



How decision-makers make the ‘right choice’?

Assessing instrument selection between legitimacy and instrumentality: evidence from education policy in Italy (1996-2016)

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Abstract

In recent years, an emerging stream of literature has focused on instrument selection as a driving question in policy design and public policy studies. In fact, within studies on policy instruments, scholarly attention has gradually moved from defining the concept of an instrument to exploring their adoption by policymakers. Hence, scholars have devoted increasing attention to the political, institutional and cognitive dimensions that influence decision-makers when choosing a policy instrument based on their preferences and the contextual pressures. On this issue, a recent typology, proposed by Capano and Lippi (Policy Sciences, 2017), assumes that two main factors determine the process and assessment of instrument selection: legitimacy and instrumentality. Given the boundaries created by how decision-makers perceive these two dimensions, decision-makers can show only four selection patterns: hybridization, stratification, contamination or routinization. The paper aims to assess these four patterns by using a specific field analysis; thus, the main goal of the paper is to provide current theoretical insights on instrument selection with methodological completion regarding variables and indicators. The empirical basis for this reasoning is a time-series analysis of instrument selection in Italian education policy for the 20-year period from 1994 to 2016. The methodological exercise focuses on the main decisions (acts and regulation in general) made in educational reforms and the means-ends matching pursued by policymakers across five cabinets (four ministers). Document analysis and in-depth interviews with past ministers, cabinet chief executives and high-ranking officers (analysed through Grounded Theory) support the analysis.

Paper presented at 3rd *International Conference on Public Policy (ICPP3)* June 28-30, 2017 – Singapore, panel T02P20 - *Formulating Policy*

1. Introduction

Decision-makers can follow only specific patterns of choice when they are in charge of designing policies and thus choosing which kind of instruments or set of instruments to select in response to an arising policy problem. In this paper, we address this issue according to a specific theoretical framework in which we assume that decision-makers have significant autonomy in selecting policy instruments that manifests in four specific patterns of selection (routinization, hybridization, stratification and contamination) depending on how they perceive the legitimacy and instrumentality of the choice in the specific decision context (Capano and Lippi 2017). The usefulness of this theoretical approach is tested by applying it to analyse the main decisions of reform in education policy in Italy.

Owing to this longitudinal focus (decisions made over a period of twenty years by 4 governments, belonging to different political sides), we have the opportunity to conduct an intertemporal comparison of the selection of instruments in the same policy field and thus have strong basis for assessing the validity of the framework and understanding the dynamics of policy design in education in the selected country. Furthermore, in the empirical application of the framework, we have tried to focus more on the operationalization of the two basic dimensions of the choice selection (legitimacy and instrumentality) and the methodological way through which we show how they concretely drive decision-makers' choice.

The paper proceed as follows. In the second section, the theoretical framework will be summarized. In the third section, the research design, especially how we operationalize legitimacy and instrumentality and how the data have been collected and addressed, will be presented. In the fourth section, the main features of the policy dynamics in Italian education, as well as the main instruments chosen by the five analysed governments (four ministers of education), will be presented. In the fifth section, the results of the empirical analysis will be presented. In this regard, the general patterns of choice and the choice of instruments in the following five policy issues will be shown and explained according to the theoretical framework: (i) teacher recruitment and careers, (ii) evaluation and assessment, (iii) institutional autonomy, (iv) work-linked training, and (v) organizational structure of the school system. In the conclusion, some lines for further research will be proposed.

2. Theoretical Framework: Legitimacy and Instrumentality from theory to the empirical evidence

The main concern with the selection of instruments is the discretion of decision-makers when the political context pressures them to make appropriate choices in adopting tools rather than taking them for granted and to raise their capacity to resolve problems. The underlying assumption is that in each specific contingency, decision-makers have to acknowledge *how* to make the right choice in adopting suitable means to accomplish their preferred ends. In this paragraph, we summarize a theoretical framework of the recurrent patterns for instrument selection as derived from the combination of its main drivers (Capano and Lippi, 2017): legitimacy and instrumentality.

In recent years, instrument selection has gained considerable attraction among scholars, who have focused on how decision-makers makes choices by examining what type of process is involved. In this regard, there has been a profitable debate for theoretical reasoning between contextual (Doern and Phidd, 1988; Howlett and Ramesh, 1993; Salamon 2002) and contingent (Bressers and Klok 1988; Peters, 2002) approaches. Instrument selection may thus be considered to result from the interaction between pre-existing factors (e.g., ideas, interests, institutions, technological opportunities, policy legacies) and individual orientation (perceptions, responsiveness, ideational background, career opportunities).

Accordingly, instrument selection occurs within a decisional environment that frames the choice and provides decision-makers with preliminary assumptions. Hence, the selection of instruments is pre-structured from a range of insights that delimit the context in which selection occurs. This framework thus involves legacies and other contextual and individual factors, which may concern several elements, such as the institutional setting (constitutional arrangements, former legislation, acknowledged judgements by courts), political orientations (parties' preferences, electoral mandates, coalition agreements, interests), ideational backgrounds (ideological background, ethical orientations and values) and rational achievement (stakes, career and gains) (see also Walgrave and Dejaeghere, 2017:235).

From this perspective, instrument selection occurs at the intersection of these factors. We assume that decision-makers are rational beings who are trying to find ‘good reasons’ for believing that a policy instrument is suitable and useful in light of its political acceptance and feasibility. Therefore, the combination between individual and contextual factors joins both logics of decision making noted by scholars across many decades of studies: sense making and effectiveness seeking. Legitimacy and instrumentality involve both logics. Legitimacy is related to the need to pursue the more acceptable choice that is grounded in the congruence of such instruments with prevailing social values, whereas instrumentality mainly refers to goal achievement and the need for effectiveness. Legitimacy increases when policy instruments have to be justified for the same reason that decision-makers require legitimization. The legitimacy of a policy instrument is particularly significant for democratic life (Bemelmans Videc et al.,1998, 8).

In contrast, instrumentality concerns decision-makers’ perception of an instrument as useful and effective in achieving given ends (Hood and Margetts, 2007). Instruments encapsulate the pursuit of the goal-means relationship that is intrinsically related to decision making. The technical shape of a policy instrument tends to influence choices through the perception of the expected results of their use.

Both legitimacy and instrumentality give the decision-maker a cognitive framework with a range of insights that he/she re-elaborates to evaluate the appropriate choice. Instrument selection must therefore be scrutinized by looking at the evaluation of alternatives that the decision-maker considers when he/she determines the presumed effects.

Hence, legitimacy and instrumentality do not arise before the decision-maker and instrument selection. Rather, they take shape and gain relevance at the *specific juncture* when their features meet the decision-maker’s preferences. The suitability of an instrument is subsequently located in the *eyes* of the decision-maker. In fact, the scrutiny of the instrument selection must retrace and recompose the *grounded logic of the decision-maker when choosing instruments* according to the influence of legitimacy and instrumentality in light of sense-making and effectiveness-seeking experiences.

Therefore, instrument selection research must focus on the combination of instrumentality and legitimacy in a given situation. Legitimacy may be divided in internal and external legitimacy, according to the different sources. The real matter concerns *who*

is perceived as validating the instrument susceptible to selection. The validator(s) may be an insider within the policy field (internal legitimacy), such as an expert, accredited institution, or hardened stakeholder. In contrast, the validator may be an outsider (external legitimacy), such as undoubtable and prestigious stakeholders or institutions, which can be perceived as trustworthy and plausible. In brief, internal legitimacy is endogenous: decision-makers, when lending sense to their choice, hold values and maintain arguments and rhetoric deriving from *that* specific field. In contrast, external legitimacy is exogenous, as it originates from a different policy sector and can be coercively imposed (e.g., EU directives) or mimetically inspired as a matter of diffusion or transfer (i.e., “best practice” regardless of any real transferability to, or subsequent success within, the new context).

While internal and external legitimacy are well-investigated concepts in the social sciences (see Drori and Honig, 2013), instrumentality has been considered only recently (Le Galès and Lascoumes, 2007). It can be divided into two different categories: specialized and generic instrumentality. Specialized instrumentality refers to instruments perceived as non-substitutable. In this regard, specialization means individualization and distinction: the instrument is intended to be an original template or best practice to be subsequently imitated. Generic instrumentality includes instruments perceived to cover an increasing number of actors, policy problems and situations, so they may be generally considered to fit because of their ability to encompass a broad range of problems both within the same policy field and in different policy fields.

The dichotomization of legitimacy and instrumentality produces a typology (Capano and Lippi, 2017) with four patterns of instrument selection: (i) routinization, (ii) contamination, (iii) hybridization and (iv) stratification (Table 1)

Table. 1 *Four types of patterns of instrument selection*

		Legitimacy	
		<i>Internal</i>	<i>External</i>
	<i>Specialized</i>	Routinization	Hybridization
Instrumentality			
	<i>Generic</i>	Contamination	Stratification

Source: Capano and Lippi (2017)

Routinization occurs when instrument selection is influenced by the perception that the instrument is still valid and perfectly suitable according to the approval of insiders and the consolidated reputation of the tools as not-substitutable and reinforced by the constituencies of experts and stakeholders supporting it. As such, decision-makers continue to adopt the instrument despite its effectiveness and external social acceptance. Internal approval and uncontested suitability are sufficient conditions for adoption without any doubt that the instrument is routine. This pattern involves a conservative perception of tool choice: people are convinced either that the current mix is performing well or that there is no other real choice (under the assumption that other choices could be more dangerous from both a political and policy perspective), so there is no need to change it by adding new tools. Routinization affects persisting behaviours oriented to preserve consolidated selection. It does not concern any kind of learning, and it stands out for having a conservative attitude. Both legitimacy and instrumentality seem to say to the policymaker: 'don't change and stay there!' There are no reasonable and attractive alternatives.

Contamination occurs when instrument selection is influenced by the perception that that instrument is valid because of the approval of insiders within the policy field, but it is now contaminated by a new tool in an unspecific way. The instrument is considered suitable because it plays the role of an umbrella – good for many seasons and applications and consequently well-fitting for the case in question. Decision-makers contaminate a consolidated pattern to defend existing positions of power within the policy field by showing that they are capable of changing. However, this pattern implies a

change in the policy sector, because in one way or another people (policymakers first and foremost) are forced to adjust their preferences to the requirements of the new constraining tools. This adjustment produces a new blend of policy tools that can be the basis for a potential incremental policy change. The tool choice is not necessarily congruent, but it may be endorsed as innovative and thus efficient and effective

Hybridization occurs when instrument selection is influenced by the perception that a specialized tool is needed in light of the highly constrictive approval by influential, external and prestigious validators, whose opinion is highly recommended and favourable. Hybridization involves an innovative policy mix through the inclusion of new modes within the existing set of policy tools. Thus, there is a loss of congruence because the mix includes a highly constraining tool from a different policy field, but a wider range of actors and situations are also included, in the name of renewed efficiency or effectiveness. Ultimately, hybridization involves the establishment of a new policy mix in which different governance principles and ways of working are combined in the pursuit of a new balance. Hence, as in the case of contamination, what we have once again is not a simple layering but a process in which the new policy instruments adopted oblige actors to redesign, in a consistent manner, the set of tools employed.

Finally, *Stratification* is a pattern whereby policymakers introduce instruments in a generic way, such that they are readily accepted in other fields owing to the need for external legitimation. The degree of congruity in this case is extremely low, and it does not necessarily entail any policy change since policymakers perceive the *new* instrument as suitable (from a political point of view) for the policy in question. Moreover, its integrated nature means that there is no pressure to render it congruous with the existing set of policy tools. Policymakers simply have to adopt it and thus juxtapose it with previously existing instruments, without having to search for any apparent congruity or integration. The choice of instrument is actually legitimized by the appealing nature of the new instrument and by the fact that it encompasses a number of different situations, people and solutions. Thus, it achieves broad consensus, although its generic nature means that it is not really of a constraining character (no one perceives to lose something because of it). The logic of stratification implies that the new instrument is added, but there are no real relations with existing instruments; thus, this choice does not necessarily produce any real change.

All four categories may be interpreted as insights of recurrent patterns for understanding the process decision-makers regularly follow to justify the adoption of an instrument so that it seems effective and socially and politically acceptable. In fact, they provide theoretical insights that must be refined and proved by evidence through operationalization.

3. Research Design

We have adopted the above sketched theoretical framework to analyse the main decisions of reforms in Italian education policy between 1996 and 2016.

There are two main relevant reasons to have chosen education policy as field of application of the framework. First of all education policy is always characterized, in comparative perspective, to be ideological sensitive (Ball 1990; Ansell 2010; Busemeyer 2009). This element is quite relevant for our theoretical lenses because the ideological afflatus could be a stronger driver of decision-makers perception and preferences respect to the policy instruments to be selected. In this sense the Italian case guarantees the presence of systematic changeovers in the ruling coalitions.

Second, education policy has been characterized by continuous waves of reform, not only in Italy, during the last three decades, and thus it offers a picture of reiterated waves of choices on policy instruments, and thus the chance to compare the adopted patterns of selection choice over time.

According to the framework, we needed to gather information on three types of factors: the characteristics of the context, the decisions made on policy instruments and to operationalize the concepts of legitimacy and instrumentality.

Regarding the context we have reconstructed the political dynamics that has developed in the considered time period, by focusing specific attention on three dimensions: the ruling coalitions structure and their preferences respect to education and the dynamic of party competition; the “policy stream” that is the debate about problems and solution on education; the existing set of policy instruments. The last one plays the role of a legacy according to the pre-existing set of instrument adopted by the previous cabinet. Thus we have collected all the national laws and regulations on education policy in Italy in the chosen time period and we operated a selection based on the ministerial continuity and on the relevance of the decision operated. We have decided to focus on five specific policy areas: teachers’ recruitment and career, institutional autonomy, organizational factors of the school systems; evaluation and assessment, and work-linked training that, according the comparative literature are the most relevant in higher

education (Whitty et al. 1998; Hannaway and Woodroffe 2003; Hudson 2007; Maroy 2009).

Based on this criterions we have selected the most significant decisions respect the policy instrument to be adopted made under four ministers (corresponding to 6 governments) symmetrically divided between right-wing and left-wing governments.

Based on the content of the two previous steps we had at our disposal enough material to reason about the developments of selection of policy instruments in education and also to make some inferences in relations to the four patterns of choice.

But the third step, the operationalization of legitimacy and instrumentality, was needed to find the connections (complementarities, incoherence) between what seemed to emerge from the reconstruction of the context and the analysis of the evolution of the choices on the policy instruments and the perceptions/convictions of the real decision-makers. Thus we have planned to interview the most relevant decision-makers involved in the chosen decisions: the ministers, their chief of cabinet and their chief of legislative service. We did 10 out of 12 expected interviews.

But before proceeding to the interviews we needed to operationalize legitimacy and instrumentality, because, as we have stated in the theoretical framework, their significance is not embedded in their *objective* social or political relevance, but in the *subjective* perception by the policy maker in *that* specific contingency. As a consequence, there are not indisputable nor better sources for providing legitimacy or instrumentality (e.g. an uncontested instrument or an undisputable institution), but specific and contingent ones that have great impact to policy makers in a given situation. Instrument selection has to be consequently scrutinized looking at the evaluation of alternatives the decision maker carries out imaging presumed effects. According to the theoretical framework, legitimacy and instrumentality don't pre-exist the decision-makers and the instruments' selection but they take shape when decision-makers interact with the context in presence of a perceived problem to be solved: thus, the relevance and the degree of influence of each analytical dimension is located in the eyes of the decision maker. For instance, about legitimacy, the reputed influence by some relevant stakeholders in the field or the accreditation by prestigious agency or the opinion of eminent academics universally considered as inescapable, may be excluded by a decision maker in favor of the approval by secondary actors or not accredited agency. At the same time, about instrumentality, certain given well known and irrefutably instruments considered as well functioning and suitable for given ends, are not perceived from decision maker as fitting, while some seemingly abstruse or not appropriate may be judged as definitely suitable with respect their ends. In both case, instrument selection is grounded on a belief, and not on evidence. All in all, the grounded thinking of decision-makers when choosing instruments matters. There, he/she combines his/her own aims with the surrounding stimulus he/she perceives as relevant and suitable.

Thus we have operationalized legitimacy in terms specific sources through which decision-makers take information or actors in constant interaction with them. The sources for *internal legitimacy* are contiguous to the institutional and political environment of the decision maker in that contingency. They may consist of policy arena's insiders like:

- Colleagues, as political actors, eminent leaders, influential peers in the Cabinet, unions' leaders
- Institutions pertaining the policy field, as Ministries, Courts, Agencies, supra national institutions, etc.
- Public Officers and chief executives, as public employees, staff collaborators, technicians, lawyers, etc.
- Internal advisors, as experts, consultants, staff experts all engaged in a collaboration with the decision maker of his/her institution from long time.

All the opinions by these sources for legitimacy may support the instrument selection from inside. They are usual actors the decision maker meets in the policy arena. These actors are universally and irrefutably considered as reputable. Their opinion may matter and the decision maker can give an account to what extent he/she really reposes their approval as supporting.

The sources of external legitimacy are those actors who are out of the policy sector but whose opinion decision maker reposes as influential in that contingency. They may consist of policy arena's outsiders:

- Eminent supra national agencies and institutions universally reputed as relevant or significant international institutions that may matter in the case in question, etc.;
- Advisors or experts working in other policy sectors, universities, think tanks, institutions and countries reputed as challenging and innovating;
- Best practices and/or successful cases implemented by other institutions or countries and inspiring mimetic isomorphism;
- Social stakeholders, as associations, foundations, social movements, group of interests and other political actors who are attractive in the eyes of the decision maker looking at the instruments selection.

Specialized instrumentality depends on its supposed and indisputable attractiveness provided by an instrument and its constituency (Jordan and Matt 2014;

Beland and Howlett 2015). It can be operationalized in terms of well-known and practiced instruments in the policy arena:

- institutionalized tools well rooted in that policy sectors and universally reputed as suitable and specific for that environment;
- Institutions, agencies and organizational units from the public sphere as well as private companies already working in that area, but also specific consolidated instruments like existing, contracts, rules and guidelines

Generic instrumentality is perceived by a decision maker looking at the supposed breakdown it promises thus its attractiveness is given from the potential innovating contribution and the ‘air of success’ behind its implementation in other contexts (policy sectors, countries or institutions). Thus, the operative characteristic of generic instrumentality are:

- Fashionability (instruments practiced by other institutions or context but strongly recommended by constituencies as mass media, parties, think tanks, agencies and financial trader;
- Successfulness (instruments practiced by in other sectors or countries that are reputed to have been effective)

We have searched for the above-listed operational dimensions of legitimacy and instrumentality in two ways: by deducting them from the facts and events we have reconstructed (also thanks the information gathered with the interview to the policy-makers we have done) and by a qualitative analysis of the interviews themselves that have been treated through the grounded theory methodological techniques. The first way can help to grasp the contextual anchoring of legitimacy and instrumentality while the second way, thanks to the potentiality of the “open “coding” and the eventual subsequent “theoretical coding” can help not only to anchor legitimacy and instrumentality at the individual level but also to “discover” something not visible through the deductive process.

The analysis of interviews has been done with Nvivo and with reference to some techniques of the Grounded Theory (Glaser e Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Charmaz 2006). The advantage provided by Grounded Theory *is to offer clear and transparent procedural rules of coding*. According to Charmaz e Bryant (2011) the validity and credibility of this approach is based exactly in the procedures of coding. In the first step (*open coding*) data are open and explored in a way through which the texts are fragmented and conceptual labels are attributed and compared each other. In the second step (*axial coding*) conceptual labels are aggregated in macro-categories and then in the

third step (selective or theoretical coding) the macro-categories are linked to eventual new hypothesis (Bruscaglioni 2016). In our analysis, starting from 4 pre-established concepts (external e internal legitimacy, specialized e generic instrumentality) considered as theoretical codings, thanks to the Grounded Theory techniques and Nvivo it has been possible:

- To compare the 4 pre-established concepts with an empirical basis and to operationalize them by a decomposition based on sub-categories emerging for the interviews' data (see **Appendix A**)
- To find new elements of the operational definition of the four concepts
- To root the four concept in the text (thus identifying how many times they are present in the interviews)
- To compare different contexts, governments and policy issues.

Following this way we assume to be able to give more empirical content and support to the theoretical significance of the four patterns of choice (routinization; contamination, stratification and hybridization)

4. Education Policy in Italy, 1996-2016

4.1. Policy Legacy

Education policy in Italy has long been characterized – indeed, since the Unification of Italy - by the traditional bureaucratic-professional model of systemic coordination/governance (i.e., a high degree of centralization together with a very weak degree of institutional autonomy) and the consistent capacity of teachers to control their own employment conditions (through unions) and the nature of their work. This combination of bureaucratic and professional regulation (Bidwell 1965) has represented the common framework shared by Continental Europe's other larger countries (Germany, France and Spain) as well as by Italy. From a policy-instrument perspective, this type of governance works through a specific combination of strong centralised all-pervasive regulations (micro-regulations and compliance with the rules), close negotiation between

the State and teacher unions at the central level, and the substantial individual autonomy of teachers in their day-to-day jobs (Barroso 2000).

In the Italian case, the Ministry of Education, supported by an extensive bureaucracy, was the real decision-maker and ruler of the system, albeit with the strong cooperation of teacher unions, which very often goes beyond mere wage or employment issues. In terms of setting adopted policy instruments, the Italian interpretation of the bureaucratic-professional governance model was therefore characterized by the strict use of authority (targeted budget allocations for schools, a centralized mechanism for the recruitment of teachers, centralized planning of buildings, a centralized policy for pupils' and students' access to schools, centralized standards and regulations governing the composition of classes, and so on) and the substantial self-regulation of teachers' individual work. Schools did not play a significant role as institutions; rather, they were simply the places where teachers and students taught and learned. Moreover, the heads of schools were appointed by the ministerial bureaucracy, and their role was simply that of grass-roots agents of the central bureaucracy who carry out its orders and observe the provisions of its circulars. From this point of view, the Italian school system was governed through traditional command and control tools (central standardized procedures and organizational design) and organizational uniformity. The prevalence of this instrumentation was justified by the belief that owing to this way of governance, equal access to all and the performance of pupils could be guaranteed.

Although it came later than in other countries, education reform in Italy finally witnessed challenges to the historically rooted policy tools used to coordinate education policy, which represented the same problems faced by other countries: on the one hand, the need for financial retrenchment, owing to the fiscal crisis of the Welfare State; and on the other, increasing political and social expectations regarding education as a whole. First, the universalisation of further education (with almost all school pupils now going on to receive a high school diploma) has entailed a significant increase in public expenditure. Thus, the restructuring of welfare systems and public spending in all Western countries in recent years has also focused on the efficiency of educational and higher educational policies. Therefore, from this point of view, the changes in the inherited governance models and their policy tools have represented a means of guaranteeing greater efficiency within the context of public spending cuts. Second,

governments have begun to perceive education as the engine of national socioeconomic growth, while society has reinforced the perception of education as a way of improving its own socioeconomic status, as well as the idea that families should have a greater choice of schools and universities for their children. From this point of view, since the beginning of the 1980s, changes in governance throughout the West have aimed to render education more accountable and more effective than it has been in the past. Thus, the old bureaucratic model has been gradually replaced by new institutional governance arrangements in which a market-oriented approach and a different role for the state (from commander/controller to remote evaluator and ruler) have become the prevailing features.

Institutional autonomy, external evaluation, competition, decentralization/centralization, consumer choice, social involvement, and the increased control over teachers have been the fundamental policy tools used to create new governance modes and new sets of policy tools, through a process of assemblage based on national peculiarities (Maroy 2009). Within this broader international context, Italy began to modify the traditional, bureaucratic governance of schools in 1997, with a law that provided for the introduction of greater autonomy for schools in terms of both teaching itself and its organization. This law opened the doors to twenty years of an uninterrupted process of reforming different significant aspects of education policy and thus of continuously changing the set of adopted policy instruments.

4.2 The Context

The specific context in which the decisions have been made shapes the arena in which the policymakers solve the functional pattern/legitimacy puzzle. In the case of education policy, the context is characterized by three main characteristics that determine the contingencies in which decision-makers have proceeded in changing the set of adopted policy instruments.

First, the context has been characterized by a radically new political situation. In fact, following decades of stalemate, a new political-institutional context that characterized Italy from the early 1990s onwards – that is, more majoritarian dynamics and the more effective role of government (Capano and Giuliani 2001; Cotta and Verzichelli 2007; Conti and Marangoni 2015; Zucchini 2016) – offered a favourable

context for legislative reform. The bipolar trend of the political competition has pushed government to take unprecedented decisions in education, as well as in other fields. Concurrently, the majoritarian dynamics of Italian politics has also favoured the upraising of partisan conflict and ideological divide around the policy solution to be adopted in education.

However, while the political dynamics has been pushing towards reforming education policy, thus making this issue a stable presence in the governmental agenda, two counter-acting ideational factors have been inherited from the past: (i) the conception of the fundamental role of the state in guaranteeing equal of access to education together with the uniformity of the education service throughout the country (Dei 2012); and (ii) an egalitarian idea of careers and roles strongly shared by teachers (Cavalli 2000). These values have persisted over time, and over the twenty years of reforms that we have analysed, they have represented a constraint or a significant contextual factor that decision-makers have considered when intervening in the existing set of policy instruments.

4.3 The Governments, Their Lines of Reforms and the Main Approved Policy Instruments

In the period that we have analysed, there have been 12 governments and 9 ministers of Education. We have counted nine laws and more than 20 national regulations (delegate legislative decrees and ministerial decrees) that provide for changes in the set of the adopted policy instruments in the field. After a deep analysis of the content of the legislative text, we have selected the governments that seem to have been more “reformist”: Prodi I (1996-1998); D’Alema I and II (1998-2000); Berlusconi II and III (2001-2006); Berlusconi IV (2008-2001); Renzi (20014-2016).

It should be underlined that there is a balance between the right-wing government (Berlusconi) and the left-wing governments (the others).

Furthermore, some characteristics of the policy design of the analysed governments should be noted:

- The Prodi and D’Alema governments (with the same person serving in the role of Minister of Education) have consistently changed the existing set of policy instruments by introducing institutional autonomy for schools. Then, it should be noted that in 2000, a law changing the organizational structure of the education system was approved, but it was immediately abolished by the subsequent right-wing government. An attempt to introduce meritocratic bonuses for teachers

failed. In addition, the same person has served as Minister of Education in all these cabinets.

- The Berlusconi government (2001-2006) approved a new reform concerning the organizational structure of the education system (characterized by the abolition of the distinction between lyceums and vocational secondary education), but this law remained completely unimplemented owing to the change of government in 2006.
- The Berlusconi government (2008-2011) introduced measures of drastic budgetary cuts and approved and ultimately implemented a reorganization of the structure of education system (following very different lines from the content of the reform previously approved by the same right-wing coalition). An attempt to introduce meritocratic bonuses for teachers failed.
- The Renzi government radically changed the system of recruitment, strengthened the role of the head of school, launched a plan to solve the problem of the huge number of teachers working under temporary contracts, and introduced, again, a meritocratic salary bonus for teachers

Overall, the chosen governments have been characterized by the design of significant policy interventions in a very conflictual context in which, as can be seen, the subsequent government has not applied or has abolished. Furthermore, the different content of the Berlusconi government reforms on organizational structure should be noted, as well as the reiteration of the provisions with respect to the meritocratic salary bonus. This sketched picture of the general trends of the more reformist government in education thus shows that the contexts have been quite variable, owing to political dynamics, and that there has been constant attention to the same problems (e.g., the organizational structure of the system, the role and powers of the heads, merit bonuses).

It is not simple to determine the regulations that can be considered the most significant or innovative from a huge amount of regulations that often concern all the aspects of education policy in a very detailed way. In proceeding with this selection, we have adopted the criterion of higher distance from the status quo; thus, we have focused on provisions that seem to introduce significant changes in the set of adopted policy instruments. Table 2 summarizes the results of our selection for the most reformist governments made by grouping the chosen instruments with respect to five policy issues (teacher recruitment and careers, evaluation and assessment, institutional autonomy, work-linked training, and organizational structure of the school system).

Table 2 Main Policy Instruments adopted in Education reforms in Italy (1996-2016)

	Policy areas of interventions and adopted instruments				
Governments/ Ministers	Teachers' career	institutional autonomy	organizational dimensions of the schools system	evaluation and assessment	work-linked training
Prodi (1996-1998) D'Alema (1998-2000) <i>Berlinguer</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual performance based bonus for teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First attribution of organizational and teaching autonomy to schools Criterion for optimal size of schools School heads granted managerial powers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift from a 3 tracks system to a 2 tracks system lasting together 12 years 	Establishment of the National Agency for Schools Assessment (INVALSI)	
Berlusconi (2001-2006) <i>Moratti</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verticalization of the teachers career New system of recruitment based on initial internships (One year) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abolition of the previous reform and re-establishment of 13 of schooling The historical divide in Upper Secondary School between Lyceums and Vocational Institutes is abolished 	INVALSI is attributed the competence to annually assess the institutional teaching performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of relevant provisions favouring work-training especially 15-18 yo students with a professional degree
Berlusconi (2008-2011) <i>Gelmini</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment based on selection through <i>numerus clausus</i> at the master level Merit bonus for teachers 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction of the school staff (10% in 3 years) Re-establishment of the role of the "prevailing" teacher in the primary school Re-establishment of the distinction between Lyceums and vocational institutes Reduction of the week in class workload of the students 	A national Invalsi assessment is introduced among the tests of the school-leaving examination	
Renzi (2014-2016) <i>Giannini</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Merit based bonus for teachers New system of recruitment based on national qualification and initial internships (three years) Plan to hire more than 100,000 casual teachers on full-term contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More autonomy in managing the teaching staff Powers of Head of Schools reinforced 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased hours devoted to work linked training (2400 hours)

Thus, the choice of the above-listed instruments should be explained in terms of legitimacy and instrumentality and understood in terms of the followed pattern of choice.

5. Why Those Instruments? Decision-makers Say That...

5.1 Legitimacy and Instrumentality in the Four Cabinets

All four scrutinized Cabinets coped with unstable and turbulent times when adopting their reforms in educational policy. More precisely, instrument selection was, in turn, shaped from specific political, organizational and economic factors.

As said, the first reform was carried out by Minister Berlinguer (Prodi and D'Alema Cabinets) in 1997. The political climate surrounding the instrument selection was partially unfavourable, and many stakeholders, including centre-left parties and unions, were reluctant. The reform was adopted through a legislative trick as an appendix of a reform of the public sector. The aim was very ambitious but preliminary: the political aim was to introduce a breakdown in the paradigm and a framework for further reforms.

Under the Berlusconi II centre-right cabinet, Minister Moratti (2001-2006) inherited the task to develop the political principles set by centre-left Minister Berlinguer. The Minister and her staff had to seriously cope with the change in the Constitution approved in 2001 that promoted legal empowerment in favour of the regions and disseminated uncertainties and ambiguities about the legal power of the central government within the policy field. This cabinet also implemented reforms using legislative tricks, by issuing parliamentary laws to avoid contentiousness regarding the legislative power of regions (prominently administrated by the opposition) and court litigation. Indeed, the Minister made choices that were well supported by a strong electoral mandate and her personal prestige but had to compete with resistant and sceptical public opinion supported by the opposition parties.

The following minister, Minister Gelmini (2008-2011), was equally supported by the strongest electoral mandate in Italian history (Berlusconi IV Cabinet), though under the influential and dramatic fiscal climate of an economic crisis. The political aim was driven by external circumstances, and the reforms took place in light of austerity and fiscal retrenchment. The aim of the cabinet was similar to that of Moratti's, but it was now strongly pressured by the Minister of Economy and weakened by the low prestige of the Minister. As such, reforms were adopted in a climate of politics regarding fiscal rationalization and budget cuts: consequently, the large part of innovation was adopted by regulations.

Finally, Minister Giannini worked (2014-2016) in a political climate characterized by a spasmodic search for electoral consensus, as Prime Minister Renzi was not elected

as member of Parliament; rather, he was a mayor. Consequently, he (and his cabinet) suffered from a lack of legitimacy, which framed many of the cabinet's decisions strongly oriented to gain the approval by the public. Nevertheless, Minister Giannini worked within the context of previous reforms and had to cope with austerity politics.

As a result, such factors created a decision-making setting where one had to expect different behaviours. While decisions by the first centre-left minister (Berlinguer) and his staff were made with regard a generalized climate of reluctance, the first centre-right cabinet's minister (Moratti) was expected to look for external support because of the number of adverse constituencies within educational policy, the influential role played by trade unions, and the lack of influence of the previous reform. Analogously, the second centre-left cabinet's minister (Giannini) worked in a delegitimised and contentious climate, though with a strong legacy of preceding reforms. Finally, the second centre-right cabinet's minister (Gelmini) made choices in a well-structured environment, similar to the above-mentioned environment, but it was now deeply influenced by the previous reform and channelled by European fiscal policy and the domestic prestige of the Minister of Economic Affairs Tremonti.

Overall, the above factors shaped the expected outcomes. In fact, the interview data show an assorted picture of influences where legitimacy and instrumentality played a pivotal role into creating the policy mix of each specific reform. In the interviews, ministers and their staff claimed paths of selection with recourse to different combinations of both dimensions, according to the emerging *nodes (collection of references on a specific theme)* gathered through our interviews (Table 3).

Table 3 Nodes of Legitimacy and Instrumentality and Italian Cabinets

	Prodi (1996-1998) D'Alema (1998-2000) <i>Berlinguer</i>	Berlusconi (2001-2006) <i>Moratti</i>	Berlusconi (2008-2011) <i>Gelmini</i>	Renzi (2014-2016) <i>Giannini</i>
External legitimacy	7	37	17	19
Internal legitimacy	14	17	9	13
Generic instrumentality	4	32	9	13
Specialized instrumentality	7	29	17	7

As shown in table 3, the first centre-left cabinet (Minister Berlinguer) considered internal legitimacy to be more relevant than external legitimacy. While consulting prestigious opinion makers, experts and journalists (and shaped by the British experience), the decision-maker seriously considered the influences of insiders:

“I set up a very copious workgroup with teachers, ministry supervisors, and headmasters. They were the best in the field. Also, in the secondary education world, one may easily know who is a capable headmaster” [Int. 1].

The workgroup was led by the staff and included ministry experts belonging to left-wing intelligentsia and pedagogists. A significant influence also came from the legacy of the preceding exploratory draft delivered by eminent academics and experts. Finally, the Minister was more focused on generic instrumentality, as he took inspiration from innovative, although allusive, instruments: “but it dealt with a reform that promoted a *lyceumnization* of the school as a whole, separating it from professional training...even if in particular this new lyceum also has practical subjects as professional institutes: in fact, the reform provided laboratories in the lyceums as well as job training activities” [Int. 1].

The subsequent centre-right cabinet (Minister Moratti) perceived external legitimacy as an undeniable driver for selecting instruments. References needed for external legitimacy are frequent in the interviews. The decision-makers claimed the need for external support to promote a revolutionary plan for secondary education in Italy, and they looked to external sources for approval, as well as because of resistances inside the policy field, especially from trade unions, teachers and public officers. Here, the main source of legitimacy came from a specific body of consultants (*Stati generali della cultura*) that was established by the Minister and that included eminent opinion makers such as politicians, intellectuals, academics, deans, consultants, journalists and anchormen.

Special attention was also paid to family associations, charities and student associations, with the most prominent being catholic associations:

“[T]he method was to survey public opinion.[...] [I]t was called ‘focus’, namely, landmark, so that we could gain insight about Italy’s point of view” [Int. 4].

A second influential source of approval for instrument selection also came from international agencies, such as the OECD, the EU Commission and programs enacted from other central governments (Germany) or regional governments (the region with special status of Trentino-Sued-Tirol). Among external consultants, trade unions, public officers, staff members of previous ministers, teachers and headmasters were also involved. Regarding instrumentality, the cabinet seemed to have achieved a balance between the two types. The interviewees referred to generic instrumentality as a main characteristic of useful instruments. Generic instrumentality concerns the ‘inspiration’ that the minister and her staff gained from other experiences and then imported in the

context with a different meaning and use. Some instruments have been imported from Germany (i.e., apprenticeship) but biased and re-contextualized with a different strategy, profile, aim and use:

“[I]t was not apprenticeship, because the student was not engaged to work but to visit a job place and to get insight and learn by observing” [Int. 5].

In other cases, specialized instrumentality was also considered a source of selection, and well-structured bureaucratic instruments were reinforced in their use. In this way, specialized instrumentality concerns the rules, contracts and technicalities for hiring and substitute teacher recruitment. There is also evidence that specialized instruments gained consolidated constituencies, calling for their reiterative use: trade unions and teacher interest groups requested similar or reiterated ways of recruiting.

The second centre-right cabinet (Minister Gelmini) devoted major attention to both specialized instrumentality and external legitimacy. Specialized instrumentality drove decision-makers to consolidated instruments, which were now perceived as reasonable and more feasible (because of the financial crisis). In this way, the decision-makers moved away from the limited innovation of the previous centre-right majority toward more conservative – but fast and feasible – decisions. In this way, specialized instrumentality led the decision-makers to change many aspects of secondary education through implementing micro-legislation and patching circumscribed details. The resulting patchwork was innovative given its continuity. Here, there was space also for generic instrumentality, as in the case of the abolition of professional institutes and parameters for the maximum number of foreign children admitted in a classroom.

In addition, the pattern of substituting professional institutes with lyceums again produced a second opportunity for the *lyceum-ization* of vocational programs in secondary schools. Again, a generic feature of the instrument ‘lyceum’ is also perceived to fit many aims and vocational secondary school. Legitimacy also played a significant role, as for the previous centre-right cabinet. External legitimacy was perceived as essential and inescapable: the approval from supranational agencies, as well as the influence from the EU and prominent international experiences, was considered to drive and strongly address the choice of instruments. Nevertheless, internal legitimacy was less cited in the interviews; however, it was extremely influential, as all decisions occurred under the approval of the Minister of Economic Affairs, who strongly inspired the timing and limits for decision making. As such, all decisions needed the approval of the above-mentioned minister and the cabinet. Political approval inside the core executive was thus essential: “the decree was mainly enacted inside the Ministry of Economic Affairs” [Int. 7].

External legitimacy also played a crucial influence in the Renzi government (Minister Giannini) owing to the programmatic governmental intention to surprise the public with breakthrough choices. Validation by external experts such as businessmen,

consultants, managers now prevailed, together with opinions by experts and academics: “we arranged many debates in the country with hundreds of people; we mobilized the people. [...] [W]e asked them: oh country, what do you want we do about secondary education?” [Int. 9].

However, in general, the attractive influence from supranational and European institutions, together with the search for approval by indisputable opinion makers, was decisive in the instrument selection. Rhetoric in favour of students and families and their social needs was also used: “I believe that ambitious reforms must be implemented by negotiating, and so, we agreed by sharing” [Int. 10]. Internal legitimacy was not discarded; however, it had a minor influence. Headmasters, teachers and academics have been consulted and involved in workgroups, but internal legitimacy was complementary to external legitimacy. Analogously, generic instrumentality has been perceived as suitable being for government ends. Instruments have been adopted in a generic way, as they are often imported and reshaped merely because of their vagueness and ambiguity. This is the case for recruitment rules, which have been changed without a specific and definite path but oriented to include as many teachers as they can. In addition, in this case, generic instrumentality included constituencies (teachers in search of a job) and seemed, in the eyes of policymakers, to be the best fitting choice at the contingent place. By contrast, specialized instrumentality has been marginalized.

Overall, two main findings can be drawn from this first step of analysis. First, all four cabinets are driven by all four categories, though with different combinations and different intensity. Second, the combinations vary across cabinets.

The first scrutinized cabinet (Berlinguer) was in search of a breakdown. One would expect a major recourse to external legitimacy; however, it was relied upon only partially. The main influence was internal legitimacy, as the cabinet aimed to reassure insiders and consolidated constituencies in the policy field about the innovative programs and the change. Generic and specialized instrumentality were used to integrate this aspect of the instrument selection. The subsequent centre-right cabinet (Moratti) was expected to cope with strongly innovative reforms in following the ‘pioneer’. Here, we observed a strong external influence together with a balance between generic and specialized instrumentality.

External legitimacy was influential together with specialized instrumentality in the decisions made under Minister Gelmini. Finally, the fourth scrutinized cabinet (Giannini) seems to mostly be influenced by generic instrumentality and external legitimacy.

Consequently, we can observe four different trends, even if they are not entirely independent. The governments’ decision making did not show only one pattern. On the contrary, all four patterns of instrument selection can be detected for each government, as secondary education policy involves multiple issues, and each cabinet selected

instruments according to different influences from legitimacy and instrumentality with respect to the subject of decision making. For instance, one decision-maker was influenced by specialized instrumentality and external legitimacy when deciding on one issue (e.g., evaluation) but was then influenced by internal legitimacy and generic instrumentality when deciding on another issue (e.g., teacher careers). Hence, an overall finding for secondary education policy in Italy regarding a single cabinet cannot be provided; however, we may observe the behaviour of each cabinet across the five policy issues.

5.2. Patterns of Choice Concerning the Five Policy Issues

Obviously, the general pattern could hide significant differences in the decisions made by the same government according to the different issues at stake. Thus, we have focused our attention on five thematic issues that have always been considered the most important in the political debate on school reform in Italy: (i) teacher recruitment and careers, (ii) evaluation and assessment, (iii) institutional autonomy, (iv) work-linked training, and (v) organizational structure of the school system. We have analysed these issues by extracting the thematic nodes emerging from the NVIVO analysis. For some items, no thematic node related to legitimacy emerged from the NVIVO analysis; therefore, we decided to assign a prevalence on that dimension according to the general pattern of the related cabinet (see **Appendix B**). In table 4, we report the final results of the analysis in terms of patterns of choices. The table can be read both to grasp the patterns of choice prevailing in a specific thematic policy issue and to view how each cabinet has selected instruments with respect to every thematic issue.

Tab. 4 Patterns of choice in five thematic policy issues

POLICY ISSUES	Prodi (1996-1998) D'Alema (1998-2000) <i>Berlinguer</i>	Berlusconi (2001-2006) <i>Moratti</i>	Berlusconi (2008-2011) <i>Gelmini</i>	Renzi (2014-2016) <i>Giannini</i>
Work-linked training	Stratification	Stratification	?????? (Hybridization)	Stratification
Evaluation and assessment	?????? (Contamination)	Stratification	?????? (Stratification)	-----
Teachers' career	?????? (Routinization)	Stratification	Hybridization	Contamination
Institutional autonomy	Contamination	Stratification	?????? (Stratification)	Hybridization
Organizational dimensions of the schools system	?????? (Contamination)	Hybridization	Contamination	-----

If we start from the first perspective, the emerging evidence clusters the five issues into three trends: i) stratification as a common pattern for evaluation and worked-linked training that joins all the cabinets; ii) all four patterns observed with clear differentiation among the four cabinets; iii) hybridization and contamination for the organizational structure of the school system.

i) Stratification as a common pattern for evaluation and worked-linked training that joins all the cabinets. Stratification emerges as the most common pattern that characterizes the choice of instruments across the cabinets (with the potential exception of Gelmini's reform) both for work-linked training and for evaluation. This homogeneous and bi-partisan trend indicates that with respect to these two issues – which did not belong to the policy legacy in Italian education – decision-makers have consistently searched for instruments that are legitimized by their appealing nature and by the fact that they can accommodate a number of different actors and solutions. Thus, they achieved broad consensus, although given their generic instrumentality, the instruments were not really of a constraining character (nobody imagines losing anything). However, for this reason, the generic and loose nature of work-linked training was more attractive and reputed by decision-makers as suitable for the case in question: “we were doubtful if worked-linked training had to be compulsory or to promote it without a mandatory scope; we were worried about compulsory work-linked training because in Italy, mandatory reforms are never implemented” [Int. 9].

Quite exemplary in this case is the story of the many waves of decisions about work-linked training. Such training is always considered a strategic pillar for improving school effectiveness, according to the highly recognized international best practices; however, it is implemented through very generic provisions, which are very evocative and consensus driven. Further, these provisions have been accepted because there was no perception that they should be enforced in practice or because they can be incorporated into the previously adopted toolkit: “the Italian school, we said, must be a producer of culture and originality but not of superficial knowledge; [...] [A]s a result, it must connect to the firms. On the contrary, to be competitive with respect the challenges of globalization and technology, firms need a ‘formative’ school capable of looking forward for intelligent workers and students involved in projecting creativity and entrepreneurship within their own job” [Int. 3].

Regarding evaluation, a similar result may be observed. In this case, stratification is also an emerging finding, even if the choices from Minister Berlinguer here could be potentially different: “the content was entirely on evaluation. It changed function [...]. It depended on the Minister: she had a private attitude.[...] [B]ut evaluation was missing, so we found an institute to do evaluation” [Int. 4].

ii) *All four patterns have been adopted for teachers' careers and institutional autonomy.*

Concerning both issues (teachers' careers and institutional autonomy in favour of the schools), all four patterns (routinization, hybridization, contamination, stratification) have been detected. Indeed, an evident differentiation among all the cabinets with respect to the four patterns is also observed. Regarding teachers' careers, this variety of patterns of choice is a clear indication of the political salience of the issue, as well as the different context in which decision-makers acted. There is no partisan divide: both Ministers Berlinguer (centre-left) and Moratti (centre-right) followed the less costly patterns (*routinization and stratification*) because of their general strategy of reform. Their choice for less innovative instruments with respect to teachers' careers can be justified in terms of the search for internal consensus to gain support for the other reforms that they were pursuing (institutional autonomy for Berlinguer and the reform to the structure of the school system for Moratti). Berlinguer routinized well-known instruments: "we went on because they feared that primary school teachers could be dismissed" [Int. 2]. In contrast, Moratti adopted generic and externally legitimized instruments: "they were used to implementing ranking for recruitment; like sausages, they were tied! [...] [S]o, we decided to change the slow and gradual hiring with a trick. According to the needs of the courts and the unions, we adopted ranking for recruitment as a comb. So, we hired a lot of new teachers and inserted them into the old ranking" [Int. 5].

In contrast, both Ministers Gelmini (centre-right) and Giannini (centre-left) pursued more demanding patterns (*hybridization and contamination*, respectively), motivated by the will to show their reform afflatus, though in different way. Gelmini's reform of teachers' careers has been characterized by the search of strong external legitimacy and high specialized instrumentality (*numerus clausus* to gain the master degree for becoming a teacher): "we had a relevant degree of freedom in respecting the requirement or reducing the workforce according to external pressure to rationalize expenditure but consolidating and making leaner the consolidated way by Ministry regulations" [Int. 7].

Giannini's reform, however, has been characterized by the search for internal legitimacy (especially by connecting the reform to the hiring of 100,000 casual teachers) and generic instrumentality (the national qualification that could be accepted by all the actors): "regarding careers, we imagined a massive recruitment plan that was then less massive than the planned one[...] It was a mechanism to provide Italian schools with all the needed teachers [Int. 9].

Regarding institutional autonomy, the variety of patterns shows a partisan divide. In fact, while the two centre-right governments opted for stratification, the two centre-left cabinets were proactive: Minister Berlinguer introduced the general principles of institutional autonomy (*contamination*), while Giannini strongly reinforced the

managerial power of the headmasters and school autonomy in staffing (*hybridization*): “the headmasters were transformed into managers!” [Int. 1].

iii) Hybridization and contamination of the organizational structure of the school system.

The organizational structure of the schools is an issue that has been characterized by hybridization and contamination. Here, three cabinets of four tried to change the structure of the school system but with a different orientation. The context influenced the emerging patterns of choice, which shows how drastic changes can be based on internal legitimacy. This is the case for Minister Berlinguer, who introduced a radical reform (the shift from a 3-track system to a 2-track system that lasted 12 years) by searching for strong internal legitimacy (by gain consensus among teacher unions) but offering a very generic definition of the two tracks and their future implementation: “we perceived a danger for Italian students who gain their high school diploma when they are 19, not 18. They are discriminated with respect the rest of the EU!” [Int. 1].

In sum, there are also a variety of adopted pattern across each cabinet facing each issue in secondary education policy in Italy. Indeed, the decision-makers showed different behaviour with respect to different issues. Hence, legitimacy and instrumentality mattered to a different degree each time according the characteristics of the issue at stake. From this point of view, it is quite clear that when faced with multi-issue policies, governments can follow different patterns according to the intensity of their preferences. Variability in instrument selection can occur not only between cabinets but also within an issue. Thus, when coping with different issues at the same time, decision-makers are likely induced to invest more in one or two specific issue(s) than in all the remaining issues. Most likely, the intensity of preferences for a decision will influence the decision-maker to favour of the issue reputed as feasible or preferred. For example, it is quite clear that when hybridization is the chosen pattern for selecting instruments, there is a clear intensity of preference among decision-makers to significantly innovate the way of ruling that specific issue. Hence, the diversified behaviours with respect to the five issues should be considered entirely coherent.

6. A Promising Way to Understand How Decision-makers Choose Instruments

In this paper, we have analysed instrument choices in Italian education policy by following a specific theorization that assumes that only four patterns of choice exist, according to decision-makers’ perception concerning the legitimacy and instrumentality of the instrument to be chosen. The empirical application represents a first effort to

operationalize the four patterns and to test the framework's validity and usefulness. The empirical research has focused on data collected through interviews, and by reconstructing the interview data through some techniques of Grounded Theory and using NVIVO, we show the logics of reasoning that real decision-makers adopted when choosing instruments.

Second, for the framework to be useful, we had to operationalize how legitimacy and instrumentality are actually perceived by decision-makers. From this point of view, the framework of the four patterns of choice seems to have empirical relevance and to be a promising analytical tool to grasp how decision-makers think when choosing a policy instrument. Thus, legitimacy and instrumentality actually capture how decision-makers think when constructing their motivations to choose one instrument or another.

Furthermore, the empirical analysis has shown the different patterns of choice that can characterize the same government or minister and thus how decision-makers actually embed their choices in the specific context surrounding the specific policy issue at stake. This finding confirms that instrument choices are made inside specific arenas whose borders depend on not only the context but also the way in which decision-makers disaggregate the policy at stake (according to their political preferences).

The presented analysis is a preliminary test – a step forward in reconstructing how instruments have actually been adopted in light of decision-makers' micro-logics. In fact, this one longitudinal policy sector is an embryo, a pilot case to be widened and reinforced by further empirical research to provide greater generalization. Such further research may include the following: (i) a comparison among different cabinets along the same policy sector (already done); (ii) a comparison among different policy sectors (i.e., widening the application to other sectors); and (iii) a comparison among states with respect to the same policy sector.

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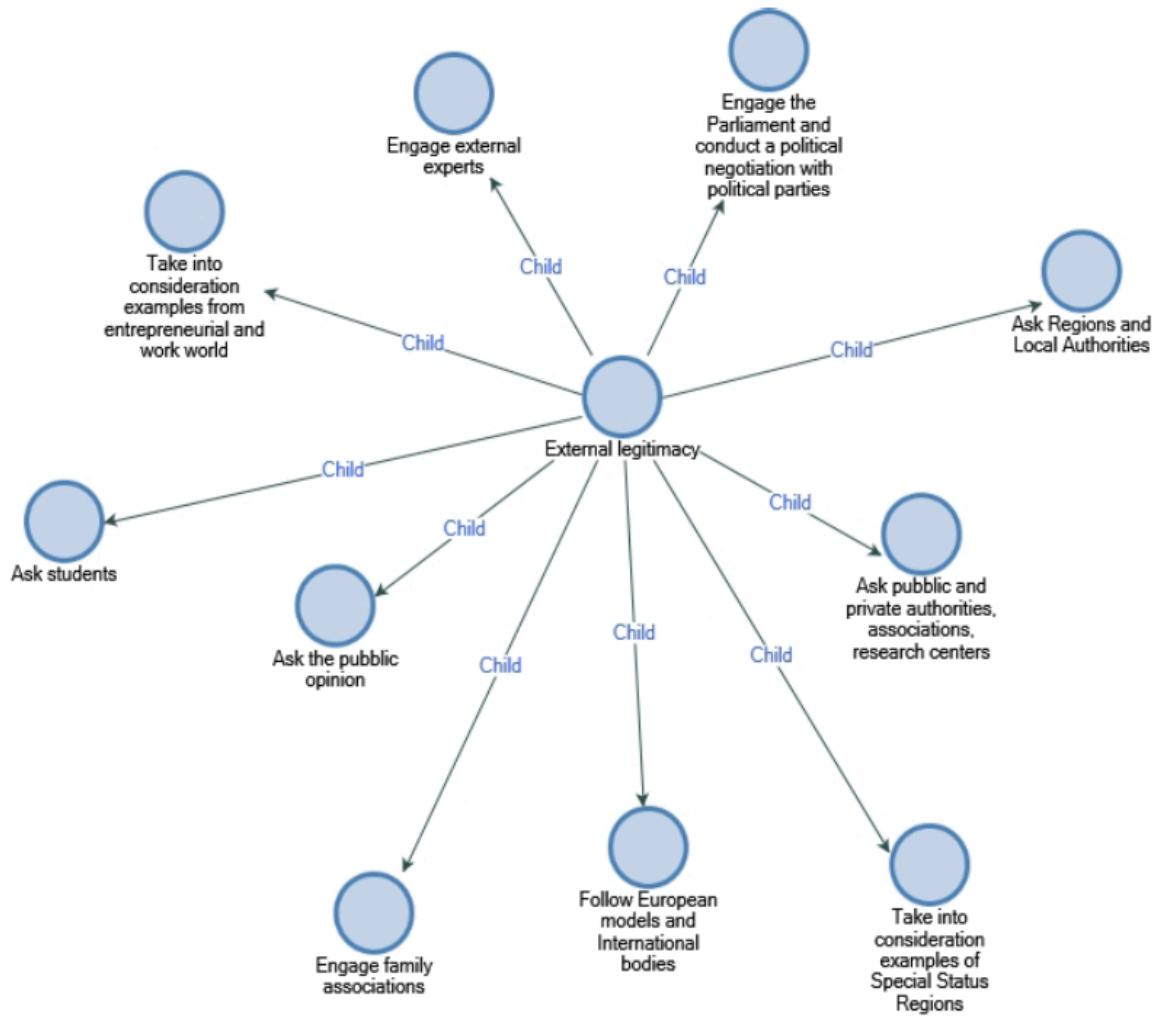
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APPENDIX A

EXTERNAL LEGITIMACY

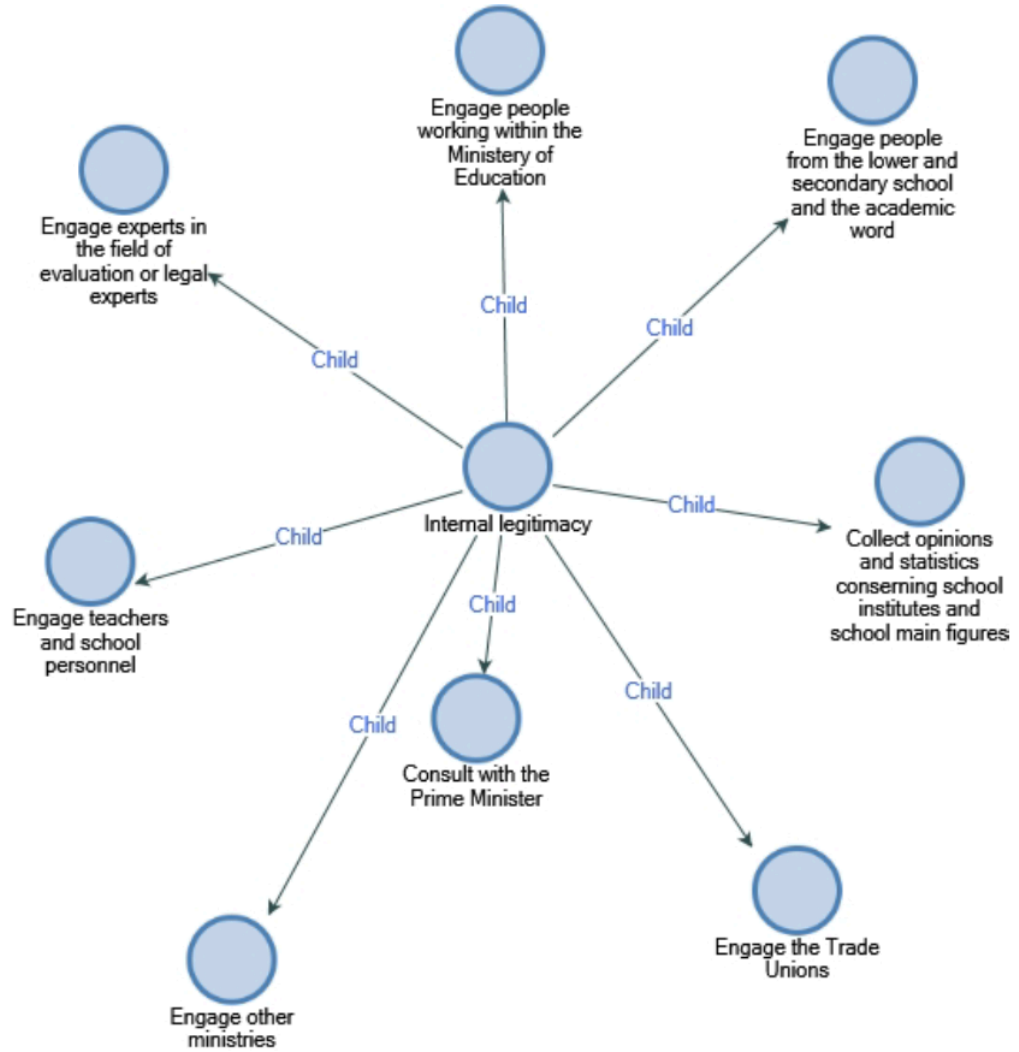
decomposition based on sub-categories emerging for the interviews



APPENDIX A

INTERNAL LEGITIMACY

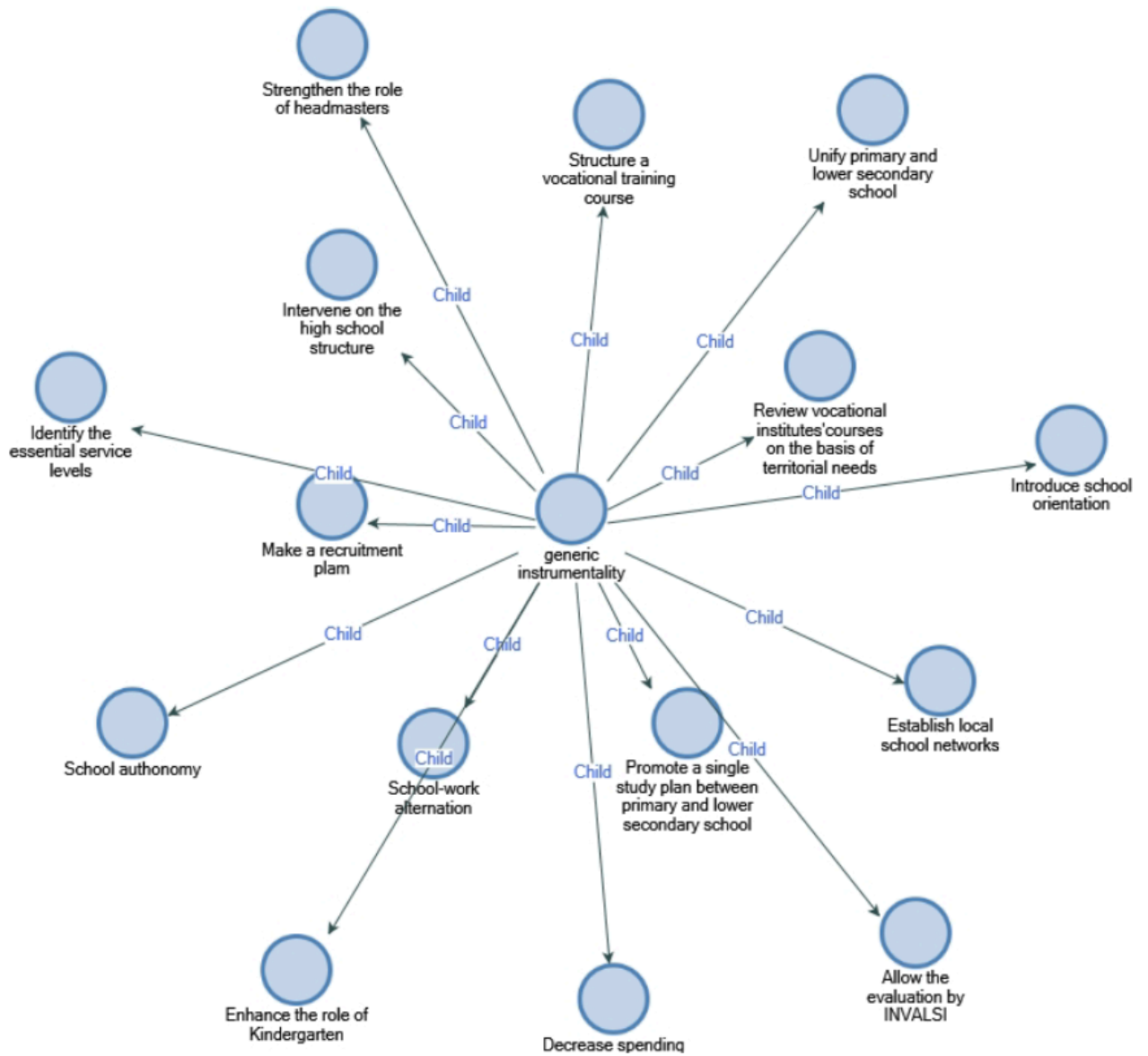
decomposition based on sub-categories emerging for the interviews



APPENDIX A
SPECIALIZED INSTRUMENTALITY
decomposition based on sub-categories emerging for the interviews



APPENDIX A
GENERIC INSTRUMENTALITY
decomposition based on sub-categories emerging for the interviews



APPENDIX B

Legitimacy, instrumentality and patterns of choice in the five thematic policy issues

	Prodi (1996-1998) D'Alema (1998-2000) <i>Berlinguer</i>	Berlusconi (2001-2006) <i>Moratti</i>	Berlusconi (2008-2011) <i>Gelmini</i>	Renzi (2014-2016) <i>Giannini</i>
Work-linked training				
External legitimacy	1	8	0	3
Internal legitimacy	0	0	0	1
Generic instrumentality	1	18	0	8
Specialized instrumentality	0	4	2	1
pattern	stratification	stratification	?????? (hybridization)	stratification
Evaluation and assessment				
External legitimacy	0	8	0	0
Internal legitimacy	0	3	0	0
Generic instrumentality	1	9	4	0
Specialized instrumentality	0	5	0	0
pattern	?????? (contamination)	stratification	?????? (stratification)	-----
Teachers' career				
External legitimacy	0	3	1	1
Internal legitimacy	0	0	0	2
Generic instrumentality	1	18	0	12

Specialized instrumentality	2	7	8	4
pattern	?????? (routinization)	stratification	Hybridization	Contamination
institutional autonomy				
External legitimacy	11	4	0	0
Internal legitimacy	14	0	0	0
Generic instrumentality	9	13	4	3
Specialized instrumentality	3	3	0	5
pattern	Contamination	Stratification	??????? (stratification)	Hybridization
organizational dimensions of the schools system				
External legitimacy	0	4	3	0
Internal legitimacy	0	0	7	0
Generic instrumentality	2	4	10	0
Specialized instrumentality	1	9	5	0
pattern	??????? (Contamination)	Hybridization	Contamination	-----