The role of the OECD in the development of global policies for migrant education

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ABSTRACT
This paper reports the results of a document analysis study examining the policies, trends, and conceptions developed by the OECD in the last 15 years regarding the development and mainstreaming of globalised policies of migrant education. From the process of the analysis, three thematic categories emerged: (i) Socio-economic aspects of education: International testing and the performance gap; (ii) OECD’s recommendations on Migrant Education; and (iii) Influence mechanisms: Standardisation, benchmarking, and dissemination of suggestions. Findings are discussed in the light of the concepts of neoliberalism, standardisation and soft governance. It is argued that, despite the philology pertaining the promotion of neoliberalism and standardisation through the OECD’s policy suggestions, OECD’s soft governance champions for alternative models, philosophies and practices that may challenge dominant modus operandi towards more just educational policies for migrants.

Introduction
Globalisation has been interconnected to socio-cultural and economic trends promoted international debates on migrant education, often in diverse ways. These controversies are made apparent in global policies of migrant education developed, disseminated and mainstreamed by international organisations, such as the United Nations, the European Union, the Council of Europe, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Despite the fact that most international organisations appear to recognise the important role of education in promoting migrants’ inclusion and enhancing social cohesion, they have suggested different possible routes towards achieving this goal. As most work of international organisations targets educational access, funding, and achievement, there has been a general impression that their activities in migrant education have been somewhat limited in respect to the direction of intercultural education (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016, 2017). However, Leganger-Krogstad (2011, p. 23) counteracts this impression by explaining that migrant education is “given a high priority in influential European and global political institutions”. He...
thus stresses out the importance of examining the role of such institutions in the development and dissemination of global policies of intercultural education.

In addressing this call, we examine the global policies, trends, and conceptions developed by the OECD with regards to migrant education. Nevertheless, this examination is only a part of a bigger study that examined the role of various international organisations, such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, and the UN. In response to the question “why focusing on OECD”, which is “a stolid-grounding, economic-oriented international organisation”, Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, and Taylor (2001, p. 1) explain that the OECD is self-identified as “a unique forum permitting governments of the industrialised democracies study and formulate the best possible policies in all economic and social spheres” (OECD, 1994, p. 7). Therefore, through this research we envisage “to understand the changing nature of policy making in the context of the epochal shift now most often described as the era of globalisation” (Henry et al., 2001, p. 1).

The focus of our study is the analysis of the development and mainstreaming of globalised policies of migrant education by examining the policies, trends, and conceptions developed by the OECD. On the basis of document analysis, we not only set out to examine the pedagogical aspects of migrant education, but to analyse the definitions and interpretations attached to the discourse of migrant education by the OECD. In order to theoretically bind our analysis in later parts of this article, we firstly set out to theoretically unpack the notion of globalisation and the globalisation mechanisms in the field of education.

Globalisation and globalisation mechanisms in education

Most researchers in the field, view globalisation in education as an umbrella term, a catchword, a buzzword, or a meta-field that is rather hard to define or conceptualise (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016). However, for the purposes of this research, we consider globalisation as a multifaceted and non-linear process with ideological and political underpinnings “in which the universal and particular, the similar and the dissimilar, the global and the local are to be conceived, not as cultural polarities, but as interconnected and reciprocally interpenetrating principles” (Beck, 2005, pp. 72–73). In the field of education, globalised discourses seem to be mostly rooted in the neoliberal paradigm pointing to the adoption of principles, practices and mechanisms from the corporate sector (Ball, 2007), such as increased accountability, privatisation, and decentralisation (Verger, Novelli, & Altinyelken, 2012). Neoliberal globalised discourses further socio-economic inequalities around the globe, while introducing blanket policies that disregard the socio-political, economic and historical localities. However, at the same time, a more democratic and humanistic facet of globalisation is envisaged by anti-hegemonic-globalised discourses of social justice promoted by specific international organisations or global justice movements (Evans, 2008).

Moving a step forward, globalisation is manifested through mechanisms of global influence on domestic change (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). These mechanisms span from direct mechanisms of influence, such as legislative coercion (i.e. legal mechanisms and binding treaties), positive and negative incentives, socialisation and persuasion to indirect or soft mechanisms. In more detail, global influence on domestic change may
be driven by: (a) the logic of consequences according to cost-benefit calculations (instrumental rationality); (b) the logic of appropriateness meaning the socialisation into rules to be part of a larger community (normative rationality); and the logic of arguing meaning reason-giving and challenging reasons as actors try to persuade each other (communicative rationality) (Börzel & Risse, 2012). What we should acknowledge is that actors (i.e. member states of an international organisation) at the receiving end are not passive recipients, but engage in active roles of “interpretation, incorporation of new norms and rules into existing institutions, and also resistance to particular rules and regulation” (ibid: 4). Additionally, we should take into consideration the indirect mechanisms of emulation, including competition, lesson drawing, and mimicry (Börzel & Risse, 2012). Competition refers to the borrowing of what is considered as “best practices” by the actors to improve their performance comparatively to others; lesson-drawing suggests that actors selectively choose institutional solutions from elsewhere; and mimicry entails imitation processes of other actors whose appropriateness is taken for granted.

**The OECD and the globalisation of migrant education**

The OECD aims to foster collaboration between its 30 member states so as to better respond to the socio-economic and environmental consequences of globalisation (OECD, 2004a, 2010a). As one of these consequences is migration and its socio-economic influences on education, migrant education is one of the areas on which OECD focuses (OECD, 2016a, 2017b, 2018c). Notably, since 1960, net migration has tripled in OECD countries, while migrant students reach the 10 to 20% of the total student population in many OECD countries (OECD, 2010b, 2015a, 2016c, 2017b, 2018c). In the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) launched by the OECD, almost one out of four 15-year-old students reported that they were either foreign-born or had at least one foreign-born parent (OECD, 2017a, 2017b).

Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2016), in their research focusing on the globalisation of intercultural education, argue that the OECD mainly deploys the mechanism of standardisation to influence national policies to promote migrants’ success. The OECD seems to define success as the narrowing of the performance gap between native and migrant students. The OECD, because of its worldwide student assessments (i.e. PISA), has been the main international organisation deploying the mechanism of standardisation to promote migrants’ success. As pointed out by Rinne, Kallo, and Hokka (2004, p. 454) “the educational policy governance of the OECD is based on overall and supranational information management – the instruments of which in practice are published analyses, statistics and indicator publications, as well as country and thematic reviews”.

In more detail, the results of international performance tests (i.e. PISA, TIMMS, and PIRLS) exert influence on the standardisation of curriculum content across the globe. Through country rankings that are perceived as signs predicting the economic future of a country (Sjöberg, 2019), the international assessment regime seems to be setting the scene for national educational reforms oriented towards a neoliberal form of quality, which is defined along the “disciplinary forces of the market” (Ball, 1994). This leads to the post-bureaucratic model of regulation and control of the education system that is
manifested in the “evaluation, measurement and standards” social object, because standards aspire to ensure consistency and comparability in the everyday conduct that occurs at diverse locations (Fenwick, 2010).

Through the standardisation mechanism, consistency and comparability become a form of disciplinary power containing forms and systems of expertise and technology utilisable for the purposes of political control (Foucault, 1991a; Olssen & Peters, 2005). In this context, neoliberalism represents an art of government, a form of political reason and a political rationality transcending the notion of ideology and becoming a discourse of theories and ideas emerging in response to the issues within a specific historical period. What the neoliberal paradigm has created is a culture of performativity, which according to previous research is rather reinforced by the OECD through standardisation and global assessment mechanisms (Exley, Braun, & Ball, 2011; Sjöberg, 2019). In the following section, we set out to further discuss how this culture of performativity is formed in the neoliberal paradigm.

The OECD and the culture of performativity in the neoliberal paradigm

In the neoliberal paradigm, the classical liberalism axiom for the discovery of freedom as a natural condition is substituted by a prescription for rule, which defines both the ethos and techne of government. Classical liberalism, represented for Foucault (1991a), is considered as a constructed political space where individual freedom could be secure. It therefore stands in opposition to the polizeiwissenschaft of the ancien régime which constituted a formula of rule that sought total control. Interestingly, however, and despite the classical liberalism’s negative conception of state power, neoliberalism has come to represent a positive conception of the state’s role in creating the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for its operation. The state in neoliberalism aims towards the development of people who are enterprising and competitive entrepreneurs.

Therefore, while for classical liberalism government conduct favours natural, private-interest, free, market-exchanging individuals, for neoliberalism “the rational principle for regulating and limiting governmental activity must be determined by reference to artificially arranged or contrived forms of free, entrepreneurial and competitive conduct of economic-rational individuals” (Burchell, 1996, pp. 23–24). This means that certain individual civic qualities like freedom, choice, competition and individual initiative must be constructions of the state. The state is therefore safeguarding and enhancing these new qualities through the development of regulation by utilising among others the applied sciences and techniques of auditing and management which enable the marketplace for services to be established as “autonomous” from central control. “Neoliberalism, in these terms, involves less a retreat from governmental ‘intervention’ than a reinscription of the techniques and forms of expertise required for the exercise of government” (Barry, Osborne, & Rose, 1996, p. 14).

In the field of education, Ball (2007) cautions about neoliberalism being the dominant socio-political and economic ideology that globally influences education policy discourses by pointing to the adoption of market mechanisms in education. In discussing the issue of global education policy in terms of the development of global networks and flows supporting neoliberalism, Exley et al. (2011) draw upon the Foucaultian
concept of “governmentality” to explain that OECD studies such as PISA and TIMMS tend to create a push for the adoption of globalised neoliberal policies as so-called “solutions” to what is perceived by countries around the world as national “crises” because of global “surveillance” produced by OECD performance indicators on education. Such solutions are based on managerial and market models of education that are substantiated by comparative argumentation produced by the OECD claiming that as such policies worked in other countries they may bridge the “interstate education gap” showcased by international assessment tools (Resnik, 2011). To this end, Barnett (2000) utilises Lyotard’s concept of “performativity” to argue that marketisation has become a new universal theme manifested in the trends towards the commodification of teaching and research and the various ways in which universities meet the new performative criteria, both locally and globally in the emphasis upon measurable outputs.

However, concerns have been raised about the global performativity culture and the dangers of ranking and labelling countries and students (and especially migrants), according to international testing such as PISA and TIMMS (Sjøberg, 2019). Through the globalisation mechanism of international testing and benchmarking, and thus standardisation, neo-liberalism has introduced reform trends to education deriving from the corporate sector such as competition, consumer choice, privatisation, market-oriented management, and decentralisation (Verger et al., 2012). This is why concerns for PISA and its influence have been raised by academics from both OECD and other countries. Notably, in 2014, academics from around the globe communicated an open letter to Dr. Andreas Schleicher, director of the OECD’s PISA cautioning about the “damages” caused by OECD and PISA tests to education worldwide: “unlike United Nations (UN) organisations such as UNESCO or UNICEF that have clear and legitimate mandates to improve education and the lives of children around the world, OECD has no such mandate” (Guardian, 6 May 2014).

On a similar vein, many academics and researchers caution about “market agendas” incorporated in education by the OECD (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2019). By fostering a new paradigm for management, such agenda aims at “fostering a performance-oriented-culture in a less centralised public sector” including schools (OECD, 1995, p. 8). Nonetheless, such neoliberal pressures on education counteract teaching and learning practices promoting children’s well-being, social-justice, and equity values, which should provide for the cornerstone of migrant education (i.e. Ball, 2007). A strict and limited focus on measuring teachers’ and learners’ performance has provoked a “culture of performativity” that inhibits teachers’ efforts to become agents of social justice who bring change by being reflective of and responsive to their students’ socio-cultural and linguistic diversity (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2019). To this end, OECD migrant education policies should not exclusively focus on migrants’ performativity and its economic consequences, and from providing market solutions to societal problems. On the other hand, they should shift towards education for global responsibility that aims to the development of “cosmopolitan identities”, meaning “learning the principles of democracy”, real-life commitment to group and community life, and “genuine interest in and understanding of other cultures, humanitarian responsibility of self and others and caring for excluded groups within and beyond one’s own society” (Sahlberg, 2004, p. 78).
Following the observation above, there is an imperative need to turn migrant education towards the direction of intercultural education. Intercultural education relates to social justice that calls for socially and educationally transformative activism (Gorski, 2009; Zapata-Barrero, 2017). The paradigm of intercultural education as critical social justice aims to enable all people to play a fully participatory role in society, by substantiating active citizenship as a contributing factor of intercultural education (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016). The notion of active citizenship pays more attention to citizens’ responsibilities rather than rights. It draws upon the idea of active participation by promoting the feeling of belongingness to a community. Active citizenship also has a normative value, as it usually refers to participation that requires respect for others and that does not contravene human rights and democracy (Hoskins, 2014).

**Methodology**

The focus of this research is to examine globalised policies of migrant education developed by the OECD. We seek to examine how the OECD frames and identifies the “problem” with regards to migrant education, what “solutions” it provides as a framework of reference for its member states, and through which globalisation mechanisms the OECD exerts influence on national policy agendas regarding migrant education. We draw upon Bowe, Ball, and Gold’s (1992, p. ix) definition of policy as “a changing series of texts whose expression and interpretation vary according to the context in which the texts are being put in practice”. Accordingly, we consider policy as a discourse, meaning “the production of knowledge and evolution of practices through language and interaction, with policy embracing a set of tacit assumptions determined by its relationship to a particular situation, social system or ideological framework and representing a struggle over ideas and values” (Shaw, 2010, p. 1).

For Foucault (1980), discourse encompasses the ways in which knowledge is constituted, along with social practices, stemming out of the nexus between language, subjectivity, and power relations. As power influences knowledge construction, it forms subjects who are both restricted and enabled by its omnipresence (Foucault, 1980). However, although power has an omnipresent character, it does not exclude the possibility of resistance. In the context of neoliberalism, Foucault argues that knowledge and social practices are constituted, maintained, and mainstreamed by “‘governmental’ or ‘biopolitical’ techniques of subjectification and especially through techniques of governing the self” (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016, p. 14). Therefore, we should make a case for macro-micro links, implying the interrelationship between structure and agency (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016).

Drawing upon the Foucaultian theory of discourse, in this research we examine the development of global policy discourses of intercultural education by the OECD within the broader socio-economic and political contexts, while looking at the values and power mechanisms that influence the development of such discourses. To do so, we drew upon the framework of historical-comparative methodology (Neuman, 2000). To this end, we treated our data as produced at particular moments in time, by specific actors, and in specific contexts. The comparative-historical approach allows the exploration of the reasons why a social phenomenon or outcome occurred, but also
the comparison of “old” and “new” explanations of a social phenomenon or outcome, and what happened historically in-between these explanations (Neuman, 2000).

In this context, we analysed a wide range of policy-related documents produced and disseminated by the OECD. The selection of these documents adhered to a purposive sampling strategy. We firstly identify policy-related documents related to migrant education by using the electronic archives and search engines of the official websites of OECD. Thereafter, we selected our documents according to the following criteria: (a) documents published by the OECD that relate to diversity and migrant education, (b) documents published in the last fifteen years, and (c) documents that are publicly available. In the event, a total of 40 documents were selected for data analysis (See Table 1 below).

In order to examine the multiple positions and viewpoints emerging from our data, we carried out an inductive analysis aiming to identify the thematic priorities of each document. These priorities were compared and contrasted across the different documents so that common themes emerged. This enabled us to identify similarities and differences in the definitions of migrant education and policy goals. Then, we read our data closely, while keeping notes about our thought processes. After that, we examined our data for groups of meanings, themes and assumptions and tried to locate how these linked back to our theoretical framework (Robson & McCartan, 2016). We continued the process of analysis by dividing our data into thematic categories. Finally, we substantiated the emerging themes with raw data.

**Findings**

From the process of analysis, three thematic categories emerged: (i) Socio-economic aspects of education: International testing and the performance gap; (ii) OECD’s recommendations on Migrant Education; and (iii) Influence mechanisms: Standardisation, benchmarking, and dissemination of suggestions. In the following sections, we present our emerging thematic categories, while substantiating them with raw data. Thereafter, in a separate section, we proceed to the overall discussion of our findings and to the conclusions of this research.

**Socio-economic aspects of education: International testing and the performance gap**

According to the OECD itself, education plays a pivotal role in preparing both first and second generation migrants to fully participate in the labour market and in the society (Nusche, 2009). It is only through education giving opportunities to migrant children to fully develop their potential that we may promote economic growth and social cohesion in OECD countries (OECD, 2018). OECD highlights the huge impact of education on adults’ chances of employment and future earnings to argue that all OECD countries should develop policies and search for additional resources to make education more effective (OECD, 2010a, 2018b).

As we discussed in other sections above, the OECD mostly influences migrant education through the standardisation mechanism, which mostly prevails through the international assessment of PISA (Sjøberg, 2019). PISA measures 15-year-olds’ ability to
Table 1. Overview of policy documents analysed for this study (by year).

1. OECD (2004a). Education in a New Internationalisation: Curriculum Development for Internationalisation (Project Brief). Paris: OECD Publishing.
2. OECD (2004b). Messages from PISA 2000. The Final Summary Report from the PISA2000 Survey. Paris: OECD Publishing.
3. OECD (2004c). What Makes School Systems Perform. Seeing School Systems through the Prism of PISA. Paris: OECD Publishing.
4. OECD (2006). Where Immigrant Students Succeed? A Comparative Review of Performance and Engagement in PISA 2003. Paris: OECD Publishing.
5. OECD (2007). PISA 2006: Science Competencies for Tomorrow’s World. Paris: OECD Publishing.
6. Marmolejo, F., S. Manley-Casimir and S. Vincent-Lancrin (2008). Immigration and Access to Tertiary Education: Integration or Marginalisation? In Higher Education to 2030, Volume I, Demography. Paris: OECD Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264066631-en]
7. Nusche, D. (2009). What Works in Migrant Education?: A Review of Evidence and Policy Options. OECD Education Working Papers, 22, Paris: OECD Publishing. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/227131784531]
8. OECD (2009a). Education Today. The OECD Perspective. Paris: OECD Publishing.
9. OECD (2009b). Insights: International Migration: The Human Face of Globalisation. Paris: OECD Publishing.
10. OECD (2010a). Education at a Glance. 2010 OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing.
11. OECD (2010b). OECD Reviews of Migrant Education. Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students: Policies, Practice and Performance. Paris: OECD Publishing.
12. OECD (2010c). PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV). PISA: OECD Publishing.
13. OECD (2011). Against the Odds. Disadvantaged Students Who Succeed in School. Paris: OECD Publishing.
14. Cho, E. (2012). Migrants, language and education: An international perspective. In: D. Chiesa, B., J. Scott & C. Hinton (Eds.) Languages in a Global World: Learning for Better Cultural Understanding, Paris: OECD Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264123557-25-en]
15. Musset, P. (2012). School Choice and Equity: Current Policies in OECD Countries and a Literature Review. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 66, OECD Publishing. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k9fq23507vc-en]
16. OECD (2012a). Learning Beyond Fifteen: Ten Years after PISA. Paris: OECD Publishing.
17. OECD (2012b). Overview of Immigration Regimes and Education Systems. In Untapped Skills: Realising the Potential of Immigrant Students. Paris: OECD Publishing. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264172470-4-en]
18. OECD (2015a). Education at a Glance. 2015: OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing.
19. OECD (2015b). Helping immigrant students to succeed at school – and beyond. OECD
20. OECD (2015c). Immigrant Students at School-Easing the Journey towards Integration. OECD Publishing.
21. OECD (2015d). Can schools help to integrate immigrants? PISA in Focus, No. 57. Paris: OECD Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1787/5jrqj7vk0jhk-en]
22. OECD (2015e). Is this humanitarian migration crisis different? Migration Policy Debates. [https://www.oecd.org/migration/is-this-refugee-crisis-different.pdf]
23. OECD & European Union (2015). Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015. Paris: OECD Publishing
24. OECD (2016a). Education at a Glance. 2016: OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing.
25. OECD (2016b). PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools, PISA. Paris: OECD Publishing. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en]
26. OECD (2016c). International Migration Outlook 2016. Paris: OECD Publishing.
27. OECD (2016d). Low-Performing Students: Why They Fall Behind and How to Help Them Succeed. Pisa. Paris: OECD Publishing. [https://www.oecd.org/publishing/lows-performing-students-9789264250246-en.htm]
28. Bilgili, O. (2017). The ‘CHARM’ Policy Analysis Framework: Evaluation of Policies to Promote Immigrant Students’ Resilience. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 158. Paris: OECD Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1787/164a7643-en]
29. OECD (2017a). PISA 2015 Results: Students’ Well-Being. Paris: OECD Publishing.
30. OECD (2017b). People on the move. Trends Shaping Education Spotlight 11. [https://www.oecd.org/education/eri/spotlight11-PeopleontheMove.pdf]
31. OECD (2017c). School Choice and School Vouchers: An OECD Perspective. Paris: OECD Publishing.
32. Ainley, J. & R. Carstens (2018). Teaching and learning international survey (TALIS) 2018 conceptual framework. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 187. Paris: OECD Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1787/799337c2-cen]
33. Borgonovi, F. (2018). How do the performance and well-being of students with an immigrant background compare across countries? PISA in Focus, No. 82. Paris: OECD Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1787/a9e8c1ab-en]
34. OECD (2018a). The Resilience of Students with an Immigrant Background: Factors that Shape Well-being, OECD Reviews of Migrant Education. Paris: OECD Publishing.
35. OECD (2018b). Graph B3.c – Completion rate of upper secondary education, by immigration background (2015): Completion of any upper secondary programme within the theoretical duration of the programme in which the student entered. In Access to Education, Participation and Progression. Paris: OECD Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2018-graph96-en]
36. OECD (2018c). International Migration Outlook 2018. Paris: OECD Publishing. [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/international-migration-outlook-2018_migr_outlook-2018-en#page1]
37. OECD (2018c). Education at a Glance. 2018 OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing.
38. Forghani-Arani, N., Cerna, L. & Bannon, M. (2019). The lives of teachers in diverse classrooms. OECD Working Papers No. 198. Paris: OECD Publishing.
39. OECD (2019a). Learning Framework 2030. [https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/learning-framework-2030.htm]
40. OECD (2019b). Trends Shaping Education 2019. Paris: OECD Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1787/trends_edu-2019-en]

Total number of documents analysed: 40
use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. On the basis of PISA assessments, the OECD has consistently reported in various documentation and programme reports (i.e. the “Where immigrant students succeed?” programme which included a comparative review of performance and engagement in PISA 2003 (OECD, 2006)) the significant performance gap between native and migrant students (OECD, 2006, 2009b, 2018a). According to such data, the OECD argues that the performance gap on average leaves first-generation migrants 1.5 school years behind their native peers (Borgonovi, 2018; Nusche, 2009; OECD, 2018a).

To this end, the OECD (2018a) is preoccupied with promoting “students’ ability to achieve at least baseline level performance in the core PISA subjects (Science, Reading and Mathematics), their sense of belonging at school, their satisfaction with life, anxiety at school and their motivation to achieve’.

According to PISA statistics, the OECD draws attention to the fact that we cannot predict students’ performance solely on the basis of migration status. Accordingly, while some migrant students are high achievers, others are still “struggling” (i.e. OECD, 2009b, 2018a). Differences in achievement seem to be affected by a variety of factors such as: socio-economic differences; personal motivation and family support; culture and education acquired prior to migration; differences between the school systems of the countries of origin and destination (Nusche, 2009; OECD, 2007, 2015b). Most importantly, the OECD claims that migrant students tend to perform better in destination countries that implement highly selective migration policies or are “better than others at nurturing the talents and abilities of students with different intellectual and cultural backgrounds” (OECD, 2015b, p. 4).

According to the OECD, migration should not be examined as an isolated factor but, as one, among many other factors (i.e. demographic, social, economic and educational factors) that can significantly affect a student’s performance and well-being in school (OECD, 2016b). Thus, as the OECD (2015b) clearly points out, that the concentration of migrant students in schools does not, by itself, bear effects on student performance or integration efforts. PISA shows that it is not the concentration of migrant students in a school but, rather, the concentration of socio-economic disadvantage in a school that hinders student achievement (Forghani-Arani, Cerna, & Bannon, 2019). For example, non-completion of upper secondary education is not the result of a single factor, but rather a combination and accumulation of various barriers and disadvantages that affect students throughout their lives. It is notable that these results are consistent with the findings from the OECD Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (Survey of Adult Skills [PIAAC]), highlighting the challenge of intergenerational mobility in education (Indicator A4 in Education at a Glance 2015 [OECD, 2015a]).

What we thus may argue is that the OECD, in terms of identifying the “problem” with regards to migrant education, argues that the comparative results of its various member states evidence the performance gaps between migrant and native students (i.e. OECD, 2009b, 2010b). OECD’s restricted focus on measurable outcomes disregards educational “success” as a multifaceted notion encompassing students’ socio-emotional growth, skill development (beyond academic success). Nonetheless, the OECD explains that migrant students “often have more restricted access to quality education; are less likely to participate in pre-primary education; more prone to drop out before
completing upper secondary; more apt to have lower academic scores; and more likely to attend schools with peers from less advantaged backgrounds” (OECD, 2010b, p. 7).

The OECD appears to also define the “problem” in terms of social stratification mirrored in schools. As noted by the OECD (2008, p. 3) “Ten Steps to Equity in Education” policy brief “governments often allow parents a choice of schools, partly in the interests of equity. But this may in fact increase the risk of inequity because better-educated parents make better-informed choices”. Thus, education systems should ensure a social mix in school populations by avoiding admissions through student performance, encouraging lottery selection methods, and providing financial premiums to schools with high percentages of disadvantaged students. It is interesting that admission policies deployed by some OECD countries (i.e. a number of schools in Ireland, regulate student enrolment by the educational and socio-economic status of migrants. This is an attempt to counteract the effects of migrant residential segregation, perceived as negatively influencing the socio-economic status of the schools of the area, which in turn seems to negatively influence student performance and lead to the achievement gap.

In attempting to explain such gaps, the OECD (2007, 2009b, 2016d) refers to language barriers, family background, and socio-economic status, such as residential segregation, selective mechanisms and resource inequality, as the most important reasons. According to the OECD (2006), there are multiple other factors that influence migrant students’ attainment such as xenophobic attitudes, students’ personalities and attitudes, and the structure and traits of the educational system per se (i.e. streaming between blue-collar and white-collar schools) (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016). In the same spirit, the OECD’s paper “What Works in Migrant Education?: A Review of Evidence and Policy Options” conducted by Nusche (2009, p. 6) classifies the factors influencing the educational success of migrant students in three categories, namely: (a) “structural features of education systems such as school choice, tracking, selection mechanisms and resource inequalities”; (b) “features of each individual school such as teacher expectations, classroom environments and school organisation”; and (c) “individual student characteristics including socio-cultural background and language proficiency”. The same factors are also highlighted in the more recent publication “Low-Performing Students: Why They Fall Behind and How to Help Them Succeed?” (OECD, 2016d).

Moving a step forward, more recently the OECD has introduced in its discussions about the performance gap the concepts of resilience and adversity (Bilgili, 2017; OECD, 2018). Empirical research on student resilience illustrated that despite of academic achievement being characterised by large socio-economic disparities, some disadvantaged students exhibit adjustment by beating the odds and becoming higher performers (OECD, 2011, 2012a). Adjustment refers to “children’s positive adaptation, both overall and in key areas, namely academic, social, emotional and motivational” becoming “key indicators of these children’s capacity to thrive economically, socially and emotionally as adults” (OECD, 2018a, p. 32). In relative and utilitarian terms, the OECD views adjustment as students’ ability to perform among the top quarter of students internationally in one the PISA assessment domains (OECD, 2018a).
Last but not least, the way the OECD frames and defines the “problem” with regards to migrant education seems to also influence other supranational organisations such as the European Union (EU). The EU in its Green Paper “Migration and Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems” (European Commission, 2008), draws upon PISA testing and the identified “problem” of the performance gap. By drawing upon PISA and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) data, the Green Paper laments performance disparities between migrant students and their native peers in various European countries (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016). The Green Paper also cautions that in some countries like Germany, there is a tendency pointing to second-generation migrants’ lower performance in comparison to first-generation migrants.

In discussing the OECD’s extreme reliance on comparative data stemming from international testing, previous research and literature seem to argue that comparative assessments such as PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS reflect the widespread and, evidently, neoliberal definition of education, rendering it as the caretaker of economy rather than a public good (i.e. Ball, 2007; Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2019; Sjøberg, 2019). The underlying assumption within the neoliberal framework is that educational priorities should be based on economic rather than cultural, political or national needs. However, this understanding of education “may be narrow and limiting as it ignores the larger set of societal objectives and therefore limits education to the production of workers and the promotion of economic growth” (Zajda & Rust, 2009, p. 89).

The OECD could be “held accountable” for the establishment of a global “race” among educational systems that originated in the quest of surpassing competitive nations in the economic arena. Even in this case, one cannot neglect the fact that international assessments generated discussions on major issues pertaining education that could not be addressed before, since national education systems were considered, for many years, as the “sacred cows” in a globalised world.

Hence, the context of globalisation and neoliberal market capitalism which favoured the proliferation of the OECD, served as the Trojan horse that allowed for “hot” educational topics – such as migrant education – within national educational systems, to be addressed; topics that remained untouchable before the widespread of comparative studies. Sellar and Lingard (2014) argue, that in the context of the simultaneous “economisation” of education policy and “educationising” of economic policy, nations now demand data on comparative schooling performance as a surrogate measure of their global economic competitiveness. The OECD has redefined its technical role in education to meet these demands promoting arguments for the necessity of international comparative data as a basis for national policy-making, in areas such as migrant education, and as a complement to national testing programmes.

Following the above observations, the OECD, on the basis of global comparative data, examines what can be done to help raise migrants’ lower performance in comparison to their native peers by making up educational shortfalls. To this end, in the following section, we aim to examine the OECD’s suggested “solutions” to the identified “problem” of the performance gap by discussing its recommendations on migrant education.
The OECD’s recommendations on migrant education

The OECD’s recommendations about migrant education echo its broad conceptualisation of education which revolves around an economic rationale (Bieber & Martens, 2011). This focus is apparent in the “Overview of Immigration Regimes and Education Systems” (OECD, 2012b, p. 28) which sets the level of resources to be invested and the ways to be distributed across the school system, to accommodate the complexity of educating diverse student populations. Undeniably, the PISA assessment is one of the most powerful mechanisms of the OECD in setting its agenda on various education issues, including migrant education (Sjøberg, 2019). For example, through the report “PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful (Volume IV)” (OECD, 2010c), the OECD stresses that, due to migrant students’ particular needs, the distribution of resources, students’ diversity, and school governance may affect the quality of educational opportunities.

The OECD places equity at the centre of its attention, while indicating the negative effect of exclusion (OECD, 2009a, p. 77). It strongly supports reforms of national school structures so as to turn selective models into integrated ones (OECD, 2004c, p. 65). To this end, the OECD emphasises the need to specify educational quality standards (OECD, 2009a, p. 14) and to upgrade teachers’ professional development and education practices (OECD, 2009a, pp. 25–26). Further, it supports more rigorous procedures for the selection of candidates at the beginning of teacher training to increase teachers’ qualifications and social status (OECD, 2004c, pp. 65–66). Moreover, the OECD suggests the employment of internal and external quality assurance systems to identify difficulties and monitor student progress. School autonomy is promoted as means to improve school systems, by delegating responsibilities to schools and local authorities, including the liberty to choose course content, allocate budgets, and admit students (OECD, 2004b, p. 19; 2004c, pp. 67, 71). Pointing to the growing demand for evidence-based policy-making, the OECD suggests that educational research and statistics should be improved to inform policy-making and practice (OECD, 2009a, p. 87).

An important aspect discussed by the OECD is that school choice policies and their variance across different countries. School-choice advocates often argue that the introduction of market mechanisms in education allows equal access to high-quality schooling. They explain that all students, including the disadvantaged as migrants, to enter better schools. On the other hand, school-choice critics caution that school choice can exacerbate inequities, as it increases sorting of students between schools based on their socio-economic status, ethnicity, and ability. Therefore, quality can become increasingly unequal between schools. The OECD (2017c) suggests that school choice, by itself, neither assures nor undermines the quality of education. What matters are “smart” policies that maximise the benefits of choice and minimise the risks by establishing a level playing field for all providers to contribute to the school system. School choice may only generate the anticipated benefits when choice is “real”, relevant and meaningful (i.e. when parents can choose an important aspect of their child’s education, such as the pedagogical approaches used to teach them). Thus, as Musset (2012), concludes, school choice requires balance to ensure that all families can exercise it and benefit from it; especially disadvantaged families, who are the ones who exercise it the least.
The OECD (2015b) suggests that educational systems should provide information to migrant families on the schooling options available for their children and help them to overcome financial and/or logistical barriers to access the school of their choice. Further, it recommends the restriction of the extent to which advantaged schools can select students according to their socio-economic status by providing financial incentives for over-subscribed schools to enrol migrant students, and by retaining and attracting more advantaged students in schools that also host migrant students (i.e. schools in disadvantaged areas may make their curricula more appealing to students from across the socio-economic spectrum by offering special mathematics, science and/or art courses). Moreover, the OECD’s recommendations on migrant education mainly focus on zeroing family background in education (OECD, 2009b, p. 72), as according to PISA reports family factors, such as socio-economic status, are strongly correlated with students’ achievement. To counteract family factors, the OECD suggests the development of policies that promote migrants’ access to high-quality pre-school education for purposes of host-language learning and livelihood.

Moving towards this direction, the OECD (2018, p. 58) urges for teacher’s agency to bring change that is “reflective of their students” social, cultural and linguistic experiences. The OECD Learning Framework 2030 defines teacher agency as their empowerment as professionals. From 2015 to 2018, the OECD Learning Framework 2030 aimed to co-create a conceptual Learning Framework with all stakeholders and to conduct international curriculum analyses. Since 2019, it envisages to build common ground on the principles and instructional designs that can effectively implement intended curricula and explore the types of teachers’ competencies teachers in supporting all students to achieve the desired outcomes. The Framework delineates that for empowerment to happen, school systems should refrain from a strong culture of teachers’ performativity, which inhibits teachers’ efforts for agency and change (OECD, 2019a). Arguably, teachers’ empowerment in culturally-diverse classrooms requires intercultural teacher education fostering teachers’ stances of appreciation to cultural knowledge and experiences, and their skills to make learning not only cultural-relevant, but also effective for culturally-diverse students (Ainley & Carstens, 2018; Forghani-Arani et al., 2019) through strategies such as interculturally-differentiated teaching (Valiandes, Neophytou, & Hajisoteriou, 2018).

Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2016, 2020) in researching the globalisation of intercultural education and the influence of various supranational organisations on setting globalised agendas, focused inter alia on the OECD. They concluded that one of the most influential globalised initiatives introduced by OECD in the field is the “OECD Reviews of Migrant Education – Closing the Gap for Immigrant Students: Policies, Practice and Performance” (i.e. OECD, 2008). By deploying means of comparative data stemming out of PISA study across various countries (i.e. Austria, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden), the OECD examined migrants’ outcomes on education access, participation and performance in comparison to native students. On the basis of this comparative examination, the OECD set out to identify evidence-informed policy options in the form of concise action-oriented suggestions for policy makers, school leaders, teachers and parents. Over the years, the OECD laments for migrant students’ restricted access to quality education, early school leaving, and lower
academic achievement than their native peers (i.e. OECD, 2008, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2015c).

According to Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2016), OECD Reviews of Migrant Education induct interdependence among OECD countries as they set shared goals and recommendations for common policies and practices in “managing” and “standardising” migrant education via international collaboration. In this context, the OECD Reviews envisage the launch of a holistic framework that extends from system-level support mechanisms to government-level policies, and school-level strategies and practices (i.e. OECD, 2008, 2010b, 2015d). The proposed framework draws upon shared responsibility among institutions and stakeholders across all levels of reference. To begin with, at the level of system mechanisms, OECD recommends the exchange of best practices between (i.e. supranational, national, regional, and local), but also within (i.e. schools, municipalities, communities, and school actors) the aforementioned levels of reference. To fight against the inequalities of educational opportunity, OECD argues that system mechanisms should include diversified and advanced funding strategies to schools in disadvantaged areas. According to OECD, system mechanisms should also be developed for the monitoring and evaluation of student achievement leading to the collection of quality data on outcomes, which in turn will inform the development of effective tailored-made policies for migrant students and the design of better teacher training on how to use such data to differentiate their practice (OECD, 2010b, p. 81).

At the level of government policies, the OECD’s agenda mainly focuses on countering language and socio-economic barriers faced by migrants, as in all its reviews it concludes that these are the main reasons causing gaps between migrant and native students’ achievement (OECD, 2008, 2015c). Although some universal policies are needed for all students, governments should recognise that migrant students do not consist of a homogenous group, and because of their heterogeneity, tailored-made policies and measures are also necessary (OECD, 2010b). Towards this direction, OECD calls governments to endorse targeted policies and tools at local, regional, and national levels. For a more robust approach towards migrant education, OECD foresees that governments should set explicit goals, regulations and legislations for migrant students within their broader policies, which in turn they should support with effective funding schemes. Policy frameworks, in turn, should focus on: raising awareness; building pertinent curriculum and pedagogy; promoting capacity building (mainly through teacher training and support); establishing standards and qualifications frameworks; and sustaining monitoring, research, evaluation and feedback (OECD, 2010b, p. 7).

At the level of school strategies and practices, OECD recommends the launch of institutional change fostering larger equity schemes, average socio-economic composition of student population, and increased school accountability. Furthermore, suggested strategies and practices encompass intensified language teaching, adaptations in school curricula and teaching methodologies, school leaders’ and teachers’ training on diversity issues, and development of stronger school-family-community collaboration (OECD, 2010b). Whole-day school programmes that include after-school activities should also be applied to further support migrant students. Other OECD recommendations refer to school efforts to support early home reading activities and to provide migrant families with education resources to use at home.
Programmes that address the cognitive and psychosocial needs of struggling students should be offered early on, so that gaps in knowledge and difficulties in communicating do not become sources of social exclusion. These targeted interventions, together with more general efforts to reduce the influence of socio-economic status on performance, can ultimately benefit everyone (OECD, 2015d). Further, successful integration, OECD (2015c) advocates, is measured in more than academic achievement; migrant students’ well-being and hopes for the future their aspirations and sense of belonging at school. Receptiveness to welcoming migrants could be the context that could make all the difference in how well migrant students integrate into their new communities (OECD, 2015c).

What stems from our data analysis above, OECD’s suggestions echo a widely accepted axiom that educational opportunities for children ought to be equal. Accepting that education, per se, has a significant impact on a person’s life in terms of participation in society, success in the labour market and general prosperity, OECD appears to take an active stand so as children’s life chances should not be predetermined by certain circumstances related to their birth, such as culture, origin, race, and gender. Equality of educational opportunity is often understood as an anti-discrimination principle that requires the removal of any sort of formal obstacles (i.e. laws, entrance criteria), which may cause segregation among children.

Nevertheless, formal equality of opportunity is not a sufficient norm to guide the distribution of educational opportunities. The principle of non-discrimination does not regulate neither the extent that the state will provide the required resources nor how those resources should be distributed (Gutmann, 1999, p. 127). Thus, as long as some resources are allocated, formal equality of opportunity appears to be compatible with low performance, school failure and dropout of some children. Positive discrimination is needed, and this is in fact what OECD’s champions though its policies: a holistic approach and shared responsibility among all key stakeholders that is required for the effective implementation of inclusive education giving advantage to those groups in society that are often treated unfairly because of their race, sex and other characteristics. OECD calls for affirmative action (Sowell, 2004) favouring members of disadvantaged group, such as migrants, to achieve the goal of bridging inequalities and restoring past hindrances.

However, as Van Zanten (2005) argues, positive discrimination has had some undesirable, negative effects. In countries such as France where positive discrimination has been applied on a territorial basis, “positive discrimination” schools have remained academically, socially and ethnically segregated. The label “positive discrimination” has encouraged white-middle-class flight which prevented the policy from being as effective as it should have been limiting the scholastic progress of lower-class children.

Addressing, the issue of migrant education via the perspective of the ethical theory of utilitarianism (i.e. Bentham, 2001, 2009; Bentham, Dumont, & Hildreth, 2005; Mill, 1998,), we must admit an inescapable truth: funding for education is in competition with other social goods. As Gutmann (1999, p. 129) points out “The price of using education to maximise the life chances of children would be to forego these other social goods”. Other primary welfare needs (e.g. healthcare, food, housing,) must be evaluated and considered. Is the provision of high-quality education better than catering for the basic needs? Revisiting the Coleman Report (1966) that found that school funding levels
do not significantly affect student achievement, but student background does, one could question the purpose and value of educational reform against other social provisions. Further, applying a simple cost benefit analysis, given that expenditure on education appears be less than costs on other basic social welfare provisions (i.e. housing, health), OECD’s policy suggestions could provide to governments, a cheap solution and an easy way out of a moral dilemma.

Moving a step forward, migrants’ success stories in education can be used to further support the claim of investing in education rather than elsewhere and in this way enforce minimisation of other welfare policies. This however does not only influence migrants but, also indigenous children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Migrants are still located at the bottom, but, in many countries they seem to be the group to have benefitted most from educational provisions in the last thirty years, perhaps because they are more disposed, than “established” groups, to believe in and take advantage of new opportunities (Ogbu, 1987; Van Zanten, 1997). Migrants’ success stories can be used to legitimise inequalities and create an alibi for the state policies: since migrants can succeed, the failure of children from indigenous population lies absolutely in themselves and their families. Further, while migrants’ success stories weave a myth of educational equality opportunities, they produce another form of segregation founded on the claim for meritocracy. As in many other social policies of this kind, teachers, parents and pupils themselves have contributed to various forms of selection and self-selection of “deserving” pupils. However, this construct of meritocracy seems to neglect the deeper social conditions that favour certain children instead of other.

**Influence mechanisms: Dissemination of suggestions, benchmarking, and standardisation**

The OECD deploys various mechanisms to influence the development and implementation of policy interventions by disseminating its suggestions on the basis of data collected around the globe, research, and debates on key socio-economic issues. Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2016) in examining the influence of supranational institutions on policy-development for intercultural education, point out that those OECD publications for non-specialised audience on the topic entail some of its influential mechanisms of reference. They refer for example to “Insights”, a series of reader-friendly books, which aim to provide an insight to internationally comparable data collected by the OECD. One of the Insight books is “International Migration: The Human Face of Globalisation”. The book poses the question: “How can governments ensure it benefits migrants, the societies in which they settle and the homes they leave behind?” (OECD, 2009b). More recently, the organisation aimed to exert influence on policy making by publishing the ‘Trends shaping education 2019’ (OECD, 2019) including inter alia globalisation, global mobility, and modern culture. What is argued is that the world becomes more mobile and diverse, and migration tends to have rather a temporary and circular character, the biggest challenge for education is the transferability of skills and experiences. Thus, according to the report, education policy initiatives should prioritise intercultural sensitivity, while they should re-orient the teaching of citizenship and identity.
In other efforts to disseminate suggestions, the OECD has launched a number of policy pointers with regards to managing diversity in education. OECD’s policy pointers entail further mechanisms of influence on the policies of its member states calling them to: (i) avoid reception classes for migrants as they could potentially reinforce school and social segregation (OECD, 2010b); (ii) to provide additional teaching of the host language complimentary to regular classes (OECD, 2009b, p. 77); and (iii) provide opportunities to migrants learn and maintain their mother languages. Additionally, the OECD recommends the employment of highly trained teachers who are well-prepared to work with a population of students who may are yet to acquire the national language. The organisation also affirms the benefit of positive representations of migrant children’s languages and cultures in the academic environment (Cho, 2012).

Beyond disseminating suggestions and addressing policy pointers, the OECD attempts to exert influence on migrant education through benchmarking and indicators. One of the most important OECD’s publications on indicators is “Indicators of Immigrant Integration” (OECD, 2015). This joint publication with the European Commission includes 27 indicators clustered in five categories: (i) employment, (ii) education and skills, (iii) social inclusion, (iv) civic engagement, and (v) social cohesion. According to Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2016) this publication provides for an influential framework as it was the first attempt for a broader international comparison across all EU and OECD countries. In summing up the comparative outcomes underlined by this publication, we may refer to the following points:

(a) School performance correlates with longer residency in the host country. However, native offspring of foreign-born parentage tend to outperform migrant students, who arrived in the host country in their childhood.

(b) It is more likely that socio-economic disadvantage has a more negative impact on educational attainment than migrant background. Therefore, high concentration of migrant students in schools has an impact on peer outcomes when it is combined with lower socio-economic and educational status of family.

(c) The percentage of migrant students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds that are among the top performers is substantially lower than that of their native peers (i.e. 6% for migrant students compared to 12% for native students in OECD countries in 2012).

(d) Higher-level education may lead migrant-background youth to better integration in the labour market. We should notice that referring to men, there is a slightly larger increase in employment rates for higher-educated migrants in comparison to their native peers (OECD, 2015a).

Moving a step forward, in its annual publication ‘Education at a Glance 2018’, OECD (2018c) draws a very promising picture: Examining the Indicators for 2015 regarding completion rate of upper secondary education by immigration background, OECD reports an increase in almost all the examined countries. Additionally, when reviewing the trends and issues on immigration and higher education according to set benchmarks and indicators, OECD highlights the importance of widening access to higher education to migrants and their children in the coming decades (Marmolejo, Manley-Casimir, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2008). For OECD (2015a) the achievement gap is a threat
to social cohesion leading to societal and economic “ghettoisation” due to higher unemployment rates.

However, we are cautious about OECD’s standardisation agenda that is reinforced by its international assessment mechanisms, such as the PISA. The OECD seems to provide a “cheap solution” with major drawbacks with regards to the agenda of migrant education as opposed to active interculturalism that is proposed by other international and European organisations, such as the United Nations, committed to safeguard human rights, education for all, equity, and social justice. Consequently, we may argue that this tension is reflected in the escalating globalisation of national policies and practices of intercultural education.

Arguably, attached to educational goals referring to outcomes are the globalisation mechanisms of standardisation and benchmarking drawing upon globalised assessment procedures, including international performance tests (i.e. PISA, TIMMS, and PIRLS). At times, such mechanisms even point to the standardisation of curriculum content around the world (Hajisotiriou & Angelides, 2017, 2020). Heavy comparison between countries or students (i.e. migrants compared to native students), and benchmarking policies often disregard issues of inclusion and social justice. Similarly, White and Cooper (2013) argue that emphasis on standardisation in education and assessment de-emphasises social justice, as schools globally tend to implement “blanket policies” leading disenfranchised and disadvantaged minority and migrant groups to further marginalisation, exclusion and suffering.

As Neophytou (2012) points out, standardisation in education, applied though prescribed curricula and exam-centred teaching, treats teachers and students as objects, with routine obligations in a mechanistic system. The assumption underlying any regularisation of behaviour is that all persons, all teachers, all students, have a canonical way of thinking, feeling and doing. Teachers’ and students’ personhood, differences and diversities are thus sacrificed into an easy to-handle entity. In this context, the discussion focusing on the influence and the conflicting interests of social, economic, and political factors in education (e.g. Apple, 2009; Goodson, 1989; Young, 1971) is totally ignored. Notions of use replace notions of truth: a utilisation perspective that advocates the narrow pragmatic understanding of education and persons striving to meet cost effective solutions. Educational organisations are adopting goals, methods and strategies from the entrepreneurial business world and are therefore bound to the corporate ethos of efficiency, accountability and profit-driven managerialism (Zajda & Geo-JaJa, 2010). The politics of education reform reflects a new emerging paradigm of standards driven policy change discernible throughout all the so-called developed countries and applicable to all possible expressions of human behaviour and conduct. Standards are no longer confined to immediate work related skills; they are now applied to areas that beforehand used to be left alone and unchallenged such as feelings and emotions.

Nevertheless, the merit of the policy suggestions made by OECD seems indisputable. Despite the criticism often made on the tacit neoliberal agenda underpinning the ideological and political framework of OECD, it is hard to argue against the need for system wide, coherent and sustainable changes, aiming to enhance quality and effectiveness of education and thereby augment the inclusion of migrants across the globe (i.e. Ainscow & Goldrick, 2010; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Srivastava, de Boer, & Pijl, 2015).
Discussion and conclusions

The focus of this research has been to examine the ways OECD frames the question of migrant education, its recommendations to its member states, and the influence mechanisms it deploys. To begin with, in discussing OECD’s recommendations attached to migrant education, OECD’s studies have been used to bring to surface, enhance and introduce many educational policies including best practices for regulating school populations through school choice, bridging the performance gap between migrant and native students, improving language learning and reading achievement (i.e. Motiejunaite, Noorani, & Monseur, 2014), exploring the association between types of text and students’ reading performance (i.e. Jerrim & Moss, 2019), modelling adult skills (i.e. Scandurra & Calero, 2017), building stronger school-family collaborations and many more. Approaching this in Bourdieu’s terms, Sellar and Lingard (2014) point out the alignment of policy habitus across the global and national scales of educational governance. This habitus accepts the reliability, validity, and global (or universal) applicability of “commensurative work” in education (Espland, 2000), seeing the globe as a commensurate space of performance measurement and assuming the right to the universal in a globalised version of Bourdieu’s (1999) account of the logics of practice of bureaucratic state structures (the assumption of the “monopoly of the universal”).

Additionally, the OECD has been involved in helping to specify the skills and competencies that give contemporary human capital its value and has become a prominent actor in education policy globally, due to its measurement and comparison of skills within nations. Despite the fact that in contemporary societies, endeavours to modernise and reform migrant education, like those generated by the OECD, may usually be bound to the neoliberal strive to meet benchmarks, indicators and market-oriented goals, we cannot neglect the fact that massive and wide media coverage of OECD’s reports, highlight shortcomings in education systems worldwide, where minorities and migrants are discriminated against. Educational systems are thus forced to break down boundaries that excluded those individuals and their groups. We do not suggest this is an outcome of the OECD’s agenda. However, since power in a postmodern world is acentric and contextualised, it appears that OECD has generated a surplus of soft power that can be used, either to promote neoliberal standardisation or inclusiveness.

Moving a step forward, in discussing our findings with regards to OECD’s influence mechanisms on migrant education, we endorse Sellar and Lingard (2014) argument that the OECD is enacting a form of epistemological governance. Epistemological governance in migrant education spans both the cognitive and normative functions and works through the creation of new policy discourses, the conduct of peer reviews and the generation of comparative data. The expanding scope and scale of PISA, and associated increases in its explanatory power, are strengthening this mode of governance, which operates on and through an emergent global epistemic community of policy-makers at the OECD and within nations.

As Woodward (2009) suggests, OECD’s exercises its influence via cognitive, normative, and palliative governance. Cognitive governance, functions through the agreed values held by member nations (i.e. liberal democracy, market economics, human
rights), while normative governance, stands for the epistemological assumptions supporting the OECD’s policy work and allows OECD to exercise its influence by the use of an alignment across epistemic communities and national policy-making levels. Finally, palliative governance refers to OECD’s role in greasing “the wheels of global governance” through questioning emergent policy issues and working in alliance with the WTO and Group of Eight (G8) nations. OECD is a pivotal international organisation because “it sows the seeds of international consensus and cooperation that allow humankind to reap a greater capacity to manage our common affairs” (Woodward, 2009, p. 8).

In this sense, the OECD deploys a mode of soft governance that fits perfectly within the contemporary political structure. Soft power operates through “surveillance and peer pressure”, rather than through sanctions. OECD’s soft power facilitated the shift from government to governance (Rosenau, 2005). The term governance, according to Bonnafous-Boucher (2005) describes a phenomenon deriving from the decline of the nation-state and the elaboration of new, alternative supranational and intra-national rules which contribute to the development of models and systems of government able to counter this decline. Standardisation became an indispensable component in the modus operandi of governance since “steering from a distance” could not be realised without a solid framework of reference. OECD, being established as a centre of technical expertise, data collection and analysis, can exercise soft governance and influence policies at global and national level.

In conclusion, our study bears wider implications with regards to OECD’s role in migrant education in terms of global policy development. Our research explicitly suggests that OECD’s work in the field should refrain from an apolitical examination of the ways to narrow the achievement gap – as identified by international assessment tools deployed by the OECD – in terms of “differences in levels of educational achievement, usually measured narrowly with standardised test scores, between society’s privileged and oppressed groups” (Gorski, 2009, p. 87). On the other hand, central to OECD’s recommendations on migrant education should be the issue of intercultural education as social justice. Thus, our study calls for further research focusing on what ways the OECD may move towards this direction without disregarding its current role in global education.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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