the basics', which could indicate the discourse of being 'overwhelmed' as can be seen in the extract below. From the extract below, some academics appear overwhelmed with competing academic priorities, such as implementing the new [11]HEQSF-aligned qualifications and phasing out the [12]NATED qualifications.

[11] In the South African context, the HEQSF is a policy framework promulgated to regulate all qualifications offered by higher education institutions nationally. Higher education institutions had to revise their curricula to ensure alignment of qualifications with the HEQSF as it was the new policy regulating all higher education qualifications.
[12] In the South African context, NATED qualification means the National Accredited Technical Education Diplomas which were regulated through the then Department of Education's policy referred to as Report 151 for Instructional Programmes offered by technikons.

> *"People are battling to implement and phase out and get to grips with the new modules, and we constantly throw them with quality*: … *It goes back to the issue of being overwhelmed by quality assurance*" *(AcaDev1).*

The interplay of the discourse of being overwhelmed with the discourse of competing priorities could account for causal mechanisms underlying the silences in academic responses related to transformation. The extracts above illustrate this analysis.

The absence could also be linked to the interplay of the structural and cultural causal mechanisms that resulted in the difficulty experienced nationally in effecting transformation across the sector. This was confirmed by a TUT publication which states "universities have had limited success to effect comprehensive transformation since the advent of democracy despite recent legislative documents and two Higher Education Transformation Summits convened in 2010 and 2015" (TUT, 2017, p. 5).
In addressing these gaps in the concluding chapter, I recommended the structural and cultural changes that could influence agents' to embrace the discourse of transformation.

In concluding this section, I argue that the discourse of transformation is central to the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. However, data analysis suggests that there are still some transformation ideas that are not yet or have limited implementation at TUT, such as curriculum transformation. However, other ideas, such as increasing access with success, have been implemented, monitored, and reported through institutional structures such as the Senate Committee for Success Rate. The interplay of constraining mechanisms at the level of the Real explains the challenges related to the absence of discourses of transformation from my interview data.

6.3.8 Continuous Quality Improvement

Emphasis on continuous quality improvement was evident in a number of participants' responses. I argued in Chapter three for the importance of a culture of continuous quality improvement contributing to QE and achieving transformative learning and

teaching. Continuous quality improvement is central to Harvey and Knight's transformative model (1996). As noted in the earlier discussion, leadership structures and the social actors occupying those roles are critical in enabling a culture of continuous quality improvement to be possible at TUT. However, the enabling effect of the social actors depends on the extent and depth of how they use the PEPs they have in a way that could enable continuous improvement of the quality of learning and teaching.

There are a number of mechanisms at the level of the Real, that tend to constrain and enable a culture of continuous quality improvement to be possible at TUT. Of interest, though, is that my data analysis identified more constraining mechanisms than enabling ones for continuous quality improvement. Such constraining mechanisms and events include the lack of capacity development opportunities in QA and QE, inadequate promotion of an institutional quality culture, lack of buy-in, a dominant compliance culture, the absence of formally documented processes for developing, monitoring and reporting on the quality improvement processes, absence of an integrated record management system, absence of processes for closing the quality loop, and lack of proper handover processes when a manager resigns. I discuss these mechanisms below.

6.3.8.1 Continuous quality improvement as enabling an integrated QA and QE approach

The discourse of wanting to do better

Data analysis shows that continuous quality improvement is underpinned by ideas associated with quality enhancement processes and the intrinsic motivation to want to do better. An extract below by an Academic Manager provides an example of the discourse of wanting to do better.

> "… *Quality enhancement is to ask yourself every day, what can we do better? … I see enhancement as updating and continuously changing and never to stop growing…" (AcadMan1).*

If social actors draw from discourses of wanting to continuously improve and grow, they are more likely to enact PEPs that enable the implementation of the integrated QA and QE approach at TUT.

The discourse of student involvement

The data analysis revealed that students, as primary agents, are critical stakeholders who must be taken into account when considering continuous quality improvement of learning and teaching. The interview extract below indicates the importance of understanding the profile of the students that the University enrols, to better understand the diverse learning needs and expectations of the students. The profiling has implications for the nature of the QA and enhancement structures and events that the institution establishes to support and enable transformative learning and quality learning experiences for students.

> *"The other things that impact on quality are also things like the students, your student profile, where are the students coming from, what is their preparedness, how much can the institution offer, what kind of support... it could be simple things like the psychological well-being of students that will affect the quality in an institution" (ExtQA1).*

Some academics also emphasised the importance of students and the student voice in the quality improvement processes and initiatives, as shown in the two interview extracts below.

> *"I think it comes back to the student; the student is your main factor, so you need to make sure that your policies and procedures are in place, not just to support your Lecturer, but also to support your students and the system and the practices to enhance and maintain that quality" (Acad4).*

> *"…And something else that has also come over time is the involvement of students and also the Alumni that can reflect on the training that they receive and received with us, as well as employers. You know, previously, students*

didn't have a voice, but I think that has also been positive in including them." (Acad8).

Based on the experiences as described by the academics above, quality structures should enable events associated with the quality enhancement of learning and teaching to improve the learning experiences of students. This finding confirms Harvey and Knight's (1996) argument in their model for the empowerment and enhancement of students, with emphasis placed on privileging improving students' learning experiences. Furthermore, enabling the students' voices to be heard also entails putting systems in place at the level of the Actual, such as feedback systems to empower students by giving them the responsibility to contribute to the quality improvement of their learning (Dzimińska, 2022).

Integrating the student voice into a regular and continuous cycle of analysis, reporting, action, and feedback is essential for effective improvement (Harvey, 2022). It is important that student voices be acknowledged, and their perspectives on quality education considered, especially as the focus of education shifts away from Lecturers toward student needs (Fomunyam, 2016). Events in the form of processes for closing the feedback loop are crucial to ensure that student learning and institutional processes are improved to enhance student experience. However, if the University conducts feedback for purposes of compliance and managerial controls, then the potential for QE will be limited.

6.3.8.2 Mechanisms constraining continuous quality improvement

The discourse of inadequate promotion of a quality culture

A dominant compliance culture, as discussed in Section 6.3.1, prevalent in the institutional context may have hindered the promotion of a quality culture (Bendermacher et al., 2017), which may consequently hinder continuous quality improvement efforts and constrain an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT. In the extract below, a senior quality manager believed that the Quality Unit was not adequately promoting a quality culture in the University, which may hinder the continuous improvement of the quality of learning and teaching.

"…the second constraint will be just an inadequate approach to promoting a quality culture from the central [quality] office"… (SenQA2)

In response to the observation that some academics still approach quality as a compliance exercise, a quality practitioner emphasised the need for more discourses and events associated with promoting continuous quality improvement at the level of the Real.

"…some academics still see any quality-related processes as just a compliance exercise, and when that happens, the process is not taken seriously; it becomes a tick box exercise rather than a genuine reflective exercise. As the institution, we need to build a quality culture where QA and QE processes are seen as improvement mechanisms" (QA1).

The commitment to promoting and building a culture of continuous improvement is linked to the idea of putting trust in key stakeholders such as academics (Dzimińska, 2022). In addition, other ideas linked to the discourse of trust include events such as promoting partnerships, dialogue, and transparency (ibid). The effect of dominant discourses associated with compliance results in events where academics tend to approach quality as a 'tick-box' exercise. See Section 6.3.1 above, where I have discussed some of the events that emerged at the level of the Real as a result of some constraining mechanisms linked to the discourse of compliance.

The discourse of lack of buy-in

Analysis of data indicates that continuous quality improvement efforts can be constrained by agential mechanisms which account for a lack of commitment and lack of buy-in by academics. The interview extract below from a quality practitioner attests to this observation.

"…there are instances where some people don't quite buy-in into the idea of quality and see it as an add-on… Lack of buy-in by some people, lack of understanding, more importantly, it can be a compromising factor…" (QA3)

The observation above suggests the importance of agents drawing from discourses associated with the enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching to enable continuous quality improvement.

The discourse of a pervasive compliance culture

Quality improvement plans emerged as important events that enable continuous quality improvement. However, as indicated in the interview extract below by an academic, there are no structural mechanisms in the form of formally documented processes for guiding the development and monitoring of the quality improvement plans for these events to occur.

> *"… what I've picked up is that after the review, you don't really have those follow-up processes that are necessary to attend to… But as far as I've observed, those exercises appear to be for compliance purposes, and I think that for me, that's short-changing ourselves because the processes are meant to improve the quality of our products, and if we do not attend to issues that would have been raised, then we are not cheating anyone but ourselves." (Acad2).*

A strong compliance culture at the level of the Real is a major constraint to achieving continuous quality improvement. The discourse of compliance pervades much of the data. However, the extract above indicates that this academic has the PEPs to be aware of the consequences of the discourse of compliance and how it can constrain continuous quality improvement.

My findings indicated that most faculties use existing structures, such as teaching and learning committees, or postgraduate committees (in the case of review of postgraduate programmes), to monitor and report on the quality improvement plans. An example is cited below by an academic outlining their departmental process.

"..Yearly, we have to submit to the Head of Department our quality improvement plan. I submit both the HPCSA[13] and the internal one that was done and what I have done as well now because I'm struggling to implement some of the things" (Acad7).

However, the extract further indicates that even though there was a process in place, some improvements were not easy to implement. For the improvement processes to be beneficial for the continuous quality improvement of learning and teaching, there have to be events in the form of effective planning at the level of the Actual (Harvey and Knight, 1996).

The discourse of intrinsic motivation

For continuous quality improvement to be possible at TUT, it is important that the agents enact their agency, informed by intrinsic motivation to want to improve and not just to meet external requirements. Analysis of data indicates that if the agents' approach to quality draws from discourses of compliance with external requirements and is not underpinned by an intrinsic motivation to improve, it can result in a compliance approach where the focus is just on meeting minimum requirements. I provide an example of a data extract by a senior QA manager.

"It can develop from intrinsic motivation by an organisation itself to do better, to excel, or it can start by enforcement of the regulation from the external environment, including funding bodies. When it is done through the external environment, there is a tendency just to meet minimum requirements. Unlike when it's an intrinsic activity within an organisation…" (SenQA2).

An institutional cultural system dominated by compliance mechanisms tends to result in agents feeling policed; unlike where the focus is on building a quality culture, agents are intrinsically motivated to embrace quality. Cheng (2017) thus encourages higher education institutions to regain the trust of academics when it comes to quality issues. In addition, the cultural system that is underpinned by values of trust enables

[13] HPCSA : Health Professions Council of South Africa

transformation (Dzimińska, 2022). The interplay of structural mechanisms such as policies, with cultural mechanisms such as staff empowerment, support, recognition of efforts, and others, can lead to the kind of agency amongst academics to respond positively with intrinsic motivation to undertake quality activities. The quality culture approach where academics as primary agents are trusted and valued could lead to what Harvey and Knight (1996) refer to as a 'bottom-up' approach to QE rather than a 'top-down' approach.

The structural mechanism of absence of dedicated faculty-based QA agents

The data analysis revealed that a lack of faculty-based agents dedicated to quality activities to support and advise the faculty on quality matters could also constrain continuous quality improvement.

> *"…if there can be maybe a structure where there is a direct link or a person in each Faculty that can be responsible for the quality inside the Faculty with a direct link to the quality unit and then a direct link back to the Departments; it will really assist in improving the quality assurance and quality enhancement." (AcadMan8)*

This shortcoming links to an earlier discussion regarding the challenges raised by how centralising some institutional quality functions constrains the QE efforts. The extract above by an Academic Manager illustrates this constraint.

The structural mechanism of absence of a records management system

Another example of a structural mechanism identified in the data as constraining continuous quality improvement is the absence of an effective departmental records management system. See the data extract below by a Senior Academic.

> *"Lack of records management results in problems when people leave the University system and certain documents required for quality reviews are needed and cannot be found. Or sometimes, when the new HoD takes over and wants to compile the quality improvement plan." (SenAcad4)*

The interview extract above by a Senior Academic Manager indicates how the absence of an effective records management system could disrupt a process of continuous quality improvement at the level of the Actual. An evidence-based approach to quality improvement is required for a university to attend to both accountability and improvement aspects (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2004).

Due to the absence of this major structural mechanism, events in the form of storing and tracing documents have become challenging, which has resulted in some academics experiencing record-keeping as a tedious process at the level of the Empirical as can be shown in the data extracts below.

> *"…I am more and more getting a sense that it's a tedious process of keeping documents, you know, storing, tracing and tracking documents… I get a sense that we do a lot of duplication of reporting, and evidence is available in different parts of the University" (AcadMan7).*

> *"…departmental and faculty administrators in quality matters. For instance, these are the people or the staff members who should assist in terms of record-keeping, and if it is not done efficiently, we can forget about the quality assurance and quality enhancement systems being put in place because it is all about evidence which needs to support all your activities and everything else." (SenAcad4).*

These experiences and challenges could further point to the absence of institutional structures for effective records management and the lack of administrative staff who are able to do record-keeping, as evidenced in the data extracts above.

Furthermore, the extract below points to how the lack of appropriate PEPs by some of the agents designated to managing records can constrain the continuous quality improvement process.

> *"So, my experience is that when it comes to quality matters – departmental administrators and faculty administrators who are key in this process as well, it*

looks they are not knowledgeable on what needs to be done, and that can be a huge constraint" (SenAcad4)

An effective records management system is crucial as part of the evidence-based approach, as suggested by Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2004). However, an evidence-based approach depends on efficient record-keeping by the agents designated to manage records in the department, as indicated by the data extracts above.

The discourse of 'not closing the quality loop'

Findings also showed that at the level of the Real, a discourse of 'not closing the quality loop' has resulted in events at the level of the Actual associated with inadequate monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of the quality improvement plans. One of the quality participants identified this cultural constraint as indicated in the interview extract below

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"…even though we've got all these activities that promote quality assurance, we have been lacking in terms of closing the quality loop. For example, through reviews that have been conducted from the institutional review that took place in 2004…we have not been able to close the quality loop by looking at monitoring and evaluation of the quality improvement plans. So for me, that is very critical in the QA process" (QA2).

Furthermore, analysis of data revealed that if events that lead to the monitoring and evaluation of quality improvement plans are not conducted to 'close the quality loop', that can constrain the continuous improvement of quality and can impact the QE processes. See the data extract below by a senior Academic.

"Closing the loop becomes a problem because if I leave an institution at a stage where a review had already been done and perhaps a department is expected to compile an improvement plan, and I leave, and the next person now is not aware of what needs to be done hence I am talking about proper handovers – that can really interfere with quality processes hugely…" (SenAcad4).

QE mechanisms enable the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach to be possible at TUT. Harvey and Knight (1996) also referred to ‘closing the quality loop’, and they emphasise the importance of feedback processes and actions to address quality concerns effectively.

In concluding this section, I argue that the discourse of continuous quality improvement is an essential cultural enabler for an integrated QA and QE approach to be possible at TUT. However, I have indicated that there are mechanisms that enable and constrain the events associated with continuous quality improvement at TUT. In summary, the interplay of the following constraining mechanisms at the level of the Real explains the challenges of continuous quality improvement by the University: a pervasive compliance culture, inadequate promotion of a quality culture, lack of buy-in, absence of dedicated faculty-based QA agents, absence of a record management system, and absence of structural mechanisms for closing the quality loop. On the other hand, data showed that continuous improvement is also enabled by discourses of wanting to do better, recognising the students’ voice, and knowing who your students are.

My analysis revealed that even if the University has put appropriate structures in place to enable QA and QE, they are not sufficient if the cultural system of TUT is not underpinned by cultural mechanisms that tend to enable continuous quality improvement and quality being everyone’s business in the institution.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I identified causal mechanisms which explain why things are the way they are in the TUT context. The findings indicate that the institutional context is dominated by discourses and structures that encourage QA related events and experiences much more than QE. These discourses and structures at the level of the Real condition the type of events and experiences at the levels of the Actual and Empirical. Furthermore, findings revealed that there are more mechanisms that constrain the context than enable it. I discussed how each of the eight themes tends

to enable the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT, as well as the mechanisms that may constrain each theme.

At the level of the Real, the pervasive compliance discourse has resulted in events that have constructed QA as being about unnecessary bureaucracy, many approval processes, and rigid and less agile processes. On the other hand, compliance was seen as necessary to protect the institutional reputation and take responsibility for the quality of provisioning. Accountability emerged as an essential discourse to enable an integrated approach. However, some mechanisms constrain events associated with accountability. While leadership emerged as a critical structural mechanism to enable an integrated approach, its potential can be constrained by mechanisms such as the pervasive compliance discourse and insufficient empowerment opportunities on QE.

Quality of learning programmes, quality of teaching, and review of learning programmes are related events that have the potential to enable an integrated approach. However, some mechanisms have emerged as constraining and enabling these events. The transformation discourse is crucial to TUT's implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach. Findings have shown that transformation is constrained mainly by cultural mechanisms as the University has established necessary structures to drive transformation. For the University to implement an integrated approach successfully, mechanisms constraining the discourse of continuous improvement should be addressed.

My discussion showed the importance of the interplay of cultural, structural, and agential mechanisms in conditioning the institutional context for implementing an integrated QA and QE approach. If the goal of an integrated QA and QE approach is transformative quality, then there should be structural and cultural mechanisms that encourage academics to implement transformative learning and teaching. In addition, too much focus on compliance tends to diminish the opportunity for enhancement.

In the next chapter, I conclude this study by identifying the mechanisms that should be in place to enable the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach for

TUT. Also, my contribution to current debates in the field of QA and QE in higher education is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the outcomes of my analysis of the empirical data and identified mechanisms that tend to constrain or enable an integrated QA and QE approach using abductive reasoning. In my discussion, I answered the main research question: “what mechanisms enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT?” In this concluding chapter, I address the main retroductive question of what must be in place at TUT for an integrated QA and QE approach to be possible. Retroduction is a thought process that involves positing relevant causal mechanisms that could explain the phenomena (Hoddy, 2019). Furthermore, it seeks to clarify the preconditions or circumstances without which something cannot exist (Danermark et al., 2002). Therefore, this chapter focuses on identifying mechanisms without which an integrated approach will not be possible at TUT.

7.2 Mechanisms enabling the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach at TUT

In this section, I provide recommendations regarding mechanisms that need to be in place to enable the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach for TUT. I found TUT to be an intriguing case study due to its size, complexity and being a university of technology. By providing these recommendations, I am also being future-oriented by finding ways to overcome some of the current structural, cultural, and agential constraints that I have identified in Chapter six. As I make these recommendations, I also attempt to contribute to knowledge in the field of QA and QE in higher education. In addition, these recommendations can potentially contribute to the debates about integrated quality approaches in other higher education contexts.

In Chapter one, I indicated three objectives that guided my study (see Section 1.6). The third one is most applicable to this chapter, which is about "Recommending structural, cultural, and agential conditions that would contribute to making the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach possible". The retroductive questions presented in the sections that follow served as a structure to guide my recommendations. The recommendations highlight the significance of the interplay between structure, culture, and agency.

7.2.1 What structural mechanisms should be in place for the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach to be possible at TUT?

A Quality Unit with a strong corporate agency: My findings indicated that the Quality Unit is the main structure enabling the implementation of QA and QE at TUT. Without this structure, agents tend to struggle to implement QA and QE due to the various reasons outlined in Chapter six. Therefore, for an integrated approach to be possible at TUT, the University's Quality Unit should be staffed by agents with a strong corporate agency to lead and support an integrated approach. Quality practitioners should work collaboratively to become a group of corporate agents and share a set of values and beliefs that shape their approach to quality and related events. Some of these values are outlined in Section 7.2.2 below. The interplay of the existence of the Quality Unit, which is well-staffed and the way quality practitioners exercise their agency is critical for an integrated QA and QE approach.

Establishment of structural and cultural mechanisms to encourage QE: The findings indicated that QE structures and culture were not yet firmly established at TUT. Therefore, changes in the domain of structure and culture are required to encourage QE. As a result of the intertwined nature of structure and culture, changes in one domain have an impact on the other**.**

At the level of structure, the Quality Unit alone does not have adequate capacity in the form of SEPs to enable QE. Therefore, the interplay of the Quality Unit, supported by other structures in the form of institutional leaders, policies, processes, and strategies,

and cultural values promoting QE at the level of the Real, would most likely enable the emergence of structures and events promoting QE at TUT.

Furthermore, existing QA structures (e.g., policies), associated events (e.g., programme reviews), and the underpinning discourses will need to change from being predominantly about compliance, bureaucracy and rigid processes, to being agile, developmental, transformative, and improvement-driven. See Figure 12 below for a summary of recommended cultural changes at the level of the Real for an integrated QA and QE approach to be possible at TUT. These structural and cultural changes should also be complemented by reviewing institutional policies to be more focused on encouraging QE, which is about transformative learning and teaching. Additionally, these changes should be supported by events in the form of continuous professional development opportunities and more visible promotion of QE for agents to embrace the value of QE. The interplay of structural changes, supported by cultural changes, is required for the integrated approach to be possible.

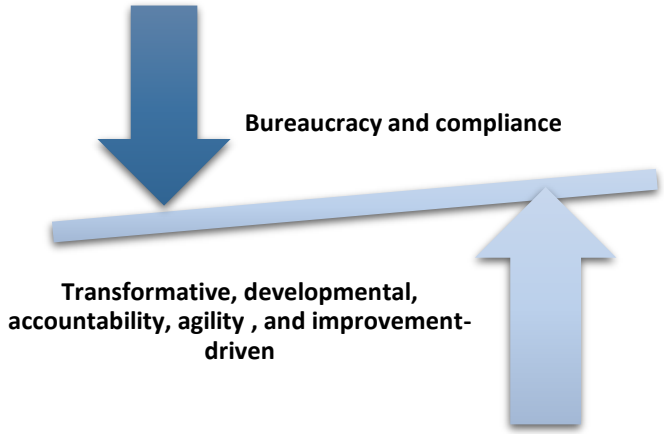

Figure 12: An indication of the recommended changes at the level of the Real (author's work)

Shifting the focus of the institutional QA system towards QE also entails reviewing some QA events, such as programme reviews. I have indicated in Chapters five and six how, at the level of the Empirical, agents experience programme reviews as stressful, which make them feel distrusted and judged. I recommend that the approach to programme reviews be revised to emphasise the improvement of learning and teaching rather than managerial controls aimed at meeting external accountability and

compliance requirements (Cheng, 2017). The lengthy and complex QA documentation appeared to be one of the main constraints experienced by academics. Therefore, the approach should be reviewed to minimise the bureaucratic burden academics experience with programme reviews. Focusing on the assurance and enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment of student learning can potentially increase academics' trust, buy-in, and ownership of QA and QE events.

An integrated approach will enable the University to balance its focus on satisfying the external regulatory requirements with the need for quality enhancement of learning and teaching. However, for the University to achieve this balance, some of the already existing QA structures (e.g., TUT Policy on QA) should be revised and strengthened to incorporate values, discourses, and events promoting QE. These values and discourses need to be shared by quality practitioners and academics.

Dedicated QA agents to support faculties: For QE to be effective, faculties need dedicated quality practitioners to support and guide academics across all levels, especially in strengthening the faculty structures for QA and QE and lessening the QA administrative load for academics. The dedicated QA practitioner should enable and support the faculties to implement QA and QE events such as programme reviews, development and monitoring of quality improvement plans, and enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching. The existing faculty structures should be empowered to monitor and report on the implementation and monitoring of quality improvement plans as a way of closing the quality loop. Implementing feedback or recommendations generated through QA events is crucial for QE to be effective. This, in turn, could improve faculty communication and ensure that QA and QE information filters through from social actors to Lecturers as primary agents.

Engaged and empowered leaders: The University has established clear academic and institutional leadership structures, which is key to enabling the assurance of fit for purpose learning and teaching at TUT. My findings indicated that visible, empowered, committed, and engaged institutional and academic leadership is a critical structural

mechanism enabling the integrated approach. If key agents are empowered, they tend to champion transformative learning and teaching, which is one of the underpinning principles for an integrated approach. Incumbents occupying leadership roles should be continuously empowered to enact their agency and corporate agency in ways that will promote QA and QE in the University.

Empowered leaders play a critical role in leading and shaping the review and development of structures, such as policies and processes that enable and support QE. Furthermore, institutional and academic leaders should create conditions conducive to enabling QE; they should promote values that encourage transformation and enhancement of academic quality. I outline these values in Section 7.2.2 below. Moving towards an integrated approach to QA and QE, the institutional leaders must spearhead the structural and cultural changes from a predominantly compliance culture to an integrated approach where quality enhancement is prioritised as part of the University's mission and strategic objectives (fitness for purpose). This approach will enable the resourcing, monitoring, and reporting of both QA and QE events across all levels of the University.

Empowerment of agents: The University has implemented structures in the form of policies and relevant units to support and enable fit for purpose teaching and learning. However, findings indicated the absence of structures and events to support academics to understand better and enact their agency concerning QE and transformational learning and teaching. Empowerment events in the form of continuous professional development are necessary to capacitate academics and enhance their knowledge and understanding of transformative teaching and curriculum development. My findings indicated that the quality of teaching and quality of learning programmes are central to an integrated QA and QE approach. If lecturers as primary agents are empowered, they gain a deeper understanding of the importance and relevance of quality at programme or module levels.

However, the Quality Unit cannot provide the necessary professional development on its own. As a result, the capacity development strategy of the Quality Unit should be premised on values of collaboration and collegiality, which point to the importance of the interplay between structure and culture. The strategy should be underpinned by the Quality and Academic Development Units collaborating to support and ensure that structures for QE of learning and teaching are activated and effective. In addition, the Academic Development Unit should assist with ensuring that discourses enabling transformative learning and teaching underpin professional development events for academics. An institutional context where quality and academic development collaborate to support academics in achieving transformative teaching and learning is a critical structural enabler for an integrated approach.

Empowered agents are likely to take responsibility for the quality of their curricula and buy-in and support QA and QE events. An integrated QA and QE approach should prioritise agent empowerment to understand QA and QE while minimising the emphasis on QA document completion. Empowerment of agents is a critical structural precondition for commitment, taking responsibility, and gaining academic buy-in and trust.

Establishment of an effective records management system to support QA and QE activities: Evidence-based approaches play a critical role in QA and QE events. There is a need for the University to establish an effective records management system to support the evidence-based approach. Its importance should be made clear and relevant agents should be empowered to use the system. The system could also play a significant role in the promotion of a culture of continuous quality improvement and potentially assist in addressing the leadership handover challenges and tracking important documentation such as learning programme documentation. In addition, events in the form of processes for handing-over when a leader resigns should be strengthened to address the challenges of lack of processes in this regard. A records management system can enable the integrated approach if structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms work collaboratively.

7.2.2 What cultural mechanisms should be in place for the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach to be possible at TUT?

A culture of continuous quality improvement: For integrated QA and QE to be possible at TUT, the University should promote a culture of continuous quality improvement underpinned by mechanisms of collective responsibility, accountability of quality, visible and committed leadership, effective communication, trust, and empowerment of staff. Continuous quality improvement that is driven from the bottom up enables academics to trust the QA and QE events and processes. The bottom-up approach also enables closing the quality loop. A culture of continuous improvement can enable an integrated approach if structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms are operating in tandem.

Promote the discourse of quality as transformation: The TUT Transformation Framework and the Learning and Teaching Strategy are some of the important structures underpinning transformation at TUT. The Framework and the Strategy have been put in place, but they have not been fully actualised and used by agents to draw discourses from them to enact their PEPs and SEPs. As transformation is central to the integrated approach, The Transformation Framework and Learning and Teaching Strategy should be promoted more, and agents must be made aware of these critical structures. In addition, social actors should engage more with the Framework and Strategy to ensure that transformation ideas permeate the academic structures and underpin the cultural system of TUT. In addition, other existing structures (policies) and events (e.g., meetings) should also be strengthened. My study demonstrated the significance of a transformation discourse as one of the fundamental guiding principles necessary for an integrated approach at TUT. The interplay of structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms will enable the transformation discourse to be understood and enacted at TUT.

Less focus on the discourse of compliance: Even though compliance discourse emerged as constraining the integrated approach, its presence is needed as part of the University's cultural system to fulfil the accountability and regulatory requirements. However, compliance should not only mean bureaucracy and rigid structures; it should be about agents being empowered to understand the role that compliance plays in

enabling accountability in learning and teaching. Compliance should not dominate the University's cultural system if the University is to implement an integrated QA and QE approach successfully.

Institutional values: An integrated QA and QE approach should be underpinned by values enabling the assurance and enhancement of learning and teaching at TUT. My findings indicated that values that support QA are already activated and part of the institutional cultural system. These include values of equity of provisioning, accountability, integrity, and compliance. However, there is limited reference to values that promote QE in the University's cultural system. I recommend that values of collective responsibility, critical reflection, empowerment of agents and commitment towards learning and teaching that encourages enhancement and empowerment of students be clearly indicated in the official University documents such as policies and strategic plans. Learning-oriented and student-centric policies and strategies that privilege transformative teaching and student learning experiences should be some of the key underpinning values that all agents should embrace. In addition, the values of collaboration should underpin the work done by the and the Academic Development Units, as a collaborative approach will enable accountability and enhancement of learning and teaching.

7.2.3 What agential mechanisms should be in place for the implementation of an integrated QA and QE approach to be possible at TUT?

Critically reflective agents: For the implementation of an integrated QA and QE to be possible, the University structures and events should support and promote critical reflective practice on the part of academics and other agents. Critical reflective practice, underpinned by the relevant discourses and supported by relevant structures, may lead to transformative teaching by academics. In addition, it is an important discourse for academics to draw from when enacting their PEPs, especially when they review their teaching and learning programmes.

The Academic Development Unit should play an enabling role aimed at the empowerment of academics with the knowledge and competencies to undertake critical reflection. If the University structures and culture cannot enable or encourage academics to be reflexive practitioners, transformative learning and teaching may not be achieved. Critical reflective practice should be one of the values underpinning the integrated approach for QA and QE. The interplay of structure and culture can enable or constrain agency. It is thus important for the University leaders to establish structures and cultural mechanisms that will support the agents to be critically reflexive.

7.3 Contribution to current debates in the field of QA and QE

In Chapter one (Section 1.4), I drew on the literature related to quality in higher education (Harvey, 1998; Luckett, 2006; Mkhize & Cassimjee, 2013; and Ansah, 2015) to argue that achieving an integrated approach which balances improvement and accountability in a single QA system, is not easy. As a result, I conducted this study to identify mechanisms that can enable or constrain the implementation of an integrated approach in a single QA system. My study has made a practical contribution to the current debates on the integrated quality approaches in higher education by identifying how the interplay of structural, cultural and agential mechanisms can contribute to making integrated QA and QE possible in a particular context. The findings of this study may be beneficial to TUT since no similar study has ever been conducted for TUT, and the findings may also be useful to other UoTs in particular.

As evidenced in the literature on quality in higher education, there are various models, frameworks, and approaches for quality in higher education. To further make a practical contribution, I have recommended mechanisms that will encourage a context-specific approach for TUT rather than adopting a generic approach that may not be responsive to the TUT context. My recommended approach puts greater emphasis on transformative learning and teaching, meaning that both QA and QE mechanisms should enable transformation at TUT. I argued for an integrated approach supported by mechanisms that ensure assurance and enhancement while also focusing on enhancing transformative learning and teaching. However, to achieve the goals of

transformative learning and teaching, the primary focus should be on QE, with QA as secondary.

In this study, I used two main approaches to analysing the data by integrating thematic analysis and discourse analysis, which identify more with CR ontology and epistemology. The thematic analysis offers a theoretically adaptable method for analysing qualitative data, and it is not restricted to a specific epistemological position (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Thus, I used it as an organising framework in this CR and SR study to make sense of and organise my empirical data into 'themes' complemented by using abduction. This was followed by discourse analysis underpinned by CR's stratified ontology to further analyse my data and access the level of the Real to search for and identify mechanisms. Through abduction, I was then able to theorise about the underlying mechanisms at the level of the Real. The South African studies (for example, Luckett, 2007; Quinn & Boughey, 2009; Luckett, 2010; McKenna & Quinn, 2012; Masehela, 2015; and Boughey & McKenna, 2017) that have used CR and SR as their theoretical and analytical frameworks did not use both thematic and discourse analysis. As my methodological contribution, I have shown how a thematic analysis method can be used in a CR and SR study and be complemented by discourse analysis and abduction to provide causal explanations of the mechanisms enabling and constraining an integrated approach to QA and QE.

7.4 Possible areas for further study

This study had a methodological limitation of not focusing on Research and Community Engagement as two of the other core functions of the University. The study focused on the core function of learning and teaching. Further studies can test the applicability of these proposed mechanisms in the Research and Community Engagement functions.

I have come to realise from my engagement with the literature on higher education that QA is a well-developed area of the literature on quality. Similar to the literature

from other contexts, my study found that TUT has well established QA structures to assure fit for purpose learning and teaching. However, to further understand and develop knowledge on QE**,** more research is needed to find out how QE shapes policies and practices in higher education, especially in ensuring transformative learning and teaching.

This study focused only on one UoT, limiting the study's generalisability to other UoTs or other kinds of universities. Future research could focus on evaluating the applicability of the recommendations to other UoTs, comprehensive, and traditional universities in South Africa.

This study's data was limited to staff and did not include students. Further research could examine how an integrated QA and QE approach enhances student engagement in transformative learning, and the influence on the student experience.

7.5 Conclusion

This study was able to generate data that can inform institutional decision-making processes, policy development and review in relation to structural, cultural, and agential mechanisms that should be in place for an integrated QA and QE approach to be successful at TUT. Although some of the findings from this study have already been well documented in the literature on higher education, other findings are new and relevant to the TUT context. To summarise, structural mechanisms accounted for most of the recommendations, that TUT should consider implementing an integrated approach. However, I have argued for the importance of the interplay between structure, culture, and agency and how these mechanisms enabling QA and QE should operate in tandem to enable an integrated QA and QE approach.

The structural mechanisms include a Quality Unit with a strong corporate agency supported by relevant structures and underpinned by relevant cultural mechanisms. There need to be institutional-level structural and cultural changes to encourage QE, dedicated QA practitioners assigned to support faculties, and visible, committed, and empowered institutional leaders to lead and support the integrated approach. In addition, the empowerment of agents as a continuous event carried out by relevant units, and the establishment of an effective records management system is needed. At the level of culture, continuous quality improvement is key, and the discourse of transformation should be strongly promoted and infused across all structures and supported by institutional values promoting QE. The pervasive compliance discourse should be minimised in the institutional cultural system and work in tandem with other mechanisms. Discourses and structures that tend to encourage compliance are not likely to lead to the kind of change that the institution requires, which is more about enhancement of quality linked to more emphasis on the student and institutional transformation. The recommended structural and cultural mechanisms will have to be enabled by agents who are empowered and critically reflective for the mechanisms to be effective and transformative.

In conclusion, I argue that an institutional context that encourages structural, cultural, and agential QA and QE mechanisms to work in tandem can enable an integrated QA and QE approach.

A short reflection on my PhD journey

I conclude this study by reflecting on the transformation of my knower identity and the learnings during my doctoral study. During the six years I spent on this transformative doctoral journey, I experienced personal, professional, and scholarly growth and transformation. It was a long, demanding, but rewarding six-year experience.

On a personal level

Since undertaking this PhD, I have developed intellectually and became more critical as I progressed through the development of the chapters. I appreciated the value of critical feedback, as it meant more learning and improvement in my scholarly competencies. The growth and progression also impacted my professional life as a quality manager. As I continued to work on this thesis, there was not a single chapter that did not intellectually challenge me. This process was iterative and required continuous critical engagement with my work.

As a professional

The PhD gave me an opportunity to engage with the literature and conversations in the field of QA and QE. The experience challenged my understanding of what quality entailed, the role of quality, QA, and QE, and how they are positioned to benefit the students, staff and the University. I now have a better understanding of my role as a quality practitioner and quality manager, as well as academics' experiences, and how, as a quality practitioner, I can better enable and support academics in the quality enhancement and transformation of learning and teaching.

I was able to critique my role for a large, complex higher education institution and how my role and the Unit in which I am based can better contribute to the University moving towards a transformative academic project. I now understand my role better as a transformation agent. I can contribute to my professional area of responsibility by using my learnings from this PhD to influence discussions and decisions on QA and QE. My arguments have improved as they are grounded and influenced by literature. The

theoretical approaches that I have been exposed to in my PhD have enabled me to have different perspectives on the implications of quality in a complex University such as TUT. My agency has also been enhanced.

As a scholar

My journey as a doctoral candidate has exposed me to writing and reasoning at a higher cognitive level. PhD-level writing demands a high level of analytical, reflexivity, and critical thinking, which I developed during my writing process. Criticality and reflexivity contributed the most to the transformation of my knower status. I had to be critically aware of my positionality and how it could possibly influence my thinking, writing, and data analysis. As my study typifies an insider–researcher and my dual role in this study, being critical of my practice has not been easy for me throughout the research process. However, my supervisor was always there to critique my writing and highlight where my quality practitioner role was clouding my analytical and researcher lenses. As I progressed through the writing of the chapters, I learned to question my assumptions about the subject matter I was engaging in. I have become a critical scholar who questions practice and evaluates information and no longer accepts things without critical analysis.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A : Interview Protocol

Appendix B : Transcriber confidentiality declaration

Appendix C : Gatekeepers permission

Appendix D : Rhodes Ethics clearance

Appendix E : Tshwane University of Technology Ethics Clearance

Appendix F : Invitation letter

Appendix G : Informed Consent

Appendix A: Interview protocol

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Grahamstown • 6140 • South Africa

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT, EXECUTIVE DEANS, ASSISTANT DEANS, HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS, LECTURERS, QUALITY DIRECTOR AND PRACTITIONERS

Study Title	Towards an integrated quality assurance and enhancement framework for a University of Technology
Name of Researcher	Emily Mabote
Institution	Rhodes University
Department	Centre for Higher Education Research Teaching and Learning (CHERTL)
Supervisor	Prof Lynn Quinn
Researchers' contact details	Cell number : 082 927 4365 Email : ntelem@gmail.com
RUESC approval reference number	2019-0209-427
TUT REC approval reference number	REC2019/07/009

Date: ..... **Interviewee:** .....

Interviewee category: ..... **Campus and Venue:**.....

Time started: ..... **Time finished:** .....

A. Introductory remarks

Good day (Prof, Dr, Ms, Mr)

Thank you for accepting my request to be interviewed for my study. The aim of my study is to conduct an analysis of the conditions enabling or constraining the emergence of an integrated quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE) framework for TUT. The intention of the study is to undertake a meta-analysis of the institutions' QA and QE structures, practices and experiences of the agents responsible for QA at TUT. Although it is not my intention in this study to research the weaknesses of the Institution, it must be acknowledged that some critiques may emerge from my data. These will be used in a constructive and developmental manner so as to avoid any reputational risk for individuals and for TUT. I would like to better understand what it is about the TUT context which is likely to enable or constrain the emergence of an integrated QA and QE framework. My study has the potential to contribute to the debates about integrated QA/QE frameworks in other HE contexts.

With your permission, I am going to record the interview in order to enhance the factual accuracy of the interview data, thereby improving the credibility of my research. The interview data will be used for purposes of research and later for publication in order to contribute to the knowledge in the discipline of quality in higher education. Your identity will be protected by removing identifying information that can link you to the raw or analysed data. If you wish you will be given access to the recording and the transcribed data for verification of accuracy. Furthermore, you will have access to the final draft thesis to confirm that your identity has been protected and that you have not been compromised in any way.

Please note that your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any given time during the study.

I have prepared an informed consent form where I have outlined the confidentiality details and other ethical considerations for my study. Please sign it before we begin with the interview.

B. The following questions will be used to guide the interview

Category 1: Quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE) at TUT.	
Question	**Response / Notes**
1. What is your understanding of the concepts of *quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE)*	
2. In your view, has the QA system contributed to the enhancement of teaching and learning at your faculty and at TUT? Please explain.	

Category 2: Enablers and constraints of quality assurance and quality enhancement at TUT	
Question	**Response / Notes**
Internal enablers / constraints (institutional and faculty levels)	
3. What would you say are the factors enabling an effective QA / QE system in this faculty and in TUT? Please explain.	

4. What would you say are the factors constraining an effective QA / QE system in this faculty and in TUT? Please explain.	
	External enablers / constraints
5. Considering the external QA context - what would you say are the factors that enabled the deployment of an effective QA / QE system at TUT?	
6. Considering the external QA context - what would you say are the factors that constrained the deployment of an effective QA / QE system at TUT?	

Category 3: Quality Structures	
Question	**Response / Notes**
7. Looking back at how quality evolved over the years in TUT – what internal structures and policies were in place to guide QA and QE activities in TUT? Reflecting on your role as (executive management / academic manager / lecturer / quality director / quality practitioner), how would you describe the effectiveness of structures and policies in enabling quality enhancement of teaching and learning	
8. What structures and processes do you have in place in the faculty and institutionally to implement and monitor the recommendations made in the quality assurance reports?	

Category 4: Values and beliefs underpinning QA and QE (Culture)	
Question	**Response / Notes**
9. In reflecting on the TUT QA policies and processes, what would you say are the values and beliefs that underpin the deployment of QA and QE at TUT? To what extent are these values and beliefs enabling or constraining the effective deployment of QA / QE at TUT? Please explain.	

Category 5: Agency	
Question	**Response / Notes**
10. In your view, what is your role as the executive management / academic manager / lecturer / quality director / quality practitioner in driving QA and QE at your faculty / at TUT? Considering your role, what would you say enables or constrains your agency with regard to QA and QE?	

Category 6: Recommendations for an ideal integrated QA and QE framework	
Question	**Response / Notes**
11. What recommendations would you like to suggest for TUT to create an enabling environment for an integrated QA / QE framework?	

Appendix B: Example of transcriber confidentiality declaration

Tshwane University of Technology

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Thank you very much for being willing to transcribe the semi-structured interviews for my PhD study. This letter is a confidentiality agreement in which you undertake not to divulge any information you work with as you transcribe the recordings. You are also requested to maintain participants' confidentiality throughout and after completing the transcribing project. Kindly note that failure to do so might compromise the validity and reliability of my research project and cause reputational risks both to my research participants and the institution.

Remuneration for services rendered: As agreed, you will be remunerated according to the quotation which you have submitted to me.

Kindly note my contact details should you need to discuss or clarify any issues pertaining to this research:

Ms Emily Mabote

Director: Directorate of Quality Promotion

Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)

082 927 4365

Ntelem@gmail.com / mabotene@tut.ac.za

Name of transcriber : **Zenobia Grove**

Signature of transcriber : Zenobia Grove

1. **Signed at: Pretoria (place) on 10 March 2021 (date)**

Appendix C: Gatekeepers permission

Tshwane University of Technology
We empower people

Office of the Chief Information Officer &
Executive Director: Institutional Effectiveness and Technology

Memo

To: Ms E N Mabote

Date: 10 May 2019

Dear Ms Mabote

Re: Permission to use Institutional Data

Thank you for requesting to use institutional documentation and/or data for research and publication thereof. By virtue of my office as the custodian of the Institutional Management Information System and the data stored therein, I have a fiduciary responsibility to protect the university's intellectual property as well as ensure compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (2013).

Your request has been reviewed and I am pleased to inform you that you may access institutional documentation as stipulated in your email and supporting documentation dated 9 May 2019.

The documentation may only be used for research purposes on the topic "Towards an integrated quality assurance and enhancement framework for a University of Technology," and any in further publications emanating from the research.

As indicated in your email, kindly comply with the ethical conduct principles as stipulated by the Tshwane University of Technology Policy on Research Ethics.

I want take this opportunity to wish you every success in your PhD.

Kind Regards

Dr D Naidoo
CIO and ED: Institutional Effectiveness and Technology

Appendix D1: Rhodes University Ethics Clearance (first study topic)

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

Rhodes University Ethical Committee
PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 8055
f: +27 (0) 46 603 8822
e: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za

www.ru.ac.za/research/research/ethics

11 June 2019

Ntele Emily Mabote
Email: g15m6458@campus.ru.ac.za

Dear Mrs Mabote

Title: Towards an integrated quality assurance and enhancement framework for a University of Technology
Principal Investigator: Prof Lynn Quinn
Collaborators: Mrs Ntele Emily Mabote
Reference number: 2019-0209-427

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and APPROVED by the Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC) – Human Ethics (HE) sub-committee.

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the ethical standards committee is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the ethical standards committee should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely
Sincerely,

Prof Jo Dames
Chair: Human Ethics sub-committee, RUESC- HE

Note:

Appendix D2: Rhodes University Ethics Clearance (revised study topic)

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn
www.ru.ac.za

Office of the Dean of the Faculty of Education
Education Department, Grey Street, Grahamstown/Makhanda, 6139, South Africa
PO Box 94, Grahamstown/Makhanda, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 8315
e: dean.education@ru.ac.za

14 November 2022

Rhodes University Student Number: 615M6458

To Whom it May Concern,

PhD thesis title change of Ms Ntele Emily Mabote

Ms Ntele Emily Mabote (South African ID number 7703050503087) requested that the title of her PhD in Education thesis be changed as follows:

From:

Towards an integrated quality assurance and enhancement framework for a university of technology.

To:

Mechanisms conditioning the implementation of an integrated quality assurance and enhancement approach at a South African University of Technology.

The change in title was served before the Faculty Board at a meeting on the 20th of September 2022 and no objections were raised. It further served at a meeting of Senate on the 21st of October 2022 and no objections were raised. Her thesis title was therefore successfully changed.

Should you require any further information, you are most welcome to contact my office.

Sincerely,

Professor Eureta Rosenberg, PhD
Dean of Education

1

Appendix E1: Tshwane University of Technology Ethics Clearance (first study topic)

Tshwane University of Technology
We empower people

Research Ethics Committee

The TUT Research Ethics Committee is a registered Institutional Review Board (IRB 00005968) with the US Office for Human Research Protections (IORG# 0004997) (Expires 30 Jan 2020). Also, it has Federal Wide Assurance for the Protection of Human Subjects for International Institutions (FWA 00011501). In South Africa, it is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-160509-21).

September 11, 2019

REC Ref #: REC2019/07/009
Name: Mabote NE
Student #: 15M6458, RU

Ms NE Mabote
C/o Prof Lynn Quinn
Faculty of Education
Rhodes University

Dear Ms Mabote,

Decision: Gatekeeper Permission - Final approval

Name: Mabote NE
Project title: *Towards an integrated quality assurance and enhancement framework for a University of Technology.*
Qualification: Doctor of Philosophy in Education
Supervisor: Prof Lynn Quinn

Thank you for submitting the revised project documents for review by the Research Ethics Committee (REC), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). In reviewing the documents, the comments and notes below are tabled for your consideration, attention, and/or notification:

- **Informed Consent Form**
  - The REC takes note of the corrections. The corrections are in order.
- **Invitation to Participants**
  - The corrections are duly noted and in order.

The Chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee, Tshwane University of Technology, reviewed the revised project documents on September 11, 2019. **Final Approval** is granted to the study.

The proposed research project may now continue with the proviso that:

1) The researcher/s will conduct the study according to the procedures and methods indicated in the **approved proposal**, particularly in terms of any undertakings and/or assurances made regarding the confidentiality of the collected data.
2) The proposal will be submitted to the Committee for prospective ethical clearance if there are any substantial **deviations** and/or changes from the approved proposal.
3) The researcher/s will act within the parameters of any applicable **national legislation, professional codes of conduct**, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Strict adherence to the following South African legislation, where applicable, is especially important: Protection of Personal Information Act (Act 4 of 2013), Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005) and the National Health Act (Act 61 of 2003).
4) The researcher will inform the REC as soon as possible of any **adverse events** involving research participants that may have occurred during the course of the study. It includes the actions and/or processes that were implemented to mitigate and/or prevent any further injuries and/or adverse outcomes.
5) The researcher will inform the REC of any **new or unexpected ethical issues** that may have emerged during the course of the study, as well as how these ethical issues were addressed. The researcher must consult with the REC for advice and/or guidance in any such event.
6) The current ethics approval expiry date for this project is **July 31, 2021**. No research activities may continue after the ethics approval expiry date. An application for the extension of ethics approval must be submitted for projects that need to continue beyond the expiry date.

Note:
The reference number [top right corner of this communiqué] should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication [e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters] with the intended research participants.

Yours sincerely,

H Mason (Dr)
Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee
[TUTRef#2019=07=009=MaboteNE]

Appendix E2: Tshwane University of Technology Ethics Clearance (revised study topic)

Tshwane University of Technology
We empower people

Research Ethics Committee

The TUT Research Ethics Committee is a registered Institutional Review Board (IRB 00005968) with the US Office for Human Research Protections (IORG# 0004997). Also, it has Federal Wide Assurance for the Protection of Human Subjects for International Institutions (FWA 00011501). In South Africa it is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-160509-21).

January 24, 2023

REC Ref #: REC2019/07/009
Name: Mabote NE
Student #: 15M6458, RU

Ms NE Mabote
C/o Prof Lynn Quinn
Faculty of Education
Rhodes University

Dear Ms Mabote,

Decision: Gatekeeper Permission - Final approval

Name: Mabote NE
Project title: *Mechanisms conditioning the implementation of an integrated quality assurance and enhancement approach at a South African University of Technology.*
Qualification: Doctor of Philosophy in Education
Supervisor: Prof Lynn Quinn

Thank you for submitting the revised project documents for review by the Research Ethics Committee (REC), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). In reviewing the documents, the comments and notes below are tabled for your consideration, attention, and/or notification:

- **Project Ttile**
  - The REC took note of the letter requesting a change of the Research Project title from *"Towards an integrated quality assurance and enhancement framework for a University of Technology"* to *"Mechanisms conditioning the implementation of an integrated quality assurance and enhancement approach at a South African University of Technology"* (Letter dated 14 November 2022). The REC approves the application for a project title change on condition that the information provided for the initial ethical approval of the project has not changed.

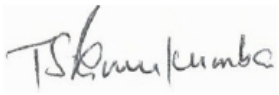
The Chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee, Tshwane University of Technology, reviewed the revised project title on January 23, 2023. **Final Approval** is granted to the study.

The proposed research project may now continue with the proviso that:

1) The researcher/s will conduct the study according to the procedures and methods indicated in the **approved proposal**, particularly in terms of any undertakings and/or assurances made regarding the confidentiality of the collected data.
2) The proposal will be submitted to the Committee for prospective ethical clearance if there are any substantial **deviations** and/or changes from the approved proposal.
3) The researcher/s will act within the parameters of any applicable **national legislation, professional codes of conduct**, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Strict adherence to the following South African legislation, where applicable, is especially important: Protection of Personal Information Act (Act 4 of 2013), Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005) and the National Health Act (Act 61 of 2003).
4) The researcher will inform the REC as soon as possible of any **adverse events** involving research participants that may have occurred during the course of the study. It includes the actions and/or processes that were implemented to mitigate and/or prevent any further injuries and/or adverse outcomes.
5) The researcher will inform the REC of any **new or unexpected ethical issues** that may have emerged during the course of the study, as well as how these ethical issues were addressed. The researcher must consult with the REC for advice and/or guidance in any such event.
6) The current ethics approval expiry date for this project is **December 7, 202**. No research activities may continue after the ethics approval expiry date. An application for the extension of ethics approval must be submitted for projects that need to continue beyond the expiry date.

Note:
The reference number [top right corner of this communiqué] should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication [e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters] with the intended research participants.

Yours sincerely,



Prof TS Ramukumba
Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee
[TUTRef#2019=07=009=MaboteNE]

Appendix F: Example of participant's invitation letter

Name and Surname
Head of Department: Name of Department
Faculty of (name of Faculty)
Tshwane University of Technology
Pretoria Campus

18 January 2021

Dear Dr (Name and Surname)

Re: Invitation to participate in a research study

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled "*Towards an integrated quality assurance and enhancement framework for a University of Technology*". My study aims to conduct an analysis of the conditions enabling or constraining the emergence of an integrated quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE) framework for TUT. The intention of the study is to undertake a meta-analysis of the institutions' QA and QE structures, practices and experiences of the agents responsible for QA at TUT. Although it is not my intention in this study to research the weaknesses of the Institution, it must be acknowledged that some critiques may emerge from my data. These will be used in a constructive and developmental manner to avoid any reputational risks for individuals and for TUT. My study has the potential to contribute to the debates about integrated QA/QE frameworks in other higher education contexts.

Your participation is important to give your account and experiences of how QA and QE evolved in TUT and to identify enablers and constraints to inform the potential conceptualisation of an integrated QA /QE framework for TUT.

The research will be undertaken through document analysis and interviews with key internal stakeholders. Every effort will be made not to reveal your identity. I will use pseudonyms in all written accounts. The collection of this data will require between 45 minutes to an hour of your time.

Please note that before our interview commences, I will explain in detail and provide you with information on the potential risks, benefits, and your rights as a participant. Partaking in this research is voluntary and a positive response to this letter of invitation does not oblige you to take part in this research. To participate, I will ask you to sign a consent form to confirm that you understand and agree to the conditions, prior to any interview commencing.

RU Ethics approval #: 2019-0209-427 TUT REC approval # REC2019/07/009

Please note that you have the right to withdraw at any given time during the study. Ethical approval to undertake this study has been obtained both from Rhodes University and TUT.

Any ethical misconduct on my part can be reported to the Rhodes University Ethics Coordinator, Mr Siyanda Manqele at s.manqele@ru.ac.za or 046 603 7727.

Thank you for your time, and I hope that you will respond favourably to my request.

Yours sincerely,

Ms. Emily Mabote (Signature) Date: 18 Jan 2021
Registered PhD: Education student
Rhodes University: Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL)

Prof Lynn Quinn (Signature)
Supervisor
Rhodes University: Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning (CHERTL)

RU Ethics approval #: 2019-0209-427 TUT REC approval # REC2019/07/009

Appendix G: Informed Consent form

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Grahamstown • 6140 • South Africa

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Provisional Research Title	Towards an integrated quality assurance and enhancement framework for a University of Technology
Name of Researcher	Emily Mabote
Institution	Rhodes University Centre for Higher Education Research Teaching and Learning (CHERTL)
Supervisor	Prof Lynn Quinn
Researchers' contact details	Cell number : 082 927 4365 Email : ntelem@gmail.com
Rhodes University Ethical Standards Committee (RUESC) approval reference number	2019-0209-427
TUT REC approval reference number	REC2019/07/009

Participation Information

- I understand the purpose of the research study and my involvement in it.
- I understand the risks and benefits of participating in this research study.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research study at any stage without any penalty.
- I understand that participation in this research study is done on a voluntary basis.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, my identity will not be revealed and there will be no reference to my name or staff number.
- I understand that while the raw data from the study may be re-used by the researcher after completion of her study, my identity will remain anonymous and there will be no reference to my name or staff number.
- I understand that other data collection requirements particular to this research may be used.
- I understand and agree that the interviews will be recorded electronically.
- I understand that I will be given the opportunity to read and comment on the transcribed interview notes.
- I confirm that I am not participating in this study for financial gain.

Information explanation

- I confirm that the above information was explained to me by Ms. Emily Mabote and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study:" *Towards an integrated quality assurance and enhancement framework for a University of Technology".*

- The above information was explained to me in English and I am in command of this language:

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Voluntary Consent:

I, **xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx**, voluntarily give my consent to participate in the above-mentioned research.

Signature:

Date: 25/01/2021

Researcher Declaration: I, **Emily Mabote**, declare that I have explained all the participation information to the interviewee and have truthfully answered all questions asked by the participant.

I also declare a possible conflict of interest or potential researcher bias due to my dual role of being a researcher and a quality manager in same University where I am conducting this study. The potential bias will be managed through recording the interviews and keeping detailed field notes, a research interview journal to record all my reflections of the interviews and a daily activity log. I also do not foresee any ethical risks as a researcher and employee of TUT.

I further declare that the information received during the project will only be used for research purposes and will not be released for any academic assessment, study progress and/or disciplinary purposes.

Signature: 

Date: 25 Jan 2021