

Questioning the rhetoric: A critical analysis of intergovernmental organisations' entrepreneurship education policy

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship education is increasingly prominent in university and school curricula worldwide, following its intensive advocacy by intergovernmental organisations and national governments as a remedy for the urgent pressures to better prepare students for today's globalised and highly competitive workplace. This study analyses the official policy documents of two of the most influential intergovernmental organisations – the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – in a quest to understand how each of these organisations presents and promotes entrepreneurship education. We argue that while the rationales and problems the European Union and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development address regarding entrepreneurship education differ somewhat, the two organisations propose a very similar solution for entrepreneurship education implementation, occasionally even advocated through formal collaboration between the two intergovernmental organisations. We suggest that this collaboration exemplifies how intergovernmental organisations seek to govern in line with a globally dominant logic by providing universal, de-contextualised solutions to various problems. We build on previous studies on other policies these intergovernmental organisations advocated (e.g. quality education and modernisation of higher education) to learn about the nuances of such policy moves. We conclude by suggesting a critical understanding of such policy convergences and outlining recommendations for future research.

Keywords

Entrepreneurship, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, European Union, policy, discourse

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Introduction

This study aims to develop a better understanding of how two major actors in global education governance and key intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) – the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – are advocating for entrepreneurship education (EE) (see also Grek, 2014). While IGOs began promoting EE in the late 1980s, the topic gained prominence in many countries' school curricula mainly in the last years (Morselli, 2018; Ruskovaara et al., 2016; Yemini et al., 2019). Significant resources are being invested in developing, implementing and assessing the effects of EE at the global, national and regional levels. National and regional governments apply customised ways of addressing EE in their educational systems (e.g. Oldham, 2018). However, they tend to rely on recommendations advocated by IGOs (Grek, 2014). Hence, an understanding of how IGOs articulate these policies is critical.

In this study inspired by the work of Foucault (e.g. Foucault, 1995[1977], 2000) and Fairclough (2001) we analyse the discourse on EE taking place within the EU and the OECD as reflected in formal documents that these IGOs released during the past five years. Both these organisations propose EE as a solution to various challenges that they argue their member states are facing, and have developed and advocated solid policies promoting EE. Markedly, the OECD and the EU both compete and cooperate with each other; hence, they develop and promote some of these policies jointly, and others through independent, competing discourses (Barnett and Finnemore, 2005). Moreover, although their stated goals, structure and modes of governance differ, in recent years both the EU and the OECD have expanded and intensified their involvement in shaping education policies in general (Grek, 2014) and EE in particular. In this paper we compare these organisations' approaches towards EE, examining how despite their diverse initial areas of focus and modes of governance, the two converged around the same policy of encouraging an entrepreneurial focus within education. Specifically, we address the following research questions: *How do the EU and the OECD discursively justify and shape the concept of EE? How are their respective discourses characterised? What are the similarities and differences between the EU and OECD in shaping the discourse on EE?*

Such inquiry is critical especially in light of the resources that national and regional governments channel into developing EE and assessing its impact. A critical analysis of the discourses and practices proposed for the implementation of EE contributes to understanding the underlying variety of conceptions of education, as well as the ideologies, ambivalence and concerns reflected therein.

As Oldham (2018) and others have argued, EE has become increasingly important in education systems worldwide. Yet critical research is still lacking, as the 'overwhelmingly majority of existing research is concerned with enhancing the practices of EE', ignoring the 'ideological implications' of the concept (Oldham, 2018: 87). Even the OECD itself stresses that research about EE is scarce: 'Almost no research has been conducted using a wider definition of entrepreneurship, or the potentially resulting student engagement and societal value creation' (OECD, 2015a: 19). While promotion of EE is not a new phenomenon, and a number of studies have analysed it on the country level, this article is the first to show how EE policies are being orchestrated simultaneously by the EU and OECD at the global level, highlighting the roles designed for teachers and students in this context.

Theoretical orientation

In this section we provide some background information on the origins and meanings of entrepreneurship and EE, critically tracing EE's expansion within education. Next, we briefly discuss the

theoretical conceptualisation of the role of IGOs in shaping national education policies, before moving on to present the specific context of our study.

Conceptual background on entrepreneurship

The concept of entrepreneurship originated in the business world. No consensual definition of entrepreneurship exists, but most definitions involve elements of innovating, identifying and exploiting opportunities, and establishing a new business or organisation (Miller, 1983; Pozen, 2008; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Although the term ‘entrepreneurship’ is hundreds of years old, stemming from economics, entrepreneurship as a distinct field of knowledge emerged only recently (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Previously, entrepreneurship was described mainly through the notion of the entrepreneur – a person who conceives of and executes a new business – which made it difficult to study the phenomenon as a whole. Studies have dealt with the character of the entrepreneur as pioneering, charismatic, stubborn, creative and an innovative problem-solver who takes risks and aspires to high achievements (Miller, 1983; Pozen, 2008). Attention has been dedicated to the nature of the entrepreneur’s thought and strategic activity, addressing the environment in which the act of entrepreneurship takes place and the surrounding actors that might play a role in this process (Alvarez and Busenitz, 2001). Entrepreneurs are often described as the major drivers of modern economies, and governments invest substantial funds to encourage entrepreneurship in a quest to boost national economies. Oldham (2017: 93) suggested that the ‘notion that private enterprise is responsible for “wealth creation” was used regularly to justify deregulation and privatisation during the 1980s’, followed by the call to encourage entrepreneurship.

Understanding the growth and evolution of EE requires contextual reflection on the theoretical development of entrepreneurship as a whole. Previous research on EE has stressed that theories about entrepreneurship are rooted in the capitalist economic discourse (e.g. Pozen, 2008). Before academic interest turned to entrepreneurship in full force, entrepreneurial activity had increased greatly (Pozen, 2008). Indeed, the concept of entrepreneurship expanded from its initial grounding in the business realm and spread across different realms (e.g. social, policy and educational entrepreneurship) and settings. The concept has come to engulf the individual entrepreneur, the entrepreneurship of a small business or a non-profit organisation, and an individual or group working in an entrepreneurial manner within a big corporation (Pozen, 2008).

Entrepreneurship education

In the present study, we deal with EE as the process of imparting entrepreneurial skills to students on the broadest educational continuum, in ways that involve both theoretical knowledge and actual practice. The skills included in EE comprise (among others) negotiation, information technology (IT) skills, flexibility of thought, resilience, creativity and leadership skills (Matricano, 2014; Mendick et al., 2015). In this study, we follow Pittaway and Cope’s (2007) definition of EE as spanning diverse areas such as policy, higher education, school curricula, extracurricular programmes, training, management and organisational issues.

Education systems have offered EE for decades already; however, this field has undergone tremendous developments over time, from its roots in higher education (especially in management and business administration departments) to its current presence also in primary schools and even in preschools (Matlay, 2006), as discussed below. Notably, any discussion of EE touches on the age-old debate regarding whether entrepreneurship is an aggregate of innate traits or can be taught (Henry et al., 2005; Matlay, 2006). The premise of this research, as well as of policymakers in this

area, is that most of the skills required for an entrepreneur or characterising entrepreneurial thinking can be taught and imparted.

The interest in EE began in the post-World War II period and intensified with the growing political focus on establishing businesses as a way to create new jobs and spur economic growth. The first documented course in entrepreneurship was offered at Harvard University's Department of Business Administration in 1947 (Katz, 2003). Over the following decades, thousands of courses and hundreds of academic centres for entrepreneurship studies and training programmes opened worldwide. The expansion of the field was exponential, fuelled by support from governments and IGOs and by the public image of entrepreneurs as modern society's role models (Bosma et al., 2012). Universities took on an active role in nurturing the image of the ideal entrepreneur who takes responsibility for his/her life, fate and fortune; lives a satisfying life; and contributes to the economic well-being of the nation (Lackéus, 2017). Slowly, EE started to penetrate disciplines other than business at universities and then primary and secondary school curricula.

In the early 2000s, to cope with a decline in economic growth, the EU launched the Lisbon Strategy,¹ which identified EE as one of the solutions to the challenges of globalisation and the transition to a knowledge economy (European Parliament, 2000).² Since then, universities have established entrepreneurship programmes that combine more than one discipline and extend beyond the boundaries of business and economics. This development expresses the general acceptance of entrepreneurship as a discipline and a transdisciplinary skill-set. Reflecting this approach, many universities worldwide offer entrepreneurship programmes in design, engineering and humanities (Kuratko, 2005).

Moreover, as noted above, the discipline has penetrated into school systems and is taught to young children (Draycott and Rae, 2011; Heilbrunn and Almor, 2014; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2009). Programmes advancing education for entrepreneurship at a young age are being instituted on the premise that they promote an entrepreneurial mind-set among children and generate curiosity about entrepreneurship as the students mature (Hessi, 2016). Such programmes' proponents also argue that entrepreneurship education from an early age improves children's chances of developing their own business or securing better employment opportunities later in life (Obschonka et al., 2011).

A critical look at education for entrepreneurship

In 2010, the OECD noted the need to introduce to its educational assessment processes (the most prominent of which is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test) a measurement of characteristics related to innovation and entrepreneurship. This decision expresses a key trend in the OECD in recent years; namely, a technical and analytical view of complex issues such as education in general, and, specifically, the desire to quantify and rank countries' human capital (Auld and Morris, 2019; Sellar and Lingard, 2014).

Indeed, the emerging discourse surrounding education for entrepreneurship focuses on the ability of countries and individuals to compete in the global knowledge economy. From this perspective, the EE skills required to nurture human capital and 'win' global competition can be quantified, measured and internationally compared (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2012; Morris, 2016). This narrative of entrepreneurialism and resilience has often been related to an expression of free market values, which favour a model of a 'lean' state with minimal intervention that emphasises the market and individual responsibility (Auld and Morris, 2019; Sukarieh and Tannock, 2009). Through this prism, individuals' freedom of choice and ability to exploit their skills optimally improve both individual and social welfare. As such, EE became especially relevant for advocates of neoliberal governance (Oldham, 2017, 2018).

Critics, however, see this notion as a way for the state to shed most of its responsibility and pass it on to organisations that seek to implement their own agenda or to maximise profits and promote economic, commercial values over humanistic, democratic ones (Lackéus, 2017; Patrick, 2013). Scholars have argued that neoliberalism penetrated politics, society and education through the involvement of IGOs (Lawn and Lingard, 2002; Rowe et al., 2018; Springer et al., 2016). Hence, an economic discourse entered the field of education that refers to education as an item for consumption offered by the school as a service provider to clients (students and their parents). Of course, this mode of governance is not promoted solely by IGOs, but rather is being shaped and reshaped in a complex set of interactions between the IGOs, nation states and other stakeholders. One example of this capitalist conception of education is reflected in the introduction to schools of external programmes offered by for-profit providers and firms, in addition to foundations and non-governmental agencies (Molnar, 2006; Tannock, 2020). The neoliberal approach is also reflected in the increasing pressures to measure, rate and publish school achievements in various areas, so as to compare within and between countries; parents' ability to choose their children's school; and the introduction of parental payments at public schools to provide children with 'services' beyond the 'basic package' that schooling guarantees by law (Ball, 2012b).

Through this prism, individuals strive to improve their individual happiness through economic success, and entrepreneurial skills are supposed to contribute to their ability to do so (Lackéus, 2017). EE is supposed to benefit all by supporting individual rational interests. Yet this orientation might create an excuse to blame those students with poor background conditions or meagre social capital for failing if they do not perform as well as others in school, despite seemingly having been given tools to succeed. Hence, teachers and educators warn of the perpetuation of (or even mere increase in) inequality due to education for entrepreneurship (Yemini, 2018). The concern is that through EE, capitalist norms may penetrate the educational system at the expense of humanist ones (Lackéus, 2017).

Yet beyond issues of distributive justice, the key criticism of EE questions the ability of education for entrepreneurship to influence individual employment opportunities and market growth truly and directly (Kolleck, 2016). Critics question the effectiveness of EE in school curricula and argue that the aspiration to boost economic growth would be better served by focusing on establishing new companies and introducing innovation into existing ones, as well as on improving education levels in general, rather than necessarily stressing EE specifically (Eyal and Yosef-Hassidim, 2012; Hoppe, 2016).

IGOs as global norm setters

Notably, states have become less independent in determining their own education policies in recent years. Instead, they are increasingly influenced by IGOs, which govern policy design and policy-making (Dale, 2000; Gulson et al., 2017; Kleibrink, 2011; Rinne, 2008). For example, despite the declared EU policy that education remains under the independent control of member states, a large number of education policies are no longer formulated by national governments (Lawn and Lingard, 2002). The 'soft power' over member states exerted by the EU is exemplified in lifelong learning policies (Kleibrink, 2011) and the Bologna Process (Brøgger, 2016), both of which involved tremendous voluntary reforms in the structure and function of national education systems facilitated by the EU. That said, nation states do maintain considerable autonomy. Moreover, the influences of the EU and other IGOs on nation states are not linear, but rather complex and multidimensional.

Most fundamentally, states reform their education systems to conform with universal, de-contextualised standards that IGOs advocate in reliance on intra-regional and international

comparisons, based on sets of indicators they develop. ‘Policy-borrowing’ acts, whereby states import policies implemented elsewhere to enact in local settings, are generally motivated by the continued movement of global capitalism. Such practices often sacrifice inquiry into countries’ specific context and unique characteristics or even take place contrary to states’ own interests (Rinne, 2008; Rizvi and Lingard, 2000; Steiner Khamsi, 2004).

The EU, OECD, World Bank and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) enable countries to ‘borrow’ education policy from one another by creating meetings between policymakers, using the press to advocate certain worldviews, and employing rankings and large-data comparisons to impose proposed solutions for existing problems (Grey and Morris, 2018; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Williamson, 2017). Through such ‘borrowing’, IGOs encourage standardisation – producing indices, mappings, ratings and criteria that apply to all member states – that can undermine states’ influence in setting their own indicators and targets (Rinne, 2008). States’ loss of power, alongside the more substantial role played by non-state actors (e.g. corporations) and large IGOs, is an expression of the neoliberal approach that prioritises market welfare over state or individual interests (Rizvi and Lingard, 2000). Furthermore, state autonomy is being lost not only from above (facilitated by IGOs) but also from below, through privatisation that enables external actors to enter the education system. Indeed, these external actors are often the ones responsible for bringing EE to schools (Yemini et al., 2018). Many studies have covered the role of IGOs in educational agenda-setting; yet despite EE’s high prominence in schools, it has not yet been explored in this regard. This study contributes towards filling in this gap by inquiring into the policy documents of leading IGOs with the aim of elucidating how they present and promote EE.

Methods

Qualitative sampling and data collection

Our initial aim in this study was to identify and analyse formal policy documents produced by major IGOs that directly concern EE. We began by including four major organisations that are actively involved in education and are claimed to have substantial influence over national education agenda setting; namely, the EU, OECD, World Bank and UNESCO (Grek, 2014; Rutkowski, 2007). However, our searches revealed no formal, consistent treatment of EE within UNESCO documents (which addressed EE only in the context of local partnerships) or World Bank documents (which made no direct mention of EE). Thus, we focused on the OECD and the EU, contributing to the literature that compares various education policies advocated by OECD and EU (e.g. Grek, 2014; Martens and Wolf, 2009).

Hence, we identified and analysed all major policy documents published by the OECD and the EU between the years 2012 and 2018 that focus mainly on EE (see Table 1). These policy documents reflect the formal voice of IGOs regarding EE. As such, they not only provide formalities and regulations (such as budgets and time-tables for execution of agendas), but also reveal some of the organisational values and priorities of these IGOs.

Three of the 10 policy documents we analysed were published jointly by the OECD and the EU, as part of their ‘Entrepreneurship360’ initiative. However, although this publication was declared as a mutual venture, we treated it in our analyses as relating to the OECD only. We categorised it as such because it appeared only on the OECD’s website, its opening disclaimer mentions only the OECD, and its visual language is branded as OECD documents are – its colours and graphics match those of other OECD policy documents, in contrast to EU documents that are very formal and lack visual elements. In addition, we analysed one general OECD document that was not

Table 1. European Union (EU) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) entrepreneurship education documents included in the analyses.

	Organisation	Publication date	Title	Link
1	European Commission	2012	Rethinking education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes	https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012DC0669&from=FR
2	European Commission	2013	Reigniting the entrepreneurial spirit in Europe	https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52012DC0795
3	European Commission. Working Group on Entrepreneurship Education	2014	Thematic Working Group on Entrepreneurship Education	https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2011-2013/key/entrepreneurship-report-2014_en.pdf
4	European Parliament	2015	<i>Promoting youth entrepreneurship through education and training</i>	http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P8-TA-2015-0292+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN
5	European Council	2015	Council conclusions on entrepreneurship in education and training	https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015XG0120(01)&from=ES
6	European Commission	2016	A new skills agenda for Europe	https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381
7	OECD	2015a	Entrepreneurship in education: What, why, when, how. Entrepreneurship360 background paper	https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/BGP_Entrepreneurship-in-Education.pdf
8	OECD	2015b	Entrepreneurial education in practice – the entrepreneurial mindset. Entrepreneurship360 thematic paper	http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/Entrepreneurial-Education-Practice-pt1.pdf
9	OECD	2016	From creativity to initiative: Building entrepreneurial competencies in schools. Entrepreneurship360 guidance note for policy makers	http://www.oecd.org/employment/leed/E360-guidance-note-policy-makers.pdf
10	OECD	2018	The future of education and skills: Education 2030 position paper	https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf

directly focused on EE; namely, the new OECD education strategy: ‘The future of education and skills: Education 2030 position paper’ (OECD, 2018), since this document presents the organisation’s general vision on the future of education.

We analysed six EU documents. Five of these solely deal with EE, whereas one is a general EU education policy document. The latter is titled ‘A new skills agenda for Europe’ (European Commission, 2016) and dedicates substantial attention to EE.

Data analysis

In our analysis, we applied constructivist grounded theory (CGT) as developed by Charmaz (2006) combined with elements of discourse analysis (DA) according to further critical elaborations of the later work of Foucault (e.g. (Foucault, 1995[1977]; 2000)) and Fairclough (2001). In this regard, one might argue that the two approaches chosen have strong theoretical, ontological and epistemological differences and even involve fundamental epistemological contradictions.³ Indeed, older concepts of grounded theory (GT) in particular have often been associated with post-positivism, assuming that knowledge or even ‘truth’ can be found in data alone. DA, on the other hand, is usually associated with more critical analyses and is sometimes classified as a post-structuralist approach (see e.g. Ball, 2012a). In recent years, however, scientists have made fundamental contributions that have further developed GT, so that combinations of elements of DA with GT are now common (see e.g. Charmaz, 2014; Clarke, 2003; Clarke et al., 2017).

One example is the classical situation analysis conducted by Adele Clarke (2003), in which she confronts GT with the postmodern turn, thus providing an extension of GT by merging Strauss’s elaborations with critical DA (Clarke et al., 2017), while focusing on the interpretation of specific situations (Clarke et al., 2017: xxvi).

Hence, in our study, CGT and DA are both subjectively positioned. While CGT is based on the assumption of a socially constructed nature of phenomena, DA adopts critical considerations of practices of power (Johnson, 2014). From this perspective, CGT can be regarded as a postmodern turn of GT, originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later substantiated and concretised by Corbin and Strauss (1990), who began reconceptualising the methodology through a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology (Kassam et al., 2020). In doing so, the authors initiated a process of methodological development, loosening GT’s positivist original roots and moving it towards an imperative inquiry arena while preserving its pragmatic worldview (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, our choice of CGT to analyse and interpret policy rests on our identification as researchers with Charmaz’s assumptions about the social construction of knowledge from a relativist ontology and a position of subjective epistemology. In so doing, we follow an emerging trend of using CGT for critical policy analysis. This method was already applied in studies covering fields such as health policy and digital mental health (Mills et al., 2006), vulnerable populations (Kassam et al., 2020), accountability in education (Khanal, 2018) and the UK’s old-age health policy (McGeorge, 2011).

The DA we employed builds on the work of Fairclough (2001) and its further elaborations by others (e.g. Kolleck, 2019; Lukes, 2005; Taylor, 2004). We understand discourses as the entity of signs, announcements and statements that refer to a system of formation. In this sense, discourses result from regularities of discursive formations or fields of knowledge (Foucault, 1971). These notions provide us with techniques that help to analyse how complex normative concepts (such as education) are understood, and how actors try to shape these concepts (Taylor, 2004). Applying this stream of DA allowed us to concentrate on the expressions of the text being ideologically shaped by relations of power (Fairclough, 2001). By combining CGT and DA in the data collection and

analysis of our study, we applied an iterative, flexible approach marked by self- and peer-reflection.

Initially, the data was openly coded, meaning that it was examined qualitatively without using codes with the aim to identify individual phenomena and subjective perspectives in the data. We followed the principles of inductive CGT (Charmaz, 2006, 2014); that is to say, we read all the texts multiple times and carefully coded sentence-by-sentence, labelling and conceptualising recurring patterns of meaning without imposing any interpretation on it (Charmaz, 2006). At a later stage, we continued by employing a focused coding, allowing us as researchers to interact with the data and elicit its meaning by connecting patterns and creating categories. This process was performed for each document, each organisation, and in the end in comparison between the two organisations. To get a profound understanding of the materials, we read and coded the documents several times, using a shared Excel sheet, adding and amending codes according to a different analytical aim in each reading.

Findings gathered in this first analysis step were re-analysed using the technique of axial coding, which helped us advance them from categories to themes (Saldaña, 2009). As suggested by Søreide (2007), during the first couple of readings of policy documents they are seen as impenetrable and it is only through further readings and coding that meanings emerge. Based on CGT and DA, the emergence of meaning is not an objective one, passively revealing itself from the data; rather, it is actively created by the researcher's interpretation and comparison process (Mills et al., 2006). In the final coding stage, the theoretical coding, we integrated all findings from past coding stages, interpreting relations and proceeding to create an analytical story with a theoretical direction (Charmaz, 2006: 2014). This stage overlapped with DA and included critical considerations of the modes of communication for each of the organisations, applying DA concepts (e.g. storylines, as explained below). Furthermore, we actively sought out omissions of stakeholders, rationales and ideas as presented in each set of documents (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The two IGOs' understandings of EE became evident over the course of this coding process.

In the following sections, we present results of our analysis along three discourse dimensions:

1. *Storylines*, which 'connect discursive elements, characterize discourses, and give meaning to social phenomena' (Kolleck, 2017: 5). Hence, with this concept we can also analyse how actors are interlinked through shared storylines (and build discourse coalitions): 'Analysing discourse coalitions and storylines can bring to light how discursive complexities are reduced by constructing issues as "impossible," thereby revealing the ideas and norms that discourses are based on (Kolleck, 2017: 10). Storylines relate how the IGOs build and develop a narrative to position themselves in relevant discourse coalitions and identify the notions and constructions of truth or possibilities they wish to promote (Anshelm and Hansson, 2014; Hewitt, 2009). These storylines emerged in inductive analysis of the documents.
2. *Communication strategies* are the way the storylines are framed so as to convince the reader of the story's authenticity.
3. *Omissions* are oversights: the lack of mention or discussion of a specific topic or actors, which we claim to be meaningful. Our 'reading' of textual absences is inspired by the deconstructive approach, originating from Derrida. By identifying the missing actors or neglected subjects, we offer an alternative reading and significance of the text (Mumby and Stohl, 1991).

In the following section, we present the storylines, communication strategies and omissions for each of the IGOs and then conclude with a general discussion.

Findings and discussion

The OECD

Storylines. Three main storylines arose in our inductive analysis of the OECD policy documents: (a) teachers as a severe barrier to EE; (b) the learners' own responsibility for their fate; and (c) the need to measure and assess the programmes and processes related to EE.

Teachers as a barrier. The first storyline, pointing at teachers as an obstacle to EE enactment in schools, was prominent in all OECD documents we analysed. Through the usage of implicit language, the OECD creates an image of unprofessional teachers who are out-dated and fail to understand the fast-changing world (corresponding with the findings of Berkovich and Benoliel (2020) who also found such presentation of teachers). This image is reinforced by statements such as: '(EE) is often viewed as a "dark threat" by teachers, stating that the "ugly face of capitalism" is now entering educational institutions' (OECD, 2015a: 18). Moreover, teachers are described as automatically opposed to any new idea or practice: 'When a new teaching practice is presented to teachers they may perceive it rather as a "popular trend" and something that needs a new name in order to be added to an already crowded curriculum than something genuinely new' (OECD, 2016: 10).

To deal with this obstacle, the OECD encourages 'marketing' EE to teachers as a way 'to spur increased perceived relevancy of subjects taught among learners, increasing motivation and school engagement and alleviating problems of student boredom and dropout' (2015a: 18). All OECD policy documents advocate the tactic of emphasising broader benefits of EE as a way to engage teachers with the process. For example: 'being entrepreneurial can mean many things. It does not exclusively refer to the creation of new firms (entrepreneurship) but also to how employees approach their tasks (intrapreneurship), and how individuals act in their everyday lives, and in society' (OECD, 2016: 8). This storyline presents teachers as an obstacle to learners' success and suggests direct measures to engage teachers in implementation of EE as a remedy.

Learners' responsibility and characteristics. The second storyline we identified in the OECD documents revolves around the learners' characteristics as products of the education system, who are responsible not only for their own success but also for the future success of their nation. The analysed documents suggest that such success can be achieved and fostered through EE. This view of the learner typifies neoliberal policies (Ball, 2015), which tend to commodify the learner as a future worker and to use education as a means to reach this specific end (Patrick, 2013). The OECD justifies this storyline through a discourse of the fast-changing world – or, as Fairclough (2001: 231) described it, 'the representations and narratives of the contemporary process of change'. In the OECD's words, in the 'increasingly globalised, uncertain and complex world we live in' (OECD, 2015a: 17), '(w)e are facing unprecedented challenges . . . driven by accelerating globalisation and a faster rate of technological developments. . . The future is uncertain, and we cannot predict it' (OECD, 2018: 2).

The learners' responsibility storyline is related both through direct discussion of this issue and by ignoring learners' differing background and life opportunities. The underlying message is that a learner's future success (alongside society's economic success) can be guaranteed only by equipping the learner with the suitable knowledge and skills. Hence, we find statements such as: 'students are central actors. They are encouraged and supported – in a framework, which is adapted to age and ability requirements – to co-design, co-educate and co-assess education activities' (OECD, 2016: 23). This self-regulated learner emerges as a key theme in the OECD documents: 'Assessment

of learning within entrepreneurial education needs to rely on context, alignment to the learning tasks, harvesting expertise, self-direction and relevance in the eyes of the learners' (OECD, 2016: 11). Indeed, the desirable learner is a self-regulated one: 'To navigate through such uncertainty, students will need to develop curiosity, imagination, resilience and self-regulation' (OECD, 2018: 2). The self-regulated learner is responsible not only for him/herself but also for the fate of the society as a whole: 'Future-ready students need to exercise agency, in their own education and throughout life. Agency implies a sense of responsibility to participate in the world and, in so doing, to influence people, events and circumstances for the better' (OECD, 2018: 4).

The OECD conceptualises EE as necessary for students' future participation in the world. Hence, EE is framed not only as a contribution to society, but also as a necessity for taking on the responsibility to shape social 'circumstances for the better' – a responsibility nations are expected to partner in. Yet despite this partnership, students' success relies on individual responsibilities, overlooking the difficulties facing students with weak or non-existing communities, who lack support in exercising their agency.

Criticising the focus on standardised testing and large-scale assessments. The OECD is notoriously criticised for its measuring and standardised approach to assessing national policies and for 'auditing' cultures. Indeed, critical scholars have titled it the 'centre of calculation' (Lewis et al., 2016: 32) and accused it of fostering 'globalising empiricism' (Sellar and Lingard, 2014: 918). Therefore, it was not surprising that the third storyline, regarding assessment, was a central one, appearing several times in the documents. In this storyline, the discussion started with the lack of assessment tools for EE and the emerging need to develop such tools over time. It then proceeded with a concrete call for action to extend research of EE and develop such tools. Moreover, the documents analysed addressed the criticism raised concerning the OECD's declared intention to exert power through numbers (Grek, 2014).

The OECD identified lack of assessments and measurements as a major barrier to EE's assimilation: 'assessment difficulties and lack of definitional clarity are some of the challenges practitioners have encountered when trying to infuse entrepreneurship into education' (OECD, 2015a: 6). It also offered a more precise description of the outcome of the lack of assessment: 'The current educational policy climate emphasising high-stakes standardised testing, international large-scale assessments and institutional ranking has led to a focus on cognitive competencies, neglecting non-cognitive competencies (such as EE competencies). This has led to a narrowing of the curriculum, teaching to the tests and a de-professionalisation of teachers' (OECD, 2015a: 12). This criticism of the current focus on assessment and its outcomes is interesting, coming from the organisation that many scholars consider the main agency responsible for this focus (Bieber and Martens, 2011; Meyer, 2014; Ozga and Lingard, 2007).

This claim is followed by a lament that assessments (many of which the OECD itself undertakes) focus exclusively on cognitive skills and not on non-cognitive ones: 'non-cognitive skills significantly impact academic performance and future labour market outcomes, perhaps even more than cognitive competencies' (OECD, 2015a: 13). The OECD summons the development of designated assessment tools for EE: 'Assessment strategies need to be outlined that can be put to use by teachers in daily practice, allowing for detached and individual assessment' (OECD, 2015a: 17). A later policy document calls for tools to 'assess the impacts of educational interventions', noting that 'it is often useful to think in terms of outputs, throughputs and inputs' (OECD, 2015b: 6).

Communication strategies: we've got all the answers! The first document in our OECD collection, entitled 'Entrepreneurship in education: What, why, when, how' (OECD, 2015a), is comprised of four questions. It implies that all the answers are there, inside the document. In this case, the message is that the

OECD possesses the knowledge, therefore the power. On the one hand, the OECD documents are phrased in an open, inviting, engaging communication manner, frequently written in the first-person-plural ‘we’ and framing the readers as partners. In strengthening this discourse, the OECD suggests that research about EE is scarce: ‘Almost no research has been conducted using a wider definition of entrepreneurship, or the potentially resulting student engagement and societal value creation’ (OECD, 2015a: 19). On the other hand, the structure and the linguistic usage of why, what, when and how suggests that the OECD has all the answers. This image of knowing and having the right answer is projected throughout all the OECD documents analysed, expressed mostly by phrasing assumptions and opinions as if they were proven and unquestionable facts, or by creating sentences with a weak connection between cause and effect; for example: ‘Students who are best prepared for the future are change agents’ (OECD, 2018: 4). The tone of the OECD’s documents is mostly determined; in many paragraphs, vague solutions are offered absent any alternative suggestions.

Moreover, the framework being proposed addresses all countries similarly without differentiating between their vastly divergent cultures, values, resources or starting points. This oversimplification co-exists with another communication strategy we identified – that of overstatement, glorifying EE policy as a ‘Copernican revolution in entrepreneurship education’ (OECD, 2015b: 6), implying that it will dramatically change the way people think and act (as the Copernican revolution did). Indeed, the decisive tone and mixture of numerous statistics to strengthen arguments based on weak evidence creates an impression of recommendations that are unique and unavoidable and a sense that embracing them worldwide is the only option.

Omissions: absence of specific discussion or actors within OECD policy. According to discourse theory, much can be learned from the absences in a policy document (Fairclough, 2001; Mumby and Stohl, 1991). Overlooking aspects, actors and possibilities can be interpreted as a discursive choice. From this perspective, presenting EE as the main solution to world challenges such as employability, environmental challenges and migration (among others) ignores or neglects a broad range of other options (such as the limits on growth or educational equality). Indeed, scholars have argued that taking a particular option for granted and not presenting others is a recognised neoliberal linguistic tactic (Ball, 2013; D’Agnese, 2018; Peters, 2018).

Tellingly, none of the OECD documents analysed refer to previous research or consider other alternatives alongside the EE policy they promote. An additional oversight, as noted above, involves the uniform discourse surrounding students. Only one of the four documents mentions challenges regarding students who lack family support, students at risk and students with low individual capabilities. Moreover, the OECD instructs teachers that a ‘concept underlying the learning framework is “co-agency” – the interactive, mutually supportive relationships that help learners to progress towards their valued goals’ (2018: 4), while suggesting that teachers harness the external community to cooperate with the schools in creating a richer EE experience. On the surface, this may sound like solid advice; however, a deeper reading leads us to question the effect this approach will have on schools operating in communities of low socio-economic status or on students lacking family support. Scholars have argued that the ‘student’ the OECD refers to in its recommendations is the dominant privileged one who is raised in supportive surroundings (Auld and Morris, 2019). This inherent focus reflects hegemonic relations, deeply embedded in the act of seeing only one specific type of student (Gillborn, 2005). Such reasoning also results from the public discourse being shaped by and for elites (Van Dijk, 2009).

The EU

Storylines. Three main storylines arose from our analysis of the EU documents:

1. This is an emergency – we are facing a situation that demands immediate action.
2. We are up against the world.
3. Member countries are not doing enough.

In his theorisation of public policy, Kingdon (1995) conceptualised the process of policymaking through a metaphor of three streams: policy, politics and problems. These streams converge together when a policy window opens and creates an opportunity for a certain policy solution to be adopted widely, or at least to be positioned high on the agenda. One of the tactics used to form awareness regarding a specific problem and to capture the public and stakeholder's attention is the creation of a sense of urgency (Kingdon, 1995, 2014).

Emergency. In the EU documents, this approach has become more than just a tactic; the 'state of emergency' is one of the leading storylines:

The massive increase in the global supply of highly skilled people over the last decade puts Europe to the test. The time when competition came mainly from countries that could offer only low-skilled work has come to an end. The quality of education and supply of skills has increased worldwide, and Europe must respond. (European Commission, 2012: 2)

This short paragraph demonstrates the urgent need for Europe to act ('Europe must respond'). It further implies that failure to do so will have grave consequences. The same document continues as follows:

The varying nature and urgency of the challenges facing Member States requires the use of different instruments implemented over different time scales, and joint action is needed from the worlds of both education and employment. Efforts to boost the supply of relevant and high-quality skills must go hand-in-hand with targeted actions to smooth the transition from schools to work, reduce obstacles to mobility and improve the functioning of the labour market so young people have wider access to job opportunities. (European Commission, 2012: 14)

The description of the challenges Europe faces as unique and urgent raises a few questions. What makes this specific period of history more challenging than others? Why does the present situation require a different kind of action? Why does the response require a joint action from the worlds of education and employment specifically – what about the fields of welfare or social justice? Or bureaucracy and regulation? The text leaves the readers without sufficient answers.

A later paragraph offers a description of an improvement trend, with reservations: 'Despite progress over the last five years in the percentages of those qualifying from higher education . . . early school leaving remains at unacceptable levels in too many Member States' (European Commission, 2012: 2). Continuing this spirit, a later document reads as follows: 'although youth unemployment is diminishing – it has decreased by 494,000 compared with February 2014 – this is taking place at too slow a pace' (European Parliament, 2015: 77). Stronach (1989) identified this phenomenon (of presenting no alternative for either the problem or the solution) as a reduction of the explanation for economic challenges to education alone, while in fact there are many unmentioned alternative explanations.

In further linking between education and economics, all the EU documents discuss the 2008 economic crisis, presenting it as one of the main reasons to adopt EE policy intensively: 'Since 2008 Europe has been suffering the effects of the most severe economic crisis it has seen in 50 years' (European Commission, 2013: 3); 'To help fight the impact of the economic crisis, most

importantly youth unemployment, Europe needs more entrepreneurial individuals' (European Commission, 2014: 3); 'The recent economic crisis underlined that Europe struggles to respond to unexpected shocks' (European Commission, 2014: 10). This reliance on the economic crisis of 2008 as an explanation for present ills not only supports the aforementioned sense of urgency, but also misrepresents reality. The global financial crisis is presented as almost a 'force majeure', something no one could have predicted (Davies and McGoey, 2012). This construction clears world governments and the EU from blame and uses EE policy to bestow them with a new image as the global saviours (or in this case as Europe's saviours).

We are up against the world. The 'sense of emergency' storyline is connected directly to the prominent storyline related to competition. In March 2000, the European Parliament declared its new strategic goal of becoming 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Parliament, 2000). This competition is phrased mostly in economic terms: a 'knowledge-based economy', 'sustainable economic growth' and 'better jobs'. Only the term 'greater social cohesion', which is used at the end of the sentence cited here, may be interpreted in a non-economic sense, although social cohesion also comprises one of the central conditions of a well-functioning economy. In the EU's arena of competition, human capital is its main means of production. In other words, one of the EU's main ambitions is to ensure that its residents attain better employment, which will strengthen the EU's economic standing in the world.

Indeed, the introductory chapter of the thematic paper on EE opens as follows: 'For Europe to compete globally, we need future generations to have the mind-set and skills to be entrepreneurial in society, in work and in business' (European Commission, 2014: 8). Placing this statement right at the beginning reflects the EU priorities: entrepreneurship is our mean to get to the end – being competitive. This storyline is strengthened by an image of the desired EU citizen: 'Europe needs more entrepreneurial individuals' who 'turn ideas into entrepreneurial action . . . Europe needs citizens who are creative, socially responsible, can spot opportunities, understand and take risks, and can work in teams and solve problems' (European Commission, 2014: 3). Other documents further express the need for 'confident, active citizens . . . In the global race for talent, we need to nurture our skilled workers, reduce brain drain, while facilitating mobility of EU citizens, attracting talent from abroad and making better use of migrants' skills' (European Commission, 2016: 2). The key message is that Europe used to be strong and competitive, must act to be as competitive again, and entrepreneurship is the way to do so: 'Entrepreneurship makes economies more competitive and innovative and is crucial in achieving the objectives of several European sectorial policies' (European Commission, 2013: 4).

Member countries are not doing enough. The third storyline frames EU member countries as investing inadequately in human capital and therefore not contributing enough to the EU's competitiveness:

Across the EU, reforms have streamlined curricula. They have introduced national standardized tests; established an infrastructure of literacy . . . and stepped up action to improve digital and media literacy. Nevertheless, underperformance remains and addressing low achievement is now urgent . . . Member States need to introduce new systemic reforms to strengthen early screening and intervention for learning difficulties and to replace repetition or ability grouping with increased learning support . . . but some Member States are still lagging behind as seen in the Education and Training Monitor 2012. (European Commission, 2012: 4)

An additional indicator of the EU's dissatisfaction with member states' efforts and achievements emerges in the European Commission's (2013) thematic paper on EE. The text presents two tables; the first lists five policy approaches toward EE among EU member states, and the second lists examples of contributions of different ministries to EE. Following those tables, the text highlights Denmark as an example of a coherent policy adaptor, since it developed its strategy through the partnership of four ministries, led and managed by a private organisation (European Commission, 2013). This type of discussion creates internal competition among member states, alongside the external competition described above. Placing the blame for inadequate EE efforts on member states highlights the need to act jointly as a union in defining, implementing and measuring EE, while 'shaming' states that are not adequately contributing towards these goals.

Communication strategies: decisive, formal and evidence-based. Like the OECD, the EU also uses very decisive language, shaping a discourse that inherently assumes a connection between EE and a stable economy: 'Investment in education and training for skills development is essential to boost growth and competitiveness: skills determine Europe's capacity to increase productivity' (European Commission, 2012: 2); 'For Europe to compete globally, we need future generations to have the mind-set and skills to be entrepreneurial in society, in work and in business' (European Commission, 2014: 8). As Ball (2015: 6) notes, 'policy discourses are produced and formed by taken-for-granted and implicit assumptions'. Upon first reading, the EU wording seems logical, especially when phrased in such a determinant manner; however, these arguments are deficient at best or fail to meet any conditions of logic at worst.

Another salient linguistic aspect is the use of pronouns: 'we' versus 'it'. Excluding two EU documents – 'Reigniting the entrepreneurial spirit in Europe' (European Commission, 2013) and 'A new skills agenda for Europe' (European Commission, 2016) – none of the documents includes the first person ('we'). The most common phrasing is the third person: 'the EU' or 'EU member states'. Using third-person language creates a sense of distance and formality. Accordingly, this is the image of the EU being shaped in the readers' minds. In contrast, the OECD documents make frequent use of inclusive 'we' and 'us' phrasing, creating power relations of solidarity (Fairclough, 1989).

Finally, the EU documents apply a vast usage of numbers, which can also be interpreted as a way to foster trust and to connect to the international discourse of evidence-based decision-making. Based on the stated need to assess EE programmes and actions to prove their effectiveness ('governance by numbers', as Ozga (2008) suggested), the documents' use of numeric evidence neglects to prove the initial connection between EE and macro-economic success, thus manipulating the readers not to challenge this assumption. The following two examples (from European Commission, 2012: 2–3) demonstrate this trend: '(E)arly school leaving remains at unacceptable levels in too many Member States, such as Spain with 26.5% and Portugal with 23.2%'; 'There remains significant evidence of underperformance in other areas: 73 million adults have only a low level of education; nearly 20% of 15 year olds lack sufficient skills in reading; and participation in lifelong learning is only 8.9%.'

This presentation of different statistics is followed by an indoctrinating quest to collect evidence of programmes' (not policies') effectiveness: 'monitoring actions taken by Member States to prioritize growth-enhancing expenditure and developing an evidence-based framework to analyse the efficiency of public spending for quality education and training' (European Commission, 2012: 16); and

(t)o ensure sustainable engagement in entrepreneurship education, there must be robust monitoring and evaluation of the impact of strategies and actions at a Member State and EU level . . . systematic assessment

of learner achievement can demonstrate the impact of entrepreneurship education, which in turn can allow policy makers to take evidence-based decisions. (European Commission, 2014: 13)

Such statements fuel criticism that filling up the policy documents with statistics might appear serious and scientific to decision-makers, but may actually reflect a lack of normative pedagogical vision (Ozga and Lingard, 2007).

Omissions: teachers. Our analysis of the EU policy documents revealed that their discourse neglects teachers. While the OECD documents declare that it is challenging to recruit teachers to the cause of EE, and occasionally address teachers directly, the EU nearly ignores them. One reason for this omission can be respect for the member states' educational autonomy, given the EU's criticism towards teachers' present activities in this regard. Indeed, whenever any reference is made to teachers, it usually involves criticism of their own training regarding entrepreneurial skills: 'Educators and education leaders in Europe are not sufficiently trained in entrepreneurship education, which negatively impacts on the potential for entrepreneurship to become embedded in education systems' (European Commission, 2014: 4).

Limitations

Our study has some limitations that should be acknowledged in examining the analytical value of our findings. First, despite the prominence of IGOs in global governance regimes, their influence on national educational policies is limited. Nations often adopt only certain elements of the prescribed recommendations while amending others, according to the local national needs. Nevertheless, we have outlined different ways IGOs shape the EE discourse, thus inviting more research into the specificities of EE implementation and its relation to this discourse in specific countries and regions.

Moreover, our findings cannot simply be generalised to other types of documents on other subjects or to IGO policies in general. However, the comprehensive in-depth analysis of all relevant EE documents produced by these two leading IGOs does provide us with the requisite analytical power to nuance our understanding of how EE policy is expressed, while the comparison between how the EU and OECD frame their EE policies strengthens our argument.

Conclusion

In this article, we have analysed major policy documents produced by the EU and OECD dealing with EE. These documents present EE as a key policy solution to contemporary ills, which member states are urged to implement in the quest of achieving or sustaining economic and social prosperity.

Our analysis revealed the two IGOs' similar agenda of taking part in (or even leading) 'discourse coalitions' (Hewitt, 2009). Yet despite the comparable solutions they offer, the OECD and the EU use slightly different wordings and divergent emphases; both reinforce an economically oriented discourse, but they create different organisational images. Specifically, the OECD seems younger, more updated and universal, while the EU generates a formal, national and competitive self-image. Both agencies seek to convince states to implement EE as a major solution for a long list of diverse and distinct problems. We relate to the EU and OECD advocacy of EE policy as a discursive practice aimed at conveying a certain realm. Hence, we sought to reveal the particular strategies that allow policy documents to be read without being challenged, understood as unproblematic and as offering statements whose validity can be taken for granted.

While several critical academic studies examined the neoliberal notions espoused by the OECD and to some extent the EU (e.g. Fischman et al., 2019; Grek, 2017), these IGOs' turn towards

advocating EE represents a relatively unexplored and significant development in this field. Grek (2014) noted these two organisations' convergence of policies (which intensified with the EU and OECD's joint initiative, Entrepreneurship360) and its effect on national education systems. Here, we illuminate some of the nuances of this process by projecting the rhetoric involved and highlighting how similar solutions can be legitimised differently, in light of differing target audiences, organisational structures, rhetorical structures and constraints.

As Oldham (2018) and others have argued, EE has become increasingly important in education systems worldwide. While critical research remains lacking, the 'overwhelmingly majority of existing research is concerned with enhancing the practices of EE', ignoring the 'ideological implications' of the concept. Indeed, even the OECD stresses that research about EE is scarce: 'Almost no research has been conducted using a wider definition of entrepreneurship, or the potentially resulting student engagement and societal value creation' (2015a: 19).

While previous studies have highlighted different ways in which IGOs and nation states promote neoliberal governance through education systems (Fischman et al., 2019; Grek, 2017; Lackeus, 2017; Oldham, 2018), we contribute several novel insights. First, beyond showing that the EU and OECD are orchestrating an EE agenda simultaneously, we offer a nuanced analysis of how this is done in practice. Thus, we underscore the roles designed for teachers and students in this context, as well as the assumptions made about who the students are and what the teachers' attitudes, stereotypically, tend to be. While these IGOs have promoted EE for years, their action-focused involvement in EE policies has intensified recently, making such communications more potent. Second, we contribute to the contemporary discourse on the meanings of EE and show how various agencies promote their different interpretations. Lastly, while previous studies analysed EE at the national level (Bergman et al., 2011; Oldham, 2017, 2018) or within an organisation (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2009), we offer a novel comparative analysis of IGOs' policies in that regard, thus helping to sharpen the 'big picture' and assisting future studies that might delve further into the particular situations within specific nations or organisations.


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Notes

1. The Lisbon Strategy, which came into force in March 2003, called for a special discussion of the ways in which the EU intends to address employment and other social and economic challenges in light of the transition to a knowledge-based economy. The programme analysed the weaknesses and strengths of the EU in this context and outlined clear goals and objectives for the following 10 years.
2. A knowledge economy can be defined as a system of consumption and production based on the intellectual capital of its participants (Olssen and Peters, 2005).
3. We thank the anonymous reviewers and the chief editor for this information.

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